

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF

HOLIDAYS & CELEBRATIONS

A Country-by-Country Guide

MATTHEW DENNIS, PH.D., EDITOR



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Encyclopedia of
HOLIDAYS AND
CELEBRATIONS

❁ *A Country-by-Country Guide* ❁

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Encyclopedia of Holidays and Celebrations: *A Country-by-Country Guide*

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How to Use This Encyclopedia

Volumes I and II of this encyclopedia are organized by country, and volume III lists major internationally observed holidays and religions. Volumes I and II feature countries of the world arranged in alphabetical order. Each country entry offers introductory material about the nation's origin, history, political system, economy, geography and climate, lifestyle and culture, and cuisine. The heart of each country entry is its description of the country's chief holidays—public/legal, religious, and regional—and its significant rites of passage, or major transitional events (birth, coming-of-age, marriage, and death) that mark an individual's life journey from cradle to grave. Public/legal holidays are those officially recognized by the country's government; schools, businesses, and public offices are generally closed on these days. Religious holidays include those that are either religious in nature and officially recognized by the government or are observed by the country's majority religions. Regional celebrations are often large gatherings that are unique to a particular area of the country, ethnic group, or religious minority.

The encyclopedia includes entries for those nations commonly accepted as sovereign by organizations such as the United Nations and other international bodies, as well as some overseas territories and dependencies, such as Greenland, Bermuda, the Cayman Islands, and French Guiana.

Given the complexity and sheer enormity of the subject, the encyclopedia must make some accommodations, and no such work could be or remain definitive, given the multifarious and ever-changing world we inhabit. No individual country entry can be exhaustive. Not all religious, ethnic, or language groups can be included, particularly in those nations that are most diverse socially and culturally. Nor can every festival or holiday observance be recorded, even though such events may be enormously important to those who observe them. But the encyclope-

dia does strive to include those ethnic or religious groups who live in the greatest numbers or prominence in each country and to list and describe their most important and representative public, religious, and regional holidays and rites of passage.

Each country entry distinguishes between “public” and “religious” holidays. This division is designed to accommodate the complexity of holidays as they function in the real world. In the United States, for example, Christmas (December 25) is a federally authorized public holiday; yet it is simultaneously a Christian religious festival. It is not one or the other but is, rather, both a religious and a public holiday. And while some observe Christmas in a secular, if festive, fashion, or treat it simply as a day off, others continue to vest it with great religious meaning. In this encyclopedia we have chosen to include Christmas under religious holidays. In other cases—St. Valentine's Day (February 14), for example—the religious content of the “religious” holiday has become even more tenuous or remote; so we have placed these holidays in the public/legal category.

At times religion suffuses social and political affairs in ways that in essence transform secular holidays into holy days. Memorial Days around the world, for example, frequently employ prayers and devotions even though commemorating non-religious events. Memorial Days can be found under the public/legal category. On the other hand, religious holidays, even as they retain their religious significance, fulfill important political functions, as when, for instance, a saint's day functions as a national holiday. These holidays have generally been placed under the religious heading. In nations that do not separate church and state, distinctions between public (secular) and religious holidays can be particularly weak. In these cases, holidays have been categorized according to whether the religious or secular aspect is more prominent in the way people observe it.

Volume III contains overview entries on major religions, festivals, or particular holidays observed broadly or even worldwide. These topics transcend national boundaries. Because the country entries focus on national customs and observances, helpful cross-references direct the reader to the overview entries for detailed background and analysis. Cross-references may be found in “See also” sections following many of the holiday subentries in volumes I and II. The relevant overview articles are listed in small capital letters.

For the sake of clarity, we have standardized holiday names, which often vary by country, language, and the way they are transcribed into English. Alternative names for holidays have been included in the description of the holiday.

Among the organizational challenges for an encyclopedia of holidays is accommodating the different ways that time is reckoned worldwide. Calendar systems, not merely individual holidays, vary greatly. In the West, a solar calendar (itself revised over time) controls the calculation of days and years. But Muslims and Jews, among others, employ lunar schemes to organize their liturgical calendars. And Christians, though they use a solar calendar, nonetheless

peg key religious festivals to the Moon, situating holidays within seasons but not anchoring them to a single, consistent date in the Gregorian calendar. Christians—like others—celebrate some holidays as “moveable feasts.” Easter, for example, can fall on any day between March 22 and April 25, depending on the year (it is celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full Moon after vernal equinox, which occurs on March 21). Making matters even more complicated, Eastern Orthodox Christians use the much older Julian calendar, and celebrate their holidays 13 days after other Christian sects.

The encyclopedia generally employs the Gregorian calendar as the basis of its dating and organizational scheme. We do this for clarity and consistency, while recognizing that many in the world mark and experience time differently. For the myriad moveable feasts, we supply the official dates of observance within the relevant liturgical or cultural calendar of the celebrants. Appendices at the back of volume III explain the origins as well as the similarities and differences among solar, lunar, and lunisolar calendar systems in use throughout the world. The appendices also provide equivalent dates in the Gregorian calendar.

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Introduction



by Matthew Dennis

Holidays help us mark time. They are the extraordinary events that give shape and meaning to our everyday existence. Throughout human history the vast array of nations and peoples have punctuated their calendars with special days to celebrate, commemorate, memorialize, or trace the passage of their lives. Individually and as communities, we set aside times to reflect on the past and future, to rest and renew our bodies and souls, and simply to have fun. In the English language we call these extraordinary moments “holidays,” a contraction of the term “holy day.” Sometimes holidays are literally holy days—the Sabbath, Easter, or Eid al-Fitr, for example—but they can also be secular occasions that serve local or national political purposes, address the social needs of communities and individuals, or indulge the whimsies of celebrants. This encyclopedia explores the fascinating and complex world of holidays, offering a guide to holidays and rites of passage worldwide, country by country, and thematically in essays on important transnational celebrations and religions that cross national boundaries. Its numerous entries show both the distinctions among the peoples of the world and what they have in common—the need to commemorate, to organize and measure the passage of time, and to infuse their ordinary lives with meaning, purpose, or joy.

Holidays are “times out of time”—moments when time seems to stand still. Regular time stops. We put work aside, alter normal activities, assemble in different ways with family and friends, eat special foods, and allow our minds to become more reflective or, often, less practical and more carefree. Holidays cast shadows. As they approach, we anticipate and prepare for them, and in their wake we recover from them, pay their toll, or bask in their afterglow. If holidays are ephemeral or transient, they are nonetheless like guests who visit often and profoundly affect our lives. We anticipate their arrival, remember them when they leave, and greet them regularly in cycles. As these entries

show, we can learn much about a people or nation by the holidays they keep. What do the people believe, hold dear, or revile? What religious faiths or systems of belief hold sway, giving meaning and order to their lives? How uniform or diverse are they religiously, culturally, or socially? How rich or poor are they, and how do they invest their lives with value that is not monetary but psychic, emotional, or moral? What sorts of bonds unite them, and what differentiates them or pulls them apart? How are they governed, and how deeply are they invested in the officials or systems that govern them? What triumphs or traumas have they experienced, and how does the past weigh on their present? The celebration, commemoration, or observance of holidays gives us insight into such questions, informing us about the countries and peoples of the world, both on their own terms and in comparison to one another.

Yet if holidays seem to make time stand still, we recognize in another aphorism that “time waits for no man.” The world and our lives are in flux, and despite the patterns and cycles we impose, time races on. Calendars and holidays reflect such change, recording it and marking the passage of time. At the very least, in our modern world, they chronicle that things were different in the past and are destined to be different in the future. Traditional holidays take us “back to the future”—linking us with if not physically returning us to the past. If cycles of religious holidays or ancient seasonal festivals often seem timeless, social and political calendars regularly incorporate new holidays or expunge old ones that have become obsolete, inexpedient, or embarrassing. And as we celebrate or commemorate, festivals evolve and are themselves transformed. New governments or political systems replace old ones, and supporters erect new holidays to celebrate and legitimize new political orders and to persuade, educate, or promote the allegiance of citizens or subjects. Religious calendars can change as well in nations that undergo transformation, as new religions arise or older

faiths gain new followers and compete with established religions for ceremonial space in the calendar. Paradoxically, then, time and the holiday calendars that mark time seem to move both forward and in cycles. Our holidays are forces, not merely of tradition but of innovation. They help us to preserve who we are and to reinvent ourselves over time.

Globalization versus Local Identity

Is the world becoming more or less diverse? The notion that the world is “shrinking” might be a cliché, but development and increasing economic integration of the globe certainly do lend greater uniformity to the ways we calculate time across countries and continents. In some cases disparate nations separated by thousands of miles celebrate the same holidays. Nationally specific holidays pose challenges to international businesses. They must coordinate their operations worldwide to avoid “bad business days”—days when government offices, banks, and businesses are closed in observation of local holidays. In 1999 an American financial publisher compiled and began to sell an international holiday calendar, which attempted to identify all the holidays that would occur in more than 100 countries over the next 100 years! It will be a challenge to maintain the calendar’s accuracy. Societies and political regimes change, cultural and religious traditions wax and wane, and holidays are shifted in national calendars, sometimes to form three-day weekends.

In 2005, for example, the South Korean government announced that April 5 that year would be the last time that Koreans had the day off for Arbor Day. Koreans created the holiday in 1946 to encourage tree planting in response to the wartime devastation and deforestation the country had suffered. But by the early 21st century, officials believed that country’s calendar contained too many holidays and that Arbor Day had lost its meaning and had become simply a day off.

Russia similarly sought to purge its calendar in November of 2004 when its parliament moved to abolish the annual November 7 observance commemorating the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, a discomfiting festival in the post-Communist era. But apparently unconcerned about any surfeit of holidays, the parliament voted to replace the abandoned one with a new festive day on November 4 to celebrate a more historically distant, but more acceptable, event, the Russian uprising against Polish domination in 1612. While they were at it, legislators proposed cutting two other holidays but extending the New Year’s holiday season to five days (from two), expanding the overall number of holidays from 11 to 12 days.

Japan presents a final example among many of the flux typical in national calendars. In 2007 Japan will begin celebrating Showa Day each April 29. It honors Emperor

Showa (1926–89), known during his reign as Emperor Hirohito. Though a revered figure in Japan, Hirohito is regarded by many as a symbol of Japanese militarism and aggression in Asia. April 29 has been a national holiday for years, marking the emperor’s birthday, but since his death in 1989 it has been called Greenery Day, to avoid controversy and emphasize the emperor’s (and Japan’s) love of nature. With the passage of time and a rebirth of Japanese nationalism, however, the holiday has reemerged in a new fashion. Greenery Day will now move to May 4 and remain a national holiday, sandwiched between Constitution Day on May 3 and Children’s Day on May 5.

As these examples show, despite globalization, local and national communities retain their distinctions. Holidays can be tools to resist homogenization, to stem the internationalizing tide, and to assert particular ethnic, cultural, religious, or national identities. Through celebration or commemoration, people can make the case—to themselves and to others—that they are unique, authentic, and worthy. Paradoxically, then, holiday celebrations can be both engines of international integration and a means of affirming and defending particular localized identities. Readers of this encyclopedia can find in each entry evidence of national distinctiveness as well as similarity or commonality with other countries and peoples of the world.

International Holidays

Many countries share holidays and festivals with other nations because their people share religious beliefs and practices. Christmas and Easter, for example, are pervasive among those nations with substantial Christian populations (some 2 billion worldwide). Ramadan is observed broadly in every hemisphere in Muslim countries and wherever the world’s 1.3 billion Muslims reside. One billion Hindus celebrate Holi, the springtime festival of color, creation, and renewal, and Diwali, the autumn festival of lights marking the new year, not merely in India but in Nepal, Myanmar (Burma), Malaysia, Suriname, and even Great Britain. Some 350 million Buddhists, in China, Japan, Thailand, Tibet, and elsewhere celebrate Vesak, which commemorates the birth, enlightenment, and salvation of Gautama, or Buddha, the founder of Buddhism. Yet the names and particular means of celebrating these occasions vary, inflected by local customs and traditions.

Colonialism and the spread of peoples throughout the globe, especially since the 16th century, has also functioned to distribute holidays worldwide, secular as well as religious ones. If for a time the “sun never set on the British Empire,” then British holidays were celebrated around the clock and around the globe. Today, for example, many former British colonies continue to observe Boxing Day on December 26, and commonwealth nations still celebrate the Queen’s Birthday. They do not, however, do so on the

same date. Even in the United Kingdom, Britons do not mark Queen Elizabeth's birthday on the anniversary of the day she was actually born (April 21, 1926), but on the second Saturday in June. (Official birthdays became separated from actual birthdays in Britain during the reign of King Edward VII [r. 1901–1910], who, though born in November, held his birthday celebrations in the summer.) Yet residents of the Falkland Islands celebrate the actual date of April 21 (because it's summer and more salubrious in the Southern Hemisphere then). Canadians mark the event on the Monday on or before May 24 in honor of Queen Victoria's birthday. In Australia, except in the state of Western Australia, it is celebrated on the second Monday of June. In New Zealand the first Monday in June is the queen's official birthday. On the Caribbean Island of Saint Kitts, it's observed, as in Australia, on the second Monday in June, as Kittisians have been doing since the reign of the former King George V (1910–1936), who was born in June. Surprisingly, Fiji also celebrates the Queen's Birthday (as well as the Prince of Wales's Birthday) as a national holiday (in June), even though Britain's monarch ceased to be the head of state in Fiji in 1987. On the other hand, the Queen's Birthday lapsed as an official holiday in Hong Kong after the United Kingdom handed back the territory to China in 1997. Such holidays come and go and shift their place in the calendar. They leave traces of a country's historical experience and inform us about that people's national life and culture.

Transnational holidays have also emerged and entrenched themselves in national calendars worldwide in other ways. Labor Day, for example, arose in the United States in the 1880s and then took a more radical course (and found a different day in the calendar—May 1) internationally. From Sweden to South Africa, from Madagascar to Martinique, from Kazakhstan to Korea, Labor Day is observed to honor workers, build solidarity nationally and internationally, and improve the conditions of laborers. Here, too, differences in observance lay behind the appearance of global uniformity. In September 2004 Labor Day in the United States was, as usual, an occasion to pursue leisure during the three-day weekend that marked the end of summer. Few thought of work, and most were able to avoid it. A lack of ceremonial seriousness and reflection among Americans might seem to compromise the purpose of the holiday, but a major objective of organized labor had been to win shorter hours and a reduced work week. Thus a holiday focused on leisure might be considered a valuable prize, worth celebrating on its own terms. Elsewhere around the globe, however, on May Day 2005 workers staged massive rallies, sometimes in defiance of their governments, which officially sanctioned Labor Day. In Moscow radical Communist activists clashed violently with riot police; in Zimbabwe, an umbrella group of trade unions held numerous rallies without police interference, though they feared repression; and thousands of

Bangladeshis marched to demand the country's first-ever minimum wage (\$50 per month).

International Women's Day (March 8) is another holiday that has achieved worldwide acceptance, but it would be easy to overstate its impact in celebrating women and promoting equal rights internationally. The same holiday can mean different things in different countries—in places, it reflects women's actual achievement of rights, in places it merely voices the aspiration to such rights, and in places it serves as window dressing for societies or regimes hostile to women. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, International Women's Day is a public holiday, the streets are decorated with flowers, and men relieve women of some basic tasks. Yet the country is also home to the practice of *ala kachuu* (meaning “grab and run”), in which men kidnap their brides. Such abductions are common; more than half of Kyrgyzstan's marriages begin in this fashion. The Kyrgyz have a saying, “Every good marriage begins in tears.” Kyrgyzstan is clearly a world apart from Australia, France, Great Britain, or the United States, where the holiday was initiated in 1909 by women activists in the Socialist Party of America. The Central Asian nation of Kyrgyzstan, in contrast, provides a different environment and different challenges to those hoping to advance the cause of women's rights. Ironically, the United States does not recognize the day as a public holiday. In such holidays, set in their local contexts, we can learn much about the countries of the world, about what they share as well as how they are distinctive or unique.

What could be more common among countries yet forcibly indicative of their individuality and autonomy than national or independence days? While these festivals celebrate the birth or independence of nations, they do so in strikingly varied ways, exhibiting the particular character and experience of the countries they glorify. The Fourth of July in the United States, marking the adoption of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, for example, is today a boisterous, blissful, midsummer fête, more known for picnics and fireworks than serious reflection. In dramatic contrast, Finland's Independence Day is held on December 6, in the midst of the cold and dark of the Finnish winter. It is a serious, even somber, affair reflecting the heavy price Finns paid to secure their independence through revolution, civil conflict, and world war. Israel's Independence Day is celebrated on the fifth day of the Hebrew month of Iyar, commemorating the creation of the state of Israel on this day in the Hebrew year 5708 (May 14, 1948). While the occasion explodes with joyous celebration, it is inconceivable to Israelis apart from the solemn holiday that precedes it by one day, Yom Hazikaron, Remembrance Day. Remembrance Day is devoted to the memory of those who gave their lives for the achievement of the country's independence and its preservation. If Independence Day is ecstatic, its companion Remembrance Day is grave, a time to express personal and collective grief mixed with awe and gratitude.

Ironically, some powerful and well-established nations have no Independence Day. England has existed as an independent kingdom since the 10th century. It incorporated Wales in the 13th century, joined with the kingdom of Scotland in 1707 to become Great Britain, and in 1801, with its union with Ireland, became the United Kingdom. Great Britain rose to unprecedented global power in the 19th century; in the 20th century and beyond, despite the dismantling of its empire, it remains a worldwide political and economic leader. Yet it has no particular national day. Is this absence a sign of national self-confidence and powerful international presence? On the other hand, some countries have more than one national day. The Seychelles—an archipelago nation in the Indian Ocean—has been independent since only 1976, yet it has both an Independence Day (June 29) and a National Day (also known as Constitution Day), celebrated each June 18 to hail the advent of multiparty democracy. The Central Asian nation of Azerbaijan has a Republic Day (May 28), an Independence Day (October 18), and a Constitution Day (November 12), not to mention a Salvation Day (June 15), a Revival Day (November 17), and a Day of Azeri Solidarity (December 31). Commemoration and the public calendar can become complicated as a nation struggles not only to establish but also to maintain its independence.

Such commemorative events can be serious, even dangerous. India celebrates Independence Day on August 15, while rival Pakistan marks its independence on August 14, though both emerged as independent nations at the same moment, when the British Empire relinquished its hold on the Indian subcontinent in 1947. In both countries wild celebrations, filled with firecrackers, patriotic songs, honking horns, and other revelry erupt amid heightened security measures and concerns about terrorism. In 2005 Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh delivered his celebratory remarks in Delhi from behind a screen of bulletproof glass. In the disputed region of Kashmir—a province of India but disputed by Pakistan and populated by many who would prefer autonomy from both—August 14 and 15 raise more serious worries and threats. Independence Day brings fear in Kashmir, of Indian security forces as well as militant Islamic groups. Many Kashmiris believe they have no independence to celebrate, and they reel from the thousands of casualties suffered in the long tug-of-war. Independence Day events in Kashmir's capital, Srinagar, are typically confined to heavily guarded Bakshi Stadium, and few attend (out of concern for their safety). In 2000 a militant strike depressed attendance, for example, and a state police spokesman acknowledged, "Who would want to attend anyway? . . . People are afraid to die." In 2005 a grenade attack rocked the Independence Day venue an hour before the Kashmir chief minister was set to arrive. No one was hurt in the blast, but Islamic militants killed five Hindus and injured nine others in an attack on a remote village. Shops and businesses in Kashmir were shut tight, not so that

Kashmiris could celebrate, but so that they might protect their lives and livelihoods.

As a people spread across national boundaries, Assyrians in Turkey have no national day. But they express their ethnic identity as a people through celebration of their new year, or Akito. Long prohibited as a threat to Turkish nationhood, Akito was suppressed, but in 2005 Turkey (concerned about its entry into the European Union) allowed its Assyrian minority population to observe their new year openly.

Nationalist celebration can be problematic—and dangerous—when nations (defined ethnically or religiously) and nation-states are not exactly synonymous or completely overlapping. Kurds in Turkey—part of an ethnic or national group spread over Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, but without their own nation-state—face similar restrictions and cause greater consternation among authorities in Turkey. But in 2005, expedience, perhaps a sense of atonement, and reduced fear of the Assyrian minority's objectives pushed Turkey to permit Akito, which began on March 21 and culminated on April 1. Turkey's misgivings are not without some basis. A pan-Assyrian (or even more, a pan-Kurdish) movement would pose a challenge to established states, and holidays such as Akito can give voice to such national aspirations. As Emanuel Khoshaba, an Iraqi Assyrian in Damascus, Syria said, "Protecting our national days is as important to us as preserving the soil of our nation. Whether they live in Iraq or Syria or Turkey, our goal is to bring Assyrians together as a nation."

Significance of Holidays

Throughout the world, holidays matter. They can be matters of life and death, requiring observance as a patriotic or religious obligation or necessitating avoidance to preserve life and limb. In Darfur in April 2005, for example, the relentless assault on the province's Muslim tribespeople by marauding Sudanese Janjaweed militia forced fleeing people to give up any celebration of the prophet Muhammad's birthday. They were afraid to come together for ceremonies, to drum or dance or to call attention to themselves and their whereabouts. The victimized tribes similarly are unable to hold weddings or other festive events, not only because of the threat of the Janjaweed killers, but also because they have no dowries to provide or food to offer celebrants.

Yet in other places and circumstances, holidays and rites of passage are affairs of fun and frivolity, times to let loose and indulge fancies. What could be more exuberant, more joyous, more filled with fantastic pleasure than Carnival, celebrated widely in Catholic countries in the days before Lent, the austere ritual period that precedes Easter? Carnival is at its most extravagant in the Caribbean. Culminating in Mardi Gras (Fat Tuesday), the day before Ash Wednesday that commences Lent, Caribbean Carnival explodes with excitement and abandon. In Martinique the

celebration even extends beyond Mardi Gras into Ash Wednesday itself. In Saint Lucia Carnival is the island's biggest festival, and revelers fill the streets with parades, colorful costumes, and the pulsating beats of soca and calypso music. Carnival in French Guiana turns things topsy-turvy, as revelers don outlandish attire and break normal social rules with relish. Among the most spectacular festivities are those in Trinidad and Tobago, influenced by African traditions remade in the Caribbean, and overflowing with drinking, dancing, and the percussive intensity of steel bands. Moving to South America, Brazil virtually defines Carnival, and Carnival defines Brazil, with its whirling celebration set to the rhythm of samba. Holidays are thus times of joy as well as sadness, moments that can be bitter or sweet.

Holidays matter to us even when they have little "meaning." The Canadian calendar, for example, is filled with Monday bank holidays, which construct three-day

weekends and stand for nothing other than the benefits of leisure. Holidays tell us much about a society, whether they are bottom-up celebrations created and maintained by common people or top-down festivals constructed or imposed by leaders on sometimes unenthusiastic masses. Holidays are both the medium and the message: they are a crucial means through which people communicate, and they offer complicated but critical messages about the lives of those they envelope with festivity.

The *Encyclopedia of Holidays and Celebrations* surveys this rich and varied festive terrain. It invites browsing as well as more intense examination or comparative study of individual entries. It cannot be all-inclusive or the last word on so vast a subject, but it can offer a vital first step for those eager to learn more about the diverse, fascinating, and vibrant cultures of the people of the world, on their own terms, through the festivity that gives expression, order, and meaning to their lives.



 *Country Entries A–K* 

~ Afghanistan ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Southern Asia, north and west of Pakistan, east of Iran
Size	250,000 sq. mi.
Capital City	Kabul
Flag Description	The flag has three equal vertical bands of black (hoist side), red, and green, with a gold emblem centered on the red band. The emblem features a templelike structure encircled by a wreath on the left and right and an Arabic inscription at the top that reads, "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger."
Independence	August 19, 1919 (from United Kingdom control over Afghan foreign affairs)
Population	29,928,987 (2005 est.)
Government	Transitional
Nationality	Afghan
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Pashtun (42%); Tajik (27%)
Major Language(s)	Afghan Persian (Dari) (50%); Pashtu (35%) (both official)
Major Religion(s)	Sunni Muslim (80%); Shia Muslim (19%)
National Holiday(s)	Navruz, March 21; Remembrance Day for Martyrs and Disabled, May 4; Independence Day, August 19; Pashtunistan Day, August 30

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Archaeological evidence indicates that there were probably well-developed prehistoric civilizations in southern Afghanistan as far back as the Stone Age (50000–20000 B.C.E.). Plant remains found in the foothills of the Hindu Kush Mountains suggest that people living in the region were among the first to develop agriculture and domesticate animals. Certainly the course of the nation's history has been determined by its location at the crossroads of Central, West, and South Asia, attracting conquerors one after the other. Starting around 500, when the Persian king Darius the Great (c. 550–486 B.C.E.) conquered the region, to the USSR's failed takeover, Afghanistan has risen from the rubble of one war, only to be reduced to rubble by yet another. Alexander the Great (356–323 B.C.E.) conquered the region on his way to India, and Genghis Khan (1162–1227 C.E.) swept through

the area between 1220 and 1223, razing Balkh, Herat, and Bamiyan. Yet no conqueror has been able to gain control of its people, and the resulting bloody revolts have become the nation's hallmark.

Religion has been closely connected to the successive conquests. Zoroastrianism, a monotheistic religion and one of the world's oldest, was introduced by Zoroaster in 628 B.C.E. in northern Afghanistan in what was then the capital, Bactria. Afghanistan remained under its influence for a considerable length of time until people from the east, the Yuechi, founded the Kushan dynasty early in the second century C.E., and introduced Buddhism into the Bamiyan Valley, where it held sway up to the 10th century. Islam arrived in Afghanistan in the seventh century C.E. when the Muslim conquest began. It has flourished since then.

The rich cultural and political history of Afghanistan as a nation extends over a little more than two centuries. Ahmad Shah united the country in 1747 and founded the Durrani dynasty, which lasted until 1818. The name *Afghanistan* is mentioned officially for the first time in the Anglo-Persian peace treaty of 1801. The Durrani were the first Pashtun rulers

Fun Fact

Mujahideen is a plural form of Arabic *mujahid*, meaning “struggler” or someone who engages in jihad or “struggle,” but it is often translated as “holy warrior.” In the late 20th century the Western media began to use the term to describe various armed fighters who subscribe to Islamic ideologies.

of Afghanistan, and it was under the leadership of Ahmad Shah that Afghanistan began to take shape as a nation-state after centuries of fragmentation and exploitation.

In recent times Afghanistan has seen a great deal of war and civil unrest. The country’s last period of (relative) stability occurred between 1933 and 1973 under King Zahir Shah (b. 1914). He was responsible for introducing programs of political and economic modernization, establishing a democratic legislature, encouraging education for women, and other much needed changes. These reforms, however, did not

endear him to the religious militants who opposed him. In 1973 his brother-in-law Sardar Mohammed Daoud (1909–78) staged a coup while Zahir Shah was abroad. Then in 1978, when the communist People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan took over the government, his whole family was killed.

In 1979 the Soviet Union invaded but was forced to withdraw 10 years later by anti-Communist mujahideen forces financed by the CIA, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. The Communist regime in Kabul collapsed in 1992. Fighting that subsequently erupted among the various mujahideen factions eventually led to a feudal situation that ultimately resulted in the advent of the Taliban, an ultra-fundamentalist Islamic group. Clerics of the ferociously devout Pashtun, a tribe of both Pakistan and Afghanistan, formed the Taliban in the early 1990s.

The black-turbaned clerics’ aim was to end Afghanistan’s civil war, which they achieved with help from Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency. The Taliban seized Kabul in 1996 and managed to capture most of the country outside of Northern Alliance strongholds, primarily in the northeast.

The Taliban was overthrown by the United States in 2001 in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11. In late 2001, under sponsorship of the United States, prominent opponents of the Taliban and Afghans living in exile met in Bonn, Germany. They agreed on a plan to form a new government. This led to the appointment of Hamid Karzai (b. 1957) as the chairman of the Afghan Interim Authority (AIA) on December 22, 2001. When national elections were held in June 2004, Karzai was elected as the first president of Afghanistan. The change in government marked a revival of celebrations and religious festivities that the Taliban had forbidden.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Afghanistan is bordered on the north by Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan; on the extreme northeast by China; on the east and south by Pakistan; and by Iran on the west. The terrain comprises mostly rugged mountains with plains in the north and southwest. The country is divided east to west by the Hindu Kush mountain range, which forms a rough border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Damaging earthquakes occur in the Hindu Kush. In the east the mountains may reach 18,000 feet; farther west peaks rise to heights of 24,000 feet. The highest peak Tirich Mir is over 25,000 feet high. Except in the southwest most of the country is covered by high, snow-capped mountains and is traversed by deep val-

Northern Alliance

Many of the men now identified as Northern Alliance fighters began as mujahideen, the Muslim fundamentalists who fought against the Soviets after they entered Kabul at the end of 1979. This started the 10-year war between the Soviets and the mujahideen resistance, which was financed largely by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. Prominent among the mujahideen as an organizer and financier was a wealthy Saudi named Osama bin Laden. With the support of the American, Pakistani, and Saudi governments bin Laden funneled money, arms, and Muslim fighters from around the world into Afghanistan.

In 1989 the Soviet Union withdrew its troops but continued to support the Communist government, led by Mohammed Najibullah (1947–96), former chief of the Afghanistan secret police. Likewise, the CIA and

Saudi Arabia continued to provide massive amounts of financial support for the mujahideen. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the Najibullah government was overthrown in 1992, when Abdul Rashid Dostum (b. 1954) mutinied and allied himself with Ahmed Shah Massoud (1953–2001). Together they took control of Kabul and declared the Islamic State of Afghanistan.

The Northern Alliance ruled Afghanistan for the next four years, a period marred by civil war between the Northern Alliance and Pashtun leaders, and infighting among Alliance factions. Some of the prominent members of the Alliance were Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras, ethnic minorities in Afghanistan. In 1996, the Taliban swept to power, driving the Northern Alliance into a small corner of northwest Afghanistan.

leys. The climate of the country is arid to semi-arid, with cold winters and hot summers. Afghanistan is also prone to frequent droughts and flooding.

❁ ECONOMY

Afghanistan is one of the world's poorest countries. The average life expectancy is 45–47 years; men have a slightly higher life expectancy than women. Centuries of war and the resulting political instability have ravaged the country and left it in shambles. Landlocked and poor, Afghanistan is dependent on foreign aid and has a national debt of US\$8 billion, most of it owed to Russia. Agriculture accounts for 60 percent of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP) although only 12 percent of the land is arable. The major food crops are poppies, corn, rice, barley, wheat, dry fruits, nuts, and grapes. Other cash crops include tobacco, madder, castor beans, and sugar beets. Sheep farming is also extremely profitable. The major sheep exports are wool and the highly prized skins of young Karakul, a hardy breed of sheep native to Central Asia. Afghanistan is rich in natural resources. There are numerous deposits of minerals—coal, and precious and semi-precious stones—as well as natural gas. Only some of these have been explored. The country's petroleum resources have not yet been exploited. Industry, which includes small-scale production of textiles, soap, furniture, shoes, fertilizer, cement, and hand-woven carpets, accounts for only 10 percent of the country's GDP.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The history of art in Afghanistan goes back to the very beginnings of the culture, although much has been destroyed by war and civil strife. Probably the most famous Afghan art is known as Gandhara, named for an area now located in northern Pakistan, where the Greek and Buddhist cultures met and flourished (250–130 B.C.E.). The monumental Buddhas in the Valley of Bamiyan were survivals of this rich interaction. Carved directly from the sand-

stone cliffs in which they were sheltered, the Buddhas had watched over the valley for 1,500 years, before being destroyed by the Islamist Taliban government in 2001.

Afghanistan's violent history has not been kind to its other arts either. During the 1990s, the Taliban banned instrumental music and public music making was suppressed. In spite of arrests and the destruction of instruments, Afghan musicians have sustained their art into the 21st century. Although Kabul has long been considered the cultural capital of the country, Europeans have paid more attention to the city of Herat, perhaps because its music is closely related to that of Iran.

The two forms of poetry for which Afghanistan is famous are *ghazal* and *charbeiti*; both were originally unique to the Dari language, a form of Persian, but they are now popular forms in other languages as well. The *ghazal* (an Arabic term that means “speaking with women”) consists of couplets, called *sher*, that rhyme and share a refrain, called a *radif*. The *charbeiti* is an oral form based on four lines, usually describing love, youth, and war.

Afghans celebrate holidays (especially religious ones) with their families and relatives. Holidays in post-Taliban Afghanistan are also marked by revelry and rejoicing. Men dye their beards with henna, and women adorn their hands with intricate henna designs, especially for social occasions. Houses and streets are lit up, and special foods are shared among friends and families. Children dress up in new clothes and are given gifts or cash by their elders. Oral renditions and recitations from the Koran, in praise of Allah (as well as Muhammad and Hazrat Ali), are given. The Koranic recitations take place in local dialects, as well as in the traditional Arabic.

Navruz, the Zoroastrian (Persian) New Year, remains a significant holiday in Afghanistan, where it is celebrated on the first day of the month of Fardardin, the first month of the Persian (Jalali) calendar. It is celebrated in different countries on different dates, depending on the calendar used in each country. Navruz is celebrated on March 21, the vernal equinox, in countries that follow the Gregorian calendar. The Muslim observance of El am Hejir is also

Buzkashi

Translated literally *buzkashi* means “goat-grabbing” or “goat-killing” and probably evolved from hunting mountain goats on horseback. According to legend, the game of *buzkashi* was originally played in the Oxus River Basin in Central Asia, during the time of Genghis Khan and the Mongols, with a prisoner of war, not a goat. It is the national sport of Afghanistan, a dangerous game, played fiercely and swiftly by two opposing teams of several hundred horsemen (*chapan-daz*) each. Both sides try to snatch the headless car-

cass of a goat or calf from a pit, carry it to the scoring area, and then back to the pit.

This deceptively simple task is in reality almost impossible to achieve, given the brutal nature of the game. Women are not allowed to watch. Only a few rules apply. It is an unwritten rule that no one can tie the dead goat to his saddle or try to snatch it by hitting an opponent. The use of a rope to trip an opponent is also forbidden. To most Afghan men it is a way of life, more than a mere sport. Teamwork, communication, lightning reflexes, and superb horsemanship as well as specially trained horses are essential for success in this sport.



Fun Fact

The people of Afghanistan practiced Zoroastrianism, a Persian religion, long before the advent of Islam.

celebrated around that time, but its date is set by the lunar Islamic calendar, so it falls on the first day of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar.

Afghanistan Independence Day, celebrated on August 19, is also an important national holiday. Afghans celebrate this day by dressing up in colorful clothes, setting off fireworks, and participating in parades, *buzkashi* matches, and dances.

Afghanistan, like Iran, uses the Persian (or Jalali) calendar, a solar calendar. Although the Persian calendar is virtually unknown in the West, it is one of the most accurate calendars in use. Whereas the Gregorian calendar, introduced by Pope Gregory in 1582 C.E., errs by one day every 3,226 years, the Persian calendar requires a one-day correction only every 141,000 years. The current calendar has been used in Afghanistan since 1957, except for 1999–2002, when the Islamic calendar was used. National holidays (such as Independence Day and New Year's Day) are observed according to the solar calendar and consistently fall on the same date. However the dates of Islamic holidays and observances will usually be given according to the Islamic calendar, which is a lunar calendar. This means that Islamic holidays occur 11 or 12 days earlier each year on the Persian and Gregorian calendars than they did the previous year.

❁ CUISINE

The key ingredients of Afghani cuisine include walnuts, pine nuts, pickles, and spices. Like other facets of Afghan culture, its cooking style has been strongly influenced by the cuisines of Persia (modern Iran), India, and Mongolia. Some of the characteristic dishes include Afghan naan (a round, flat leavened bread), Kabuli *palow* (rice pilaf), kebabs (lamb, beef, and chicken), *sambosa* (crispy triangular fried pastries filled with ground beef and chickpeas), *mantu* (steamed dumplings with minced onion and beef), *sabzi* (sauté spinach flavored with onion, salt, and garlic), *buranee-e-kadu* (chunks of eggplant topped with creamy white yogurt and a light meat sauce made with oil, chopped onion, ground beef, and tomato purée).

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NAVRUZ

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 21

The festival of Navruz (also called Norouz, Noh Ruz, Now Roze, Persian New Year, or, in Afghanistan, Nauroz and Farmer's Day) marks the first day of spring and the beginning of the new year. This ancient celebration originated with Zoroastrianism, a religion widely practiced in the Middle East

before the advent of Islam. It was probably a pastoral observance. Traditionally this is the day when farmers take their decorated cows to the nearest city for the annual agricultural fair, hoping to win a prize.

On Navruz in Afghanistan a black-faced character known as *haji firuz* plays the tambourine and sings, "*Haji firuze, sali ye ruze*" ("It is haji firuz time. It happens one day a year.") People gather around such *haji firuzi* figures to listen to the drums, *saz* (a stringed instrument), and *kamancheh* (bowed spike fiddle). They throw coins and paper money at the performers. In Kabul families follow a tradition of serving *haft mewa* (literally, "seven fruits"), a compote made up of walnuts, almonds, pistachios, dried apricots, red and green raisins, and *sanjet*, seeds of the mountain ash. A dessert called *samanak*, made of wheat and sugar, is also a favorite.

Khane tekani ("cleaning of the home"), carried out on this day, has a symbolic meaning. It shows that friends and family members are willing to entertain the spirits of their ancestors. Some Afghans believe that Ajuzak, a threatening old woman, roams the countryside on Navruz. Rain on New Year's means that Ajuzak is washing her hair, a sign that the harvest of the coming year will be a rich one.

In northern Afghanistan, a standard—*jandab bala kardan*—is raised at the tomb of Hazrat Ali in Mazar-I-Sharif, and thousands of people visit the shrine hoping to touch the staff in order to gain merit or, for the sick and lame, to be healed. The standard remains for 40 days and is not removed until a specific red tulip blooms.

El am Hejir is also celebrated on this day by Muslims. It is the anniversary marking Muhammad's flight (Hegira) from Mecca to Medina in 622 C.E. In addition the Bahai faithful, who number about 23,000 in Afghanistan, end a 19-day sunrise-to-sunset fast that reminds them of their spiritual nature.

See also Volume III: BAHAI; EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM; NAVRUZ; SPRING FESTIVALS; ZOROASTRIANISM

❁ REMEMBRANCE DAY FOR MARTYRS AND DISABLED

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 4

This event commemorates the martyrs and those who were wounded in the Soviet-Afghan War, which lasted 10 years. The people of Afghanistan pay homage to soldiers who died fighting for the country, and family gatherings are held to honor loved ones who died in the war.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 19

Afghanistan won its independence from Britain on August 19, 1919. Independence Day (Jeshn) was cel-



Afghan tribal men from Paktiya province on the way to Kabul to celebrate Afghanistan's Independence Day on August 19. Afghanistan won its independence from Great Britain on this day in 1919. (AP Photo/Musadeq Sadeq)

States-backed fighting forces ousted the USSR-backed Communist government in 1992. Subsequently the continuous civil war among various competing groups restricted the celebrations. Since the end of the Soviet occupation, however, Independence Day has once again been officially recognized. Government and business offices, as well as schools, remain closed for three days. In post-Taliban Afghanistan people celebrate this day by dressing in colorful clothes, setting off fireworks, and enjoying parades, *buzkashi* matches, and dances.

❁ PASHTUNISTAN DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 30

Pashtunistan Day is an annual reminder that the border dispute between Pakistan and Afghanistan, involving the world's largest group of tribes, some 30 million people, variously referred to as Afghans, Pashtuns, or Pakhtuns, remains unresolved in the 21st century. In the 19th century when the British ruled India, they were forced by two costly military losses to negotiate with Afghanistan. In order to placate Afghanistan the British negotiator, Sir Mortimer Durand (1850–1924), agreed to a boundary between Afghanistan and what was then British

India cut through Pashtun territory. This boundary, known as the Durand Line, was in effect from 1893 to 1949 when it was declared invalid by Afghanistan. From its inception, this boundary perpetuated a region of permanent instability between eastern Afghanistan and western Pakistan.

Pashtunistan Day is celebrated every year to reaffirm the resolution adopted by Afghanistan's parliament in 1949 that it "does not recognize the Durand or any similar line." While an argument could be made that many national holidays are the result of geopolitical strife, the survival of Pashtunistan Day underscores this aspect of national celebrations.

Symbol of Freedom

During the Independence Day celebrations in 2002 a pigeon landed on the table in front of Hamid Karzai, Afghanistan's new president, and remained there until the celebrations ended, when Karzai set it free to fly again. The audience applauded this symbolic spontaneous act of their new president, underscoring Afghanistan's newfound freedom.



Religious Holidays

ASHURA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First 10 days of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

In Afghanistan, Ashura, or the Mourning of Karbala, is a major festival among the Shia Muslims; they celebrate it for 10 days and, on the first day, dress in mourning and do not bathe or shave. For Sunni, however, it is a voluntary day of fasting. *Ashura* means “ten,” referring to the day on which it is observed. It is a day of public mourning that honors Muhammad’s grandson Hussein and other martyrs who sacrificed their lives in the Battle of Karbala. Shia Muslims consider Hussein the true successor to Muhammad. The conflict took place in what is now Iraq in 680 C.E. between Sunni and Shia Muslims. The Umayyad caliph Yazid overwhelmed Hussein and his followers. Hussein was decapitated, and his severed head was carried back to Damascus on a spear.

Ashura is the defining religious event for Shia Muslims, who strive to live and, if necessary, to die like Hussein. Shia believe that a model life can revive Islam and banish tyranny and oppression from the world.

Observed primarily on the 10th day of Muharram by Sunni, it consists of two days of fasting and prayers for forgiveness. Shia, however, end their 10-day observance with a large procession that reenacts Hussein’s funeral. Some of the Shia men flagellate or ritually cut themselves. They believe that inflicting bloody wounds on themselves will connect them with Hussein’s suffering and guarantee their salvation on the Day of Judgment.

See also Volume III: ASHURA; ISLAM

MOULOU

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

In Afghanistan the celebration of Mouloud, the birthday of the prophet Muhammad, began in the 13th century and is now observed across the country. This date is also called Mawlid al-Nabi, Mawlid al-Nabi, Maulid-ud-nabi, or Birth of the Prophet Muhammad. Speeches on the life of Muhammad, the founder of Islam, and public feasts are typical on this day. Meetings and conferences are held in Kabul, Qandahar, and Herat to dramatize stories about the birth, preaching, and other aspects of Muhammad’s life. These stories also recall his suffering, his leadership, and his spirituality. Conservative Muslim sects, such as the Wahhabi, however, disapprove of celebrating any human, including Muhammad. They believe that such celebrations interfere with the unwavering worship of Allah

(God), although other sects consider this a great holiday and celebrate it with enthusiasm.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOU

RAMADAN

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First Friday of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar

This is one of the most important holidays for people of the Muslim faith. Ramadan (also Ramzaan) begins with the actual sighting of the new Moon. (Authorities in Saudi Arabia determine the exact moment of the official sighting.) Ramadan lasts for an entire month, and the fourth of the Five Pillars of Islam requires day-long fasts during Ramadan. Over a billion Muslims around the world dedicate their time and energy to self-expression and self-control through prayer, sacrifice, and fasting. The fast of Ramadan ends when the new Moon is again sighted, and a new lunar month begins. The end of Ramadan is marked by the holiday of Eid al-Fitr. In Afghanistan a public holiday is observed on the first Friday of the month of Ramadan.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr (also Id al-Fitr), the Festival of Fast-Breaking, or the Lesser Feast, marks the end of the fasting and austerity that characterize the month of Ramadan and the beginning of a three-day feast on the first day of Shawwal. It is a day of thanksgiving for Muslims, when they must give to a special charity and ask everyone to pardon them for wrongs they may have committed during the past year. They attend a special community prayer at the *masjid* (mosque) in the morning and then celebrate the occasion with their families and by visiting friends and relatives. Gifts are exchanged and new clothes are worn.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, the Feast of Sacrifice, is celebrated on the 10th day of the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj). It is a three-day festival, also called Eid al-Kabir, the Great Feast. The pilgrims, having returned from Arafat (another Muslim observance associated with hajj), slaughter cows, rams, lambs, or

similar animals. The sacrifice is performed in remembrance of *alaibis salaam* (Ibrahim's [Abraham's] act of obedience to God—his willingness to sacrifice his son). According to tradition family members consume one-third of the slaughtered animal, one-third is distributed among friends and relatives, and the rest is given to the poor. This act of giving symbolizes the willingness of Muslims to give up things important to them. On this day people also visit friends and relatives and exchange gifts.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; HAJJ; ISLAM

Regional Holidays

❁ TAKHT-E-SAFAR FESTIVAL

Observed in: City of Herat
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July–August

Takht-e-Safar (or Takhte-Safar) is one of the most beautiful gardens of Herat, located on the slopes of the majestic Parapamisos Mountains on the northern bank of the Herat River. The garden is constructed around the grave of Imam Shish Noor (a Sufi saint). A festival that begins at the end of winter, and lasts through the spring season is held here each year. Every spring the faithful gather to pay homage to the saint. People sing hymns in his memory and give alms to the poor. The entire city of Herat takes on a festive air, and musical concerts are held during the festival.

❁ RED FLOWER FESTIVAL

Observed in: Cities of Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 21

During Navruz the Red Flower Festival is held in Mazar-e-Sharif (which means “the tomb of a noble/holy man”) to welcome and celebrate the spring season. This festival was originally celebrated by the Aryans who settled in northern Afghanistan. On the first day of spring the pastures of Afghanistan are covered with wild red tulips—which give the festival its name—as well as poppies, daisies, and violets. Against the backdrop of the Asa-Mayee and Shair Darwaza Mountains, which divide the Kabul Valley, everyone gathers to enjoy picnics and kite-flying contests. Many believers visit the shrine of Hazrat Ali, the fourth caliph of Islam, at the foot of Asa-Mayee. On the night of Navruz the Kabulis eat *sabzi chalau*, made with chicken, and *samanak*, a traditional dish made especially for the New Year that requires elaborate preparation: Two to three weeks before Navruz wheat is planted in small pots; from this wheat a sweet pudding is made on the eve of Navruz by young women. Through this observance the Afghans celebrate a good harvest and the beginning of a new year. The festival symbolizes happi-

ness, peace, friendship, and reconciliation around the country.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS; NAVRUZ; SPRING FESTIVALS

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

In Afghanistan, a ceremony for a newborn child is held six days after birth. Among the people of Pash-tun tribes, the birth of a male child is announced with gunshots because they consider this the birth of a new warrior. During the celebration either the religious head or an elder of the family names the child. Names usually refer to Islamic heroes. Guests and relatives offer gifts to both the child and the mother.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Circumcision (*khitān*) is performed on boys in Afghanistan when they have recited the entire Koran once through. As a common practice the boy undergoes the operation when he is between 10 and 12 years of age, making it a puberty rite. Circumcision separates the boy from childhood and introduces him to a new phase of his life. This is a major change of status, anxiously awaited, because the young male is increasingly aware of his own sexuality. In some cases the event is semi-public, although it is more often performed in a clinic or hospital. The occasion is marked by festivity, music, special foods, and many guests. While the actual event takes place, one may hear praise of God, partly, as some observers have suggested, to muffle the boy's cries. But the procedure is relatively safe, and those who perform it are usually trained and experienced. Circumcision is not mentioned in the Koran, but Muslims everywhere regard it as an essential ritual.

❁ MARRIAGE

There is no such thing as “dating” in Afghanistan, since the sexes are segregated at puberty. Premarital sex is strictly forbidden and, if it is discovered, the penalty for the woman is death. Marriages based on love do not occur in Afghanistan. Instead most marriages are arranged by parents and are between cousins, because marriages made within a family are thought to strengthen family ties. After the parents of both the would-be bride and would-be groom have met and come to an agreement, they ask the girl and boy if they are willing to marry each other. Usually both parties agree to the marriage, but this should not be confused with consent. Children are extremely obedient and loyal to their parents, so the idea of refusing to marry the person chosen by one's parents probably would not occur to them. And the parents on both sides expect their children to agree to the partner chosen for them.

The legal age for marriage is 18 for males and 16 for females. Men often marry in their late teens, but despite the law girls are often sold into marriage when they are still children, particularly in rural areas. Once they have agreed to marry each other the boy and girl can meet, but they do not go out on dates, and they must follow certain rules. The boy can visit the girl in her home in order to get to know more about her and her family. A month or two after the parties have agreed to the marriage, an engagement ceremony is held, either in the boy's house or in a hotel. All the relatives of both families are invited, and many foods and desserts are served. The boy's family is expected to pay for the engagement ceremony.

Traditionally Afghan girls are expected to wear a dark green dress for their engagement ceremony because the color green is believed to ensure peace and happiness in one's future life. Boys can wear whatever they want to, but it must be suitably formal attire such as a suit and tie. Usually the boy and his parents greet everyone who attends the ceremony; once all the guests have arrived the engagement ceremony begins. The boy puts the engagement ring on the third finger of the girl's left hand, and she puts a ring on the third finger of his left hand. Then both read something from the Koran. Once the rings have been exchanged and the Koran has been read from, the engagement is official.

The date for the marriage ceremony is determined by the boy and his parents, usually five or six months after the engagement occurs. While the marriage ceremony is similar to the engagement, the wedding lasts for three days, with some of the festivities being held in the bride's home and others held in the groom's. Both families can invite anyone they know to the ceremony, and they provide many different kinds of food for all the guests. For the marriage ceremony the bride wears a white dress, and the bridegroom usually wears a suit and tie. As with the engagement the groom and his parents are expected to go around and greet everyone who attends the wedding.

If possible famous Afghan singers are hired to sing at the wedding. First they sing a traditional song called "Ho-esta Boro" ("walk slowly"), and the

groom and bride sit together, joined by their families. Then both the bride and the groom are given copies of the Koran, and each reads a few lines from it. Next the bride says that she accepts the groom as her husband, and the groom says that he accepts the bride as his wife, and everyone comes and offers their congratulations to the newlyweds. Once the wedding ceremony is over, the new wife goes around to everyone in her family and hugs them, and the new husband takes his wife home with him.

Divorces in Afghanistan are extremely rare but very simple: a man has only to announce his wish for a divorce publicly three times, and the marriage is ended.

❁ DEATH

In Afghanistan elderly people from neighboring villages, along with the bereaved family, gather to grieve for the dead person. Traditionally funeral rites are assigned to youngsters, while the women and elderly mourn. The dead body is positioned with the eyes closed, toes tied, and the face turned toward Kaaba (Kaaba is situated at the heart of the Holy Mosque's central courtyard in Mecca). The body is placed on a cot in the courtyard of the house, where the women encircle the body and grieve over the departed. Wailing and gesticulating wildly are considered natural ways of expressing sorrow. Even passersby may join the funeral procession to attain *sawab* (a pious act). When the body of the deceased is buried, the mourners offer *janaza* (recitation of the burial service by an imam). Mourning generally continues for a minimum of three days, but sometimes it may go on for weeks or up to 40 days. The deceased's close relatives are not allowed to marry until the first anniversary of the death is observed.

Further Reading

Ludwig W. Adamec, *Conflict in Afghanistan: A Historical Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2003); John C. Griffiths, *Afghanistan: Key to a Continent* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1981); Amin Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan: A History of Struggle and Survival* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004).

Albania

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Albania is located in southeastern Europe along the Adriatic and Ionian Seas between Greece and Serbia and Montenegro
Size	10,811 sq. mi.
Capital City	Tirana
Flag description	The flag has a black two-headed eagle centered on a red background.
Independence	November 28, 1912 (from Turkish rule)
Population	3,563,112 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary democracy with president as head of state
Nationality	Albanian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Albanian (95%)
Major Language(s)	Albanian (official)
Major Religion(s)	Muslim (70%); Albanian Orthodox (20%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Republic Day, January 11; Navruz, March 21; May Day, May 1; Mother Teresa Day, October 19; Independence Day, November 28; Liberation Day, November 29

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Throughout its history Albania has been ruled by foreign powers, beginning with the Romans, and later the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires. It did not become an independent nation until 1912, when Turkish rule ended. From 1944 to 1990, the Albanian government was completely controlled by the Communist Party, known locally as the Albanian Party of Labor (APL). In 1991 Albania began its transition to a democratic state and in 1998 it became a multiparty parliamentary republic.

Having ended 46 years of Communist rule, the transition has proven difficult as successive governments have had to deal with high unemployment, widespread corruption, an infrastructure in shambles, and powerful organized crime networks with links to high government officials. The president is the head of state and shares control of the armed forces with the prime minister. The president is elected by the People's Assembly (Kuvendi Popullor) for a five-year term and appoints the prime minister with the approval of the nominated party.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Albania is situated on the eastern shore of the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, along the western edge of the Balkan Peninsula, with Serbia and Montenegro to the north, Macedonia to the east, and Greece to the south.

Albania is a mountainous country with 70 percent of the land lying above 1,000 feet; its lowest point (sea level) is the coast along the Adriatic Sea, while its highest point is Mount Korab (Maja e Korabit) at 6,562 feet. Rising from the coastal plains, its mountains run northwest to southeast. The coast is less mountainous and is a densely populated area. The region experiences destructive earthquakes and tsunamis along the southwestern coast, as well as floods and drought.

Albania's longest river is the Drin, which is 175 miles in length. Other major rivers are the Seman, Shkumbin, and Vjose, but they are virtually unnavigable. The rivers have cut deep gorges with vertical walls as high as 300 feet in the mountains. These deep gorges make irrigation difficult, but they are well suited for enormous dams that enable Albania to generate cheap hydroelectricity.

Fun Fact

Between the 16th and 20th centuries, Turkish and Greek Orthodox stories and myths played an important role in Albanian folklore. During this period Albania also played a role in European theater. Shakespeare set his comedy *Twelfth Night* in Illyria, the name by which Albania was known in earlier times. In Mozart's opera *Così fan Tutti*, two principal male characters, Ferrando and Guglielmo, appear as two "Albanian noblemen" involved in a clever scheme to test the love of their fiancées.

Fun Fact

Albanian is the only modern representative of a distinct branch of Indo-European languages.

Albania has a reputation as a land of great natural beauty and romantic remoteness. The country has been referred to as the "Switzerland of the Balkans" and as "the rock garden" of southeastern Europe. On the other hand the country's isolation from the world, arising generally from its rugged mountains, has also led foreigners to speak of it as the "Tibet of Europe."

ECONOMY

Compared to other European nations, Albania is quite poor, with a low-performing economy. The country has mineral resources such as chromium, copper, nickel, iron, coal, phosphates, crude oil, and natural gas. It is the world's third largest producer of chromium. Electrification of the country was completed only in the early 1970s, and within two decades Albania was exporting electricity. But the system of a collective economy that prevailed until late 1990 did not lead to economic growth. In 1992 the new government introduced a program of economic reform with an emphasis on privatizing economic sectors, and the economy rebounded in 1993–95. Between 1997 and 2000 the country achieved a 7 to 8 percent annual growth rate. Albania is increasingly active in the movement of Southwest Asian opiates, hashish, and cannabis into Europe but engages to a limited extent in the production of opium and locally grown cannabis. The government's current priorities are energy (more can be exported) and improvement of the national road network for maintaining sustained economic growth.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The official language is Albanian, a member of the Thracio-Illyrian group of languages. There are two ethnic groups in Albania—Tosks and Ghegs—identified by which dialect they speak. Most of the Tosks live south of the Shkumbin River, while most of the Ghegs live north of the river. Tosk is the official dialect of Albanian.

The traditional Albanian dress consists of colorfully embroidered shirts and dresses and, in some

regions, loose-fitting pants for women. Traditional costumes are still worn in many rural and highland areas, particularly by women.

Today, traditional dances are also widely practiced in rural areas. Traditional dances in the south are accompanied by songs and music played on the flute, bagpipes, drums, and *lebute*. In the north the common instrument is the *ciftelia*, a small mandolin with a long, thin neck and two strings. Due to Islamic influences, especially in the south, men and women generally do not dance together in public. Albanian music is deeply rooted in ancient Illyria. However there is a marked difference between the northern and southern musical traditions. In the north songs are usually sung by a single individual on themes of honor, loyalty, courage, and heroic struggle against the Turks. In the south, music and songs are presented by several performers on varied themes.

In spite of the Communist government's rigorous efforts to suppress religious observance (religious leaders have estimated that 95 percent of all mosques and churches were razed or gutted during Communist rule), Albanians held onto their religious identities, marrying within their faiths and covertly observing religious holidays. Since the end of Communist rule, the practice of Islam and of Orthodox Christianity has begun to reemerge in Albania. In addition to recognizing the major Muslim and Christian holidays, the Albanian Parliament declared October 19 Mother Teresa Day in 2003. Mother Teresa (1950–97), who was born to Albanian parents, was beatified by Pope John Paul II on October 19, 2003. Albanians observe the Persian spring festival of Navruz on March 21, a remnant of the country's period under Ottoman rule. Following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, Albania adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1912.

CUISINE

The staples of the Albanian diet include milk, cheese, vegetables, and bread. A coarse white cheese called *djathe I bardhe* is common, and so is feta cheese. Eggplants, peppers, olives, tomatoes, and meat are frequently used in Albanian dishes as well.

Albanian cooking has been influenced by Turkish cuisine. Shish kebab, *quoftë* (meatballs), *romstek* (beef patties), pilaf, and *faszle* (white bean soup) are popular foods. *Hoshaf*, a dessert made of figs, is also popular. The midday meal is the main meal for Albanians, and it usually includes soup, salad, meat, and vegetables. People will normally finish the meal with fresh fruits or nuts, instead of a sweet dessert. *Akullorë* ("ice cream") is quite popular in the summer. Citizens of the city of Kruja like *boza*, a thick drink made of cornmeal, sugar, and water. A guest in an Albanian home may be offered Turkish coffee and *raki*, a brandy made from grapes.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 1

New Year's Day is the first day of the year in the Gregorian calendar currently used by much of the world. The day is celebrated as a holiday to mark the end of the preceding year and the beginning of the new year. In Albania where the holiday is called Viti I Ri, people celebrate New Year's with parties in the company of family and friends.

❁ REPUBLIC DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 11

This day is of great significance to Albanians because on January 11, 1946, Albania became a full-fledged republic. In 1944 the country was liberated from the Italian and German occupation of World War II by the USSR, which paved the way toward its becoming a republic. Flag-raising, ceremonial parades, and official gatherings mark the day.

❁ NAVRUZ

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 21

Navruz is not a religious holiday but a celebration of the vernal equinox. It heralds the beginning of spring, the commencement of agricultural activities, and the gradual onset of warm weather. Navruz is believed to have been celebrated even in pre-Islamic times. According to scholars it originated in ancient Mesopotamia. In Babylon the New Year began with the first new Moon after the vernal equinox. Festivities lasted 12 more days, each observed with specific rites. Today this holiday is celebrated for only one day, with elaborate feasting and general rejoicing.

In Albania Navruz is celebrated on the same day as the Muslim holiday of El am Hejir.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM; NAVRUZ; SPRING FESTIVALS; ZOROASTRIANISM

❁ MAY DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, an occasion to honor workers and laborers for their contributions to the social and economic development of nations. The May 1 observance of Labor Day was called for by the international socialist movement at the Second International in 1889. It was scheduled to coincide with a general strike called by the American Federation of Labor in the United States to demand

The *Lehute*

The *lehute* is a stringed musical instrument resembling the Medieval and Renaissance lutes of northern Europe. It is one of the most ancient instruments still used in Albania and in some other parts of Europe. The *lehute* was played by ancient oral poets to call the attention of audiences to the poets' recitations.

an eight-hour workday. In Albania where the day is called Nje Maji, trade union activists organize parades and processions and pledge to rededicate themselves to the cause of the workers.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ MOTHER TERESA DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 19

Mother Teresa, the founder and head of the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta, India, who won the Nobel Prize for peace, was born to Albanian parents. On this day in 2003 the head of the world's Catholics, Pope John Paul II, formally beatified Mother Teresa. This was a major step toward formally naming her a saint of the Catholic Church. As a gesture of respect and honor to Mother Teresa the Albanian Parliament ratified this as a special day and an official holiday in Albania, where it is called Dita e Nene Terezës.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 28

Four hundred years of Turkish rule over Albania ended with the early 20th-century Balkan War, after which Albania proclaimed its independence on November 28, 1912. The Republic of Albania (Republika e Shqipërisë) observes this day, called Dita e Pavarësisë in Albanian, as a national holiday.

Navruz

Navruz is a feast celebrated in the Persian and Turkish world with great enthusiasm. It marks the rebirth of nature and renewal. *Navruz* is a Persian word that means "new year." The holiday is observed on March 21, when day and night are equal in length. It heralds the advent of spring, after a struggle between spring, symbolic of goodness, and winter, symbolic of evil. It is a day of feasting for peace, friendship, and togetherness. Navruz is celebrated by the people living in a vast area, from the Balkans to the wall of China and up to Siberia.



Albanian children dance in traditional costumes in the main Skenderbeg Square in Tirana on November 28 during celebrations marking Albania's Independence Day. Albania declared its independence from Turkish rule on this day in 1912. (AP Photo/Hektor Pustina)

Celebrations include civic ceremonies such as flag-raising, honor guard inspections, concerts, and public speeches by Albanian leaders.

✿ LIBERATION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 29

Liberation Day, *Dita e Clirimit* in Albanian, which is similar in tone and content to Independence Day, is significant in the political history of Albania. On

November 29, 1944, at the end of World War II, the Soviet Army liberated Albania from occupying German and Italian troops. This is an official holiday, and civic ceremonies such as speeches and parades are highlights. Because Independence Day occurs on the previous day, Albanians enjoy a two-day holiday.

Mother Teresa

Mother Teresa was born in August 19, 1910, in Skopje, Macedonia, as Goxhe Bojaxhiu, of Albanian parents. Her father was a well-known contractor, and her mother, a housewife. They were devoted Catholics. By the age of 12 Mother Teresa realized that her vocation was aiding the poor. She decided to become a nun and traveled to Dublin to join the Sisters of Loreto. After about a year in Ireland, she left for the Indian town of Darjeeling, where she spent 17 years teaching in a convent school. On September 10, 1946, she said that she received a calling from God "to serve Him among the poorest of the poor." She got permission to leave her order and moved to Calcutta to set up her school; in 1950 she created a religious order of nuns known as the Missionaries of Charity. Mother Teresa received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. Due to her declining health she stepped down as the head of the Missionaries of Charity in March 1997. She passed away on September 5 of the same year at the age of 87. Mother Teresa was beatified by the pope in 2003.

Religious Holidays

✿ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

El am Hejir, also called al-Hijra, is the Islamic New Year. It is celebrated on the first day of Muharram, the first Islamic month. The Islamic calendar, based on the revolutions of the Moon, has only 354 days. On Western calendars the Islamic year loses 11 days every year. The beginning of the Islamic New Year is fairly low-key, unlike the frivolities and revelry associated with the New Year's celebrations in other countries. In Albania Muslims gather in mosques for special prayers and readings. A major activity on this occasion is the recounting of the Hegira, Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina in 622. On this day Muslims also reflect on the impermanence of human life and the fleeting nature of time. In Albania Navruz is celebrated on the same day.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

✿ ORTHODOX EASTER

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: Sunday and Monday after Easter (generally a few days after Catholic Easter)

The Eastern Christian Churches, which did not accept the Gregorian calendar and continue to follow the older Julian calendar, commemorate Easter on a Sunday that usually follows the day observed in the West. (Occasionally, the dates do coincide.) As with its Roman Catholic counterpart, this two-day festival (comprising Easter Sunday and Easter Monday) marks Jesus' Resurrection following his Crucifixion. In Albania it is called Pashket Ortodokse and is observed with prayers, religious services, and rejoicing.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

MOULoud

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

Mouloud, also called Eid Milad Nabi, Milad un Nabi, Mawlid al-Nabi, Mawlut al-Nabi, or Maulid-ud-nab, celebrates the birth of Muhammad on this date in 570 and is observed with great reverence by the Muslim population in Albania. Muslims observe this day by attending mosque prayer services.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULoud

EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr (Lesser or Small Bayram) is a significant day in the Islamic calendar, marking the end of the month-long austerities and fasting required during Ramadan. In Albania on this day, as in other Muslim countries, people wear new clothes, take part in prayer services in mosques, and exchange greetings and gifts with friends, relatives, and acquaintances. This is a joyous day for Muslims and features feasting and exuberant celebrations.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM

ORTHODOX CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: January 7

The Christian festival of Christmas commemorates the birth of Jesus more than 2,000 years ago. It is a day of great rejoicing for Christians the world over. In Albania, houses are decorated with Christmas trees and gifts are exchanged with relatives and friends. On Christmas Eve, the night of January 6, the Christian Albanians eat a meal of pancakes made without butter or oil. At the end of the meal each person leaves a spoonful of food on his or her plate to show gratitude to God. Thereafter all the dinner guests stand up and swing the table back and forth while singing, "May there be plenty in this house. May the time for a wedding be near."

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th (or pilgrimage) month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha (Greater or Big Bayram), is the second in the series of Eid festivals that Muslims around the world celebrate. In Albania it is called Bajrami i Vogel. Eid al-Adha commemorates Ibrahim's (Abraham's) willingness to sacrifice his son in accordance with a divine command from Allah (God). In Albania families sacrifice animals that have been deemed *balaal* (fit for sacrifice). The meat is then shared with neighbors, relatives, the poor, and the hungry.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; HAJJ; ISLAM

Fun Fact

In the mountains of Albania announcements of a death, birth, or marriage are passed from house to house by a gunshot or a shout that echoes through the mountains.

Rites of Passage

MARRIAGE

In Albania marriages are usually arranged by the boy's parents, with the help of a matchmaker, sometimes when the boy and girl are still children. The most popular time for weddings is August, when immigrants working abroad return on vacation. Engagement parties and weddings are important social events in Albania.

A wedding is an occasion for families and friends to eat and drink together, play music, tell stories, and dance, and they are typically very noisy. Every weekend wedding celebrations go on far into the night, and Sunday church services are punctuated by blowing car horns as wedding processions move down the main streets. Marriage feasts are prepared using recipes handed down from generation to generation.

At weddings, people may wear the traditional Albanian dress, which varies according to region. In the northern region women's traditional dress is a black dress and a short jacket with fringe on the shoulders. Because the color red has traditionally been believed to protect against evil influences, Albanian brides still wear a red veil occasionally. A wide apron is worn over the skirt, and black or wine-colored velvet, gold thread, or black beads decorate the outfit. Men's traditional dress includes a white kilt called a *fustan*. It is worn with a full-sleeved shirt and a white felt hat. A red and white scarf may be tied around the forehead.

Further Reading

Robert Elsie, *A Dictionary of Albanian Religion, Mythology, and Folk Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Edwin E. Jacques, *The Albanians: An Ethnic History from Prehistoric Times to the Present* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 1995).

Algeria

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Northern Africa, bordering the Mediterranean Sea
Size	921,906 sq. mi.
Capital City	Algiers
Flag Description	The flag has two equal vertical bands of green (hoist side) and white, embossed in the center with a red crescent with a red star inside.
Independence	July 5, 1962 (from France)
Population	32,531,853 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Algerian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Arab-Berber (99%)
Major Language(s)	Arabic (Official); French; Berber
Major Religion(s)	Islam (Sunni)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Commemoration Day, June 19; Independence Day, July 5; Revolution Day, November 1

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Ancient peoples, including Neanderthals, inhabited North Africa for hundreds of thousands of years. The Berbers, a mixture of peoples living in North Africa, eventually became a distinctive group. They were the original inhabitants of the region in North Africa occupied by Algeria. For much of the last 3,000 years they have been under the rule of foreign powers. The Phoenicians, Romans, and Vandals preceded rule by the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires. Between 642 and 669 C.E. sporadic Arab military incursions into the Maghrib (the western Islamic world, as distinguished from the Mashriq, or eastern Islamic world, the Middle East) brought Islam to the region. Literally, the Arabic word *maghrib* means “the time and place of the sunset—the west.” For its Arab conquerors, the region was the “island of the west” (*jazirat al maghrib*), and Algeria has traditionally been included in this designation. (Other North African nations included in the Maghrib are Morocco, Tunisia, and Mauritania.)

A series of Islamic caliphates followed, beginning with the Umayyads (661–750), then the Abassids and Aghlabids (750–909), followed by the Fatimids (909–972), the Zirids (972–1148), the Hammadids (1011–1151), and the Zayyanids. Until the Ottoman Turks conquered the Maghrib in the 16th century, for 300 years the Zayyanids maintained tenuous control. These in turn were followed by a series of privateer merchant captains whose power reached its height in the 16th and early 17th centuries. These privateers, from their base in Algeria, preyed on many vessels, including those of the United States and other Western nations. France, preoccupied with the Napoleonic wars and their aftermath in the early 19th century, was not in a position to act. However in 1827, enraged by an alleged insult to the French consul by the *dey* (local ruler), France put in place a three-year blockade of Algiers. This incident led to a full-scale French invasion of Algeria in 1830 and the imposition of French rule, which lasted until Algeria obtained its independence in 1962.

During the colonial days discontent on the part of the Algerians led to several uprisings, the most prominent occurring in 1871. Heavy violence also broke out on Victory in

Europe (V.E.) Day in 1945, in response to which the French military killed more than 1,500 Algerians and detained more than 5,400. The growing French authoritarian rule and Algerian nationalism led to the creation of the National Liberation Front (Front de Libération Nationale [FLN]) and a military network throughout Algeria, the National Liberation Army (Armée de Libération Nationale [ALN]) by Ahmed Ben Bella (b. 1916) and his colleagues in 1954. The War of Independence was launched by the FLN on November 1, 1954, and all Algerian Muslims were urged to support it. A bloody war ensued, killing as many as 30,000 Algerians and ending only when Algeria attained independence on July 5, 1962.

The French reluctantly gave the reins of Algeria to its people. The country's strategic location at the crossroads of the Mediterranean, Arab, and African worlds was the main reason for the delay in granting it freedom. After independence Algeria saw a number of regimes and military coups. Ahmed Ben Bella appointed himself the president in 1962 and was then elected as the first president of the Algerian Republic in 1963. Ben Bella formed his government from the ranks of the military and close personal and political allies, indicating that the factional infighting was far from suppressed. He drafted a constitution, steered his country toward a socialist economy, and strengthened the power of the presidency.

Ben Bella was overthrown by Houari Boumedienne (1932–78) in a bloodless coup on June 19, 1965. The latter suspended the 1963 constitution, disbanded the militia, and abolished the Political Bureau, which he considered an instrument of Ben Bella's personal rule. Eleven years after he took power, in April 1976, Boumedienne set out, in a draft document called the "National Charter," the principles on which the long-promised constitution would be based. He died on December 27, 1978, and was succeeded by Chadli Benjedid (b. 1929). Ben-



Young Berbers in Ghardaia, southern Algeria. The Berbers, the original inhabitants of Algeria, have lived in the region for thousands of years. (AP Photo/Laurent Rebours)

did began to liberalize Algeria's economy, shifting from investment in heavy industry to concentration on agriculture and light industry. He also disbanded a number of large-sized government enterprises and state farms.

The economy suffered from high unemployment and food and housing shortages, resulting in social discontent. The unrest culminated in a series of widespread strikes in 1988. The strikes were repressed by the military with considerable force and a loss of life estimated in the hundreds. To counter this unrest and the rising appeal of the Islamists, Benjedid cut back on the reforms and encouraged private agriculture and small businesses. In 1989 the president also instituted political reforms, including a new constitution that eliminated the term *socialist* ushered in by Ben Bella, separated the FLN party from the state, and granted freedom of expression and association.

Algeria's repressive policies had made such a big impact on the economy that Benjedid's reforms failed to show results immediately. Moreover, the control of one party, the FLN, between 1962 and 1980 had led to an authoritarianism that was difficult to reverse and that had resulted in the rise of Islamists, particularly the Islamic Salvation Front (Front Islamique du Salut [FIS]).

In January 1992 a conservative military coup overturned four years of significant political and economic liberalization undertaken by Benjedid in the late 1980s. The coup took place only days before the second round of the first free national elections, which were likely to usher in a new government dominated by Islamists. Since then the virtual elimination of constitutional government and the resurrection of military authoritarianism have returned Algeria to the familiar situation of placing power in the hands of a small, elite group, nullifying almost all democratic freedoms and many of the free-market reforms of the preceding few years.

The Islamic insurgency saw intense fighting between 1992 and 1998, which resulted in over 100,000 deaths. Many were attributed to indiscriminate massacres of villagers by extremists. The government had gained the upper hand by the late 1990s and FIS's armed wing, the Islamic Salvation Army, disbanded in January 2000. However small numbers of armed militants persist in confronting government forces and conducting ambushes and occasional attacks on villages. The army placed Abdelaziz Bouteflika (b. 1937) in the presidency in 1999 in a fraudulent election but claimed neutrality in his 2004 landslide reelection victory.

Fun Fact

Maghrib (or Maghreb) is also the name of one of the five daily Islamic prayers, performed just after sunset. During Ramadan it signals the end of the daily fast.

Fun Fact

Frantz Fanon (1925–61), the FLN's most important theorist, provided intellectual justification for the violence required to end the French occupation of Algeria.

Berbers

North Africa served as an important route for people traveling to Europe from the Middle East. Thus, the region's inhabitants have been influenced a good deal by different cultures. The Berbers—the indigenous people of Algeria—developed out of this mix. Their language, traditions, and culture dominated most of the country until the spread of Islam and the arrival of the Arabs.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Algeria is the 10th largest country in the world and the second largest in Africa (after the Sudan). This mineral-rich country is also one of the wealthiest in Africa. Algeria is bordered by Mauritania, Morocco, and Western Sahara on the west, the Mediterranean Sea on the north, Tunisia and Libya on the east, and Niger and Mali to the south. The nation is divided by the Atlas Mountains into a coastal lowland strip and a semiarid plateau. The Sahara, which is much larger but arid and sparsely populated, lies in the south. Algeria's highest peak, Mount Tahat (9,540 feet) is located in the Ahaggar Mountains, about 930 miles south of the capital of Algiers.

Algeria's geography ensures that its climate is also diverse. While the coastal areas are endowed with a Mediterranean climate, the southeast is semiarid, and the south is dry. Algeria's coastal areas experience mild and wet winters with hot, dry summers.

The high plateau is dry and has extremes of climate, with chilly winters and very hot summers. Summer temperatures are very high throughout the country; they can reach 130°F during the day in the Sahara. High humidity is a common phenomenon in the northern cities, which are cooled by sea breezes. The southern oases become a major tourist attraction in winter due to the pleasant weather. Nighttime temperatures drop dramatically in the desert, to below freezing in places where it had been over 100°F during the day. The temperatures between September and May in the north of the Sahara are very mild, and there is little variation between night and daytime temperatures. South of the desert, temperatures are pleasant between October and April, but there are tremendous differences between night and daytime temperatures. Coastal areas are regularly hit by sea storms. Rainfall is low throughout the country.

Fun Fact

A common feature of Algerian summers are siroccos, hot dust- or sand-laden winds.

❁ ECONOMY

The Algerian Sahara is richly endowed with natural and hydrocarbon resources. This sector, the lifeline of the economy, accounts for 60 percent of budget revenues, 30 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), and over 95 percent of export earnings. Algeria has the seventh-largest reserves of natural

gas in the world and is also the second-largest gas exporter. It also has rich oil reserves.

Algeria is one of the few developing countries with iron and steel industries, as well as petrochemical, mechanical, electronic, and processing industries. Almost 80 percent of the country has electricity. Before independence, agriculture played a strong role in the economy. However, after the French left, this sector was critically handicapped by the sudden loss of skilled labor and foreign managers. Moreover, after independence, the government started focusing on the profitable hydrocarbon sector, neglecting the agriculture sector. Natural factors, such as insufficient rainfall and drought, also took their toll. Algeria today has to import food for its people. Principal food crops include grains, vegetables, and fruit; sheep and cattle are the principal livestock. Fishing also plays an important role in the economy.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Islam is the dominant religion in Algeria. The number of foreigners was reduced dramatically after independence; in 2003, there were only 2,500 Christians remaining in Algeria. Nevertheless there has been tremendous Western influence on Algeria's culture and learning. Islam is a major force not only as a religion, but also in the political arena. Sunni Muslims are the largest group within the Islamic population.

Algeria is dominated by Gallic traditions as a result of more than a century of French rule. Roman, Spanish, Arab, and indigenous influences are also very much present in Algerian architecture, music, and literature. Algeria's interest in a national Arabic literature, which had been suppressed by the French during the 1950s, was raised again during the War of Independence. Even before independence, local artists and intellectuals had been striving to revive national interest in their Arab-Berber heritage. This movement has steadily gained national support since 1962. Kateb Yacine (1929–89), Mohammad Dib (1920–2003), and Malek Haddad (1927–78) are some of the noted 20th-century Algerian writers who wrote in French. French novelist Albert Camus (1913–60), famous for his existential novels including *L'Étranger* (*The Stranger*) and *La Peste* (*The Plague*), was born and educated in Algeria. Assia Djebar (b. 1936), a famous Algerian woman writer, has described the lives of women in books such as *So Vast the Prison* (2001) and *A Sister to Scheherazade* (1988).

After independence, the government established handicraft centers to encourage local artisans to use traditional methods in rug-making, pottery, jewelry, and brassware. The National Institute of Music promotes traditional music, dance, and folklore. Algeria also has a rich architectural heritage with strong Roman and Turkish influences. There are beautiful Arab mosques decorated with mosaics. The old towns and cities are full of historic buildings built around courtyards. Narrow and winding streets are a main feature in these areas, called *medina*,

which are usually the native quarters of the city. Most Algerian houses have domes to ease the intense heat. El Oued, an oasis town, has earned the title of the “Village of a Thousand Domes” because of its many domed houses.

In Algeria local festivals and celebrations are called *moussems*. Moussem Taghit celebrates the harvest of dates in an oasis in western Algeria at the end of October. Similarly, there is a cherry *moussem* in Tlemcen during springtime and a tomato *moussem* in Adrar.

❁ CUISINE

Algiers and certain popular coastal towns, which are the main tourist haunts, have an array of good restaurants, serving mainly French- and Italian-style food. However the food is much spicier than their European equivalents. Even classic European dishes have a unique Algerian touch. The coastal areas boast a multitude of fish dishes. A typical Algerian three-course menu consists of a soup or salad to start, roasted meat or fish as a main course, and fresh fruit for dessert. Ubiquitous street stalls sell kebabs in French bread, topped with a spicy sauce, the local version of the hamburger. For ordinary meals, Algerians generally cook roasted meat, usually lamb, couscous (a dish of steamed semolina) with a vegetable sauce, and fresh fruit to finish.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 1

New Year's Day is the first day of the year in the Gregorian calendar. Although Algeria is an Islamic country, and Islam follows the lunar calendar, European influence remains in the January 1 New Year's celebration. It is a public holiday with government offices, schools, and businesses closed.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day to commemorate the important role played by workers in national economies. The May 1 observance of Labor Day was first decreed by the international socialist movement in 1889. The date was set to coincide with a general strike called by the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in the United States to win an eight-hour workday. Labor Day is a national holiday in Algeria, and all government, commercial, and educational institutions are closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

Marabouts and Turuqs

A significant feature of Sufi Islam in North Africa was the cult of holy men (*maraboutism*). The *marabouts* (“dervishes”), for whom the cult was named, were believed to have *baraka*, or divine blessing, and they were also widely believed to be able to perform miracles.

Turuq, which are Sufi brotherhoods, have been another unique feature of Islam in North Africa since the Middle Ages. They were prevalent mainly in Algeria's rural and hilly regions. The *turuq* leaders were often *marabouts* or sheikhs. In urban areas orthodox Sunni Muslims dominated the *turuqs*.

❁ COMMEMORATION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 19

Commemoration Day, also known as National Day or Historical Readjustment Day, is observed on June 19. It marks the anniversary of the day in 1965 when Colonel Houari Boumedienne came to power by overthrowing Mohammed Ben Bella in a bloodless coup d'état. Boumedienne remained Algeria's leader until his death in 1978. Algerians remember him for broadening the people's access to education, health facilities, medical care, and other services.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 5

Algerians celebrate July 5 as their Independence Day to mark the day in 1962 when the country became free from French rule after a bloody seven-year war. On this day musicians in traditional dress crisscross the streets of Algiers reminding the people of their hard-earned freedom. Concerts by famous *rai* stars like Khaled (b. 1960), Cheb Mami (b. 1966), and Rachid Taha (b. 1958) are held on

Rai

Spanish, Moroccan, and Algerian traditional music have fused, primarily in western Algeria, to produce a new form of music called *rai* (pronounced “rye”). This music has traditionally been performed at festivals and weddings. *Rai* has become world famous and is often accompanied by modern instruments. This simple music is rhythmic, and the lyrics, in the local dialect, are often repetitive.

Fun Fact

World famous Parisian fashion designer Yves St. Laurent was born in Oran, Algeria, in 1936. He completed his education in Algeria, before moving to Paris to pursue a career in fashion.

the eve of Independence Day. Flag-raising ceremonies are also part of the day's festivities. It is a national holiday, with government offices, schools, and many businesses closed.

❁ REVOLUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 1

Algerians observe Revolution Day to mark the anniversary of the start of the country's revolution against French colonial rule. It is an official national holiday. People gather in huge crowds in Algiers, the capital, to celebrate the day, marking the founding of the National Liberation Front (Front de Libération Nationale [FLN]), and the beginning in 1954 of a War of Independence led by the FLN that ended with Algerian independence in 1962.

Religious Holidays

❁ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

North Africa was completely transformed by the introduction of Islam and the Arabic language in the seventh century. The new religion and language ushered in various changes in social and economic relations. It helped the region establish links with a rich culture and also paved the way for greater political discourse and organization. From the great Berber dynasties of the Almoravids and Almohads to contemporary militants seeking a fundamentalist Islamic state, there has been a recurrent call for a return to Islam's true values and practices.

Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina (about 200 miles north of Mecca) on the first day of the Muslim month of Muharram in 622. This is the day on which the Muslim calendar starts. It commemorates Muhammad's Hegira (migration) from persecution in Mecca and his acceptance in Medina. In Algeria, however, this holiday is more civil than religious. It is a time for good food and is also considered a good time to make important decisions.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

Fun Fact

Though Algeria produces some very good wines, much of it is not served in the country. Sale of alcohol is not encouraged in this predominantly Muslim country. It is only available in the upscale restaurants and hotels and is very expensive.

❁ ASHURA

Observed by: Shia Muslims, some Sunni
Observed on: Tenth of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

Ashura is a significant holiday for Algerian Muslims. On this day Muhammad's grandson Hussein was killed in the battle of Karbala by Yazid, the Umayyad caliph. For Shia Muslims Ashura is a day of great mourning, and this strong emotion is reflected in the many rituals connected with it. The most visual Ashura ritual is self-flagellation. Men use whips, often with sharp ends, or even small knives, to make their backs bleed. The reason for this ritual is the Shia belief that only physical pain can truly reflect the pain of the Muslim world when Hussein died. Sunnis also observe Ashura but not with the same intensity as Shia. Sunni, the majority sect in Algeria, usually fast through the day, though this is not mandatory. Muslims also visit the graves of their deceased family members, and the poor are given gifts.

See also Volume III: ASHURA; ISLAM

❁ MOULOUD

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

Mouloud (or Mawlid al-Nabi) commemorates the birth of Muhammad. This day is very important in the Islamic calendar. As strict monotheists Muslims do not consider Muhammad to be God, but rather a prophet of God. He is highly revered as the prophet of Islam who received revelations from the archangel Gabriel (Jibril). Conservative Muslims do not celebrate birthdays, even Muhammad's, because they believe it detracts from the worship of Allah. However all other Muslims enjoy the holiday. Algerians mark the day by wearing their best clothes and decorating the streets and their homes. People meet their friends and relatives and exchange sweets.

See also Volume III: MOULOUD; ISLAM

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr, the most important Islamic holiday, marks the end of the month-long fast of Ramadan. During the month of Ramadan, all Muslims fast from dawn to dusk. During this holy month Muslims have to restrain themselves, not only from food and water during the day, but also any sexual activity or impure action.

In Algeria, Eid al-Fitr is a three-day feast. The entire community prays together and asks for forgiveness for any wrongs that they might have committed during the past year. Celebrations include giving pres-

ents to children and visiting family and friends. There are carnival-style festivities in the village squares.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth to 25th days of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th (or pilgrimage) month of the Islamic calendar

The Islamic holiday of Eid al-Adha, the Feast of Sacrifice, commemorates the readiness of Abraham (Ibrahim) to obey Allah and sacrifice his son. The day is observed not merely to remember Abraham's supreme sacrifice, but to encourage others to emulate the virtues of generous giving and to stress the importance of making sacrifices. In Algeria, as in other Islamic countries, each family makes a sacrifice, usually a goat or a sheep. The sacrifice is made either by the town butcher or by the head of the family. The women cook the sacrificial meat, while the men go to the mosques to offer a special prayer. The sacrificial meat is then partly consumed by family and friends and partly given to the poor. This is also the time when Muslims may make a pilgrimage, called Hajj, to Mecca, in Saudi Arabia. Islam requires that Muslims make this pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime.

Muslims who cannot make the pilgrimage encourage the pilgrims by decorating the streets with colored lights and giving them carpets and *kafan* (shrouds), which the Muslims believe carry them from the grave to the next world. Pilgrims sacrifice a goat or a sheep at the end of their journey and shave their hair, or at least cut a lock. This time of the year is also considered an auspicious time for marriages.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

Regional Holidays

❁ TAFSIT

Observed in: Tamanrasset

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April

During the colonial era, tribal traders from Algeria, Libya, Niger, and northern Mali would meet in the Algerian town of Tamanrasset for a great festival. The principal attraction was the camel race, and each clan would contribute its best *mebarist* (camel rider). The festival continues but has been modernized and is now also called Tafsit, or the Festival of Spring. The festival takes place in April; its slogan is "friendship discovered." Algerians love this festival, and the different tribes exchange music, culture, and trade here. The camel race, however, remains the main attraction.

See also Volume III: NAVRUZ; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ SBIBA

Observed in: Djanet

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May

Every year in May the town of Djanet celebrates the pact of peace. Sbiba (or "Peace Celebration") is a local Berber tradition. It commemorates the end of a bloody fratricidal war that took place more than a thousand years ago. Djanet is a hub for musicians and painters. During this festival, a war simulation is enacted, and men dressed as warriors perform a war dance. The women sing war songs and encourage the men. They play tambourines, and their songs pay tribute to the warriors. This reenactment of an ancient war culminates with the signing of a peace treaty.

Rites of Passage

❁ MARRIAGE

Weddings are organized with great pomp and show in Algeria. The celebrations may last from one day to several, depending on the financial status of the family. Sometimes men and women celebrate separately. An Algerian Muslim is forbidden to marry a non-Muslim under the Islamic Sharia law. Marriages, which are mostly arranged, are primarily a contract between two families in which the elders negotiate the terms and conditions of the union.

The bride has a very important role in planning the wedding. She is the one who decides the venue of the wedding party, which is usually a big hall. According to custom the bride has to carry a lot of clothes to her husband's home, so shopping is important. Brides must also decide on the wedding day menu and select the caterers. Algerian weddings are known for their sumptuous food, which usually includes couscous, soup, and meat, often served with tomato sauce. The groom has only to buy a new suit.

The wedding celebration generally lasts two days. The bride celebrates the wedding with her family and friends on the first day. This is called the henna ceremony: Women decorate the bride's hands and feet with beautiful motifs using henna dye. At the same time some of the groom's relatives pay a visit to the bride, carrying her trousseau and other presents. They also bring with them one or more sheep, along with the necessary ingredients for a big party at the house of the bride's father. The bride's family then gives a bowl of henna to them, which is used to decorate the groom. The next day is the big day

Fun Fact

In Algeria it is easy to distinguish a woman who has been betrothed from one who is married. During the engagement, the groom gives a ring of white gold; after the marriage ceremony he gives her a yellow gold ring to wear.

groom. The next day is the big day when the bride leaves her parental house for her new home.

❁ DEATH

In Algeria's urban areas bereaved families are assisted by professional morticians in arranging funerals, which are usually held at the local mosque. The burial generally takes place in the community graveyard. Algeria has no custom of cremation, and Islamic law forbids it. In the desert region, onion-shaped mosques known as white *kuppa* can be seen

near residential areas. In these mosques religious leaders of the Berber and Maragut are enshrined. These *kuppa* can be seen throughout the Maghrib countries of North Africa.

Further Reading

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Andorra

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Southwestern Europe, in the Pyrenees Mountains between France and Spain
Size	180 sq. mi.
Capital City	Andorra la Vella
Flag Description	The flag has three vertical bands of equal size in blue (hoist side), yellow, and red. The center of the yellow band has the national coat of arms, which features a quartered shield.
Independence	1278
Population	70,549 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary democracy (since March 1993)
Nationality	Andorran
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Spanish (43%); Andorran (33%)
Major Language(s)	Catalan (official); French; Spanish; Portuguese
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Constitution Day, March 14; Labor Day, May 1; National Day or Our Lady of Meritxell Day, September 8

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Not much is known of Andorra's history prior to Charlemagne (742–814), who is credited for wresting the region from the Muslims in 803. Charlemagne, king of the Franks (a Germanic tribe) and the first Holy Roman emperor, created the March states, also known as Marca Hispanica ("Spanish Mark" or "March"), as barriers against the advance of the Moors toward the French mainland. Of these Andorra is the only surviving independent nation. Charlemagne promised to reward the people of Andorra with a charter if they helped him in his fight against the Muslim Moors.

Fulfilling the promise made by Charlemagne to the people of Andorra, his son Louis the Pious (778–840) granted a charter of liberty to the Andorrans in the early 800s. In 843 Charles the Bald (840–77?) also known as Charles II, son of Louis the Pious, granted the lordship of Andorra to Sunifred (834–48), the Count of Urgell (a Spanish town, also known as Urgel). By the Act of Consecration, which dates back to 860,

all the towns of Andorra came under the jurisdiction of the count. Later one of the descendants of Sunifred Ermengol IV (1052–92) passed the lordship of Andorran townships to the Diocese of Urgell, which was headed by the bishop of Urgell.

Many neighboring lords wanted to establish their rule in Andorra. The bishop of Urgell sought and secured protection against probable hostilities from a Spanish nobleman the lord of Caboet. Subsequently the French count of Foix (the county of Foix is located in the modern French *département* of Ariège) became the heir apparent to the property of the lord of Caboet, after marrying his daughter. However the Count of Foix began interfering in the administration of Andorra, which was legally still under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Urgell. This led to constant conflict over ownership issues, which were resolved only after the Acts of Joint Overlordship, known as the Pareatges, or Paretages (meaning "agreements signed between two parties"). These were signed between the count of Foix and the bishop of Urgell in 1278 and 1288, giving joint ownership and right of governance to both warring claimants.

For the next three centuries French and Spanish rulers exercised control over Andorra at different times. However

Fun Fact

Andorra's first constitutional documents, the Paretages, over 700 years old, are among the oldest such documents remaining in force.

when the French reclaimed the region from Spanish control in 1607, under the leadership of the French monarch King Henry IV, he signed a proclamation according to which the bishop of Urgell and the French king were declared the joint rulers of Andorra.

After the French Revolution (1789–99), in a desire to eliminate all signs of absolute monarchy, the French government abolished the right of the head of state of France to exercise joint ownership of Andorra, along with feudal rights to the region. However at the behest of the people of Andorra, who feared a Spanish invasion in the absence of French rule, Napoleon reinstated the feudal rights as well as joint rule by France in 1806.

During the two world wars Andorra was neutral and thus escaped much of the brutality and destruction. However in 1933 Andorra was taken over by a Russian explorer Boris Skossyreff (1898–?), who declared war on the bishop of Urgell, with the support of some Andorrans, and declared himself King Boris I, the new king of Andorra. But his reign, which began on July 6, 1933, was brought to an end on July 14, 1933, by French military forces that reclaimed the region and restored peace in Andorra.

The feudal system in Andorra was modified in 1993 when the titular heads of state were retained, but the government was transformed into a parliamentary democracy. Andorra became a member of the United Nations in 1993 and a member of the Council of Europe in 1994.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The tiny state of Andorra is situated on the southern slopes of the Pyrenees. It is just 16 miles from north to south and 20 miles from east to west. It shares its 78-mile border with France and Spain. Andorra la Vella, the capital, is situated in the southwest of the country at the confluence of the Gran Valira, the Valira del Oriente, and the Valira del Norte Rivers. Most of Andorra's 40 or so towns and hamlets—some with fewer than 100 people—are situated in a group of mountain valleys whose streams join to form the Gran Valira, the country's main river. The principality's highest point is Pic de Coma Pedrosa (6,562 feet), on the Spanish border in northwestern Andorra.

Fun Fact

Because Andorra was a neutral country, its people engaged in smuggling French goods to Spain during the Spanish Civil War and Spanish goods to France during World War II. Out of these endeavors Andorra's modern role as a center for duty-free shopping developed.

Andorra enjoys a temperate climate, with snowy winters and warm summers. The country's mountain peaks often remain snowcapped until July.

❁ ECONOMY

Tourism generates the economy and constitutes more than 80 percent of Andorra's gross domestic product (GDP). The duty-free policies of Andorra also boosts its tourism industry. The banking sector of Andorra, with its "tax haven" status (there is no income tax levied in the country), also contributes significantly to the economy. Little more than 2 percent of the land is arable, and agricultural production is limited to tobacco. This means that most food items must be imported.

Among the main items manufactured are cigarettes, cigars, and furniture. Timber, mineral water, lead, hydroelectric power, and iron ore are some of the other important mineral and natural resources found in Andorra. Due to lower taxes on imported items these goods are available at cheaper prices than in neighboring countries. Andorra is not a full member of the European Union (EU) but enjoys a privileged relationship with that organization. While trading in manufactured items Andorra is considered a member of the EU, but it enjoys non-EU status in trade related to agricultural products.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Andorra's population was around 6,000 until the 1950s. The population has increased but is still sparse compared to other countries. Only a quarter of the population—almost two-thirds of whom live in the capital of Andorra la Vella—are Andorran nationals. The remainder are primarily Spanish, French, and Portuguese. Catholicism is widely practiced here.

Catalan (Català), a Romance language related to Provençal, also spoken in parts of Spain, Italy, and France, is the official language of Andorra. In addition to Catalan, Andorrans commonly converse in Spanish and French.

The culture of Andorra is essentially Catalan. *La sardana* is a traditional Catalan dance in which performers hold hands while dancing, reminding many of similar dances in ancient Greece. Others insist that *la sardana* was not introduced until the 15th-century Catalan occupation of Sardinia, hence the name. Whatever its origins, *la sardana* emerged during the *Renaixença* (the 19th-century Catalan renaissance).

Andorrans are extremely fond of all varieties of music and, though very small, the country has a chamber orchestra. Every September a Festival of Classic Music is held. An annual international jazz festival, held every July in the parish of Escaldes-Engordany, is the most important musical event in Andorra and attracts renowned local performers as well as international stars like B. B. King and Miles Davis.

❁ CUISINE

Andorran cuisine is mainly Catalan, which is rich in taste and diversity, with strong French and Italian influences, such as the use of mushrooms and snails. Sauces are generally served with meat and fish. Pasta is also common. Local dishes include *cunillo* (rabbit cooked in tomato sauce), *xai* (roast lamb), *trinxat* (bacon, potatoes, and cabbage), and *escudella* (a stew of chicken, sausage, and meatballs). Whole vegetables and especially tomatoes, eggplant (aubergine), onions, and peppers are very popular. Dried beans and rice form the base for cooking during the winter. Pork is the meat used in most daily meals; lamb is usually reserved for special occasions. Herbs and spices are an integral part of Andorran cooking, with mint, anise, rosemary, saffron, cinnamon, parsley, and basil considered indispensable.

French desserts are very popular and are savored with dry fruits such as nuts, almonds, and figs. Fresh fruits such as red currants, raspberries, blackberries, oranges, and lemons are eaten abundantly. These are mainly found in the province of Lleida. Butter from the towns of La Seu d'Urgell, Sort, and Puigcerda in the Pyrenees of Catalunya is famous. A popular Andorran appetizer is *pa amb tomaquet* (tomato toast)—toast scraped with a garlic clove, rubbed with half a tomato, sprinkled with olive oil, and topped with sea salt. It is sometimes embellished with ham or cheese. When served in restaurants it is usually offered without charge. This is also the traditional workers' breakfast.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 1

The first day of the Western Gregorian calendar January 1 is celebrated as New Year's Day. In Andorra New Year's celebrations begin on New Year's Eve. Tourism is the lifeline of the country, and hotels, as well as shopping malls, throw big parties to lure customers and revelers. Fireworks fill the night sky, while confetti and streamers add a riot of color to the snow-covered surroundings.

❁ CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 14

In 1991 Andorran leaders drafted the nation's first written constitution. It was approved by a referendum on March 14, 1993, and came into force on May 4 of that year. By authority of the constitution Andorra is a sovereign parliamentary democracy, and the head of state of France and the bishop of Urgell continue to enjoy the status of co-princes as

well as heads of state. Andorrans celebrate their democracy on Constitution Day. It is a public holiday, and all administrative, educational, and commercial organizations are closed on this day.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, in many parts of the world. The holiday commemorates the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. While the earliest origins of May Day are ascribed to the pagan celebrations that were practiced by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well into the Middle Ages, the May 1 observance of Labor Day dates back to 1890 when it was established by the Second Socialist International. In Andorra everyone has the day off, and workers assemble at factories and workplaces before participating in demonstrations and parades organized by trade unions.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: September 8

Since 1730 September 8 has been celebrated as Our Lady of Meritxell Day (Mare de Deu de Meritxell), in honor of the patron saint and protector of Andorra, Our Lady of Meritxell (the Virgin Mary). Although this is a public holiday it is steeped in religious tradition. On this day thousands of Andorrans flock to the church in Meritxell to pay respect to their patron saint.

It is believed that on the day of the Epiphany (January 6) in 1278, which was also celebrated as the Three Wise Men's Day, a group of residents of Meritxell were traveling to Canillo to attend Mass. However, the sight of a rosebush (or, some say, an almond tree) in full bloom in the harsh winter months took them by surprise. On further investigation they found a beautiful picture (or statue) of the Virgin Mary, took it along with them to the church at Canillo, and placed it at the altar. Miraculously the picture disappeared from the altar the next day. Initially the residents of Canillo considered this an act of theft. However a pilgrim noted that he had seen a similar picture in Meritxell. Everyone concluded that perhaps the Virgin Mary preferred to stay in the church of Encamp (Meritxell is situated in Encamp), so the picture was placed on the altar of the church of Encamp. Once again,

Fun Fact

Andorra's typically heavy snowfall lays perfect ground for a number of winter sports, most notably skiing.

Fun Fact

Many immigrants (legal and illegal) are attracted to Andorra's fast-growing economy because there is no income tax.

Fun Fact

Catalan has over 10 million speakers in Europe and ranks 21st out of the 56 most common languages spoken in Europe.

however, the picture disappeared the next day and was found near the same rosebush, where it was initially found.

Honoring the desire of divinity, the residents of Meritxell built a church where the rosebush grew. Since then people visit the church at Meritxell and pay their respects to Our Lady of Meritxell.

On this holiday Andorrans attend a special Mass in the honor of Our Lady of Meritxell and make a pilgrimage to her sanctuary in Meritxell, four miles northeast of Andorra la Vella. At the end of the Mass the faithful kiss the medal on the statue of the Virgin Mary. To celebrate this day there is a spectacular display of fireworks; people eat lamb grilled on slabs of slate and dance all night long.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EPIPHANY

Religious Holidays

❁ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: January 6

The Feast of the Epiphany is a Christian feast that celebrates the arrival of the Magi (the three Wise Men, or astrologer-priests, of ancient Persia: Caspar, Balthasar, and Melchior) in Bethlehem after the birth of Jesus to see the infant, as well as the life of Jesus until his baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. The feast of Epiphany is widely observed in Andorra. A special dinner that includes all kinds of delicacies is prepared on this occasion. Families enjoy a cake known as a *galette des rois* (“three kings cake”), which has a special ritual attached to it: A bean or charm is hidden inside the cake, and the person who finds it is given a gilt crown to wear and declared king for the day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS; EPIPHANY

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

Maundy Thursday, or Holy Thursday, is a Catholic commemoration of the day on which Jesus washed the feet of his apostles before the Last Supper. It falls on the Thursday before Easter. On Holy Thursday church bells stop ringing, and no Mass is celebrated until the proclamation of Jesus’ Resurrection on Easter. The church bells are once again rung on Easter. On this day Roman Catholics also celebrate the institution of the Holy Eucharist, the ritual Christian sacrament of taking bread and wine. Andorrans, who are all Roman Catholics, embrace

the religious spirit of Holy Thursday. People throng to the churches; afterward families gather for a special supper.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

The Christian festival of Good Friday falls on the Friday before Easter. According to Christian doctrine it is the day when Jesus was crucified. It has been in the Christian liturgical calendar even longer than Easter Sunday. No one is sure why it is called Good Friday. Some have suggested that the use of *good* in the name goes back to Old English and means “God’s” Friday, while others interpret *good* to mean something like “observed as holy.” This observance is also known as Black Friday and Sorrowful Friday, and in Eastern Orthodox Churches it is called Great Friday.

It is a day of mourning, fasting, and abstinence for all Catholics. Catholics are also supposed to meditate and pray between the hours of noon and three o’clock in the afternoon, because it is believed that Jesus hung on the Cross during this period.

In many parts of the world a ritual called the Stations of the Cross is performed, which is a reenactment of Jesus’ final journey. In Andorra Good Friday starts out on a solemn note. Church bells do not ring for three days (from Holy Thursday until Easter Sunday) as a sign of mourning.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Saturday before Easter

The Christian observance of Holy Saturday, *Sabbatum Sanctum* in Latin, commemorates the day on which Jesus’ body lay in the tomb. Catholics believe that on this day Jesus arose in spirit and rescued those who were held captive in purgatory and sent them to heaven. Holy Saturday is an important festival because it represents the end of life in one world and the beginning of the era of salvation symbolized by Jesus’ Resurrection. Andorrans observe Holy Saturday with solemnity.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

The Christian festival of Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus’ rising from the dead. It falls on the first

Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. In Andorra the church bells that had stopped ringing on Maundy Thursday begin to ring again, telling people that Jesus has risen. Children awake on Easter Sunday to find colorfully decorated eggs scattered about their rooms. They also search for Easter eggs in the gardens.

Christians sometimes call Jesus “the Light of the World,” so candles are part of an Easter vigil and midnight services held before Easter. In Andorra the lit candles are extinguished on Good Friday to signify Jesus’ passing away. Then on Easter a special candle is lit once again to signal his Resurrection, and the candle is lit every day for the next 40 days until Ascension Day, when it is finally extinguished.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE ; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

❁ EASTER MONDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Monday after Easter

Easter Monday is an extension of the Easter festivities and is celebrated on the Monday after Easter Sunday. Andorrans celebrate Easter Monday by telling jokes, playing pranks, and feasting on lamb. People add fragrant oil or perfume to the Easter holy water they have brought home from church and then use this water to sprinkle on and bless their food, pets, gardens, and homes.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

❁ ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Forty days after Easter

Ascension Day is a day of special celebration for Christians all over the world. It commemorates Jesus’ ascent into heaven, 40 days after his Resurrection from the dead (Easter). In Andorra the scene of the Ascension is vividly reproduced in churches by elevating the figure of Jesus above the altar through an opening in the roof of the church. In some churches the figure is made to ascend, and that of the Devil is made to descend. The day is generally meant to celebrate the completion of the work of humanity’s salvation and Jesus’ entry into heaven.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

❁ PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fifty days after Easter

Pentecost takes place 50 days after Easter. The holiday celebrates the descent of the Holy Ghost on the disciples. This was considered a great miracle: Parted tongues of fire accompanied by a strong gust of wind

descended on the apostles, marking them as fit preachers of the Gospel to all corners of the world.

Many scholars believe that many of the traditions and celebrations associated with this holiday were borrowed from pagan celebrations of spring in Western Europe. Homes are often decorated with green branches and flowers. In Christian tradition this is the 50th day after Easter and has been celebrated since the first century. (Pentecost in Greek means “fiftieth.”)

In many countries, including Andorra, this is a two-day holiday. Whitsunday and Whitmonday are the names used locally to celebrate the event. The name *Whitsun* originated in the third century C.E. and was derived from the white garments that were worn by those who were baptized during the vigil of this feast. In Andorra it is customary to blow trumpets during the worship service to recall the sound of the mighty wind that accompanied the descent of the Holy Ghost.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; PENTECOST

❁ ST. JOHN’S DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: June 24

This day is the feast day of St. John the Baptist, celebrated nearly six months before the birth of Jesus (December 25). Thus while John the Baptist’s feast day falls near the summer solstice, the birth of Jesus is celebrated close to the winter solstice. In Andorra huge communal bonfires are prepared in every village, and each house contributes fuel. As evening approaches the entire village assembles at the site; then an elderly man prays for a good harvest and lights the bonfire. While reciting prayers people walk clockwise around the huge bonfire. Many people dispose of broken or damaged blessed items in the bonfire, including rosaries and statues.

The festivities that follow include storytelling, dancing, playing musical instruments, and singing. Men light torches from the bonfire and walk across their fields. It is believed that this will help them protect their crops from damage and ensure a good harvest in the next year. After the bonfire has gone out people sprinkle the ashes across the four corners of their fields to bless their harvest. Single young men and women jump over the remains of the bonfire and sing and dance.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: August 15

Assumption Day commemorates Mary’s Assumption into heaven. It is an important festival for Catholics because it reaffirms their belief in Jesus, who said

that all devout Christians would find a place in the glory of heaven. On Assumption Day Andorrans attend church to offer prayers to the Virgin Mary. Picnics, feasts, garden parties, excursions, and get-togethers also mark the day.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day is a Christian feast that honors all the saints (known and unknown) of Christianity. The Feast of All Saints has been celebrated on November 1 since the time of Charlemagne. King Louis the Pious declared it a Day of Obligation (a day that all devout Christians must observe) at the request of Pope Gregory IV. On All Saints' Day in Andorra, some people visit the graves of their relatives, bringing flowers and candles and spending time tidying up the gravesites. It is said that this eases the spirits of the dead, especially those who did not die in peace.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: December 8

The Immaculate Conception refers to a Roman Catholic belief that at the time of her birth Mary was protected by God from original sin and filled with his grace. It is believed that since God wanted Mary to be the mother of Jesus, she had to be free from sin of any kind. On this day devout Andorrans visit churches and offer special prayers in honor of Mary. Roses are kept at the feet of the Mother's image, and candles are lit.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Christmas Eve in Andorra

In some parts of Andorra there is a belief that on Christmas Eve the dead rise from their graves and kneel at the foot of the cemetery cross where they are awaited by a former parish priest who wears a white surplice and golden stole. The priest says the prayers for the Nativity aloud, and the departed respond reverently. Once the prayers are finished, the dead rise, look longingly at the village and the houses where they were born, and then silently return to their coffins. There is another belief that animals have the power of speech on Christmas Eve, and whatever they say is supposed to come true.

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 25

Christmas falls on December 25 and marks the birth of Jesus. In Andorra homes are decorated with multicolored lights and a Christmas tree. It is believed that Santa Claus brings gifts to good children on Christmas Eve (December 24). Andorrans attend Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve and then go outside to drink hot wine and eat sausages, baked ham, roast fowl, salads, fruit, pastries, and *coca* (a home-made cake).

The traditional Andorran Christmas feast consists of turkey and *turrons*, which are Christmas sweets. *Turrons* are like nougats and come in different flavors such as chocolate, coffee, and almond. Originally from Alicante in Spain *turrons* are extremely popular with Andorrans.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

SANT JULIÀ DE LÒRIA

Observed in: Sant Julià de Lloria
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July

Andorra is famous for its village festivals, held primarily during the summer months, when locals gather to enjoy music, dancing, wine, and feasts. One of the best known is the three-day festival held in Sant Julià de Lòria in July. There are cultural and sporting events, with activities for everyone. Children enjoy special competitions, games, and clowns. There are musical and street theater shows for teenagers and jazz, as well as theater, for adults.

Rites of Passage

BIRTH

Andorrans are primarily Roman Catholic. When a child is born it is baptized in the local church. Baptism is one of the seven sacraments, or essential transformative rituals, of the Catholic Church. At the time of baptism at infancy, parents choose two or three adults who will be the godparents of the child and who will take care of it, along with the biological parents, and encourage it to follow the path of Christianity. Traditionally for a male child, there are two male and one female godparent, while for a girl it is the reverse.

Before the actual ritual the priest confirms that the parents and godparents will bring up their child as a devout Catholic. The priest calls out the name of the child while tracing the Sign of the Cross on

the child's forehead. After reading a short passage from the Bible, the priest prays for the child, his parents, and godparents. Then with holy oil he anoints the child and later brings the child near the altar and sprinkles water three times over the child's head.

❁ COMING OF AGE

When an Andorran reaches puberty he or she becomes a member of the local church and has to be confirmed. Confirmation is performed by a bishop, who represents the church and confirms people by laying his hands on their heads and praying for them. Before people are confirmed they usually go to confirmation classes, where they are taught about the important beliefs and practices of Christians.

The actual ritual of the sacrament of confirmation takes place during the Mass. After the priest completes the sermon he reads aloud the names of all those individuals who will be confirmed. Each individual whose name has been called goes up to the bishop. After he or she asserts a total faith in Jesus and promises to reject evil completely, the bishop lays his hands on the candidate. According to Catholic belief the hand symbolizes the strength and power of the Holy Spirit. Then the bishop calls out the confirmation name of the candidate, which can be the individual's given name or the name of a saint. Using the oil of chrism the bishop makes the Sign of the Cross on the candidate's forehead, thereby indicating that the candidate is now a child of God.

❁ MARRIAGE

In Andorra the permissible age for marriage is 16. Andorrans may choose whether to get married in a civil ceremony or in a church. Civil marriages are conducted by the mayor in the town hall and in the presence of at least two witnesses. Andorrans who get married in a religious ceremony generally do so

in the churches in which they are members. The marriage service is led by a priest who reads from the Bible. The bride, who wears a white wedding gown and a veil, is ushered into the church by her father. Only close relatives and friends attend the service, lending it an intimate tone. The bride also has bridesmaids, who are generally her sisters, cousins, or friends. The father of the bride "hands over" his daughter to her future husband. The bride and groom exchange rings as a symbol of their marriage and commitment and sign a church register along with the witnesses. The priest and family members then bless the couple. Songs are sung, and sacred passages on love and marriage are read. After the marriage service a reception is held where there is a feast organized for the guests. Friends and family members of the couple raise a toast and say a few lines in honor of the newly married couple. Gifts are generally given to the newlyweds.

❁ DEATH

According to the Christian Bible all devout Christians will find a place in the glory of heaven after they die. To prepare for the passage the dead body is cleaned, dressed, and placed in a coffin. Then the coffin is taken to the church, where a service is held in the deceased's honor. Family and friends read passages from the Bible at the funeral. The body is buried in the local cemetery, and flowers are placed at the gravesite.

Further Reading

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Angola

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Southern Africa, bordered by the South Atlantic Ocean, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zambia, and Namibia
Size	481,354 sq. mi.
Capital City	Luanda
Flag Description	The top half of Angola's flag is red; the bottom half is black. Centered across the red and black bars is a yellow symbol, a five-pointed star within half a cogwheel crossed by a machete.
Independence	November 11, 1975 (from Portugal)
Population	11,190,786 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Angolan
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Ovimbundu (37%); Kimbundu (25%)
Major Language(s)	Portuguese (official); Bantu; other languages
Major Religion(s)	Indigenous beliefs (47%); Roman Catholic (38%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Memorial Day, January 4; Liberation Day, February 4; International Women's Day, March 8; Peace Day, April 4; Labor Day, May 1; Organization of African Unity Day, May 25; World Children's Day, June 5; National Heroes Day, September 17; Independence Day, November 11

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Before the arrival of European colonists small groups of hunter-gatherers had spread over most of southern Africa for thousands of years, and they lived well in even the driest and wettest areas of the subcontinent. Some 2,000 years ago the domestication of sheep, cattle, and goats led to the emergence of nomadic herders, primarily in the wetter coastal areas and the nearby interior. These early inhabitants of the subcontinent have been known as the Khoisan people.

The European colonists who arrived during the 17th century called the herders (who referred to themselves as *Khoekboen*) *Hottentots*, and the hunter-gatherers (called *Sonqua*, *Obiqua*, or San by the Khoekhoen), *Bushmen*. Both of these terms at first referred to differences in their ways of life but

acquired narrower racial meanings in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Because of their pejorative uses the terms *Bushmen* and *Hottentot* have been dropped in favor of *San* and *Khoekboen*. The Khoisan people, however, were diverse, and each group had its own name and language or dialect. Despite these differences in language and ways of life, the Khoisan shared common patterns of kinship, territorial organization, rituals, and religious beliefs.

The European colonization of southern Africa between the 18th and early 20th centuries had disastrous consequences for the Khoisan population, leading to their loss of control over the natural resources crucial to an independent existence. Many Khoisan people were killed in warfare with European colonists and with other African people. An unknown number also died from imported diseases, such as smallpox. This was a common effect of colonization. The survivors were forced into colonial society at its lowest levels as domestic servants, farm laborers, and industrial workers. In the western and northwestern parts

The Slave Trade

In Angola the slave trade had a significant impact between the 15th and 19th centuries, when black natives were taken as captives and exchanged for arms, gunpowder, glassware, and shells. Because Angola's rivers—the Zaire, Kwanza, Cunene, Cubango, and Queve—flow into the Atlantic Ocean, they were used to help the captors move the slaves from the interior to the Atlantic coast. Agents known as *pombeiros* combed Angola's interior to find slaves. Most of the slaves were

chained and had to walk long distances before they reached Luanda, the main port for slave traders during the 16th century. There they were fed and made ready to cross the Atlantic. The Atlantic crossing used to take five to eight weeks. The ships were overcrowded, and there was no proper sanitation, so many captives died on the way. As many as two million slaves were taken from Angola. In the 1830s the Portuguese appointed a new prime minister Marques de Sá da Bandeira. It was he who was responsible for abolishing the slave trade. In 1858 slavery was legally abolished in Angola.

of southern Africa, some Khoekhoen people settled around mission stations, where they managed to maintain a semi-independent pastoral existence until as late as the 1950s. By then, however, there were only a few Kalahari San groups remaining in the central areas of the subcontinent who could still depend on hunting and gathering for a livelihood.

The Portuguese influence in West Africa began in the late 15th century when King John II of Portugal (1455–95), keenly interested in finding a sea route to India around the southern tip of Africa, sent Diogo Cam (or Cão; fl. 15th century), who reached the northern part of Angola in 1482. The northern region was then ruled by King Afonso (d. 1543) of the Kongo state and Queen Nzinga (1583–1663) of the southern Mbundu kingdom of Matamba. (Her royal title in the Kimbundu language was *ngola*, and it was from Queen Nzinga's title that the Portuguese took the name for the colony of Angola.) Since the slave trade was a thriving business and promised great wealth, the Portuguese decided to establish their colony in the region. After building their first settlements in Luanda in 1576, the Portuguese began to exercise their control in the region.

The Catholic Portuguese brought Christian missionaries with them, and King Afonso I embraced Christianity. Queen Nzinga, in contrast, fiercely resisted the Portuguese and punished those who formed alliances with whites. The Matamba queen also understood that the practice of converting Africans to Christianity was a European psychological tactic to separate them from their culture and renounced the name given to her by the Catholic missionaries.

The Portuguese encouraged slavery in the region and profited handsomely from it. King Afonso cooperated with them, hoping that by doing so he could provide his people with the skills and education found among Europeans. But the Portuguese were insatiable in their appetite for slaves and the wealth they brought, and Afonso's efforts to end the slave trade proved futile. People from Angola were captured and forced to work as slaves in the sugar plantations in Brazil, São Tomé, and Príncipe. Between 1516 and 1539 Kongo was supplying 4,000 slaves a year to the Portuguese planters

in South America, and by 1540 that number had increased to 7,000. When King Afonso died in 1543 the king of Portugal did not even notice. By 1830 Angola was deemed the largest source of slaves who were sent to Brazil and the United States.

Portugal was not without competitors for the rich potential of the region. The Dutch had South African interests and took over Luanda in 1641. While they held it for seven years the Portuguese recaptured the city in 1648 and undertook a systematic conquest of the Kongo and Ndongo states. In 1671 the Portuguese victory was complete. The British, who were also interested in the thriving slave trade of the region, refused to acknowledge the Portuguese right to Angola at first. Only after an Anglo-Portuguese Treaty was signed between the two countries in 1894 did England concede Angola to the Portuguese, and complete Portuguese control of the interior was not achieved until the beginning of the 20th century.

Until the early 20th century dictatorship and forced labor were the hallmarks of Portuguese rule in the region. After World War II the Portuguese also encouraged white migrants to settle in the region. In 1951 Portugal changed the colony into a province and called it Portuguese West Africa. This led to racial violence. Also around the same time, voices of independence were being raised in most colonies of West Africa, and the Angolans demanded their freedom from the Portuguese, who turned them down. Because Portugal continued to refuse to decolonize the region, three liberation movements emerged: the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola, or MPLA), which had connections to Communist parties in Europe; the National Liberation Front of Angola (Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola or FNLA), with links to the United States and the Mobutu government in Zaire; and the National Union for Total Independence of Angola (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola, or UNITA). Although all these groups fought for the same goal—the independence of Angola—they differed in ideologies and were unable to manage a unified war against the Portuguese.

In 1974 after a military coup in Portugal that



brought a military government to power, Angola was handed over to the coalition government formed by the MPLA, UNITA, and FNLA. But their internal conflicts plunged the nation into a civil war. The region became an international military intervention hotspot with the UNITA and FNLA backed by the armed forces of the United States, Zaire, and South Africa. Cuba, on the other hand, supplied forces in support of the MPLA and had the backing of the Soviet Union in this endeavor. By November 1975 the MPLA had crushed the UNITA and FNLA; on November 11 Angola declared its independence from Portugal, and the MPLA came to power. Agostinho Neto (1922–79) became the first president of Angola.

However the remnants of UNITA continued its fight with the MPLA, and the civil unrest in the region continued until 2002, when a cease-fire was signed between the MPLA and UNITA. In August of the same year UNITA disbanded its forces and became a democratic political party. Finally after a period of great turmoil and uncertainty, Angola found peace. However the country has a long way to go since its economy was virtually destroyed during the civil war.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The coastal lowland, rising inland, and a high plateau form the three principal regions of Angola. The edge of the plateau region of Angola is marked by a chain of mountains. Prominent among them is Chella (5,250 feet), Tala Mugongo (4,400 feet), and Vissecua (6,500 feet). The volcanic mountain Caculo-Cabaza lies to the south of Kwanza, while Mt. Elonga (7,550 feet) and Mt. Loviti (7,780 feet) are the highest peaks in the Benguela region. The uneven topography of Angola has produced many

Ovimbundu Social Structure

In Ovimbundu society agriculture has traditionally been the main occupation, although many also work as wage earners. Until the 20th century this society was neither patriarchal nor matriarchal; while one's mother's side controlled economic matters such as property rights, the father's side controlled all political matters. But the arrival of the Europeans and their subsequent colonization of the region ensured that local political and economic controls were both taken away from the Ovimbundu. As the tribes grew in strength, the Portuguese spread them out into large villages in order to control them. Moreover the UNITA insurgency disrupted these villages, and the Ovimbundu began to flee, abandoning both their homes and work. They lost their culture and many of its traditions too. Eventually, since UNITA gained control over southeast Angola, the Ovimbundu have tried to recover and preserve some of their culture and ancestral traditions.

rapids and rainfalls. The Cuanza and Cunene are the two major rivers of the country. Angola experiences both dry and wet climates like other African regions. Heavy morning mists are the main feature of the dry season. Rainy seasons can last up to seven months (September–April) in the northern parts of Angola, while in the south the rainy season begins in November and lasts until February. July and August are the coolest months. The mean annual temperature is 72°F at São Salvador Congo, while at Caconda it is 67°F.

❁ ECONOMY

After attaining Angola's independence in 1976, the main concern of the MPLA leadership was to stabilize the economy of the country and repair the extensive damage to the infrastructure caused by the civil war. Influenced by Marxist-Leninist policies, the country survived on oil exports, although agriculture was given some prominence as well.

Agriculture is the main means of livelihood for the majority of Angolans. The two important cash crops are sugarcane and coffee. Angola also produces cassava, cotton, bananas, sisal, and tobacco. Fishing is also common. In the savanna regions, cattle, pigs, and sheep are raised. However since 1975 foodstuffs have to be imported.

The country is also rich in mineral resources and hydroelectric power. Oil is available primarily from offshore reserves and contributes 50 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). Due to overspending on the military and widespread corruption, however, progress has been limited. Diamond mining is another industry that flourishes in Angola. Deposits of iron, gold, copper, and many other metals are also found here.

The country's infrastructure is badly in need of repair, its railroads and roadways damaged by the frequent civil wars. Luanda and Lobito are the chief shipping ports of Angola. An active member of the Southern African Development Community, the United States, Portugal, and Brazil are Angola's main trading partners.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Angola has a rich cultural history derived from the traditions of its tribal groups. The Ovimbundu of the central highlands of Angola constitute 37 percent of the population and are the largest ethnolinguistic group. Umbundu is their mother tongue. In the past Ovimbundus played a major role as intermediaries in the slave and ivory trades and controlled the well-knit Angolan community in the 1940s. The Mbundu tribe, the second largest ethnolinguistic group (25 percent), settled just north of Ovimbundu territory. Their language is Kimbundu. Although most of the boundaries of Mbundu territory have remained fairly firm, the social and linguistic boundaries of the category have shifted. Some of the peripheral groups have been variously influenced by neighboring groups, and

the groups closest to the coast have been more strongly influenced by the Portuguese than the groups living in the interior.

The Bakongo people constitute 15 percent of the total Angolan population. They speak Kikongo. Lunda-Chokwe, Nganguela, Ovambo, Nyaneka-Humbe, and Herero were the other prominent indigenous communities of Angola. Although Christianity has many adherents in Angola, Angolans also continue to observe their traditional rituals.

In the 1980s Marxist-Leninist policies influenced a large number of Angolans. Efforts made to develop a more systematic and friendly political structure by the MPLA party were based on the Soviet model, forcing many tribes to leave their tribal communities in rural areas and search for new methods of livelihood in cities. Due to this displacement, many tribal groups lost their ethnic identities.

Even with the difficult socioeconomic system in the country, people are drawn to music and art. Their traditional music influenced the popular music of modern times. *Batuque*—a lively type of circle dance, a mix of African and Brazilian styles—and drum music, are also extremely popular in Angola.

❁ CUISINE

The staple foods of Angola include corn, vegetables, meat, and palm oil. *Funge*, a cornmeal porridge, is a staple food and it is the base for many preparations. A popular Angolan recipe, called *calulu*, is a rich stew of okra, tomatoes, greens, garlic, and palm oil with chicken, dried beef, or fish. Chicken *muamba*, which contains onion, palm hash, garlic, and okra, is equally delicious. *Muamba* can be served with rice, funge, or palm oil beans. *Piripiri*, a fixture of Portuguese cuisine, originated in Angola. It is a paste of dried red chili peppers, garlic, chopped fresh parsley or cilantro, sea salt, lemon juice, and peanut or vegetable oil, and makes an excellent marinade or sauce for chicken, pork, beef, or fish.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 1

The first day of the Western or Gregorian calendar, January 1 is celebrated as New Year's Day throughout the world. As in many other countries celebrations in Angola begin on New Year's Eve, December 31, the last day of the old year. People head toward the places where the planned celebrations in their cities will be held or attend private parties thrown by friends and family. Angolans dance and party their way through the night. As the clock strikes 12:00, the night sky is lit up with spectacularly choreographed fireworks. New Year's Day is a national holiday in Angola.

Angola, Louisiana

Angola, Louisiana, is the Louisiana State Penitentiary, the largest prison in the United States. Located near Baton Rouge, the area was originally a slave plantation manned with slaves from Angola, Africa. The government began sending prisoners to the area in the late 1800s. Known as the "Bloodiest Prison in the South" in the 1960s, the prison became a model of prison reform in the 1970s. Today it hosts the popular Angola Prison Rodeo and its inmates produce the nation's only non-censored inmate produced magazine, *The Angolite*.

❁ MEMORIAL DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 4

Angolans observe Memorial Day to remember and salute those who fought and died to liberate their country from Portuguese control. People gather in the streets and attend parades. In schools children also participate in parades and pay tribute to the war veterans.

❁ LIBERATION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: February 4

Liberation Day, also called the Beginning of Armed Uprising, commemorates the rebellion against Portuguese rule that paved the way for Angola's independence. It began on February 4, 1961, and was staged in a prison at Sambizanga, a Luandan suburb. Although the uprising was brutally crushed by Portuguese forces, it sparked the independence movement in Angola. Widespread demonstrations against the brutality of the Portuguese regime took the form of violent protests, and every act of suppression was countered with intensified protests. In the end the freedom fighters were successful in ousting the Portuguese from Angola, and the nation achieved complete independence on November 11, 1975.

On Liberation day Angolans remember those who fought against the military strength of Portugal and helped Angola attain its independence.

❁ INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 8

International Women's Day is celebrated by women all over the world, regardless of caste, culture, and tradition. It recognizes women's ongoing struggles

to achieve social equality, justice, independence, and the right to participate in every society at every level on an equal footing with men.

In Angola women from all walks of life come together for a rally at Luanda's Independence Square. Nongovernmental organizations that address women's issues and support female labor also attend the meetings and festivities.

✿ PEACE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 4

Peace Day represents the end of an era marked by internal violence, civil wars, bloodshed, and death in Angola. April 4 is the date in 2002 on which the Angolan Army signed a memorandum of understanding with UNITA, the warring dissident group, in order to end 27 years of civil war. The memorandum was the outcome of two weeks of secret meetings between the warring groups held at Luena, located southeast of Luanda, the nation's capital. The discussions were the result of a peace initiative undertaken by the army in order to unify of the country. Envoys from the United States, the United Nations, Russia, and Portugal attended.

The formal cease-fire marked an important event in Angolan history. Military leaders of both sides came together and embraced after signing the agreement. The two groups pledged to put an end to the ongoing warfare in Angola, and UNITA's army was disbanded.

Angolans pay tribute to the thousands of innocent people who were killed during the long, drawn-out war by attending solemn memorial meetings.

✿ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day or May Day by many nations because it is an occasion to honor workers and laborers for their invaluable contributions to the social and economic development and prosperity of their countries

The holiday is celebrated on May 1, because in 1889 the Second International declared this a day to recognize workers around the world. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union the American Federation of Labor (AFL) demanding an eight-hour workday.

In Angola May 1 is celebrated as Workers' Day. The government of Angola has declared the day a public holiday, so all public and private institutions are closed. Trade unions and workers' groups attend meetings and rallies.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

✿ ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY DAY

Observed by: Africans

Observed on: May 25

The Organization of African Unity (OAU) was organized in 1963. The visionary behind the group's formation was Libyan leader Muammar al-Gadhafi (b. 1942). Unhappy with the Arab world he gave up the ideology behind Arab nationalism and encouraged the formation of a union of African states.

The OAU has 63 members including Angola. It is modeled on the European Union (EU) and has many general bodies, including the Pan-African Parliament, the African Commission, the Executive Council, the Assembly, the Peace and Security Council, and the Economic Social and Cultural Council. The OAU encourages the use of African languages. Other languages used are Arabic, French, and Portuguese.

In Angola flag-raising ceremonies are held to mark the unity and solidarity of the African Union.

✿ WORLD CHILDREN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 5

World Children's Day is celebrated on June 5 in Angola and on different days in more than 120 nations. First observed in 1953 Children's Day recognizes the principle that children should come first. In accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have been declared a national priority, and member nations are required to initiate programs to protect children and to make their education, sanitation, health, and welfare priorities.

Angola is a signatory to the United Nation Convention on the Rights of Children. Hence special welfare programs have been instituted by its government to safeguard the interests of Angolan children. In its efforts to stop child abuse in the country, Angola, along with UNICEF, has initiated stricter laws and has organized special task forces to protect Angolan children from exploitation. The government, with the help of international organizations like UNICEF, organizes seminars and conferences where child-related issues are addressed.

✿ NATIONAL HEROES DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 17

National Heroes Day is a tribute to those who died for the independence and integrity of Angola. It honors the spirit of patriotism of those who fought against the Portuguese during Angola's struggle for freedom and sacrificed themselves for the cause of freedom. Also those who perished during the years of civil war are remembered and memorialized on this day.

Official speeches and floral wreaths laid on their graves mark the National Heroes Day celebrations as all honor the nation's patriots.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 11

At the time that other African nations were gaining their independence Angola was still in a state of chaos. The heads of the FNLA and MPLA parties had united in 1972 to create a council and work toward the liberation of Angola. In the same year the Portuguese government changed the status of Angola to an autonomous state, limiting its control to matters of defense and foreign relations. Elections were held in 1973. In 1974 and in 1975, however, there was a military uprising. The Portuguese government was overthrown, and Angola became a free nation.

On November 11, 1975, the nation gained its freedom from the Portuguese, and the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola-Partido do Trabalho (the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola-Labor Party, or MPLA) came to power. It declared the country independent and officially named the country the Republic of Angola.

To commemorate this, November 11 is celebrated as Independence Day.

Religious Holidays

❁ CARNIVAL

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Last Tuesday before Lent

Carnival, also known as Mardi Gras or Shrove Tuesday, is a Christian religious festival; it is a last chance to feast and party before the austere fasting period of Lent. Mardi Gras is its French name and means "Fat Tuesday."

In Angola Carnival is a long-awaited event. The capital of Luanda comes alive at this time of the year. Traditionally processions of people wearing masks and colorful dresses, accompanied by drums and whistles, have been known to pass through the streets of Luanda. However, the civil war in Angola has devastated the country's economy, and, with inflation steadily increasing, the people are finding it difficult to pay for masks and dresses for Carnival.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; LENT

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus and is observed by Christians all over the

world. It falls on the last Friday in Lent, the Friday before Easter.

For many years Good Friday was primarily a Catholic observance, but many Protestant Churches now hold special services from noon until three in the afternoon on this day to symbolize Jesus' last hours on the Cross. Many of the faithful fast on this day; when they eat, they generally choose fish instead of meat.

Christians in Angola attend a special service in local churches, where choirs sing devotional hymns dedicated to the glory of God. In some parts of the country, plays based on the life of Jesus are also part of the Good Friday celebrations. Good Friday (as well as Ash Wednesday) is a day of fasting for Angolan Christians.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; GOOD FRIDAY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a Christian feast that celebrates Jesus' Resurrection from the dead on the third day after his Crucifixion. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over.

This occasion is celebrated with a lot of joy and enthusiasm in Angola. It starts with special church services in which the priest wears white vestments. New clothes are also worn by worshippers at the Easter services.

Easter eggs have gained importance in Angola as part of the holiday. Easter is also a spring festival, and Christians consider an egg the seed of life.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ ALL SOULS' DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: November 2

This is a Roman Catholic festival commemorating the dead. It is usually celebrated on November 2, unless it falls on a Sunday, in which case All Souls' Day, also known as the Day of the Dead, is celebrated on Monday in Angola. It follows All Saints' Day and shifts the focus from those in heaven to those whom Catholics believe are waiting in purgatory. Three Masses are conducted on this day: one for the celebrant, one for the departed, and one for the pope.

Angolans believe that the soul of the dead return on this day to have a meal with their family members. Candles are kept on the windowsills to help them find their way home, and an extra place is set at the table for them.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus, whom Christians regard as God's son. Christmas Day is the most important holiday for Angolan Christians. Plans for special Christmas celebrations begin weeks in advance. People buy gifts for family and friends and organize parties on Christmas.

Christmas festivities in Angola begin on December 24, Christmas Eve, and continue until the New Year. On Christmas Eve Angolans attend evening services and share a traditional feast with family and friends afterward. Eating grapes and wishing each other a merry Christmas is a part of the festivities. Friends and family exchange gifts and attend Christmas parties. Angolans also stage plays and sing gospel songs during Christmas.

Masks have an important place in Angolan and other African cultures during Christmas. Children make various kinds of masks—sad, happy, or scary—so they can wear a different one each day. The masks are decorated with beads, tissues, and feathers. The children dramatize Christmas stories by using different masks to portray different characters. Adults too join in the fun. These celebrations last a week.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ LUANDA CITY DAY

Observed in: Luanda

Observed by: General public

Observed on: January 25

The capital of Angola Luanda was created on January 25, 1576. It was founded by the Portuguese, although the status of city was conferred much later. Luanda City Day commemorates the historical events that gave Angola its present-day capital. Prior to the arrival of the Portuguese, Luanda was called Loanda, which means “flat land,” and was part of the kingdom of Kongo. It was one of the first places the Portuguese settled; they renamed it São Paulo de Loanda. In 1605 the then-governor of the region Manuel Cerveira Pereira designated Luanda a city. Thus Luanda went down in history as the first city to be founded by the Europeans on the west coast of sub-Saharan Africa.

On this day the capital city is beautifully decorated, and official programs are organized in which homage is paid to the founding fathers of the region. The government also unveils its latest plans for the city's development. Traditional dances and musical performances enhance the celebration.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

The birth of a child is generally celebrated with joy in Angola. The people of the Ovimbundu tribe do not take the child outside their home for the first seven days after birth. They fear that bad luck may befall the child, because it is fragile and susceptible to evil spirits.

❁ COMING OF AGE

In Angola coming of age is celebrated with singing and dancing. During a special ceremony, birth and death are emphasized. Name changes can also happen at this time.

In ancient Angola the initiation ceremony for girls included leading a secluded life for a particular period of time. Female relatives would teach them about life as an adult and their responsibilities toward their ethnic group. Female circumcision is not practiced in Angola. The male circumcision ceremony takes place at puberty and is of great importance in Angola because the people believe that after circumcision a boy completes his transition from boyhood to manhood.

Masks play an important role in the initiation ceremonies. For example the male dancers in most tribes wear a female mask called *mwana pwo*, which means “young woman,” during initiation ceremonies. Also during the circumcision ceremony, men wear a polychromatic mask called a *kalehwa*, which means “protective spirit.”

❁ DEATH

In Angola people believe that they move on to a new dimension after death. Referred to as the “cult of ancestors,” the traditional belief is that the spirit lives on after the body is buried. Children are kept away from burial rituals. Only when their parents die are they allowed to participate.

Angolans believe that those who do not have a proper burial turn into harmful spirits and end up disturbing their own families, often causing diseases and death. Because the civil war in the country has claimed many lives and prevented many from having traditional burials, the people believe that there are many angry spirits that want to cause trouble. In order to avoid the harm such spirits can cause, Angolans perform other traditional rituals for their loved ones to pacify the ancestral spirits and protect the living from their wrath.

Further Reading

Thomas Collelo, *Angola: A Country Study*, 3rd ed. (Washington: U.S. Department of the Army, 1991); Karl Maier, *Angola: Promises and Lies* (London: Serif Publishing, 1996).

Antigua and Barbuda

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Islands between the Caribbean Sea and the north Atlantic Ocean, east-southeast of Puerto Rico
Size	170 sq. mi. (Antigua 108 sq. mi., Barbuda 62 sq. mi.)
Capital City	Saint John's (on Antigua Island)
Flag Description	The flag has an inverted isosceles triangle, with its base at the top edge of the flag, that splits the bottom of the flag into two red areas; the triangle contains three unequal horizontal bands of black (top), light blue, and white, with a yellow rising sun in the black band.
Independence	November 1, 1981 (from the United Kingdom)
Population	68,722 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional monarchy with UK-style parliament
Nationality	Antiguan, Barbudan
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Black; British; Lebanese; Portuguese; Syrian
Major Language(s)	English (official), local dialects
Major Religion(s)	Christian (predominantly Anglican, some Protestants and Roman Catholics)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; CARICOM Day, first Monday of July; Carnival, first week of August; Heritage Day, October 29; Independence Day, November 1

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The remains of the first inhabitants, the Siboneys (or Ciboneys, called “the stone people”), were discovered at Jolly Beach, Deep Bay, and North Sound. Their shell and stone tools have been excavated as well. These hunter-gatherer-fishers settled on these islands about 2400 B.C.E. About the time the Siboneys disappeared, the Tainos, migrating north from South America (35–1100 C.E.) arrived and named the island Wadadli, a name still popularly used. Finally the Calinago arrived, also migrants from South America.

Tainos and Calinagos inhabited the islands when Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) happened upon them in 1493. He named the country after Santa Maria de la Antigua, the patron saint of Seville, Spain. The Spanish conquerors called the Calinagos *Caribs*, from whom the Caribbean Sea got its name. The Caribs were a disciplined and highly independent people, far from the “savages” described by the conquistadores,

and they fiercely resisted the European invaders. Spanish and French settlements did not fare well because of the resistance of the Caribs and the lack of fresh water, still a problem on the islands in the 21st century. In 1632 English settlers arrived from St. Kitts to settle in Antigua. Other English arrivals established a settlement in Barbuda in 1666. There was a short-lived French annexation of the islands in 1667.

In 1684 Sir Christopher Codrington (d. 1710) landed in Antigua and was the first to cultivate sugarcane there. Sir Christopher and his brother had leased land in Barbuda from Britain from 1685 to 1870 and paid a rent of “one fat pig” a year. They set about growing agricultural produce using enslaved natives. Sugarcane proved a lucrative product, and by the mid-18th century there were numerous large sugar plantations, each with its own cane-processing windmill. A total of 150 windmills dotted the island.

By the end of the 18th century Antigua had become an important strategic port as well as a valuable commercial colony. Known as the “gateway to the Caribbean,” its location offered control over the major sailing routes to and from the

Fun Fact

The word *cannibal* comes from Taino Caniba, meaning “Carib person.”

region’s rich island colonies. Slaves were brought in from Africa as well as other Caribbean islands to work on the sugar plantations in Antigua. When Great Britain’s Emancipation Act of 1834 abolished slavery, Antigua and Barbuda was the only country exempted from the apprenticeship clause that, in other countries, bound the freed slaves to their former masters for four additional years before they were truly emancipated.

The trade union movement of the 1940s, led by V. C. Bird (d. 1999), proved an important step toward independence. In 1967 Antigua became an Associated State of the Commonwealth, with Barbuda and Redonda as dependencies. Antigua achieved independence on November 1, 1981, again with the two smaller islands as dependencies of Antigua. There was opposition in Barbuda, however, to this status.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The country of Antigua and Barbuda consists of three islands, bounded on the west by the Caribbean Sea and on the east by the North Atlantic Ocean. St. John’s, the capital, is on Antigua, the largest and the most populated of the three. Barbuda, the other main island, is located 25 miles north of Antigua. Lying southwest of Antigua is the uninhabited, tiny island of Redonda. Redonda is a dependency of Antigua and Barbuda, but it is also a micronation called the Kingdom of Redonda.

Antigua and Barbuda is part of the Leeward Islands in the Lesser Antilles archipelago and has a tropical climate with relatively constant temperatures and sunshine throughout the year. The land is primarily low-lying limestone and coral islands, with some higher volcanic areas. Antigua has an uneven shoreline that provides many natural harbors and beaches. Barbuda has a large harbor on its western (Caribbean) coast. The natural beauty of the islands makes this a popular tourist destination, but the country is also prone to drought. Antigua and Barbuda, because of its location, is also vulnerable to hurricanes between July and October.

Nelson and Antigua

In 1784 the English naval hero Lord Horatio Nelson (1758–1805), came to Antigua to develop the naval facilities at English Harbor and to impose strict shipping laws. Nelson’s Dockyard was the result of this endeavor, but his stern attitude earned him no admiration. The future King William IV (1765–1830) was serving under Nelson at the time, and it was during his reign that slavery was abolished.

❁ ECONOMY

Tourism is Antigua and Barbuda’s major industry. Both islands are known for their pink and white sands, palm trees, and coral reefs. Antigua has 365 beaches or, as Antiguanians like to say it, one beach for each day of the year. One hundred sugarcane-processing windmill towers remain in Antigua, and visitors through Betty’s Hope, Antigua’s first sugar plantation, for its completely restored sugar mill. The waters around Barbuda boast the remains of interesting shipwrecks, and the island’s fauna, particularly the beautiful fallow deer and a large population of frigate birds (*Fregata magnificens*) draw naturalists from around the world. The Bird Sanctuary is home to more than 170 species, and tourists can visit numerous historical landmarks.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Most Antiguanians are descendants of slaves, and they retain many West Indian traditions, including a love of calypso and reggae music. This permeates not just the celebrations but also everyday life. Festivals and religious holidays (both Protestant and Catholic) are known for their exuberance. These celebrations, which sometimes continue for weeks or even a full month, include beauty pageants, masquerades (parades of people in masks and costumes) and dancing in the streets to calypso, as well as cricket and other sports competitions.

Antiguanians are also passionate cricket fans. Cricket season lasts from January to July, and the country has given the West Indies team four of its greatest players: Andy Roberts, the bowler, (b. 1951); Ritchie Richardson, batsman (b. 1962); Curtley Ambrose, bowler (b. 1963); and Vivian Richards, batsman (b. 1952).

❁ CUISINE

The cooking of Antigua and Barbuda reflects its diverse history. Seafood of all kinds is readily available, always fresh, and figures prominently in many local dishes, such as conch fritters. A variety of fresh fruits, including bananas, coconut, pineapple, papaya, and mango, are also very popular as snacks or refreshing juice drinks. In addition to being eaten raw at any time of the day, fruits are versatile and turn up in such dishes as papaya pie. The national dish of Antigua and Barbuda is called *fungi* and pepper pot, a thick stew made with squash, okra, aubergine (eggplant), spinach, and pumpkin, served with salted meats and cornmeal dumplings. *Fungi* (pronounced “funjee”), an African dish, is a cornmeal and okra preparation. The hot sauces, lobster and pumpkin soup, and fish varieties that include porgy, parrotfish, and snapper are typical Caribbean fare. Rum is the local drink of choice. It can be drunk neat (straight, or unmixed) although it is perhaps more refreshing served with fruit in cocktails and punches.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

New Year's Day is the first day of the new year on the Gregorian calendar. In Antigua and Barbuda, the holiday is celebrated with lively music, fireworks, and lots of *boj* (alcohol made from sugarcane). It is traditional to wear new clothes for New Year's.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Labor Day is celebrated in many countries of the world as a tribute to workers. Most countries observe Labor Day, also known as May Day or Worker's Day, on May 1, but some countries, like the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands celebrate Labor Day on the first Monday in September. The May 1 observance of Labor Day has its origins in the international socialist movement.

The first International Labor Day was called by the Second International in 1889 to coincide with an American Federation of Labor general strike in the United States to demand the eight-hour workday. Thereafter International Labor Day became and remained more radical than the U.S. version observed in September.

In Antigua and Barbuda government offices, business establishments, and schools remain closed. People assemble in large numbers to commemorate Labor Day by participating in public meetings and lectures on labor and social issues.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ CARICOM DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First Monday of July

CARICOM Day commemorates the institution of the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) on August 1, 1973, under the Treaty of Chaguaramas. The purpose was for the countries of the Caribbean to band together on development issues and improve the lives of the people in the region. The first four signatories were Jamaica, Barbados, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago. Currently there are fifteen members and five associate members. The treaty was revised in 2001 and created the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME). Although many CARICOM nations observe this holiday on the first Monday of July, the date varies.

Antigua and Barbuda joined CARICOM on July 4, 1974. In Antigua official gatherings and political meetings are convened for discussions, presentations, and analyses of the development efforts and future plans of member countries.

❁ CARNIVAL

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July/August

Carnival is one of the biggest annual festivals in Antigua and Barbuda, where it has been celebrated for the last 40 years. In contrast to many other countries where Carnival is a pre-Lenten holiday, in Antigua and Barbados, it commemorates Britain's Emancipation Act of 1834, which freed approximately 670,000 slaves in the West Indies. This is the only country where the four-year mandatory apprenticeship of former slaves was not imposed. In other countries they had to continue to work for their former masters despite their official freedom.

This is a 10-day event that takes place in late July and culminates in a parade on the first Tuesday of August. Concerts, food fairs, parades, and other cultural shows are organized throughout the islands, but the most spirited celebrations take place in the capital city. The Antigua Recreation Ground in St. John's is the venue for this extravaganza. These grounds are tended by staff provided by the local prison, and two of the viewing stands are named for the legendary cricket players Vivian Richards and Andy Roberts.

Calypso, soca, reggae, and steel bands make this a rich musical experience. There are masquerades (parades in which people wear special masks and costumes) as well. The main events are the Parade of Costumed Bands, Miss Antigua Pageant, Caribbean Queen, Calypso Monarch, and Party Monarch.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL

❁ HERITAGE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 29

This is a major holiday that is part of two weeks of festivities that occur here in preparation for Independence Day. Heritage Day is also known as National Dress Day, and people make it a point to wear national dress on this day. Streets and buildings are hung with flags and colored lights, and several cultural events are held throughout the day, including arts and crafts exhibitions, a service of thanksgiving, a food fair, and, most colorful of all, a parade.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 1

Antigua celebrates its Independence Day with great exuberance. In 1981 Antigua gained its independence from the United Kingdom, with the islands of Barbuda and Redonda as its dependencies. On the island of Antigua the Independence Ceremonial

Fun Fact

In 1865 a Montserrat trader named Matthew Dowdy Shiell claimed Redonda as his own and in 1880 had his son Matthew Phipps Shiell (1865–1947) crowned King Felipe.

Reggae, Soca, Calypso, and the Steel Bands

Reggae is of Jamaican origin and was created by Jackie Mittoo (1948–1990) in 1963. He was asked by Coxson Dodd (1932–2004), a well-known Jamaican record producer, to compose original music, and Mittoo did so by building on the traditions of ska (Jamaican music, which originated in the 1950s). Reggae is characterized by the chops on the backbeat; the rhythm guitarist is vital to this music. The music associated with Bob Marley (1945–1981) is known as “roots reggae,” a spiritual type of reggae. Soca is a blend of slower soul music beats and the

quick rhythms of calypso. It was introduced in the 1970s and became an essential part of Carnival within a decade. Calypso was originally a means of communication between the slaves working the fields, because they were not allowed to speak to one another while working. The soloist (calypsonian) is the main artist who has to combine the different sounds of different cultures (tribes) into one lyrical piece. The first percussion instruments were made of bamboo. These were replaced by steel pans cut from oil drums. The steel pan originated in Trinidad, but the steel band was an indigenous effort, inspired by the iron bands that played at Christmas. Antigua is known for having the best steel bands of the Caribbean.

Parade begins at 8:00 A.M. on November 1 and proceeds down Independence Drive in Antigua. This is followed by the Independence Banquet at 8 P.M. The Independence Day Parade in Barbuda is followed by the Grand Picnic at Martello Tower beach.

Celebrations on both islands commence two weeks before the actual day of independence. People start decorating homes, businesses, and government buildings for the best-decorated competitions. Cricket matches, dance festivals, youth rallies, arts and craft exhibitions, food fairs, and kite-flying contests are some of the events that make up the celebrations. On both islands, apart from other activities, there is National Clean-Up Day, about a week before Independence Day.

Religious Holidays

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday commemorates Jesus' Crucifixion. The day is sometimes known as Holy Friday or Mourning Friday, and became an important Christian holiday in the fourth century. (Epiphany was the major festival celebrated before this.) Good Friday has been in the Christian liturgical calendar even longer than Easter has, although no one is sure why it is called Good Friday. Some have suggested that the use of *good* in the name goes back to Old English and means “God’s Friday, while others interpret *good* to mean something like “observed as holy.” This observance is also known as Black Friday or Sorrowful Friday, and in Eastern Orthodox Churches it is called Great Friday.

For many years Good Friday was primarily a Catholic observance, but many Protestant Churches now hold special services from noon until three in the afternoon on this day to symbolize Jesus' last hours on

the Cross. Many of the faithful fast on this day; when they eat, it is generally fish instead of meat. Church services follow tradition: The evening service, known as Tenebrae (meaning “darkness” or “shadows”), is marked by a darkening of the premises as candles are put out and lights dimmed. During the day there are processions in which thousands of people take to the streets carrying colorful flowers and sawdust to be thrown on the penitents carrying the cross. There are readings from the Gospels and the Psalms. Hymns on the life and deeds of Jesus are also sung.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

The joyous Christian holiday of Easter marks the Resurrection of Jesus three days after his Crucifixion, which is commemorated on Good Friday. Christians attend special Easter services in church and afterwards enjoy family meals.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

EASTER MONDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Monday after Easter

Easter Monday is the first day of Bright Week or Easter Week, and it is regarded by many as a continuation of Easter Sunday. The day was once part of weeklong celebrations, but in the 19th century it was changed to a one-day holiday.

Egg-rolling competitions are the traditional way of celebrating, as is dousing with perfumed holy water. This holy water is given to worshippers on Easter for use at home, and people add perfume to it. Easter Monday is also a day for playing pranks and telling jokes.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

✿ PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fifty days after Easter

Pentecost takes place 50 days after Easter. The holiday celebrates the descent of the Holy Ghost on the disciples. This was considered a great miracle: Parted tongues of fire accompanied by a strong gust of wind descended on the apostles, marking them as fit preachers of the Gospel to all corners of the world.

Many scholars believe that many of the traditions and celebrations associated with this holiday were borrowed from pagan celebrations of spring in Western Europe. Homes are often decorated with green branches and flowers. In Christian tradition this is the 50th day after Easter and has been celebrated since the first century. (Pentecost in Greek means “the fiftieth day.”)

In many countries, including Antigua and Barbuda, this is a two-day holiday. It is referred to locally as Whitsunday and Whitmonday, names that have been used to celebrate this holiday since the third century C.E. The name “Whitsun” was derived from the white garments that were worn by those who were baptized during the vigil of this feast. It is customary here for the devout to attend church services on Whitmonday. The Antigua Christian Council organizes cultural and religious events to promote mutual understanding and tolerance among different Christian denominations.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; PENTECOST

✿ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas is a major Christian holiday, marking the birth of Jesus. The earliest celebrations of Jesus’ birth were in Alexandria, Egypt, in the second century, and they took place on May 20. Before Christmas was established, most countries observed Epiphany and Jesus’ birth on January 6. December festivities were established in the church by the fifth century.

In earlier times a day was considered from sunset to sunset, and any festival began on the evening of what we now understand to be the previous day. Christmas began on the evening of December 24.

In Antigua and Barbuda families attend Christmas Eve services. Christmas is celebrated with traditional dinners and public feasts hosted by the church and by individuals and families. People decorate their houses with Christmas trees and exchange gifts and cards. There are many activities to look forward to: musical performances, comedy acts by children, visits to wine cellars, wine tastings, and lavish parties.

There is also a Christmas Day Champagne Party at Nelson’s Dockyard on the island of Antigua. This festivity begins at noon, when people start arriving, and continues late into the night. A steel band performs and the champagne, kept in large ice-filled containers, is available at a reasonable price.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

✿ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26

Boxing Day, also called St. Stephen’s Day, is an old custom with its roots in the Middle Ages, when wealthy estate owners in England gave gift boxes to their employees on the day after Christmas. In addition, the church opened its charity boxes on this day, and ships setting out on long journeys carried a charity box to be filled with donations for the church. The sailors believed this would ensure a safe journey. St. Stephen was the first Christian martyr, and Christians honor his memory by collecting for the poor in charity boxes and donating the funds.

In Antigua and Barbuda the day is one of giving gifts and money to the poor and needy. Families and friends gather at the public performances of folk dances and music programs performed by local talent. Regional cuisine is an integral part of these events.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

✿ INTERNATIONAL SAILING WEEK

Observed in: St. John’s, Antigua

Observed by: General public

Observed on: Late April or early May

International Sailing Week is one of the most important sailing events in the world. The event spotlights a series of sailing events that include the Guadeloupe to Antigua Race and five yacht races: Dickenson Bay Race, Olympic Courses off Dickenson Bay, Falmouth Harbor Race, Windward/Leeward Islands, and Ocean Race. After-sailing parties are hosted on different beaches of Antigua each night. There is the Beating of the Retreat, and the week ends with Lord Nelson’s Ball and an awards ceremony.

✿ CARIBANA

Observed in: Santiago, Antigua

Observed by: General public

Observed on: Month of Carnival, usually in February/March

Rooted in the Trinidad and Tobago Carnival, Caribana at Santiago, Antigua, is a showcase of Caribbean culture. Begun in 1984 the five-day Caribana is held at Whitsuntide. It is called Caribana to distinguish it from Carnival. It has been a spectacular success, and the focus has broadened to include many events in addition to the Caribana parade; other aspects of

Fun Fact

Zouk has a distinctive rhythm—a blend of quick tempos, layered percussion effects, and brass sections—offset by the smooth lyrics sung mostly in Creole. The word *zouk* means “party” in Creole.

Caribbean art and talent are promoted as well. Caribana is one of the largest festivals in the Caribbean.

This is an event of international standing. It features Jamaican reggae, Brazilian samba, and African *djembe* rhythms, along with Latin salsa and Haitian *zouk*. Thousands of brilliantly costumed masqueraders (people in masks and elaborate costumes) and dozens of trucks carrying soca, calypso, steel pan, reggae, and salsa artists jam the roads to the delight of hundreds of thousands of onlookers.

Other keynote events include the King and Queen of the Bands Competition and the two-day Olympic Island Caribbean Arts Festival. Outdoor concerts of Caribbean music, Calypso Harbor cruise parties, and glamorous dance parties are held throughout the month.

Rites of Passage

✿ MARRIAGE

A traditional Antiguan wedding is marked with several parties held before and after the wedding ceremony. Customarily once the groom chooses his bride-to-be, he writes a letter to her parents declaring his love and seeking their permission for the marriage. Once parental consent has been received from both sets of parents, the engagement begins. This is the official courtship period and typically lasts four to six months. During this time both families prepare for the wedding.

As a part of the wedding ceremony several animals, such as pigs, sheep, and chickens are slaughtered as offerings to God. The Ground Wetting ceremony is performed—wine or wine and water is

poured on the ground as a thanksgiving gesture to God and as an invitation to dead ancestors. This rite is accompanied by prayers prior to the slaughtering of the animals. Once the wedding ceremony is solemnized at the church, a reception party is held at the bride’s residence, where the food to be served at the wedding feast is usually cooked. The reception is followed by a big drum dance. A party known as “return thanks” is held two weeks later for close relatives and friends who attended the wedding.

✿ DEATH

Family and community members hold a wake after a death. Funeral observances continue for several days, often with hundreds of visitors. Several prayer nights or prayer meetings are observed for the deceased on the third, ninth, and 40th nights following the death. The big drum dance is performed on either the ninth or the 40th night after death.

The first death anniversary for Catholics is marked by a Mass in the morning, followed by refreshments and snacks. In the evening a table is set—it is laid before 6 P.M. and cleared before 6 A.M.—covered with linen and filled with a variety of foods for the ancestors. Neighborhood children are invited to partake of this meal.

Further Reading

Desmond V. Nicholson, *Antigua & Barbuda: A Historical Sketch* (Norfolk, U.K.: Heritage Publications, 2000); Desmond V. Nicholson, *The Story of the Arawaks in Antigua and Barbuda* (Antigua: Antigua Archaeological Society, 1983); Ronald Sanders, *Antigua and Barbuda: A Little Bit of Paradise* (London: Hansib, 1994); Adam Vaitilingam, *The Rough Guide to Antigua & Barbuda, 2nd ed.* (London: Rough Guides Ltd., 2002).

Big Drum Dance

The term *big drum* has nothing to do with the size of any drum. It refers to a large communal gathering of different tribes that come together for a social reason, whether a wedding or show of respect for the ancestors. The tribes were originally West African, and the songs and dances derive from their traditions. The songs are mainly in a patois, interspersed with many ancient words related to African spiritual beliefs, spirits, or ancestors.

Such a gathering and dance is also known as *gwa*

tambu. A big drum dance begins with the soloist (the chantwell, who formerly used calypso to tell a story), who opens with a musical statement that is then repeated. The chorus joins in for a call-and-response. As the chorus continues, the two brass drums (*boulas*) enter to play a nation theme (of any one tribe), and the solo drum (*kata*) enters soon after with a quicker tempo. This is followed by the dancers whose movements complement the drum beats. It is the flourish and color of the dance, together with the drumbeats, that give this ceremony its distinctive nature.

Argentina

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	South America, at the southern tip, bordered by the Atlantic Ocean, Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil, and Uruguay
Size	1, 068,302 sq. mi.
Capital City	Buenos Aires
Flag Description	The flag has three horizontal bands of equal size—light blue (top), white, and light blue. At the center of the white band is a human face called the Sun of May.
Independence	July 9, 1816 (from Spain)
Population	39,537,943 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Argentinean
Major Ethnic Group(s)	White (97%)
Major Language(s)	Spanish (official); Quechua; Guarani; Araucanian; Italian
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (93%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Malvinas Day, April 1; Revolution Day, May 25; Flag Day, June 20; Independence Day, July 9; Anniversary of the Death of General San Martín, August 12; Columbus Day, October 12

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The oldest remains of human settlement in Argentina, found in the Piedra Museo settlement in Santa Cruz province, date back 13,000 years. The Los Toldos settlement, situated 62 miles north of Piedra Museo, is at least 12,000 years old. Archaeological evidence suggests that these early people were nomadic hunter-gatherers.

At the beginning of the 16th century at the time of the arrival of the Spanish, Argentina was home to various indigenous groups including the Tehuelches, Araucanians, Rehuelches, Guaranis, Rampas, Matacos, Guaycures, Charruas, Huerpes, Diaguitas, and Mapuches. The Diaguitas and Guaranis were primarily farmers, engaged in the cultivation of maize. The Diaguitas were also excellent fighters and had successfully defended themselves against Incan incursions. In 1516, the Spanish navigator Juan de Solís (1470–1516) sailed up the Río de la Plata (which he named; “river of silver”) and went ashore but was allegedly killed by Charrua or Guarani

warriors. (Some, however, believe this story was made up to hide the fact that he was killed in a mutiny.)

In 1527 rivals Sebastian Cabot (1476?–1557) and Diego García sailed into the Plata estuary and established a settlement. Apparently this too was wiped out by the local populace. Finally in 1536 Pedro de Mendoza (1487–1537) led a well-equipped force and succeeded in setting up a lasting settlement, which later became Buenos Aires, the capital city. Many expeditions were launched from this settlement, and gradually the entire area came under Spanish rule. This was formalized in 1776 with the creation of the Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata. The viceroyalty had its capital at Buenos Aires and covered what is today Chile, Paraguay, Argentina, Uruguay, and part of Bolivia.

On May 25, 1810, a segment of the population started a revolution against Spanish rule and drove out the viceroy, but the struggle dragged on until 1816. On July 9, 1816, representatives from various provinces met at the city of Tucumán and declared independence from Spain. Subsequently, however, the new nation had to contend with internal power struggles, which culminated in civil war in 1819 between the Unitarists (known as Azules, “Blues”) and the Federalists. Eventually, the Uni-

Unitarists and Federalists

Seething regional disparities, which Spanish rule had obscured, became vividly apparent once independence was achieved. The early years after independence in Argentina were marked by a bitter struggle between two political groups—the Unitarists and the Federalists. The Unitarists wanted a strong central government, while the Federalists wanted local control. The Federalists of the interior (conservative landowners, supported by the gauchos and the rural working class) advocated provincial autonomy, while the Unitarists of Buenos Aires (cosmo-

politan city dwellers who welcomed the infusion of European capital, immigrants, and ideas) upheld Buenos Aires's central authority.

But a country as vast as Argentina could not be ruled easily from Buenos Aires, and a civil war broke out between the Unitarists and Federalists. This led to the installation of the country's first dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas, a Federalist who ruled from 1829 c.e. until he was ousted in 1852. The Unitarists instituted a liberal constitution in 1853 and encouraged trade, so that prosperity grew during the following decades.

tarists prevailed and enacted their own constitution in 1853.

Initially this resulted in some prosperity, but a combination of factors, including excessive foreign interference in commerce and industry, weakened both the economy and the government. This continued until 1943, when a series of upheavals, including a military coup, culminated in Juan Perón (1895–1974) taking over as virtual dictator in 1946.

Perón ruled until 1955, initiating a series of economic measures to boost self-reliance and domestic production. He was deposed in a military coup, which marked the beginning of a 30-year period of almost uninterrupted, and uniformly disastrous, army rule. Perón returned to power in 1973 and died in office in 1974, after which his third wife Isabel, took over. The fall of Isabel's government in 1976 ushered in another period of military rule.

Argentina's spell under martial rule was finally broken in 1983. The previous year General Galtieri (1926–2003) had attempted to divert attention from his inept governance by invading the Falkland Islands in 1982. (Known in the Spanish-speaking world as *Islas Malvinas*, these islands had been held by Britain.) The resulting military debacle merely sealed Galtieri's fate. Galtieri was succeeded in office by President Carlos Menem (b. 1930), who instituted a series of wide-ranging economic reforms, selling off state-owned industries, and opening up the economy to foreign investors. These measures helped curb inflation but also brought in their wake rising unemployment and recession.

Menem was replaced in 1999 by a center-left alliance led by Fernando de la Rúa (b. 1937). The recession only intensified, however, and Argentina defaulted on a series of international debt repayments. Following a brief interval with Eduardo

Duhalde (b. 1941) at the helm, Nestor Kirchner (b. 1950) took over as president in 2003. To his credit, he managed to stabilize the economy to a degree not thought possible.

ECONOMY

Argentina's inherent economic strengths are many. It has a literate workforce, abundant natural resources, and a well-developed industrial sector. Its agricultural economy is forward-thinking and export oriented. Its major agricultural exports include soybeans, peanuts, grapes, sunflower seeds, corn, tobacco, wheat, and livestock. Its industrial exports include motor vehicles, textiles, chemicals, steel, petrochemicals, and consumer durables. Its chief imports include machinery, motor vehicles, chemicals, and plastics. In the last few years, Argentina has posted growth rates of about 11 percent per year. Nevertheless, poverty remains a problem, and large international debts have undermined investor confidence.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

From the time of the Spanish invasion Argentina's economy and culture have been divided among various immigrant groups, mainly European in origin. For instance the Basque and Irish communities controlled sheep-rearing; farming was a mainstay of the Germans and Italians; and the emigrant British population played a crucial role in the development of the nation's infrastructure.

Indigenous groups became marginalized a long time ago and remain so today. The main indigenous peoples include the Quechua of the northwest, the Mapuche of Patagonia, and the Matacos and the Tobas of the northeastern regions. Argentina also has strong Jewish and Anglo-Argentinean communities, as well as small groups of Japanese, Chileans, Bolivians, and Paraguayans.

Almost 90 percent of the population lives in urban areas, with Buenos Aires alone accounting for more than one-third of the population. Spanish is the official language and, as such, is widely spoken, but many indigenous and immigrant groups take

A Quechua Riddle

Question: *Ima k'urun wiksaykita qachun?*
“What bites you inside your stomach?”

Answer: *yarqay* “hunger”

pride in retaining their mother tongues.

The tango, a sensual bracing dance, originated in Argentina just prior to the beginning of the 20th century. Both the music and dance grew out of the brothels of Buenos Aires and were initially disparaged as vulgar. Today tango music and dance are inextricably associated with Argentina and are enjoyed throughout the world.

❁ CUISINE

Argentinean beef is famous the world over. *Asado*, different cuts of meat grilled or cooked on an open fire, is Argentina's version of barbecue and it is a traditional dish. People who have grills may prepare *asado* at least once a week. A meal of grilled meat, called *parrillada* (*parilla* means "grill"), may consist of steak, sausages, pork, lamb, goat meat, and various organs, which are served first. Often, meat is seasoned only with salt before grilling, but it is also marinated or served with a sauce called *chimichurri*, made of chopped parsley, garlic, salt, oregano, pepper, and chili, combined with oil. Italian food is also popular, and pasta and pizza are favorite street foods.

Indigenous food cultures, dating back to pre-Columbian times, remain in provincial areas. Maize, beans, gourds, and pumpkin are popularly eaten here. *Locro* is a labor-intensive stew made out of beef, beans, pumpkin, sweet potato, and pork.

Argentina grows fine coffee and also some tea; both are important elements of the nation's lifestyle. *Mate* is a tea-like drink made from *yerba*, the leaves of an evergreen tree. Wine and beer are also extremely popular in Argentina, and the country produces some of the finest wines in the world.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

New Year's Eve celebrations in Argentina begin in earnest on the evening of December 31 after sundown. For the people of Argentina the New Year (Año Nuevo in Spanish) is an exuberant occasion with music, dancing, and street processions. Spectacular fireworks displays are customary, especially just after the clock strikes midnight. In addition, people customarily make resolutions to become better in the coming year than they were in the preceding year. Food and drink figure prominently in the celebrations. Two sweets traditionally associated with the occasion are *pan dulce* (sweet bread) and *turrón* (nougat made of almonds, honey, sugar, and egg yolks).

❁ MALVINAS DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 1

Las Islas Malvinas, known to the English-speaking world as the Falkland Islands, are a group of islands in the South Atlantic Ocean, situated to the east of the southern coast of Argentina. Discovered in 1592 by an English navigator, they have traditionally been a source of conflict. First the French established a settlement in 1764; then they turned over the islands to Spain two years later. This sparked a dispute between Britain and Spain. Then in 1833, Britain laid claim to the islands and established a naval garrison, provoking a dispute with Argentina.

On April 2, 1982, General Galtieri, head of Argentina's military government, mounted a surprise invasion of the Falklands. Initially, he was successful, but after seven weeks of fierce fighting, the Argentine forces were repulsed by the British, and the islands returned to British rule.

Even though Galtieri was deposed for his incompetence, and a civilian government took over in 1983, Argentineans still officially recognize the invasion of the islands as Malvinas Day. The occasion is also celebrated as Veterans Day or Memorial Day, and the country recognizes those who fought and died in the battle for the islands. Veterans of other wars and old soldiers are also honored.

Pollo Rio Negro (Marinated Chicken)

Ingredients:

- 1 whole chicken
- lemon juice, to taste
- 1 onion, cut up
- 2 carrots, sliced
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 tsp. rosemary
- salt and pepper, to taste
- 1 c. white wine
- 1 apple, grated
- 1 Tbs. sugar

Preparation:

Wash the chicken, cut it in pieces, and rub salt and pepper all over each piece. Place the pieces in a glass baking dish and add the onion, carrots, bay leaf, rosemary, and wine. Cover with foil and place in the fridge to marinate for 24 hours.

After the chicken has marinated, roast it in the oven, in the same dish covered with the same foil for one hour. While the chicken is roasting, grate the apple and combine it with the water and sugar. Remove the foil, cover the chicken with the apple mixture, and continue cooking for 20 more minutes until the chicken is browned.



❁ REVOLUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 25

Until 1810 Argentina, like much of South America, was a Spanish colony. In the early 1800s, Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821) defeated and imprisoned the Spanish king. This sparked revolutions all over South America, and Argentina was no exception. On May 25, 1810, the *criollos* (indigenous residents) rejected the authority of the Virreinato del Río de la Plata (Spanish viceroy) and began their struggle for independence. This uprising is known as the Revolución de Mayo (“May Revolution”), and the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires was named for this event.

Like other days commemorating Argentina’s struggle against colonial forces, this day is an occasion for celebration. Pageants and processions abound, as do music and dancing, and the cathedral in Buenos Aires holds special religious services.

❁ FLAG DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 20

Manuel Belgrano (1770–1820) was a key figure in Argentina’s struggle for freedom. Born in Buenos Aires, he studied in Spain and became a lawyer. After practicing law for several years, he returned to Argentina and joined its freedom struggle. One of his most significant contributions to the movement was the Argentinean flag, which he designed and which was officially adopted on February 12, 1812. Belgrano chose a design that would represent white clouds parting to reveal the blue sky, since he apparently observed just such a phenomenon on May 25, 1810, the day the liberation movement began. The yellow emblem in the center of the flag, which represents the “Sun of May,” was added in 1818.

Belgrano died on June 20, 1820, and the anniversary of his death is observed in Argentina as Flag Day, when it is customary for residents to wear small badges or flags pinned to their clothing.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 9

Argentina’s independence movement began in earnest on May 25, 1810, which is celebrated as Revolution Day. That date marked the beginning of a long, protracted military struggle, fought under the leadership of the revolutionary and military strategist General José de San Martín (1778–1850). He is regarded as the father of his country.

July 9, 1816 was an important turning point. On this day, the Congress of Tucumán passed a resolution declaring the independence from Spain of the Provincias Unidas de América del Sur (United Provinces of

the South), which also included Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia. Juan Martín de Pueyrredón (1816–19) was declared supreme director.

On both Independence Day and Revolution Day, special services are held at the cathedral in Buenos Aires, and dramatic performances take place in the Colón Theater.

❁ ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF GENERAL SAN MARTÍN

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 12

General José de San Martín (1778–1850) is one of the greatest revolutionary and military heroes South America has produced, and he is considered one of the most important liberators of Argentina. His upbringing and schooling were completed in Spain, after which he joined the Spanish army. After fighting for Spain against Napoleon and rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel, he resigned from the army in 1811 and joined the revolutionary forces committed to South America’s independence. It was primarily due to his astute strategic and tactical thinking that the revolutionaries were able to score decisive victories against the royalist forces and achieve independence in 1816.

Subsequently San Martín campaigned for the liberation of other South American nations, notably Chile and Peru, and achieved considerable success. His Chilean campaign included a spectacular march across the Andes Mountains, 15,000 feet above sea level.

In spite of his successes, however, he found himself politically sidelined. Coupled with his growing disillusionment with the factionalism in South American politics, in 1824 he immigrated to France. He returned to Argentina for a visit in 1828 and made a futile attempt at mediating between different political factions. In 1829, however, he went back to France, never to return. General San Martín remains a hero to the people of Argentina and, indeed, much of South America.

❁ COLUMBUS DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 12

October 12 is traditionally associated with Columbus’s arrival at the American continents. More recently, it is also observed as Native American Day, a reminder of the cruelty and oppression the indigenous populations endured under their European conquerors.

In Argentina the day is also celebrated as Día de la Raza (“Day of the Race”). This day celebrates the Hispanic heritage of the continent, as well as the influences of indigenous people on Argentina’s ethnic and cultural composition. The occasion is celebrated with colorful festivities. Pageants,



A man portraying Jesus Christ carries a cross in Buenos Aires in a reenactment of the crucifixion of Christ during Good Friday celebrations. (AP Photo/Natacha Pisarenko)

processions, music, and other cultural activities figure importantly in the proceedings.

Religious Holidays

✿ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

This Christian festival commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. It has been in the Christian liturgical calendar even longer than Easter has although no one is sure why it is called Good Friday. Some have suggested that the use of *good* in the name goes back to Old English and means “God’s” Friday, while others interpret *good* to mean something like “observed as holy.” This observance is also known as Black Friday and Sorrowful Friday, and in Eastern Orthodox Churches it is called Great Friday.

For many years Good Friday was primarily a Catholic observance, but many Protestant Churches now hold special services. Many of the faithful fast on this day; when they eat, it is generally fish instead of meat. On Good Friday (Viernos Santo), many churches hold mourning services from noon until three in the afternoon to commemorate Jesus’ last hours on the Cross. Some congregations perform a ritual known as the Stations of the Cross, a reenactment of Jesus’ procession to the cross.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is the most important Christian holiday since it commemorates the Resurrection of Jesus after his Crucifixion. In Argentina Easter Egg hunts are very popular with children. Gifts are exchanged, and a large meal is shared. Usual items on the menu include pig’s feet, dumplings, and fried chicken.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Argentina celebrates Christmas (La Navidad, or the birth of Jesus) with boisterous revelry. Houses are decorated with red and white garlands, and Father Christmas’s boots are hung by the front door. Christmas trees—any kind of live or artificial tree can be used to celebrate the holiday—are decorated with colored lights and ornaments, and a figure of Father Christmas is placed on top of it. In addition to the tree, a nativity scene can be found in many

homes. Late on Christmas Eve the family gathers to eat, and, at midnight, the presents that have been placed under the tree are opened.

In Argentina Christmas falls during the summer, and many families hold picnics or barbecues. Christmas dinner in Argentina is an elaborate affair. One of the traditional dishes prepared is *niños envueltas*: Steak is cut into three-inch squares, stuffed with a spicy mixture of minced meat, onions, and hard-boiled eggs, shaped into rolls, then browned, baked, or simmered until tender. Other traditional dishes include roast turkey, roast pork, stuffed tomatoes, mince pies, and special Christmas breads (*pan dulce*, or “sweet bread”), and puddings. Toasts are raised with a drink made of juices, cider, and chunks of fruit. Beer, cider (*sidra*), and wine are also consumed in quantity. On Christmas Eve, people attend church and then gather with their families at home. Midnight is marked by champagne toasts and fireworks displays. The adults usually go out and dance. The next morning, people open the presents that sit under the Christmas tree.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ CARNIVAL

Observed in: Northern Argentina
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: First Sunday before Lent

In northern Argentina Carnival, a festival that has pagan roots, is still observed by people of the Andes Mountains. It begins when the *algarroba* (carob) beans have ripened. Singing—accompanied by *charangos*, related to the guitar and ukelele—can be heard throughout the village. On the Thursday before Lent, women form two lines—one for mothers, the other for grandmothers—and meet under an arch of fruit, cheese, tiny lanterns, and sweets. There, the women exchange a doll that is touched on each woman’s forehead. This ceremony unites the women in an eternal bond.

Carnival reaches its high point on Sunday, when women wear traditional clothes: wide ruffled skirts, colorful ponchos, and white hats. They mask their faces with starch and water. Riding on horseback and singing folksongs, they arrive at the dance in honor of Pukllay, the spirit of Carnival in pre-Incan times. When the celebrations end, a rag doll that represents Pukllay is buried, symbolizing the end of Carnival.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ LA FIESTA DE LA VENDIMIA

Observed in: Mendoza
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March–April

In the province of Mendoza, the center of Argentina’s winemaking industry, this three-day festival is celebrated during the grape harvest season in the fall. The clergy blesses the grapes on the vines, winemakers serve free red wine, and a harvest queen is crowned. The grand finale includes an elaborate display of fireworks. This festival reminds people that they are inextricably linked with the elements of nature: the Sun, rain, and Earth.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

❁ FESTIVAL OF PACHAMAMA

Observed in: Puna
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July

The inhabitants of Puna, in northwest Argentina, still proudly observe numerous ancient traditions. They participate in the cult of Pachamama—giving thanks to Mother Earth for making the corn grow and livestock multiply. They sing and dance to the rhythm of Andean instruments: *charangos* (a stringed instrument), *queñas* (flutes), *siku* (panpipes), *cajas* (snare drums), and *bombos* (drums). Before people drink *chicha*, a drink made from fermented corn, they sprinkle a few drops onto the ground for the Earth goddess Pachamama. This blessing ritual is called *cha’lla* and is thought to guarantee a good harvest.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

❁ BATALIA DE TUCUMÁN

Observed in: Tucumán Provinces
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: September 24

Tucumán is the commercial center of an area (of the same name) that produces sugarcane, legumes, lemons, and tobacco. The city was founded in 1565 and was moved to its present site in 1685.

This festival celebrates the defeat of Spanish royalists at a battle at Tucumán (1812) by nationalist forces under Mañuel Belgrano. The independence of the United Provinces of La Plata from Spain was proclaimed in this city.

Further Reading

Sandra Bao, Ben Greensfelder, and Carolyn Hubbard, *Argentina Uruguay, and Paraguay*, 4th ed. (Berkeley, Calif.: Lonely Planet Publications, 2002); Gabriella Nouzeilles and Graciela R. Montaldo, *The Argentina Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 2003); John W. White, *Argentina, the Life Story of a Nation* (New York: Viking Press, 1942).

Armenia

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Southwestern Asia, bordered by Georgia, Turkey, Iran, and Azerbaijan
Size	11,506 sq. mi.
Capital City	Yerevan
Flag Description	The flag has three horizontal bands of equal size of red (top), blue (middle), and orange (bottom)
Independence	September 21, 1991 (from Soviet Union)
Population	2,982,904 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Armenian
Major Ethnic Group (s)	Armenian (98%)
Major Language (s)	Armenian 98%—official language.
Major Religion (s)	Armenian Apostolic (95%)
National Holiday (s)	New Year's Day, January 1; International Women's Day, March 8; Motherhood and Beauty Day, April 7; Armenian Genocide Memorial Day, April 24; Peace Day, May 9; Restoration of Armenia's Statehood Day, May 28; Constitution Day, July 5; Independence Day, September 21; Earthquake Victims' Memorial Day, December 7

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Armenia is situated in a strategically important region, at the crossroads of the Great Silk Road, the major trade route that linked the East and the West. Because of its geographical position, many empires have sought to control the region.

The country is formerly known as Hayq or Hayastan (“Land of Haik”), and Armenians claim descent from Haik, the great-great-grandson of Noah. There are several accounts of how Armenia got its name. Some claim that the modern name may have been given to the country by its neighbors. According to this story, it is derived from the name of the strongest tribe in the history of Armenia, the Armens, who may have gotten their name from Armenak or Aram, a descendant of Haik and a powerful leader of Hayastan, also said to be the father of all Armenians.

Still other accounts suggest that the name *Armenia* was

derived from *Nairi*, the Assyrian name for the people of the Armenian Plateau. The word meant “land of rivers,” but it referred to the people as well as the region, which was home to some 60 different tribes, several small kingdoms, and about 100 cities, according to contemporary Assyrians. *Nairi* was also the name used by Greek historians around 1000 B.C.E., the first recorded inscription with the name, the Behistun Inscription in Iran, dates from around 400 B.C.E.

The earliest information about the area comprising the states of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan indicates that it was ruled over by the Shulaveri-Shomu (early inhabitants of the Caucasus region) around 6000–4000. Farming and animal husbandry were their main occupations. According to recorded history, around 800–600 B.C.E., the Indo-European group called Armenians moved into what was then the ancient kingdom of Urartu or Van (present-day Turkey), which ruled over the Caucasus region, and the two groups merged.

Later Armenia was made part of the Seleucid Empire, one of the political states formed after the death of Alexander the Great, and it was governed by the Seleucid Dynasty from

Fun Fact

A structure in Armenia known as Zorats Karer or Karahunj may be older than the United Kingdom's Stonehenge, and it suggests that its builders had contact with the megalithic cultures of Atlantic Europe (Brittany, Ireland, and Britain).

323 B.C.E.–60 C.E. The Seleucid Empire was destroyed, however, due to internal conflicts between different dynasties within the empire over the right to rule the kingdom.

In 190 B.C.E. while the Seleucid Empire was in decline, the first Armenian state was formed. It covered a large expanse of land including the Caucasus Mountains, and part of modern-day Syria, Turkey, and Lebanon. Armenia soon became one of the most powerful states in the region. At about the same time the Roman Empire was expanding its territories. Around the

year 66 powerful Roman forces invaded Armenia, and it eventually became part of the Roman Empire.

In a bid to rule over the Caucasus, Persia fought a series of wars with the ruling Romans. As a result Armenia fell into the hands of the Sassanid Persians (the ruling dynasty of Persia), and, although western Armenia remained part of the Roman Empire, eastern Armenia was ruled by the Persians.

In 301 Armenia became the first nation in history to adopt Christianity as the state religion. Between the 4th and the 18th centuries various invaders—the Persians, Arabs, Mongols, and Turks—ruled the region. In the early 19th century the Russians annexed the region along the Yerevan and Lake Sevan, which was part of the ancient Persian Empire and an area that was part of modern-day Turkey. This triggered Russian-Turkish Wars in the 1870s, which led to the indiscriminate killing of Armenians in Turkey.

The situation for Armenians worsened after Russia and Turkey fought on opposite sides during World War I. Turkey concluded that the Armenians were

supportive of Russian forces, and this sparked a systematic killing of the Armenian people in those territories under Turkey's control. On April 20, 1915, the Armenians of Van revolted against the Muslim rule of the Turks, killed local Muslims, and established control over the region. On April 24, 1915, they handed the control of Van to Russian forces. This triggered another series of atrocities against Armenians by the Turkish government that became known as the "Armenian genocide." As many as 1.5 million Armenians may have been killed.

In 1917 Ottoman Armenia (eastern Armenia) was returned to the Turks when Russia suffered a defeat during World War I. The local Armenians quickly formed an independent state, the Transcaucasian Federation, that was independent of Russia. However, conflicts within the ruling factions resulted in the split of eastern Armenia into the states of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. In 1922 after the establishment of the Soviet Union, the three territories were reunited by the invasion of the Red Army (the army of the former Soviet Union) and the Transcaucasian Federation of the Soviet Socialist Republic was formed.

In 1936 the USSR dissolved the Transcaucasian Federation of Soviet Socialist Republics, and the regions of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan became individual republics of the Soviet Union. There were ongoing border and religious disputes between Azerbaijan and Armenia, but the Soviets controlled the situation and prevented its escalation into a war between Christian Armenia and Muslim Azerbaijan. In 1988 the ethnic tensions between the two republics led to war after the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, which was largely inhabited by Armenian Christians, voted to unify with Armenia. Nagorno-Karabakh had untapped oil reserves worth billions of dollars, which made Azerbaijan even more unwilling to part with its territory. Historically Nagorno-Karabakh had been part of the Armenian state, but, as the result of borders defined by the Soviet Union under Stalin, it was made part of Azerbaijan. Armenia, whose 10-percent industrial capacity was destroyed by a devastating earthquake in 1988, was more than willing to reintegrate Nagorno-Karabakh as an Armenian state.

The dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh sparked the mass killing of Armenians and Azerbaijanis on both sides of the border, and the Azerbaijan Popular Front (PF), then an opposition political party with its own militia, unleashed a reign of terror in the region. The mass killings came to a temporary halt after Soviet military intervention, but the fighting resumed in 1990. During the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Armenians in Azerbaijan and Armenia passed a referendum calling for independence from Soviet rule, and on September 21, 1991, the independent state of Armenia came into existence.

Levon Ter-Petrossian (b. 1945), a prominent Armenian leader, was sworn in as the first president of Armenia in 1991. He continued the war over the Nagorno-Karabakh region and eventually defeated the Azerbaijan forces. By May 1994 the governments of Azerbaijan and Armenia had declared a ceasefire. By this time Armenia had established its control over the Nagorno-Karabakh region and some other parts of Azerbaijan as well.

The war took a heavy toll on the Armenian economy, which worsened after Turkey and Iran imposed economic sanctions as a consequence of the ethnic war. In 1998 Levon Ter-Petrossian resigned as president, accepting responsibility for the economic and political problems of Armenia. Fresh

Fun Fact

The Behistun Inscription, created to record the triumphs of King Darius I of Persia (reigned 521–485), is to cuneiform what the Rosetta Stone was to Egyptian hieroglyphics in that it unlocked the meaning of an extinct language. The text is presented in three different languages: Old Persian cuneiform, Elamite (Akkadian), and Babylonian. Both Elamite and Babylonian are Semitic languages.

Armenian Genocide

On April 24, 1915, after Russian forces successfully took control of the Van region in Armenia (with the support of local Armenians), Turkey committed a series of atrocities against Armenians living in their territory. The Turks sent thousands of Armenians, including women and children, to camps along the Iraqi and Syrian borders, and massacred many Armenians (mostly men). It is widely reported that children were separated from their parents in the camps and either distributed among the childless Muslim population by the Turkish

government or sent to the mezzanine floors (intermediate floors between the main floors of a building) under the pretext of letting them have a bath. Instead the children were killed by poisonous gases and buried in mass graves. An estimated 1.2 to 1.5 million Armenians were killed as part of the systematic extermination. Turkish authorities denied authorizing these acts of violence and to prove it even conducted military trials in Istanbul in 1919 to punish the perpetrators. Many of the military officers who were in charge of the concentration camps were either imprisoned or sentenced to death by Turkish authorities.

elections were held in March 1998, and Robert Kocharian (b. 1954) was elected president of Armenia. He was reelected at the end of his five-year term in 2003, though his reelection was marred by allegations of election fraud.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Armenia is located in the southern Caucasus between the Black and Caspian Seas in southwestern Asia. It is a landlocked country, with Georgia to the north, Azerbaijan along its eastern border, Turkey along its western border, and Iran and a small enclave of Azerbaijan to the south.

The Lesser Caucasus mountainous range Maly Kavkaz, which extends through the northern parts of Armenia, moves southeast and passes through Lake Sevan and Azerbaijan and eventually crosses the Armenian-Azerbaijan border to Iran. The Armenian Plateau lies in the southwestern part near the Aras River, which forms Armenia's border with Iran and Turkey. The plateau has a number of small mountain ranges and extinct volcanoes. Mount Aragats, the highest mountain in Armenia (13,419 feet), lies along the Armenian Plateau.

Lake Sevan, with the Debed and Aras Rivers, and a tributary of the Aras River the Razdan are the main sources of water in Armenia.

Armenia has a highland continental climate characterized by hot summers (June to September) and extremely cold winters. During summer, the temperature ranges from 71°F to 96°F. However, in winter, temperatures vary from 14°F to 23°F. A rainy season lasts from spring into early summer, with a second rainy season in October and November.

❁ ECONOMY

Under Soviet rule Armenia was a major exporter of machinery, tools, textiles, and manufactured goods to other Soviet republics. However, postindependence Armenia's economy was shattered by the war with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. In addition, the devastating earthquake that killed more

than 25,000 Armenians in 1988 also destroyed 10 percent of the country's industrial capacity.

Huge investments are required for the development and upgrading of infrastructure facilities. Since 1994 the government of Armenia has taken significant steps in the form of growth reforms and economic liberalization programs, which are backed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The economy is gaining stability, but Armenia continues to depend on foreign investment and international aid.

Agriculture remains the primary occupation of Armenians. The main crops include potatoes, vegetables, berries, grapes, tobacco, figs, cotton, olives, and sugar beets. Armenia also has small mineral deposits (including bauxite, copper, and gold).

In 2003 Armenia became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Armenia has a diverse cultural heritage that reflects its geographical location and tumultuous history. The country has contributed to many of the arts, but it is perhaps best known for its music and dance,

Apostolic Christianity

Two of Jesus' apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew were the first to preach to the Armenians, probably as early as the second half of the first century C.E. In the early fourth century St. Gregory the Illuminator (c. 240–332) formally established the church in Armenia, when King Tiridates III (286–344) was baptized and proclaimed Christianity the official religion of Armenia. The Armenian Apostolic Church is considered to be one of the oldest national churches in the world. The head of the Armenian Apostolic Church is the *apostolic catholicos* in the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin, in Echmiadzin, Armenia. The church rejects the authority of the pope and the doctrine of purgatory.

especially its liturgical and folk music. Although the country has often been conquered, the roots of its music can be traced to pre-Christian Armenia. Ancient friezes on the walls of buildings show singers with various musical instruments, and the country used to have traveling musicians who entertained royal audiences.

Mesrop Mashtotz (c.361/62–440) and the Parthian Sahak I (388–439) may be the first Armenian composers. In addition to creating the Armenian alphabet, they composed the first monophonic liturgical songs—chants, composed in one of eight modes, in which several notes are sung on the same syllable—used in the Armenian Church. In the Middle Ages 1,200 hymns called *sharakans* (or *sharagans*) were composed. Even though they are still regularly sung in the divine liturgy, *sharakans* were probably not written after the 13th century.

Early church music was composed using *kbaz*, invented in the ninth century, an Armenian musical notation that permitted variation within a set modal structure. Eventually the system became so complicated that even church musicians were unable to interpret it, and the system was revised early in the 19th century by Hambardzoum Limondjian (1768–1839). Musicologists at the Armenian Academy of Sciences in Yerevan are trying to decipher *kbaz* with the help of computers.

Legends of Armenia’s pre-Christian past were probably known to fifth-century writers in some form, either as ballads or in written form; these became the folk music of Armenia. Wandering minstrels, called *gusans* or *asbughs*, preserved these ancient stories in their songs, passing them down from one generation to the next. The *kamancha*, a stringed instrument played with a bow, was certainly one of the instruments played by the *gusans*. Other popular instruments include the *kanon*, a type of hammer dulcimer; the *davul*, a hand drum with two heads; *oud* (a type of lute); *tar* (a lute with a short neck); and the *zurna* (also *shawm*), a woodwind instrument and the predecessor of the oboe. These instruments are familiar among the peoples of this region and are still used, although with different names, in the folk music of Turkey, Iran, and Azerbaijan, for example.

Dance, like music, is an integral part of a culture, and Armenians enjoy dancing. Armenian dances are usually classified by region; the Armenian word for “dance” is *bar*. A traditional Armenian dance from the northern region of Speetak, called Jo Jon or Zhora Bar, is a line dance performed only by the men. They stand in an open circle, with their hands at shoulder level, and interlock their little fingers. Their dance steps are small and restrained, while their bodies maintain an erect relaxed stance. The leader (*bar bashi*), whoever is standing at the right end, often waves a white handkerchief. Other popular Armenian dances include the Tamzara and Ghosh *bilezik*, line dances from western Erzerum (now in Turkey), where the Armenian kings had their summer residence; and the Laz, a fisherman’s dance from

the Black Sea region, in which the movements of the dancers imitate the fish’s movements as it is pulled out of the water. Kurdish influences are strong in several dances from Van, the ancient home of the Armenians (now in Turkey), including the Papouri, Khumkhuma, Tenn, and Halay, all line dances performed with tightly linked arms. These dances are called *babd* (“wall”) or *pert* (“fortress”) dances.

❁ CUISINE

Lamb is a staple in the Armenian diet, and a special dish called *kasblama*, made with boiled lamb and potatoes, is one of the country’s specialties. Some other favorite Armenian dishes include *soujoukh* (spicy dried sausage), kebabs, and *salamorah toursbi* (pickled green peppers stuffed with chopped vegetables). *Basterma*, dried slices of beef soaked in spicy *chaman*, may be for the adventurous. *Chaman* is named for its main ingredient, fenugreek (a clover-like Eurasian plant), but the mixture also contains ground red pepper, minced garlic, ground black pepper, ground allspice, ground cumin, and worm water (made from worm castings).

A traditional Armenian meal consists of rice, lamb, yogurt, eggplant, and a sweet dish called *paklava* or *baklava*, which is made with thin pastry. For making *baklava*, pastry is rolled into long, thin sheets of reddish-brown color. These are then rolled into cylindrical shapes and served with nuts such as walnuts. Armenians eat bread with most of their meals, and two traditional favorites are *lavash* and *matkanash*. *Lavash* is used, like many Middle Eastern flatbreads, as a wrap for cheese or meat with onions, greens, and peppers, but especially for the Armenian version of barbecue.

Armenians also include lots of vegetables in their diet such as cauliflower, celery, tomatoes, onions, and carrots. Dishes made from chickpeas, yogurt, beans, and eggplant are very popular as well. A local brandy called *konyak* and coffee are the preferred beverages, but Armenians have been brewing beer since they arrived in Urartu.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR’S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western or Gregorian calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year’s Day throughout the world. In Armenia New Year’s Day is a very important holiday, and the celebrations begin on New Year’s Eve (December 31). Armenians prepare their favorite lamb dishes, bake cookies, and visit their friends and families on New Year’s Day. Houses are kept open, and guests are warmly welcomed.

New Year's Day also marks the beginning of week-long festivities, which end with Orthodox Christmas on January 6.

❁ INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 8

It was on March 8, 1848, that the king of Prussia promised to grant women the right to vote. International Women's Day has been celebrated in Armenia since the Soviet occupation. It commemorates the social, economical, political, and cultural achievements of women throughout history. It also honors all the women who fought for justice and equality for their sex and pays tribute to women's contributions to a world in which justice is the common law. In Armenia men give presents to women, and the streets are decorated with flowers, but it is primarily an occasion for Armenian men to extol the traditional female virtues of motherhood, beauty, and tolerance. All government ministers in Armenia are men, and only a handful of women are members of parliament. Many Armenian men still regard housekeeping as the primary mission of women.

❁ MOTHERHOOD AND BEAUTY DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 7

Motherhood and Beauty Day is the second holiday in the Armenian calendar dedicated to women. This holiday honors Armenian women who are mothers. Traditionally, they receive gifts and flowers.

❁ ARMENIAN GENOCIDE MEMORIAL DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 24

Armenian Genocide Memorial Day, also known as Martyrs' Day, is observed in memory of the killing of over a million innocent Armenian men, women, and children by Turkish forces. On April 24, 1915, during World War I, the Armenian people handed over the region of Van to Russian forces (Turkey's archrival). The Turks, believing that the Armenians were sympathetic to Russia, against whom it had been struggling to dominate the region for decades, began the systematic execution of Armenians. Armenians were also sent to concentration camps along the country's frontiers with Iraq and Syria. It is estimated that between 1.2 million and 1.5 million were killed during the Armenian Genocide, which continued until 1917. It was the first genocide of the 20th century.

Holy Echmiadzin

For more than six million Armenian Christians, Holy Echmiadzin is the spiritual seat of authority. It is believed that, after Christianity was adopted as the state religion, St. George, one of the proponents of Christianity in Armenia, had a vision in which Jesus came to Earth and pointed to a site where the first church in Armenia was later built, in 303. St. Gregory became the first spiritual Armenian catholicos. Since then, Echmiadzin—the place Armenians believe Jesus chose—has been the residence of the Armenian supreme patriarch and catholicos.

On April 24 Armenians all over the world come together and pay tribute to those who perished during this genocide. Armenians walk to the hills of Tsitsernakaberd, which houses a memorial complex dedicated to the victims of this genocide, pay their respects to the victims and grieve for them. The complex has a 130-foot-high obelisk that symbolizes rebirth, boldness, and the Armenians' peace-loving nature.

❁ PEACE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 9

Peace Day, or Victory Day, commemorates the victory of Russian and Armenian forces in World War II. On this day World War II veterans, who command immense respect and are revered as war heroes, lead processions in different parts of Armenia. While children offer them flowers and kisses, the elderly offer these heroes vodka or their local brandy called *konyak*. Cultural and music festivals are also part of Peace Day celebrations in most parts of Armenia.

❁ RESTORATION OF ARMENIA'S STATEHOOD DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 28

On May 28, 1918, after breaking free from Turkish dominance, Armenia temporarily restored its lost sovereignty and declared itself an independent state. Although Russian forces quickly reclaimed the entire region, this day marks the beginning of a new quest to restore the country's independence.

Also known as First Republic Day, May 28 is a national holiday in Armenia, and all public and private institutions are closed on this day.

Fun Fact

Armenian brandy has won many renowned admirers, including the former prime minister of Britain Sir Winston Churchill. Churchill is said to have preferred Armenian brandy to the French variety.

Fun Fact

In Armenia Santa Claus is called Dzmer Papik. Children write him and send him their lists of toys and other gifts before New Year's Eve, then he surprises them with gifts on New Year's Eve.

❁ CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 5

This day commemorates the referendum of July 5, 1995, in which the Armenians unanimously voted in favor of the first constitution of the Republic of Armenia. The referendum promised to safeguard the rights of every Armenian and reflected the will and determination of Armenians to live in a free and democratic society. The constitution that was approved in 1995 is still in effect. On May 25, 2003, Armenians unanimously rejected amendments that the government proposed. Since it is a national holiday, all government and private institutions remain closed on July 5.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: September 21

This day commemorates the historical referendum that took place on September 21, 1991, in which the Armenians voted unanimously in favor of independence from the Soviet Union. After elections were held in October 1991 Levon Ter-Petrossian, a prominent Armenian leader, was chosen as the first president of the Republic of Armenia.

On this day, the president presides over the Independence Day celebrations in the capital city of Yerevan. The day's events include a flag-raising ceremony, a speech by the president, a display of the defense capability of the Armenian armed forces, featuring the latest arms and ammunitions acquired by the country, as well as cultural activities. A spirit of patriotism prevails throughout the nation as Armenians all over the country participate in local Independence Day celebrations. It is also called Referendum Day.

❁ EARTHQUAKE VICTIMS' MEMORIAL DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 7

This day memorializes the devastating earthquake that struck Armenia on December 7, 1988, killing more than 25,000 Armenians. Almost 10 percent of Armenia's industrial capacity was destroyed, and millions of Armenians were left homeless. The cities of Gyumri (formerly known as Leninakan) and Vanadzor (formerly known as Kirovakan) were severely affected.

On this day people solemnly remember those Armenians who lost their lives and family members to the destructive forces of nature. Families of the deceased visit the graves of their loved ones to pay their respects.



An Armenian Apostolic Church archbishop, left, baptizes a girl as part of the celebrations surrounding the 1,700th anniversary of Christianity as the national religion in 2001. Armenia adopted Christianity at the dawn of the fourth century. (AP Photo/Misha Japaridze)

Religious Holidays

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: January 6

Although the Eastern Orthodox Church celebrates Christmas on January 7, Armenian Orthodox Christians prefer to celebrate Jesus' birth on January 6, because the Armenian Church gives more importance to the Feast of Epiphany, which also falls on January 6. Epiphany is a related Christian feast that recalls a visit to the infant Jesus by the Magi—three astrologer-priests of ancient Persia named Caspar, Balthasar, and Melchior.

In Armenia Christmas is a very important religious holiday, marked by rituals of baptism, which include a blessing of water. During this ritual water is blessed with the holy chrism, symbolic of Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist. Devout Armenian Christians attend church services on Christmas Eve (January 5), as well as on Christmas Day.

Armenians visit their friends and families during three days of greeting. They do not have Christmas

trees or exchange gifts. A traditional Christmas dinner of fish and rice is prepared and served with wine.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS; EPIPHANY

❁ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday (also known as the Tsaghkazard Festival) is celebrated a week before Easter. It commemorates Jesus' triumphal return to Jerusalem. Armenian boys and girls wear new clothes. In each village young men uproot a willow tree and neatly decorate its branches with colored pieces of cloth, fruit, and candles.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; PALM SUNDAY

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Orthodox Easter, called Surp Zatik in Armenia, is one of the most important religious festivals in Armenia because it is celebrated as the day Jesus rose from the grave. During the 40-day fasting period that precedes Easter, Armenian families place lentils and other sprouting grains in a tray, which is then covered with a thin layer of cotton. They keep the tray in the house, and by the time Easter arrives the lentils and grains have sprouted, symbolizing the awakening of nature or the arrival of spring. The sprouted grains also serve as grass, which is placed on the Easter table under colored Easter eggs.

Armenian Christians believe that, after Jesus' Crucifixion, his mother Mary took some eggs and bread wrapped in a shawl to where the Cross stood. Grief-stricken at the sight of her son's body and the blood streaming from his wounds, she knelt down and wept bitterly. Her tears and the blood from his wounds dropped on the shawl and eventually on the eggs and bread, coloring them both. Mary then covered her head with the shawl. It is believed that this event gave rise to the tradition of coloring eggs and explains why women cover their heads while visiting church.

Attendance at a church service on Easter morning is followed by a traditional Easter meal consisting of wheat, chicken or lamb, and butter. Armenians also visit friends and relatives. After greetings have been exchanged, people gather in open spaces to wrestle and play games.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ VARDAVAR FESTIVAL

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Fourteen weeks after Easter

The Vardavar (or Vartavar) Festival, also called the Transfiguration of Summer or the Feast of Water, was initially celebrated to recognize the annual pilgrimage undertaken by young and old Armenians to the temple of the pagan goddess of love Astghik. It is celebrated all over Armenia. The word *vardavar* has two meanings: "to sprinkle with water" and "the flaming of the rose." According to Armenian legend, a pagan goddess named Astghik spread the message of love all over Armenia by presenting roses and sprinkling rose water across the country. The pagan god Vahagn, who fought against all evil, safeguarded the love that was spread by Astghik. After Armenia adopted Christianity this celebration was transformed into the Feast of Water to celebrate peace and love.

On this day Armenians wake up early in the morning and start pouring water on each other, drenching everyone they meet.

❁ HOLIDAY OF ST. MARY

Observed by: Armenian Apostolic Christians

Observed on: Sunday between August 12 and 18

This is a day devoted to Mary, the mother of Jesus. The traditional ceremony on this holiday is the annual blessing of the grapes in the church, which coincides with the beginning of the harvest.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

❁ HOLY CROSS

Observed by: Armenian Apostolic Christians

Observed on: Sunday nearest September 14

The Armenian Church celebrates this holiday, also called Khachverats, on the Sunday nearest September 14, which is devoted to the Holy Cross (Surb Khach). This holiday is also a day for remembering the dead.

See also Volume III: ALL SOULS' DAY

❁ HOLY TRANSLATORS DAY

Observed by: Armenian Apostolic Christians

Observed on: September 14

This holiday (known locally as Targmanchats ton) is dedicated to the creators of the Armenian alphabet Mesrop Mashtots and Sahak I in 404 C.E. The Armenian alphabet was invented in order to translate the Bible into Armenian and paved the way for the first golden age of Armenia. Over the centuries Armenian writers, philosophers, mathematicians, and scientists have been inspired by the translators' legacy to achieve excellence in scholarship, creativity, and world acclaim in spite of long periods of devastation, attack, conquest, and subjugation.

Regional Holidays

❁ TIARNNDARAJ

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 13

According to some, Tiarndaraj (or Terndez) originated in Jewish law and celebrates the day Mary and Joseph took Jesus, who was just 40 days old, to the Temple to meet an old man, named Simon, who eagerly awaited the arrival of the Messiah. Others say it originated in pagan times, when fire was believed to have cleansing powers. During the celebration the fire of Terndez symbolizes the arrival of spring, a rich harvest, and a blessing of newly married couples. In some celebrations the fire is permitted only on holy ground, but elsewhere families with a recently engaged daughter or a newly married offspring light the fire in their yards. In such instances the couple collects the firewood. If held on holy ground, the firewood is blessed by a priest.

People gather around the fire, believing that the direction in which the smoke blows points to the most fertile land for planting crops. Couples then jump through the fire, followed by any children in attendance. Next people suffering from illness or infertility jump through the fire, along with pregnant women or those who have just given birth. If some part of their clothing burns, it is believed it will protect them from the bites of snakes and the stings of scorpions.

Once the fire has been extinguished everyone begins to dance; some take what remains of the fire to burn in their homes. The ash is also saved, to be prepared as a drink for the sick or pregnant women. Some spread the ashes across their fields and cattle sheds, or place it in *tonirs*, where *lavash* ("thin bread") is made.

The festival is observed on February 14 by Armenians who live in other countries.

See also Volume III: SPRING FESTIVALS

Rites of Passage

❁ MARRIAGE

Armenian marriages are solemnized in church. Many Armenian couples get married on Tiarndaraj

(Terndez) and incorporate the observances of the festival into their wedding ceremony.

On the wedding day, the bride wears a red silk gown and a headpiece made of cardboard that has been shaped into wings and decorated with feathers. The wedding ceremony is presided over by a priest who sanctifies the marriage in the presence of the couple's families. Traditionally two white doves, symbolizing love and happiness, are released during the marriage ceremony.

After the ceremony the bride and groom attend a reception given by their families. At the site of the reception the bridesmaids and the friends of the groom hold flowers aloft to make an arch. The bride and groom enter the reception by walking under the arch. During the reception guests throw coins on the wedding couple to bless them with prosperity.

Mom bar, the candle dance (so-called because it is performed with lit candles), is the last dance of the wedding ceremony. It originated in Maroon, a village near Lake Sevan in Armenia. At the end of the dance the candles are extinguished, indicating to the guests that the festivities are over, and it is time to go home.

❁ DEATH

Armenians bury their dead. Friends and family members take part in the funeral procession. A day after the burial a remembrance ceremony is held, and they all gather again to share their memories and celebrate the deceased's life. Thereafter, every year on the anniversary of the person's death, it is customary for Armenian families to visit the graves of deceased family members.

Further Reading

Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Edmund Herzing and Marina Kurkchyan, eds., *The Armenians: Past and Present in the Making of National Identity* (Oxford: Routledge Curzon, 2005); Thomas J. Samuelian, *Armenian Origins: An Overview of Ancient and Modern Sources* (Yerevan, Armenia: Iravung Publishing House, 2000).

Aruba

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	An island in the Caribbean Sea, north of Venezuela
Size	75 sq. mi.
Capital City	Oranjestad
Flag Description	The flag is blue, with two narrow, horizontal yellow stripes across the lower portion and a red, four-pointed star outlined in white in the upper hoist-side corner.
Independence	N.A. (Autonomous state within the Kingdom of The Netherlands)
Population	71,566 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary democracy
Nationality	Aruban, Dutch
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Mixed European/Caribbean Amerindian (80%)
Major Language(s)	Dutch is the official language. English and Spanish are both widely spoken, as is Papiamentu (a mixed Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, English dialect).
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (82%); Santería
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Birthday of G. B. Croes, January 25; National Anthem and Flag Day, March 18; Queen's Day, April 30; Labor Day, May 1

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

The first inhabitants of Aruba—the Caquetio—were probably related to the Arawaks. Various 16th century sources indicate that the Caquetio spoke Maipuran, an Arawak language. Basic information about the earliest Indian settlements has been gleaned from ancient painted symbols still visible on limestone caves found at Fontein, Ayo, and a few other places. These sites date back to about 1000 C.E. as do the pottery remnants, which have been preserved at the Archaeological Museum of Aruba in Oranjestad.

In 1499 the Spanish navigator Alonso de Ojeda (c.1466–c.1515), made his way to this remote corner of the Caribbean Basin and laid claim to the territory for Queen Isabella. According to one tradition he christened the place Oro Hubo (“golden hub”), implying that gold was to be found there. The name Aruba, however, was possibly derived from the Arawak word *oibubai*, which means “guide.” The Spanish made little use of the island, finding the climate too arid for cultivation and discovering little evidence of gold.

Spain's belief that Aruba had nothing it could exploit and its consequent abandonment opened the way for the notorious slave hunters (*indieros*), and in 1515 Diego Salazar took about 2,000 Indians from the three islands and put them to work in the gold and silver mines in Hispaniola. For the most part, however, the Spanish abandoned Aruba to the Caquetios for the next 150 years and devoted themselves to more lucrative conquests. Their lack of interest in Aruba probably spared the Caquetios some of the more hideous and cruel practices for which the Spaniards became known. Gradually the island became a clandestine hideout for buccaneers, who raided ships transporting Indian treasures back to Europe. At Bushiribana on the northeast coast, the ruins of an old pirate castle still stand.

In 1636 about the time of the conclusion of the Eighty Years' War between Spain and Holland, the Dutch, who had been expelled by the Spanish from their base in St. Maarten, set out looking for another place to establish their colonial presence. They captured the islands of Aruba, Curaçao, and Bonaire from the Spanish without much resistance. Curaçao became the administrative capital for the Dutch West India Company in the Netherlands Antilles (Aruba, Bonaire,

Fun Fact

Because the Spaniards found no gold or pearls on Aruba, Diego Columbus (the oldest son of Christopher Columbus, 1476?–1526) decided that Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao were “*islas inútiles*,” “useless islands.”

Curaçao, and Suriname), with Aruba operating as one of its chief satellites. The Dutch controlled Aruba for nearly two centuries.

Poor soil and aridity saved the island from plantation economics and the African slave trade. Instead the Dutch left the Arawaks to graze livestock on the parched landscape, using the island as a source of meat for other Dutch possessions in the Caribbean. During the Napoleonic Wars the English briefly took control of the island in 1805 but returned it to the Dutch in 1816.

In 1826 Aruba’s first economic boom occurred when gold was discovered near Balashi. Hordes of gold-hungry immigrants arrived from Europe and Venezuela, and mining continued until 1916. When the mines became unproductive Aruba turned to oil refining on a large scale. In 1929 the world’s largest refinery was built on the southeastern tip of the island.

Things went smoothly until the 1940s, when Aruba became resentful about playing a secondary role to Curaçao in the Netherlands Antilles. Aruban calls for autonomy increased over the next few decades, and in 1986 Aruba finally became an autonomous state within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The queen of the Netherlands is the head of state, and a governor general, appointed for a six-year term, represents her locally. The Netherlands is responsible for all matters relating to defense, judicial appointments, applications for citizenship, and foreign affairs.

Aruba has its own constitution, however, based on Western democratic principles. Legislative, executive, and judicial powers are vested in the parliament, which has its seat in Aruba’s capital, Oranjestad. The Aruban Parliament consists of 21 members elected by universal suffrage. Matters such

Buccaneer

A buccaneer is a pirate, someone who robs at sea or plunders the land from the sea without having the approval of any sovereign nation. The first recorded use of the French word *boucanier* (borrowed into English during the 17th century) referred to a person on the islands of Hispaniola and the Tortugas who hunted wild oxen and boars and smoked the meat in a barbecue frame called a *boucan* in French. The French word is derived from the Tupi word meaning “a rack used for roasting or for storing things, or a rack-like platform supporting a house.” (The Tupi were people who lived along the coastal areas of Brazil.) The original barbecue makers are believed to have gradually adopted a more remunerative way of life—piracy—which accounts for the new meaning given to the word.

as aviation, customs, immigration, communications, and other internal matters are handled autonomously by the Aruban government. All laws are written in Dutch, and the highest court is the Dutch Supreme Court in The Hague.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Aruba lies at the center of the southern Caribbean, 15 miles north of Venezuela. The island is 19 miles long and 6 miles wide, with a total area of nearly 75 square miles. Aruba enjoys a dry, sunny climate, which is kept pleasant and temperate all year due to the cooling effects of the trade winds. The average annual temperature is 81°F, and the meager rainfall amounts to just 17 inches a year. Most of this occurs during the months of October and November. Aruba is located well below the hurricane belt.

The island is characterized by a flat landscape dominated by Mount Jamanota (617 feet). Hemmed in by calm blue seas, with visibility up to a depth of a hundred feet in some places, the island’s south and west coasts consist of miles of white beaches. The eastern coast of the island is a desert. Inland Aruba presents a unique but unlikely landscape of cactus, aloe plants, and dramatic rock formations that resembles a desert.

❁ ECONOMY

Tourism is the mainstay of Aruba’s economy, although offshore banking, and oil refining and storage also enjoy considerable importance. The rapid growth of the tourism sector over the last few decades has resulted in the expansion of other related activities. Construction has boomed, with hotel capacity reaching five times the 1985 level. The reopening of the country’s oil refinery in 1993—a major source of employment and a foreign exchange earner—further helped economic development. Aruba’s small labor force and low unemployment rate have led to a large number of unfilled job vacancies, despite sharp rises in wages in recent years. Early in the 21st century the government faced a budget deficit and a negative trade balance.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Aruba’s population is made up of people from South America and Europe, as well as from Asia and other Caribbean islands. The *lingua franca*, spoken by 200,000 people in Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao, is a Creole dialect called Papiamentu (also spelled Papiamentu) that came from the neighboring island of Curaçao. It developed during the 1500s so that African slaves could understand and be understood by their owners. Most of the countries that have used the island in the past have contributed to Papiamentu. In addition to the contributions of various African languages, Portuguese and Spanish missionaries, Dutch merchants, South American traders, and Indians added additional words, creating a mix-

ture of Dutch, Spanish, English, French, Portuguese, and African languages as well as the Arawak language Maipuran.

Although a majority of Aruba's citizens would identify themselves as Roman Catholic if asked, it is likely that a large number of them also practice the Afro-Caribbean religion called Santería. The term Santería was originally a very negative word used by the Spanish to speak of the religious practices of their slaves. Over the years, however, as the word has come into widespread use, its sense of disapproval has been neutralized, and many practitioners have begun to use it themselves.

Its origins date back to the slave trade when African peoples were caught and forcibly transported to the Caribbean. Typically, the new slaves were baptized by Roman Catholic priests as soon as they arrived, and their native beliefs and practices were suppressed. Santería incorporates the worship of the *orisha* (Yoruba deities; literally "head guardian") and beliefs of the Yoruba and Bantu people in Southern Nigeria, Senegal, and the Guinea Coast. These are combined with elements of worship from Roman Catholicism.

In order to keep their old beliefs alive, the former slaves equated each Yoruba deity (*santo*) with a corresponding Christian saint. For example Babalz Ayi became St. Lazarus, patron of the sick; Eleggua (or Elegba), the guardian of crossroads, became identified with St. Anthony, who protects travelers; Shango, who controls storms, thunder, lightning, and fire, was identified with St. Barbara; Ogun, the *orisha* of war, was identified with St. Peter; and Oshun, thought to be very wealthy, became Our Lady of Charity.

Tambu, *muzik di zumbi*, *seú* or *simadan*, and *tumba* are the Afro-Caribbean forms of music typically performed during celebrations in Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao. The lyrics to these forms of music are sung in Papiamentu.

Oranjestad, Aruba's capital since 1797, takes its name from the Dutch Royal House of Orange-Nassau. Its architectural designs are mainly Dutch with an occasional touch of Spanish styles. The second largest city, San Nicholas, is a fairly modern township, which gained prominence with the island's oil boom. It is the venue of Aruba's Carnival, third only to those held in Brazil and Trinidad.

❁ CUISINE

The confluence of divergent cultures has lent a distinct flavor to the island's cuisine. The typical local menu contains an array of freshly harvested seafood. International menus, including Indonesian, Japanese, Chinese, Dutch, Italian, French, and Cantonese cuisine, are easily available in Aruba. Some famous local dishes include *arepas*, cornmeal griddlecakes (of Venezuelan origin) stuffed with ham, eggs, chicken, okra, cheese, and other ingredients; *pastechis*, small pastries stuffed with spicy meat, okra, or fish, an ideal dish for parties; *ayaca*, a spicy dish prepared with pork, chicken, and dried fruits, all tightly

packed in banana leaves and steamed in a pan of boiling water; and *bolo pretu*, a dark fruitcake, which is a popular dessert that keeps for six months or more if refrigerated. Elaborately decorated, *bolo pretu* is the wedding cake of preference.

Fun Fact

Some Yoruba say there are 401 *orisha*, or deities, but others believe there are probably more.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 1

January 1, the first day of the Gregorian calendar, is celebrated as New Year's in much of the world. In Aruba the New Year is ushered in with a big fireworks show at midnight. According to popular legend, the fireworks keep evil spirits away. Music, singing, and drinking are traditional activities of the celebration, and groups of musicians, called *dande*, go from house to house singing good luck greetings for the New Year.

❁ BIRTHDAY OF G. B. CROES

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 25

On this day Arubans celebrate the birthday of one of their most eminent political leaders Gilberto Francois (Betico) Croes (1938–86). Popularly known as Betico Croes he helped the island attain Status Aparte. This new status granted Aruba autonomy (apart from the Netherlands Antilles) and allowed it to function as a commonwealth within the Dutch kingdom. Croes also introduced Aruba's currency and established Aruba's national anthem and flag. All schools and government offices, as well as some commercial establishments, remain closed on this

Useful Papiamentu Phrases

<i>ajo</i>	"good-bye"
<i>bon dia</i>	"good morning"
<i>bon tardi</i>	"good afternoon"
<i>danki</i>	"thank you"
<i>keds</i>	"sneakers"
<i>plaka</i>	"money"
<i>Hopi bon!</i>	"Very good!"
<i>Kwan tor tin?</i>	"What time is it?"
<i>Mi stima Aruba.</i>	"I love Aruba."
<i>Mi tin sed.</i>	"I'm thirsty."
<i>Te aworo.</i>	"See you later."

day. Arubans take part in many sporting events and games across the island.

❁ NATIONAL ANTHEM AND FLAG DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 18

During a Dutch parliamentary session in March 1976 it was decided that March 18 would be celebrated as Aruba's National Anthem and Flag day. The day was first observed in the same year. Every year since Aruba has celebrated with nationalistic shows and folkloric presentations, the venue for which is the Plaza Betico Croes in the capital of Oranjestad. All educational and government offices and stores remain closed. The islanders, old and young alike, participate in land and marine sports and games on this day.

❁ QUEEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 30

Her Royal Highness Beatrix Wilhelmina Armgard (b. 1938), the queen of the Netherlands, ascended the Dutch throne on April 30, 1980. Because Aruba is a Dutch dependency and because the queen is a popular figure among Arubans, they embrace Queen's Day. Apart from the official ceremonies, kite-flying contests, sporting events, and other celebratory activities are held all over the island.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

The Labor Day/May Day holiday has a tenuous American origin but is associated more generally with international socialism. The first Labor Day occurred in 1889, set up as an international obser-

vance by the Second Socialist International to coincide with an American Federation of Labor-sponsored general strike in the United States to win the eight-hour workday. From the beginning International Labor Day has been more radical than the U.S. Labor Day observed in September.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

Religious Holidays

❁ CARNIVAL

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Last three days before Lent

Carnival is a three-day festivity that signals the beginning of the 40-day period of Lent. It is over at midnight on Mardi Gras (which means "Fat Tuesday" in French), right before Ash Wednesday starts. The name of this popular celebration is derived from the Italian *carne vale*, which means "farewell to meat."

In Aruba preparations and events begin months in advance with a calypso competition at the end of January; a steel band competition follows to determine which bands will participate in the Oranjestad parade. There is also a contest for *tumba* bands. (*Tumba* is the indigenous music of the Netherlands Antilles.)

The Carnival festivities culminate with the main event the Grand Carnival parade, which is always the Sunday before Mardi Gras. It begins at 11 A.M. in Oranjestad and takes about eight hours to make its way through the streets of the city. The Old Mask Parade is lead by King Momo, the symbolic straw figure who reigns over Carnival in many countries. When King Momo (symbol of the flesh) is burned, he takes the sins of the village with him, leaving the island pure. The burning of King Momo must take place before midnight, signifying the end of Carnival and the start of Lent. Symbolically Momo's ashes are used on Ash Wednesday.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL, LENT

Dande

On New Year's Eve in Aruba small groups of musicians go door-to-door singing and wishing family and friends a happy New Year. This custom, thought to date back to 1880, is called *dande* (or *dandee*) in Papiamentu; *dande* is derived from *dandara*, which means "to revel, carouse." It is also called the *paranda* sweep; *parandea* also means "to revel." As the group members move from house to house singing, they collect money in a hat. Some Arubans believe that they will have bad luck in the coming year if the *dande* musicians do not serenade them on New Year's Eve.

Typically, the musical format is call-and-response, with one singer and a chorus. The violin, *tambu* ("drum"), guitar, *wicharo* or *wiri* ("metal grater," "rasp"), and occasionally a small accordion are the musical instruments usually used to accompany the singer. The song's rhythm is monotonous, with little variation in tone, and, at the end of each phrase, the chorus responds "*ai nobe*" (or *ana nobo*, meaning "new year").

This custom, and its music, can be found around the Caribbean with local variations. In Puerto Rico groups of musicians also go from house to house singing. There it is a Christmas tradition called *paranda*.

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, also called Holy Friday or Mourning Friday, is a solemn occasion for Christians. This holiday commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. It has been in the Christian liturgical calendar even longer than Easter has although no one is sure why it is called Good Friday. Some have suggested that the use of *good* in the name goes back to Old English and means “God’s” Friday, while others interpret *good* to mean something like “observed as holy.” This observance is also known as Black Friday and Sorrowful Friday, and in Eastern Orthodox Churches it is called Great Friday.

For many years Good Friday was primarily a Catholic observance, but many Protestant Churches now hold special services from noon until three in the afternoon on this day to symbolize Jesus’ last hours on the Cross. Many of the faithful fast on this day; when they eat it is generally fish instead of meat. In Aruba public readings of the Psalms and Gospels are performed, and the participants sing hymns about Jesus’ death. There are also religious processions through the streets.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday and Monday after Lent

Easter Sunday celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus on the third day following his Crucifixion. Easter is at once a solemn and a joyous occasion. In Aruba church services begin before daybreak. These early services recall the empty tomb that was found on the morning of the day of Resurrection and of Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem before sunrise on the same day.

Easter Monday is a Christian holiday often celebrated the day following Easter Sunday. Events include egg-rolling competitions and playful practices such as dousing other people with water that has been blessed by a priest. In the religious context, the rolling of eggs symbolizes the rolling away of the stone placed at the mouth of Jesus’ tomb. Ideally this day is to be devoted to the teachings of the Bible and its message of humanitarianism. Easter processions and special novenas or prayers take place on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Forty days after Easter

For a period of 40 days after his Resurrection Jesus preached and spent time with his apostles and other followers. At the end of 40 days he commenced his



Each year thousands celebrate Carnival in the streets of Oranjestad. Carnival, a series of parades and parties, is the biggest annual celebration in Aruba. (AP Photo/Pedro Famous Diaz)

final journey into heaven, which is celebrated by Christians as the Feast of the Ascension, Ascension Day, or Ascension Thursday. In Aruba people attend church for special prayers and Masses.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

❁ ST. JOHN’S DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: June 24

St. John’s Day (Día di San Juan), also called Dera Gai on Aruba, is a colorful religious celebration. The day honors St. John the Baptist, who baptized Jesus on the banks of the River Jordan. He is venerated as the precursor of the Jesus.

Dera Gai (which means “the burying of the rooster”) came to Aruba from Mexico and has been an annual festival since 1862. Originally the holiday was celebrated to give thanks to various gods for a successful harvest and to seek their blessings for the next year. In an effort to convert the native people to Christianity, priests combined the burying of the rooster with the feast of San Juan.

Although St. John’s Day is celebrated in many countries Aruba is the only country in which it is celebrated with dancing and singing. Arubans, wearing bright red and yellow costumes, participate in folk dance competitions and sing special festive songs. The red and yellow clothing worn by women and men represents fire. A live rooster used to be buried up to its neck, and a hollowed gourd was placed over its head and covered with sand. Then the blindfolded person who managed to find the bird won it. In addition to the burying of the rooster, leftover crops and disposable items were buried to symbolize cleansing of the soul. In modern times the rooster

cleansing of the soul. In modern times the rooster has been replaced with a gourd.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; HARVEST FESTIVALS

❁ ST. NICHOLAS'S DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 5

In Aruba each year the old and young alike celebrate the birthday of Sinterclaas (St. Nicholas), accompanied by his *zwarte pieten* (literally, “black Petes,” St. Nicholas’s helpers). The center of the festivities is Paardenbaai Harbor in the capital city of Oranjestad, where St. Nicholas arrives by boat to greet the children of Aruba and reward them with gifts for their good behavior during the year. This gift-giving occasion, celebrated several weeks before Christmas, is a Dutch tradition.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus. A spirit of good humor, benevolence, and brotherhood characterize the day. In Aruba Christmas is celebrated with food and drink and an exchange of gifts at family gatherings.

Toward the end of the 20th century, *ayaca*—banana leaves, which are lined with pastry and filled with highly spiced pork, chicken, and dried fruits and then steamed—evolved into a Christmas tradition. Arubans usually begin to make *ayaca* in large quantities in the last week of November; the *ayaca* are then refrigerated (the dish remains fresh if refrigerated properly) and saved for consumption during the Christmas season.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26

This festival can be traced back to an old custom (particularly among the British) of giving cash or durable goods to those of the lower classes on the day after Christmas. Those who performed public services and tradespeople would go around collecting tips or bonuses in small pottery boxes. The alms boxes in churches were also opened, and their contents distributed among the poor. Gifts among equals were exchanged on or before Christmas Day, but the less fortunate received their gifts the day after. This is an official holiday in Aruba, with all educational, commercial, and government organizations remaining closed.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY, CHRISTIANITY, CHRISTMAS

Rites of Passage

❁ MARRIAGE

In Aruba it is believed that a young, unmarried woman who wishes to attract a man should devote herself to San Antonio. She should purchase an icon of this saint and worship him by lighting scented candles. If this fails to work the saint is punished; the icon is turned to face the wall, with a lit candle at the icon’s back.

Practitioners of Santería (an Afro-Caribbean mystical religion) recommend taking baths with sweet scented salts, oils, and potions to attract a husband. Rose petals, honey, cinnamon, sandalwood, and musk will increase a woman’s chances of getting married. Once a woman has married she must domesticate her new husband to ensure that he doesn’t wander. This is accomplished by stealing his right sock and burying it before midnight on the third Monday of the month, on the right side of the main entrance to the house. Thereafter, during the last week of every month, she puts five drops of a special potion in his morning coffee.

Bolo pretu, a dark fruitcake, thickly iced and aglitter with tiny silver balls, is the Aruban wedding cake. Keepsake slices, placed in small white boxes inscribed in silver with the initials of the newlyweds, are distributed to guests at the wedding reception. Without the trimmings, *bolo pretu* is a popular everyday dessert that keeps for six months or more if refrigerated.

❁ DEATH

Because death is a significant event in both Caribbean and Roman Catholic cultures, numerous beliefs and superstitions have grown up around it. In Aruba it is believed that people’s spirits begin to roam when they are terminally ill, visiting friends and relatives before their actual death. According to legend many omens foretell death, such as black butterflies entering the house. When the deceased is laid out in the coffin in the church prior to the funeral, the nose is touched or pulled. Should bad luck result from this practice it is promptly washed off by consuming one or several alcoholic drinks, a custom referred to as *laba man* (“washing the hands”).

Further Reading

J. Hartog, *Aruba, a Short History* (Aruba: Van Dorp, 1988).

❧ Australia ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Island continent in the Southern Hemisphere between the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific Ocean
Size	2,967,909 sq. mi.
Capital City	Canberra
Flag Description	The flag is blue, with the flag of the United Kingdom in the upper hoist-side quadrant and the seven-pointed Commonwealth star in the lower hoist-side quadrant; the bottom half shows the Southern Cross constellation in white with one small five-pointed star and four larger, seven-pointed stars.
Independence	January 1, 1901 (from the United Kingdom)
Population	20,090,437 (2005 est.)
Government	Democratic, federal state system recognizing the British monarch as sovereign
Nationality	Australian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	White (92%)
Major Language(s)	English (79%)
Major Religion(s)	Anglican (26%); Roman Catholic (26%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Australia Day, January 26; ANZAC Day, April 25; Queen's Birthday; Labor Day

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

The Aborigines were the first people to live in Australia. How long they were there before the first Europeans arrived is uncertain. Various factors make certainty about how long Australia has been inhabited, whether there were one or more waves of migration, and whether they came from island or mainland Asia impossible. The most commonly given estimate is between 48,000 and 50,000 years ago. Discoveries of Aboriginal art engravings in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, however, indicate Aborigines may have inhabited Australia for more than 116,000 to 176,000 years, crossing the sea from Indonesia to the Australian landmass. (The word *aborigine* means “the people who were here from the beginning.”) We may not yet know, however, how long Australia has been inhabited by hominids; new fossil evidence indicates that the history of humans in Australia may go back

as far as 500,000 years.

Fossilized skulls found at Bathurst, New South Wales (NSW), have been identified as being of two distinct late *Homo erectus* types unrelated to the Aborigine. Some anthropologists now think that two distinct races of people inhabited Australia at the same time, during the last ice age and that these two races interbred to produce the modern Aborigine. The robust Kow Swamp race appears to be descendants of the Java Man (*Homo erectus*) of 500,000 years ago, while the smaller Lake Mungo race came to Australia from China, probably descendants of the Peking Man (*Homo erectus pekinensis*) and later Java type, Wadjak Man. An earlier cranium from Katoomba, NSW, is believed to be as much as 500,000 years old.

Although probably the oldest landmass in geological terms, Australia was the last to be visited by European adventurers. There are several reasons why, even though the existence of a large southern landmass had been postulated in the late Middle Ages. Europeans had failed to find what they called Terra Australis, in spite of active trade routes between Asia and

Europe. Perhaps the most likely reason for their failure is its location. First, the continent was positioned off the oceanic-island trading corridor of the Indian and South Pacific Oceans, so there was no lucrative incentive to search for it. Second, Australia was hard to reach in the sailing ships of the day. The winds in the Southern Hemisphere have a tendency to veer north toward the equator west of Australia, and east of the continent strong headwinds discourage sailing into them.

The Dutch were the first European explorers to reach the continent. In 1616 the Dutch sailor Dirk Hartog (1580–1621) followed a new southern route across the Indian Ocean to an island off the coast of Western Australia. In 1688 William Dampier (1652–1715), an English pirate, landed in the north-west of what he called New Holland. After his return to England he published a book about his travels, entitled *Voyages*, and persuaded the naval authorities to finance another expedition to search for the continent's wealth. His report on the second expedition (1699–1700), however, criticized the land and its people in such discouraging terms that the British lost interest in Australia for almost 70 years.

In 1768 Captain James Cook (1728–79) left England on a three-year expedition to the Pacific, in the course of which he visited Australia. Cook landed first at Botany Bay on the eastern coast of Australia, and at Possession Island in the north where he named the region New South Wales and claimed it for England. Cook's two additional voyages in the 1770s added to the information available about the Australian landmass and strengthened Britain's claims to the continent. Australia was generally seen as a remote and unattractive land unfit for European settlement.

After the American Revolution ended in 1783, and Britain could no longer ship British convicts to America as it had done, it decided to establish its first settlement in Australia to solve the problem of overcrowded prisons. In 1788 Arthur Phillip (1738–1814), a naval officer, arrived at Port Jackson with his cargo of prisoners, where he found a near-perfect harbor.

On January 26 (now commemorated as Australia Day) the first permanent European settlement in Australia was founded on January 26, 1788, and named Sydney for Lord Sydney (1733–1800), who had issued the charter for the colony.

By the mid-1800s Britain had two flourishing penal colonies in New South Wales and Western Australia, with nearly 150,000 prisoners. Among them 30 percent were Irish, 20 percent were women, and the majority hailed from Britain's poorer classes. Unskilled British officers were granted large tracts of land, and convicts, many of them poorly educated or illiterate, were assigned to them as laborers. Later land grants were also extended to the prisoners who had been released after completing their sentences. In 1793 free settlers began arriving from England.

During the period between 1820 and 1880, Australia witnessed several major developments: the establishment of new colonies along the coast, the expansion of sheep- and cattle-rearing in the interior, and the discovery of gold and other minerals in the eastern colonies. With the influx of immigrants and the growth of the cities and ports, the Australian colonies began to agitate for more democratic government. By the mid-1850s all four eastern colonies had instituted new systems that vested power in a cabinet or council of ministers responsible to a popularly elected assembly.

At the time Europeans began to arrive on the continent, it is estimated that the indigenous Australians numbered about 350,000, but the population steadily decreased over the next 150 years. Initially there were only a few confrontations between the settlers and the Aborigines around Sydney, even though there were many Aborigine campsites nearby. The causes of the declining Aboriginal population were infectious diseases to which the natives had no immunity and colonial government policies that included forced removal from their lands and separating children from their parents. It would be 1967 before the Europeans began to understand that their treatment of the indigenous people was wrong.

Australia's Name

Australia's name is derived from the Latin word for "southern," *australis*. There were legends about an "unknown southern land" (in Latin, *terra australis incognita*) as early as Roman times, and such legends were popular in geographies of the Middle Ages. Still no one actually knew that the continent called Australia existed. As early as 1638 Dutch officials used the adjective *Australische* ("Australian" in the sense "southern") to refer to the land after its discovery. Alexander Dalrymple (1737–1808) was the first writer in English to use the word *Australia* (in his book *An Historical Col-*

lection of Voyages and Discoveries in the South Pacific Ocean, 1771), but he used it to refer to the entire South Pacific area. In 1814 Matthew Flinders (1774–1814) used the word in his book *A Voyage to Terra Australis*, and because Flinders's book was popular the word became widely used to refer to the new continent. The governor of the colony of New South Wales Lachlan Macquarie (1762–1824) then began to use it in his messages to England, and in 1817 he suggested that "Australia" be formally adopted as the continent's name. Finally in 1824 the British Admiralty determined that the continent would be called Australia.

Once Britain established a penal colony on Van Diemen's Land in 1803 (which they renamed Tasmania in the 1850s), the indigenous population that had inhabited the island for about 35,000 years was almost eradicated. Although the people had numbered about 5,000 when the British arrived, there were soon merely a few mixed race survivors. On the continent the story was much the same, and Aboriginal communities were destroyed on a large scale. In spite of the official British policy of protection, as the European population of Sydney continued to expand, and as the ranchers sought larger expanses of land for their sheep, Aboriginal communities retreated into the drier interior.

The official colonial policy of Britain throughout the 19th century was to treat the Aborigines as equals, with the intention of converting them to Christianity. Governor Macquarie established a school for Aboriginal children. Such gestures, however, underfinanced and generally unsupported in practice, were the exception. In fact change from a policy of protection to one of punishment was the usual direction in the colonies.

A number of Aboriginal people were assimilated into white settlements, while others assisted settlers as guides, trackers, and stockmen. But clashes, enmity, and sporadic violence were common as the settlers moved into the center of the country, encroaching on Aboriginal lands. Some Aborigines were employed on sheep stations, and others were used for police patrols. The colonists' real attitude toward Aborigines is revealed by the fact that they were systematically hunted and poisoned. Aboriginal women were abducted and raped, and children were taken from their parents. While exceptions to the European hostility existed, it was the general assumption among the whites that Aboriginal culture would die out. On the local and colonial levels the active destruction or neglect of Aboriginal culture was often accompanied by the practice of segregation: The indigenous population was herded onto reserves and denied participation in the world of the colonists.

Forced to survive on increasingly meager supplies of food, the Aborigines' numbers continued to decrease. By the 20th century those Aboriginal communities capable of sustaining their culture were mostly confined to the Northern Territory, Queensland, and New South Wales. Not until the 1950s did the colonial government begin to reconsider the inhumanity of its policies toward the Aboriginal population and attempt to reverse the consequences of Europeans' past treatment of them. Then the Aboriginal population began to creep back to its pre-European level, but it required a 1967 referendum for the federal government to begin to initiate policies that would actually benefit the Aborigines. It would still be years before Australia's high court would recognize the Aborigines' title to their land.

During the 19th century the European population continued to grow, primarily along the coastline, where the capital cities of the six original

colonies were located. Dense settlement of the continent's interior was simply impossible. As gold mining in Victoria and New South Wales declined in the 1860s, even prospectors moved to the cities. By the beginning of the 20th century Sydney and Melbourne were among the world's largest cities, even though the continent itself was sparsely populated.

In spite of rapid urbanization the six capitals were engaged in intense rivalry, making unification and the necessary standardization difficult. Furthermore the individual colonies regarded their connections to each other as secondary to their ties with Great Britain. Victoria and New South Wales, for example, used different gauges for their railways, making rail travel between them impossible, and the project of standardization did not begin until the 1960s.

As a result of urbanization the capital cities dominated in all the colonies. In the 1850s, for example, merchants and professionals were the ones who demanded political reform and new constitutions. After 1850 it was the small urban manufacturers and the growth of mass trade unionism that made possible democratic governments, ensuring the passage of legislation that favored urban populations. It was Victoria's workers, for example, who pioneered the eight-hour workday in 1856. Although the production of wool and new mineral discoveries continued to be the major economic supports in the colonies, their political systems managed to keep the large ranch owners and other wealthy families from dominating them.

Development of the Australian colonies into a single nation lacked the passionate nationalism of similar struggles in other colonies. Earl Grey (1764–1845), the colonial secretary of Britain, had considered unification of the colonies back in 1847, and John Dunmore Lang (1799–1878), a Scottish Presbyterian cleric in New South Wales, had formed the Australian League to work toward uniting Australia. With the formation of the Dominion of Canada in 1867, however, British officials rejected the idea of a similar arrangement for Australia. Eventually Australia adopted its constitution in 1901. Based on British parliamentary traditions; it incorporated some features of the United States' governmental system as well. The British sovereign is Australia's head of state, and the Australian prime minister, accountable to the Australian parliament, is the head of the government. The states exercise all powers not specifically given to the federal government.

In the course of the 20th century Australia began to develop both a national government and a national culture. Commonwealth governments, led by such Australians as Alfred Deakin (1856–1919), quickly moved to declare a protective tariff on imports to foster the new government's economic base, established consistent ways of determining minimum wages, and retained the white immigration policy. In spite of such advances Australians wanted to retain their individual colonial identities, so national political parties

Fun Fact

The powers of Australia's states are protected by its constitution. One result of this autonomy is that Labor

Day, while a national holiday, is observed during different months by each state's population and may even have a different name.

were only loosely organized.

It was World War I, however, that transformed Australia into a unified state with a distinct identity. Australia sent more than 330,000 volunteers when the Allies asked for help; more than 60,000 perished, and 165,000 were wounded. With a casualty rate higher than most of the Allies, Australia became increasingly conscious of its contribution to the war effort. When the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) attacked the Ottoman (Turkish) forces in the Dardanelles on April 25, 1915, Australians forged an identity as a nation. In numerical terms Gallipoli may have been a minor

engagement, but it acquired considerable national and personal importance to the Australians who fought there.

ANZAC Day remains the country's most significant day of public recognition.

Between World War I and World War II, in an effort to sustain the wartime levels of production and expansion that had enriched Australia's economy, the government tried to expand some basic industries, but the Great Depression of the 1930s severely damaged the Australian economy, and public and private debt increased dangerously during a period of massive unemployment. Recovering from the depression proved to be an uneven effort in Australia. Economic policies such as price cuts and limited credit made the post-depression years harder in Australia than they were in other countries.

When World War II began in 1939 Australia sent its armed forces to support Britain. Then in 1941 the Pacific war between Japan and the United States began. Because Great Britain could not provide enough support for defending Australia, the government allied itself with the United States, and until the Philippines were freed General Douglas MacArthur (1880–1964) and his staff based their operations in Australia. Although Australia's casualties were not as heavy as they had been in World War I, Australians were more psychologically affected because of the proximity of Japanese forces.

Australian industry was, however, improved as a result of the war. The economy had been reoriented toward manufacturing, and heavy industries now surrounded the capital cities. Postwar development continued to expand the possibilities created during the war.

In 1949 when Robert Menzies (1894–1978) became Australia's prime minister, a long period of stability began. While he maintained a sentimental link with Great Britain, he also paid more attention to Pacific and South Asian affairs. Soon Asians were attending Australian institutions, and by 1966 the white Australia immigration policy was inconsequen-

tial. It was formally discarded in 1973, and immigration has since been based on criteria other than race.

In 1967 a national referendum gave the federal government a mandate to implement policies and make laws that would start to reverse the harm caused to the Aboriginal people during European colonization. In 1970 Harold Thomas, an artist and an Aborigine, designed the Aboriginal flag. It was intended to be an eye-catching rallying symbol for the Aboriginal people and a symbol of their race and identity. It is divided horizontally into two sections of equal size, one black (top) and one red (bottom). Centered on the line between the black and the red is a solid bright yellow circle. The black represents the Aboriginal people, the red, the Earth and the Aborigines' spiritual relationship to the land, and the yellow, the Sun, the giver of life.

During the second half of the 20th century Australia's alliance with the United States continued to gain strength, and the country followed the United States into the Korean War, joined the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), participated in it from 1954 until its dissolution in 1977, and fought alongside U.S. troops in Vietnam. During the same period Australia's ties with Japan continued to develop, and the country adjusted its domestic and foreign policies accordingly.

Australia's involvement in Vietnam was as controversial as it was in the United States. By 1967 as many as 40 percent of Australians serving in Vietnam were conscripts. The civil unrest caused by conscription and being sent to fight an unpopular war, helped the Australian Labor Party gain power in 1972, with Gough Whitlam (b. 1916) at the helm. Whitlam acted immediately to quell the civil disturbance by withdrawing Australian troops from Vietnam, abolishing national service and fees for higher education, establishing a system of free and universally available health care, and supporting the land rights of Aboriginal people. On June 3, 1992, Whitlam's sensibility was confirmed when Australia's High Court rejected the European claim of *terra nullius* ("empty land") in *Mabo and others v. Queensland (No. 2)* in proceedings begun in 1982 and confirmed the Aborigines' native title.

After a period of recession and high unemployment in the early 1990s, the electorate lost faith in the Labour government, and in early 1996 the Conservative coalition, led by John Howard (b. 1939), defeated Labour leader Paul Keating (b. 1944). In the last years of the 20th century, placing the government in the hands of an Australian president instead of the British queen was a major issue, because some felt that the rule of a distant monarch was archaic. In 1999 a national referendum was held to decide the issue. A majority of the population voted to retain the status quo.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Australia is the largest island and the smallest continent in the world. Its coastline is 16,007 miles long. It

is situated in the Southern Hemisphere, between the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific Ocean in an area sometimes referred to as Oceania. Australia's borders lie beyond its landmass. East Timor, Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea lie to the north of Australia; the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu are northeast of it; and New Zealand is off the southeast coast. The shortest border, 93 miles, is between Australia and Papua New Guinea, but Boigu Island (with two smaller islands), the northernmost inhabited island in Australian territory, is only three miles from Papua New Guinea. This geographical anomaly has necessitated an unusual border arrangement that allows people of Papua New Guinea and Torres Strait Islanders access to the waterway across the border.

Australia consists of six states and several territories. The six states, which began as separate British colonies, are New South Wales (capital, Sydney), Queensland (capital, Brisbane), South Australia (capital, Adelaide), the island of Tasmania (capital, Hobart), Victoria (capital, Melbourne), and Western Australia (capital, Perth). The two most important territories are the Northern Territory (capital, Darwin) and the Australian Capital Territory (or ACT; national capital, Canberra), located within the state of New South Wales. ACT also includes Jervis Bay Territory, which serves as a port and naval base for the national capital. Australia has several inhabited external territories that include Norfolk Island, Christmas Island, and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, as well as several largely uninhabited external territories.

The climate in Australia is arid to semiarid. The country has a temperate zone in the south and east and a tropical climate in the north. The tropical zone (40 percent of Australia's landmass) has two major seasons—wet (summer) and dry (winter)—while the temperate zone has four seasons. Because of its location Australia's summer begins in December, its fall, in March, its winter, in June, and its spring, in September.

Uluru (known as Ayers Rock until 1986), which is located in central Australia, is the second largest monolith in the world; the largest, located in Western Australia, is Mount Augustus. The highest mountains in mainland Australia are situated in an area known as the Snowy Mountains in the province of New South Wales. These form a part of the Great Dividing Range that separates the central lowlands from the eastern highlands. The highest peaks are Mount Kosciuszko (7,310 feet), Mount Townsend (7,247 feet), and Mount Twine (7,201 feet). The largest coral reef in the world, the Great Barrier Reef, extends for 746 miles along Australia's northeast coast.

The main rivers in Australia are the Murray River and its tributary, the Darling River, which flow in the Murray-Darling River Basin. This drainage basin comprises the major part of the interior lowlands of Australia, covering more than 386,102 square miles, about 14 percent of the continent.

Australia's most distinctive fauna are the marsupials and monotremes. These animals are found nowhere else on Earth. The marsupials, including

kangaroos and koalas, give birth to partially developed offspring, which they suckle and keep in a pouch.

The monotremes, including platypuses and echidnas, lay eggs but also nurse their young.

ECONOMY

Except for the area around Perth in Western Australia, most of Australia's rich farmland and good ports are found in the east and the southeast. Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, and Adelaide are the leading industrial and commercial cities.

Australia is highly industrialized as a result of the two world wars, and manufactured goods account for most of its gross domestic product (GDP). The chief industries include mining (most of which is accomplished with Japanese financial aid), food processing, manufacture of industrial and transportation equipment, chemicals, iron and steel, textiles, machinery, and motor vehicles. Australia's mineral resources include coal, iron, bauxite, copper, tin, lead, zinc, and uranium, opals, and diamonds. Some logging is done in the east and southeast.

The country is agriculturally self-sufficient. Sheep- and cattle-raising have long been staple occupations. Agriculture and horticulture (producing citrus fruits, sugarcane, and tropical fruits) are also important; there are a good number of vineyards, dairies, and tobacco farms. Australia's chief export commodities are metals, minerals, coal, wool, and beef (of which it is the world's largest exporter), mutton, grains, and manufactured products. The main imports are manufactured raw materials, capital equipment, and consumer goods.

While the Australian economy fell into a severe recession in the late 1980s, it experienced an extended period of growth beginning in the 1990s. During the last two decades of the 20th century, there was considerable industrial development and an increase in the standard of living.

Fun Fact

The kangaroos in Booderoo National Park are very friendly and approach people to be fed and petted.

Monotremes

Monotremes are classified as mammals, even though they differ from other mammals in some respects. Like other mammals monotremes have one bone in the lower jaw, three bones in their inner ear, a high metabolic rate, hair, and the females provide milk for their young. In other ways their anatomy is unusual: Adult monotremes have no teeth. Moreover, they are considered more primitive because they lay eggs, like reptiles and birds, instead of giving birth to live young. The three living monotremes exist only in Australia and New Guinea—the duck-billed platypus and two species of echidna, or spiny anteaters.

✿ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Australia is a country rich with diverse cultures, traditions, and customs; the major influences include the European, Aboriginal, and Southeast Asian (a large and growing immigrant group in recent years). Although it still has strong ties to Great Britain, Australia also shares a powerful affinity with the United States. Coming out of decades of isolation Australians are gaining prominence in Hollywood; Australian art galleries have been mushrooming in the streets of London and New York; and Australian musicians are performing more and more often on the world's stages. Australian pop singers, from the Bee Gees to INXS, the Little River Band, and Kylie Minogue (b. 1968) have earned global recognition.

In the 20th century Australia could boast several world-famous writers including Nobel Prize winner Patrick White (1912–90) and Booker Prize winners Peter Carey (b. 1943) and Thomas Keneally (b. 1935). Other well-known Australian writers include Thea Astley (1925–2004), Robert Drewe (b. 1943), Helen Garner (b. 1942), Rodney Hall (b. 1935, in England), Christina Stead (1902–83), Elizabeth Jolley (b. 1923), David Malouf (b. 1934), Frank Moorhouse (b. 1938), and Tim Winton (b. 1960).

The Australian film industry is small but growing quickly. Mel Gibson (b. 1956, in the United States), Russell Crowe (b. 1964), and Nicole Kidman (b. 1967, in Hawaii) are the country's best-known actors.

Australian athletes are internationally respected for their skills. British sports such as cricket, rugby, and soccer are very popular. The Australian cricket team is a formidable force. Sir Don Bradman (1908–2001) was a batsman for Australia. Cricket fans consider him the greatest batsman of all time, and he remains one of Australia's greatest popular

heroes. In tennis the Australia Open is one of the four tournaments that make up the Grand Slam, and several Australian players are internationally renowned. Evonne Goolagong (Cawley; b. 1951 in New South Wales), the first Aboriginal tennis player and the winner of many championships, was inducted into the Tennis Hall of Fame in 1988.

Australians have also had great international success in swimming, sailing, and yachting, and Melbourne was the site chosen for the 1956 Olympics, where several Australian athletes distinguished themselves in swimming and track and field events. Sydney hosted the 2000 Summer Olympics, where women's water polo, Tae Kwon Do, and the Triathlon debuted. Australia ranked second overall in sailing during the Sydney Olympics and stunned the world in 1983 by winning the America's Cup, the premier race in international sailing competition.

Recently after centuries of brutal treatment, efforts have been made to revive the ethnic Aboriginal folk culture and ethos. Aboriginal culture experienced a revival at the end of the 20th century, as Aboriginal artists began to explore ways to preserve their ancient values and share them with a wider community.

✿ CUISINE

Contemporary European tastes in Australia use the best seasonal ingredients available with a mix of Asian, European, and Indian cuisines. But many food writers ignored the most basic and authentic Australian cuisine, bush tucker food (wild food), the foods made available by Australia's plants and animals until 1975, when the Cribbs published *Wild Food in Australia*. Since then a small industry has grown up around the sale and distribution of "tucker" ingredients, and average diners have come to view bush tucker as an important part of their culinary repertoire. Andrew Fielke, an award-winning Adelaide chef, has pioneered the use of native foods, and the Aussie dialect of English contains many bush tucker words such as *yabby* (a freshwater crayfish), *billy* tea (a billy is a metal can used to make tea over an open fire), *floaters* (a meat pie floating in soup peas or gravy), and *chook* (chicken).

Bush tucker food is unique to Australia and is made up of dishes learned from the Aboriginal peoples. These recipes reflect the survival skills of the Aborigines passed from one generation to the next as community knowledge, and they doubtless enabled many Europeans to survive in the Outback. Bush tucker recipes include *witjuti* (or witchetty) grub and *bunya* nut soup (a soup that contains grubs found in live wood and the seeds of the bunya-bunya pine tree), pop moths (a combination of *bogong* moths popped with popcorn in macadamia nut oil), kangaroo tail soup, and mango *balmain* bugs (*balmain* are a small type of crayfish found in the waters around Sydney). Andrew Fielke's *quandong* pie is said to be delicious. (*Quandong*s are fruit similar to peaches but not as sweet.)

Australian Damper

Damper is an unleavened bread that bush settlers cooked in the ashes of a fire. It was originally wrapped around a stick and laid in the coals. It is called *damper* because the fire has to be dampened (made less intense) before the bread can be cooked.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups of self-rising flour
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 2 tsp. sugar
- 3 tbs butter
- 1 cup milk

Preparation:

Combine the dry ingredients—flour, salt, and sugar—in a bowl. Add the milk to make a soft dough. Knead the dough on a floured board until smooth. Shape it into a small loaf, brush with milk, and bake at 375°F for 30–40 minutes, or until the loaf makes a hollow sound when tapped.

Among the Europeans, Southeast Asian cuisine is very popular in Australia, as is Chinese, and restaurants serving both cuisines are common in the urban centers. Large cities also have many Indian, Japanese, Thai, and Vietnamese restaurants. Tea is a popular hot drink in Australia, although coffee consumption has soared during the past few decades. Beer, called “amber fluid,” is the most popular alcoholic drink.

Meat is a major part of the Australian diet. Beef is the most popular meat, followed by lamb and mutton, poultry, and pork. Traditionally Australians have preferred plain food to spicy dishes, though the influx of Southeast Asian immigrants and the proliferation of their cuisines have had some effect on the national taste, particularly among the young. Meat is usually grilled or roasted and served with potatoes and a vegetable. Australia’s long, sunny summers and mild winters provide opportunities for picnics and barbecues (*barbies*) year-round. For a picnic a good *possie* (position) and an *esky* (cooler) for *sangers* or *sango* (sandwiches) and *stubbies* (beer) are essential.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR’S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 1

January 1 begins a new year according to the Gregorian solar calendar. On the first of January, it is usually hot and sunny in Australia, which is in the

Southern Hemisphere. People often enjoy the holiday season by going to the beach to swim, surf, or simply relax. On New Year’s Eve there are fireworks displays throughout the country and all-night parties.

Over the objections of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, one Australian town has an unusual way of celebrating the New Year. At Pine Creek in Australia’s Northern Territory, there has been an annual wild boar and wild cat hunt organized by locals. The person who kills the most animals receives a cash prize at a New Year’s party, and any method used to kill the animals is acceptable, even blowing them up with dynamite or running over them in a vehicle.

❁ AUSTRALIA DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 26

On January 26, 1788, Captain Arthur Phillip raised the British flag at Sydney Cove and proclaimed British sovereignty over the eastern seaboard of Australia. The celebration of a united Australian national day on this date can be traced back to the period after the landing of the first fleet and the subsequent white colonization of the continent. First celebrated in 1817 by the people of Sydney, Australia Day was declared a public holiday in 1838. The Aboriginal peoples regard this as “invasion day.”

This holiday is the biggest nationwide celebration for those of European descent and is observed as a public holiday in all states and territories. Awards for outstanding performances in diverse



A boy shakes the hand of a 105-year-old World War I veteran prior to the start of the annual ANZAC Day parade through the streets of Sydney’s central business district on April 25. Australia’s most important day of commemoration, ANZAC Day was first observed in 1916 as a tribute to World War I soldiers. (AP Photo/Mark Baker)

fields (public service, arts, sports, humanitarian endeavors) are given on this day. Flag-raising ceremonies, honor guard inspections by the state governors, colorful parades, and barbecues mark the day. Each town, city, and even some neighborhoods, all have their own lists of programs. Leading up to Australia Day, schools sponsor activities to instill a sense of national pride in students.

ANZAC DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 25

ANZAC Day commemorates the first major military engagement in which Australian and New Zealand soldiers fought, and it remains one of the country's most important holidays. The acronym ANZAC stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. During World War I Australia and New Zealand joined the Allies (Britain, France, Russia, Italy [neutral at first], Japan, and the United States) against the Central Powers (Germany, Turkey [then known as the Ottoman Empire], and Austria-Hungary). In 1915 Australian troops landed on the Gallipoli Peninsula (part of Turkey) only to discover that, having landed at the wrong place, they were surrounded by steep cliffs and in the direct line of enemy fire. Over the next two days 20,000 Australian soldiers landed on the beach to encounter large numbers of well-armed Turkish forces. Eight thousand Australian men died in the battle, which dragged on for eight months before the Allies withdrew. Although it was not a military victory the battle is a source of great pride for Australians, because of the bravery shown by their soldiers in the face of adversity.

On this day Australian veterans take part in a predawn march to local war memorials. Later other citizens join them. Short religious services comprise prayers and hymns (including a poem by Rudyard Kipling [1865–1936], either “The Recessional” or “Lest We Forget,” dedicated to those who died for Australia). These are followed by an address in memory of the dead, which concludes with the last stanza of Laurence Binyon’s (1869–1943) patriotic poem “For the Fallen.”

The “Last Post” is then sounded, after which those assembled observe a minute’s silence. Whereas Reveille began a soldier’s day, the “Last Post” signaled its end. It is believed originally to have been part of a more elaborate routine, known in the British Army as “tattoo,” which originated in the 17th century. The memorial service concludes with a closing prayer and the singing of the national anthem.

Although it began officially as a World War I commemoration in 1916, it has come to include veterans and heroes of World War II, Korea, and Vietnam with the passing years. Another ceremony takes place later in the day when ex-service personnel and war veterans from other wars, displaying their medals, march behind banners or flags. They are joined by the public, including members of the

armed forces, the Red Cross, cadets, and veterans from other countries.

THE QUEEN’S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Second Monday in June, except in Western Australia, where it is celebrated in September or early October

This holiday celebrates the official birthday of the British monarch (currently, Queen Elizabeth II), who is not only king or queen of Great Britain and Ireland but also of Australia and New Zealand. It was first celebrated on June 4, 1788 (King George III’s birthday) by convicts and colonists soon after they arrived in Australia. Since then the reigning monarch’s birthday has been celebrated on the second Monday in June (except in Western Australia, which moves the holiday to September or early October so as not to conflict with that state’s Foundation Day).

The only notable civic event associated with this day is the release of the Queen’s Birthday Honors List, which specifies who will be inducted into the Order of Australia. This honor recognizes Australian citizens and other individuals for their achievements or meritorious service. The order was established on February 14, 1975; before that Australian citizens received British honors.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Different dates in different states and territories

Labor (spelled “labour” locally) Day is a public holiday in Australia’s states and territories, but because the states have autonomous governments, with their own parliaments and premiers, each determines the date on which the holiday is observed. It is called Labor Day in every state except Tasmania, where it is called Eight Hours Day. Thus whereas the observance in most countries occurs on May 1 and signals the beginning of spring, it takes on different meanings in the Southern Hemisphere, depending on the season in which it is celebrated.

Australia’s Labor Day holiday has its roots in the eight-hour day movement in Great Britain, which sought a more balanced life for workers: eight hours of work, eight hours of recreation, and eight hours of rest. On April 21, 1856, the stonemasons and construction workers on sites around Melbourne staged a direct action protest: They stopped working and marched from the University of Melbourne to parliament demanding an eight-hour workday. The protest was a success, and they are recognized as the first organized workers in the world to achieve an eight-hour day, inspiring workers around the world to organize similar protests.

In Western Australia, the contributions of

workers are celebrated on the first Monday in March; in Tasmania and Victoria, the festivities take place on the second Monday in March. In these states the observance signals the waning of summer and the approach of fall. In Queensland, where Labor Day falls on the first Monday in May, the weather may be more like November in the Northern Hemisphere, so the events that mark the day are more suited to cold or chilly weather.

In the states of New South Wales and South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory, Labor Day is observed on the first Monday in October, and the scheduled events resemble those of the countries in the northern temperate zone.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

Religious Holidays

✿ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed By: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Observed as a solemn occasion this Christian holiday commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. Many schools, government offices, and businesses are closed. Devout Christians attend church and spend the rest of the day in quiet contemplation.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter celebrations in Australia are observed primarily by people of Anglo-Irish origin. They attend church services early in the morning and later have hot cross buns for breakfast. These special buns, which have a cross mark in white icing on the crust, originated in a British tradition with pre-Christian origins.

On Easter children receive chocolate eggs, though some are made with sugar and contain little toys. On Easter Sunday many families arrange Easter Egg Hunts in their homes or gardens to see who among the children can find the most eggs. Later they get together for traditional family meals (consisting of roast lamb, beef, or chicken with roasted vegetables such as potatoes, carrots, and pumpkin).

Often Easter bunnies made of chocolate are exchanged. In recent years Easter bilbies (nocturnal burrowing bandicoots) have also become popular. The bilby, an animal native to Australia, is an endangered species. Because of their endangered status, chocolate manufacturers decided to make Easter bilbies and contribute some of their profits toward protecting them from extinction.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Because Christmas takes place at the peak of summer in Australia, people often prefer to spend at least part of the day with their families at the beach. Christmas dinners are usually salads, cold meats, and seafood in addition to the traditional roast turkey and plum pudding. Australian children believe that Santa Claus leaves presents for them under the Christmas tree on Christmas Eve.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

✿ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26

Australians, like residents of other Commonwealth nations, celebrate the day after Christmas as Boxing Day. On the day after Christmas in England tradespeople and others who provided public services used to carry around small ceramic boxes to collect tips and year-end bonuses, hence the name. The alms boxes in churches were also opened, and the money in them was distributed among the poor.

Boxing Day falls during the peak of summer in Australia, so it is largely devoted to sports and outdoor activities. In Melbourne the cricket test match (a test match is considered a test of strength between national teams) starting on December 26 is called the Boxing Day Test Match and is played at the Melbourne Cricket Ground before a huge crowd. In Sydney the annual Sydney-Hobart Yacht Race, one of the biggest and most prestigious ocean racing events in the world, begins. If December 26 falls on a weekend day Boxing Day is observed on the following Monday or Tuesday.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

✿ SYDNEY FESTIVAL

Observed in: Sydney

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January

The annual Sydney Festival celebrates arts and culture and lasts for three weeks during the month of January. This highly popular festival showcases a wide range of both local and international theater, along with music, dance, opera, and the visual arts. The venues for this three-week-long festival include the city's landmark—the Sydney Opera House—in addition to the Riverside Theater, the Roxy, St. John's Cathedral, Parramatta Park, and Olympic Park.

❁ BRISBANE MEDIEVAL FAYRE

Observed in: Brisbane
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Mid-May

This highly popular festival re-creates the atmosphere of the medieval era in Europe. Stalls selling crafts made by local artisans and popular delicacies recapture the old-world charm of medieval marketplaces and their alleyways, where an array of foods, handmade armors, perfume, rare gift items, and apparel could be found. Other attractions include roaming street theater, jesters, fortune-tellers, and morris dancers (morris dancing is a type of folk dance that dates back at least to 1477). Wandering minstrels, musicians, and singers perform everywhere from the village green to the main highway. Well-stocked taverns serve spiced wine, mead, and a range of quality ales.

❁ NATIONAL CELTIC FESTIVAL

Observed in: Port Arlington
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 10–13

Port Arlington, Victoria, is located at a distance of almost 20 miles from Geelong on the Bellarine Peninsula. It is host to Australia's largest and most diverse celebration of Celtic culture, paying tribute to the Irish who made this island continent their home centuries ago. During this festival people of Celtic origin from all parts of Australia come together in Port Arlington during the Queen's Birthday weekend. The grand event upholds and promotes Celtic culture through music, dance, literature, and drama. During the three-day festival numerous concerts, acoustic performances, workshops, community dance, and dramatic performances attract large crowds.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

As they get close to giving birth, Australian Aboriginal women are accompanied by elderly women during their daily chores. The women seldom rest before delivery; what is more, they often walk a mile or two after the infant is born. A newborn Aboriginal child has a light coppery complexion, and after a few hours it is smeared with grease and charcoal to keep its skin soft and protect it from exposure.

There is great excitement among the village women and neighbors, who visit the mother and child as soon as the good news reaches them, bringing gifts of seeds or whatever else they may have.

The baby is usually wrapped and carried in *cajeput* bark. (The *cajeput* is a tropical evergreen tree, of the myrtle family, with flowers similar to those of bottlebrush and a spongy bark.)

❁ COMING OF AGE

At the age of fourteen, Aboriginal boys are recognized as young men and are expected to be initiated into manhood by being circumcised. The Aborigines call circumcision *buckley*. The families of the boys meet at a designated spot, at a date and time determined by the phases of the Moon. When people have assembled the boys are seized by the elders, and cords of spun hair are fastened around their arms, while the *coolardie* is swung vigorously in front of them. (The *coolardie* is a flat, carved, wooden shield, with a hole at one end through which a cord of spun hair is fastened. The end of the hair is held in the hand, and when the shield is swung around, it makes a sound that resembles the roar of a bull.)

The elders teach the novices all the ancient traditions in detail and what is expected of them on this occasion. The boys are given about three days to learn the chants and dances associated with the initiation. The novices are also taught hymns called "Nambey" and "Wallawollangoe," which are to be sung on the day of circumcision. During this period they cannot converse with young women or children, and two men acting as guards escort them everywhere. Before the actual ceremony the guards gather as many people as possible for the ceremony and feast that follow.

Only initiated males may attend the actual ceremony. At the spot selected for the circumcision, the men prepare a couch of boughs near a flat stone. The operation is performed with a piece of yellow flint kept for the purpose by each family and known as the *candemerrab*. The parents do not operate on their own children. The operations are performed by the boys' uncles or any one of their male tribal relatives. The youth are pinned down by four or five men, and the seasoned operators perform the task.

After the ritual is over, everyone gathers to enjoy a feast, an essential feature of this ceremony. The guests are segregated into two groups: one includes only men and elderly women; the other is restricted to younger women and children, who are supposed to have their feast some distance away. The concluding ceremony is performed about a month later when the *buckley* has healed.

Further Reading

Inga Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers: Europeans and Australians at First Contact* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); James Hurst, *Game to the Last: The Eleventh Australian Infantry Battalion at Gallipoli* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Austria

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Central Europe, north of Italy and Slovenia
Size	32,382 sq. mi.
Capital City	Vienna
Flag Description	Austria's flag has three equal horizontal bands of red (top), white, and red.
Independence	November 12, 1918
Population	8,174,762 (2005 est.)
Government	Federal republic
Nationality	Austrian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	German (89%)
Major Language(s)	German (official nationwide); Slovene (official in Carinthia); Croatian (official in Burgenland); Hungarian (official in Burgenland)
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (74%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; National Day, October 26

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The early history of what is known as Austria today was marked by the rule of various tribes such as the Celts, Romans, Vandals, Visigoths, Huns, Avars, and Slavs. These warlike tribes entered the country through the Danube Valley and replaced each other in quick succession. This continued until Charlemagne (742–814), founder of the Frankish Empire in Western Europe, established his rule in an area known as the Ostmark in 803. Gradually the region became Christianized and largely Germanic.

Austria was ruled by the Babenbergs between 976 and 1246. The Babenbergs came from Bamberg in Franconia (now known as northern Bavaria). The Babenbergs were succeeded by a powerful dynasty known as the Habsburgs, who ruled Austria from 1278 right up to World War I. The Habsburgs were one of the major ruling houses of Europe. They expanded their empire through marriage and land purchases rather than war and conquest.

The next challenge was to keep out the Turks, who were intent on invading Europe. Austria accomplished this with the

help of the German and Polish armies. With peace restored Austrians began putting up grand and opulent buildings in several cities, and Vienna became a center for music under the patronage of rulers like Emperor Leopold I (1640–1705).

In 1740 Empress Maria Therese (1717–80) ascended the Austrian throne and ushered in a peaceful reign that lasted 40 years. During this period the foundation was laid for the modern Austrian state. This development was halted, however, when the French Emperor Napoleon (1769–1821) defeated Austria in the Battle of Austerlitz in 1805.

After Napoleon Bonaparte assumed the title emperor of France, Francis II (1768–1835), understanding that the old empire was finished, declared himself the emperor of Austria. In 1804 the Austrian Empire was founded and then transformed in 1867 into the Austro-Hungarian Empire. As a compromise between the Hungarian nobility and the Habsburg monarchy, the kingdom of Hungary had self-government and representation in joint affairs such as foreign relations and defense with the western and northern lands of the Austrian Empire, which were still ruled by the Habsburgs.

In 1878 Austria-Hungary occupied Bosnia-Herzegovina, which had been isolated from the Ottoman Empire by the formation of new countries in the Balkans. The territory was later annexed in 1907 and put under joint rule by the governments

Fun Fact

The name Austria is based on the German term *Österreich*, which means “eastern realm.” The German is probably a translation of the Latin name for the area, *Marcha Orientalis*, which means “eastern border.” Austria was at the eastern edge of the Holy Roman Empire.

of both Austria and Hungary, but nationalist struggles would intensify in the following years.

Finally in June 1914, a Serb nationalist group in Sarajevo assassinated Emperor Franz Joseph’s nephew, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand (1863–1914). As a result, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. When the Russians went to the aid of the Serbians, the conflict escalated into World War I. The countries of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria were united in an alliance during World War I, known as the

Central Powers because these countries all lay between Russia in the east and France and the United Kingdom in the west. World War I ended with the defeat of the Central Powers in 1918, and this led to the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Emperor Karl (1887–1922) of Austria, the last of the Habsburg emperors, was exiled.

After the war Austria became a much smaller country when its territory was divided into the states of Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, and Yugoslavia. The country went through great economic hardships that made it a fertile ground for the growth of fascism and Nazism. Although the Treaty of Versailles and the Treaty of St. Germain had expressly opposed the unification of Austria and Germany, Nazi Germany tried its best to annex Austria during the late 1930s. Austria was finally annexed to Germany by a referendum in 1938. This annexation was called the *Anschluss*, literally “connection” or “political union.”

With the Allied victory ending World War II in 1945, Austria was freed from Nazi rule by the Allied Forces and divided into zones that were occupied by

American, British, French, and Russian troops. They stayed on until Austria declared its neutrality a decade later.

The Austrian Independence Treaty was signed on May 15, 1955. The neutrality clause was incorporated in the constitution on October 26, 1955 and Austrian independence was restored. Its two biggest parties, the Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP) and the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) formed a coalition led by the ÖVP. The ÖVP was a conservative democratic party based on Christian values that sought to address diverse interests by stressing the importance of expanding economic welfare and educational opportunities for all social groups.

Austria strove to overcome its economic difficulties and established a free trade treaty with the European Community (the EC, which later evolved into the European Union, or EU) in 1972. In January 1995, it formally joined the EU.

When the right-wing Freedom Party (headed by Nazi sympathizer Jörg Haider) formed a ruling coalition with the moderate right People’s Party early in 2000, the leaders of the other 14 EU members decided not to cooperate with Austria. The EU came to understand that its actions were counterproductive, and relations between Austria and other EU countries returned to normal later in 2000. Austria continues to be plagued by issues like restitution for Holocaust crimes, which is a volatile topic of public debate.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Mountains dominate about 60 percent of Austria in the west and south. Located in the Central Eastern Alps, Austria can be divided into the Tirolean Alps, the High and Low Tauern, the Northern Limestone Alps, the Southern Limestone Alps, and the Wienerwald Alps. The Alps have many passes and valleys that are easily traversed and so allow Austria to act as the pivot of central Europe. The country is flat or gently sloping along the eastern and northern borders and has the largest population. Winters are cold with rain and snow in the low-lying areas. Summers in Austria are moderate with short but heavy showers accompanied by thunder. The main river is the Danube. The highest peak is Grossglockner (12,457 feet) in the Central Alps.

ECONOMY

Austria has a well-developed economy, and its people enjoy a high standard of living. It has close relations with other countries in the EU, especially Germany. Between 2001 and 2003, there was an economic slump, but the economy has improved. The government’s aim is to encourage knowledge-based areas of the economy, reduce taxes, deregulate the service industries, and attract more adults to play an active role in the labor market.

In spite of the fact that Austria is a small country that suffered many setbacks as a result of World

The Thirty Years’ War

The Thirty Years’ War took place between 1618 and 1648, mainly in central Europe. Although it was primarily a religious conflict between Protestants and Catholics, the Habsburg Dynasty’s survival also depended on the outcome of the conflict.

In 1571, with religious freedom being granted to them, most Austrians chose to become Protestants. But in 1576, Emperor Rudolph II, who was a staunch Catholic, forced most of Austria to adopt the Catholic religion. In 1618, this attempt to replace Protestantism with Catholicism in Europe sparked the Thirty Years’ War. Peace was finally achieved with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648.

War II, its economy has managed to grow steadily. It accomplished this by exporting goods such as high-quality machine tools, chemicals, and other manufactured goods to Western Europe, with Germany a major trade partner. Austria is self-reliant in food production and it has achieved this by means of subsidies. It imports fuel, especially oil, coal, and gas, and certain industrial raw materials. However, it has developed its hydroelectric power-generation capacity and, by doing so, has been able to avoid overdependence on importing fossil fuels. Austria attracts a large number of tourists and, thanks to this revenue producer, it has been able to keep its budget balanced despite the trade deficit.

Austria has worked hard to develop trade relations with its neighbors in Eastern Europe and has signed a number of mutually profitable trade agreements. In 1989 Austria sought to become a member of the European Community (EC) and is now a member of the European Union (EU).

❁ LIFESTYLE AND CULTURE

In the region now called Austria, culture goes back at least to 1050 B.C.E. when it was inhabited by the Hallstatt and La Tene cultures. Fine architecture, music, literature, and art are all a part of Austria's rich cultural heritage, which was influenced by neighboring countries including Italy, Germany, Hungary, and Bohemia. Apart from classical music, folk music and folk dance also occupy pride of place. Austria has a variety of dances such as the *Schubplattler*, *Ländler*, polka, and waltz that are well known, as well as a number of less familiar dances like the *Zwiefacher*, which is performed in southern Germany. Although the origins of the *Ländler* are unknown, it has been known by several names. At some point, it became known as *Landl ob der Ens*, which was shortened to *Ländler*. There was a time when the Catholic Church disapproved of the *Ländler* because it required close contact between partners of the opposite sex. It became popular around 1720 and eventually became what we know as the waltz.

These folk dances are accompanied by such musical instruments as the Styrian harmonica (a type of accordion), the fiddle, the clarinet, the harp, the flute, and brass bands as well as the contrabass or the guitar. Drums are not used, though they may accompany modern Austrian folk-pop music. The most popular form of modern Austrian folk music is Viennese *Schrammelmusik*. This is played with an accordion and a double-necked guitar. This type of music is a mixture of rural Austrian, Hungarian, Slovenian, Moravian, and Bavarian music.

Vienna has long been a center of musical innovation, and the patronage of the Habsburgs drew large numbers of composers during the 18th and 19th centuries. The presence of such famous composers as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91), Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827), and Johann

Adolf Hitler

Adolf Hitler was born in the Austrian town of Braunau on April 20, 1889. When he was three years old, his family moved to Passau on the German side of the border. Germany was going through hard times that paved the way for Hitler's rise to power as the leader of Germany during the 1920s and early 1930s. His attempt to seize power by force in 1923 failed, but he finally became the country's leader after being voted to power as *führer* and *reich* chancellor (president and chancellor) in 1934. Hitler tried to wipe out the Jewish race, as well as all opposition to his rule. He wanted Germany to control the world. However he was defeated by the Allies in World War II and ended his own life.

Strauss II (1825–99), among others, made the city the center of classical music in Europe.

Another kind of music for which Austria is famous is *Juchizn*, a kind of yodeling (throat-singing) developed in the Alps. This was a form of communication across the mountains. From Austria, it spread into Bavaria, Switzerland, and elsewhere.

Austrians have a style of clothing called country estate style. It is popular primarily with farmers, peasants, and other rural people. Girls wear a *dirndl* (a long skirt with a tight-fitting bodice) and boys wear shirts with *lederhosen* (leather shorts or trousers with suspenders).

❁ CUISINE

Austrian food has been influenced by Hungarian, Czech, Jewish, and Italian cuisines. Goulash is one such dish, which traces its roots to Hungary. Austrian pastries and sweet dishes are acknowledged for their excellence throughout the world. New regional cuisines that make use of easy methods of cooking are also gaining popularity in Austria.

Meat and dumplings form the core of Austrian cuisine. It is hearty, simple food, and the best-known dish is probably Wiener schnitzel, which originated in Vienna. It consists of a fried cutlet, most often veal, batter-fried with egg and bread-crumbs. *Beuschel*, which means calf's lights (lungs), is made of thin slices of calf's lungs and heart. The most well-known Austrian dessert is *Apfelstrudel* (a kind of apple pie), which is made with baked dough filled with a variety of fruits and a sprinkling of raisins and cinnamon. Other dishes include: *Topfenstrudel* (a cream cheese strudel), *Salzburger Nockerln* (Salzburg dumpling), which is a meringuelike dish, *Palatschinken* (a Viennese crêpe, from the Hungarian

Fun Fact

The city of Salzburg was the setting for one of the world's favorite musicals, the Oscar-winning film *The Sound of Music* (1965), with the Alps providing some breathtaking scenery.

The Waltz King

Johann Strauss II (1825–99) was a gifted Austrian composer who popularized the waltz in Vienna during the 19th century. The waltz had been nothing more than a rural folk dance (the *Ländler*) until Strauss elevated it to a sophisticated, stately dance popular in the courts. He was known as “The Waltz King,” and is especially famous for a waltz titled “The Blue Danube.”

palacsinta), *Powidl* (a plum preserve), Sacher torte (a chocolate cake named for 19th- and 20th-century restaurant owners), *Tafelspitz* (boiled oxtail, often served with apple and horseradish sauce), *Selchfleisch* (smoked meat) with sauerkraut, and *Rindsuppe* (beef soup). Austrian beer, wine, and coffee are also celebrated for their superior quality.

To round off a meal, Austrians usually have a glass of schnapps or fruit brandy. The latter beverage is made from a variety of plants and fruits including apricots, rowanberries, gentian roots, or various herbs. It is made in small private schnapps distilleries known as *Selberbrennter* or *Hausbrand*. There are almost 20,000 such distilleries in Austria.

Between meals, Austrians like to snack on open sandwiches. These are made using a variety of sausages, along with mustard and bread. The sausage is sliced, and rolls are usually used. Other favorites include *bosna*, a spiced bratwurst in a hotdog roll that can be found at any roadside fast-food eatery.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day in

A Musical Prodigy

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born on January 27, 1756, in Salzburg. Even as a child he was thought of as a musical genius. At the age of six he made his first attempts at composition. Mozart is considered one of the world's greatest composers. He created 24 operas, including *The Magic Flute*, *Don Giovanni*, and *The Marriage of Figaro*, over 50 symphonies, and 17 masses. Apart from Mozart, Austria has given the world other well-known composers including Franz-Joseph Haydn, Franz Schubert, Anton Bruckner, Johann Strauss Sr., Johann Strauss Jr., and Gustav Mahler.

many countries. New Year's Eve in Austria is known as Sylvesterabend, or the eve of St. Sylvester. According to legend, St. Sylvester slew the evil serpent-dragon Leviathan in 1000 C.E. Leviathan, said to feed on other dragons, was so big that its coils surrounded the planet. This monster was expected to appear, devour the land and all the people, and set fire to the heavens, but St. Sylvester slew Leviathan.

Taverns and inns are festively decorated with confetti, evergreen wreaths, and streamers. In St. Sylvester's honor a traditional punch made with cinnamon, sugar, and red wine is drunk, as well as champagne. To rid themselves of evil spirits from the past year, cannons, called *Böllers*, are fired. People attend midnight mass and trumpets are blown from the church steeple at midnight. The Vienna State Opera and the Vienna Philharmonic perform *Die Fledermaus* every New Year's Eve and again on New Year's Day. Concerts and grand balls take place all over Vienna in celebration of the New Year.

The elaborate balls held in Vienna and other cities are known all over the world. Soothsayers predict the future by reading the lead shapes (*Bleigiessen*) created when molten lead is poured into a bucket of water. Pork and carp are among the foods eaten because they are believed to bring good luck, and good luck charms (*Glücksbringer*), chocolate and marzipan candies shaped like horseshoes, gold coins, pigs, and four-leaf clovers are exchanged.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

In many parts of the world May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, May Day, or Workers' Day to commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. Some claim the observance was started by the International Socialist movement in 1889, and scheduled to coincide with a strike called by U.S. workers demanding an eight-hour workday, but the date and many of the festivities also borrow from the European pagan spring celebrations forbidden by the Catholic Church.

Austrians celebrate Labor Day with parades, and businesses and government offices are closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 26

After World War II, Austria was occupied by the Allies (Soviet Union, United States, Great Britain, and France). Though the occupation forces allowed the Austrians to elect their representatives democratically, every law and action had to have the Allies' consent. This occupation came to an end with the signing of the State Treaty. On May 15, 1955, this



Dancers in traditional dress perform during May Day celebrations in Lofer in the Austrian province of Salzburg. (AP Photo/Kerstin Joensson)

treaty was signed in Vienna's Schloss Belvedere.

National Day commemorates the withdrawal of the last foreign troops from Austrian territory and marks the emergence of Austria as an independent and sovereign nation. The Austrian parliament also passed a law establishing permanent neutrality since it wanted to maintain a unilateral and independent position. On this day, people like to take long walks in a display of fitness, and it is celebrated as a kind of patriotic "fitness" day. The public is given free access to museums and the parliament building, and all commercial establishments are closed.

Religious Holidays

❁ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: January 6

Epiphany is celebrated to remember the three wise men from the East who Christians believe were looking for the newborn Jesus. The Christmas trees in many Austrian homes remain up until Epiphany. Boys and girls wear oriental costumes and go from house to house singing traditional songs and accepting small gifts and money.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS; EPIPHANY

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

This Christian festival commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. It has been in the Christian liturgical calendar even longer than Easter has although no one is sure why it is called "Good" Friday. Some have suggested that the use of *good* in the name goes back to Old English and means "God's Friday," while others interpret *good* to mean something like "observed as holy." This observance is also known as Black Friday and Sorrowful Friday, and in Eastern Orthodox churches it is called Great Friday.

For many years Good Friday was primarily a Catholic observance, but many Protestant churches now hold special services from noon till three in the afternoon on this day to symbolize Jesus' last hours on the cross. Many of the faithful fast on this day; when they eat, it is generally fish instead of meat.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday and Monday after Lent

Fun Fact

Danish pastry is said to be a Viennese creation, and in Denmark it is called *wienerbrød* (Viennese bread).

Fun Fact

“Silent Night” was sung for the first time in 1818, in the village church of Oberndorf in Austria. On Christmas Eve the priest discovered that the church organ was not working; there were holes in the bellows that pumped air through the pipes. The priest decided to ask the organist, Franz Bauer, to play a Christmas hymn that he had written because Bauer composed music that could be played on a guitar.

Easter is a Christian feast that celebrates Jesus’ Resurrection from the dead on the third day after his Crucifixion. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. Since Austria is a staunchly Catholic country, Easter occupies a paramount position among all the religious festivals. It is a family time in Austria. In Vienna and Salzburg Easter concerts featuring classical music are popular. Easter bread is braided and baked for the Easter feast. Easter celebrations extend through Sunday to Monday in Austria. The first Monday after Lent is celebrated as Easter Monday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Forty days after Easter

Forty days after Easter in both the Christian and Orthodox faiths, the Feast of Ascension takes place. It celebrates the Christian belief that Jesus ascended to heaven 40 days after his Resurrection.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

✿ PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: 51 days after Easter

Pentecost, also called Whitsunday and Whitmonday, marks the day the Holy Ghost is said to have appeared before Jesus’ disciples. Southeast of Vienna, the Whitsun Kings in Arbesthal follow the custom of wearing hazelnut branches in homage to spring.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; PENTECOST; SPRING FESTIVALS

✿ CORPUS CHRISTI

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Sixty days after Easter

The Feast of Corpus Christi commemorates the institution of a Christian ritual of offering sacred bread and wine. Corpus Christi is celebrated on the second Thursday after Pentecost. Processions are

held across the length and breadth of Austria in churches and parishes from St. Stephen’s Cathedral to the tiny chapel in Salmansdorf. The most famous of these processions is the one at Ringstrasse in the heart of Vienna. The host (the bread consecrated in the Eucharist) is taken out in a grand procession, in a shrine called a monstrance, followed by the bishop and the emperor. Schools and shops remain closed on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CORPUS CHRISTI; EASTER; PENTECOST

✿ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: August 15

The Feast of the Assumption (also known as Mariähimelfahrt) is celebrated to commemorate the Christian belief that Mary, Jesus’ mother, ascended into heaven. Stores are closed on this day.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

✿ ALL SOULS’ DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: November 1

All Saints’ Day honors and pays tribute to all Christian saints, known and unknown. It is an occasion to offer thanks for the various charitable acts of these saints. The devout also glorify God and give thanks for sending all the saints and Jesus. On this day all stores and schools in Austria are closed.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS’ DAY; CHRISTIANITY

✿ ALL SAINTS’ DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: November 2

On the next day, which is All Souls’ Day, only schools are closed. Austrians visit the graves of loved ones where they light candles and lay wreaths or dry-flower arrangements.

See also Volume III: ALL SOULS’ DAY; CHRISTIANITY

✿ IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: December 8

The Immaculate Conception refers to a Roman Catholic belief that Jesus’ mother, Mary, was born free from all sin. On this feast day, devout Christians go to church and offer special prayers in Mary’s honor. Roses are placed at the feet of the Virgin’s image or idol, and candles are lit.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians because it celebrates the birth of Jesus. On Christmas Eve in Austria, chorale music played on brass instruments can be heard in churches and carol singers go from house to house with blazing torches, bearing a manger. At the end of this ritual, the carolers assemble on the steps of the church. Families enjoy a lavish Christmas Eve meal that usually features carp as the main course.

Austrians believe in treating Christmas as a day of rest, attending church or visiting family. Friends and relatives are usually invited to join in the Christmas dinner, which features a roast goose.

Austrians do not believe in Santa Claus. Children believe that their gifts are brought by a golden-haired baby with wings, called *Kristkindl*, who represents the baby Jesus. The story goes that on Christmas Eve the baby Jesus comes down from heaven with a group of angels and decorates and distributes Christmas trees. There is a lot of carol singing (several of the world's favorite carols originated in Austria).

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ ST. STEPHEN'S DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 26

St. Stephen's Day is a legal holiday, a day set aside for visiting. It is seen as a day of rest after Christmas. This day honors St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, who was stoned to death shortly after Jesus was crucified. It is also called Boxing Day in many countries because tradespeople and those who performed services went from door to door with small ceramic boxes, seeking tips and year-end bonuses. It was also the day that alms boxes in churches were opened and their contents distributed among the poor.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ AUSTRIAN HARVEST FESTIVALS

Observed in: Nationwide
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: September

The new wine season is ushered in with outdoor wine tastings and picnics featuring music in the background. The season for these festivals, typically celebrated in *Heurigen* (wine restaurants), begins with St. Leopold's feast day (also called Leopoldstag

or Goose Day). St. Leopold III (1073–1136), marquis of Austria, is the country's patron saint. He is remembered for his generosity and humility.

One place Austrians like to celebrate this day is Klosterneuberg Abbey (founded by St. Leopold), where, over the centuries, the monks have produced their famed Leopoldsberg wine. A unique custom on this day is *Fasselrutschen*, which requires people to climb onto a huge 12,000-gallon cask and slide down the wooden side for luck. The harder the ride, the better the luck. The abbot had this barrel made for the abbey's wine cellar in 1704. People from all classes queue up to try out the "great leveler."

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

❁ SALZBURG JAZZ HERBST

Observed in: Salzburg
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November

An event that is eagerly awaited in the fall is the Salzburg Jazz Herbst (Jazz Autumn Salzburg). Though Salzburg has always been acclaimed for its classical music, the city has also boasted lively jazz since the 1990s. This music festival was opened to the world in 1996. Apart from concert halls and clubs, visitors can enjoy the music in the streets and squares of Salzburg.

❁ BREGENZ FESTIVAL

Observed in: Bregenz
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 21–August 22

Bregenz is a unique music festival that takes place in summer on the Bodan Lake. A part of this musical extravaganza takes place in an opera house (*festspielhaus*) and part of it is staged outdoors on the lake stage (*seebühne*). This fan-shaped auditorium can accommodate up to 7,000 people. With various venues, the Bregenz Festival adds even more luster to the rich cultural and artistic traditions of which Austria is justly proud.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

In Austria, families get a lot of help and support from society. It is illegal for pregnant women to work eight weeks before the date their babies are due and eight weeks after birth. During this period they are given leave with full pay. The parents are entitled to two years of maternity or paternity leave and can split the leave time between them.

Baptism, as practiced by Austria's predominantly Catholic population, is a water purification ritual that is performed on children after birth to initiate them into the Church. Baptism is performed in

church by a priest. This ritual can be traced back to John the Baptist, who is believed to have baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. Baptism stands for the cleansing of sins and the union of the person with Jesus.

Baptism in the Roman Catholic Church takes place during the Sunday service. The parents choose godparents to help them in the child's spiritual and religious upbringing. The priest usually performs the rites with the family and other guests gathered around him. The baby is carried by either of its parents. The priest blesses the water in the font in front of him. (The font is a fairly big marble container.) He then prays for the child and thanks God for the new life. The parents and godparents are reminded of their own faith and beliefs. The parents are asked to give the child its name. The priest repeats the name. He then holds the baby and pours a little water over its head with the words, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." He takes some holy oil and makes the sign of the cross on the child's forehead. The parents and the godparents are given a candle to hold as they watch the rites being administered and make a promise to bring the child up as a Christian.

✿ COMING OF AGE

For Roman Catholics the First Communion is an important ceremony. It is the time when the body and blood of Jesus, in the form of bread and wine, is received by a child for the first time. It is a sacrament administered to children when they reach the age of discretion, usually from the age of seven on.

The other major coming-of-age ceremony is confirmation. It is a sacrament in which the Eucharist is given to those who have already been baptized. The bishop administers it in church. He prays and anoints the forehead of each child. The confirmation ends with the bishop's blessing.

✿ MARRIAGE

In Austria church weddings are optional but a civil ceremony is mandatory if the marriage is to be considered legal. During the time needed to get ready for the wedding, the couple concerned must be physically present in the country. If only one of them is available, he or she has to get signed permission from the other person on a form known as *Ermächtigung*. The forms can be obtained from the *standesamt* (vital statistics) offices. If neither partner can be present before the ceremony, special arrangements can be made to hold the wedding anyway.

After the wedding ceremony the bride and groom compete for the title of head of the household. This privilege goes to the person who is the first to buy something after the wedding ceremony. The bride usually wins by buying some small item—like a pin—from her bridesmaid.

✿ DEATH

In a Catholic burial the body of the deceased is prepared and then laid out in a coffin. The coffin is taken to the burial site, where a priest conducts a prayer service before the coffin is lowered into the grave. However, the body can be laid to rest only after certain formalities have been completed. When death occurs the first formality is to get a coroner's certificate. This is known as a *Todesbescheinigung* in Vienna and the *Totenbeschaubefund* in the other Austrian provinces. Only after the coroner's release can the certificate of death be issued by the registrar's office in the district where the person died.

Further Reading

Melanie A. Sully, *A Contemporary History of Austria* (Oxford: Routledge, 1990); A. J. P. Taylor, *The Habsburg Monarchy, 1809–1918: A History of the Austrian Empire and Austria-Hungary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

~ Azerbaijan ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Southwestern Asia, located between Iran and Russia, with a small European portion lying north of the Caucasus range
Size	33,205 sq. mi.
Capital City	Baku
Flag Description	The flag of Azerbaijan has three equal horizontal bands of blue (top), red, and green; centered on the red band is a crescent with an eight-pointed star inside.
Independence	August 30, 1991 (from Soviet Union)
Population	7,911,974 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Azerbaijani
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Azeri (91%)
Major Language(s)	Azeri (Azerbaijani Turkic); Russian
Major Religion(s)	Muslim (93%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Martyrs' Day, January 20; International Women's Day, March 8; Navruz, March 21; Labor Day, May 1; Victory Day, May 9; Republic Day, May 28; Salvation Day, June 15; Army and Navy Day, October 9; Independence Day, October 18; Constitution Day, November 12; Revival Day, November 17; Day of Azeri Solidarity, December 31

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Historically Azerbaijan has been occupied by a variety of peoples including Persians, Romans, Arabs, Turks, Mongols, and Russians. The region has been inhabited for at least 3,000 years. Bronze Age settlements have been found in and around the capital of Baku. The first state to emerge in the territory of present-day Azerbaijan was Mannai, in the ninth century B.C.E. It lasted until it was overthrown a century later by the Medes, who were Zoroastrians. They established an empire that included southernmost Azerbaijan. In the sixth century the Archaemenid Persians, under Cyrus the Great (585–29), took over the western part of Azerbaijan when the Persians subdued the Assyrians to the west. In 330, Alexander the Great (356–23) absorbed the entire Archaemenid Empire into

his conquests, leaving behind Persian satraps (governors) to rule. According to one account, Atropates (c. 370–221), one of Alexander's Persian generals, whose name means "protected by fire," gave his name to the region when Alexander made him its governor. Another legend explains that Azerbaijan's name derives from the Persian words meaning "the land of fire," a reference either to the natural burning of surface oil deposits or to the oil-fueled fires in temples of the once-dominant Zoroastrian religion.

In the first century C.E. the Romans assumed control, followed by the Persians in the fourth century once again. Arabs had gained control by the eleventh century, only to be replaced by the Seljuk Turks, who laid the foundation of modern Azerbaijan. Overrun much later by Mongols, the region was divided into several principalities after the fall of Taimur Lang (Timur the Lame, 1336–1405), ruler of the Timurid Empire (1370–1405) in Central Asia, which survived until 1506.

Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)

The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was created in December 1991 after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. In the declaration adopted by the participants, they asserted that sovereign equality would be the basis of their interaction. In the early years of the 21st century, CIS included Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Ukraine. In September 1993 the heads of these states signed an agreement creating an economic union with the following objectives: to provide a common economic platform based on the free movement of goods, services, labor, and capital; to coordinate monetary, tax, price, customs, and external economic policy; to standardize methods of regulating economic activity; and to create conditions favorable to the development of direct production.

Eventually Azerbaijan was acquired by Russia from Persia through the treaties of Gulistan (1813) and Turkamanchai (1828). During the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 Russian Azerbaijan joined Armenia and Georgia to form the anti-Bolshevik Trans-Caucasian Federation. After that federation was dissolved in May 1918 Azerbaijan proclaimed itself independent; but in 1920 it was conquered by the Red Army and made into a Soviet republic. In 1922 Azerbaijan officially joined the USSR as a member of the Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Republic. It became a separate republic again due to an administrative reorganization in 1936.

During the late 1980s, ethnic Armenians in the Nagorno-Karabakh region pressed for its unification with Armenia, leading to a guerrilla war and violent conflicts between the two republics in 1992. The Armenian side gained effective control of the region and some adjoining Azerbaijani territory by 1994, when a cease-fire was reached with Russian mediation. Approximately one million Azeris were made refugees within Azerbaijan. Attempts to fully resolve the conflict have proved unsuccessful. Azerbaijan has offered the region a high degree of autonomy, but the Armenians there have insisted on independence or union with Armenia.

Azerbaijan declared itself independent of the USSR in August 1991 and became a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States. In 1992 Abulfaz Elchibey (1938–2000), leader of the Popular Front party, was elected president, but he was ousted by the parliament a year later after a military coup. Heydar Aliyev (?1923–2003), leader of the Azerbaijan Communist party from 1969 to 1982, assumed power and was confirmed in office by an election in 1993. Aliyev promoted the exploitation of the country's oil resources in the Caspian Sea through agree-

ments with Russia and several Western oil companies for development. A popular leader Aliyev was reelected twice. However the ailing president withdrew from the October 2003 election in favor of his son Ilham Aliyev (b. 1961), who was elected in a landslide victory.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Azerbaijan is located in the southeastern part of the Greater Caucasus Mountains on the shore of the Caspian Sea. It is divided into two parts: the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic, which is separated from the main part of the country by about 30 miles of Armenia; and the Autonomous Oblast of Nagorno-Karabakh, which, following a war with Armenia in the early 1990s, declared itself an independent republic. It is now mostly under Armenian control, as is much of the territory immediately surrounding it.

Azerbaijan is surrounded by mountains, except for its Caspian shoreline in the east and some areas bordering Georgia and Iran. To the northeast, bordering Russia's Dagestan Autonomous Republic, is the Greater Caucasus range; to the west, bordering Armenia, is the Lesser Caucasus range. To the extreme southeast the Talysh mountain range forms a part of the country's border with Iran. Baku, the capital, is located on the Apsheron Peninsula, which juts out into the Caspian Sea.

The highest peaks are in the Greater Caucasus, where Mount Bazar-dyuzi rises 15,551 feet above sea level. Eight large rivers flow down from the Caucasus ranges into the central Kura-Aras lowlands through alluvial flatlands and low delta areas along the coast of the Caspian Sea. The Mtkvari ("slow one"), the longest river in the Caucasus region, forms its delta and drains into the Caspian a short distance downstream from the confluence with the Aras, its main tributary. Most of the country's rivers are not navigable. Only about 15 percent of the country's land is suited to agriculture.

The climate of the country varies immensely, from subtropical and dry in its central and eastern parts to subtropical and humid in the southeast. It is temperate along the shores of the Caspian Sea, and cold in the higher mountain regions. Baku enjoys mild weather, averaging 39°F in January and 77°F in July.

Since most of Azerbaijan receives scant rainfall—an average 6 to 10 inches annually—agricultural areas require irrigation. The heaviest rainfall occurs in the highest elevations of the Caucasus and in the Lenkoran lowlands, in the far southeast, where the yearly average exceeds 39 inches.

ECONOMY

Azerbaijan is industrially underdeveloped compared with the neighboring regions of Armenia and Georgia. It resembles the Central Asian states in its majority Muslim population, high rates of unem-

ployment, and low standard of living. The chief commercial products are oil, cotton, and gas. Production from the Caspian oil and gas fields declined during the 1990s, but things have been slowly returning to normal during the last few years. A number of major oil field agreements, worth about US\$35 billion, were finalized in the early years of the 21st century.

Azerbaijan, like many of the other former Soviet republics, has gone through a difficult transition from a command- to a market-driven economy. Its considerable energy resources, however, make its long-term prospects look good. A major short-term obstacle to economic progress (including foreign investment) is the continuing conflict with Armenia over the Armenian-dominated region of Nagorno-Karabakh. Trade with Russia and the other former Soviet republics is declining in importance, while trade is increasing with European Union (EU) countries, as well as Turkey, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

About 90 percent of the Azerbaijani population is ethnic Azeri, supplemented by a smattering of Dagestanis, Russians, Armenians, and Jews. Most Azerbaijanis speak Azeri, (related to Turkish) and Russian. Despite attempts on the part of the Soviet regime to wipe it out, Islam remains the most popular religion with Azerbaijanis, followed by various Orthodox Christian sects. Azerbaijan is one of the most liberal Muslim-majority states.

The Azerbaijani have inherited a unique and harmonious blend of Islamic and European cultures. Around 1050 the country enjoyed a cultural renaissance, as exemplified by its many great architectural and artistic achievements during that time. Azerbaijani architecture has gone through many different stages since then, but the rich legacy of the medieval period has been preserved, as is evident in the Maiden Tower and the palace of the Shirvan Shahs in Baku. The capital's ornately decorated subway stations are more recent architectural accomplishments.

The country has a diverse literary heritage, much of which is derived from an oral tradition of poems and ancient epics. Perhaps the most well-known work is the *Book of Dede Korkut*, an epic about the Oghuz Turks, a collection of tales that take place in pre-Islamic Azerbaijan and Central Asia. Written around the sixth or seventh century, it is valued both as literature and as an important historical document that provides insights into the language, way of life, religions, traditions, and social norms of the people who once inhabited this region. It has been translated into many languages.

Historically, Nizami Ganjavi (?1140–?1217) has been held up as one of Azerbaijan's greatest poets, although Iranians can also claim him since he wrote in Persian. Perhaps his best-known play concerns Layla and Majnun, two lovers whose story is told as a religious morality play. The Sufis consider Layla and Majnun an especially important parable.

Azerbaijani literature again flourished during the 16th century, when folk literature grew and minstrels and bards developed Ashiglar poetry. It was



Children in traditional Azerbaijani costume dance during a concert. (AP Photo/Efrem Lukatsky)

also during this time that Shah Ismail, using the pen name Khatayi, produced *Divani Xetayi*, his most famous work. He is also known for developing a unique literary style known as Qoshma, which was further developed by Shah Tahmasp, his successor. In the mid-19th century Mirza Fatali Akhundzada contributed to the beginnings of modern Azerbaijani literature, especially drama.

Azerbaijan is also famous for its embroidered textiles. Artists use colorful threads (often made of gold or silver) and beads to create geometric patterns on a thin wool fabric called *tirme*. The country's flora and wildlife are featured in many designs and patterns. Other popular Azerbaijani textiles include carpets, veils, shawls, and towels.

The country's musical traditions are preserved by *ashugs*, or poet-singers, who play the *kobuz* (a stringed instrument) while singing ballads about their ancient heroes. Another popular form of music in Azerbaijan is *mugam*, a kind of improvisational music often compared to jazz, in which the voice, and wind and stringed instruments are prominent.

CUISINE

Azerbaijan is often called “the home of long life,” and scientific research attributes the longevity of the Azeri peoples not only to the excellent climate they enjoy, but also to their healthful and nourishing cuisine, which relies heavily on meat, fish, and vegetable dishes made of beets, cabbage, eggplants, and spinach. Many dishes use saffron, along with coriander, fennel, mint, and parsley. Soup is also a staple of Azerbaijani cuisine, often made with meat and sheep fat seasoned with greens and spices. While it resembles the cooking of its neighbors, Azeri food has a character all its own, and each region has its own specialties. As is the case with other Azeri arts, the recipes are refined and require time and practice to prepare correctly.

A salient trait of Azeri cooking is a combination of tart and sweet flavors, produced by mixing pomegranate juice, dried lemons, and sour plums with dried fruits (mainly apricots, quince, and raisins). Chestnuts are used to garnish meat and other dishes, and fresh pomegranate seeds may be scattered across the plate immediately before it is brought to the guests. More familiar items, such as kebabs, dolmas, and baklava reflect the influences of Turkish, Greek, and Lebanese culinary arts. Azeri pilaf has nearly a hundred variations but, instead of being prepared in one pot, the rice and seasonings are cooked in sepa-

rate pots and then served separately, with melted butter in a jug. Azeri dolma, is usually made of minced lamb meat seasoned with coriander, dill, mint, pepper, cinnamon, and melted butter, and rice wrapped in grape leaves (*Yarpag dolmasy*), but it can also be wrapped in cabbage leaves (*Kyalyam dolmasy*). Numerous variations of dolma are also common, and aubergines (eggplants), potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, onions, quince, and apples can also be stuffed with lamb meat. Sour milk can be used as a sauce.

Kingal, a dish made with meat, fried onion, *kurut* (a dry cottage cheese), and flour, is popular in the northwest, whereas in the Lenkoran region, along the coast of the Caspian Sea, chicken stuffed with nuts, onion, and jelly, and then fried is a favorite recipe. The Apsheron peninsula is famous for its *dushpara*, small meat dumplings, and *kutabs*, meat patties wrapped in very thin dough. Bread is served with most meals, the most common being the round loaves called *chorek* and *lavash*, a flat bread. Tea (*çay*), primarily black tea, is central to all social, family, and even business occasions. It is served in small pear-shaped glasses called *armuds* (literally, “pear”), and is often accompanied with various jams, nuts, or raisins. An unusual tea is also brewed with cinnamon (*darchin*) and ginger. *Kvas* (from Russian, “sour beverage”), unknown to most Westerners, is a nonalcoholic fermented drink made from malt. It is sold on the streets and is a refreshing drink on a summer day.

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

In Azerbaijan, the New Year celebration is a family holiday. Traditionally, families decorate a New Year tree (much like a Christmas tree) on New Year's Eve, December 31. It is removed only after the official passing of the old year (January 13). An important feature of the celebrations is the presence of a character resembling Santa Claus, called Ded Moroz (in Russian) or Shakhta Babah (in Azerbaijani), and his granddaughter Snegurochka. They are believed to bring gifts for children on New Year's Eve. It is also a common practice for family members and friends to get together on December 31. They toast the departing year and welcome the new one at the stroke of midnight.

MARTYRS' DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 20

The significance of this day, also called Day of Sorrow, can be traced back to the year 1990, when the residents of Baku turned out in the streets and squares of the city to protest the aggressive actions

Quince

Quince is a yellow-skinned fruit whose taste is a cross between an apple and a pear. Its texture and flavor make it better cooked than raw. Because of its high pectin content, it is ideal for use in jams, jellies, and preserves.



of Armenia, which was backed by the Soviet army. To control the protestors the Soviets resorted to violence that led to the death of hundreds of innocent people. On this day Azerbaijanis pay tribute to the patriotism and valor of those who died.

❁ INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 8

International Women's Day is a global event commemorated at the United Nations and observed by women's organizations in many countries. In Azerbaijan, Women's Day is an official holiday. On this occasion the women of Azerbaijan, regardless of their ethnic or linguistic backgrounds, come together in solidarity. At seminars and workshops organized for the occasion, they work toward equality, justice, peace, and development.

❁ NAVRUZ

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 21

Although celebrated in some Islamic countries, Navruz, or Nawruz, is not a religious holiday. In fact, it celebrates the vernal equinox, the beginning of spring, when days and night are of equal length. Navruz is thought to have originated in ancient Mesopotamia and to have been celebrated even in pre-Islamic times. In ancient Babylon the New Year was celebrated around the same time, on the 21st day of Nissanu (March–April). Festivities lasted 12 days, each of which was commemorated with individual rites, amusements, and performances.

In addition to being the Azeri New Year, Navruz also heralds the commencement of agricultural activities and the gradual onset of warm weather. It is the day when conflicts and hostilities are forgotten and forgiven. On this day the people of Azerbaijan greet each other and enjoy lavish feasts. An atmosphere of friendliness prevails.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; NAVRUZ; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

Labor Day, also called May Day or Workers' Day, is the international workers' holiday observed on May 1 by former Communist countries and many socialist states. Since the Second Socialist International first declared a strike to demand an eight-hour workday in 1889, this day has been set aside to honor laborers and workers of the world for their contributions and to raise awareness of workers' rights. All the government offices, business establishments, and

schools in Azerbaijan are closed. The day is observed with labor union activities, including marches, meetings, and speeches.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ VICTORY DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 9

On this day, also known as Celebration of War Veterans' Day, the Soviet Union scored a decisive victory over their Fascist enemies (Germany and Italy) toward the end of World War II. Though the Soviet Union and Azerbaijan's membership in it no longer exist, Victory Day is still an official holiday. It was, indeed, a turning point in the history of the region. Azerbaijanis spend the day in leisure activities.

❁ REPUBLIC DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 28

It was on this day in 1918 that the first independent Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan (ADR) was formed. Two years later it was invaded by the Red Army and annexed to the Soviet Union as the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. The historic formation of the ADR is considered the most important national holiday in Azerbaijan. It is celebrated by Azeris with parades and public speeches, flag-raising, and parties.

❁ SALVATION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 15

In the political history of Azerbaijan, Salvation Day, or Day of National Salvation, has great significance. It was on this day in 1993 that the country's parliament invited the Communist-backed leader Heydar Aliyev to Baku to assume the stewardship of the nation's political future. All government offices, schools, and educational institutions are closed. There are some public events, though people generally spend this holiday quietly with their families.

❁ ARMY AND NAVY DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 9

This is a day when Azerbaijanis celebrate the courage of their armed forces. Baku hosts a magnificent military parade, with different contingents wearing the colors of their regiments. Impressive displays of tanks and other weaponry are also part of the parade. In other towns and regions celebrations take place on a more modest scale. Military awards and honors are conferred on this day, and fund-raising events for veterans are held.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 18

On October 18, 1991, the parliament of Azerbaijan adopted the Constitutional Act of Independence, later approved by referendum on December 30 of the same year. This is a landmark in the history of Azerbaijan because it took place shortly after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, which had included Azerbaijan as a federated republic. This day is an official holiday in Azerbaijan, marked by flag-raising, speeches, and parades.

CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 12

This day marks the adoption of the Constitution of independent Azerbaijan in 1995. The event is remembered by every citizen of Azerbaijan with pride and solemnity. The Constitution, drawn up under the supervision of President Heydar Aliyev, is based on the centuries-old principles of lawmaking and judicial traditions of the country. On this occasion parades and public speeches take place in the capital as well as other areas. This is an official holiday when all business transactions and commercial activities come to a standstill.

REVIVAL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 17

Revival Day, also known as Day of National Revival, commemorates the first uprising of the Popular Front in Azerbaijan in 1988. The group was protesting Moscow's policies toward Azerbaijan, particularly in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, ignited by separatist Armenians wishing to merge their region with Armenia. This is an official holiday, and all public establishments are closed. There are official government ceremonies with speeches; the people spend this day in leisure and recreational activities.

DAY OF AZERI SOLIDARITY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31

When Russia acquired Azerbaijan from Persia in the early 1800s, a sizable portion of the country had been retained by what is now Iran. Azeris still claim this as a rightful part of their country, since approximately 25–30 million Azeris are thought to be living in Iran. In 1989, while the Soviet Union was still in existence, some spirited Azerbaijanis broke down the international borders separating them from the territory of Iran. The commemoration of this event originated at the initiative of President Heydar

Aliyev. It is a day when Azerbaijanis promote their culture and seek to foster feelings of friendship and belonging with Azeris outside of Azerbaijan. Cultural programs and speeches by prominent personalities highlight this occasion, which is also known by the name Azerbaijani Solidarity Day.

Religious Holidays

EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

The Islamic New Year is celebrated on the first day of Muharram according to the Islamic calendar. Its corresponding date on the Western (Gregorian) calendar is different every year. This is because Islam uses a lunar calendar based on the revolutions of the Moon and has only 354 days in its year. Thus the Islamic year loses 11 days annually in comparison with the Western year.

The beginning of the new year is usually quiet, unlike New Year's celebrations associated with other calendars. In Azerbaijan Muslims gather in mosques for special prayers and readings. A major part of the holiday is a recitation of the story of the Hegira—Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina. Muslims also reflect on the ephemeral quality of life and the fleeting nature of time.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Ramadan is considered the holiest month of the Islamic calendar. It was during this month that Muhammad fasted for 40 days, after which the angel Jibril (Gabriel) revealed the Koran to him. Eid al-Fitr, or Ramazon Bayram (from the Turkish, meaning "small feast"), celebrates the end of the month-long fast that devout Muslims observe during Ramadan. Azerbaijanis celebrate by participating in morning prayers, generally in mosques and *idgahs* (communal open-air places for prayer). These rituals are followed by social visits, exchanges of greetings and gifts, and feasting. *Sewiyan*, a vermicelli pudding, is a special dish prepared for this occasion.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM

EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, or Qurban Bayram ("Feast of Sacrifice"), celebrates the patriarch Ibrahim's (Abraham's)

absolute devotion to his God, manifested by his willingness to sacrifice his young son because Allah had commanded him to do so. In Azerbaijan on this day every Muslim family that can afford it is expected to sacrifice an animal (a sheep, goat, ram, or cow) in the name of Allah; this sanctified meat is then divided among friends, family, and the poor. Prior to this festival, devout Muslims may undertake a hajj, or pilgrimage, to Mecca, which is the central city of the Islamic faith.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

Rites of Passage

❁ COMING OF AGE

In the Islamic countries where circumcision (*khitān*) is practiced, the boy usually undergoes the operation between the ages of 10 and 12. This is a rite of puberty, separating the boy from childhood and introducing him to his new status and responsibilities as a man. In Azerbaijan's Muslim families, circumcisions are attended by a great deal of festivity, music, food, and many guests.

❁ MARRIAGE

Weddings in traditional Azerbaijan society involve many ceremonies and rites that are intended to protect the couple from harm, disease, and evil forces. Traditionally, the wedding cycle is divided into three stages: the prewedding period, the wedding itself, and the postwedding period. During the prewedding period, the family of a young man chooses a young woman and negotiates the match, securing the consent of the young woman and her family. The engagement (*nischān*) follows. The engagement

ceremony is arranged in the bride's house and the bridegroom's relatives bring her gifts. These gifts include sweetmeats, shoes, silk and woolen stockings (*zorabs*), and sugar loaves. A ring is given to the bride during the engagement.

The period between the engagement and the wedding can vary from two months to two years. A few days prior to the wedding, the ceremony known as *parča bichini* (cutting the wedding dress) is observed, when women of both families come together to cut out the fabric for the bride's wedding dress. The day before the bride is scheduled to leave for her husband's home, the bridesmaids anoint her hands and feet (*kbna yakhti*). This rite symbolizes the maiden becoming a woman. Dancing and singing accompany the bride's last night in her parents' home.

On the actual day of the wedding the bride is brought to the bridegroom's house where she is showered with corn kernels and presented with sweets and coins. She steps over a piece of metal at the threshold of her new home, a symbolic act of tenacity and faithfulness. A little boy is then made to sit on her lap, the hope being that her firstborn will be male.

The postwedding rites include *usa chihd*, the first time the newlywed appears in public and removes her veil. The guests in attendance present the couple with valuables and domestic utensils. The final stage is the visit of the couple to the bride's father's house, three or four days after the wedding.

Further Reading

Glen E. Curtis, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia Country Studies* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1995); Thomas De Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

~ Bahamas, The ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	A chain of islands in the North Atlantic Ocean, in the Caribbean, southeast of Florida, northeast of Cuba
Size	5,382 sq. mi.
Capital City	Nassau
Flag Description	The flag of the Bahamas has three equal horizontal bands of aquamarine (top), gold (middle), and aquamarine (bottom), with a black equilateral triangle based on the hoist side.
Independence	July 10, 1973 (from the United Kingdom)
Population	301,790 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional parliamentary democracy
Nationality	Bahamian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Black (85%)
Major Language(s)	English (official); Creole (among Haitian immigrants)
Major Religion (s)	Christian (96%)
National Holiday(s)	Junkanoo, January 1; New Year's Day, January 1; Martin Luther King Day, late January; Labor Day, early June; CARICOM Day, July 4; National Day, July 10; Emancipation Day, early August; Discovery Day, mid-October; Veterans' Day, November 11

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The first inhabitants of The Bahamas, officially, the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, were the Siboney (also spelled Ciboney), a people who lived off of conch and fish. The shells and jewelry they left behind indicate that they may have lived in the Bahamas as long as 7,000 years ago. The Siboney disappeared and were replaced by the Lucayans—the “island people”—around 900 C.E. The Lucayans, who were related to the Taino, left the Lesser Antilles to avoid their enemies, the Caribs. They were a peaceful people, farmers who lived in thatch huts and used stone tools. There may have been as many as 50,000 Lucayans when Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) arrived (it is believed he landed at San Salvador, although some historians think he landed at Cat Island.) But they had been completely annihilated by 1520 (1507, according to some accounts) because the Spanish slave traders had shipped them to Hispaniola to work in the gold mines. It is largely the descendants of the freed slaves, taken from Africa

to replace the enslaved indigenous people, who make up the population of The Bahamas today. Europeans and others compose a small percentage of Bahamians.

In 1647 a group of Bermudan religious refugees arrived at the islands. The next year Puritans from England (the “Eleutheran Adventurers”) were shipwrecked off Eleuthera, settled on it, and named it from the Spanish word for “freedom.” The Bahamas became a British Crown Colony in 1717. Groups of settlers escaping persecution and war—first, British Loyalists from the American Revolution (1775–83), and then later expatriates from the American Civil War (1861–65)—arrived. The United Kingdom outlawed slave ships in 1807, and the Royal Navy abandoned the slaves it freed on The Bahamas, making them the last group of refugees from persecution to make their home there.

The sea routes, islands, and the gold on Spanish ships attracted pirates to The Bahamas, including the more notorious ones such as Blackbeard. However, they were not the only ones plundering Spanish galleons carrying gold to Spain. There were the privateers as well, who worked under the aegis of the British Crown, complete with a Letter of Marquee that

effectively authorized their plundering. They soon found British Navy ships as profitable as the merchant vessels. Interestingly it was a former pirate Woodes Rogers (?1679–1732) who became the royal governor in 1718 and cleaned up the islands by granting amnesty to his reformed peers and by hunting down the more recalcitrant ones like Blackbeard and Charles Vane, who escaped. Blackbeard was killed in 1718 in a sea battle.

When the U.S. Civil War ended in 1865, so did The Bahamas' prosperity. In 1919, however, when the United States ratified the 14th amendment banning alcoholic beverages, smuggling became lucrative. So great was the flow of alcohol from The Bahamas to the United States, especially Scotch whisky, that the British government enlarged Prince George Wharf in Nassau to accommodate the smugglers. When Prohibition ended, the Bahama islands went into an economic slump that lasted until World War II, when an air and naval base was built, bringing jobs for many people.

In 1961 when Fidel Castro (b. 1926) took over Cuba and closed its casinos to U.S. tourists, The Bahamas's economic future brightened once more, and tourist dollars began to flow again. In 1964 Great Britain granted the islands limited self-government, and in 1969 The Bahamas joined the Commonwealth. On July 10, 1973, The Bahamas became an independent nation.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The Commonwealth of the Bahamas, or The Bahamas, as the country is popularly known, is located in the North Atlantic Ocean. Composed of about 700 islands and 2,000 cays (pronounced “keys”), the archipelago is situated northeast of Cuba and southeast of Florida. Nassau, the capital city, is located on New Providence Island. This and Grand Bahama are the largest islands in the archipelago. The climate is tropical—hot, sunny, and humid—with waters warmed by the Gulf Stream.

❁ ECONOMY

The scarcity of natural resources that frustrated Spanish settlers has been a major factor in the country's reliance on tourism. There has been a steady shift from the traditional livelihood of fishing to tourism. With its independence secured on July 10, 1973, the country developed into one of the most sought-after tourist destinations in the Caribbean. The Hawksbill Creek Agreement in 1955 established a duty-free zone at Freeport, and the Bahamian Parliament passed legislation in 1993 to extend many of the tax and duty exemptions until 2054. After 1955 free trade flourished. Its banks are well known for accepting the accounts of wealthy individuals and corporations seeking to hide their profits where tax authorities cannot get to them. The Bahamas also became notorious for smuggling, organized crime, and gambling. In 1980 the

A First

Christopher Columbus's first landing in the New World and in The Bahamas was on either Guanahani Island (now known as San Salvador Island) or, possibly, Cat Island, on October 12, 1492. He reportedly said “*baja mar*” (which means “low water or sea”), and the archipelago was named for this utterance. In fact the 12-foot depth along the coast gives way, suddenly, to a depth of 6,000 feet into what is known as the Tongue of the Ocean.

Bahamian government sought help from the United States to enforce antidrug trafficking regulations in the country, and the crime rate has since dropped.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

As a result of extended Spanish and British presence, most Bahamians are Christian; a majority belong to the Baptist sect. The country has the largest number of churches per capita in the world. While most Bahamians observe strictly Christian customs, others follow both Christian and indigenous ways. Thus, some priests mix Obeah, a mixture of African and folk traditions, with conventional Christian practices.

The cultural infusion into the islands has resulted in a tremendous diversity of customs and traditions. This richness is celebrated in all parts of The Bahamas and in all aspects of Bahamian life. Music is deeply entrenched in the Bahamian heart. *Goombab* (pronounced “goombay”) beats (a blend of African music and the European accordion), and the traditional African rhythms played on drums, whistles, and cowbells can be heard at festivals throughout the year. Masquerades—particularly the Junkanoo—and carnivals are enjoyed by young and old alike, with colorful clothes, singing, and dancing. Boxing Day and New Year's Day are two of the most popular and enthusiastically celebrated holidays in The Bahamas. The oral storytelling tradition is an ancient one and is as popular among children, as is dancing to both English folk songs and Caribbean calypso.

❁ CUISINE

Bahamian cuisine includes a variety of excellent dishes made from the bounty of the sea and land and features fresh seafood and fruit, especially conch and coconut. The conch (an ocean mollusk with a firm white flesh edged with pink) can be steamed, deep fried (called “cracked conch”), or eaten raw (just add lime juice and spices), and it turns up in chowders, salads, fritters, and stews. If conch is not available, lobster can always be substituted. The same is true for the many species of fish abundant in the sur-

Fun Fact

The Andros Barrier Reef—a coral reef about 125 miles long—is second in size only to the Great Barrier Reef of Australia.

Obeah or Obi

This is an ancient system of beliefs, the origins of which are unknown. Occult powers are an essential part of Obeah—spells, rituals, hallucinogenic substances, shamanism, and magic—but equally strong is the belief in consequences. Quite simply, whatever one does or has done to another will return, because when a ripple is created in the normal course of events through magic, then the equilibrium (or balance/harmony) must be restored, sooner or later.

The winged serpent of wisdom, a revered concept in ancient African religions, was referred to as *oph* or *ob*. The word *obeah* may have been derived from this. Obeah is practiced in the West Indies, Jamaica, and tropical America.



A member of the Valley Boys Junkanoo group shakes cowbells as he marches in downtown Nassau at the Boxing Day Junkanoo Parade held on January 1. The annual festival attracts thousands of people to the streets of Nassau in the early morning hours. (AP Photo/Tim Ayleen)

rounding waters. Steamed, grilled, fried, or curried, seafood figures prominently in the Bahamian diet. A favorite for brunches is boiled fish with grits, and another local specialty is “stew fish,” made with tomatoes, celery, onions, and spices.

Coconuts are another main ingredient, because they are not only plentiful, but the sweet white flesh is versatile and is found in many desserts—tarts, pies, cakes, custards, trifles, candies, and ice cream; it can also be shredded to add its flavor to almost any dish. The island dessert menu is rich and varied. Fruit figures prominently in local specialties such as banana breads and puddings, carrot cake, and guava turnovers. Almost anything can be tossed into the many soups and chowders, but one delicious soup found only in the Caribbean is called *souse*. Its only ingredients are water, onions, celery, peppers, lime juice, and meat, usually chicken, sheep’s tongue, oxtail, or pig’s feet.

Never bland or boring, the food is spicy and perfectly complemented by the national beer *Kalik*, which can be found only in the Bahamas. Citrus fruits and rum are the featured ingredients in iced drinks such as the *Bahama Mama* (made with coconut, coffee liqueurs, and pineapple juice added to the rum), and rum punch, for which just about every restaurant and bar has a special recipe. A unique citrus drink, *Switcher*, is made from local limes.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ JUNKANOO

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 1

Junkanoo is a national festival in The Bahamas, the only country that accords it this status. The celebration has its origins in West Africa. Junkanoo in the Caribbean began in the 17th century, when the slaves were allowed a holiday on Christmas so that they could be with their families. The dances, the music with cowbells, whistles, conch-shell horns, goatskin drums, and the exotic costumes were all essentially African. The celebrations included wearing masks and costumes and walking on stilts.

This is by far the biggest celebration in The Bahamas. Junkanoo bands begin parading in the dark hours of the early morning and finish several hours later, playing from approximately 2 to 8 A.M. They bring in the special day and the new year. These festivities, which are in the spirit of Mardi Gras in New Orleans and Carnival in Rio de Janeiro, are repeated to mark all of the major Bahamian holidays: New Year’s Day, Independence Day, Emancipation Day, Christmas, and Boxing Day, and New Year’s Day.

While the simplicity of the original Junkanoo is a thing of the past, the music remains traditional. Choreography, music, and costumes are the highlights of this masked parade. People dress up in elaborate attire and dance enthusiastically to the music. Each participating group has a theme, and the music, presentations, and costumes are selected accordingly. Competition is fierce, and the theme and costumes of each group remain a secret until the final performance. Rehearsals are held in secret

in a “base camp” or “shack.” There are prizes for the best performances.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL

❁ NEW YEAR’S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

New Year’s Day is observed on the first day of the Gregorian calendar, which is a solar-based system. Memories of the past year and resolutions for the new are combined in the celebrations. The New Year’s Day parade in The Bahamas is an important event, complemented by parties, masquerades, and family gatherings. Junkanoo bands rush into the streets in the early morning hours, because it is the beginning of the new year and this is Junkanoo day.

❁ MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Third Monday in January

Martin Luther King Jr., was the face of the U.S. civil rights movement and represented oppressed people everywhere. Although King was born on January 15, 1929, his birthday is officially celebrated on the third Monday of January in The Bahamas, as it is in the United States.

In The Bahamas this is a day for children: They participate in essay-writing and painting competitions, along with other cultural events organized by schools and local authorities. Children also make colorful hangings out of hand tracings and display them all over buildings. Discussions and lectures concerning race and civil rights are held throughout the country.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First Friday in June

Labor Day, also called May Day or Workers’ Day, is a celebration of labor unions and workers all over the world. The May 1 observance of Labor Day has its origins in the international socialist movement. The first May Day/Labor Day occurred in 1889, a date chosen by the Second International to coincide with the American Federation of Labor’s general strike in the United States to win the eight-hour workday. Thereafter, International Labor Day became and remained more radical than the U.S. version observed in September.

It is a legal holiday throughout The Bahamas that, in a departure from most other countries, observes Labor Day on the first Friday of June. Schools, universities, and public offices remain closed as people attend music festivals, spend time at the beach, and, in recent years, at nightclubs or at cookouts.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

Origins of Junkanoo

There are three suggested origins for the word *junkanoo*. Some say it refers to John Canoe, an African tribal chief brought to the islands as a slave who demanded that his people be allowed to celebrate together. Others suggest that it is derived from the French word *l’inconnu*, which means “unknown,” and is used to refer to the masked revelers at the parade. A third group thinks that the word is derived from the Scottish *junk enoo*, “junk enough.”

CARICOM DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 4

Caricom Day commemorates the founding of the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) on August 1, 1973, under the Treaty of Chaguaramas. This alliance focuses on development issues and improving the lives of the people in the Caribbean. The first four signatories were Jamaica, Barbados, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago. Currently there are 15 members and five associate members. The treaty was revised in 2001 to create the Common Single Market and Economy (CSME).

Although many CARICOM countries observe this holiday on the first Monday of July, the date varies for others. The Bahamas joined CARICOM on July 4, 1983, and the anniversary of this day features discussions and lectures on regional and national issues.

❁ NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 10

The Bahamas gained independence on July 10, 1973, after 256 years of British rule. Although Queen Elizabeth II remains the constitutional head of state, Bahamians enjoy a parliamentary form of government and have an independent executive and judicial system.

Military parades mark National Day (or Independence Day), along with music and dance programs, food festivals, and spectacular fireworks. Junkanoo parades are held in some parts of the country.

❁ EMANCIPATION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First Monday in August

Great Britain passed the Emancipation Act on August 1, 1834, declaring every slave a free person. This was welcome news for slaves in British-controlled territories, even though this freedom came

with a disclaimer: The slaves would be “apprenticed” to their former masters for a minimum of four years. (The only exception was Antigua.)

This holiday is the oldest celebrated in The Bahamas, and the festivities continue until Fox Hill Day, a week later. The six days are marked by a number of special events. The festival opens with a road race. The second day features choral singing on Fox Hill, and public luncheons are held over four days. These lunches are considered the most important aspect of the celebrations. A mini-Junkanoo parade is also part of the Emancipation Day festivities.

✿ DISCOVERY DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Second Monday in October

Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) landed in the Western Hemisphere and in The Bahamas specifically on October 12, 1492. He arrived at Guanahani Island, the present-day San Salvador Island (not to be confused with the capital city of El Salvador). He effectively christened the country with his words “*baja mer*” (“low water”).

This holiday, known also as National Heroes Day or Columbus Day, is celebrated on the second Monday of October. The city of Nassau resounds with joyous singing, and people crowd the streets to watch the parade of international floats.

✿ VETERANS’ DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 11

Veterans’ Day, also known as Armistice Day or Remembrance Day, began as a remembrance of the soldiers who fought in World War I. The observance has since been expanded to include soldiers of other modern wars. Many European and North American countries observe the day on November 11 because the war ended at the 11th hour on the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918.

In The Bahamas there are public speeches and symposiums to mark the day. Government officials place wreaths on war memorials, and at 11 A.M. people observe a moment of silence.

Religious Holidays

✿ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday is a part of Holy Week, the last week of Jesus’ life on Earth. It commemorates his Crucifixion. It has been in the Christian liturgical calendar even longer than Easter, although no one is sure why it is called Good Friday. Some have suggested that

the use of *good* in the name goes back to Old English and means “God’s” Friday, while others interpret *good* to mean something like “observed as holy.” This observance is also known as Black Friday and Sorrowful Friday, and in Eastern Orthodox Churches it is called Great Friday. For many years Good Friday was primarily a Catholic observance, but many Protestant Churches now hold special services from noon until three in the afternoon on this day to symbolize Jesus’ last hours on the Cross. Many of the faithful fast on this day; when they eat, it is generally fish instead of meat.

There is a special evening service, which is widely attended, known as the Tenebrae (Service of Shadows), held on the previous Thursday, and Wednesday as well. It consists of prayers and readings relevant to the suffering of Jesus. Lights in the church are gradually dimmed as the service progresses, evoking the darkness of a world without God. There is no Communion on Good Friday because this is not a celebration.

In The Bahamas, images of the Crucifixion are carried in processions, and participants reenact Jesus’ trial and death. Readings from the Gospel of St. John and the singing of hymns and psalms continue through the day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter (also known as Eostre or Pascha) is widely considered the most important Christian holiday, since it commemorates the Resurrection of Jesus after his Crucifixion. The day is seen as the culmination of his Incarnation and is one of the two most ancient festivals—together with Epiphany—celebrated by Christians. The festival has its beginnings in the feast of the Teutonic spring goddess Estre, and the Jewish feast of the Passover (in Hebrew, Pesach) celebrating the “passing over” of the Jews when the 10th plague hit Egypt and also their escape from slavery in Egypt during the reign of Pharaoh Ramses II (1304–1237 B.C.E.).

In The Bahamas worship services begin before dawn, marking the end of the Easter Vigil that began on Holy Saturday. There are parades and feasts to mark this special day, and young girls and women wear colorful Easter bonnets decorated with ribbons, stencil drawings, paints, flowers, dried flowers, and other decorative materials.

The day after Easter is known as Easter Monday and the first day of Bright Week. People enjoy feasts and parades and indulge in traditional activities: Catholics and Anglicans douse each other with the perfumed holy water that they received on Easter for use at home. Egg-rolling competitions are also popular for children.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fifty days after Easter

Pentecost takes place 50 days after Easter. The holiday celebrates the descent of the Holy Ghost on the disciples. This was considered a great miracle: Parted tongues of fire accompanied by a strong gust of wind descended on the apostles, marking them as fit preachers of the Gospel to all corners of the world.

Many scholars believe that many of the traditions and celebrations associated with this holiday were borrowed from pagan celebrations of spring in Western Europe. Homes are often decorated with green branches and flowers. In Christian tradition this is the 50th day after Easter and has been celebrated since the first century. (*Pentecost* in Greek means “fiftieth.”)

In many countries, including The Bahamas, this is a two-day holiday. Whitsunday and Whitmonday are the names used locally to celebrate the event. The name “Whitsun” originated in the third century C.E. and was derived from the white garments that were worn by those who were baptized during the vigil of this feast. In The Bahamas churches and homes are decorated with greens, and church services honor the descent of the Holy Spirit.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; PENTECOST

❁ CHRISTMAS DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Literally, *Christmas* means “Mass of Christ,” and it celebrates the birth of Jesus. He was born to the Virgin Mary in a manger in Bethlehem, although not on this date. A stationary star guided the Three Wise Men (or the Three Magi) to the spot. Christmas is not mentioned as one of the earliest Christian holidays, and, while it was celebrated in Alexandria, Egypt, as early as the second century, it was observed on May 20 at that time. The December holiday became widespread from the fifth century on. Pope Julius I (1337–52) designated December 25 as Christmas but died before instituting it.

In The Bahamas Christmas is celebrated in a manner similar to European and North American countries. Christmas trees, special gifts and cards, and large amounts of food served at family dinners all add to the festive mood. Junkanoo parades also mark this special day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26

Boxing Day is also known as St. Stephen’s Day in memory of the first Christian martyr. It is observed

in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and other British Commonwealth countries and former British colonies. The origins are twofold: on December 26, employers and estate owners in medieval England gave boxes of clothes and food, among other practical items, to their servants after the Christmas celebrations. Those they considered the “deserving poor”—laborers such as road sweepers and chimney sweeps—also received something. Church charity boxes were also opened on December 26, and the money was distributed to the poor.

In modern times employees as well as those performing useful public services are given tips or gifts.

In The Bahamas gifts and money are given as tokens of appreciation to all those who perform necessary public tasks including the postal employees, delivery people, and municipal workers. The day is spent in fun and friendship with family and friends. While government buildings and small businesses are closed, the shopping malls are open and full of people.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Fun Fact

One Catholic Easter tradition involves adding perfume to the holy water people receive on Easter. Men awaken their wives by sprinkling a little of this water on them and saying, “May you never wither.” Wives usually reciprocate by waking their husbands the next day with a larger quantity of the perfumed water.

Regional Holidays

❁ KADOOMENT

Observed in: Nassau

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 2

Kadooment is a harvest festival marking the ripening of the sugarcane. The festival originated in Barbados in the 1780s when that country was the world’s largest producer of sugar. The 1940s saw a discontinuation of the event, but it was revived in 1974. This is a major event with *kadooment* and *tuk* bands and calypso music. (The members of *kadooment* bands wear brightly colored costumes; the instruments played in *tuk* bands are a tin flute, a kettle-drum, and a bass drum. *Tuk* is thought to be derived from the Scottish word *touk*, which means “to beat or sound an instrument.”)

In Nassau the festival opens with the ceremonial “delivery of the last canes.” The two most productive cane cutters are crowned king and queen of the festival. Celebrations are akin to a summer carnival with revelers wearing body paint and brightly colored costumes and dancing to their favorite beats on the streets of Nassau. The festival ends with the Grand Kadooment, a carnival parade.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

❁ MINI-JUNKANOO PARADE

Observed in: West End, New Providence

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 2

This parade is a special one for The Bahamas because it focuses on Bahamian children and their assimilation of national culture and affairs. Contests, workshops, seminars, and a variety of educational programs are held across the city to teach children Bahamian traditions. Storytelling and other programs are specially designed to encourage social and political awareness.

❁ FOX HILL DAY

Observed in: Fox Hill

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: One week after Emancipation Day

Great Britain passed the Emancipation Act on August 1, 1834. This act made every slave free, but freedom came at a price: The slaves would be “apprenticed” to their former masters for a minimum of four years.

Fox Hill Day is a legal holiday and has a special place in the history of The Bahamas. In 1834 Fox Hill was a small community miles from anywhere, so news of the declaration reached its residents a week later than the rest of the country, and this day celebrates the historic event. On the second Tuesday of August, the actual day of the original Fox Hill celebration, gospel concerts are held at churches; afterward, people head to Freedom Park for an afternoon of feasting and goombah music. This holiday has grown into a two-week event with street parties, dances, concerts, public lunches, and the plaiting of the maypole.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

In The Bahamas, a priestess (*babalawo*) arrives as soon as the expectant mother goes into labor and remains with her until after the birth. The priestess will return to the house seven days after the birth of a boy or nine days after the birth of a girl. To protect the mother and newborn, a cock and hen are sacrificed, palm wine is sprinkled on their entrails, and the dead animals are removed from the premises.

A purification ceremony follows the sacrifice. Earthen vessels containing water are placed before the altar or images/depictions of God. The earthen pots are taken to the house, and the water is poured over the roof. As it drips from the eaves, mother and baby pass under it three times in succession for luck

and protection. Purified water is also used for the naming ceremony of the baby. The infant’s head is bathed, while the selected name is uttered three times. During this ceremony, the baby is held so that he or she touches the ground. After these ceremonies, new coal is brought to replace the older coal in the homes.

❁ MARRIAGE

Marriage in The Bahamas is not just between individuals, but is also an understanding between the families. Wedding customs are similar on all the islands. People gather on the streets to see the bride and groom on their way to the church. These onlookers are not hesitant to speak their minds if the couple seems mismatched. Once inside the church, the bride is escorted down the aisle by either parent or even both, her face covered until the groom lifts the veil. Traditionally the bridal gown and the bridesmaids’ dresses are handmade, never store-bought. To reinforce the fact, the seamstress carries the bride’s train down the aisle. After the ceremony the couple collects the wedding certificate from the church or rectory and then proceeds to the reception.

A small bridal doll, resembling the bride in her wedding dress, is placed on the center table with small gifts placed on the dress. At the reception, the bride and groom walk up to each guest and thank them for attending. Each guest receives a gift from the bridal doll and some, in turn, pin a dollar to the doll’s dress.

❁ DEATH

The body of the deceased is placed on a pedestal to ensure sufficient air and space. Next the body is washed with rum or herbal oils and dressed in beautiful clothes. The thumbs and toes are tied together. If the deceased is male, the head is shaved, and the hair wrapped in a piece of white cotton. This is buried in the earth alongside the house. If the deceased is female, the exposed parts of the body are painted red with dye made from tree bark. The next stage involves wrapping the body (male or female) in native attire over the clothes already worn and placing it on a mat by the door. Mourners pay their respects, and occasionally professional mourners are hired to mourn and sing.

Further Reading

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~ Bahrain ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	In the Middle East, an archipelago in the Persian Gulf, located east of Saudi Arabia
Size	257 sq. mi.
Capital City	Manama
Flag Description	Bahrain's flag is red, the traditional color for flags of Persian Gulf states, with a white serrated band (five white points) on the hoist side; the five points represent the five pillars of Islam.
Independence	August 15, 1971 (from United Kingdom)
Population	688,345, including 235,108 non-nationals (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional hereditary monarchy
Nationality	Bahraini
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Bahraini (62%); non-Bahraini (38%)
Major Language(s)	Arabic; English; Farsi; Urdu
Major Religion(s)	Shia Muslims (70%); Sunni Muslims (30%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day, August 15; National Day, December 16-17

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Bahrain's history undoubtedly goes back to the roots of civilization, and it is one of the 15 Middle Eastern countries called "the cradle of humanity." The main island probably broke away from the Arabian mainland around 6000 B.C.E. and has been inhabited since prehistoric times. The recorded history of Bahrain goes back about 5,000 years, when it was known as Dilmun to the Sumerians, who founded the first great civilization of the Middle East. The name means "the sacred land" or the "land of life," which probably refers to the numerous springs that made the main island of the archipelago so attractive compared to the vast tracts of blistering desert sands that comprise the Arabian mainland. Three temples built during the era of the Dilmun trading empire have been excavated. All three were dedicated to Enki, the god of wisdom and sweet water.

Bahrain remained a major trading and commercial center throughout the succeeding centuries. It was visited, and occa-

sionally occupied, by Babylonians, Assyrians, Greeks, Romans, Persians, Portuguese, and finally the British.

In 1783 local Arabs ended two centuries of Persian domination. Their descendants, the Al-Khalifa Dynasty, have remained in power since then. In 1816 Bahrain became a British Protectorate with governmental authority shared by the ruling Shaikh and a British adviser.

In 1968 the British withdrew military forces from the Gulf area. In March of that year Bahrain joined the mainland states of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which were also under British protection, to form the Federation of Arab Emirates. However the interests of Qatar and Bahrain proved incompatible with those of the smaller shaikhdoms, and both withdrew from the federation.

On August 15, 1971, Bahrain became fully independent. A new treaty of friendship was signed with the United Kingdom, and Shaikh Isa bin Salman al-Khalifa (1933-99) assumed the title of emir. Bahrain became a member of the Arab League and, later that same year, the United Nations. In December 1972 elections were held for a constituent assembly. This assembly produced a new constitution, which went

Fun Fact

According to legend, Enki lived in a subterranean palace covered with silver and lapis lazuli, near a freshwater lake.

into effect on December 6, 1973. In 1975 the shaikh suspended the constitution and dissolved the national assembly. Bahrain was a founding member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which was formed in 1981 with neighboring Persian Gulf countries.

During the 1980s and 1990s relations with Qatar were strained by a dispute over the Hawar Islands and the large natural gas resources of the Dome field (in the shallow sea between both countries). In the late 1980s a causeway was built connecting Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. During the 1991 Gulf War coalition forces were allowed extensive use of Bahraini territory. In 1993 a consultative council, or *shura*, was appointed to replace the dissolved national assembly.

Shaikh Isa, who had ruled since 1961, died in 1999. His son Shaikh Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa (b. 1950) became the new ruler and moved gradually toward increased democracy for Bahrain.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Bahrain is an archipelago of 33 low-lying islands in the Arabian Gulf, just east of Saudi Arabia's shore. The capital is on the largest island, which also has most of the country's population. The island's limestone bedrock ascends gently toward the central peak, familiarly called Jebel Dukhan ("Mountain of Smoke") because it is surrounded by a misty haze on hot, humid days. Though its top is only 450 feet above sea level, it seems higher due to the flatness of the surrounding plains. Land use varies from extensive urban development and diligently cultivated areas in the north to sandy desert spreading south, east, and west from Jebel Dukhan. Here actual desert conditions prevail with sparse vegetation. Horticulture and agriculture flourish in the north, dependent on freshwater supplies from artesian wells or desalination plants. Dates, almonds, pomegranates, figs, citrus fruit, and a wide range of vegetables are grown here. Another striking feature of the Bahrain landscape is the immense quantity of man-made stony *tumuli*, or burial mounds. Bahrain has cool winters with sparse rainfall and hot summers with high humidity.

The summer season lasts from June to September. It is generally hot and dry but humid. Temperatures range from 100° to 108°F and the average humidity from 67 to 82 percent. The weather is often influenced by low pressure over Pakistan, which causes dry, northwesterly winds, known locally as *al barab*, "to blow in," lowering the humidity and creating pleasant weather conditions.

❁ ECONOMY

Bahrain's economy is heavily dependent on crude oil, but the government is looking for new sources of income. Oil was found in 1931, and oil revenues have financed extensive modernization projects, particularly in health and education.

The relatively high living standards of Bahrain are based on oil revenues, but resources are expected to be fully depleted by the year 2010. Bahrain is expected to be the first Persian Gulf nation to run out of oil.

The country's major industry is the large oil refinery on the island of Sitra, which processes local oil as well as oil from Saudi Arabia transported through pipelines. The country also has a big aluminum smelter that runs on natural gas.

Bahrain has become a major regional banking and communications center, besides offering services for insurance and financing. Bahrain houses numerous multinational firms, and the government actively encourages foreign investment. The U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, which patrols the Persian Gulf, is also based in Bahrain.

Agriculture is practiced on a small scale; springs in the northern parts of the main island provide good conditions for crop cultivation. Bahrain was once a major center of pearl harvesting as well, but the stocks declined during the 20th century.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Bahrain offers a unique blend of ancient and modern values. The capital city of Manama, with its skyscrapers and lights, may project a flashy image, but outside the city life is unremarkably traditional. Modern skyscrapers jostle with magnificent mosques, and numerous air-conditioned shopping malls vie for customers with *souks* (traditional markets with narrow winding streets lined with shops) selling myriad items.

Traditional arts and crafts are very much alive in parts of Bahrain: *dhows* (fishing boats) are built on the outskirts of Manama, Muharraq, cloth is woven at Bani Jamrah, and exquisite pottery is fashioned at Aali.

Islam is the state religion, but freedom to worship is enjoyed by Hindus, Jews, Buddhists, and Christians. Bahrain's population is 85 percent Muslim. Shia Muslims are a majority (70 percent) of the population, but the Sunni dominate in government, military, and security forces. Most of the Shia are descendants from the Persians who once ruled Bahrain (Bahaareynehgaan).

Arabic is the official language, although English is widely spoken.

The island's location is ideal for water sports such as windsurfing, fishing, sailing, yachting, and pearl diving, and Bahrainis are avid fans of Formula One motor races, horse racing, and golf. Falconry, an ancient art, is a traditional sport of the Gulf ruling classes.



Falcon trainers carry falcons, Bahrain's national bird. Falconry is a popular sport among the Bahraini elite. (AP Photo/Ali Fraidoun)

❁ CUISINE

Most of Bahrain is desert, so there is little agriculture, and the country must import much of its food. The cuisine is primarily Arabic or Middle Eastern, and lamb, various seafoods, dates, pomegranates, and rice are common ingredients. Baba ghanoush, an eggplant spread, is very popular. Perhaps the best-known traditional dishes in Bahrain are *machbous*, fish or meat served with rice, and *mubammar*, a

sweet brown rice served with sugar or dates. Traditional street food like *shawarma* (lamb or chicken carved from a large rotating spit and served in pita bread) and desserts such as baklava are common. (Baklava is a very sweet dessert made of layers of flaky pastry filled with a mixture of ground nuts and sugar. The pastry is sliced, baked, and brushed with honey syrup flavored with lemon or rosewater).

Snack foods such as *sambousas* (crisp pastries filled with meat, cheese, sugar, or nuts) and small fried potato cakes are popular and can be bought in the *souks*. The traditional *gahwa* (Arabic coffee), served in a *finjan* (small cup), is strong and ubiquitous. Etiquette dictates that guests must accept a second cup if it is offered.

Fun Fact

A third serving of *gahwa* (Arabic coffee) can be refused by shaking the coffee cup from side to side.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 1

In Bahrain, New Year's is a public holiday. All educational, commercial, and government establishments remain closed. People enjoy a leisurely day with their friends and families and participate in various recreational activities.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

In 1889 the Socialist Second International, in solidarity with the American Federation of Labor, established this holiday to pay tribute to workers and laborers for their contributions and to make people everywhere aware of the need for better working conditions. On September 24, 2002, the ruler of Bahrain, His Majesty King Shaikh Hamad Bin Isa Al

Baba Ghanoush

Preheat oven to 400°F

Ingredients:

- 1 large eggplant
- 2 garlic cloves, chopped
- 2 Tbs. tahini (sesame paste)
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 1 Tbs. lemon juice
- 2 oz. yogurt
- 3 Tbs. olive oil
- Several whole olives

Preparation:

Place the whole eggplant on a baking sheet and bake it until the outer skin is crisp and the inside soft and mushy (about 1 hour). Let the eggplant cool, then remove and discard the skin. Spoon the meat of the eggplant into a food processor or blender. Add the garlic, tahini, salt, lemon juice, and yogurt. Purée until creamy. Spoon the mixture into a serving dish and garnish with olive oil and whole olives. Serve cold or warm with sliced pita bread or vegetables for dipping.

Battle of Karbala

The fierce Battle of Karbala took place in 680 in the area now known as Iraq. It was fought between Hussein (the youngest grandson of Muhammad and the incumbent caliph) and Yazid, the ruler of Kufa (a city in Iraq, about 106 miles south of Baghdad, and 6 miles northeast of Najaf, located on the banks of the Euphrates River). Yazid had the troops of Hussein massacred while they were on the way to Kufa. He believed that this would assure that he would retain his title as caliph, head of the Islamic community. This happened on the 10th day of Muharram, and the sad occasion came to be called Ashura, meaning “ten.” The date is especially important to Shia Muslims.

Khalifa, ratified a trade union law which, among other things, declared May 1, the International Labor Day, an official holiday. In Bahrain the day is commemorated with trade union activities and speeches.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 15

This day celebrates a pivotal event in the history of Bahrain. On this day in 1971 Bahrain achieved independence from British rule, although it remained under British protection until December 16 of that same year. This is the most important public holiday in Bahrain, and the national flag is raised at special ceremonies in recognition of this historic occasion. Parades and public speeches are held.

NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 16–17

This day commemorates Bahrain’s emergence from British protection on December 16, 1971. National Day was extended to a two-day holiday in 1999 by a decision of His Majesty King Hamad. In Bahrain on this day people remember and appreciate their freedom from colonial rule. The occasion is marked by civic ceremonies.

Religious Holidays

EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

The Islamic New Year is celebrated on the first day of Muharram according to the Islamic calendar. Its corresponding date on the Western (Gregorian) calendar is different every year. This is because Islam uses a lunar calendar based on the revolutions of the Moon and has only 354 days in its year. Thus the Islamic year loses 11 days annually in comparison with the Western year.

The beginning of the new year is usually quiet, unlike New Year’s celebrations associated with other calendars. In Bahrain, Muslims gather in mosques for special prayers and readings. A major part of the holiday is spent recounting the incident of the Hegira, Muhammad’s flight from Mecca to Medina in 622. Muslims also reflect on the passage of time and their own mortality.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

ASHURA

Observed by: Shia Muslims
Observed on: Tenth of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

As in other Islamic countries with a majority Shia population, Ashura, also called Mourning of Karbala, is a day of mourning, honoring Hussein (the grandson of Muhammad) and other martyrs who sacrificed their lives in the Battle of Karbala (680). Observed primarily on the 10th day of Muharram, it consists of two days of fasting and prayers for forgiveness. Processions reenacting Hussein’s funeral move through the streets, and men flagellate themselves until their backs are bloodied. It is believed that men who suffer as much as Hussein did will receive special blessings.

See also Volume III: ASHURA; ISLAM

EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

This marks the end of the austere month of Ramadan, which is considered the holiest month of the Islamic calendar. It was during this month that Muhammad fasted for 40 days, after which the Koran was revealed to him. The people of Bahrain begin the holiday with morning prayers, generally in mosques and *idgahs* (community prayer grounds). Afterward, they make social visits, exchange greetings and gifts, and enjoy delicacies, chiefly *sewiyam* (a vermicelli pudding), specially prepared to break the fast.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR, ISLAM, RAMADAN

EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

This day marks the patriarch Ibrahim's (Abraham's) willingness to sacrifice his young son as God had commanded. In Bahrain, on this day each family that can afford it is expected to sacrifice a sheep, goat, ram, or bullock to Allah. The meat from the sacrifice is then shared with friends and family and distributed among the poor. Prior to this festival devout Muslims may, if they so desire, undertake hajj, a pilgrimage to Mecca, the center of the Islamic faith.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

The birth of a child calls for celebrations in the Muslim community of Bahrain, because a child is considered a token of Allah's mercy, especially if the child is male. After the birth babies are immediately washed to remove impurities. The first sound that a baby hears has to be its father (or any male relative) whispering the call to prayer, or *adhan*, into its right ear and then the left. This is thought to help the baby understand its duty to Allah at the very outset of its life.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Circumcision is not mentioned in the Koran, but many Muslims consider it essential nonetheless, and the Hadith (a book of commentaries on the Koran) records it as a practice enjoined by all past prophets. Significantly it is also known as *tabara* in Arabic, which means "purification." The age for this practice varies from region to region and even from family to family, but usually the age of seven is preferred, although it is known to be performed as early as the seventh day after birth or as late as puberty.

In the Muslim families of Bahrain a boy's circumcision is a cause for celebration, and there is a good deal of festivity, music, and food, and many guests visit the parents' home.

❁ MARRIAGE

In Bahrain, as in other traditional Islamic societies, most marriages are arranged by the couples' families, sometimes with the help of professional matchmakers. Before the wedding takes place, the two families decide on a sum of money or quantity of household goods that the groom's family must give to the bride. This provides security to the bride just in case the marriage fails. Weddings usually take place in the bride's home and are performed by an imam.

The bride and the bridegroom sit in separate rooms during the marriage ceremony. Two witnesses—one from the bride's family and one from the groom's family—are present during the entire ceremony. The actual ceremony begins with the imam reciting relevant passages from the Koran.

The imam then speaks about the duties of marriage and asks the bride and the bridegroom individually if they agree to the marriage. Once they have agreed, the bride, the groom, and the two witnesses sign a marriage contract that confirms their agreement.

The Koran says that a man may marry up to four wives, provided he can treat them all equally. However most men in Bahrain marry only one wife. If a marriage fails to work, the Koran says that Muslims are allowed to divorce but only as a last resort. First the couple must try to resolve their problems. If this does not work, each spouse must choose a friend or relative for counseling. If this too fails, they must wait for four months before they can end their marriage.

❁ DEATH

Bahrain observes the same funeral rites as Muslim countries throughout the world. Since death is unpredictable, Muslims are exhorted always to be prepared for the inevitable. The dying person is encouraged to declare his or her faith.

Muslims are always buried, never cremated. Muslims are taught to treat the dead body with gentleness and respect. The body is ritually washed and draped before burial, which takes place soon after death. After the person dies, the face is turned toward Mecca, the arms and legs are straightened, and the mouth and eyes closed. Then the body is covered with a sheet. The dead person's friends and acquaintances gather to offer prayers for the deceased.

For the burial the wrapped body is laid directly at the bottom of the grave, on its right side; once again its face must be turned toward Mecca. The grave is sealed and then covered with dust. Although graves are dug by gravediggers, the task of filling them with earth is carried out by the relatives. Attendants at funerals cover their heads with a cap or hat as a mark of respect.

The burial customs prevalent in ancient Bahrain can be gleaned from the awe-inspiring burial mounds at Aali village. This is probably the largest prehistoric cemetery in the world. The site has an estimated 170,000 burial mounds dating back to between 3000 B.C.E. and 600 C.E. Each mound covers a stone-built chamber, which forms the grave. These burial mounds are found all over the countryside.

Further Reading

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~ Bangladesh ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Southern Asia, bordering the Bay of Bengal, between Burma and India
Size	55,599 sq. mi.
Capital City	Dhaka
Flag Description	The flag of Bangladesh is green with a large red disk slightly to the hoist side of center; the red Sun of freedom represents the blood shed to achieve independence; the green field symbolizes the lush countryside and is, secondarily, the traditional color of Islam.
Independence	March 26, 1971 (from West Pakistan)
Population	144,319,628 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary democracy; independent sovereign state within the British Commonwealth
Nationality	Bangladeshi
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Bengali (98%)
Major Language(s)	Bangla (Bengali); English
Major Religion(s)	Muslim (83%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; International Mother Tongue Day, February 21; Birthday of Bangabandhu, March 17; Independence Day and National Day, March 26; Bengali Solar New Year, mid-April; Labor Day, May 1; Victory Day, December 16

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Bangladesh has a rich historical and cultural past. The modern country was created from part of the former British colony of India and so shares a common regional history with both India and Pakistan. Over the centuries, the region witnessed the influx of many ethnic groups: Arab, Dravidian, European, Indo-Aryan, Mongol (Mughal), Persian, and Turkish. Around 1200 C.E. Sufi Muslim invaders subjugated Hindu and Buddhist royal dynasties, and converted most of the local population to Islam. Since then, Islam has played a pivotal role in the region's history and politics.

Portuguese traders and Christian missionaries reached Bengal in the latter part of the 15th century. They were followed by the Dutch, the French, and the British East India Companies during the 18th and 19th centuries. In 1859 the British Crown took control from the British East India Com-

pany, extending the British Empire in this part of the world from Bengal in the east to the Indus River in the west.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries both Muslim and Hindu leaders began to press for a greater degree of independence. Prominent in the independence movement was the Indian National Congress, created in 1885 by English-speaking intellectuals. Growing concern about Hindu domination of the movement, however, led Muslim leaders to form the All India Muslim League in 1906.

The idea of a separate Muslim state emerged in the 1930s. On March 23, 1940, Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876–1948), leader of the Muslim League, publicly endorsed the Pakistan Resolution that called for the creation of an independent state in regions where Muslims were a majority.

In June 1947 the United Kingdom decided to grant full dominion status to the two states created out of colonial India—India and Pakistan. The latter was split into two sections separated by approximately 1,000 miles of Indian territory. West Pakistan comprised four provinces; East Pakistan was formed as

a single province. Each province had a legislature. The capital of Pakistan was located at Karachi. Islamabad became the capital in 1967.

Political instability and economic difficulties marked the next three decades of Pakistan's history. A significant amount of national revenues went toward developing West Pakistan at the expense of the East. Frictions between West and East Pakistan culminated in a 1971 army crackdown against the East Pakistan dissident movement led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1921–75), leader of the Awami League (AL) Party, who had won the previous election on a platform of greater autonomy for the eastern province. What followed was one of the worst genocides in living memory and a mass exodus of millions of refugees into India. The death toll was estimated to be as high as two million. The disaster was compounded by torrential rains and destructive flooding. This human rights crisis was brought to worldwide attention by the famous Bangladesh concerts in New York in June 1971 (the first such benefit concert) and an album produced by George Harrison (1943–2001) and Ravi Shankar (b. 1920).

India and Pakistan went to war in December 1971, with Bangla Muktiyodhas ("Freedom Fighters") fighting side by side with the Indian army. The combined forces soon overwhelmed the Pakistani army in the eastern sector and ended the genocide. Pakistan's forces surrendered on December 16, 1971. What had been West Pakistan was now called Pakistan; East Pakistan became Bangladesh. The constitution of the new nation created a strong prime minister, an independent judiciary, and a unicameral legislature on a modified British model. The highly popular Mujibur Rahman assumed the office of prime minister.

In 1974 Mujibur Rahman proclaimed a state of emergency and amended the constitution to limit the powers of the legislative and judicial branches. The new constitution established an executive presidency, and instituted a one-party system. Rahman held the office of president until August 1975, when he was assassinated by mid-level army officers. This began a new phase of violence for Bangladesh, marked by successive military coups and assassinations.

In September 1991 the electorate approved another set of changes to the constitution, formally re-creating a parliamentary system, and returning governing power to the office of the prime minister, as in the original.

In an unusual move for a Muslim state, Bangladesh has twice had a woman at the helm: Begum Khaleda Zia (b. 1945), the widow of the assassinated former president Ziaur Rahman (1936–81); and Sheikh Hasina Wazed (b. 1947), the daughter of Mujibur Rahman.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Bangladesh, located on the northern coast of the Bay of Bengal, is surrounded by India, with a small common border with Myanmar in the southeast.

The country is low-lying riverine land traversed by the many branches and tributaries of the Ganges and Brahmaputra Rivers. Tropical monsoons, frequent floods, and cyclones inflict heavy damage in the delta region. Bangladesh has a tropical climate, with a hot and rainy summer and a pronounced dry season in the cooler months. January is the coolest month of the year, with temperatures averaging near 79°F, and April, the warmest month, with temperatures ranging between 91° and 97°F. The climate is one of the wettest in the world; most places receive more than 60 inches of rain a year, and areas near the hills receive 200 inches. Most rain falls during the monsoon season (June–September), and little during the dry season (November–February). During the rainy season the Ganges River turns into "cyclone alley."

❁ ECONOMY

Since its creation, Bangladesh has suffered natural calamities and political upheavals. Development of the labor force, nutrition, and the building of infrastructure for sufficient health care and population control continue to be the major concerns of the country.

One of the world's most densely populated nations, since the 1980s Bangladesh has been caught in the vicious cycle of population growth and poverty. Although the rate of growth declined marginally in the early 21st century, the ever-increasing population continues to be a tremendous burden on the nation. On the positive side, the situation provides an abundant and cheap labor force that is easily trainable and convertible into a semi-skilled and skilled workforce, making it a haven for every sector of the computer technology industry, from distributors, dealers, and resellers of computer and allied products, to vendors of locally assembled computers, software developers and exporters, and Internet service providers (ISPs).

However, Bangladesh is still primarily an agricultural country, with some 60 percent of the population engaged in farming. Jute and tea are principal sources of foreign exchange. Bangladesh's government offers incentives to encourage the use of local fabrics in the export-oriented garment industries. Toward this end, the import of capital machinery and cotton are duty-free.

Major impediments to growth include frequent cyclones and floods, inefficient state-owned enterprises, inadequate port facilities, a rapidly growing labor force that cannot be absorbed by agriculture, delays in exploiting energy resources (natural gas), insufficient power supplies, and slow implementation of economic reforms. Progress on these issues is stalled in many instances by political infighting and corruption at all levels of government. Opposition from the bureaucracy, public sector unions, and other vested interest groups are other obstacles to development.

Fun Fact

There are more than 600,000 rickshaws on the streets of Dhaka.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Bangladesh is famous for the remarkable ethnic and cultural homogeneity of its population. More than 98 percent of its people are Bengalis; the rest are Biharis, or non-Bengali Muslims, and indigenous tribes. The majority of Bangladeshis are Muslim (83 percent). The other important minority religious groups are Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians.

Bangladeshis are particularly proud of their valuable cultural and linguistic heritage, because their independent nation is the result of a powerful movement to uphold and preserve their language and culture. Bangladeshis identify closely with Bangla, their national language. In English the word *Bengali* refers to both the language, called Bangla, and the people who speak it.

In rural Bangladesh the basic social unit in a village is the family (*paribar* or *gushti*), generally consisting of a patrilineal extended household (*chula*) living in a homestead (*bari*). Above the *bari* level, patrilineal ties are linked into sequentially larger groups based on real, fictional, or assumed relationships. The significant unit larger than kinship is the voluntary religious and mutual benefit association known as the society (*samaj* or *millat*). An informal council of *samaj* elders (*matabdars* or *sardars*) settles village disputes. Factional competition between the *matabdars* is a major dynamic of social and political interaction.

Groups of homes in a village, usually thatched bamboo huts, are called *paras*, and each *para* has its own name. Several *paras* constitute a *mauza*, the basic revenue and census survey unit. Toward the end of the 20th century, a few brick structures had begun to appear.

Traditionally farming was one of the most desirable occupations, but in the 1980s parents began to encourage their children to leave the increasingly overcrowded villages to find more secure employ-

ment in the towns. Traditional sources of prestige, such as landholding, distinguished lineage, and religious piety were being replaced by modern education, higher income, and steadier work. But these changes could not prevent rural poverty from increasing, nor did they improve the quality of life for those who migrated to the towns and cities. The women go to work in the garment industry in Dhaka; approximately 800,000 people work in the 4,000 factories, 75 percent of them women. The men rent rickshaws, ruining their legs transporting people through the clogged streets.

In the 1970s the population of Dhaka, the capital, was estimated to be about one million. During the 1980s an administrative decentralization program encouraged the growth of urban areas. Most of the urban population—government functionaries, merchants, and other business personnel—congregated in shabby structures with poor sanitation and few modern amenities. By the time the 21st century began the population of Dhaka was estimated to be anywhere from six million to 15 million; the city is so crowded that accurate numbers are impossible to get. What is beyond question is the problem of solid-waste disposal. Somewhere between 3,000 and 3,500 tons of solid waste are produced every day in Dhaka, but only 50 percent of it is removed; the remaining half lies along the roads, in open drains and low-lying areas, contributing to the deteriorating quality of Dhaka's environment.

By the end of the 20th century, even in relatively sophisticated urban populations, the segregation of the sexes persisted in Bangladesh. Although urban women enjoyed more physical freedom and could pursue professional careers, they still moved in a different social world from that of men. Moreover 82 percent of Bangladeshi women still lived in rural areas, not in cities. Thus the practice of *pardab* (the traditional seclusion of women) had become a matter of degree that varied widely according to social milieu.

Traditional, full *pardab* requires the complete seclusion of women from the time they reach puberty. Within the home women live in private quarters that only male relatives or servants are permitted to enter. Outside the home, a woman in *pardab* wears a veil or an enveloping, concealing outer garment. Observing the strictures of full *pardab* requires a devotion to and the financial means to seclude women and forgo their labor in the fields. For most rural families the importance of women's labor makes full seclusion impossible, although the idea remains. In some areas, for example, women go about unveiled within the confines of the *para*, or village, but wear the veil or outer garment when they venture farther from the community.

Although Hindu society is formally stratified into caste categories, caste has not figured as prominently in the Bangladeshi Hindu community as it has in the Hindu-dominated Indian state of West Bengal. About 75 percent of the Hindus in Bangladesh

Chakmas

Chakmas form the largest ethnic group in Bangladesh and are concentrated in the central and northern parts of the Chittagong hill tracts where they live among several other ethnic groups. According to the 1991 population census, there were about 253,000 Chakmas. More than 90 percent of them are concentrated in the Rangamati and Khagrachhari districts. About 100,000 Chakmas also live in India, mainly in Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, and Tripura. Small groups have settled in other countries as well. The vast majority of Chakmas are Buddhists, and they form the largest Buddhist population in Bangladesh. Integrated with their Buddhist practice are older religious elements, such as worship of the powers of nature.

belong to the lower castes, notably *namasudras* (“lesser cultivators”), while the remaining 25 percent belong primarily to untouchable groups. Even though some Hindus of higher castes belong to the professional class, there is no Hindu upper class. However as Hindus have increasingly enjoyed professional mobility, the castes have begun to interact in wider political and socioeconomic arenas, with the result that there has been some erosion of caste-consciousness. Bangladeshi Hindus have been able to assimilate into the Bengali mainstream culture without losing their religious and cultural distinctiveness.

In Bangladesh the function of marriage is to ensure the continuity of families rather than to provide companionship for individuals, and a new bride’s relationship with her mother-in-law is probably more important to her well-being than her (frequently) impersonal relationship with her husband. The process of choosing a spouse reflects this function and depends entirely on one’s social status. Typically parents choose spouses for their children, although men often have some say in the matter. In middle-class urban families men negotiate their own marriages. Only in the most elite class does a woman participate in her own marriage arrangements. Marriage generally is made between families of similar social standing, although a woman might properly marry a man of somewhat higher status. Financial standing has come to outweigh family background. Often someone with a good job in a Middle Eastern country is preferred to an individual of impeccable lineage.

❁ CUISINE

Bangladesh is renowned for its delicious food. Cooking is considered an art, and each district has its own way of preparing even the simplest dishes. Boiled plain rice is the staple diet of the Bangladeshi. Mustard and soybean oils are used for cooking, and fish is a part of all meals. *Hilsa*, the most popular fish, is available mainly during the rainy season. The *hilsa* caught from the river Padma is world famous and exported to countries such as the United Kingdom and United States, where there are large numbers of Bengali expatriates. The many types of freshwater fish (from rivers and lakes) are consumed in large quantities.

In an average Bangladeshi home, the staple meal consists of plain boiled rice served with an assortment of fried vegetables. This forms the first course and is followed by rice and soupy lentils. The third course is rice eaten along with fish or mutton curry. Occasionally chicken curry is prepared. In addition to fish, mutton, and chicken, beef is also consumed (by Muslims) in the form of spicy curries. Cooking methods used throughout the West, such as roasting, smoking, and baking, are not integral to Bangladeshi culinary arts and are not often used. The meal is generally finished with sweetmeats, usually prepared at home. Bengali sweets, primarily based on milk products such as yogurt and cottage cheese (*paneer*), are immensely popular and well known all over the sub-

continent, including *misti doi* (sweet yogurt), *sandesh* (a sweet cottage cheese, sugar, and cardamom), *rashogolla* (sweet creamy balls), and *rosmalai* (cheese patties), especially that made in the Comilla district, to name but a few. The first step in most of the recipes for these sweets is making the cottage cheese from lemon juice added to boiled milk.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR’S EVE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 1

Bangladesh was carved out of India, which was under British rule for nearly two centuries. Not surprisingly, elements of British culture remain. One such influence is the celebration of the solar New Year (according to the Gregorian calendar) rather than the Islamic lunar New Year. For Bangladesh’s Christian population, New Year’s assumes great significance because it underscores a Western, rather than Eastern, outlook. In Bangladesh New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day are public holidays, and all educational, commercial, and government establishments remain closed. Both days are largely spent in leisure and pursuing recreational activities.

❁ INTERNATIONAL MOTHER TONGUE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 21

International Mother Tongue Day, also known as Martyrs’ Day or Shaheed Dibas, is meant to pay tribute to the lives that were sacrificed in the fight to make Bangla (Bengali) one of the national languages when Bangladesh was part of Pakistan. The West Pakistani authorities tried to impose Urdu as the national language, a move strongly resented by Bengalis. On February 21, 1952, police shot at a procession of Bengali activists and killed four of them. These four were later proclaimed martyrs of the Bengali cause. This nascent Bengali nationalism ultimately gave birth to the free nation of Bangladesh.

❁ BIRTHDAY OF BANGABANDHU

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 17

Born on March 17, 1921, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was an ardent freedom fighter and the founding father of Bangladesh. As the first president of the fledgling nation Rahman was also the architect of its development and progress. He was, and still is, hailed as Bangabandhu, or “Friend of Bengal.”

Every year early in the morning of this day, the



Bangladeshi girls dance during the Victory Day parade in Dhaka on December 16. Bangladesh holds rallies, concerts, and a display of military equipment to mark its triumph in the independence war against Pakistan in 1971. (AP Photo/Zia Islam)

Awami League (a national party founded by Mujibur Rahman) raises the national and party flags atop party offices across the country. It also holds a *milad mahfil* (memorial function), at which people lay wreaths at the grave (*mazaar*) of Bangabandhu.

Rahman's daughter Sheikh Hasina, who has been president of the Awami League since 1981, leads other party officials in offering floral tributes to the portrait of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib at the Bangabandhu Museum, in Dhanmondi (the residence of Bangabandhu during his lifetime).

Bangabandhu Shishu Kishore Mela, a children's welfare organization, celebrates this day as Children's Day. Other sociocultural and youth organizations such as the Bangabandhu Sanskritik Tarun League, the Sonar Bangla Jubo Parishad, and the Bangabandhu Lalitkala Academy hold youth-oriented activities to mark the day.

Fun Fact

Akbar the Great created the Bengali calendar to make it easier to collect rents

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY AND NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 26

The independence of Bangladesh was formally declared on March 26, 1971, after a nine-month-long war of independence waged against Pakistan.

This important event is celebrated with processions, speeches by leading public figures, and a host of musical programs.

❁ BENGALI SOLAR NEW YEAR

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Mid-April

The Bengali calendar is based on ancient subcontinent calendars that were codified and standardized by the Mughal emperor Akbar the Great (1542–1605) about 400 years ago. This is a solar calendar comprising six seasons organized around the region's agricultural cycle.

The Bengali New Year celebration, or Naba Barsha Poila Boishak, is not confined to any one religious community but is universal and secular in nature. The first day of the Bengali solar calendar marks the onset of the summer season. It symbolizes the renewal of hope and a fresh lease on life. Hindus and Muslims spend this day together in harmony (though there is a separate Islamic calendar) through social interactions, feasting, and attending concerts. Events are held throughout the country.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

Bangladesh, with its developing economy, honors the contributions of its workers and laborers to socioeconomic progress on this day, which is also called May Day. May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day to commemorate the important role played by workers in national economies. The May 1 observance of Labor Day was established by the international socialist movement in 1889. The date was set to coincide with a general strike called by the American Federation of Labor in the United States to win an eight-hour workday. In different parts of Bangladesh, including the capital city of Dhaka, workers conduct processions and rallies, as well promote workers' rights. Trade union leaders deliver inspiring speeches, and there are also musical and cultural programs.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ VICTORY DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 16

This is among the most important official holidays in Bangladesh. On this day in 1971, after a prolonged nine-month war, the occupying armed forces of Pakistan formally surrendered to the allied forces of Bangladesh and India. The day is observed with great solemnity and a spirit of patriotism. It begins with a 21-gun salute. In the capital city of Dhaka, there is a ceremonial military parade in which all uniformed services are represented. Large crowds of people gather at the National Parade Square to watch this parade. Floral wreaths are laid at the Jatiya Smriti Soudha (National Memorial Monument) at Savar, near Dhaka, in memory of those who sacrificed their lives to liberate the country.

Religious Holidays

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al Hijjah, the 12th or pilgrimage month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, or Bakr-Eid, honors the Old Testament patriarch Ibrahim's (Abraham's) unflinching willingness to sacrifice his young son because God commanded him to do so. In Bangladesh on this day, each family that can afford to is expected to sacrifice a sheep, goat, ram, or steer in the name of Allah. The meat is then shared with friends, family, and distributed among the poor. Prior to this festival, devout Muslims may, if they so desire, undertake hajj—a pilgrimage to Mecca—the center of the Islamic faith.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

❁ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

The Islamic calendar is based on the cycles of the Moon. Thus it has only 354 days. Muharram is the first month of the Islamic calendar. Compared to the Western (solar) calendar, the Islamic (lunar) year is 11 days shorter every year. Because of this, the corresponding Western date for the Islamic New Year varies from year to year. The beginning of the New Year is usually quiet, unlike New Year's celebrations associated with other calendars. Muslims gather in mosques for special prayers and readings. A major part of the holiday in Bangladesh is the recounting of the Hegira—Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina—and the devout reflect on the passage of time and mortality.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

❁ MOULOU

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the fifth month of the Islamic calendar

Mouloud, also known as Maulid or Mawlid al-Nabi, is celebrated to mark the birthday of Muhammad, who was born in 570. It is celebrated on the 12th day of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic Calendar. In Bangladesh Muslims focus on the life and teachings of Muhammad. They sing songs, say special prayers, and also reflect on how the prophet forgave even his worst enemies. This is also the day when alms are given to the poor, because Muhammad urged his followers not to make a show of his birthday. In fact following this directive, many Muslims do not celebrate Mouloud at all.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOU

❁ SHAB-E-BARAT

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Fifteenth of Shaban, the eighth month of the Islamic calendar

Shab-e-Barat is a Persian compound that means “the night of commission or assignment,” and is known in Arabic as *Lailatul baraat*, “the night of emancipation.” In Bangladesh Shab-e-Barat is observed as the night of good fortune or special mercies. Muslims believe that a man's fate for the coming year is determined on this night. If someone prays to Allah throughout the night and asks for his forgiveness, he can expect that all his sins will be forgiven.

In Bangladesh candles or strings of decorative lights illuminate houses and streets for the occasion, and children light firecrackers. People prepare breads and various kinds of sweetmeats and distribute them to neighbors and the poor. Devout Muslims go to mosques for prayer and meditation even though there is no mention of it in the Koran or Muhammad's teachings. (Some argue that it is described as a meritorious observance in the Hadith.) Many Muslims fast during the day and perform *nafal namaz* (optional prayers) at night.

See also Volume III: ISLAM

❁ SHAB-E-QADR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twenty-seventh of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar

Shab-e-Qadr in Persian means “the night of power” or “the night of respect”; it is a blessed night of the year for Muslims and is also called *Lailatul-Qadr*. According to the Koran if a believer prays throughout this night, all his sins are forgiven. Muslims believe that during this night five verses of al-Alaq, the first *surah* (chapter) of the Koran were revealed to Muhammad.

Shab-e-Qadr falls in the month of Ramadan and is observed with great religious fervor in Bangladesh. At the time of the Isha prayer, men assemble at mosques, and many stay to pray until midnight. (Isha is the nighttime prayer said by observant Muslims when the Sun has completely set.) Women pray at home. The day following Shab-e-Qadr is an official holiday in Bangladesh. To mark the occasion, radio and television stations broadcast special programs, and the newspapers and periodicals publish special features relating to the holiday.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

This day marks the celebration at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, the holiest month of the

Isha Prayers

During Ramadan, just after breaking the fast and before dinner, Muslims offer the fourth of the five daily prayers, which is called the Maghrib prayer. After dinner, they go to their mosques to offer the Isha prayer, the last of the five daily prayers. The day ends with a special voluntary prayer, the Taraweeh, offered by the congregation while reciting the Koran.

The time for Isha prayer lasts from when the red afterglow disappears from the sky after sunset until halfway through the night. The Isha prayer can be delayed as long as doing so does not cause any hardship to the members of the congregation.



Islamic calendar. It was during this month that Muhammad fasted for 40 days, after which the angel Jibril (Gabriel) revealed the Koran to him. Bangladeshis mark this day by first participating in a morning prayer with other Muslims, generally in mosques and *idgahs* (community prayer grounds). This is followed by social visits, the exchange of greetings and gifts, and partaking of delicacies, chiefly *sewiyan*, a vermicelli pudding especially prepared on this occasion.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

Regional Holidays

NABANNO

Observed in: All parts of Bangladesh

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October–November

The Nabanno is the autumn festival of the new rice harvest. There is an air of bounty and prosperity surrounding the harvest of this all-important staple of Bangladeshi cuisine. In homes, the women prepare a range of delicacies in which the basic ingredient is freshly reaped rice.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

LALON UTSAB

Observed in: Kushtia District

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October

The Kushtia district of Bangladesh is the venue for this three-day cultural festival that takes place in October, on the anniversary of the death of Fakir Lalon Shah (1774–1890). This great composer, performer, and singer combined in his work the traditions of the Bauls (Hindu wandering mendicant singers) and the Sufis (Muslim mystics, often singer-

poets). Lalon sang of peace and universal friendship, raising his voice against religious intolerance, the caste system, and other social inequities. On this occasion the Lalon Academy of Bangladesh organizes seminars, discussions, and musical performances on the life and works of this great mystic whose popularity is still growing, even after 200 years. Many renowned Bangladeshi singers perform songs and lyrics made famous by the poet.

CHIYACHOT

Observed in: Hilly areas of Bangladesh

Observed by: Mros tribes

Observed on: December–January

This festival is now the only carrier of the fading cultural heritage of one of the world's most ancient communities, Mros, people who inhabit the hilly tracts of Bandarban, in the southeastern part of Bangladesh. Chiyachot, the winter festival celebrated with the slaughter of cows and dancing, is a religious occasion for the Mros. The Mros believe that God created different religions for different societies, and the responsibility for bringing their religion to them was given to a cow. According to legend the cow, exhausted and hungry from a long journey, ate their holy book. For eating the holy book, the cow had to be severely punished; hence, the tradition of slaughtering cows.

Rites of Passage

BIRTH

The birth of a new child, especially a boy, is a time of great rejoicing in the Muslim community, because a child is considered a token of Allah's mercy. This attitude is very much alive in Bangladesh. Despite the burgeoning population, children are often referred to as wealth. After the birth babies are washed immediately to remove all impurities. The first sound that a baby hears has to be its father (or a male relative) whispering the call to prayer or *adhan* into the right ear and then the left. This helps the baby to understand its duty to Allah from the very start of its life.

Traditionally Bengalis welcome the newborn by placing a few drops of honey on its tongue and in each ear. The sweetness of the honey welcomes the infant to the sweetness of a good life. In addition, it is believed that the baby will grow up hearing sweet words and be a soft- and sweet-spoken person.

Between three and seven days after birth (this ritual can also be observed in multiples of seven—14, 21, or 28) the baby's head is shaved to remove the birth hair and encourage the growth of a thick head of hair. This ceremony is called the *aqiqah*, and it symbolizes the removal of misfortunes from the child, so that it can begin a good and independent

life. In olden days silver equal to the weight of the discarded hair was distributed among the poor. Nowadays it is more common to sacrifice an animal (two for a boy, one for a girl) and share the meat with relatives and neighbors as a celebration of the birth.

Babies also receive their proper names on this day. The choice of name is taken very seriously, since it is thought to influence the future character and behavior of the child. The local imam (Muslim priest) may be consulted. In addition to the Muslim (Arabic) name, it is common to give a Bengali name to the child, too. Both names are often used in conjunction. The naming ceremony is important and has great religious significance.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Muslim boys generally experience a major change in status—circumcision (*khitān*)—when they have recited the entire Koran through once. In Bangladesh this tradition is followed, and the boy undergoes the operation between 10 and 12 years of age. This is a puberty rite, separating the boy from childhood and granting him new status as a man. The ceremony is accompanied by a great deal of festivity, music, special foods, and many guests. God is praised loudly during the actual ritual circumcision, partly, some say, to drown out the boy's cries.

Circumcision is not mentioned in the Koran, but Muslims everywhere regard it as essential, and the Hadith records it as a practice enjoined by all past prophets. Significantly it is also known by a euphemism: *tabara*, which means "purification."

❁ MARRIAGE

Most Bangladeshis are married according to traditional Muslim wedding practices arranged by the couples' families. Muslim law holds that both the bride and the bridegroom are free to refuse the spouse that their parents have chosen for them during the ceremony itself when the *kazi* (Muslim marriage registrar) asks for their consent.

In most urban areas it is more common for the bride and the bridegroom to choose their own life partners. Before the wedding takes place, the bride's and the bridegroom's families decide on a sum of money or quantity of household goods that the groom's family must give to the bride. This sum of money is called a *mehe*, a sort of insurance for the bride, just in case the marriage fails. Weddings usually take place in the bride's home and are performed by an imam.

The bride and the bridegroom sit in separate rooms during the marriage ceremony. Two guests—one from the bride's family and one from the groom's family—witness the bride's consent for marriage and report this to the imam. The ceremony begins with the imam reciting passages from the Koran. The imam then speaks about the duties

of marriage and asks the bridegroom if he agrees to the marriage. Once the bridegroom has agreed to the marriage, the bride, the bridegroom, and the two witnesses sign a marriage contract that confirms their agreement.

The Koran says that a man may marry up to four wives but only if he can treat them all equally. However, most Muslim men in Bangladesh marry only one wife. If a marriage does not work out, the Koran says that Muslims are allowed to get divorced but only as a last resort. First the couple must try to resolve their problems themselves. If this does not work, each spouse must choose a friend or relative for counseling. If this too fails, they must wait for four months before they end their marriage. In Bangladesh, the divorce rate is under 10 percent.

❁ DEATH

Bangladeshi Muslims adhere strictly to the Islamic practices pertaining to death and funerals. Since death is unpredictable and can happen at any time, Muslims are exhorted to be always prepared for the inevitable. However, it is improper for a person to wish for death. The dying person is encouraged to declare his or her faith. Cremation and other modes of disposal are strictly forbidden by Islam. The body must be ritually washed and draped before burial, which should be as soon as possible after death. The dead body is treated with gentleness and respect. A baby dying at or before birth must be given a name.

Religious laws do not allow Muslim women to attend burials. Mourners gather and the body is carried on a bier by at least four men to the burial ground. Attendees at funerals cover their heads with a cap as a mark of respect. A prayer is recited for the deceased just before the burial. Those attending the funeral form a double line facing each other, and the bier is passed on the shoulders along this line toward the grave. In the case of a child the bier is carried in the arms of a relative. The wrapped body is laid directly at the bottom of the grave, on its right side with its face turned toward Mecca. The grave is sealed and then covered with earth. Although graves are dug by gravediggers, the task of filling them with earth is carried out by the relatives. The grave is marked by creating a raised mound of earth. A stone may be used to mark its location, but no writings are allowed. Buildings or other structures are not allowed on top of the grave.

After the funeral a wake is held for both men and women, usually on the same day, in the form of a meal for all those attending the funeral.

Further Reading

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Barbados

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	An island in the North Atlantic Ocean, northeast of Venezuela
Size	166 sq. mi.
Capital City	Bridgetown
Flag Description	The flag of Barbados has three equal vertical bands of blue (hoist side), gold, and blue, with the head of a black trident centered on the gold band; the trident head represents independence and a break with the past (the colonial coat of arms contained a complete trident).
Independence	November 30, 1966 (from United Kingdom)
Population	279,254 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary democracy; an independent sovereign state within the British Commonwealth
Nationality	Barbadian or (colloquial) Bajan
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Black (90%)
Major Language(s)	English
Major Religion(s)	Protestant (67%)
National Holiday(s)	Errol Barrow Day, January 21; National Heroes Day, April 28; Emancipation Day, August 1; Independence Day, November 30

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Several Amerindian tribes originally inhabited the island of Barbados. An archaeological site at Port St. Charles has produced fragments of tools made of shells, utensils, refuse, and burial sites left behind by Amerindians from Venezuela. The artifacts indicate that they arrived around 1623 B.C.E. in long dugout canoes. These early people were replaced by another group thought to have been Arawaks, a short people with olive skin. The chiefs of the Arawaks (*caiques*) and other important members of the group wore nose plugs and/or rings made of copper and gold alloys. They were farmers and grew cotton, cassava (manioc), peanuts, guavas, corn, and papayas (or papaws). The cotton was used to make hammocks and arm-bands, while the cassava was ground and used in cooking. Seafood was also an important ingredient in their diet.

In 1200 C.E. the Caribs, said to have been warlike and

fiercer than the Arawaks, arrived and replaced them. They were very skilled in the use of bows and arrows and manufactured a strong poison that they used to paralyze their prey. Some histories claim that the Caribs were cannibals who barbecued their enemies and washed them down with cassava beer, but this may be misunderstanding or hyperbole.

The Portuguese visited Barbados on their way to Brazil, and in 1536 Pedro a Campos named the island Os Barbados (“the bearded ones”), allegedly because the aerial roots of the fig trees growing on the island resembled beards. (Although it is widely reported that Campos named the island *los* Barbados, *los* is not the definite article in Portuguese; it would have to have been *os*.)

Although the Spanish found the island in 1492 and took the island from the Caribs, they eventually moved on to more lucrative Caribbean islands. Not, however, before eradicating the Caribs with the superior weapons of slavery and fatal diseases. An English captain John Powell claimed the now uninhabited island for England in 1625, and his brother Captain

Henry Powell arrived two years later with 80 settlers and 10 slaves. From the arrival of the first British settlers between 1627 and 1628 until its independence in 1966, Barbados remained under uninterrupted British control.

The fairly prosperous colony, which made its wealth in sugar production, using the labor of enslaved Africans, was drastically affected by the 18th-century war between France and England and also by the American Revolution. Slavery was abolished in 1834. A British government proposal to form a confederation of Barbados and the Windward Islands in 1876 was met with stiff opposition, leading to violence and bloodshed. In the following decades, the African and mixed-race majority came to political power, eventually outnumbering the white landholders in the legislature.

Yet another serious disturbance, arising from poor economic conditions, erupted in 1937, and a British Royal Commission was sent to the island. Social and political reforms were gradually introduced and, in 1950, universal adult suffrage was achieved. Barbados joined the West Indies Federation formed between 1958 and 1962, which also included Trinidad and Tobago.

The country achieved complete internal self-government in 1961, and Barbados became an independent state in the British Commonwealth of Nations on November 30, 1966. The country is a member of the United Nations (UN) and of the Organization of American States (OAS). In 1973 Barbados helped to form the Community and Common Market (CARICOM), which promotes social and political cooperation and economic integration.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Less than one million years old Barbados is the easternmost island in the Caribbean island chain. A volcanic eruption, in addition to the collision between the Atlantic and Caribbean crustal plates, created it. Later coral began to form, eventually accumulating to around 300 feet in depth. This pear-shaped island is geologically unique, because it is actually two land masses that have merged over the years. Densely populated, with nearly 280,000 people inhabiting an area of only 166 square miles, it is one of the few coral-capped islands in the region. Although it is relatively flat compared to its volcanic neighbors, its mixture of bustling towns and gentle, laid-back countryside surroundings amply compensate for it. The average annual temperature is about 80°F.

❁ ECONOMY

Most of Barbados's economy is based on manufacturing, tourism, and agriculture. While many people farm or work on sugar plantations, increasing numbers work in tourism-related businesses. The Barba-

dian economy is becoming increasingly dependent on tourism as its chief industry.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Since Barbados remained under British rule from 1627 to 1966, there is a strong British cultural undercurrent that often combines with the more colorful African influences. The national sport of Barbados is, not surprisingly, cricket, and Barbados boasts more world-class cricket players per capita than any other country. Barbados native Garfield Sobers (b. 1936), widely considered one of cricket's best players, was knighted in 1975, and Sir Frank Worrell (1924–67), another island cricket hero, is on the face of Barbados's five-dollar bill.

The merging of African and British cultures is most evident in the daily lives of the Barbadians. The family life, food, music, architecture, and street names are all fusions of British and African cultures. Theater, church choirs, and dances are important elements in religious and cultural festivals. The identity and political protest songs of the Mighty Gabby, such as "Massa Day Done," a local calypso artist, speak for emergent black pride throughout the Caribbean.

Barbadians are known as a quick-witted, fun-loving people, and their gift for innuendo (words and phrases with double meanings) is especially apparent in calypso music and indigenous literature.

❁ CUISINE

Flying fish with *cou-cou* (a mixture of cornmeal and okra with onions, peppers, and spicy sauce) is the national dish of Barbados. To make *cou-cou* (or *fungi*, pronounced "foon-gee"), cornmeal is brought to a stiff consistency and then is turned over onto a plate. The dish can also be made from breadfruit or green bananas. A variation of this dish is called "sweet fungi," because sugar is emphasized rather than salt.

Of the 17 species of sea urchin in the waters around Barbados, the white "sea egg," with its spiny shell and tasty golden roe, is considered a delicacy. The sea eggs are collected by divers from about 20 feet of water, mostly on the southern coast of the island. Once brought ashore, the shells are broken, the roe is removed, washed, and then repacked into whole shells. After being steamed, the shells are taken to market and sold by hawkers. Fried stuffed plantains (similar to bananas), garlic shrimp, and deep-fried fish cakes, spiced with hot peppers, are also popular.

Fun Fact

A popular sweet cake, called *conkie*, *dunkanoo*, or *dokunu*, is made by blending cornmeal, pumpkin, coconut, raisins, and spices. The mixture is then steamed in pieces of banana leaf before being eaten.

Immortalized

The widely circulated Barbadian \$50 note is popularly known as an “Errol.” Its use is a constant remembrance of the life and service to the nation of Errol Walton Barrow (1920–87).

Public/Legal Holidays

ERROL BARROW DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 21

This day memorializes the birth of Errol Walton Barrow (1920–87), the father of Barbados’s independence. Under his leadership the country moved toward independence in 1966. He was also a cofounder of the Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA) and the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM). On this day the political parties address the nation. Meetings and lectures are held across the country to discuss Barrow’s historic contributions to the nation. People participate in various cultural events, including dance performances and concerts that are organized in remembrance of Errol Barrow.

NATIONAL HEROES DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 28

National Heroes Day was originally meant to honor the men of Barbados who died in World War I, though it has been expanded to include national heroes in general. The main celebration takes place at the National Heroes Square (formerly known as Trafalgar Square). The country’s armed forces and civilians gather to pay homage to the heroes by observing two minutes of silence, and wreaths are laid on the soldiers’ graves. The celebrations culminate with a rally and presentation of awards to men and women who have distinguished themselves in various walks of life and, in the process, made important contributions to the nation. There are three broad categories of awards: the Order of Barbados, the Bravery Decoration, and the Services Medal of Honor.

Bussa

Many Barbadians refer to the Emancipation Statue as Bussa, who was a slave. It was he who inspired the revolt against slavery in Barbados in 1816.

EMANCIPATION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 1

August 1 is Emancipation Day (or Abolition of Slavery Day) throughout the West Indies, marking the day in 1834 when slavery was abolished in the British Caribbean colonies. Many Barbadians whose ancestors were slaves gather to pay tribute to them. There is an important procession to the Emancipation Statue at Bridgetown, a walk known as the “Freedom March.”

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 30

Independence Day commemorates Barbados’s independence from Britain on November 30, 1966. Government buildings and offices are decorated with blue- and gold-colored lights. Across the country, the day starts with the raising of the Barbadian national flag and singing of the national anthem. The celebrations feature an elaborate parade at the Garrison Savannah in Bridgetown. Sports competitions, fairs, community events, and religious services are also held.

Religious Holidays

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday (also known as Holy Friday, Great Friday, or Mourning Friday) is a religious holiday as well as a legal holiday in Barbados and is the day when Christians commemorate the Crucifixion of Jesus. It has been in the Christian liturgical calendar even longer than Easter has although no one is sure why it is called Good Friday. Some have suggested that the use of *good* in the name goes back to Old English and means “God’s” Friday, while others interpret *good* to mean something like “observed as holy.” This observance is also known as Black Friday and Sorrowful Friday, and in Eastern Orthodox Churches it is called Great Friday.

For many years Good Friday was primarily a Catholic observance, but many Protestant Churches now hold special services from noon until three in the afternoon on this day to symbolize Jesus’ last hours on the Cross. Many of the faithful fast on this day; when they eat, it is generally fish instead of meat. On the morning of Good Friday, a large cross, hung with a painted body of Jesus, or Corpus Christi, is displayed in the center of every church. During afternoon prayers, the painted effigy of Jesus is removed from the cross and taken to the altar in

the church sanctuary. A low table, decorated with flowers, represents the tomb of Jesus, and this is where the body is ceremonially buried.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

The culmination of Holy Week, Easter commemorates the Resurrection of Jesus after his Crucifixion. Christians attend a special Easter church service on this day and afterward enjoy a large midday meal with family.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT

✿ PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fifty days after Easter

This holiday celebrates the descent of the Holy Ghost on the disciples. This was considered a great miracle: Parted tongues of fire accompanied by a strong gust of wind descended on the apostles, marking them as fit preachers of the Gospel to all corners of the world.

Many scholars believe that many of the traditions and celebrations associated with this holiday were borrowed from pagan celebrations of spring in Western Europe. Homes are often decorated with green branches and flowers. In Christian tradition this is the 50th day after Easter and has been celebrated since the first century. (Pentecost in Greek means “fiftieth.”)

In many countries, including Barbados, this is a two-day holiday. Whitsunday and Whitmonday are the names used locally to celebrate the event. The name “Whitsun” originated in the third century C.E. and was derived from the white garments that were worn by those who were baptized during the vigil of this feast.

In Barbados people dress in traditional costumes and parade through the streets, led by young girls dressed in white. Local fairs and festivities are held across the country to mark this day. Also called Pentecost Monday, it is also a legal holiday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; PENTECOST

✿ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas (meaning “Mass of Christ”) is both a legal and a religious holiday in Barbados. Early in its history the Catholic Church fixed this date as the day of Jesus’ birth. On Christmas Day Barbadians attend church services early in the morning. It is traditional

to wear new clothes bought especially for Christmas. After the church services children receive gifts. Adults also exchange gifts with family members and friends. Playing traditional Christmas music and decorating homes with Christmas trees and garlands are also part of the season’s festivities.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

✿ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26

Boxing Day is a legal as well as a religious holiday in Barbados. Traditionally this was the day when cash or other useful gifts were given to employees and public servants who perform useful jobs throughout the year. In Victorian England gifts among equals were exchanged on or before Christmas Day, but the less fortunate received their gifts the following day. It was also the day that church alms boxes were opened, and their contents distributed to the poor. Following the church services and family reunions of Christmas Day, Barbadians like to enjoy the outdoors on Boxing Day. Going to the horse races is a favorite way of spending the day.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Fun Fact

A dish known as *jug jug*, made with corn and green peas, is a favorite Christmas dish in Barbados.

Regional Holidays

✿ HOLETOWN FESTIVAL

Observed in: St. James

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Mid-February

The first European settlers arrived at the site of the present-day Holetown, St. James, on February 17, 1627. This historic event is celebrated with a whole week of revelry. The festival officially commences at the Holetown Monument. The highlights of the festival are the free concerts on the beaches of St. James. During the day, steel bands perform, and shops offer Barbadian food and crafts. Lectures, exhibits, and seminars on the history of Barbados are also organized. Beauty contests, parades, sports competitions, and an antique car parade are part of the festivities.

✿ OISTINS FISH FESTIVAL

Observed in: Oistins

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Easter Weekend

Oistins is the main fishing town in Barbados. During the Oistins Fish Festival people enjoy boat racing, fish boning, and greased-pole competitions. A coast-

guard exhibition, food booths, arts and crafts shows, musical concerts, and road races are the major events of this festival. The day features much Caribbean music and plenty of typical traditional Barbadian food, ranging from fishcakes to fried fish, pudding, and souse (pickled pork).

❁ DE CONGALINE STREET FESTIVAL

Observed in: St. Lawrence Gap

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Late April

The De Congaline Street Festival is often referred to as the world's greatest street party. It features the world's longest human chain, composed of the thousands of people who gather in Bridgetown for the festival. The participants, wearing colorful Congaline T-shirts, line up one behind the other, placing their



Revelers dance to calypso music in St. Michael parish on August 4 during this Caribbean Island's final "Crop Over" event called Kadooment Day. The month-long annual event finishes with a massive street party where revelers with painted faces wear colorful costumes, beat African drums, and dance to local music. The phrase "Crop Over" refers to the end of the sugarcane harvest and dates back to when slaves worked the sugarcane fields in Barbados. (AP Photo/Chris Brandis)

hands on the waist of the person in front of them, and dance through the city to the pulsating music of the island's top *soca* artists. The chain marches to St. Lawrence Gap for late-night parties. Musicians accompany the chain on mobile music trucks. Every night during the two weeks of the festival a party atmosphere pervades the entire island, with performances by top Caribbean *soca* and reggae artists.

❁ KADOOMENT DAY

Observed in: Bridgetown

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First Monday in August

The month-long harvest festival of Barbados culminates with Kadooment Day, or Grand Kadooment, which is held on the first Monday in August each year and is a public holiday. *Kadooment* means "fun and good times." This festival features large groups of participants dressed in elaborate costumes that change from year to year. There is intense competition among the groups for the best costume award as they dance through the streets to loud calypso music. The procession moves from the National Stadium to the Spring Garden, where everyone comes together for a huge party.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

Due to long years of British rule most Barbadians belong to the Church of England (C.O.E.), so all religious ceremonies connected with the birth of a child are governed by C.O.E. traditions. A newborn baby is welcomed into Barbadian society by means of prayers and ceremonial blessings. At the christening of the child, friends and relatives come together for the church ceremony, which is followed by joyous parties. Generally the family name is passed from the father to the children. Sometimes, however, the family name is inherited from the mother, when she comes from a more prestigious and prosperous family than the father.

❁ MARRIAGE

A marriage in Barbados is an alliance between the two families involved. The bride and groom handle the wedding arrangements themselves. Everyone in the village lines the streets to see the bride and groom on their way to the church. If they do not look their best, they are publicly criticized.

The bride's father (and sometimes both parents) escorts the bride down the church aisle. The bridal gown and bridesmaids' dresses are handmade by local seamstresses. The seamstress usually carries the

bride's train as she walks down the aisle. After the ceremony the couple goes to the church office to sign the wedding register. Later there is a wedding feast, and family and friends enjoy food, drink, music, and dancing, often until the following morning. The highlight is the serving of the traditional wedding cake, called *black cake*.

❁ DEATH

Funerals encompass a range of customs, which are commonly tailored to the wishes of the deceased and his or her family. Services are meant to comfort the family and guests and to celebrate the deceased's life. The funeral usually takes place within three days

after the death. It is a common practice for the friends and relatives of the bereaved family to visit them and offer condolences. The funeral service usually includes readings from the Bible and singing hymns. A close friend or family member offers a eulogy for the deceased.

Further Reading

Hilary Beckles, *Great House Rules: Landless Emancipation and Workers' Protest in Barbados, 1838–1938* (Miami: Ian Randle Publishers, 2004); Sean Carrington, Henry Fraser, John Gilmore, and Addinton Forde, eds., *A–Z of Barbados Heritage* (Oxford: Macmillan Caribbean, 2003).

Belarus

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Eastern Europe, east of Poland
Size	80,155 sq. mi.
Capital City	Minsk
Flag Description	The Belarusian flag has a red horizontal band (top) and a green horizontal band one-half the width of the red band, and a white vertical stripe on the hoist side with Belarusian national ornamentation (traditional design) in red.
Independence	August 25, 1991 (from Soviet Union)
Population	10,300,483 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic in name; dictatorship
Nationality	Belarusian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	White (81%)
Major Language(s)	Belarusian (official); Russian
Major Religion(s)	Eastern Orthodox (80%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; International Women's Day, March 8; Constitution Day, March 15; Labor Day, May 1; Victory Day, May 9; Independence Day, August 25; October Revolution Day, November 7

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Belarus has a long history of wars, conquests, and invasions, including Lithuania's seizure of Belarus in the 14th century C.E. Through it all Belarusian culture and language have managed to survive. The Slavs settled in Belarus between the sixth and eighth centuries. In the ninth century Scandinavians, called Varangians by the Slavs, began to raid the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea and entered Eastern Europe under their leader Rurik (c.830–c.79). The Varangians, some of whom were known also as Rus or Rhos, made their way down the Dnieper River and established the great trade route from Kiev to Byzantium. By the 13th century the Belarusian region formed the core of the new Grand Duchy of Lithuania. By the 15th century the Grand Duchy included most of eastern Europe from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea.

Despite wars and invasions, the 14th through the 16th centuries are considered to be the "golden age" of Belarusian

culture. During that time Lithuania was one of the main cultural centers in eastern Europe; consequently Belarusian artists, painters, and architects were in demand all over Europe. In the beginning of the 16th century, the first books were printed in the Belarusian language. However in 1569, when Poland and Lithuania were united in a federal state called the Rzeczpospolita (the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth), Polish culture was introduced in the country and gained a strong foothold.

By the end of the 18th century Russia had encroached on the area, and the Rzeczpospolita and Belarus were absorbed by the Russian Empire. Russian gradually replaced the Belarusian language, and publishing anything in Belarusian was banned. As a result, Russian soon became the main language, and only the farmers in the countryside spoke Belarusian.

During World War I Russia and Germany waged a series of battles against each other, and a large part of Belarus was destroyed. Germany eventually took over Belarus, but in 1921 the Peace Treaty of Riga was signed, which gave western Belarus to Poland.

Later, when Germany and the Soviet Union invaded Poland in 1939, the Polish section of Belarus was returned to the Soviet Union. However in violation of the nonaggression pact that Germany and the Soviet Union had signed, Germany invaded Belarus. In retaliation the Soviet Union declared war on Germany. Soviet forces, with the help of native Belarusians, launched the Great Patriotic War. In 1944 the Red Army defeated the Germans and forced them out of Belarus. The joy of liberation felt by Belarusians on July 3, 1944, was short-lived as the Soviet Union reclaimed Belarus. Moreover in the process, Belarus was totally destroyed again. Minsk, the capital of the country, was ruined, and almost 25 percent of the country's population died. Over the next few years the country made efforts to revive its economy, but Russia once again began to dominate Belarusian culture by making Russian the official language of Belarus. Minsk soon became the industrial hub of the Soviet Union.

In April 1986 Belarus suffered a serious setback when an explosion occurred at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power station in northern Ukraine. This explosion released 100 times more radiation than the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Although the disaster happened in Ukraine, winds carried the nuclear detritus into Belarus. Nearly a fifth of the country was severely affected, with drastic increases in cancers, genetic mutations, and leukemia. Belarus is still reeling from the consequences of this tragedy.

Over the years, nationalist sentiment in the country had been growing steadily, and in July 1990, with the dissolution of the Soviet Republic, the Republic of Belarus adopted a Declaration of State Sovereignty. In August 1991, a declaration of complete national independence was issued. Alexander Lukashenko (b.1954) has headed the authoritarian government of Belarus as the president of the republic since 1994, and Sergey Sidorsky (b. 1954) has served as prime minister since 2003.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Belarus is a landlocked country and shares borders with the Russian Federation in the east, Poland in the west, Lithuania and Latvia on the north, and Ukraine in the south. The terrain is largely flat and marshy. The Belarusian ridge called Belaruskaya Grada runs across the country from the west-southwest to the east-northeast and consists of low hills. The highest point in the country is 1,198 feet in Gara Lysay. River valleys cut across this ridge and form a series of uplands and lowlands. Major rivers of the country are the Zakhodnyaya Dzvina and the Nyoman. Lake Narach, the country's largest lake, covers 263 square miles. Nearly one-third of the country is forests.

Belarus is characterized by a fairly moderate climate. Winters are cold, and the average temperature in January hovers around 25°F, while summers are warm and humid, with the average temperature in July reaching 71°F.

❁ ECONOMY

Almost half of the land of Belarus is arable, and state-run farms are the chief producers of agricultural products. Potatoes, flax, hemp, sugar beet, rye, oats, and wheat are the main agricultural products.

The leading industries of the country are machine building and metal processing. The most valuable mineral resource is peat, which is used for fuel and fertilizer. Belarus imports oil and natural gas from Russia. The major trading partners of Belarus are Russia, Germany, Ukraine, and Poland.

In the 21st century, the World Bank has been providing assistance to Belarus to help the disabled and to build schools and hospitals throughout the country.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Belarus has a rich cultural heritage, which is deeply rooted in religion. Its culture is a blend of Eastern Orthodox and other religious traditions. Almost 80 percent of Belarusians adhere to Eastern Orthodox beliefs, while the remaining 20 percent of the population are Protestants, Roman Catholics, Jews, or Muslims.

Jews were once an integral part of Belarusian culture, following their arrival in the lands once encompassed by the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 13th century. But some 800,000 Belarusian Jews died in the Holocaust during World War II, and only 70,000 remain in Belarus. The great modern artist Mark Chagall is perhaps the most prominent among those Belarusian Jews who have contributed significantly to Belarusian modern culture.

Fun Fact

Until the fall of 2004 a rubber hose two miles long was used to smuggle vodka from Belarus to Lithuania.

Peace Treaty of Riga

The Peace Treaty of Riga was signed on March 18, 1921, between the Soviet Union and Poland. It marked the end of the Polish-Bolshevik War.

Russia was the traditional enemy of Poland. In the 18th century, it had established its rule in regions that were part of the Rzeczpospolita (a commonwealth composed of Poland and Lithuania). When Russia faced a civil war during World War I, the Rzeczpospolita sought to take advantage of this situation and reclaim the territories it had lost to Russia. This triggered a series of wars between the revolutionary Bolsheviks of Soviet Russia and the Rzeczpospolita, which began in 1918 and continued until the Battle of Warsaw in 1920.

Because of the great loss of life and property, as well as growing international pressure, the warring factions preferred to sign a peace treaty rather than engage in further bloodshed.

Fun Fact

In Belarus married women must wear a headdress when they leave the house.

Before 1990, when Belarus was under Soviet domination, Russian was taught in schools and was the official language for all government and business activities. However, since independence, Belarusian, an Eastern Slavonic language, has been declared the official language of the country. Both languages use the Cyrillic alphabet.

The traditional dress of Belarusian men consists of a belted shirt (*kashoulya*) over trousers. Women wear a shirt that is longer than those worn by men and a skirt called a *palatnyanik*, which is wrapped around the waist. The skirt is made from wool and is embroidered with multicolored threads and ornaments. Ornaments with rhomb-shaped symbols are supposed to protect the woman's arms from evil spirits and give her strength to work. Aprons, worn over the skirts, are decorated with lace (*karounkas*) and fringe (*machbrami*).

Belarusian folk music is based on traditional Orthodox hymns and sermons that originated in Belarus around the 12th century. Most Belarusian folk songs reflect on aspects of a peasant's life, such as work (crop gathering, harvesting), religion (traditional hymns), and life events (birth, life, death). Rock music is very popular among young Belarusians.

Traditional Belarusian musical instruments include the bagpipe (*duda*), the double pipes (*parnyia dudki*), the drum (*baraban*), the Turkish drum, the horn (*rob*), and the button accordion (*harmonik*).

❁ CUISINE

Fun Fact

For International Women's Day, every flower symbolizes a particular emotion or feeling. For example, a red rose signifies love, while a cactus flower is symbolic of long life and happiness. A yellow tulip symbolizes hidden love, while an orchid represents unique beauty.

Belarusians love mushrooms and use various kinds in their cooking. Some popular dishes are *brybi v smtane* (mushrooms with sour cream) and *bribmoy soup* (mushroom and barley soup). The most popular drink is called *kvas*; it is made from malt flour, sugar, mint, and fruit. Most dishes are accompanied by bread, which comes in different forms and flavors; the most widely eaten is black bread (made from rye).

Draniki (potato pancakes with sour cream or stuffed with meat) is a typical Belarusian meal. With increasing Western influence, however, pizzas and hamburgers are commonly eaten in Belarus.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western or Gregorian calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day throughout much of the world, and it is an important holiday in Belarus. On January 20, 1700, Peter the Great decreed that New Year's would be celebrated in Belarus on January 1. Moving the celebration to the first of the year in the Gregorian calendar was part of his goal to westernize eastern Europe. Detailed instructions on how the holiday should be celebrated were also given in the decree. Prior to this decree, Belarusians celebrated New Year's Day on January 14, following the old calendar.

On New Year's Eve, Belarusians exchange presents, indulge in fortune telling, and decorate fir and pine trees. Fireworks light up the night sky as people welcome the new year. Belarusians believe that on New Year's Eve, Ded Moroz (Father Frost) and his granddaughter, Snegurochka (Snow Girl), visit families and leave gifts for children. Many Belarusians also take the opportunity to thank God for all the good things that took place in the past year.

❁ INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 8

International Women's Day is celebrated on March 8. It commemorates the social, economical, political, and cultural achievements of women throughout the world. March 8 was chosen for these celebrations because it was on this date in 1848 that the king of Prussia promised to grant women the right to vote. In Belarus March 8 has been declared an official holiday and marks the first holiday of spring. It is a day to celebrate and acknowledge the contributions of women. Men show their appreciation to the women in their lives by giving them flowers and gifts as tokens of thanks.

❁ CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 15

This day celebrates the adoption of the constitution of a democratic and independent Belarus by the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus on March 15, 1994.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, in many parts the world to commemorate the important role played by workers. The May 1 observance of Labor Day was first declared by the International Socialist Party in 1889, and celebrated in 1890. This was a very

important holiday in the former Soviet Union, and it continues to be observed in Belarus, where May 1 is a national holiday. Trade unions hold large demonstrations, and politicians often join the rallies held throughout the country to express their solidarity with the workers. When the Soviet Union controlled Belarus, attendance at the May Day parades was compulsory; since the liberation of Belarus many people prefer to spend a quiet day at home.

The earliest European origins of May Day are ascribed to pagan celebrations that were practiced by farmers, peasants, and villagers well before the Middle Ages. In Belarus a cycle of celebrations called Spring Greeting, characterized by specific spring (*vesnavyia*) songs, includes ritual foods such as eggs (symbols of life) and pancakes (symbols of the Sun). The holidays Maslenitsa, Vialikdzen (Easter), Yur'ya, and others are supposed to awaken Mother Earth from her winter sleep. The ritual performed on Yur'ya calls for Yaryla, the Sun god, to open nature's womb and release the grass, flowers, and animals.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ VICTORY DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 9

Victory Day commemorates the victory of the Allied forces (including Russia) in Europe after Germany signed an unconditional treaty of surrender in May 1945, ending World War II.

During World War II (known in Belarus as the Great Patriotic War) Nazi forces had violated the nonaggression pact signed between Russia and Germany by invading the Soviet territory of Belarus. As a result Russia joined the Allied forces and declared war on Germany. Russian forces, with the support of Belarusians, defeated the Nazis and expelled them.

On this day Belarusians remember the heroes of World War II who protected the sovereignty of the country, and floral tributes are laid on graves. In the capital city of Minsk there is a parade of World War II veterans.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 25

On August 25, 1991, the independent Republic of Belarus came into existence after years of Soviet rule. Since the 18th century Belarus had been a part of imperial Russia, and then it was incorporated into the Soviet Union in the 20th century. As the USSR began to dissolve and lost control of its satellite countries, Belarus declared its independence.

On Independence Day huge celebrations take

Belarus Traditional Calendar

Studzen'	(January)	"Cold" month
Liuty	(February)	"Angry" month
Sakavik	(March)	"Juicy" month
Krasavik	(April)	"Beautiful" month
Traven'	(May)	"Grassy" month
Cherven'	(June)	"Red" month, which also means 'beautiful'
Lipen'	(July)	"Linden-Tree Blooming" month
Zhniven'	(August)	"Harvesting" month
Verasen'	(September)	"Verasok Blooming" month (<i>verasok</i> is a local plant)
Kastrychnik	(October)	"Fires" month (peasants burn leaves and grass)
Listapad	(November)	"Leaves Fall" month
Snezhan'	(December)	"Snowy" month

place throughout the country. In the capital city of Minsk the president presides over the celebrations. The national flag is raised, the military and young athletes parade in the streets, and cultural programs are presented.

❁ OCTOBER REVOLUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 7

This day commemorates the Bolshevik Revolution



Belarusian World War II veterans, rear, march during Victory Day celebrations in Minsk. Belarus celebrates the Allied victory over Nazi Germany on May 9. Three million Belarus citizens died in the war. (AP Photo/Sergei Grits)

(the second phase of the Russian Revolution; the first phase having occurred in February) led by Vladimir Lenin against the provisional government in Petrograd, the Russian capital, on October 25, 1917 (according to the Julian calendar). Because the date fell in October according to the Julian Calendar, it is known as the October Revolution. This day is marked by military parades in the capital city of Minsk in honor of the Russian Revolution. Great Russian revolutionaries, such as Lenin, are also remembered on this day.

Religious Holidays

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Eastern Orthodox Christians
Observed on: January 7

Christmas, which celebrates the birth of Jesus, is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world. Orthodox Christians celebrate his birth on January 7, following the Julian calendar. On this day Orthodox Christians in Belarus attend a special Christmas Mass. Souvenir candles and poinsettia plants are typically exchanged on this day in lieu of more elaborate Christmas presents.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

HOLY WEEK

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Last Week of Lent

Eastern Orthodox Christians follow the Julian calendar (instead of the Gregorian calendar), so Orthodox Good Friday, Orthodox Easter, and Orthodox Easter Monday fall 13 days after the Roman Catholic and Protestant celebrations. The Thursday before Easter is called Chysty Chaever (“Clean Thursday”), which observes the last day of Jesus’ life.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

Orthodox Good Friday commemorates the Crucifixion. A solemn occasion, it falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent (an austere season of fasting and penitence). In Belarus a procession called the Epitaphion takes place on Orthodox Good Friday. Worshippers take a shroud with an image of Jesus from the local church and carry it in processions through their towns.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Orthodox Easter is a Christian feast celebrating Jesus’ Resurrection from the dead. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over.

Orthodox Easter is celebrated two weeks after Catholic Easter and is one of the most important religious celebrations in Belarus. A week before Orthodox Easter, celebrations begin with a special service of forgiveness. On the night before Easter Orthodox Christians assemble at the church and conduct a mock search for Jesus’ body. A procession of searchers leaves the church in the darkness of night in an attempt to find his body. When they return candles are lit in the church, and the Resurrection is announced. On Easter church processions are held in which devout Orthodox Christians carry lighted candles symbolic of the Resurrection.

Easter celebrations in Belarus also preserve traditions from pre-Christian pagan observances. Painting eggs is an eastern European tradition. In Belarus a single egg is dyed red by boiling it with a red onion. Special round cakes are also baked and taken to the church to be blessed.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

RADOUNITSA

Observed by: Eastern Orthodox Christians
Observed on: Nine days after Easter

Radounitsa, the Feast of the Holy Trinity or Easter of the Dead, celebrated by Orthodox Christians nine days after Easter, preserves the ancient tradition of cleaning up the graves of dead parents and grandparents. Some also place painted Easter eggs on the graves to show that their departed relatives are still part of the family.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Observed by: Eastern Orthodox Christians
Observed on: November 2

On Remembrance Day, Orthodox Christians honor their ancestors as well as deceased family members and friends. The victims and heroes who died to liberate Belarus are also remembered. Remembrance Day is a modern version of the pre-Christian holiday of Dzyady, which honors the ancestral spirits and is similar to the Christian observance of All Souls’ Day. It celebrates the ritual awakening of deceased relatives and involves a special ritual feast composed of *kyccia* (barley porridge with berries), fried eggs, meat, and *bliny* (pancakes). Part of the tradition is to leave a share of the meal and a small amount of drink

on a special plate for the deceased. It is also customary to pour vodka on the grave.

See also Volume III: ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

Regional Holidays

❁ NAVAHRUDAK

Observed in: Hrodna (also known as Grodno)

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June

The Belarusian region of Hrodna plays host to Navahrudak, an annual medieval cultural festival. The festival includes a wide variety of events spanning a number of days, with each event attempting to bring alive the medieval era. Mounted knights' tournaments and sword fights are major attractions. Special combat scenarios from the medieval era are reenacted, and there is a fireworks display. Cultural programs include singing, dancing, and plays.

❁ INTERNATIONAL YOUTH SINGING FESTIVAL

Observed in: Minsk

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October

The International Youth Singing Festival is an annual event in which choirs from around the world participate. Individuals are judged on their ability to sing and play instruments; the festival is also referred to as the Festival of the Singing Musicians. The event has various competitions for choirs and individuals alike. Most of the participants are children between the ages of 11 and 15 years, and many of them study at internationally renowned music schools. Diplomas and special awards are given to the best choirs, as well as to individuals with exemplary musical talent.

Rites of Passage

❁ MARRIAGE

In ancient Belarus weddings took place in the order of priority, which meant that the eldest daughter of the family married first, followed by her younger siblings in the order of their births. Wedding rituals in Belarus lasted for three days; half took place at the bride's home, and half at the groom's. Gifts were exchanged between the families.

The Wedding Towel

In ancient Belarusian weddings towels played an important role. The towel marked the path of happiness that the newlyweds would follow for the rest of their lives.

When the marriage was solemnized in church, the bride and the groom would stand on the towel. After the wedding the bride would drag the towel around the altar, marking the way for her unmarried friends to follow suit and get married. Towels continue to be an integral part of traditional weddings in Belarus. Even the gifts exchanged between the families of the newlyweds are wrapped in colorful towels.

Today, as in earlier days, brides wear veils; the veil is traditionally believed to protect the bride from evil. It is also customary for brides to buy their own wedding shoes with money they have saved for the occasion. This is considered a sign of thrift, an essential quality that every Belarusian woman is expected to have. The groom is forbidden to look at the bride's face before the wedding. According to tradition he will have bad luck if he does.

The wedding takes place in an Orthodox church in the presence of the priest, friends, and family. Traditionally, the bride is surrounded by her bridesmaids, who are supposed to confuse the evil spirits that are determined to ruin the marriage by entering the bride's body. Thus bridesmaids play a vital role in safeguarding the bride on her wedding day. After the wedding the bride tosses her veil toward a group of single women, and it is believed that the one who catches the veil will be the next to get married.

The wedding is followed by a lavish reception where singing, dancing, feasting, and drinking take place. The highlight of the occasion is a wedding pie. It is an integral part of Belarusian weddings because it symbolizes good luck, happiness, and prosperity for the newlyweds.

Further Reading

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Belgium

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Western Europe, bordering the North Sea between France and the Netherlands
Size	11,787 sq. mi.
Capital City	Brussels
Flag Description	Belgium's flag has three equal vertical bands of black (hoist side), yellow, and red.
Independence	October 4, 1830 (from the Netherlands)
Population	10,364,388 (2005 est.)
Government	Federal parliamentary democracy under a constitutional monarch
Nationality	Belgian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Fleming (58%); Walloon (31%)
Major Language(s)	Dutch (60%) and French (40%) are both official languages.
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (75%); Protestant or other (25%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; National Day, July 21; French Community Holiday, September 27; Armistice Day, November 11; King's Feast/Dynasty Day, November 15

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The earliest inhabitants were the Belgae, who were predominantly Celts living in northeastern Gaul in the first century B.C.E. In 54 B.C.E. Julius Caesar (100–44) expanded his empire to include the region now known as Belgium. After the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century C.E., however, the Germans invaded the region and by 431 had established a new kingdom under the Merovingian Dynasty.

Clovis I (c.466–511), who ruled from northern France, was the most famous ruler of the Merovingian Dynasty. He converted to Christianity, and under his rule Irish monks preached Christianity and started to convert the local people. After his death the region began to splinter, until Pepin III (the Short, ?714–68) established the Carolingian Dynasty in 751 and created an empire that spanned nearly the whole of Europe. His son Charlemagne (742–814) succeeded him and ruled for 50 years. This empire remained intact until the death of Louis the Pious (967–87), Charlemagne's son, when it started disintegrating due to the infighting among Louis's

three sons. The two younger sons rallied against their older brother Lothair (795–855) and defeated him at the battles of Fountenoy (841) and Aix-la-Chapelle (843), forcing him to sign the Treaty of Verdun, which divided Charlemagne's empire into three parts. Lothair retained the title of holy Roman emperor.

In the 14th century Belgium finally began experiencing growth, prosperity, and creativity under the rule of Philip II, the Duke of Burgundy (1165–1223), but this boom proved only temporary when the Low Countries (of which Belgium is one) entered into a long struggle with Catholic Spain in the mid-15th century.

In the 17th century, Belgium came first under Austrian and then under French rule again. In 1814 the French Emperor Napoleon (1769–1821) was defeated in the Battle of Waterloo. The powers that emerged following this battle included England, Russia, Prussia, and Austria. At the Congress of Vienna (October 1814–June 1815), these major powers decided to reunite the southern and northern parts of the Netherlands into the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, which included Belgium and Luxembourg. Belgium remained part of the northern provinces in the United Kingdom of the Netherlands until the Belgian Revolution in 1830.

This revolution was the consequence of a number of factors. Above all the primarily French-speaking Belgians felt dominated by the Dutch. They were underrepresented in the government and perceived the economic and political policies of the Dutch king to be anti-Belgian. Another factor was religion—while the Belgians were Catholic, the Dutch were Calvinist Protestants.

The European powers approved Belgium's independence from the Netherlands at the London Conference in 1830–31, and the country became independent on January 20, 1831. Also in 1831 Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (Leopold I; 1790–1865) was chosen as king of Belgium under a constitution that gave the monarchy limited powers.

Trade and commerce flourished under Leopold II (1835–1909). The king acquired control of the African state of Congo after the Conference of Berlin in 1885 and made it his own personal property, capitalizing on rubber cultivation (for which there was a growing market). However rubber plantations were largely dependent on slave labor, and the local population suffered greatly. It is estimated that between 3 and 22 million Africans lost their lives during this period. International pressure finally forced Leopold II to sell his property to the Belgian state as a colony in 1908.

In World War II Belgium was invaded by Germany in 1940, and Leopold III (1901–83), the reigning king, surrendered to the German forces. After the war the people of Belgium strongly opposed Leopold's rule, and in the interest of his country he abdicated in favor of his son Baudouin (1930–93). Belgium joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) after World War II and was also one of the founding members of the European Economic Community (EEC). Brussels is the headquarters of NATO and the EECs successor, the European Union (EU), which is why Belgium is sometimes referred to as “The Heart of Europe.”

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in western, Europe Belgium lies between Germany, Luxembourg, France, and the Netherlands and occupies 40 miles of coastline along the North Sea. It can be divided into three main regions: the coastal plains in the northwest, the central plateau, and the Ardennes uplands in the southeast.

Sand dunes and polders (stretches of land regained from the sea and enclosed by dikes to keep the sea from reclaiming the land) cover the coastal area in the northwest. The central plateau is a combination of smooth fertile valleys, caves, and gorges. The Ardennes uplands have thick forests that support a variety of wildlife, but the land is too rocky for farming. The Ardennes is also an important tourist spot because of its scenic beauty. The highest point (at 2,277 feet) is Signal de Botrange. The Meuse and Schelde are the main rivers of Belgium.

Although the summers are usually cool, Belgium

Low Countries

The name *Low Countries* is usually used to refer to those countries around the deltas of the Rhine, Scheldt, and Meuse Rivers, specifically the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg. These countries are located in low-lying areas. The Low Countries were the location of the early northern towns built during the reawakening of Europe in the 12th century.

experiences extremes of temperature during the course of the year. The warmest months are from April to September, when the temperature averages 77°F. The maximum temperature in summer has been recorded at around 90°F. Belgium's winters are usually mild. The lowest recorded temperature is 10°F, although the average is around 45°F.

❁ ECONOMY

The economy of Belgium is dominated by its import and export trade. It capitalizes on a strongly developed transport infrastructure that includes ports, canals, railways, and highways that link its industry with neighboring states. Food products, machinery, rough diamonds, petroleum, chemicals, and textiles are imported mainly from Germany, the Netherlands, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, the United States, and Spain. Exports include automobiles, food and food products, iron and steel, diamonds, textiles, plastics, and nonferrous metals. Two-thirds of Belgium's trade is with EU countries. The agricultural industry engages a small portion of the population, mainly dealing in products such as sugar beets, fresh vegetables, fruits, wheat, oats, rye, barley, tobacco, veal, pork, and milk and milk products. The country is home to over 1,000 international companies with nearly 60 foreign banks in Brussels, its financial capital.

In 1999 Belgium was one of the first European nations to accept the Euro as its currency.

Fun Fact

Walloon, one of Belgium's major languages, is derived from Vulgar Latin, although it has borrowed heavily from German and Flemish dialects.

The Belgian Revolution

An opera entitled *Dumb Girl of Portici*, the story of an anti-Spanish rebellion in Naples, helped to inspire the Belgian Revolution. In the opera the line, “a slave knows no danger, as death is better than living in chains,” inspired the audience in Brussels to run out of the theater shouting revolutionary slogans and destroying symbols of the Dutch authorities on August 25, 1830.

Benelux Union

The Agreement for the Benelux Economic Union was signed in 1944 between Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg to promote and facilitate the movements of workers, goods, and services in the region. The Benelux Union, which derived its name from the two initial letters of the names of these three countries, came into force in 1958.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Belgium is a densely populated and highly educated country. Ninety-eight percent of the Belgian population is literate. Belgians have a high standard of living, which is reflected in their housing and health care facilities. Belgians are known for their world-class architecture, art, elaborate castles, museums, and historic buildings. Belgian food, beer, and chocolates are exceptional as well, and the country has a booming automobile industry.

Folklore is an integral part of Belgian culture, and concerts, plays, carnivals, and other festivals are held throughout the year. Belgians mark historic occasions and celebrations with parades.

Roman Catholics represent 75 percent of the population. In addition Belgium has small but significant populations of Muslims and Jews. Protestants and others make up the rest, but only a small percentage attend church regularly.

Belgians are known for their hospitality. They have also created a place for themselves in the field of sports. Not only is the Belgian soccer team Red Devil famous, but the country has also produced world and Olympic champions in cycling, tennis, table tennis, judo, swimming, motocross, and cyclocross (motorcycling and cycling cross-country races).

CUISINE

Belgian cooking is among the most highly acclaimed in Europe. Potatoes are the staple food of Belgium, although the diet includes plenty of vegetables. Belgians also eat a lot of seafood and meat. Belgium's mussels are world renowned, and mussels and *pommes frites* (French fries) are the national dish. Spices, mustard, vinegars, and beer are widely used in savory and sweet recipes. Fresh herbs are also used extensively in cooking.

Belgians especially relish chocolates and produce renowned brands, such as Neuhaus. Mary's, another brand, is known to be the preferred choice of the royal family.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day throughout the world. In Belgium children write New Year's messages for their parents on decorated sheets of paper. It is also an occasion for people to make New Year's resolutions that they hope to fulfill in the coming year. New Year's is a time for eating and drinking and parties with family and friends.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

The earliest celebrations on this date, also called May Day or Workers' Day, are ascribed to pagan festivals that were held by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages, and modern celebrations retain echoes of that pre-Christian past. However, May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day in Belgium, because in 1889 the Socialist Second International declared this as the day to recognize workers around the world. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union the American Federation of Labor demanding an eight-hour workday.

In member countries of the European Union, May Day is celebrated as Open Day, a chance for workers to enjoy an official day off. Workers in Belgium have a long history of labor activism. On Labor Day they parade in the streets seeking a better work environment and pro-labor policies. In recent years, campaigners have used this day to build worker solidarity and voice their protests by putting up stalls and displaying posters, leaflets, and stickers.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 21

The National Day of Belgium commemorates the day when the first king of Belgium, Leopold I, was crowned. It was after Belgium was separated from the Netherlands on October 4, 1830, that the Belgian National Congress asked Leopold to be the king. He agreed, and the day he was sworn in (July 21, 1831) became the Belgian national holiday. Leopold I supported the constitution that was drafted by the National Congress. After the formation of the kingdom, Leopold I was crowned king the same year.

This day is also observed as Independence Day. It is a national holiday and government offices, schools, and businesses are closed.

❁ FRENCH COMMUNITY HOLIDAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: September 27

The Belgian French community celebrates this day with a range of cultural events. Usually a town from the Walloon region in the south, where the majority of French-speaking citizens live, is selected to host the occasion, and that town becomes the center of all festivities. The day provides a platform for various arts and cultural activities that include classical music concerts, folksinging, exhibits, theater, and screenings of French films. Crafts markets are also set up, and the evening skies are brightly lit with fireworks.

❁ ARMISTICE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 11

Armistice Day (or Wapenstilstanddag) commemorates the end of World War I on November 11, 1918, after an armistice treaty was signed between the Allies (Great Britain, France, and the United States) and Germany in a railway carriage at Compiègne in France.

Armistice Day is observed all over Belgium. Though many towns were still occupied by German troops on this date in 1918, the people of Belgium celebrated it as the end of the war that had taken countless Belgian lives and the freedom of the Belgian nation. Religious ceremonies are held in many cemeteries on this day. Wreaths are laid at the local war memorial in every town and city, and the names of the dead are read aloud. Over the years the list has been expanded to include the dead of World War II and other wars as well. In the town of Ieper (Ypres), which is in the West Vlaanderen region of Belgium and the site of some of the fiercest battles of the war, the religious ceremonies include a service of remembrance in the morning hours at St. George's Church. Entry to the church service requires a ticket.

A Poppy Parade is held in the square by St. George's Church and St. Martin's Cathedral following the service. Participants in the Poppy Parade are each given a poppy petal to carry to the Menin Gate Memorial, where the petals are collected in baskets. Afterward an official parade with musical bands marches to the Menin Gate for the Last Post ceremony that occurs daily at 8 P.M. and consists of speeches, prayers, hymns, a choir, wreath-laying, and the "Last Post," played by the buglers of the local fire brigade.

In Brussels there is a military parade on this day, attended by the king, prominent political leaders, and military personnel. They lay wreaths at the Grave of the Unknown Soldier, Belgium's national monument to World War I.

❁ KING'S FEAST/DYNASTY DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 15

The celebration of this day, also called Dynasty Day, St. Leopold's Day, or German Community Day, was instituted during King Leopold's reign. Subsequently it has been observed on November 15 for succeeding monarchs. All the communities of Belgium, regardless of their cultural, religious, and linguistic differences, celebrate this day with fireworks and parades. This day is also celebrated by the German-speaking community.

Religious Holidays

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, the first Friday after Lent and the Friday before Easter, is the solemn Christian festival that marks the Crucifixion of Jesus. In Belgium it is called Goede Vrijdag, and the churches are draped in black because it is a day of mourning. Good Friday has been in the Christian liturgical calendar even longer than Easter has although no one is sure why it is called "Good" Friday.

Some have suggested that the use of *good* in the name goes back to Old English and means "God's" Friday, while others interpret *good* to mean something like "observed as holy." This observance is also known as Black Friday and Sorrowful Friday, and in Eastern Orthodox Churches it is called Great Friday.

For many years Good Friday was primarily a Catholic observance, but many Protestant Churches now hold special services. In Belgium's rural villages the women often wear mourning and in the afternoon attend a three-hour service at their local church from noon until three in the afternoon, a period that symbolizes Jesus' last hours on the Cross. Many of the faithful fast on this day; when they eat, it is generally fish instead of meat.

A pilgrims' procession highlights the meaning of this day by stopping in front of each of the 18 Stations of the Cross, built in Verne in 1680, to sing hymns and offer prayers. According to local lore, the number of steps between each of the stations is equal to the number of steps Jesus took as he went from

Fun Fact

The Armistice Treaty that ended World War I was signed at the 11th hour (11 A.M.) of the 11th day of the 11th month (November). It ended all German hostilities in an area controlled by the Allies in the West and Germany in the East, usually referred to as the Western Front.

Jerusalem to Calvary, or 5,751. Many Catholic churches have carvings or paintings of the Stations of the Cross.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a Christian feast that celebrates Jesus' Resurrection from the dead three days after his Crucifixion. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. The holiday was named for a pagan goddess Eostre associated with the renewal of life: spring, fertility, and the hare (allegedly for its quick and prolific reproduction). Modern worshippers describe Eostre as a "goddess of dawn" based on the etymological relationship between her name and the Anglo-Saxon word for "dawn." Much of what we know comes from the Venerable Bede (d. 735).

This day is traditionally celebrated with church services, family dinners, and Easter chocolates. In some parts of Belgium the tradition of Easter bonfires continues.

The Monday after Easter is a national holiday, continuing the Easter festivities. In Belgium people often visit their friends and families on this day, enjoying the day off from work and school.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ ST. NICHOLAS DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 6

St. Nicholas is one of the Christian church's most revered and celebrated saints. Popularly known as Santa Claus, he is considered the patron of children. On St. Nicholas's Eve (December 5) children place their shoes or small baskets at the hearth or beside the door with carrots, turnips, and a sugar lump for the saint's horse. They believe St. Nicholas rides on horseback over the rooftops, dropping his gifts down the chimneys. In the morning the shoes have been filled with chocolates and cookies shaped like the saint, as well as oranges, marzipan sweets, and toys. In the French-speaking Wallonia region of Belgium, St. Nicholas is said to ride a donkey.

In Dutch-speaking Flanders, there are colorful parades in honor of St. Nicholas with bands playing and banners depicting the saint. In shops and stores, St. Nicholas sits on a throne and greets children who come up to receive a small gift from him. Some churches collect toys and gifts for the poor at special services.

St. Nicholas is also believed to be the ruler of water and all its inhabitants (aquatic creatures,

reptiles, and so forth). According to legend St. Nicholas saved sailors trapped in a sinking boat from drowning by closing the hole with a live carp.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world. It celebrates the birth of Jesus. People begin the holiday festivities days before by decorating their homes with colored lights and singing Christmas carols. Belgium's capital Brussels prepares for Christmas with a traditional market that has a mix of art, crafts, jewelry, decorative trees, and special Belgian chocolates. Faithful Christians attend special church services on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS



Les Gilles de Binche throw oranges to the public as they celebrate Mardi Gras during the February carnival in Binche, south Belgium. The "Gille" is a local carnival character whose hay-colored costume decorated with appliqued lions, crowns, and stars in the Belgian colors of red, yellow, and black is stuffed with hay and belted with heavy, jangling bells. (AP Photo/Geert Vanden Wijngaert)

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 26

The day after Christmas Day is celebrated as Boxing Day in some countries, especially those that have been members of the British Commonwealth. However, in Belgium it is called St. Stephen's Day since it is the Catholic feast of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr. For most Belgians this is an extension of the Christmas celebrations. People generally spend the day with their families. Traditional Catholic celebrations of the day are centered in and around the city of Antwerp.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ CARNIVAL OF BINCHE

Observed in: Binche
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Three days before the beginning of Lent

Carnival precedes the Christian Lent, which requires faithful Christians to refrain from pleasure and excess for 40 days. With a history that goes all the way back to the 16th century, the festival attracts a huge crowd to Binche, and the extravaganza is now on the UNESCO Heritage List.

Its annual Carnival is world famous, and people dress up in fancy costumes and flood the streets of the small town 34 miles south of Brussels. On the night of the Trouilles de Nouilles, hundreds of people wearing masks go from bar to bar trying to convince those who aren't wearing costumes to buy them a drink. On Shrove Sunday, a day devoted mainly to musical parades, men dress in the clothing worn by women in the 19th century.

Shrove Tuesday is the big day for Carnival in Binche. Members of the different Carnival societies don their traditional costumes (Harlequin, Pierrot, and peasant outfits) along with the Gilles (clowns) in their colorful straw-stuffed costumes, made from wire, ribbons, bells, and fabric in the Belgian colors of black, red, and gold, and ostrich-plumed hats that are four feet high. At the end of the festivities, fireworks light up the night sky.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL

❁ OMMEGANG PAGEANT

Observed in: Ommegang, Brussels
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 7

The Ommegang Pageant was started as a religious procession in 1359. However over the years it has been transformed into a folkloric event. The first Ommegang Pageant was held for Charles V, his son Don Philip, the Duke of Brabant, and his sisters, Eleanor of Austria, Queen of France, and Mary of Hungary in 1549.

Today the festival is mainly an expression of riches and glamour, one in which the population of Brussels takes pride and delight. It starts with a parade that originates at the Sablon Church and ends in the Grand Place, the heart of Brussels. After the procession, there is a flag-raising ceremony and an equestrian parade.

Rites of Passage

❁ MARRIAGE

Long courtships and living together before getting married are common in Belgium. Although people celebrate marriage in religious ways, only civil marriages are legal. A unique Belgian tradition involves giving the bride an embroidered handkerchief at the time of marriage. This handkerchief, which has the bride's name embroidered on it, is later framed and hung on the wall until the next marriage in the family. The handkerchief is taken down, and the name of the new bride is also embroidered on it. This ritual is followed and passed on to each generation.

Further Reading

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Belize

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Central America, bordering the Caribbean Sea, between Guatemala and Mexico
Size	8,867 sq. mi.
Capital City	Belmopan
Flag Description	The flag of Belize is blue with narrow red stripes along the top and the bottom edges and a large white disk in the center bearing a coat of arms that features a shield flanked by two workers in front of a mahogany tree with the motto, “ <i>Sub Umbra Floreo</i> ” (“I flourish in the shade”), on a scroll at the bottom, all of it encircled by a green garland.
Independence	September 21, 1981 (from the United Kingdom)
Population	279,457 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary democracy
Nationality	Belizean
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Mestizo (49%); Creole (25%)
Major Language(s)	English (official); Spanish; Mayan; Garifuna (Carib); Creole
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (50%); Protestant (27%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year’s Day, January 1; Baron Bliss Day, March 9; Commonwealth Day, March; Labor Day, May 1; St. George’s Caye Day, September 10; Independence Day, September 21; Pan-American Day, October 13; Garifuna Day, November 19

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Between the 16th century B.C.E. and the 4th century C.E., the Mayan civilization flourished in what is now Belize. In the centuries that followed, that civilization declined due to drought, famine, and inept leadership. Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) was the first European to land there in 1502, but the Spanish thought the region unimportant and mostly ignored it. In the 1600s, English and Scottish pirates enjoyed the safety provided by Belize’s great reef but turned to logging when English lumberjacks arrived from Jamaica to establish a settlement on the banks of the Belize River.

In the 1700s Spain tried unsuccessfully to dislodge the British from Belize. Between September 3 and September 10, 1798, a series of battles, which became known collectively as the Battle of St. George’s Caye, were fought between the Span-

ish and the British around the islands and reefs off the Belizean coast. These momentous battles, in which the British defeated the Spanish, are celebrated as a national holiday in Belize. In 1862 while the United States, embroiled in its own civil war, was too preoccupied to enforce the Monroe Doctrine (which had declared the Western Hemisphere off-limits to further colonization), Belize was officially made a British colony.

During the course of the 20th century several constitutional changes were implemented to expand representative government in the territory. The British granted full-fledged internal self-government to Belize in January 1964. However, the government of Guatemala claimed that Belize was rightfully a Guatemalan territory, and territorial disputes between the United Kingdom and Guatemala delayed Belize’s independence. In June 1973 the official name of the territory was changed from British Honduras to Belize. At long last in September 1981, the United Kingdom agreed to grant complete independence to Belize, even though Guatemala refused to

drop its claim and recognize Belize as a nation until 1992.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located on the Caribbean Sea, Belize is south of Mexico and east and north of Guatemala in Central America. Along the coast, mangrove swamps and cays (pronounced “keys”) give way to hills and mountains in the interior. Most of the country is heavily forested with various hardwoods. The highest point is Victoria Peak, 3,681 feet. Belize’s barrier reef, at 180 miles in length, is the longest in the Western Hemisphere.

The climate of Belize is subtropical, with high humidity, especially along the coast, that averages 83 percent. Many days, however, cooling breezes off the Gulf of Mexico keep the humidity from feeling oppressive. The coastal area is exposed to southeast trade winds that have an uncanny consistency in July. Temperatures in Belize range from 50°F to 95°F, with an annual mean of 79°F. The coolest months are usually November to January, while May to September are the warmest, averaging 81°F. Location is a big factor for temperature in Belize. Cayo to the west can be several degrees cooler than the temperature along the coast, and in the mountains the mean annual temperature is 72°F.

The weather patterns in Belize can be dramatically changed by two meteorological disturbances: northers and hurricanes. Northers are cold, wet air masses from the northeast, usually pushed south by large arctic air masses from November to February. In Belize these northers bring heavy rains, choppy seas, and colder-than-normal temperatures. While northers may cause some discomfort, hurricanes are dangerous, violent storms frequent between June and October. Although Belize rarely experiences hurricanes, when they strike, they are devastating.

❁ ECONOMY

Tourism is the most lucrative industry in Belize. In spite of the expansionary monetary policies in place since 1998, Belize continues to be plagued by high rates of unemployment, a large trade deficit, and foreign debt. The high crime rate, as well as involvement in the South American drug and sex trades, are factors the country is trying to rein in. Nevertheless Belize is a transit and destination country for men, women, and children trafficked for the purposes of labor and sexual exploitation. Exact numbers of trafficking victims are unknown, particularly the number of transnational trafficking victims, given Belize’s long and porous borders.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Even though Belize’s population is relatively small, it is diverse, composed of several ethnocultural communities separated by language, culture, occupation, and residence: Mestizo, Creole, Garifuna, Mayan,

Chinese, Syrian-Lebanese, East Indian, and Mennonite. This diversity is evident in the various languages, religions, cuisines, styles of dress, and folklore. All have left their marks in one way or another, and the music of Belize especially reflects the traditions of the various ethnic groups.

The Maya, already in decline when the Spanish arrived in the 16th century, left behind temple complexes aligned with the movements of heavenly bodies. Lamanai, which means “submerged crocodile” in Mayan, has 60 large structures, a small temple, and a ball court. It was occupied as early as 1500 B.C.E., and was a major ceremonial center before other sites were built. Xunantunich, another major Mayan ceremonial center, was built on a hilltop near the Belize River but may have been abandoned around 900 C.E. after an earthquake. Its tallest remaining structure El Castillo rises 131 feet above the surrounding jungle.

Most of the Belizean festivals are religious in nature and express the cultural traditions of the Maya and Carib, the indigenous peoples. The celebrations of festivals, whether religious or musical, include participants from the various ethnic groups that inhabit Belize. For instance, *punta rock*—a modern musical interpretation of a Garifuna cultural dance—is performed by drummers and local artists during various festivals. The *punta* dance, in which women wear long dresses sewn from checkered material along with colored headdresses, is Belize’s most popular dance. Belizeans are also passionate about bicycle racing, kite flying, and horse racing, and these activities are featured during a number of festivals.

❁ CUISINE

Belize is home to several cultures, and each has contributed to the national cuisine, from Creole rice and beans, Mestizo *chimole*, Mayan *caldo*, and Garifuna *hudut* to East Indian curries. Many of the local animals once used in indigenous dishes, for example, the hawksbill turtle and *gibnut* (similar to a guinea pig), or *paca*, are now protected species. The staple dish is rice and beans, a Creole dish. Belize beans and rice, also known as stewed beans and white rice, is much like rice and beans except that the beans and rice are cooked separately, and the rice is cooked in coconut milk. Another Creole staple is *seré*, which usually contains fish in a seasoned coconut sauce with okra and ground cassava (manioc) and cocoa.

Creole *seré* resembles *hudut*, a Garifuna recipe. One kind of *hudut* is made with coconut milk and mashed plantain; another is more like a spicy fish stew. The “heat” will depend on whether habanero or the milder jalapeño peppers are used. Coconuts are plentiful in Belize, and every part is used, even the dried husk, which turns up in the country’s ornamental arts or as the starter for a barbecue fire. Its grated flesh is used in familiar recipes, such as coconut pies or tarts, and in local specialties like coconut crust (sweetened grated coconut baked in a folded flour crust), *tablata* (a mixture of grated

coconut, thinly sliced ginger, sugar, and water, baked and cut into squares), or *cut-o-brute*, made with chunks of coconut rather than the grated flesh. Dishes incorporated from the Mestizo culture include tacos, tamales, *panadas*, and meat pies.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the start of the New Year according to the Gregorian calendar. In Belize people begin celebrating on December 31 and most often gather for family meals. New Year's day is a public holiday with government offices, schools, and businesses closed for the day.

Fun Fact

In 1926 Henry Edward Ernest Victor Bliss, commonly known as Baron Bliss, left his entire fortune to the country of Belize for no specific reason.

BARON BLISS DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 9

Baron Bliss Day is celebrated in honor of the late British-born Baron Bliss (1869–1926), who in 1926 left a fantastic sum of more than \$1 million for the benefit of the citizens of Belize. A mysterious benefactor Baron Bliss first sailed into the Belize harbor in 1926 and died two months later without ever setting foot on Belize. A wreath-laying ceremony and harbor regatta are held in front of his tomb. All over Belize, the day is celebrated with parties, fishing tournaments, regattas, bicycle races, and kite-flying contests.

COMMONWEALTH DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Second Monday of March

Commonwealth Day, or the Queen's Birthday, is an annual celebration in all the countries that belong to the British Commonwealth, a political and economic alliance of former British colonies and Great Britain. In Belize this day is also observed as the birthday of the late Queen Victoria. The National

The Queen's Birthday

After the death of Queen Victoria of England in 1901 her birthday on May 24 became known as Empire Day. In 1958 Empire Day was renamed Commonwealth Day. Since 1977 it has been celebrated on the second Monday of March instead of May.

Sports Council holds horse races at the National Stadium and in Orange Walk Town at the People's Stadium. Bicycle races are held between the cities of Cayo and Belmopan.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, has been celebrated to honor workers all over the world for the contributions they have made to their societies since 1890. In 1889 the Socialist Second International set aside this day as part of its strategy for securing humane working conditions for laborers. On this day the minister of labor of Belize addresses the public on the rights of workers and their progress. Parades and rallies are held throughout the country, and events such as kite-flying contests, bicycle races, harbor regattas, and horse races are also organized.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

ST. GEORGE'S CAYE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 10

St. George's Caye Day, or National Day, commemorates the Battle of St. George's Caye of 1798. In this battle African slaves and British soldiers fought together and defeated the Spanish. To celebrate people dress in the colors of the Belize national flag (blue, white, and red). Street festivals that include food, live music, and a reenactment of the historic battle are popular highlights. Carnivals, sports events, fire engine parades, and pop concerts are also held to commemorate the battle.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 21

Independence Day commemorates Belize's gaining total independence from the United Kingdom. A flag-raising ceremony takes place at midnight, and a large parade features local bands and dancers. After the parade there is a street festival with more live bands. Traditional Belizean cuisine, music, dances, as well as religious and cultural fairs, are integral to the Independence Day celebrations.

PAN-AMERICAN DAY

Observed by: Mestizo and Indian citizens

Observed on: October 13

This holiday, also known as Columbus Day or Day of the Americas, commemorates the voyage undertaken by the Italian navigator Christopher Columbus on behalf of Spain in the late 15th century. His

accidental arrival in the Western Hemisphere gave rise to the greatest clash of cultures in history. People of various European and African nations came in contact with each other, as well as with the indigenous tribes, often resulting in violent conflict and disease epidemics.

Belize observes this day as a national holiday on which schools, businesses, and government offices are closed. Various cross-cultural events, ranging from street parties and beauty contests to horse and bicycle races, are held to promote the traditional Mestizo (Spanish-Indian) culture.

❁ GARIFUNA DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 19

Garifuna Day, or Garifuna Settlement Day, celebrates the cultural heritage of the Garifuna people. The Garifuna, or Black Caribs, have been in the region for more than 300 years. The descendants of shipwrecked slaves and native Caribs, the Garifuna melded the Carib language and traditions with African music and religious beliefs. On this day Belizeans take part in a festival to celebrate the unique Garifuna culture. Events like the Miss Garifuna Belize Pageant, the Classic Bike Race, and children's parades are held across the country. A Mass of Thanksgiving, accompanied by traditional African-inspired drumming, also takes place.

Religious Holidays

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

The Christian holiday of Good Friday (also known as Celebration of the Seven Words, Holy Friday, and Mourning Friday) marks the Crucifixion of Jesus. It has been in the Christian liturgical calendar even longer than Easter, although no one is sure why it is called Good Friday. Some have suggested that the use of *good* in the name goes back to Old English and means "God's" Friday, while others interpret *good* to mean something like "observed as holy." This observance is also known as Black Friday and Sorrowful Friday, and in Eastern Orthodox Churches it is called Great Friday.

For many years Good Friday was primarily a Catholic observance, but many Protestant Churches now hold special services from noon until three in the afternoon on this day to symbolize Jesus' last hours on the Cross. Many of the faithful fast on this day; when they eat, it is generally fish instead of meat.

Belizeans believe that a curse will befall those

who disobey their parents or behave rudely toward others on this day. Special church services are held, and people participate in processions, carrying a cross through the streets. Noon marks the start of the Celebration of the Seven Words. This is a two-and-a-half-hour service that focuses on readings from the Psalms and Gospels that are repeated seven times. Fasts are observed and special prayers are offered on this occasion.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Last Saturday of Lent

On Holy Saturday, also called the Vigil of Easter or the Angelic Night, Catholic Belizeans hold an Easter Vigil Mass in the evening. A bonfire is lit at the doorway of each church. From that bonfire the *cirio pascual* (Easter candle) is lit and taken inside. All the other lights are then put out. The Easter candle is subsequently used to light individual candles of the faithful who gather inside to pray. An annual cross-country bicycle race is also held in Belize on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: March–April

Easter is celebrated as a national festival in Belize. Christians celebrate Easter as the day that Jesus was resurrected from the dead. On Easter Sunday people attend church services, conducted in either English or Spanish. On the Monday after Easter processions and special prayers are performed. Horse and bicycle races are also held.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ LAS POSADAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 16–24

On Belize Christmas festivities are preceded by *las posadas*, a nine-night candle church services that begins on December 16. During this ritual statues of Joseph and Mary are carried to different houses where they symbolically ask for, and are offered, food and shelter for the evening. Participants pray together after the statues have been welcomed. The ceremony is repeated at a different home each night until Christmas Eve, when Joseph and Mary make their way back to the church for the dance of the *pastores*, a performance symbolizing the shepherds bringing gifts to the baby Jesus.

The Greasy Pole

The greasy pole is a long piece of tree trunk, carefully hewn and then greased with a combination of soap and lard. On the final day of the Deer Dance Festival a competition is held to see who can climb all the way to the top of the pole.

Christmas Eve is a noisy event as strings of firecrackers are lit to mark the occasion. Christian celebrations include prayers and vigils. The devout attend *misa de Gallo*, or Midnight Mass.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 24–25

Belizeans share the European and North American custom of decorating Christmas trees. They also decorate the exteriors of their homes with small festive lights, exchange greeting cards, and bake fruitcakes. As in the rest of the world Christmas is a time for visiting families and friends. The classic Creole Sunday dinner of rice, beans, and potato salad is typically served for Christmas.

Those of Mayan descent perform the Deer Dance, which enacts the relationship between humanity and nature, and the Garifuna perform the *charikanari*, a masquerade symbolizing the relationship between the hunter and the deer.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26

As a former British colony Belize observes Boxing Day, or St. Stephen's Day, on the day after Christmas. In England, tradespeople and those who performed public services used to go from house to house with small boxes asking for tips or bonuses. The alms boxes at local churches were also opened and the contents were passed out among the poor. Today on Belize parties, horse races, and dances—including the traditional *garifuna*—are performed by *asederabatians* (the ones who serenade) on this day. These lively entertainers parade through the streets of Belize. In Dangriga (the largest town in southern Belize), Boxing Day is celebrated with the beating of drums. Dancers go singing and dancing from one home to another and are rewarded with food and drink.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

SAN PEDRO CARNIVAL

Observed in: San Pedro

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February

San Pedro's Carnival, which is pagan in origin, is similar to Mardi Gras in New Orleans and Rio de Janeiro. It is observed during the week leading up to Ash Wednesday and Lent, the 40-day period of fasting that precedes Easter. During this time people can indulge in bodily pleasures that they will give up during Lent. The local government of San Pedro usually organizes a week of festivities for visitors and residents. Children of all ages also participate in the Carnival. On the last day, people flood the streets to paint each other with a mixture of watercolor paint and raw eggs. *Comparsa* dancers form groups, dress themselves in outlandish costumes, and dance for money through the main streets of the town. One of the most popular *comparsa* groups is all-male. These men, usually well known and influential in the community, dress up like women and dance.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CARNIVAL; LENT

DEER DANCE FESTIVAL

Observed in: San Antonio

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August

The Deer Dance Festival reflects the traditional Mayan culture and religion. Ten days are spent in celebration and the performance of obscure traditional dances, including the ritual of the greasy pole. The festival also includes historical reenactments. Handmade costumes, arts and crafts, food, music, and dances are also part of this festival.

Rites of Passage

COMING OF AGE

In Belize coming of age among Catholics is announced by a *quinceanos*. This celebration, which is Mexican in origin, is a coming-out party that is given for a young girl when she turns 15. The *quinceanos* announces to the community that the girl has attained marriageable age. Marking her passage from childhood to adulthood she is dressed in a magnificent white gown similar to a wedding gown, and friends and family members escort her to the town's Catholic church. At the church a special Mass is held. The priest blesses a ring, which is then presented to the girl.

❁ MARRIAGE

A young man interested in courting, and possibly marrying, a young woman in Belize needs to obtain permission from the girl's parents to visit her at her home, in the presence of all her family members. On the wedding day as the bride takes her last walk as a single woman on her way to the church, friends and townspeople wish her well by throwing gifts in her path and paying her compliments.

Further Reading

James F. Garber, ed., *The Ancient Maya of the Belize Valley: Half a Century of Archaeological Research* (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 2004); Leta Hunter Krohn and Froyla Salam, eds., *Readings in Belizean History*, 3rd ed. (Belize: National Institute of Culture & History, St. John's College, 2004); Heather I. McKillop, *In Search of Maya Sea Traders* (College Station, Tex.: Texas A&M University Press, 2005); P. A. B. Thompson, *Belize: A Concise History* (Oxford: Macmillan Caribbean, 2004).

Benin

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	West Coast of Africa between Nigeria and Togo
Size	43,483 sq. mi.
Capital City	Porto Novo
Flag Description	Benin's flag has a green vertical band on the hoist side with two equal horizontal red and yellow bands.
Independence	August 1, 1960 (from France)
Population	7,460,025 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Beninese
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Fon; Adja; Yoruba; Bariba
Major Language(s)	French is the official language; Fon and Yoruba are the most common vernaculars in the south, with at least six major tribal languages in the north.
Major Religion(s)	Indigenous beliefs (50%); Christian (30%); Muslim (20%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Traditional Day, January 10; Martyrs' Day, January 16; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day, August 1; National Day, November 30

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

The Republic of Benin is situated in western Africa. Throughout much of its history this region was known as Dahomey. The earliest recorded information dates back to the 12th or 13th century C.E. when members of the Aja tribe migrated eastward from Tado on the Mono River and established the village of Allada. When the state of Great Ardra was formed sometime later, Allada became the capital. In the 17th century three brothers had a dispute over who would be king. When it was settled, Kokpon stayed on in Great Ardra, his brother Do-Aklin established the town of Abomey, and the other brother Te-Agdanlin founded the town of Ajatche, or Little Ardra (called Porto Novo by Portuguese traders).

The settlers in Abomey built a strongly centralized kingdom with its own army and intermarried with the local population to form the Fon, or Dahomey ethnic group. By the end

of the century, the Fon had become slave-traders, raiding their neighbors and selling them to coastal middlemen, who then resold them to the Europeans. It is estimated that as many as 20,000 slaves were transported from Great Ardra and Oidah annually.

King Agaja (1708–32 C.E.) sought to expand the Dahomey's borders until his policies brought his tribe into conflict with the Yoruba. The Yoruba captured the lands of the Dahomey and exacted an annual tribute. Nevertheless the Dahomey managed to continue their expansion to the north and maintained its slave trade well into the 19th century.

In 1863 seeking to challenge the Dahomey's power, the village of Porto-Novo agreed to become a French protectorate. This gave the French a position from which to subjugate the Dahomey along the coast. Although King Behanzin (r. 1889–90) tried to stop them, the French conquered that part of the territory and established a protectorate there as well. Between 1895 and 1898 the French also subjugated the regions to the north; in 1904 the whole territory was consolidated into French West Africa. France increased the

production of palm products and built railroads and ports for exporting them. In addition, they encouraged Roman Catholic missionaries to build elementary schools.

The area, which came to be called after the dominant ethnic group (Dahomey), became an overseas territory of France in 1946, thereby gaining its own parliament and representation in the French National Assembly. Widespread demonstrations in the region forced the French to listen to the popular voice. Finally in 1958, the region was granted autonomy, and the Republic of Dahomey came into existence. The republic achieved independent status on August 1, 1960. Although Porto Novo is the capital, the seat of government was located in Cotonou.

Hubert Maga (1916–2000) was the nation's first president. Growing economic tensions, political instability, and tribal war, however, led to a military coup in 1963, and Justin Ahomadegbe (1917–2002) proclaimed himself chief of the state. Six more years of political unrest ensued, until 1969, when Lt. Col. Paul-Émile de Souza (?1930–99) became president.

Elections were canceled in 1970, and a three-man council was appointed. In 1972 Major Mathieu Kerekou (b. 1933) led a successful coup and declared himself head of state. When he proclaimed Marxist Leninism the country's ideology and declared it a socialist state, the country earned the nickname of "Cuba of West Africa."

In 1975, the country's name was changed to the Republic of Benin. The country was run as a socialist state until 1989. In 1991 free elections were held. Nicéphore Soglo defeated Mathieu Kerekou, but in the 1996 election Kerekou was reelected and was still in power in the early years of the 21st century.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Benin is bordered by Nigeria on the east and Togo on the west. Burkina Faso lies to the northwest and Niger to the northeast. To the south is the Atlantic Ocean. The country has a coastal plain toward the south with various lagoons created by the Oueme, Mono, and Couffo Rivers. The largest lagoon, Lac Nokouge, separates Porto Novo and Cotonou. The popular fishing village Ganvie is also near this lake. The Atakora Mountains, rising to a height of 2,159 feet, lie on the northern side.

Benin's climate varies greatly from north to south. The southern climate is subtropical. It has two dry seasons and two rainy seasons, with temperatures ranging between 64°F and 95°F. In the north, the climate is tropical, with one dry season and one rainy season. Between March and June, the temperature can reach 115°F.

❁ ECONOMY

Benin is one of the most densely populated countries in Africa. In 1961 the population was around 2.1 million, and by 2003 it had exceeded 6.6 million.

The Court Art of Benin

The art that originated in the courts of Benin, prior to colonialism, is very popular today. It is dominated by images of fish, leopards, and crocodiles, since animals were considered symbols of deities. These motifs also represent the power of the *oba* (king).

The leopard especially stands out as the symbol of power. During his rule the *oba* kept tame leopards and paraded them through the city. At one time the people used to sacrifice leopards in order to preserve the power and well-being of the kingdom.

Widely known as the "policemen of the waters," crocodiles represented the god of water Olokun. They also represented the power of the *oba*.

The god of nature was Osun, and snakes represented his power. Beninians believed that the water god Olokun sent pythons to punish men who did wrong.

The art of Benin was often executed in ivory because it represented longevity. Coral was a symbol of royalty.

Most of the people live in the southern part of the country.

Benin is also one of the poorest countries in the world and is highly dependent on international aid. It is self-sufficient in food production, but natural calamities and environmental degradation are serious problems. Salinization of the lagoons, deforestation, excessive fishing, and soil erosion plague the country. Agriculture has also resulted in destruction of the rain forest.

About 70 percent of the Beninese are farmers. Maize, millet, coffee, cassava, groundnuts, and pulses (legumes) are the main crops. They are grown primarily for consumption in the regions where they are grown and for purposes of regional trade. Cattle breeding is also common. Goats, pigs, and sheep are raised, and fishing is done on a commercial scale. The major industrial product is cement. Benin also has traces of petroleum deposits, phosphates, iron, and gold.

There has been a rapid increase in cotton production during the 20th century, and cotton constitutes 84 percent of Benin's exports. Palm oil, which is produced from palm nuts, is also a major export of the republic.

Today, the government of Benin is trying to encourage foreign investment. It is also developing food-processing systems, and improvements have been made in communications and information technology. The tourism sector is growing but remains precarious because the traditional practice of *vidomegon*, whereby poor children are placed with wealthy families, has resulted in some labor and sexual exploitation. Benin is a source, transit, and destination country for trafficked children.

Fun Fact

Yoruba, believed to be one of the oldest widely practiced religions of the world, may have given birth to such American religions as Santeria (a fusion of Christian and Yoruba beliefs) in Cuba and Candomble (an Afro-American religion) in Brazil.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

There are more than 20 sociocultural groups in Benin, each with its own history, language, traditions, and culture. The major tribes in this polyglot nation are Fon, Yoruba, Bariba and Dendi. The Fon, along with the Yoruba, are the two largest groups in the south, where most people speak the Fon language.

The Yoruba inhabit the southeastern and central parts of the Republic of Benin. Yoruba are followers of Christianity and Islam and fuse indigenous beliefs with these two religions. They organize themselves into small kingdoms, which are politically autonomous but culturally similar.

In the north, the Bariba, Dendi, and Somba, mainly farmers and shepherds, form the largest cultural groups. The Dendi tribal state can trace its origins to the kingdom of Songhai, which was destroyed by Morocco and then conquered by the French in 1901. The inhabitants of this region, as well as the language they speak, share the name of the region and are called Dendi. The Dendi breed cattle, but farming is their primary occupation. The Somba are mainly nomadic hunters and have no formal political organization.

The Bariba inhabit the central and northern parts of Benin. They form the largest ethnic group in the north and account for one-twelfth of

Vodoun

The term *Voodoo* or *Vodoun* applies to all the ancestor-based religions of West Africa whose origins may be traced to the Fon-Ewe people. The word *Vodoun* is a Fon-Ewe word, which means “spirits.” The practice of voodoo, or voodooism, is one of the world’s oldest religions, and Benin is considered its birthplace.

According to Beninese Vodoun beliefs, each family of spirits has its own specialized clergy, which is often hereditary. Some of the important spirits are: the goddesses of water, who are referred to as Mami Wata; a young and energetic spirit called Legba; the ruler of iron and the smith craft, known as Gu; and the ruler of diseases Sakpata.

All the spirits are revered for their powers, and regular rituals are performed to appease them. Vodoun is also used as a weapon against one’s enemies. Priests preside over rituals to invoke the power of these spirits to destroy one’s enemy.

the country’s population. Bariba society has high-ranking members who are chiefs and subordinate chiefs of towns. The nature of one’s work reflects the status of the family and is generally handed down from one generation to the next. Although a majority of Bariba are Muslim, the upper strata of society still adhere to indigenous beliefs. They are mainly farmers who grow crops like sorghum, rice, cassava (tapioca), corn, palm oil, and cotton. Men enjoy a dominant role, and women are expected to assist their husbands in agricultural activities.

Almost half of the Beninese population adheres to either the Christian or Muslim faith, while the other half practices indigenous beliefs. In 1996 the ancient religion of Vodoun, which involves witchcraft and animistic deities, was recognized as the official religion of Benin. Benin is the birthplace of Vodoun, better known as voodoo in the Western world. Vodoun recognizes one god and a series of intermediaries who act as communicators between God and the faithful.

CUISINE

The diet of the people of Benin consists in large part of yams, beans, millet, cassava (tapioca), and rice. *Gari*, made from the paste of the cassava (tapioca), is a popular dish in the southern part of the country. *Djenkoume* is made out of a paste of corn, red palm oil, and tomatoes. Okra pods (referred to as “ladyfingers”) are stewed or eaten raw. The Beninese have their own version of fries, which are made out of boiled and fried yams or plantains.

Stews are a favorite in Benin; one of their specialties is *ago glain*, made with shellfish, onions, and tomatoes in a sauce that varies by locale. The people in the north prefer starchy dishes such as millet couscous and often add local sauces for spiciness. *Lamounou dessi* is a favorite local sauce made from chilies, smoked shrimp, fish, and vegetables.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR’S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

New Year’s is celebrated as an extension of Christmas in Benin. Christmas celebrations start in the beginning of December and last through January 1. Drinking, parties, and wishing friends and neighbors prosperity in the year to come mark the New Year’s Eve celebrations. People play drums, and everybody dances and sings. Dance and theater performances are also popular. On New Year’s Day, most people stay home to rest and recuperate from the prior night’s festivities.



People rejoice at a festival during Benin's Traditional Day in Ouidah, Benin on January 10. (AP Photo/Erick-Christian Ahounou)

❁ TRADITIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 10

Traditional (or National Voodoo) Day is unique to Benin. Special festivals are organized in the city of Cotonou as well as in other parts of Benin. Cotonou is considered the birthplace of the Vodoun religion and celebrates Traditional Day in style. Thousands of Vodoun followers from all over the world flock to Cotonou to receive the blessings of the head of Cotonou's Vodoun practice, currently Daagbo Hounon Houna. Worshipers visit the official residence of the high priest, Daagbo Hounon Houna, where lavish arrangements are made for welcoming the followers. Drinks and feasting follow as people invoke the blessing of the holy spirits and pray for mercy.

Voodoo, or Vodoun, as practiced in West Africa, started with the Yoruba people. It spread to other African countries through the slave trade. As a result of the slave trade, which flourished in some regions of Benin, Benin natives were exported to different parts of Africa, America, and Europe, where they practiced, or came in contact with, Vodoun.

Voodoo is now practiced by 50 percent of Benin's population. In many places, people belonging to other religious faiths also practice voodoo. According to voodoo belief, life begins from earth, water, fire, and air. The people believe that voodoo

exists for doing good and for the good of society.

A festive spirit envelops the whole of Benin on Traditional Day. Songs and dance are an integral part of the celebrations with drummers highlighting the show. Goats are sacrificed to give thanks to the ancestral spirits.

See also Volume III: Yoruba

❁ MARTYRS' DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 16

Martyrs' Day commemorates an unsuccessful mercenary attack on the city of Cotonou, the seat of government, on January 16, 1977. On this day a group of French and other European mercenaries flew into the Cotonou airport and launched an offensive against the armed forces. The mercenary group had the backing of the neighboring state of Gabon, which supplied arms, ammunition, and planes to the mercenaries. The Benin army responded immediately. They fought for a few hours and drove the mercenaries away. Many innocent civilians, as well as soldiers, lost their lives defending Benin.

On Martyrs' Day big celebrations are planned all over the country to mark the victory against foreign invaders. Homage is paid to those heroes who fought for Benin.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, May Day, or Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers. The May 1 observance of Labor Day was set in 1889 by the Socialist Second International; the date was selected to coincide with a general strike in the United States in 1890 called by the American Federation of Labor (AFL) to demand an eight-hour workday.

In Benin workers hold large demonstrations all over the country.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 1

On August 1, 1960, the country that was to become the Republic of Benin was granted independence from French colonial rule. For that reason Benin celebrates its independence on this date.

Benin, formerly called Dahomey, had been under French rule since the late 19th century. In 1946 following World War II, France designated the country an overseas territory. But the Beninese people wanted to be independent and pressed for total freedom. France granted it in 1958, and the Republic of Dahomey came into existence. The country achieved complete independence on August 1, 1960, after the Beninese intensified their protests against the French.

On Independence Day huge celebrations are held, and traditional dance and music performances take place all over Benin. Independence Day celebrations are presided over by the president, the official host of the foreign dignitaries invited for the occasion. Parades by the armed forces, patriotic speeches, and cultural programs are also a part of Independence Day celebrations in Benin.

NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 30

Until 1975, Benin was known as the Republic of Dahomey. In 1972, after seizing power in a coup, Major Mathieu Kerekou became president of Dahomey. On November 30, 1975, he changed the country's official name to the Republic of Benin. Since then November 30 has been celebrated as National Day in Benin. This is a national holiday, and all public and private institutions are closed on November 30.

Religious Holidays

EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

During the holy month of Ramadan, Muslims observe a month-long fast lasting each day from dawn until dusk. Its purpose is to build a stronger spirit. Eid al-Fitr, or Koriteh, marks the end of Ramadan, and fasting on this day is strictly forbidden in the Holy Koran. On this day Beninese Muslims awaken early for a light meal. They dress in new clothes and gather in mosques to offer prayers. They thank Allah for his benevolence and for granting them the strength to endure the month-long fast.

A festive spirit reigns in Benin as Muslims visit friends and family and exchange greetings and gifts.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

The Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha honors Ibrahim's (Abraham's) willingness to sacrifice his own son at God's command. For this reason the observance is also called the Festival of Sacrifice, or Tabaski in Benin. Just as Ibrahim was about to kill his son, God replaced the young boy with a ram. On this day Beninese Muslims offer prayers to Allah and thank him for his benevolence. Then they greet their friends and families. Goats are sacrificed, and their meat is distributed among family, friends, and the poor.

The holy pilgrimage, or hajj, also takes place at this time of year. Each Muslim is directed by the Holy Koran to undertake this journey at least once in his or her lifetime if at all possible. At the end of the journey, the pilgrim is expected to make a sacrifice and have the top of his or her head shaved.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday is observed as the day that Jesus was crucified. It falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday in Lent. Some Christians fast on Good Friday.

This Christian festival commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. It has been in the Christian liturgical calendar even longer than Easter, although no

one is sure why it is called Good Friday. Some have suggested that the use of *good* in the name goes back to Old English and means “God’s” Friday, while others interpret *good* to mean something like “observed as holy.” This observance is also known as Black Friday and Sorrowful Friday, and in Eastern Orthodox Churches it is called Great Friday.

For many years Good Friday was primarily a Catholic observance, but many Protestant churches now hold special services from noon until three in the afternoon on this day to symbolize Jesus’ last hours on the Cross. Many of the faithful fast on this day; when they eat, it is generally fish instead of meat.

On Good Friday in Benin Catholics attend a special Mass and offer prayers to God and Jesus. Devotional hymns sung by church choirs and theatrical plays depicting the life and teachings of Jesus are highlights of Good Friday observances.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday and Monday after Lent

The Christian festival of Easter celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus three days after his Crucifixion. It also marks the culmination of Lent, which begins on Ash Wednesday. Lent is a 40-day fasting period that prepares Christians for Easter.

In Benin this day is a public holiday. The following day is also a holiday and is celebrated as Easter Monday. For Easter most Christian Beninese attend church services and hold large family get-togethers.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ MOULOUD

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

The Muslim holiday of Mouloud celebrates the birthday of Muhammad, the most revered of Islamic prophets. His birthday falls in the third month of the Islamic year. This calendar follows a lunar calendar and, since that calendar is 11 days shorter, has no fixed date on the Western solar calendar. On this day Beninese Muslims offer prayers in their local mosques and thank Allah for communicating his messages through Muhammad. The spirit of the day is festive as people exchange greetings with their friends and families. A special meal is also prepared on this occasion.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOUD

❁ ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Forty Days after Easter

Ascension Day is a day of special celebration for Christians all over the world, because they believe Jesus ascended to heaven 40 days after he rose from the dead. Special Ascension services are held in churches all over Benin. Devout Christians offer prayers and reaffirm their commitment to the Christian faith.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

❁ PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fifty days after Easter

The Christian festival of Pentecost (a Greek term that means “fiftieth”) is celebrated 50 days after Easter. Pentecost commemorates the Christian belief in the visitation of the Holy Spirit to the apostles 50 days after Jesus was crucified. The exact date is dependent on Easter and is therefore a moveable Christian feast day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; PENTECOST

❁ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: August 15

The Feast of the Assumption commemorates the death and elevation to heaven of Mary, the mother of Jesus. It is also celebrated as the Virgin Mary’s heavenly birthday. Observed annually on August 15, it is one of the most important Catholic festivals. Mary’s ascent to heaven is of great significance to devout Catholics, because Jesus had assured them that those who believe in him and in God would find a place in the glory of heaven.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

❁ ALL SAINTS’ DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: November 1

All Saints’ Day is a Christian feast honoring all saints (known and unknown) of the Christian Church. It is an annual religious celebration that takes place on November 1. On All Saints’ Day devout Beninese Christians attend a special prayer service in memory of the saints and offer thanks to God for his benevolence, as well as for the gifts of the pious saints to humanity. The lives and teach-

The Edo Calendar

In the Edo kingdom, there were two kinds of years: male and female. One was a month longer than the other. The year was divided into Moons. The names of the Moons did not correspond to lunar months, but to ceremonies conducted in proximity to the said Moon (month). From time to time months were longer than lunar months, and at one point in northern Edo 40-day months were even used, yielding a nine-month year. In addition, a four-day week was more universal, because this was the typical interval between two markets at a given location. In the Idah area though, eight-day markets were sometimes found. On the day of rest, men would typically stay at home, although farm work was not totally prohibited. Women, however, went to market as usual.

ings of these saints are remembered and serve as a source of inspiration to the worshippers.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus and is an important festival for Christians. Beninese Catholics attend a special evening Mass on December 24, Christmas Eve. Protestants attend services that include singing Christmas carols with the church choir. Afterward, people greet one another and exchange gifts with friends and family. Dancing, singing, and feasting are high points of the Christmas celebrations.

See also Volume III: CHRISTMAS; CHRISTIANITY

Regional Holidays

THE YAM FESTIVAL

Observed in: Savaloo

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Mid-August

The Yam festival celebrates the main food of most Beninese: pounded yams and ground manioc. This festival takes place in mid-August and is usually combined with the celebration of the feast of the

Assumption. There is traditional singing and dancing and lots of food, especially yams.

IGUE FESTIVAL

Observed in: Regions with Edo populations

Observed by: Edo tribe

Observed on: Thirteenth month in the Edo calendar

In the ancient kingdom of Edo, tradition dictated that the king (or *oba*) be worshipped as the people's god. It was believed that the people's luck depended on that of the king. Thus this festival is dedicated to good luck, prosperity, and long life. People make offerings to appease the *oba* and other gods. Ritual sacrifices of animals are made in front of the *oba*, followed by traditional dance performances. Singing, feasting, drinking, and dancing are the main highlights of the Igue festival. The festival lasts for seven days, and the Edo people eagerly await this annual event.

Rites of Passage

MARRIAGE

Wedding rituals vary from community to community in Benin. Many value virginity highly. Thus, the mothers of Edo brides give their daughters cash if they remain virgins until their wedding night. After the wedding night the bedsheets are checked thoroughly for bloodstains. The next morning the bride's nightgown may be shown to the public as proof of her virginity.

DEATH

In the Vodoun culture, which is widespread in Benin, death is not regarded as the end of life. Practitioners believe that the body is the shell for the life force. After death, the soul journeys back to where it came from. It is important to send the soul back to the cosmic community; otherwise, it will wander the Earth and cause harm to the person's family.

Further Reading

Paula Girshick Ben-Amos, *The Art of Benin* (New York: Smithsonian Books, 1995); Iro Eweka, *Dawn to Dusk: Folk Tales from Benin* (Portland, Ore.: Frank Cass and Co., 1998); Elliot Kitt, *Benin: An African Kingdom and Culture* (Minneapolis: Lerner Publishing Group, 1979); Dominique Malaquais, *The Kingdom of Benin* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1998).

❧ Bermuda ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	A group of islands in the north Atlantic Ocean, east of the United States, off coast of the state of North Carolina (United States)
Size	21 sq. mi.
Capital City	Hamilton
Flag Description	Bermuda's flag is red, with the flag of the United Kingdom in the upper hoist-side quadrant and the Bermudian coat of arms (white and green shield with a red lion holding a scrolled shield showing the sinking of the ship <i>Sea Venture</i> off Bermuda in 1609) centered on the outer half of the flag.
Independence	N.A. (Overseas territory of the United Kingdom)
Population	65,365 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary; British overseas territory with internal self-government
Nationality	Bermudian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Black (55%); white (34%)
Major Language(s)	English (official); Portuguese
Major Religion(s)	Anglican (23%); other Protestant (18%); Roman Catholic (15%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Bermuda Day, May 24; Queen's Birthday, June 14; Emancipation Day, July; Labor Day, September; Armistice Day, November 11

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

Bermuda is named after the Spanish naval captain Juan de Bermudez (d. 1570 C.E.), who sighted the uninhabited islands around 1503. The Spanish did not claim the islands, but they became an important navigational landmark for galleons crossing the Atlantic between Spain and the Western Hemisphere. Since Bermuda is surrounded by dangerous coral reefs, nautical misadventures cast the Spanish ashore on several occasions and littered the seabed with huge amounts of treasure.

In 1609, the flagship *Sea Venture*, commanded by Admiral Sir George Somers (1554–1610) was blown off course and wrecked off the coast of Bermuda. The *Catch*, another vessel of the group of nine ships that sailed from Plymouth, England, was also wrecked. Both ships were headed for the British settlement at Jamestown, Virginia. Although the sur-

vivors of the wreck found the island quite pleasant, they fashioned replacement ships of fine Bermuda cedar and sailed off to Jamestown, arriving just in time to save the locals from starvation. However they left behind a couple of men to establish a British claim to the islands. Admiral Somers returned to Bermuda later in the year, only to die shortly afterward. The British renamed Bermuda Somers Islands in honor of the admiral, but the name failed to stick.

The Virginia Company, excited by news of the islands' habitability, sent 60 settlers to establish a colony three years after Somers's misadventure. Unfortunately the shallow topsoil and the lack of water prevented commercial crops such as sugarcane from being introduced. The settlers soon became reliant on food imports from the British colonies on the North American mainland, which they paid for by supplying sea salt from the islands. For many years the Virginia Company—a company chartered for the purpose of settling Virginia, and then a subsidiary, the Bermuda Company, ran the islands like a fiefdom. Eventually, however, settlers managed

Fun Fact

The experience of these British castaways is believed to have inspired William Shakespeare to write *The Tempest*.

to get the company's charter rescinded, and in 1684 Bermuda became a British Crown Colony.

Slaves were first introduced to the islands in 1616; most were from Africa, though some were Amerindians. The slaves lived in deplorable conditions and were generally employed as domestic servants or tradesmen rather than agricultural laborers. The skills they learned stood them in good stead when slavery was abolished in 1834.

At the time of emancipation in 1834 more than half of the people residing in Bermuda were registered on the census as black or colored. The former slaves became sailors and shipbuilders. In the 1840s Portuguese immigrants came to Bermuda as agricultural workers. They were later followed by the West Indians. Despite Bermuda's reliance on trade with the North American colonies, political bonds with Britain proved stronger. During the American War of Independence Bermuda remained loyal to the Crown. During the War of 1812 the British Navy used Bermuda as a base from which to ransack Washington, D.C. The Americans responded by confiscating the unprotected cargo of Bermuda's merchant fleet, devastating the local economy.

In a bid to escape the long, harsh Canadian winter, Princess Louise, the daughter of Queen Victoria (1819–1901) and the wife of the governor general of Canada paid an extended visit to the islands in 1883. Unwittingly she was instrumental in putting Bermuda on the world tourist map. By the turn of the century Bermuda had been transformed into a fashionable winter destination for people seeking a warm-weather respite, who flocked aboard steamers, which sailed regularly from New York and Hamilton, Ontario, in Canada.

In the wake of World War II, women were given the right to vote, and, gradually some restrictions on the rights of black voters were removed. In 1963 the Progressive Labour Party was introduced, in part to represent the interests of nonwhite

Gombey Dancers

Gombey dancing is an art form unique to Bermuda. While it has roots in West African tribal music, *gombey* dancing also incorporates influences from Christian missionaries, the British military, and Amerindians, from whom *gombey* dancers have adapted their costumes. To the uninitiated, the *gombey* dancers may look like wildly costumed characters jumping up and down to loud music, but in fact the dancing is carefully choreographed to specific rhythms and often portrays biblical stories. The dancers traditionally take to the streets on Boxing Day and New Year's Day.

Bermudians in a government composed entirely of white landowners.

Today Bermuda enjoys an affluent status as an offshore financial center, but the government has begun reforming this industry to clean up the territory's reputation as a tax haven. More than 13,000 companies are registered here. The territory's other mainstay is tourism; more than half a million people visit annually. Although a healthy majority of islanders voted against independence in 1995, in 2004 Premier Jennifer Smith (b. 1947) reignited the issue by calling for the resumption of a territory-wide debate. In the early 21st century, the islands remain an overseas territory of Britain.

✿ CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Bermuda consists of about 138 coral islands and islets with ample rainfall but no rivers or freshwater lakes. Since it is located in the subtropical region, it commonly experiences gales and strong winds in winter. Bermuda has a remarkably mild, humid climate that seldom sees extremes of hot or cold. Rainfall is spread fairly evenly throughout the year.

✿ ECONOMY

The mainstays of Bermuda's economy are international financial services, especially insurance, and tourism. Fine beaches, an excellent climate, and picturesque sites have made Bermuda a fashionable and popular year-round resort. Semitropical produce, sales of fuel to aircraft and ships, and pharmaceuticals are among Bermuda's exports, though all are relatively minor in the overall economic picture.

✿ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Bermudian culture is a melding of British and African heritages. The British influences are seen primarily in institutions, including the government, educational system, and legal framework. The judges still wear powdered wigs, and cricket is the most popular sport. English is spoken on Bermuda, and the majority of islanders identify themselves as Christian. The African influence is a bit subtler but can be seen in the island's music, which features reggae and calypso. These two types of music are African in origin but came to Bermuda by way of the West Indies. The wonderful rhythms of *gombey* dancers are another African-inspired art form.

✿ CUISINE

Bermuda does not have a distinctive cuisine, but it does have some local seafood dishes worth noting. The island's fish chowder is commonly made with rockfish or snapper and flavored with local black rum and sherry pepper sauce. Codfish cakes were once a staple food on the island and are still prepared on certain days of the year. Johnnycakes—cornmeal griddlecakes with peas and rice—are popular every-

day fare. A typical well-known meal is the Sunday codfish breakfast, a huge affair consisting of codfish, eggs, boiled Irish potatoes, bananas, and avocado with a sauce made of onions and tomatoes.

Cassava pie is a traditional Christmas delicacy. Cassava, or yucca, is a starchy vegetable, which has special significance for Bermudians, since it is credited with having helped early settlers survive during periods of famine. Black Seal rum is the locally brewed national beverage. Locals often combine it with ginger beer, while visitors prefer it as the main ingredient in their rum swizzles.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

The residents of Bermuda bid farewell to the old year and welcome the new with hopes and aspirations. New Year's Day is celebrated by hosting parties with family and friends. As a popular tourist destination, Bermuda holds celebrations and festivities throughout the year for tourists, but New Year's is a particularly special time for residents.

❁ BERMUDA DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 24

Bermuda Day was originally called Empire Day to celebrate Queen Victoria's birthday, but now May 24 marks the beginning of summer for Bermudians. This event-packed day kicks off with a bicycle race from Somerset to Hamilton, along with a half-marathon and a rollerblading race on the same course. In the afternoon a parade of floats and bands winds its way through the streets of Hamilton, the capital, while the first dinghy race of the season keeps boating enthusiasts entertained.

❁ QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 14

Since Bermuda is a British protectorate, the birthday of the reigning British monarch assumes great importance. The occasion is celebrated annually in June with great pomp and show. Politicians and civil servants attend the official ceremonies. The premier, opposition party leader, fire chief, police commissioner, and mayor of Hamilton (in top hat and chains of office) also attend. The governor, dressed in full ceremonial whites, plumed hat, and blue sash, inspects the regimental troops. There is a 21-gun salute before the governor leads the crowd in shouting three cheers for the queen.

❁ EMANCIPATION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Last Thursday of July

On August 1, 1834, as in other British possessions in the West Indies, slavery was abolished in Bermuda, with the release of nearly 5,000 slaves from bondage. This historic event is commemorated on the last Thursday of July.

The most spectacular celebrations are those in the island town of St. George. They include dramatic readings, music, and dance. Part of the commemoration is a visit to the burial ground for slaves (as well as those of free blacks) at St. Peter's Church. These celebrations conclude with the famous and hugely popular Somers Cup Match: a cricket match between the Somerset and St. George's Cricket Clubs. Most Bermudians are lifelong supporters of one team or the other. Those who do not attend the match listen eagerly to the commentary on the radio.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: First Monday of September

In many countries Labor Day recognizes workers' contributions to economic development and progress on May 1, the date chosen by the Socialist Second International in 1889. In Bermuda, however, the observance takes place on the first Monday in September, the same day as in the United States. Labor union leaders make speeches and hold rallies, and there are road races, games, and other festivities on this day. Banks and educational institutions are closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ ARMISTICE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 11

Armistice Day, or Remembrance Day, was originally instituted to honor veterans and those who were killed in World War I. Since then it has been expanded to include veterans and heroes of other wars. World War II has particular importance for Bermuda, because its strategic location in the Atlantic gave it an important role in aiding British and U.S. allies in military and intelligence operations. On this day the inhabitants of the island remember and pay homage to the soldiers who died in those wars.

Fun Fact

Bermuda has intimate associations with a number of famous writers and painters who lived, worked, or vacationed on the island, including Eugene O'Neill, Noel Coward, James Thurber, Peter Benchley, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Winslow Homer.

Religious Holidays

✿ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

This Christian festival commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. It has been in the Christian liturgical calendar even longer than Easter has although no one is sure why it is called Good Friday. Some have suggested that the use of *good* in the name goes back to Old English and means “God’s” Friday, while others interpret *good* to mean something like “observed as holy.” This observance is also known as Black Friday and Sorrowful Friday, and in Eastern Orthodox Churches it is called Great Friday.

For many years Good Friday was primarily a Catholic observance, but many Protestant Churches now hold special services from noon until three in the afternoon on this day to symbolize Jesus’ last hours on the Cross. Many of the faithful fast on this day; when they eat, it is generally fish instead of meat.

This is a solemn occasion, and people spend the day listening to readings of the Gospels and Psalms and singing hymns, although there are other traditions on the island. One of them is flying kites, a custom that goes back to a 19th century Sunday school teacher who flew a kite to show his pupils how Jesus got to heaven.

Another Bermudian tradition is a special breakfast served on Good Friday: salted cod soaked overnight and boiled with potatoes. The dish is served with an olive oil and mayonnaise sauce and sliced bananas on the side.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter celebrates the day Jesus rose from the dead, three days after his Crucifixion. Many Bermudians and other local residents celebrate at sunrise on Easter morning with special prayer services, which are held throughout Bermuda. One of the most notable services is the one conducted at Horseshoe Bay. For Easter Sunday services the churches are colorfully decorated with special floral arrangements featuring Easter lilies, which bloom during this season. For the children there are Easter Egg Hunts and plenty of kite flying, a favorite pastime in Bermuda.

During Easter week celebrations, Bermudians eat traditional (British style) hot cross buns. Besides being available at local bakeries, they are often homemade and sold or given away by women. The buns are square-shaped, about one and three-quarters inches wide and one and a half inches deep, with sugar frosting applied to them in the shape of a cross, symbolizing Jesus’ agony and death on the Cross.

It is also customary for Bermudians to eat codfish cakes with bananas on this occasion, a dish ritually eaten during Lent. In previous centuries, Catholics abstained from meat on Fridays as a measure of austerity. Therefore eating codfish on Easter Sunday is meant to symbolize the end of austerity and penance and the commencement of festivities.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

On Christmas, the people of Bermuda attend church, visit friends and relatives, and exchange gifts. Christmas carols are sung and festive meals are enjoyed in the company of friends and relatives. A cheerful air prevails and includes an influx of foreign tourists who come to Bermuda to spend the Christmas season.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

✿ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26

The day after Christmas is known as Boxing Day, Family Day, or the Feast of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr. It is called Boxing Day following an old British tradition whose origins are unclear but may have been rooted in the custom of distributing the contents of alms boxes among the poor on this day. The day after Christmas tradespeople and others who performed public services went from door to door with small ceramic boxes asking for tips or bonuses. Boxing Day has been a recognized holiday in Bermuda only since the 20th century. Adding it to extend the Christmas holiday has allowed many people to travel and visit extended families. By and large it is a day devoted to outdoor sports, especially horse racing and cricket matches. Food, fun, and a spirit of love and friendship pervade the atmosphere.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

✿ BERMUDA KITE FESTIVAL

Observed in: Horseshoe Bay

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March

No one knows for certain exactly when or why Bermuda embraced kite flying during the Easter season. The story goes that a Sunday-school teacher used the flying of a kite to illustrate the way Jesus ascended to heaven. Once the kite was airborne at

the full length of the string the teacher would cut the string, allowing the kite to be swept away by the wind until it disappeared. Over the centuries kite flying on Good Friday has become as much a part of the day as eating codfish cakes and playing marbles. The Kite Festival at Horseshoe Bay is indeed a spectacular event that fills the skies with kites of all shapes, sizes, and hues. There is a great deal of excitement among the people who take part in this much-anticipated event.

See also Volume III: EASTER

❁ PEPPERCORN CEREMONY

Observed in: Town of St. George

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April

This is an old ceremony full of color, pomp, pageantry, and some silliness. The leading players in

the ceremony are the governor and Freemasons of Lodge No. 200, a Scottish fellowship established in Bermuda in 1797. The ritual commences when the governor arrives in his landau (a four-wheeled, horse-drawn passenger carriage) wearing his ceremonial white uniform. Local dignitaries and members of the St. George's Lodge greet him. The Bermuda Regiment provides a guard of honor, and lodge members turn out in full regalia for the handing over of the annual symbolic rent for their use of the old State House—a single peppercorn. After the payment is made and speeches have been delivered, the governor and his escort leave.

Further Reading

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❧ Bhutan ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Southern Asia, between China and India
Size	18,147 sq. mi.
Capital City	Thimpu
Flag Description	The flag of Bhutan is divided diagonally from the lower hoist-side corner. The upper triangle is yellow and the lower triangle is orange; a large black-and-white dragon, facing away from the hoist side, is centered along the dividing line.
Independence	August 8, 1949 (from India)
Population	2,232,291 (2005 est.)
Government	Monarchy; special treaty relationship with India
Nationality	Bhutanese
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Bhote (50%); Ethnic Nepalese (35%)
Major Language(s)	Dzongkha (official); Bhotes speak various Tibetan dialects; Nepalese speak various Nepalese dialects
Major Religion(s)	Buddhism (75%); Hinduism (25%)
National Holiday(s)	Losar, February; Birth Anniversary of Third King, May 2; Coronation of the Fourth King, June 2; Death of the Third King, July 16; Birthday of the Fourth King, November 11; National Day, December 17; Winter Solstice, December 21

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

Because little or no archaeological research has been done in Bhutan, nothing is known about the prehistory of the region. The earliest records available indicate that the first settlers arrived here about 1,400 years ago. However they may have encountered scattered clusters of earlier inhabitants. The official name of this country is Druk Yul, which means “land of the thunder dragon.” The Bhutanese call themselves Drukpa. The colloquial name Bhutan is probably derived from the Sanskrit word *bhotant*, which means “the end of Tibet”; another possible root is *bhuuttan*, which means “high land.”

In addition to the majority Bhote, today’s Drukpa population is made up of three main ethnic Nepalese groups: the Sharchops, the Ngalops, and the Lhotsampas. As far as is known the Sharchops were Bhutan’s earliest residents. They were originally members of tribes in northern Burma and

northeast India. Today, they occupy eastern Bhutan. The Ngalops, who brought Buddhism to the kingdom, originated in the Tibetan plains. In the early 20th century the Lhotsampas (who are of Nepalese origin) migrated to the southern plains of Bhutan, mostly in search of agricultural land and work.

The roots of the present form of government were planted by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (late 1500s–1651), a Tibetan lama (or priest) of the Drukpa School, who came to Bhutan in 1616. Under Namgyal’s leadership Bhutan was unified for the first time. Although he was the country’s supreme leader, he delegated responsibility for all civil affairs to the *druk desi* (an administrator similar to a prime minister) and responsibility for religious activities to the *je khenpo*, or chief abbot. Namgyal also built a system of fortified monasteries (*dzongs*), which have become an important focus of Bhutanese culture. After Shabdrung died, sporadic civil wars continued for almost two centuries. During this period the regional governors (*ponlops*) became increasingly powerful.

Ugyen Wangchuk (1861–1926), the *ponlop* of Trongsa, was finally successful in subduing the other feuding *ponlops* who had

Dzong

Dzongs are fortified monasteries prevalent in Bhutan. They serve as the religious, military, administrative, and social centers of their districts and are often the site of local festivals (*tsechu*).

Dzongs are frequently sited on hilltops or mountain spurs. If a *dzong* is built on the side of a valley wall, a smaller *dzong* is typically built directly uphill from the main *dzong* for the purpose of keeping the slope clear of attackers, who might otherwise shoot downward into the courtyard of the main *dzong* below.

Dzong architecture is a distinctive type of fortress architecture. The buildings are massive, with towering exterior walls surrounding a complex of courtyards, temples, administrative offices, and living quarters for monks. The distinctive features of this genre include: high inward sloping walls of brick and stone painted white, with few or no windows in the lower sections of the wall; and the use of a surrounding red stripe near the top of the walls (perhaps punctuated by large gold circles)

plunged Bhutan into a state of almost perpetual civil war. He had consolidated his authority across the entire country by 1885; in 1907, an assembly of representatives of the monastic community, civil servants, and other citizens, elected Ugyen Wangchuck the first king of Bhutan in recognition of his superb statesmanship and leadership abilities. Around the same time Wangchuck also assumed the role of mediator between the British and the Chinese. He ruled until 1926, establishing a dynasty. The monarchy has thrived ever since, and the present fourth king His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck (b. 1955) commands the overwhelming respect of his subjects.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Bhutan is a landlocked country surrounded by the eastern Himalayan Mountains. It is south of Tibet and north and west of the Indian territories of Assam, West Bengal, and Sikkim. Bhutan's total area is about 18,147 square miles (about the size of Switzerland). The Greater Himalayas in the north reach heights of over 23,950 feet and are sparsely populated. Their height diminishes in the south of the country to form the fertile valleys of the Lesser Himalayas, which are divided by the Torsa, Raidak, Sankosh, and Manas Rivers. The majority of the population lives in the cultivated central uplands and Himalayan foothills.

The climate of Bhutan ranges from cold in the north to tropical in the south. In the high-altitude passes, the snowfall is so heavy it can lead to roadblocks. The period of heaviest snowfall in the higher mountain elevations is late December through mid-February. March through May is the spring season. Scarlet rhododendrons are in bloom, and Bhutan is vibrant, colorful, and quite spectacular. During the summer (late May–late September), the monsoons from the Bay of Bengal affect Bhutan. These monsoons have led to dense forestation in the south and alpine vegetation at higher altitudes.

Many species of wild orchids blossom during the late summer season (August). The autumn season (late September–November) is usually mild and clear.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The most common occupation in Bhutan is farming, and small family farms are the predominant social unit. At higher elevations cattle and yak breeding is the primary source of income, and the majority of Bhutanese here also live in small rural villages.

The Buddhist faith plays an important part in the Bhutanese way of life. Bhutan is the only country in the world to have retained the Tantric form of Mahayana Buddhism. Padmasambhava, better known as Guru Rinpoche (precious master), is the father of its official lineage (*drukpa kagyü*).

Buddhism affects all aspects of secular life. It is common to see Bhutanese making circles around offering receptacles (*chortens* or *stupas*) with prayer beads or twirling prayer wheels. In every Bhutanese home there is a special room used for prayers called a *chosum*.

Tshechus and *dromchoes* are two different kinds of spiritual festivals that are important here. They unite the population and are dedicated to the Guru Rinpoche or protective deities. There are also *chortens* lining the roadsides, marking places where it is believed Guru Rinpoche or other senior lamas stopped to meditate. Innumerable prayer flags (*dashi*) dot the hills, because the Bhutanese people believe they keep them in constant contact with the spiritual world.

There is no rigid class system in Bhutan, and neither rank nor birth affects social and educational

Masked Dances

Masked dances and dance dramas are common features at all Bhutanese festivals. Energetic dancers wearing colorful wooden or composition masks employ costumes and music to depict a panoply of heroes, demons, death heads, animals, gods, and caricatures of common people. The dances enjoy royal patronage and preserve not only ancient folk and religious customs but also perpetuate the art of mask-making.

opportunities. Bhutanese men and women enjoy equal rights in all respects. Dzongkha is Bhutan's official language, but the geographic isolation of Bhutan's highland villages has preserved a number of dialects.

Bhutanese women wear an ankle-length dress called a *kira*. It is made from finely woven fabric and beautifully colored in traditional patterns. They also wear necklaces made from coral, pearls, turquoise, or agate. (The Bhutanese call these stones *dzi* beads or "tears of the gods.") Men wear a *gho*, a long robe tied around the waist with a small belt called a *kera*. Bhutan uses both the Buddhist lunar calendar and the Gregorian calendar in designating its holidays.

❁ CUISINE

Meat and poultry, dairy products, grain, and vegetables are all basic to the Bhutanese diet. The Bhutanese also eat red or white rice with every meal. Chilies are used lavishly in preparing poultry and meat dishes (pork, beef, and yak). The national dish is *emdatse* (chili peppers and cheese stew). The usual drink on all social occasions is *suja*, a salted butter tea. A local beer called Chang, as well as *arra*, a drink distilled from rice, maize, wheat, or barley, are also popular. It is customary to offer *doma* or betel nuts to guests as a sign of welcome.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ LOSAR

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February

Lasting for three days Losar (Tibetan *lo* means "year" and *sar* means "new") is the Buddhist New Year and one of Bhutan's major festivals. Before the onset of a new year, it is mandatory for Buddhists to complete all unfinished business and dismiss unhappy memories. On the last day of the old year Bhutanese visit monasteries to make offerings to the monks and deities. The first day of the new year is reserved for celebrating only with family.

On all three days of the holiday there are many feasts and dances throughout the country. The Bhutanese participate in the many New Year's ceremonies presided over by the monks. One important ritual is a play in which celebrants wear grotesque masks and robes, telling the story of the struggle between good and evil through dance and pantomime.

The dances, with their complicated patterns performed by specially trained monks, once served as a way of teaching Buddhism to people who could not read or write. But their deeper function was to control and influence the spirits. In the Drum Dance of Dramitse, which depicts a vision of heavenly entities at the palace of the Guru Rinpoche, the dancers wear animal masks representing deer, tigers, elephants, and crocodiles and carry ornately decorated

drums. Some of the dancers wear costumes made of multicolored silk and skirts of brightly colored scarves. But the Black Hat dancer wears an elaborate, brocade robe and a black hat. This dance has two purposes. First it depicts the murder of a Tibetan king who persecuted Buddhists in 842. It is also a conquest of and offering to the Earth deities. Clowns provide a lighter spirit by mimicking the serious dancers and joking with the onlookers.

Another outstanding feature of the celebrations is the archery competitions across the country. Archery is Bhutan's national sport, and although archery competitions occur year-round, these are the most important ones. The night before a contest, the competing teams employ astrologers to cast spells on the opposition. The competitors then spend the night in a *barn*, a tradition continued for centuries and partly devised to keep the male competitors separated from their womenfolk, lest concentration should be compromised.

For the competitors the day of the event begins with a traditional breakfast and initiation ceremonies, after which the alcohol begins to flow freely. As competitors prepare to hit the targets, made of colorfully painted wood, the opposing team indulges in diversionary games. They whisper obscenities and, more daringly, dance in front of the target. Meanwhile the women sing to encourage their teams and try to discourage the opponents by jeering at them.

❁ BIRTHDAY OF THE THIRD KING

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 2

The architect of modern Bhutan King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck was born on May 2, 1928. He ascended to the throne as the third king in 1952. An educated and enlightened ruler, he helped Bhutan achieve significant development during his 20-year reign, and Bhutan became a member of the United Nations (UN).

❁ CORONATION OF THE FOURTH KING

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 2

The establishment of a hereditary monarchy in 1907 was a significant event in the country's history. The people of Bhutan are extremely loyal and devoted to the occupant of the throne. The king of Bhutan is known locally as the *druk gyalpo*. Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuk became king on July 23, 1972, at the age of 17, following the untimely death of his father. The official coronation was held on June 2, 1974.

In an otherwise quiet country, royal functions such as birthdays and coronations assume great sig-

nificance. The general public celebrates with archery competitions, fireworks, and masked dances.

❁ DEATH OF THE THIRD KING

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 16

The third king of Bhutan Druk Gyalpo Jigme Dorji Wangchuk (1929–72) passed away on July 16 1972, while on a visit to Africa for medical treatment. He had suffered from a weak heart most of his life, having had his first heart attack at age 20. In spite of his ill health, he had a tremendous impact on the country: ending feudalism and freeing the serfs, moving Bhutan toward democracy, helping the peasants with labor-saving innovations such as wheeled vehicles (instead of hand-carrying crops), and moving the country from isolation to international involvement. The loyal Bhutanese population remembers their former king on this day by offering prayers. The royal family pays tribute with special religious ceremonies.

❁ BIRTHDAY OF THE FOURTH KING

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 11

The fourth and incumbent ruler of Bhutan and head of the Bhutanese royal family Jigme Singye Wangchuck (r. 1972–) was born on November 11, 1955. He studied both in India and in the United Kingdom. However his education was interrupted by his father's sudden death from a heart attack. He cut short his studies to replace his father on the throne, and over the years he has emerged as a highly popular monarch with a progressive outlook. In Bhutan, especially in the capital of Thimphu, a festive air prevails on the king's birthday. There are brilliant displays of fireworks, many mask dances, and an unusual din and bustle. To ensure safety and discipline the streets of the capital are often closed to vehicular traffic on this day.

❁ NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 17

This day commemorates the ascension of Ugyen Wangchuck to the throne of Bhutan on December 17, 1907. Ugyen Wangchuk (1861–1926), the former *ponlop* (regional governor) of Trongsa, was instrumental in restoring peace among the feuding regional governors, who had devastated the country. By 1885 there was peace in the nation, and Ugyen's influence extended across the entire country. His next role was that of a mediator between the British and the Chinese. His outstanding contribution to the unification of a factionalized, warring territory into a peaceful, vibrant nation did not go unrecognized. The entire population of a grateful Bhutan,

which included representatives of the monastic community, civil servants, and local residents, elected Ugyen Wangchuck the first king of Bhutan, and the date of his coronation came to be celebrated as National Day. Ugyen became the first hereditary king of Bhutan and established a dynasty. His royal line has continued uninterrupted since 1907.

❁ WINTER SOLSTICE

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 21

In the Northern Hemisphere the winter solstice is the day when the Sun is farther south than any other day of the year. At this time the Earth has its shortest period of daylight and longest hours of darkness. The people of western Bhutan celebrate the winter solstice with the same excitement as New Year's. It is common for young people to take part in archery contests (the national sport), while the elderly visit religious monuments. For farmers the solstice means the departure of winter, the prospect of warmer weather, and planting time.

Religious Holidays

❁ SHABDRUNG KUCHOE

Observed by: Buddhists
Observed on: April–May

The most dynamic era in Bhutanese history was probably the 17th century, which began with the arrival in 1616 of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the great leader of the Drukpa School of Mahayana Buddhism. This day commemorates his death in 1651 at the Punakha Dzong on the tenth day of the fourth month in the lunar calendar.

Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal unified the country and laid the foundation for national governance and the Bhutanese identity. Beginning with the Simtokha Dzong in Thimphu, the Shabdrung (meaning “at whose feet one submits”) constructed many more *dzongs*, monasteries, and religious institutions. He founded Drukpa Kagyu as the state religion.

The Shabdrung left as his legacy a dualistic system of government—temporal and religious—with the *je khenpo* (chief abbot) as the religious head and the temporal leader known as the *desi*. This system saw Bhutan through the turn of the 19th century until the birth of the Wangchuk Dynasty and establishment of the hereditary monarchy in 1907.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM

❁ VESAK

Observed by: Buddhists
Observed on: Full Moon day in May

Vesak, known locally as Lord Buddha's Parinirvana Day, is a very important Buddhist festival, celebrating

the birth, enlightenment, and death (and salvation, or *parinirvana*) of the Buddha. It is observed on the day of the full Moon in May, except in leap years, when the festival is held in June. On this day the devout congregate in the local Buddhist temples and monasteries and take part in ceremonial prayers to the rhythm of drums.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM; VESAK

GURU RINPOCHE BIRTHDAY

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: Tenth of the fifth month of the Buddhist calendar

The most important figure in Mahayana Buddhism (which is followed in Tibet and Bhutan) was Padmasambhava, also known as Guru Rinpoche. There was a significant growth of Buddhism with his arrival in Bhutan in the eighth century. Born in the Swat province of what is now Pakistan, he became a Buddhist scholar and teacher and spread Buddhist teachings in Tibet and throughout the Himalayan region. His profound wisdom and mastery of the subject laid a firm foundation for Buddhism in Bhutan, where he traveled extensively and was involved in many daring encounters in the course of subduing local demons and deities. Throughout the Tibetan-Buddhist world Rinpoche Padmasambhava is venerated as the second Buddha.

In Bhutan his birthday is marked by community prayers and colorful mask dances. A special message from the Dalai Lama, the present leader of Tibetan Buddhists, is read to the celebrants.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM

THE FIRST SERMON OF LORD BUDDHA

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: Full Moon day in July

This Buddhist festival, known also as Asalha Puja Day and Dhamma Day, commemorates the Bud-

Rinpoche Padmasambhava

In the eighth century Padmasambhava, Guru Rinpoche (or the second Buddha) is believed to have made his legendary trip from eastern Bhutan to western Bhutan on the back of a flying tigress to subdue the evil spirits who hindered the propagation of Buddhism. After defeating them he blessed them as guardians of the doctrine, thus introducing Tantric Buddhism to Bhutan. The area where he landed is known as Taktshang, or Tigers' Nest, and is located in the Paro Valley. Today it remains one of most sacred places in Bhutan.

dha's first sermon to the public after he had attained enlightenment. On this occasion the Buddha set in motion the wheel of religion (*dharmacakkappavattana*) in the presence of five ascetics at a deer park in Sarnath, near Allahabad in India. It was the venue where Kondanna, the senior ascetic, became a stream-winner, or *sotapanna* (one who has attained the first level of enlightenment).

On this day the worshippers visit monasteries and bring food to the monks. They visit Buddhist shrines to offer flowers and light candles before images of the Buddha. The devout also listen to discourses by monks about the significance of this day, when the Buddhist faith was formally founded.

This day also marks the beginning of the Buddhist Lent (a three-lunar month period of austerity and abstention, coinciding with the rainy season).

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM

BLESSED RAINY DAY

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: Late September

Toward the end of the monsoon season Buddhists celebrate the festival known as Blessed Rainy Day. According to legend this is the day when the *khandroms* (female celestial beings) shower their benedictions on Earth and its inhabitants in the form of rain to wash away bad luck. People wash their hair and shower, which symbolically purges their bodies and souls.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM

DASHAIN

Observed by: Nepalese/Hindus

Observed on: October

During the month of Karttika in the Bikram Sambat calendar (late September and early October), the Nepalese people celebrate the biggest festival of the year—Dashain. Since Nepalese constitute a majority of the population in southern Bhutan, it is an important holiday in that part of the country. The 15 days of celebration occur during the bright lunar fortnight ending on the day of the full Moon. The Nepalese of Bhutan worship the Hindu deity Durga in all her manifestations with ceremonial prayers, offerings, and animal sacrifices. This celebration glorifies the triumph of good over evil. People wear colorful, new clothes and prepare special dishes for the occasion. Meat, a luxury for poor and lower-middle-class people, is a big part of Dashain feasts. Often animals are bought live from markets and sacrificed at home or in temples; then the whole family helps to cut up and prepare the meat.

See also Volume III: HINDUISM

❁ DESCENT OF LORD BUDDHA FROM HEAVEN

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: October–November

This festival, also called Lhabab Dheuchen, symbolizes the descent of Lord Buddha from heaven. In Tibet, the source of the Tantric form of Buddhism practiced in Bhutan, *lha* means “heaven,” *bab* means “descent.” According to legend Queen Mahamaya, the mother of Lord Buddha, who died shortly after his birth, was reborn in Trayastrimsa, or the heaven of the 33 gods. After attaining enlightenment Lord Buddha learned the whereabouts of his mother, and at the age of 41 ascended to the heavens along with many of his followers. He stayed in heaven for three months, teaching his mother and other celestial beings the supreme truth. Maudgalyayana, one of his disciples who had stayed behind on Earth, and other devotees began pining for him. Maudgalyayana, who possessed miraculous powers, was exhorted to go up to heaven to request the lord to return. The gods were not willing to let Lord Buddha return to Earth, so Maudgalyayana suggested that, since the earthly beings did not have the powers to visit heaven, the celestial beings could come to Earth to listen to Lord Buddha’s preaching. Lord Buddha finally relented and descended to Earth at a place called Sankasya. On this day devout Buddhists offer prayers at the local Buddhist shrines and prepare festive meals for friends and family.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM

Regional Holidays

❁ THIMPHU DRUPCHEN

Observed in: Thimphu

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 9

This festival (*dromchoe*) is dedicated to the Great Black Lord known as Mahakala (a bodhisattva or compassionate being) and Penden Lhamo. Dark blue in appearance, Penden Lhamo is the solitary female among the many *dharmapalas*—defenders (custodians) of the Buddhist faith. She is the patron deity of Tibet, the protector of all Tibetan Buddhist denominations (of which the Bhutanese Buddhists are one). She rides her mule through a sea burning with wisdom and streaming blood (opportunity of life in the bodily form) and is sheltered by an umbrella made of peacock feathers. Lhamo is conceptually related to the Hindu Shakti (goddesses Kali or Durga, who also destroy demons). This holiday is observed mainly by the residents of Thimphu, and the celebrations are confined to the capital.



Monks perform a black hat dance, a dance of ground purification, during the first day of the Tsechu festival at the Punakha Dzong. (AP Photo/Lisa Poole)

❁ THIMPU TSECHU

Observed in: Thimphu

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 13–15

Tsechu is a three-day masked festival that celebrates the virtuous deeds of Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava). Tsechu takes place in several regions of Bhutan, but the Tsechu in Thimphu is the most spectacular. The biography of the guru is highlighted by a 12-episode dance drama. Monks as well as laypeople perform the dances. Many of the dances were established by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal or by Pema Lingpa. The dancers enact the tales and myths connected with wrathful and compassionate deities, heroes, demons, and animals. The dances, known as *cham*, bring blessings to the onlookers, propagate the dharma (Buddhist creed), protect the onlookers from misfortune, and exorcise evil influences.

During the dances *asaras* (clowns) mimic the dancers and perform comic routines wearing masks with long red noses. The name is a corruption of the Sanskrit *acharya* (master). During the intermissions between the masked dances, elegantly dressed women sing and perform traditional dances.

Fun Fact

Tsechus are festivals conducted in honor of Padmasambhava, Guru Rinpoche. Dromchoes are festivals dedicated to either Yeshe Gampo (Mahakala) or Penden Lhamo, the two main protective deities of the Bhutanese.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

Since Bhutan is predominantly Buddhist, most Bhutanese adhere to the Buddhist ritual related to birth. The family chants and recites passages from the scriptures when the expectant mother goes into labor. The recital of prayers is believed to be helpful in allaying her fears. They may also be repeated by the father-to-be, to help to boost his confidence and calm his mind.

❁ COMING OF AGE

As in all Buddhist countries monasteries play a key role in everyday life in Bhutan. It is common practice among Buddhist families to have at least one son (generally the oldest) ordained as a monk. The initiation ceremony of a young boy (as a novice monk) is an important rite of passage. It represents the transformation of the boy into an adult. The initiation is accompanied by a big celebration and festivities, which are attended by the boy's family and friends. After the guests depart the boy is tonsured, and he takes his monastic vows. He leaves home for a sojourn in the monastery (which might last from a few days to a few weeks) and practices the rituals of Buddhist monastic life, including begging for food. During this time, it is mandatory for everyone, even his parents, to bow to him in reverence and acknowledge that he has reached a superior spiritual status. When the boy returns to his normal life, he is considered an adult in every respect. He may relinquish domestic life and enter the monastery again in the future if he so chooses.

❁ MARRIAGE

A traditional Bhutanese marriage is simple and is performed according to Buddhist precepts. Once the horoscope of the boy and the girl are matched, the family of the groom consults the lama for an auspicious day to conduct the marriage. The groom's family then visits the bride's house to ask her parents for their daughter's hand in marriage. On the day of the wedding bride and groom rise early to prepare food as offerings to the monks, as well as flowers, incense, and candles. These are believed to ensure good fortune for the marriage. At the stipulated time the bride and groom are taken to the venue of the wedding. The designated place must have a shrine featuring a statue or image of the Buddha, adorned with candles, flowers, and incense.

Buddhist wedding traditions do not necessarily require the presence of monks. The ceremony begins as the entire assembly recites the Vandana, Tisarana, and Pancasila readings. The couple then does obeisance to the image of the Buddha. Though there are no established marriage vows, the bride and groom are usually expected to be governed by the Sigilovdda Sutta doctrines. The bridegroom vows to love and respect his wife, to be kind, considerate, and faithful, and to provide her with pleasing gifts. The bride promises to perform her household duties competently, to be hospitable to her in-laws and her husband's friends, to be faithful, to invest their income, and to perform her duties lovingly and conscientiously. After the vows are uttered, the bride and groom can exchange rings. If monks are present, all the rituals will be punctuated by their chanting. Afterward the bride accompanies her husband to her new home, on either the same day or the next day, depending on their horoscopes. At her new home the bride is received by her mother-in-law. This is followed by a lavish meal.

❁ DEATH

In Bhutan, in cases where death is not sudden and the individual is languishing, monks are called in; they are expected to chant to help release the dying person's good energies from his or her body. The chanting continues until the person has drawn his or her last breath. After the person has died, the body is cleansed and dressed in neat but simple attire, utterly devoid of jewelry or embellishments. It is believed that the deceased has already been reborn elsewhere; thus such things are of no use to him or her. The body is placed in a casket and adorned with incense, and flowers offered by relatives, friends, and neighbors. It is common to cremate the dead, and the monks accompany the family to the cremation ground. The family offers food and candles to the monks in a bid to foster goodwill; it is commonly believed that this gesture contributes substantially toward the attainment of eternal peace and tranquility by the departed soul.

Further Reading

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~ Bolivia ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	In the middle of South America, near the Andes mountains, bordered by Peru and Chile to the west, Brazil to the east, and Paraguay and Argentina to the south
Size	424,164 sq. mi.
Capital City	La Paz (Administrative); Sucre (Judicial)
Flag Description	Bolivia's flag has three horizontal bands of equal size colored red (top), yellow, and green. The country's coat of arms is centered in the yellow band.
Independence	August 6, 1825 (from Spain)
Population	8,857,870 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Bolivian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Quechua (30%); Mestizo (30%; mixed white and indigenous South American); Aymara (25%)
Major Language(s)	Spanish; Quechua; Aymara—all official languages
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (95%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day, August 6

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Completely landlocked, the country of Bolivia is nestled in the Andes mountain range, the west central part of the South American continent. Around the year 1450 the Quechua-speaking Incas (an ancient South American civilization) entered the highland area of what is modern Bolivia and annexed it to their empire, which was based in Peru. They controlled the area until the arrival of the Spanish around 1525. In 1538 Spanish conquistadors founded the settlement of Chuquisaca, a city that later became the region's administrative capital.

Bolivia's significance increased in 1544, with the discovery of silver deposits in the Andes. The settlement of Potosí was founded at the foot of a mountain 13,800 feet above sea level. As commerce grew in the region, so did Potosí. By the early 1800s it had become the largest settlement in South America and boasted a population of over 160,000. Other settlements in the region included La Paz, founded in 1548, Cochabamba, established in 1574, and Oruro, started in 1604.

During the period of Spanish rule Bolivia was known as Alto Peru (Upper Peru). At first it was a dependency of the Viceroyalty of Peru, but in 1776 it was transferred to the newly formed Viceroyalty of La Plata.

Over time the Spanish regime became increasingly corrupt and inefficient. Angered by this, the inhabitants of Alto Peru banded together under Simon Bolivar (1783–1830) and began a campaign for independence. In 1824, Bolivar's second-in-command General Antonio José de Sucre (1795–1830), defeated the Spanish forces at the Battle of Ayacucho. In 1825 an assembly met at Chuquisaca and declared Bolivia's independence. Sucre was elected president. In 1826, a constitution framed by Bolívar came into force. It was then that the country officially adopted the name Bolivia. Chuquisaca was renamed Sucre after the general.

Independence was followed by successive short-lived dictatorships and internal struggles. Hostilities with neighboring countries were also frequent. When nitrate deposits were discovered in the Atacama Desert, Chile and Bolivia fought for the spoils. The war lasted for four years, from 1879 to 1883, ending in defeat for Bolivia. It had to give up large portions of its territories, including its outlet to the

Fun Fact

Near Tiahuanaco, Bolivia, a bowl called the Fuente Magna (“Great Bowl”) was apparently fashioned in the style associated with Mesopotamian ceramics. Two texts are found on the bowl, one in cuneiform, the other in a Semitic language of possible Sinaitic extraction, showing cuneiform influences. The two varieties of cuneiform suggest that the bowl originated during the transitional period between ideographical writing and cuneiform. Chronologically this places it between 3,500 and 3,000 B.C.E., the Sumerian/Akkadian period. The inscription suggests that it was used for religious purposes. The local people call it El Plato del Chanco (“the pig’s dish”).

Pacific Ocean. In 1904 it was forced to cede some territory to Brazil, and in 1935, some more to Paraguay. However it still retained significant mineral deposits, which had begun to attract foreign mining companies around the end of the 19th century. Three such conglomerates grew so powerful that they virtually ran the nation.

In 1952 the **Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario** (Nationalist Revolutionary Movement, or MNR), a revolutionary party, seized power and

introduced wide-ranging political reforms. Its rule lasted for only 12 years until 1964, when the army took over. During the next 25 years Bolivia had no less than 19 presidents, 13 generals among them. Only two completed full terms in office.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Bolivia is the fifth largest country in South America. It consists of five geographical regions: the Altiplano, prone to severe flooding, is a highly populated plateau stretching from the Peruvian border to the Argentine border; fertile highland valleys lie to the south and east of the Altiplano; the Yungas are

Lake Titicaca

Lake Titicaca is the world’s highest navigable lake. Located at an altitude of 12,500 feet above sea level, with a surface area of 3,200 square miles, it is larger than Puerto Rico and is South America’s largest lake. Lake Titicaca’s maximum depth is about 600 feet; its average depth is 500 feet, and its volume of water is large enough to maintain an average temperature of 56° F. The lake actually moderates the climate for a considerable distance around it, making crops of corn and wheat possible in sheltered areas nearby.

a transitional zone between the Andean region and the Amazonian forest; and the Chaco is a hot, dry, and largely uninhabited plain near the borders with Argentina and Paraguay. Finally, in the northern and eastern regions lies the Amazon Basin, made up of swamps, scrub, and rain forest.

There are two Andean mountain chains that run through the country. The Cordillera Occidental runs along the western border with Chile, near the Pacific Ocean. The Cordillera Real runs southeast through central Bolivia past Lake Titicaca and then joins the western Cordillera in the south of Bolivia.

Such extreme geographical variations naturally imply equally extreme weather conditions. By and large the country experiences cool temperatures. La Paz and Potosí are often very cold. However in the lowlands, the weather is hot and sunny, except for occasional cloudbursts. Bolivia’s rainy season lasts from November to March.

ECONOMY

Bolivia is one of the poorest countries in South America. In recent years it has undertaken thoroughgoing privatization. The state airline, telephone, railroad, electric power, and oil companies are all in private hands. It has also entered into a free-trade agreement with Mexico. Things have begun to look up economically, but only slightly. Bolivia is a source and transit country for men, women, and children trafficked for the purposes of forced labor and sexual exploitation. Poverty forces thousands of Bolivians to migrate or work in substandard conditions, placing large numbers at risk of being trafficked.

Bolivia produces soybeans, coffee, cocoa, cotton, corn, sugarcane, rice, potatoes, and timber. Its industries include mining, smelting, petroleum, food and beverages, tobacco, handicrafts, and clothing.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The inhabitants of Bolivia are largely descended from the indigenous communities that predated the Spanish conquests. Thus, while Spanish is the official language, only 60 to 70 percent of the people actually speak it, and then, only as a second language. Quechua, the language of the Inca civilization, is still spoken, as is Aymara, the pre-Incan language of the Altiplano district.

Roman Catholicism predominates, with approximately 95 percent of the population belonging to the Catholic Church. But many Bolivians, especially in the rural areas, adhere to a hybrid form of Christianity mixed with Incan and Aymara beliefs. The result is a unique blend of doctrines, rites, and superstitions.

CUISINE

Meat dominates Bolivia’s cuisine. It is usually eaten with rice, potatoes, and shredded lettuce. These ingredients form the base of *chairo*, or lamb soup.

Llajbua, a hot sauce containing tomatoes and pepper, is also popular. *Chankha*, which is chicken stewed in peas, and *paceno*, made from corn, potatoes, broad beans, and cheese, are national favorites.

Bolivia places great emphasis on strong liquor, and its beer and wine are well known. Bolivians also drink lots of *chicha*, an industrial-strength liquor made from corn.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

Bolivia ushers in the new year with singing, dancing, eating, and (especially) drinking. People usually spend the first few minutes of the year with close friends and family members.

The people of Bolivia also observe a few unique customs. One involves making little dolls out of straw or wood. These are then hung outside houses to bring good luck to the family.

Grapes are important to New Year celebrations in Bolivia, since they represent wishes sought to be fulfilled. Before the clock strikes midnight, the entire family gathers in a circle. Each person takes 12 grapes (one for each month) and eats them one by one, making a wish each time.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

As in many part of the world May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day. The May 1 observance of Labor Day has its origins in the 19th-century international socialist movement. The first May Day/Labor Day occurred in 1889, set by the Second Socialist International to coincide with an 1890 American Federation of Labor (AFL) general strike in the United States to win the eight-hour workday. Thereafter International Labor Day became, and remained, more radical than the U.S. version observed in September.

In Bolivia, the occasion is observed by the government as well as by workers and their unions. Speeches, rallies, gatherings, and lectures are organized, and tributes paid to labor leaders.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 6

In 1824 Simón Bolívar's lieutenant General Antonio José de Sucre succeeded in defeating the Spanish forces at the Battle of Ayacucho. The following year

on August 6, an assembly met at the settlement of Chuquisaca and declared Bolivia's independence.

The day is celebrated at unofficial as well as official events including speeches, parades, and parties. The people mark the day with folk dances and sports contests. Bullfights are particularly popular.

Religious Holidays

❁ CARNIVAL

Observed by: Christians, General Public

Observed on: February–March (just before Lent)

Carnival is held just before Lent, the Christian season of fasting that precedes Easter. It is an occasion of great festivity, with celebrations spilling over into the streets in all major towns in the country. The most enthusiastic celebrations take place in the smaller towns. Oruro boasts the largest and best-known Carnival, a unique blend of Spanish and indigenous traditions. The ancient dances of various Andean communities are always a highlight.

Santa Cruz hosts a more modern Carnival, similar in spirit to the famous one held at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. People dress in bright clothes and outlandish costumes and dance through the streets. Participants wearing plaster masks dance *la diablada* ("the devil's dance"). After performing this dance Catholics go to a church, where they are blessed by a priest. The next day they attend Mass and once again perform *la diablada*.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; LENT

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

This Christian festival commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. It has been in the Christian liturgical calendar even longer than Easter has although no one is sure why it is called Good Friday. Some have suggested that the use of *good* in the name goes back to Old English and means "God's" Friday, while others interpret *good* to mean something like "observed as holy." This observance is also known as Black Friday and Sorrowful Friday; in Eastern Orthodox Churches it is called Great Friday.

For many years Good Friday was primarily a Catholic observance, but many Protestant Churches now hold special services from noon until three in the afternoon on this day to symbolize Jesus' last hours on the Cross. Many of the faithful fast on this day; when they eat, it is generally fish instead of meat.

For Bolivians Good Friday, also called Holy Friday or Mourning Friday, is a solemn occasion. People attend church services and often spend the rest of the day in quiet contemplation and prayer.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

In contrast to the solemnity of Good Friday, Easter Sunday is usually regarded as a day of fun. Easter Egg Hunts keep children entertained. An exchange of gifts, especially gifts for the children, is customary. The Christian faithful attend a special Mass or church service at sunrise.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Catholics

Observed on: November 1

This is a holiday that honors all the saints of the Catholic Church, known or unknown. In Bolivia, where not only every town, but also every community, has its own patron saint, the holiday assumes a special significance. Special church services and prayer meetings are a feature of the day, and Catholics are instructed to avoid any kind of “servile” work. For Bolivians the day is also devoted to the remembrance of the dead as is also done on All Souls’ Day. Visiting the graves of their loved ones, Bolivians leave food, drink, and even toy boats to help the deceased in their afterlife. Candies, sweets, and bread, especially bread dolls, are customary offerings. The graves are also decorated with flowers and garlands.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS’ DAY; ALL SOULS’ DAY; CHRISTIANITY

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

On Christmas Eve in Bolivia households stock up their pantries for the mammoth feasts to come over the next few days. Festivities begin that evening. At midnight, people drink champagne and eat cookies and other sweets. Sometimes the party continues through the night.

Bolivians place a *pesebre* (“manger”) under the Christmas tree, along with little figures representing Mary, Joseph, and the infant Jesus. Little toy animals are also placed there. The baby Jesus is also referred to by the name *Cusquenos*. A Bolivian children’s fable describes how the baby Jesus gets up on Christmas and makes mischief, shifting things around and hiding them. Due to the popularity of this legend, placing the *pesebre* under the tree is an extremely important custom. Traditionally it is kept there until New Year’s Eve.

On Christmas Eve the Catholic faithful attend Midnight Mass. There are also special church services on Christmas day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

ALASITAS FESTIVAL

Observed in: La Paz

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January

The Alasitas Festival has its roots in the culture of the ancient Incan civilization. It is held in honor of Ekeko, an Aymara god. On this day people buy toy versions of the things they hope to buy during that year, such as cars, gadgets, and household appli-



A young boy dressed as an Ekeko, the Aymara God of Wealth, is seen with goods hanging around his neck at the inauguration of the traditional Alasitas Fair in downtown La Paz, Bolivia, on January 24. Bolivians believe that buying miniature goods and placing them around the neck of an effigy of an Ekeko will help them obtain the real goods in the coming year. (AP Photo/Dado Galdieri)

ances. They do this to propitiate Ekoko in the hope that he will help make their wishes come true.

❁ FESTIVAL OF THE FIRST EQUINOX

Observed in: La Paz

Observed by: Indigenous communities

Observed on: September 21

In Spanish this festival is known as Equinoccio de la Primavera. It celebrates the advent of the spring equinox. Traditionally it marks the day the first rays of Inti, the Sun god, pass through the main entrance of the Kalasasaya Temple. To Bolivians, especially the indigenous communities, it is an extremely significant occasion since it signifies the start of spring. (In the Southern Hemisphere the seasons are the reverse of those in the north, which is why spring begins in September.) People wear traditional costumes and perform the ancient indigenous dances of the region.

❁ SAN MIGUEL FESTIVAL

Observed in: Uncia

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 29

September 29 is the Feast Day of the Catholic saint Michael, or San Miguel. On this day special Masses and processions are held in his memory. Over the years the holiday has acquired traits from local cultures. As a result traditional folk dances are now as much a part of the celebrations as the Masses are. In particular groups of *tinkus*, or warriors, from the indigenous cultures of the Andes perform their ancient martial dances.

Further Reading

Herbert S. Klein, *A Concise History of Bolivia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Herbert S. Klein, *Bolivia: The Evolution of a Multi-Ethnic Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Vivien Lougheed, *Bolivia* (Edison, N.J.: Hunter, 2004).

~ Bosnia and Herzegovina ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Southeastern Europe, bordering the Adriatic Sea and Croatia
Size	19,741 sq. mi.
Capital City	Sarajevo
Flag Description	The flag of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina is blue with a yellow isosceles triangle abutting the band and the top of the flag, leaving a wide medium blue vertical band on the fly side. Along the hypotenuse of the triangle is a line of seven full five-pointed white stars and two half stars at the top and bottom.
Independence	March 1, 1992 (from Yugoslavia)
Population	4,025,476 (2005 est.)
Government	Emerging federal democratic republic
Nationality	Bosnian; Herzegovinian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Bosniak (48%); Serb (37%)
Major Language(s)	Serbo-Croatian (often called Bosnian)
Major Religion(s)	Muslim (40%); Orthodox Christian (31%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; National Independence Day, March 1; Labor Day, May 1; National Day, November 25

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Bosnia and Herzegovina (officially, the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina) is a mountainous country in the western Balkans. Initially a part of Illyria, Bosnia later became a part of the Roman Empire as the Province of Illyria. In 395 after the death of Roman Emperor Theodosius I (347–95), the Roman Empire was divided into two parts: the Byzantine Empire or the Eastern Empire, ruled by Arcadius (c. 377–408), a son of Theodosius I, and the Western Roman Empire, ruled by another of his sons Flavius Augustus Honorius (384–423). The Drina River, now the boundary between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, separated the Eastern and Western

Roman Empires. Illyria and Pannonia were included in the Western Roman Empire; Bosnia initially was part of the Byzantine Empire, but because it lay right on the border between the Eastern and Western Roman Empires, it changed hands often.

In 455 the Ostrogoths (a Germanic tribe, also known as the Eastern Goths) invaded Pannonia and Dalmatia and brought the regions under their dominance. However after a series of wars fought between the Roman Empire and the Ostrogoths, which became known as the Gothic Wars (535–53), the Emperor Justinian (483–565) of the Eastern Roman Empire defeated the kingdom of the Ostrogoths and reclaimed Pannonia. Then in the sixth century, the Eastern Roman Empire invaded Dalmatia and reclaimed its territory.

During the sixth and seventh centuries, the Slavs from Poland, along with Turkic Avars (nomadic Euroasian tribes),

invaded the Eastern Roman Empire and established their settlements in Bosnia and Herzegovina and its surrounding areas. In the eighth century, in a bid to remove the Avars and Slavs from Dalmatia, the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius (c. 575–641) invited the Croats and Serbs to establish their settlements in the region and fight alongside the Roman Empire. They successfully drove the Avars out of Dalmatia and, in recognition of their service, the region of Dalmatia (including Bosnia and Herzegovina) was split between the Croats and Serbs, with the title of duke conferred on their leaders.

By 925 a major portion of Bosnia was under the rule of the first Croatian king Tomislav (c. 10th century). However between 930 and 960 the eastern parts of Bosnia as well as the western parts of Serbia came under the rule of the Serbian Caslav Klonimirovic (r. 927–60), who acknowledged the sovereignty of the Byzantine Empire.

In 1060 Croatian King Petar Kresimir IV (r. 1058–74) regained control of Bosnia and declared its independence from the Byzantine Empire. In 1077 after taking control of the Hum region (Herzegovina), Serbian Prince Mihailo of Zeta (located in present-day Montenegro) followed suit. Mihailo was later crowned king of Serbia by Pope Gregory VII. His son Konstantin Bodin conquered and seized a major part of Bosnia from Croatia in 1083. However after Konstantin's death in 1101 the Croats reclaimed most of the regions that had been conquered by the Serbs. In 1102 the kingdom of Croatia, along with a major part of Bosnia, became a part of the Hungarian Empire. In 1160 the Byzantine Emperor Manuel I Comnenus (?1118–80) defeated Hungary and reclaimed Bosnia as part of the Byzantine Empire.

The Ottomans of Turkey attacked the Byzantine Empire in 1383 and finally conquered the region of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1463.

The 15th century saw the growth of the Sephardic Jewish community, as Jews from Spain came to settle in the Ottoman Empire. In 1541 the Turks occupied Slavonia, which consisted of Croatia and most of Hungary. They ruled this region for more than a century before surrendering it to Austria under the Treaty of Karlowitz after losing the Austro-Ottoman War (also called the Great Turkish War, 1683–99). Later in 1716 Austria also occupied the northern part of Serbia and Bosnia. The power shifted back to the Turks in 1739, when Austria ceded the regions under the Treaty of Belgrade.

The Ottoman Era lasted until 1878. During this period Islam came to be the dominant religion in Bosnia. As the Ottoman Empire disintegrated and following its defeat in the Russo-Turkish War (1877–78), Bosnia and Herzegovina was invaded by Austro-Hungarian forces. By 1908 it had become a colony of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

In 1914 World War I began after Archduke Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was assassinated by the Serbs in Sarajevo. Austria was supported by Germany, whereas Serbia was

backed by Russia. Following the end of the war in 1918 Bosnia and Herzegovina became part of the South Slav kingdom of Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenes (Serbo-Croatians), which was later renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (literally, “Land of the South Slavs”; [*jug* means “south”]) in 1929. This was the first of three separate, but successive, political entities that existed during most of the 20th century on the Balkan Peninsula in Europe.

It existed under that name until it was invaded in 1941 by the Axis powers. Thousands of Jews and Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina were killed in concentration camps. In 1944 Germany was pushed out of Yugoslavia under the guidance of Josip Broz Tito (1892–1980), with support from the British and Soviet armies. Thereafter both countries became republics within a Socialist state established immediately after World War II in 1945 as Democratic Federal Yugoslavia (DFY), which in 1946 became the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (FPRY), and in April 7, 1963, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY).

This remained in place until 1992, by which time four of its six constituent republics—Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina—had seceded. At this point the region was in a condition of tumult and crisis given the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the independence of its former republics. The third, formed in 1992 and called the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), was on the territory of the remaining republics of Serbia (including the autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and of Kosovo, officially known as Kosovo and Metohija) and Montenegro. FRY, under President Slobodan Milosevic (b. 1941), intervened militarily to unite ethnic Serbs in neighboring republics into a “Greater Serbia.” All of these efforts were ultimately unsuccessful but caused great dislocation, bloodshed, and misery. This led to the deployment of United Nations' protective forces in 1992. By the end of the conflict in 1995, an estimated 200,000 people had lost their lives, and more than two million people had fled their homes in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

On November 21, 1995, the presidents of Serbia (Slobodan Milosevic), Croatia (Franjo Tudman [1922–99]), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Alija Izetbegovic [1925–2003]) signed a U.S.-sponsored peace accord in Dayton, Ohio, which marked the end of the conflict in the region. The accord came to be known as the Dayton Accord. It provided for the division of Bosnia and Herzegovina into two political entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with 51 percent of the territory (administered by Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims and Croats); and the Republika Srpska with 49 percent of the territory (administered by Bosnian-Herzegovinian Serbs).

The power-sharing agreement that was approved by the Dayton Accord makes Bosnia and Herzegovina one of the world's most complex democracies. It provides that the presidency of

Fun Fact

Any variation in pronunciation of vowels, depending on the length and tonal accent or pitch, can change the meaning of a word in the Serbo-Croatian language.

Bosnia and Herzegovina will consist of three members: one Croat, one Bosniak from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Bosniak* has replaced *Muslim* as an ethnic term, in part to avoid confusion with the religious term *Muslim* an adherent of Islam), and a Serb from Republika Srpska. Each of them is elected for a four-year term.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) posted 34,000 peacekeeping troops in order to restore peace and help rebuild the nation, but inter-ethnic problems still exist. The European Union (EU) took over the policing responsibilities in 2003. In 2003 the name *Yugoslavia* was officially abolished when the state was transformed into a loose commonwealth called Serbia and Montenegro.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Bosnia and Herzegovina is located in southeastern Europe. The country's name reflects its mixed origin, with Bosnia occupying roughly the northern two-thirds of the country. The nation shares its borders with Croatia to the north, south, and west; Serbia and Montenegro are located to the east; and to the south, the Adriatic Sea coastline is just 12 miles away. The southern and central landscape is complemented by the Dinaric Alps. The highest point in the country is Mt. Maglic in Herzegovina at a height of 7,825 feet.

The country has rainy winters, with the minimum temperature in the capital of Sarajevo reaching 34°F in January. The landscape and conditions near Sarajevo made it suitable as a site for the 1984 Winter Olympics. Summer temperatures average 70°F.

Fun Fact

It is customary for guests to remove their shoes before entering a Muslim household in this country. The host provides slippers to his guests.

ECONOMY

Economically this was one of the weakest republics of the former Yugoslavia, and the devastation of war has made matters worse. The standard of living remains low because of rising inflation and large foreign debts. The country is also dealing with large-scale unemployment that affects close to 40 percent of the population.

The economy of Bosnia is largely concentrated in mining, forestry, agriculture, and the armaments industries. Although private farmers cultivate the land, the farms are small. Bosnia exports fruit and tobacco but has to import large quantities of basic food items. The country relies heavily on reconstruction assistance and humanitarian aid from the international community.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The influences of Turkish, Mediterranean, and Western European cultures are evident in Bosnia and Herzegovina. There are also considerable differences in the lifestyles between the urban and rural populations, and cultural clashes between the traditional and modern worlds. Among these diverse populations, hospitality, spontaneity, and a quick wit are greatly valued.

Bosnians follow a number of religions that include Islam, Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism. The various groups lived together in relative peace and tolerance for generations, but in the regional crisis that emerged in the 1990s ethnic tensions were stoked by leaders and manipulated for their own ends. In 1991 Bosnia had an urban population that was comparatively mixed by occupation, neighborhood, marriage, and friendship, and hoped for a standard of living like that of Western Europe and a rural population that was divided along ethnic lines and poorer.

Following the devastation of war, ethnic conflict has been suppressed but continues to simmer below the surface as Muslims, Croats, and Serbs are more conscious of their religious identification, and Muslim women have adopted more conservative dress, something not formerly characteristic of urbanized women. Among the Bosnian population, the memories of bloodshed and destruction of sacred sites, including houses of worship, linger. Another effect of the war was the serious damage done to the economy, which forced working women out of the workforce and back into their traditional roles of wife and mother.

Education is mandated by the state so most of the population is literate. The Bosnian and Serbo-Croatian language shares its roots with Indo-European languages such as Bulgarian, Macedonian, and Slovenian. The Serbo-Croatian language has also borrowed some words from Turkish, Arabic, and Persian.

A world-famous film festival is held every year in Sarajevo. Sarajevo is also famous for its Banja Luka, Mostar, and Bihac Museums. Roman mosaics, Neolithic era pottery, Asian architecture, and ancient Catholic and Orthodox artifacts and paintings form an integral part of Bosnia and Herzegovina's cultural heritage.

CUISINE

Bosnian cuisine consists principally of bread and roasted meats. Vegetarians in Bosnia have limited choices, especially because finding fresh fruits and vegetables can be challenging in Bosnia's long winters. The meals here vary only slightly from each other. Daily breakfast is called *kwizija* and usually consists of milk and tea with scrambled eggs, bread, and butter. Lunch is considered the most important meal of the day and includes soup followed by a meat

or fish dish, vegetables, salad, and dessert. The cuisine is not spicy. The meat and vegetables are traditionally made by slow roasting and are served in a ceramic pot with a long, wide neck. *Bosanski lonac*, a stew sometimes known as Bosnian Pot, is a rich Bosnian specialty. The recipe has many variations, though the main ingredients remain beef, lamb, cabbage, potatoes, tomatoes, and carrots, seasoned with parsley, garlic, and pepper. Bosnian dishes like shish kebabs and *burek* (a type of pastry stuffed with meat) illustrate the influence of Turkish cuisine. *Tufabijia* is a special dessert made of apples stuffed with walnuts and topped with whipped cream. Baklava is a sweet dessert prepared only on special occasions.

Popular meeting places are *kafane*, coffee-houses, and *kafici*, the more modern café bars, and many people enjoy strolling through the town promenades (*korza*) in the summertime. The consumption of alcohol, once fairly common in Bosnia, and Herzegovina, is actively discouraged among Muslims, and in some areas it is prohibited.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western (or Gregorian) calendar January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day throughout much of the world. In Bosnia New Year's is celebrated with special meals or parties at home. The children make wish lists of gifts that they keep under their pillows, and their parents buy them gifts that are on their lists. At midnight there are fireworks displays.

❁ NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 1

The National Independence Day of Bosnia and Herzegovina is observed to mark the day the country attained freedom from Yugoslavia in 1992. On this day Bosnia and Herzegovina was recognized as a multireligious, multicultural, and multiethnic European country. However, it is celebrated only in the areas with a Bosnian majority and is a normal working day in areas with a Croatian majority and in the Republic of Srpska.

Although the law does not recognize March 1 as a national holiday, some officials are campaigning for it to be changed out of respect for the 66 percent of voters who supported an independent Bosnia and Herzegovina in the referendum that was held on March 1, 1992.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

The earliest origins of May Day, also known as Workers' Day, are ascribed to pagan celebrations that were practiced by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages. The May 1 observance of Labor Day has its origins in 1889 when the international socialist movement set the date to coincide with a strike in the United States, called by the American Federation of Labor, demanding an eight-hour workday.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, because unemployment rates are high, the majority of Bosnians demand job opportunities from the government on this day instead of rallying for better working conditions. Trade unions organize only a few May Day demonstrations. Other Bosnians use the day for family outings at nearby lakes and parks with barbecue and beer.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 25

During the Nazi occupation (1941–45), Bosnia saw a brutal civil war and genocide. On November 25, 1943, the Communist resistance in Bosnia—in line with the Communist Party's stated policy of breaking up Yugoslavia—declared Bosnia's statehood. Even though this declaration was premature, since Bosnia and Herzegovina would remain an unwilling part of Yugoslavia under Soviet rule, it is still the recognized day on which the country celebrates its independence.

Religious Holidays

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Eastern Orthodox Christians

Observed on: January 6–7

The Christian festival of Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus. The Eastern Orthodox Church calculates the date in accordance with the Julian calendar, so Orthodox Christians throughout the world celebrate Christmas on January 7. The majority of Bosnians are Orthodox Christians and observe Christmas on this date by attending church services and gathering for festive meals with friends and family.

However Bosnian Roman Catholics celebrate in December, decorating their homes with colored lights and singing Christmas carols throughout the month. On December 24, Christmas Eve, the Catholic faithful attend Mass and children receive

gifts. Christmas day itself is spent feasting with family and friends.

For all Bosnian Christians the main Christmas treat is sorrel, a dark red drink made from soaking sorrel leaves in hot water and adding sugar, ginger or lime, and rum. The sorrel plant blooms only at Christmastime.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: Eastern Orthodox Christians

Observed on: January 13–14

Orthodox Christians celebrate the New Year on January 14 in accordance with the Julian calendar. In Bosnia Eastern Orthodox Christians typically mark the day with special meals or parties at home. Fireworks are lit at midnight.

EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhul al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, also called Eid al-Kebir or the Festival of Sacrifice, is celebrated by Muslims in honor of Ibrahim's (Abraham's) readiness to sacrifice his son on God's command. Muslims celebrate Eid al-Adha to remember the devotion of Ibrahim, after pilgrims end their hajj to the Kaaba in Mecca. On this day families attend mosques for special prayers, followed by feasting and the exchange of gifts.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

El am Hejir celebrates the first day of the Islamic calendar. It is believed that on this day in 622 Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina and formed the first Islamic state. Although not a grand festival like New Year's Day in the Western calendar, on this day Muslim families get together to commemorate this joyous event and pray for a happy and peaceful year.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

The Christian holiday of Good Friday commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. A solemn occasion, it falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent, a season of fasting and penitence.

Eastern Orthodox Christians meet three times during the day to pray—before noon, in the after-

noon, and in the evening (for vespers)—as well as at night for the matins of Holy Saturday. They also observe a partial fast, depending on their health, until Easter. Bosnian Roman Catholics typically also eat only one meal or two small meals between Good Friday and Easter.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a Christian feast that celebrates Jesus' Resurrection from the dead three days after his Crucifixion. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent. This is the most important holiday in the Orthodox and Roman Catholic calendars. There are church services in the morning followed by special Easter dinners to break the partial fast from Good Friday. Easter eggs (usually decorated the Thursday before) are an important part of the observances. They are often dyed red in particular to symbolize Jesus' Resurrection. The Easter eggs are shared with friends and family who visit on Easter Sunday. It is traditional to tap the end of one's egg against the end of another person's egg. Whoever's egg breaks must give it to the other person.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT



Bosnian Serb women light candles at the Orthodox Church during an Orthodox Christmas Liturgy in the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo, on January 7. Christmas falls on January 7 for Orthodox Christians in the Holy Land, Russia, and other Eastern Orthodox churches that use the old Julian calendar instead of the 16th-century Gregorian calendar adopted by Catholics and Protestants and commonly used in secular life around the world. (AP Photo/Hidajet Delic)

❁ MOULOU D

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

The birthday of Muhammad, the Muslim prophet, falls during the third month of the Islamic year. Muhammad was born in Mecca in the year 570. For Muslims this is a joyous day, though it is not a day of elaborate celebrations. Conservative Muslims do not observe Muhammad's birthday, because they believe that doing so diverts one's attention from absolute devotion to Allah.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOU D

❁ VIDOVDAN

Observed by: Eastern Orthodox Christians

Observed on: June 28

St. Vitus was a Christian saint from Sicily, Italy, who died as a martyr in 303. Vidovdan (St. Vitus's Day) is celebrated on June 15 on the Gregorian calendar and on June 28 on the Julian calendar.

The Latin term *vitus* means "lively." It also refers to a nervous condition characterized by trembling. For this reason St. Vitus is considered the patron of actors, comedians, dancers, and epileptics. He also protects against lightning, animal attacks, and oversleeping.

Bosnian Christians celebrate this day with feasting and dancing.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ PETROVDAN

Observed by: Eastern Orthodox Christians

Observed on: July 12

St. Peter was one of the twelve apostles of Jesus as well as the first pope of Rome. According to Christian belief, St. Peter holds the keys to heaven, and after death Christians who have not sinned will meet St. Peter at the gates of heaven.

The Feast of St. Peter (Petrovdan) is observed on July 12, also called St. Peter's Day, and is an important Eastern Orthodox holiday. Bosnian Orthodox Christians celebrate with feasts and by lighting large bonfires.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ ST. ELIJAH'S DAY

Observed by: Eastern Orthodox Christians

Observed on: August 2

Elijah is mentioned in the Bible as the Hebrew prophet who sought to end idolatry, restore fair dealing, and who, upon death, was carried to heaven in a chariot of fire. Many incidents in his life gave him the status of saint. He was said to have raised a widow's son from the dead; he triumphed

in a contest of faith with the priests of Baal that resulted in his victory and their death; and he was fed by ravens.

Bosnians associate St. Elijah's Day, or Ilindan, with thunder and lightning and believe that people should not drive carts or work with grass and grain on the feast day of St. Elijah because they might be killed by lightning. Bosnian traditions associated with this day include wearing new clothes, climbing mountains, and sitting by bonfires waiting for the sun to rise.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ MITROVDAN

Observed by: Eastern Orthodox Christians

Observed on: November 8

St. Demetrius of Salonica was a Christian martyr who lived in the fourth century. He is also referred to as "the Megalomartyr" by the Greeks. Demetrius was a deacon in Salonica. Early legends about Demetrius credit him with a military career, so he is also sometimes called a military martyr. He was run through with spears at Sirmium, modern Serbia, in 306, during the Christian persecutions of Emperor Maximian.

St. Demetrius was extremely popular in the Middle Ages, and, along with St. George, was the patron of the Crusades. His relics are kept in Thessalonica, Greece, a city of which he is the patron saint.

St. Demetrius's memory is celebrated on October 26, according to the Gregorian calendar. Eastern Orthodox Christians worship him as Mitar and have a feast in his honor on November 8 (St. Demetrius's birthday), according to the Julian calendar.

Bosnians believe that on Mitrovdan you can predict what kind of winter can be expected by the way an ox lies down and whether it sticks out its legs. If it sticks out its legs, the winter will not be severe.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr marks the end of the month of Ramadan, during which Muslims all over the world observe a daily dawn-to-dusk fast. It is believed that Allah revealed the Koran, the sacred book of Muslims, to Muhammad during this month. Hence it is the holiest month of the Islamic calendar.

The Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina observe a fast from dawn to dusk during the month of Ramadan. On Eid al-Fitr they offer prayers at the local mosques and then visit friends and family, exchanging greetings. Feasting, singing, and dancing are all part of Eid al-Fitr celebrations.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM

Regional Holidays

✿ SARAJEVO FILM FESTIVAL

Observed in: Sarajevo

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August

The first Sarajevo Film Festival was held under gunfire and bombardment in 1995. At that festival 37 films from 15 countries were shown over a period of 12 days. Even when the city was under the siege, 15,000 people participated in the Sarajevo Film Festival, and its popularity has made it an annual affair. The festival has grown at a remarkable pace, attracting leading national as well as international film-

makers and actors. The festival screens both feature films and shorts from amateur filmmakers worldwide. This festival now serves as a meeting place for film professionals from all over the world. Celebrities such as Willem Dafoe (b. 1955), John Malkovich (b. 1953), Steve Buscemi (b. 1957), and U2's Bono (b. 1960) have all visited in past years.

Further Reading

Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Future of Combat* (New York: Public Affairs Press, 2001); Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); Lawrence Wechsler, *Vermeer in Bosnia: Cultural Comedies and Political Tragedies* (New York: Pantheon, 2004).

Botswana

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Central part of southern Africa, bordered by Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa
Size	231,804 sq. mi.
Capital City	Gaborone
Flag Description	Botswana's flag has a light blue background with a horizontal, white-edged black stripe in the center.
Independence	September 30, 1966 (from the United Kingdom)
Population	1,640,115 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary republic
Nationality	Motswana (singular); Batswana (plural)
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Tswana (or Setswana, 79%)
Major Language(s)	English (official language); Setswana (78%)
Major Religion(s)	Christian (72%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Sir Seretse Khama Day, July 1; President's Day, July 19; Botswana Day, September 30

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Located in the central part of southern Africa, the Republic of Botswana, formerly known as Bechuanaland, is a young country. Prior to 1940 the only archaeological evidence of sustained human habitation in the Botswana region had been haphazardly assembled: the Stone Age tools collected by H. S. Gordon in the Tati district; P. W. Laidler's work on the pottery of several Iron Age sites in eastern Botswana; and some clay birds found by H. A. Wieschoff at Domboshaba. (It is believed that the clay birds were destroyed by Allied bombing during World War II.) The first systematic survey of Early and Middle Stone Age tools was not undertaken until the late 1940s for the Bechuanaland Protectorate. Because of the paucity of well-documented archaeological research, and the lack of Later Stone Age and Iron Age sites, it was commonly assumed that Botswana had been largely unpopulated for thousands of years, until the 18th–19th centuries C.E. In the 1970s this assumption was shown to be baseless

when hundreds of Middle Iron Age Toutswe culture sites in the Central District were found. As the 20th century wore on, Botswana came to seem a central player in the prehistoric innovations in South Africa rather than peripheral, as had been thought. Much, however, remains to be learned.

The modern history of this region begins with the Zulu wars of the 1880s, when the Tswana, fleeing violence in South Africa, sought refuge in Bechuanaland. In a relatively short time they became the country's major ethnic group. By the late 19th century ethnic tensions between the Batswana and recently arrived Boer settlers from South Africa escalated into violence. By this time the European powers had become a formidable force in the region and most of Africa was under colonial rule. In 1885 seeking help in their struggle against the Boers, the Batswana turned to the British, who agreed to make Bechuanaland a British Protectorate.

The relationship between the British and the Batswana was harmonious. Modern-day Botswana comprises the northern part of the original Bechuanaland while the southern part became part of South Africa. When the list of colonies to be brought together under the unified state of the Union of South Africa was being finalized, the British hon-

Fun Fact

The name “Kalahari” is derived from a Tswana word *kgalagadi*, which translates as “the great thirst.” The Kalahari is one of the largest semi-arid deserts in the world.

ored the wishes of Botswana and did not include the northern region as a part of South Africa. The southern part of Bechuanaland, however, became part of what was the Cape colony, and is now part of South Africa.

Botswana’s movement from British protectorate to independent nation was fairly gradual and orderly. In order to mediate between British control and the drive for tribal power, two advisory councils composed of African and European representatives were established in 1920. Tribal power was regularized in 1934. Under the African-European Advisory Council the 1961 constitution paved the way for a consultative legislative council of Botswana, while the 1965 constitution sanctioned Botswana’s first general election. The country finally gained its independence in September 1966, and Seretse Khama (1921–80), a prominent leader, became the first president of the Republic of Botswana.

The name *Botswana* reflects the dominance of the main ethnic group of the country, the Tswana or Batswana, as they are known. Besides the Batswana, Botswana is also home to indigenous ethnic groups such as the Kalanga, Kgalagadi, Basarwa, and a small number of white people. Although Christianity has gained adherents in the recent past, most people still prefer the beliefs of their ancestors.

Since independence Botswana has emerged as a peace-loving and prosperous democracy. It is an active member of various international institutions such as the United Nations (UN), the Commonwealth of Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement as well as regional organizations such as the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the South African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC). The Republic of Botswana leads by example and is hailed by the international community for its unwavering contribution toward regional development in Africa.

Zambezi River Dispute

The Zambezi River, a major river system, has been the cause of long-running border disputes between Botswana and Namibia. The dispute involves the particular stretch of border up to the Zambezi River, which runs parallel to the main channel of the river Chobe. The borders of Zambia, Namibia, and Botswana all meet in the center of the Zambezi River and, since the borders have never been clearly delineated, boundary disputes continue to fester.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in the heartland of southern Africa, the Republic of Botswana shares its western and northern boundary with Namibia, its northeastern boundary with Zambia and Zimbabwe, and the southern and southeastern boundary with South Africa. The Zambezi River, one of Botswana’s two major rivers, is the fourth largest river of the African subcontinent. The Nile, Zaire, and Niger are the other prominent rivers of this region. The disputed Zambezi River border that Botswana shares with Zambia is only several hundred yards across.

Geographically, Botswana has a squarish appearance. The sand of the Kalahari Desert is carried to the hollow basins of Botswana and fills them, thereby giving it a plain look. Nearly 70 percent of Botswana is covered with the Kalahari sand.

Botswana has a semi-arid climate and experiences moderate rainfall in certain regions.

However, due to the high rate of evaporation, the country does not have a perennial river, besides the Okavango River. Scarcity of water is a major hindrance to the development of agriculture in the region. The Okavango Delta formed by the Okavango River is the oasis of the Kalahari Desert. It is one of the largest inland deltas in the world.

ECONOMY

Twenty years ago Botswana was one of the 20 poorest countries in the world. Since gaining independence in 1966, however, it has recorded the fastest growth in per capita income in the world, and Botswana takes great pride in its booming economy. Guided by sound economic policies, the country has registered phenomenal growth and has made good use of the revenue generated by diamond mining. The amount of foreign debt is negligible, and besides earning the highest sovereign credit rating in Africa, Botswana has also amassed huge foreign reserves.

With the growing number of HIV/AIDS patients in Botswana and its subsequent effect on the economy, the government has initiated major health initiatives such as the Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission program and is also providing free antiretroviral treatment.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

In ancient times Botswana was a full-fledged tribal region with varied cults and belief systems. The people were driven by the belief that ancestors guided their way of life from the underworld (afterlife) and communicated only through the elders or leaders of the cult. Religion was at the core of society, and religious rites such as male and female initiation ceremonies and rainmaking ceremonies were immensely important. Polygamy was common, and after the death of the husband, the children of his head wife inherited his estate. Belief in the supernatural and

spirits and ghosts was widespread. Respecting elders and the traditional way of life was imperative.

The term *San* is usually used by scholars to refer to a diverse group of hunter-gatherers living in southern Africa who share historical and linguistic connections. This group of people was formerly referred to as *Bushmen*, but this term has since been abandoned because it is considered racist and sexist. The San folklore of Botswana has two main characters: Nodima (the good person) and Gcawama (the trickster). It was widely believed that all natural disasters and diseases were a direct consequence of the actions of these two characters.

With the advent of Christianity, the tribal way of life was greatly affected, and by the early 21st century Christianity had a strong foothold in the country. The lifestyle in Botswana reflects the confluence of Tswana and British ways of life. People wear Western attire, which has been preferred since the 19th century.

The traditional forms of dance and music gradually declined under colonial rule, but they have experienced something of a renaissance in post-independence Botswana. The northwestern region of Botswana is known for its artistic basketry, which is exported around the world.

❁ CUISINE

In Botswana common foods include corn porridge and sorghum, pulses (legumes), beans, and spinach. Tomato, onion, potato, and cabbage also find favor on the table. Beef is the most popular meat, followed by mutton (adult sheep). Dried caterpillars are a traditional snack food as well as the wild morulaplum fruit. For beer lovers, sorghum or millet-based beer is a favorite.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western Gregorian) calendar, January 1 marks the beginning of the new year. The people of Botswana take this opportunity to visit their relatives—especially those living in the countryside—and celebrate together as a family. Government offices, schools, and businesses remain closed on New Year's Day.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

Labor Day (also May Day or Workers' Day) is celebrated in many countries of the world to honor the

achievements and contributions made by workers. The observance of Labor Day on May 1 has its origins in the international labor movement and international socialism. In 1889 the Second International established May 1 as a holiday to express solidarity with the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in the United States in 1890. The AFL had called a strike to demand an eight-hour workday. In Botswana government offices, businesses, and schools remain closed on Labor Day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ SIR SERETSE KHAMA DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 1

Sir Seretse Khama Day is celebrated in honor of the first president of the Republic of Botswana, Sir Seretse Khama, who was born on July 1, 1921. His grandfather was the great tribal king Khama III, and upon his death in 1925 Seretse Khama ascended the throne at the age of four. His uncle Tshekedi Khama became regent. In 1948 Seretse Khama married Ruth Williams, an Englishwoman. The world of that time was not ready to accept this mixed-race marriage. When his uncle demanded that he divorce her, Seretse turned his people against his uncle and took over the chieftainship. This caused a furor among the white settlers; he was declared unfit to rule and exiled to England. Eventually he was allowed back home and headed the Bechuanaland Democratic Party. In 1956 he was elected the first president of the Republic of Botswana. Under Seretse Botswana developed into a prosperous and peaceful country with high principles of liberal democracy and racial tolerance.

❁ PRESIDENT'S DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 19

President's Day marks the death of Sir Seretse Khama, the tribal king and the first president of the Republic of Botswana. One of the country's most beloved figures, he was the president of the Republic from 1966 until his death on July 19, 1980. All government offices, as well schools and colleges, remain closed for two days in honor of the late president, and prayer meetings are held in remembrance of the king.

❁ BOTSWANA DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: September 30

On September 30, 1966, British rule in Botswana ended and the Republic of Botswana was born. Every year the people of Botswana come together and celebrate their nation on Botswana (or Inde-

pendence) Day. The capital, Gaborone, plays host to the celebrations. The National Anthem, *Fatshe La Rona*, which means ‘our country’, is sung proudly and is an important part of the celebrations. All public and private institutions remain closed for two days as a sign of respect.

Religious Holidays

✿ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

This Christian festival commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. It has been in the Christian liturgical calendar even longer than Easter has although no one is sure why it is called “Good” Friday. Some have suggested that the use of *good* in the name goes back to Old English and means “God’s” Friday, while others interpret *good* to mean something like “observed as holy.” This observance is also known as Black Friday, Mourning Friday, and Sorrowful Friday, and in Eastern Orthodox Churches it is called Great Friday.

For many years Good Friday was primarily a Catholic observance, but many Protestant Churches now hold special services from noon until three in the afternoon on this day to symbolize Jesus’ last hours on the Cross. Many of the faithful fast on this day; when they eat, it is generally fish instead of meat. In Botswana, Christians attend special prayer services that focus on the life and teachings of Jesus.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

For Christians, Easter is considered the most important Christian festival, and its numerous celebrations and observances form the core of the liturgical year, which begins around the time of the vernal equinox in the Northern Hemisphere (the autumnal equinox in the Southern Hemisphere) and stretches out into summer in the Northern Hemisphere (winter in the Southern Hemisphere). This occasion celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus three days after his Crucifixion. Christians believe Jesus was the Son of God, and died on the Cross to redeem humanity from sin. Apart from its religious aspect, the Resurrection symbolizes a resurgence of hope and the renewal of life for all human beings. People wear new clothes to attend church. On this day children look forward to receiving sweets and candies since Easter marks the end of the 40-day fasting period of Lent. The entire family gathers for a special Easter midday supper.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT

✿ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 25

Celebrated on December 25, Christmas marks the birth of Jesus in accordance with the Gregorian calendar. During the Christmas season the people of Botswana visit their relatives in the countryside and begin a week of festivities, filled with dance and music. Village elders slaughter a cow or a goat on Christmas Eve, and families and village neighbors gather to sing Christmas carols.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

✿ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 26

The day after Christmas is celebrated as Boxing Day. The day is also known as the Feast of St. Stephen, in honor of the first Christian martyr. On this day, boxes used for collecting money for the poor are opened, hence the name Boxing Day. In addition gifts and tips are given to those who render selfless services to the community throughout the year.

Most of the Commonwealth nations celebrate Boxing Day. The Commonwealth of Nations is an association of independent nations, most of which are former colonies of the British Empire. They share some common cultural links, which were influenced by the British, and Boxing Day is one of them.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY

Regional Holidays

✿ KURU TRADITIONAL AND MUSIC FESTIVAL

Observed in: Kalahari Region
Observed by: San
Observed on: First week of August

Held especially for the San people of the Kalahari, this festival is an endeavor of the Kuru Development Trust to revive people’s interest in their cultural heritage and to encourage them to take pride in it. Living in isolated parts of Botswana and being a minority, the San people are unable to participate in the traditional festivals held in Botswana. This festival gives them the opportunity to perform their traditional folk dances, which are finely intertwined with traditional songs and music, as well as giving them a chance to get in touch with their cultural heritage.

❁ MAUN CARNIVAL

Observed in: Maun

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August–September

The Maun Carnival is named after the state-of-the-art entertainment complex in Maun (gateway to the Okavango Delta), known as the Power Station. The people of the village of Maun build decorative floats for a joyous procession that is an integral part of the carnival. Also at stake is the chance to win first prize for the best float, and the competition is intense during this festival. Aerial displays performed by light aircraft kick off the festivities. The local charter companies provide their best pilots for the demonstration.

After the show the procession heads toward the Power Station. The complex has booths selling traditional foods and crafts. The complex transforms itself into a big gaming zone, much to the delight of the children. In addition, music and dancing continue all night.

Rites of Passage

❁ COMING OF AGE

In ancient Botswana, separate coming of age ceremonies were held for boys and girls, known as *bogwera* and *bojale*, respectively. *Bogwera* means the “school of initiation” where young boys were sent on reaching puberty. These schools trained boys to be strong and respected tribal men. The training imparted lessons on social, moral, and ethical values and lay down a rigorous exercise regime to make them physically tough. Respecting elders, fulfilling one’s duties, and understanding one’s responsibilities were inculcated in each boy that entered the *bogwera*. It was imperative for every boy to undergo this training. After the completion of the training period, a permanent name was given to each group, and every member would take great pride in identifying himself with this name.

Bojale was the school of initiation for girls and helped them make a smooth transition from girlhood to womanhood. The daughter of the tribal chief, or a close relative of the chief who herself had reached puberty, would lead the group of girls belonging to her age group. The girls were taught everything about the tribal customs and values as well as their duties and responsibilities to society.

Ancient Ceremony of Patlo

In ancient Botswana, the proposal ceremony was known as *patlo*. The young man who was ready to marry would accompany his relatives to the house of his prospective bride. The entire group would then win over the hearts of the girl’s family by their humility. Thereafter they would return to their village. The girl’s family would then consult each other and, if the proposal was accepted, they would send word to the boy’s family. After a few more meetings, if the marriage had the consent of the parents as well as the tribal heads, a lavish wedding ceremony would follow.

When they completed the training period, the girls were assumed to have reached womanhood. On graduation each group was assigned a permanent name with which each member of the group would identify herself. The groups were often called upon to participate in collective projects of a social nature.

❁ MARRIAGE

Wedding ceremonies in Botswana reflect the urge to hold on to ancient traditions as well as incorporate Christian customs. In the early 21st century, love marriages have largely supplanted the traditional arranged marriages.

Most couples prefer getting married in church in a low-key ceremony. They either follow this with a formal reception in the Western style or take the traditional path of village feasts or some combination of the two. For a village feast, the entire village is invited. Animals are slaughtered for the occasion, and feasting on the meat is central to the celebration. Folk dancing and music are always part of traditional wedding ceremonies.

Further Reading

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~ Brazil ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	In South America, bordering the Atlantic Ocean
Size	3,286,488 sq. mi.
Capital City	Brasilia
Flag Description	Brazil's flag has a green background, with a large yellow diamond that almost covers the entire central region. Inside the diamond is a blue circle, representing the celestial globe, and within the circle are 27 stars, representing each of the 26 states and the Federal District, arranged to correspond to the night sky over Brazil. A white equatorial band crosses the circle, bearing the motto "Ordem e Progresso" ("Order and Progress") in green.
Independence	September 7, 1822 (from Portugal)
Population	186,112,794 (2005 est.)
Government	Federal republic
Nationality	Brazilian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	White (54%); mixed white and black (mulatto, 38%)
Major Language(s)	Portuguese (official language); Spanish; English; French
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (73%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Tiradentes Day, April 12; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day, September 7; Republic Day, November 15

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Prior to the arrival of the Portuguese, Brazil had been inhabited by nomadic tribal communities for at least 6,000 years. Unlike the Inca and Maya, Brazilian Indians did not develop an organized civilization. Aided by jungles and climate, they left very little evidence for archaeologists to study—just some pottery, shell mounds, and skeletons. But recent excavations at Pedra Furada, a rock shelter in the Serra da Capivara National Park in northeastern Brazil, have revealed what may be the oldest human site in the Americas. Using reliable radiocarbon dates from charcoal found in hearths at different levels of the shelter, a comprehensive chronology of human habitation has been developed. The lowest layer provided definite evidence of non-Clovis Paleoindian occupations, including human remains, as early as 48,000–30,000 years B.C.E. A unique rock

painting tradition associated with a 17,000-year-old carbon-14-dated hearth has also been discovered. Human teeth found at a limestone site at Garrincho have been dated at 12,210 plus or minus 40 and are equivalent in their structure to similar teeth found in Europe and the Near East and dated at the end of the Late Pleistocene. They are clearly fossils of modern *Homo sapiens*.

It is estimated that when the Portuguese arrived, there were between two and six million Amerindians living in various types of communities in what is called Brazil. Because of unknown epidemic diseases, slavery, and slaughter, there are fewer than 200,000, most of them hiding away in the dense jungles of Brazil's interior.

In 1500 Pedro Alvares Cabral of Portugal (1467/68–1520) attempted to go to India but reached Brazil instead. In 1531 the Portuguese king sent over the first settlers. Legend has it that the locals ate the first governor and the first bishop of this new territory not long after they arrived. The

Portuguese, however, persisted, and by 1534 Brazil was well on the way to becoming colonized. In that year the king divided the region into 15 provinces or “captaincies,” each of which he gave to a friend.

Before long the settlers began to prosper by growing sugarcane. They also enslaved much of the indigenous population for this purpose, and the slave trade soon became commercially significant. The *bandeirantes* (city-dwellers born of mixed parentage) led the slave-capturing industry and brutally expanded Brazilian territory into the interior of South America. During the 1600s African slaves began to replace indigenous ones. In 1690 the discovery of gold deposits led to a further influx of settlers and African slaves brought in to work the mines.

The story of Brazil’s independence is possibly unique in the history of the colonized world. In 1807 Napoleon (1769–1821) invaded Portugal. Queen Maria I of Portugal (1734–1816) fled to Brazil with the entire royal family aboard British ships and made Rio de Janeiro the capital of Portugal and Portuguese territories. When peace was restored, the queen returned to Portugal, leaving behind her son Dom Pedro I (1798–1834). In 1822 Pedro rebelled and declared independence from Portugal and was named emperor of Brazil. Portugal was by then too weak to fight; so Brazil gained its independence without a fight.

During the 19th century coffee became Brazil’s leading crop. Slavery was abolished in 1888. Coffee planters then recruited thousands of immigrants, mostly Italians, as plantation workers. In 1889, the king was deposed by a military coup financed and backed by coffee growers. The country became a republic in name, but the vested interests retained control of the government and economy. For the next 40 years, Brazil saw a number of civil and military regimes, all effectively controlled by the military.

The coffee growers lost economic clout with the onset of the Great Depression in 1929. The opposition Liberal Alliance, supported by the military, took over but lost the 1930 election. The military took over once again and installed the Liberal Alliance leader Getúlio Vargas (1883–1954) as president; he ruled until 1954. His method of ruling was inspired by the Fascism of Mussolini (1883–1945) in Italy and Salazar (1889–1970) in Portugal. Vargas ruled Brazil until he was driven out in 1954.

His replacement Juscelino Kubitschek (1902–76) was the first of Brazil’s big spenders; he built Brasília, the new capital, which was supposed to catalyze the development of the interior. By the early 1960s the economy was battered by inflation, partly because of the expense of building the new capital, and fears of encroaching Communism were fuelled by Castro’s (b. 1926) victory in Cuba. Again Brazil’s fragile democracy was squashed by a military coup in 1964. The military rulers then set about creating large-scale projects that benefited a wealthy few at the expense of the rest of the population.

In 1989 Fernando Collor de Mello (b. 1949) became the first democratic ruler in nearly 30 years but was removed in 1992 on charges of corruption. Itamar Franco (b. 1930), the vice president, took over and stabilized the economy. Fernando Cardoso (b. 1931) was elected president in 1994. He improved the economy but had to contend with long-standing problems relating to deficit and inequalities.

A left-wing government led by Luíz Inácio da Silva (b. 1946) came to power after the 2002 elections, capturing 61 percent of the vote. He introduced far-reaching measures intended to bridge the economic gap between rich and poor. But economic growth does not necessarily bring social justice in its wake. Gains in education, land reform, and welfare contrast tellingly with a sickly health system, urban overcrowding, rural landlessness, and environmental abuse. And in spite of the effort anticorruption measures have made little headway.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Brazil is divided into four major geographic regions: the Atlantic seaboard in the east, the Planalto Brasileiro in the southern interior, the Paraná-Paraguai basin to the south, and the Amazon Basin in the north. The Atlantic seaboard, which is long and narrow, has a few coastal ranges south of Bahia but is flatter in the north. The Planalto Brasileiro, or central plateau, covers most of Brazil’s interior south of the Amazon Basin. It contains several small mountain ranges and large rivers. The highest peaks are located in the Tumucumaque, Pacaraima, and Imeri Ranges, which cross the northern border with the Guyanas and Venezuela. Toward the south lies the Paraná-Paraguai basin with its open forests, low woods, and scrubland. Finally the huge, densely forested Amazon Basin is situated in the north. The Amazon is the world’s largest river, and the Amazon forest contains 30 percent of the world’s remaining forested area. The entire length of the Amazon, from Iquitos, Peru, to its mouth on the northeastern coast of Brazil, is navigable by ocean-going ships. The most important navigable streams in the plateau region to the east and south are the São Francisco and Parnaíba.

The climate is mostly tropical but becomes temperate toward the south. The temperatures along the equator are high, averaging above 77°F, with little seasonal variation. In sharp contrast frosts are known to occur south of the Tropic of Capricorn during the winter (June–August), and in some years there is snow on the peaks in the mountainous areas.

❁ ECONOMY

Brazil’s economy is by far the largest in South America and is poised to become one of the world’s largest. It has well-developed agricultural, mining, manufac-

The Southern Hemisphere

A hemisphere is one half of a sphere. Planet Earth is divided into four hemispheres: the North, West, South, and East. Four continents are in the Southern Hemisphere: Africa, Australia, South America, and Antarctica. Brazil is in South America in the Southern Hemisphere, below the equator, and in the Western Hemisphere, west of the Prime Meridian, the line of longitude that passes through the Royal Greenwich Observatory, at Greenwich, England; it is the meridian at which longitude is 0 degrees. (The term Eastern Hemisphere is rarely used descriptively.) It used to be said that the four continents in the Southern Hemisphere were divided by four oceans: the Atlantic, Pacific, Indian, and Antarctic. In 2000 the International Hydrographic Organization created a fifth ocean, called the Southern Ocean, which completely surrounds Antarctica.

Because it is in the Southern Hemisphere Brazil's seasons are the opposite of those in the Northern Hemisphere. (This is also true for Australia, Africa, and Antarctica.) Summer occurs between December and February; fall is between March and May; win-

ter lasts from June through August; and spring begins in September. This means that holidays celebrated in winter in the Northern Hemisphere fall during the summer in the Southern Hemisphere (for example, Christmas or Hanukkah), and what are spring holidays in the Northern Hemisphere are fall holidays in Brazil (for example, Easter or May Day). The seasons during which specific constellations can be seen are also different. Ursa Major, Hercules, and Libra are summer constellations in the Northern Hemisphere and winter constellations in the Southern Hemisphere, while Orion, Cassiopeia, and Andromeda are summer constellations in Brazil and winter constellations in Canada. The Southern Hemisphere was thought of as poorer and less developed than the Northern, but the Southern is also less polluted due to lower population densities, lower levels of industrialization, and smaller land masses across the southern temperate zone. The South Pole is oriented toward the center of our galaxy, the Milky Way, and this, combined with clearer skies, makes for spectacular views of the night skies from the Southern Hemisphere.

turing, and service sectors. Coffee is one of its best-known products, and sugarcane remains an important crop. Poverty for many, however, remains a constant.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Brazil's population is concentrated primarily along the Atlantic coast and in the major cities. Two-thirds of the population now lives in cities, more than 19 million in greater São Paulo, and 10 million in greater Rio de Janeiro.

The immigrant Portuguese language has been greatly influenced by numerous Indian and African dialects, but it is still the dominant language in Brazil.

The Brazilian dialect has become the dominant influence in the development of the Portuguese language because Brazil has 15 times the population of Portugal and a much more dynamic linguistic environment.

According to the Brazilian modernist artist Oswald de Andrade (1890–1954), in his “Cannibal Manifesto” (1928), the culture of Brazil began in 1516 when a Jesuit bishop named Sardinha was shipwrecked along the coast of Brazil. When he

encountered the local people the Tupis, he undertook to teach them the values set forth in the Bible. They were so eager to absorb this new civilization that they promptly made a meal of him. This, de Andrade claimed, was the first event in Brazilian history because hereafter a Brazilian identity was shaped by avidly absorbing anything foreign and letting it all boil and steep together.

Brazilians, it seems, welcome not only the foreign, but also the paradoxical. Take, for example, the concept of time. Time, like anything else, can be shaped to one's desire. A Brazilian might drop by for an unannounced visit and stay for hours, and the host is expected to cancel prior commitments that might interrupt this social call. Most Brazilians, with the exception of people from Minas Gerais, schedule meetings provisionally. The time is likely to be changed without warning, and no one will arrive “on time.” However a bit of folklore claims that the people of Minas Gerais are so punctual that they come to meetings a day early.

Because the ethnicity of Brazilians is some combination of Amerindian, African, and European, they tend to focus on social class rather than a racial hierarchy. The very wealthy, wanting nothing to do with anyone they regard as inferior, naturally isolate themselves. The middle class, for lack of something better to do, imitates the wealthy class they wish to belong to. The poor, always with us, concentrate on getting through each day.

Fun Fact

Although Brazil has the sixth largest population in the world, because of its vast size its population density is only about 50 people per square mile. India and Japan, in contrast, both have more than 800 people per square mile.

❁ CUISINE

Approximately 1 million native Amerindians lived in Brazil when the Portuguese found them. Starting in 1538 nearly 5 million Africans were brought in as slaves, before slavery was abolished. Following the Portuguese immigrants were Italians, Germans, Syrians, and Lebanese. During the 1930s Asians started arriving.

Brazilian food reflects the diverse roots of its population and culture, and the distinctive contribution of each culture remains apparent in dishes now thought of as Brazilian.

Brazil can be divided into five regions by cuisine:

1. North (Amazon Basin): The people in this region are of mixed Amerindian and Portuguese ancestry who live on fish, root vegetables (manioc, yams, and peanuts), and palm or tropical fruits. *Caruru do par*, a one-pot meal of dried shrimp, okra, onion, tomato, cilantro, and dendé oil, is a favorite dish in the Amazon Basin.

2. Northeast (Bahia, Paraíba, and Pernambuco): This is a semi-arid area excellent for raising cattle, as well as sugarcane and cacao. In the state of Bahia, the cuisine is essentially Afro-Bahian, developed by cooks improvising on African, Amerindian, and Portuguese dishes using local ingredients. Inland, in the arid cattle-growing region, typical foods include dried meat, rice, beans, goat, manioc, and cornmeal.

3. Central-West (includes Federal District of Brasília, Golas, and Mato Grosso): This region is primarily open prairies with wooded areas in the north. Beef and pork from the ranches and fish from the rivers are featured in the cuisine, supplemented by local crops of soybeans, rice, corn, and manioc.

4. Southeast (Minas Gerais, São Paulo, and Espírito Santo): This is the primary industrial region in Brazil, with several distinctive styles of cooking. In Minas Gerais popular recipes call for corn, pork, beans, and local soft cheeses. In the large cities of Rio and São Paulo a favorite lunch dish is *feijjada completa*, made with beans and meat. Rice and beans is also popular, with black beans used in Rio, black or red beans in Minas Gerais, and red (or blonde) beans in São Paulo.

5. South (Paraná, Rio Grande do Sul, and Santa Catarina): The cowboys of this region favor dishes made with sun- or salt-dried meats and *churrasco*, fresh meats grilled over a wood fire.

The staple foods of Brazil include *arroz* (white rice), *feijão* (black beans), dried salted codfish, coconut, dried shrimp, lemon, and *farinha* (manioc [cassava] flour). These starches are usually eaten with steak, chicken, or fish.

Coffee, one of Brazil's cash crops, is the mainstay of each day. In fact, the word for "breakfast" in Portuguese, *café da manhã*, means "morning coffee." Some historians have suggested that the popularity of coffee may be left over from the days of *café com leite*

(coffee and milk) politics, when Brazil's political scene was dominated by the "coffee oligarchs."

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

Few cities can boast the renown of Rio de Janeiro's New Year's celebrations. No fewer than 2 million people from all over the world congregate at the Copacabana. It is considered good luck to dress in white. Concerts, music, dancing, and high spirits are all part of the festivities. At midnight the fireworks start. These are not ordinary firecrackers though; this is probably the finest and definitely among the most famous fireworks display in the entire world. Even after the fireworks end, the party continues throughout the night.

In Salvador, Brazil, the festival of Bom Jesus dos Navegantes is also celebrated on January 1. A procession of small boats carries the statue of Lord Jesus of Sailors from the main harbor to the Boa Viagem beach. It is said that sailors who join in this observance need never fear death by drowning.

❁ TIRADENTES DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 12

Tiradentes Day, also known as Inconfidência Week, marks the death of Joaquim José da Silva Xavier, a

Creme de Abacate (Avocado Cream)

This dessert serves 4

Brazil may be the only cuisine in which avocado is sweetened and served as a dessert, rather than salted as in guacamole or salads.

Ingredients:

2 medium avocados
2 Tbs. fresh lime juice
4 Tbs. granulated sugar
1/4 c. ice water

Preparation:

Peel and slice the avocado and discard the seed. Place the avocado, lime juice, and sugar in a food processor or blender. Puree at high speed until completely smooth. Add a little water if the puree is very stiff (some prefer white wine). It should be absolutely smooth and creamy. If lumpy, force through a wire strainer. Serve in a clear glass.



revolutionary hero of Brazil. Nicknamed Tiradentes (or “tooth-puller”) because he occasionally pulled teeth, he was a leading conspirator in an abortive attempt to get rid of the Portuguese in 1789. The revolt was foiled, however, and Tiradentes was executed. The biggest celebrations are in Tiradentes’s home state of Minas Gerais, especially Ouro Preto, which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

✿ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Brazil celebrates Labor Day, also called May Day, or Workers’ Day, with parades, demonstrations, public meetings, and lectures that call attention to workers and their contributions. Labor Day is celebrated on May 1, because in 1889 the Socialist Second International chose this as the day to recognize workers around the world. They coordinated the observance with the strike called for 1890 by the U.S. labor union the American Federation of Labor (AFL) demanding an eight-hour workday. In recent years emphasis has shifted to the household sector, including maids, cooks, and other domestic servants, who receive no labor benefits at all. Moreover deep within the Amazon forest, debt-bondage and virtual slavery are not uncommon. May Day celebrations in recent years have consistently highlighted these situations.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY



Two men parade through the streets of Ipanema during a Carnival event in Rio de Janeiro. (AP Photo/Renzo Gostoli)

✿ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 7

In 1807 when Napoleon invaded Portugal, the entire Portuguese royal family fled to Brazil aboard British ships and made Rio de Janeiro the capital of Portugal and all Portuguese territories. When peace was restored, the queen returned to her throne in Lisbon, Portugal, leaving behind her son Dom Pedro to rule Brazil. In 1822 Pedro rebelled and, declaring independence from Portugal, was named emperor of Brazil. Brazil was the only European colony to gain its freedom without a long, costly struggle. Brazilians observe Independence Day with parades, public meetings, and parties. A huge military parade is a special feature of the day.

✿ REPUBLIC DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 15

Republic Day marks the date in 1889 when Emperor Pedro II (1825–91) was overthrown by a military coup and Brazil formally became a republic. This transition was more illusory than real, however, since the military junta retained actual control over the nation. It was only in the late 20th century that Brazil began to experience prolonged periods of democracy. The day is celebrated in Rio de Janeiro with military ceremonies and speeches by politicians.

Religious Holidays

✿ CARNIVAL

Observed by: Christians, General Public

Observed on: February–March

Aside from its soccer team, Brazil is probably best known for its Carnival. The celebration occurs on the four days before Lent and represents the wildest, most abandoned celebration that Brazil and possibly all of South America has to offer.

Samba, a form of music and dance, is a big part of Carnival. Derived largely from African traditions, it is very lively and boisterous with strong rhythms. Many samba schools in Brazil teach the dance to adults as well as children year-round. The Sambadrome Auditorium in Rio de Janeiro hosts a huge samba competition every year just before Carnival.

Carnival itself involves a lot of samba dancing. Huge processions of dancers through the streets, competitions are held on the streets and the beaches, and people burst into music and dance spontaneously out of sheer joy. Elaborate floats are paraded through the streets, and many celebrants wear extravagant and

fanciful costumes. Streets and buildings are decorated with colorful streamers and lights. Food and drink are also important parts of the celebrations.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; LENT

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, the Christian holiday commemorating the Crucifixion of Jesus, is a national holiday in Brazil. It has been in the Christian liturgical calendar even longer than Easter has, although no one is sure why it is called Good Friday. Some have suggested that the use of *good* in the name goes back to Old English and means “God’s” Friday, while others interpret *good* to mean something like “observed as holy.” This observance is also known as Black Friday and Sorrowful Friday, and in Eastern Orthodox Churches it is called Great Friday.

For many years Good Friday was primarily a Catholic observance, but many Protestant Churches now hold special services from noon until three in the afternoon on this day to symbolize Jesus’ last hours on the Cross. Many of the faithful fast on this day; when they eat, it is generally fish instead of meat. Oratorios and cantatas related to Jesus’ life are also performed. Usually, the day ends with a big meal shared with friends and relatives.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

For Easter, the Christian holiday that celebrates Jesus’ rising from the dead three days after his Crucifixion, a church service at sunrise is customary. Later in the day adults hide eggs all over the house, giving children clues about where to find them. Hunting for the eggs keeps the children occupied. Often the children receive gifts as well. Some families hold picnics while others host evening parties.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ CORPUS CHRISTI

Observed by: Catholics

Observed on: Eighth Sunday after Easter

This Christian festival, which originated in the 13th century, honors the presence of Jesus in the miracle of the Eucharist, the sacrament of Communion. The most common observance on this day involves religious processions. After church services the statues

of Mary, Jesus, and the saints are placed on long logs and carried through the streets.

See also Volume III: CORPUS CHRISTI; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

❁ OUR LADY OF APARECIDA

Observed by: Catholics

Observed on: October 12

Our Lady of Aparecida is the patron saint of Brazil. Her statue was carved around 1650 by Frei Agostino de Jesus, a Carioca monk from São Paulo known for his sculpture. It somehow got lost and found its way to the bottom of the Paraíba River. On October 12, 1717, some fishermen went to the river, intent on hauling in a large catch for a feast. They were having no luck when suddenly, instead of fish, they netted the statue. Immediately their luck changed, and their nets filled with fish. One of the fishermen prayed to the statue and began to venerate it. In 1732 he moved to the village of Porto Itaguassu and built a shrine for the statue. The inhabitants of the village built a bigger church on top of a nearby hill, and moved the statue there, thereby becoming the village of Aparecida. In 1930 Pope Pius XII proclaimed her the principal patron of Brazil.

On October 12 the entire nation ceases to function. Special Masses are held, and many visit the saint’s basilica. The day is also observed as Children’s Day.

Fun Fact

Because the statue of Our Lady of Aparecida lay for so long at the bottom of the river, it lost its original color and is now a dark brown, making it easy for people descended from indigenous communities and slaves brought in from Africa to identify with this saint as one of their own.

❁ ALL SOULS’ DAY

Observed by: Catholics

Observed on: November 2

This day is the feast day for all the souls still in purgatory waiting for expiation of their sins to allow them to enter heaven. It is also, more broadly, a day of the dead, a time for honoring one’s ancestors. Special Masses and prayers mark the day.

See also Volume III: ALL SOULS’ DAY, CHRISTIANITY

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

It is traditional at Christmas in Brazil to build a nativity scene, called *presépio* (from the Latin *presepium*, which means “straw bed”). Nativity plays are also quite common. The people of the northern

region vary this by replacing shepherds with shepherdesses and introducing a scene where gypsies try to kidnap the infant Jesus.

Decorating Christmas trees and exchanging presents is essential to the celebrations. Santa Claus is known as Papai Noel (“Father Noel”). Legend has it that, when he comes to Brazil, he wears silk clothes because of the summer heat. The main streets are festooned with decorative lights, and fireworks are lit at midnight.

Devout Catholics attend midnight Mass or *missa do galo* (*galo* means “rooster”). The Mass is so named because the rooster announces the coming day, and the *missa do galo* finishes at 1 A.M. on Christmas morning. Others attend Mass the next day. However since people like to sleep late, the Masses are held in the late afternoon.

Christmas dinner occupies a position of great importance, with a menu that includes chicken, turkey, ham, rice, salad, pork, fresh and dried fruits, and even beer sometimes (since it is summer in Brazil).

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

YEMANJÍ FESTIVAL

Observed in: Salvador

Observed by: Followers of Candomblé religion

Observed on: January 1

On January 1 followers of the Candomblé religion gather at beaches all over Brazil to perform rituals to please Yemanjá, the goddess of the sea. Most of the celebrations are filmed and shown all over Brazil, but they go on all over the country. More than 1 million celebrants dressed in white go into the ocean at dusk, where high priestesses initiate new members into the

priesthood. The initiates send little boats filled with religious objects, including statues of saints, into the surf. If the boats sink, the *orisha* Yemanjá, associated with the Virgin Mary of Catholicism, has heard the people’s prayers and will continue her support for another year. Salvador, on Praia Vermelha (the Red Beach in Rio de Janeiro), features the largest and most well-attended celebrations.

See also Volume III: YORUBA

LAVAGEM DO BONFIM

Observed in: Salvador

Observed by: Catholics, Followers of Candomblé religion

Observed on: Second Thursday in January

This day marks the feast of Senhor do Bonfim, who is identified with both Jesus and the Candomblé deity Oxalá. A group of flower-carrying Baianas (Bahía residents), followed by tens of thousands of people, walk to the Igreja do Bonfim, a Catholic church. When they arrive, the Baianas wash the church steps in honor of the Senhor do Bonfim. The day also features lots and lots of *batucada* (drumming) and, later in the day and into the night, a boisterous party around the Igreja do Bonfim.

FESTA DE SÃO LAZARO

Observed in: Federação

Observed by: Catholics, Followers of Candomblé religion

Observed on: January 25–28

The Brazil Festa de São Lazaro (Feast of Saint Lazarus) takes place from January 25 to January 28. St. Lazarus, the patron saint of leprosy, lepers, and hospitals, is identified with Omulu, the god of smallpox, sickness, and health among the Candomblé

Candomblé

In the 16th century when the Portuguese began bringing Yoruba slaves to Brazil from Africa, there were already established indigenous spiritual systems, and Catholicism was desperately trying to rid the area of Amerindian beliefs. The slaves, however, found their beliefs in spirits and magic quite in harmony with indigenous faiths. Although the Catholics baptized the Yorubas as soon as they arrived, it was a meaningless act because the Africans had no idea what it was supposed to represent. Thus, although the Africans and Amerindians pretended to worship following the Catholic faith, they covertly carried on

their religious beliefs until their liberation in 1888. By then at least 15 generations of Africans had grown up worshipping the *orishas*.

Candomblé, like *Santería*, retains its roots in Yoruban spiritual practices. The name derives from the clandestine celebrations held on coffee plantations by the blacks. The first center for *Candomblé* was in Salvador, the old capital city of Brazil. The religion’s spiritual leaders are women, or high priestesses. Most of the teachings remain oral.

Millions of people in Brazil will claim to practice Catholicism, but privately they continue to worship the *orishas* of Africa.



deities. The ceremonies held on this occasion are a blend of Catholic ritual and Candomblé. For example during the Catholic Mass inside the church, worshippers receive a *banho de pipoca* (“popcorn bath”), a common Candomblé ritual.

Further Reading

Joseph A. Page, *The Brazilians* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1995); Thomas E. Skidmore, *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Brunei

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	In southeastern Asia, bordered on the landward side by Malaysia and to the northwest by the South China Sea
Size	2,228 sq. mi.
Capital City	Bandar Seri Begawan
Flag Description	Brunei's flag is yellow with two diagonal bands of white (top, almost double width) and black starting from the upper hoist side; the national emblem in red is superimposed at the center; the emblem includes a swallow-tailed flag on top of a winged column within an upturned crescent above a scroll and flanked by two upraised hands.
Independence	January 1, 1984 (from United Kingdom)
Population	372,361 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional sultanate
Nationality	Bruneian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Malay (67%)
Major Language(s)	Malay (official); English; Chinese
Major Religion(s)	Muslim (official; 67%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; National Day, February 23; Armed Forces Day, May 31; Birthday of the Sultan, July 15

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

The early history of Brunei is not well documented, although there is evidence of its trade links with China as early as the sixth century C.E. The formal name of the country is Negara Brunei Darussalam, but it is commonly referred to as Brunei Darussalam.

The Brunei Empire reached the pinnacle of its glory from the 15th to the 17th centuries when its control extended over the entire island of Borneo (of which Brunei is the northeastern part) and spread farther north up to the Philippines. Brunei had become a major power to reckon with under its fifth sultan Bolkiah (r. 1473–1521), who was renowned for his maritime adventures and exploits. The era of glory continued briefly under the ninth sultan Hassan (r. 1605–19). Thereafter Brunei's fortunes entered a period of decline, due to a combi-

nation of internal battles for succession and the influx of European colonial powers into the region.

In 1839 the English adventurer James Brooke (1803–68) arrived in Borneo and helped the sultan put down a rebellion. As a reward he was made governor, and later rajah, of Sarawak in northwest Borneo and gradually expanded the territory under his control. (Geographically the area known as Sarawak, now forming the southeast part of Malaysia, borders Brunei on three sides.)

Meanwhile the British North Borneo Company was expanding its control over territory in northeast Borneo. In 1888 Brunei became a protectorate of the British government, retaining internal independence but with British control over external affairs. British control was further intensified in 1906, when executive power was transferred to a British resident, who advised the ruler on all matters except those concerning local custom and religion.

With the drawing up of a new constitution in 1959, Brunei was declared a self-governing state, while its foreign affairs,

security, and defense remained the responsibility of the United Kingdom. In 1962 an attempt was made to introduce a partially elected legislative body with limited powers. It was abandoned after the opposition party Partai Rakyat Brunei launched an armed uprising, which the government quelled with the help of British forces. The sultan eventually decided that Brunei would remain an independent state and successfully resisted pressures in the late 1950s and early 1960s to join the neighboring area of Sabah (and also Sarawak) as part of the newly formed Malaysia.

In 1967 Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin (1914–86) abdicated in favor of his eldest son Hassanal Bolkiah (b. 1946), who became the 29th ruler. The sultan himself retained the portfolio of defense and assumed the royal title *seri begawan*. In 1970, the national capital Brunei Town was renamed Bandar Seri Begawan in his honor.

On January 4, 1979, Brunei and the United Kingdom signed a new treaty of friendship and cooperation. Finally on January 1, 1984, Brunei became a fully independent state. Its next step was to join ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations). During the next two and a half decades Brunei moved toward Islamic fundamentalism. In 1991 the sale of alcohol was banned, and stringent dress codes have been enforced since then.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Brunei is situated on the northern coast of the island of Borneo, in southeastern Asia, bounded on the north by the South China Sea and on all other sides by the Malaysian state of Sarawak.

The landmass of Brunei consists of a narrow coastal plain and a hilly interior region. There are extensive swamps, especially in the west and northeast. Most streams flow north to the coast, including the Belait River, the longest river of the country.

The climate of Brunei is largely humid and tropical with an average annual temperature of about

81°F. Although there is rain throughout the year the country experiences its heaviest rainfall during the monsoon season, which lasts from November to March.

❁ ECONOMY

Brunei is heavily dependent on its revenues from the sale of crude oil and natural gas to finance its development programs and ranks third among the major oil-producing countries in Southeast Asia. It is also the fourth largest producer of liquefied natural gas in the world. The state also receives income from rents, royalties, corporate taxes, and dividends. Because oil and gas are nonrenewable resources, the nation has made economic diversification a major priority.

The government provides for all medical services and subsidizes food and housing.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The culture of Brunei is linked with the old Malay civilization that once encompassed the entire Malay Archipelago. The influx of various cultural elements and foreign civilizations strongly influenced Brunei's culture. Although Islam emerged as the strongest force and defines the lives of the majority of the population, strong and distinct traces of animism, Hinduism, and Western cultures remain.

Brunei has tried to preserve its diverse cultural heritage. The founding of the Arts and Handicraft Center in 1975 testifies to the push for preservation. Brunei is famous for indigenous crafts such as boat making, silver work, bronze toolmaking, and cloth weaving, as well as mat and basket weaving. Brunei also boasts of the skills of *silat*, a traditional art of self-defense.

Fun Fact

Brunei has been ruled by the same family for more than six centuries.

Fun Fact

The sultan's favorite sport is polo.

Silat

Pencak silat or *silat* (“fighting by using techniques of self-defense”) is an Asian martial art with roots in the culture of the Malaysian people. This art is widely known in Indonesia and Malaysia as well as Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, and the Philippines. It is estimated that there are hundreds of *alirans* (styles) and innumerable schools. The origin of *alirans* may be traced back to the movements and gestures of wild animals such as tigers and monkeys.

The system consists of *sikap* (positions) and *gerak-gerak* (movements). When *pesilat* (*silat* practitioners) are moving, these *sikap* and *gerak-gerak* change continuously. As soon as one finds an opening in an

opponent's defense, he or she will try to finish the opponent with a fast *serangan* (attack).

Silat has a wide variety of defensive and attacking techniques. Practitioners may use hands, elbows, arms, legs, knees, and feet in attacks. Common techniques include kicking, hitting, tripping, sweeps, locks, take-downs, throws, strangles, and joint breaking.

Juru-juru is how one practices for *silat*. A *juru* is a series of meta-movements for the upper body, used as a guide to learn the positions and movements; it is known as *buah* when done with a partner. *Langkah*, or lower body movements, teach the use of footwork. When combined, it is known as *dasar pasan*, or whole body flow.

Some Bruneian Dishes

Nasi lemak is a favorite breakfast dish. This dish consists of rice cooked with coconut milk and served with spicy *ikan bilis* (anchovies), peanuts, *sambal* (spicy gravy) prawn, or fish or eggs, long beans, and cucumbers.

Satay consists of bite-size pieces of beef, goat, or chicken marinated in spices, skewered on thin sticks, and grilled over a charcoal stove. A spicy peanut sauce, *ketupat*, rice cakes, cucumber, and raw onions are the traditional accompaniments.

Beef rendang consists of fairly large pieces of beef cooked in coconut milk and spiced with onion, garlic, lemon grass, turmeric, ginger, and other spices.

Oil and gas wealth has built the ostentatious modern public buildings in the capital, but most of Brunei is undeveloped and untouched by the outside world. Alcohol is illegal, there is no nightlife to speak of, and the political culture encourages quiet acquiescence to the edicts of the sultan.

CUISINE

The cuisine of Brunei has been strongly influenced by and shows a striking resemblance to Malaysian food. The dishes are generally rich and spicy and are eaten with rice or noodles. Ubiquitous street vendors sell foods such as barbequed fish, chicken wings, and *satay* (chunks or slices of meat on put on skewers and grilled).

Ambuyat (a porridge made of sago starch), familiarly called “edible glue,” is a local specialty. This is accompanied by grilled fish, a spicy mango sauce, and an assortment of vegetables. Other local favorites include *beef rendang* (sort of a spicy beef stew cooked in coconut milk) and *nasi lemak* (rice cooked in coconut milk).

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR’S DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 1

As in other countries the people of Brunei welcome the new year with eagerness and joy. Since this is an official holiday, all educational, commercial, and government organizations remain closed. People devote the day to leisure and recreational activities.

❁ NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: February 23

This day celebrates Brunei’s heritage, culture, and identity as a young sovereign nation. Parades are held, with processions of schoolchildren, business leaders, and civil servants. There is an emphasis on activities for children, such as book fairs and contests, to instill national pride in the young. In addition, mass prayers and readings from the Koran are held in mosques throughout the country.

❁ ARMED FORCES DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 31

The formation of the Royal Brunei Armed Forces is commemorated on this day every year. Celebrations usually take place in the heart of the capital city, Bandar Seri Begawan. There are a military parade and a variety of demonstrations, such as parachuting displays and battle reenactments. In other districts units of the armed forces organize parades and similar displays.



The Sultan of Brunei, Hassanal Bolkiah, greets royal family members as Queen Hajjah Mariam looks on during a ceremony celebrating his birthday at Nurul Iman Palace in Bandar Seri Begawan, capital of Brunei. (AP Photo/Vincent Thian)

❁ BIRTHDAY OF THE SULTAN

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 15

This is an occasion of great significance in the national calendar, with events and festivities taking place across the country. People gather in large numbers at the Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin mosque in the capital of Bandar Seri Begawan. His majesty the sultan meets his subjects there and delivers a *titab*, or speech, to mark the occasion. Afterward there is an awards ceremony at the Istana Nurul Iman (one of the Sultan's palaces, which contains 1,788 rooms). During the next two weeks a series of processions, parades, and celebrations are held. During the evening, displays of fireworks take place. Night markets—*pasar malam*—are kept busy selling food and drinks to the crowds.

Religious Holidays

❁ CHINESE NEW YEAR

Observed by: Chinese

Observed on: January–February

The New Year is perhaps the most elaborate, colorful, and important festival of the Chinese calendar. It is celebrated on the first day of the first Moon of the lunar calendar. The Bruneian Chinese, who comprise approximately 15 percent of the population, congratulate each other and themselves on having lived through yet another year. Prior to this day every Chinese home gets a thorough cleaning. Spring couplets, written in black ink on large vertical scrolls of red paper, are put up on the walls or sides of gateways. Flowers and fruit are used to decorate homes. This is a time for family reunions and social visits. Families visit one another and bring oranges as a token of longevity and good fortune. Traditional cookies and lots of eating are part of the festivities. Unmarried young people and children receive *ang pow*, little red packets with money inside, a symbolic gesture of good luck, wealth, and health.

See also Volume III: CHINESE NEW YEAR

❁ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

The Islamic calendar is based on the revolutions of the Moon, so it has only 354 days. Dhu al-Hijjah, the New Year, begins on the first day of Muharram, the first Islamic month. Because all Islamic days start at sunset, so do the holidays. In Islam the celebration of the New Year is usually quiet, unlike New Year's celebrations associated with other calendars. On this day in Brunei the people gather in mosques for spe-

cial prayers and readings from scriptures. A major activity is the recounting and the narration of the Hegira, Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina. On this day Bruneians, like Muslims elsewhere, also reflect on the ephemeral quality of time and of their own lives.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

❁ MOULOD

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

Mouloud, also called Mawlid al-Nabi, celebrates the birthday of Muhammad, who was born in 570. The Muslims of Brunei celebrate this day by recalling his pious life and teachings. Special prayers are said on this occasion, recollecting Muhammad's kindness and compassion because he forgave the bitterest of his foes. The Muslim faithful, if they so wish, also give alms to the poor and the needy. Conservative Muslim sects do not celebrate Muhammad's birthday because they believe it diverts their attention from worshipping only Allah.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOD

❁ SHAB-E-MIRAJ

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twenty-seventh of Rajab, the seventh month in the Islamic calendar

This is a very special night for the adherents of Islam. The official name of the holiday is Laylat Al-Isra wa Al-Miraj, which means "the night journey and ascension," but it is also known as the Ascension of the Prophet. On this night, Muhammad is believed to have gone from Mecca to Jerusalem, ascended into the seven heavens and returned, all in the course of a single night. During his sojourn in the seven heavens, Muhammad was commanded to establish the five daily prayers (*salah*, *salat*, or *namaaz*). He is also believed to have met luminaries such as Abraham (Ibrahim), Moses (Musa), Aaron (Harun), Adam (Allahu), the Archangel Gabriel (Jibril), and Jesus (Eesa). On this day, the devout Muslims of Brunei gather in mosques or at one another's homes and listen to the story of Muhammad's journey. They share food and sweets in honor of the night.

See also Volume III: ISLAM

❁ SHAB-E-QADR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twenty-seventh of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar

This festival commemorates the most significant event in the history of Islam. It was in the ninth month of the Islamic calendar Ramadan that Allah sent down the revelation of the Koran to Muham-

mad, thus laying the foundation of a new faith. For this reason, Ramadan (or Ramazan) is considered the most sacred month of the Islamic calendar. In Brunei the people observe this day through prayers and reading of the scriptures, followed by feasts and get-togethers.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr is one of the major holidays of the Islamic calendar. It comes at the end of the holy month of Ramadan and celebrates the end of daily fasting. On this day the people of Brunei mark the end of the period of fasting during Ramadan with sweets, snacks, and dishes prepared specially for the occasion. People wear new clothes, and the men attend a special Eid prayer at their neighborhood mosques. There is a spirit of gaiety and cheerfulness all around.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Although not celebrated on a large scale in Brunei, Christmas Day, as in the rest of the world, is a joyous occasion. Observance is generally confined to the capital, Bandar Seri Begawan, and the Belait District, where the majority of the Christian population (approximately 10 percent) and Western expatriates live. They usually hold “open house” parties to entertain family and friends.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

In Brunei there are two basic Muslim rituals accompanying the birth of a child. First the father or a male relative whispers the call to prayer (*adhan*) into the newborn’s right ear as the first sound it hears. This act symbolically makes the baby aware of Allah from the very first moment of its life. This is accompanied by reading from the relevant portions of the Koran.

After a few days, a naming ceremony is held. At a gathering of relatives and friends the child is formally given a name and often a lock of hair is cut from its head. This is generally followed by a celebratory meal, sacrifices, and readings from the Koran. The baby is weighed, and an equivalent amount in silver is given to charity.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Circumcision is not mentioned in the Koran, but Muslims everywhere regard it as essential, and the Hadith (a narrative record of the sayings of Muhammad) records it as a practice required by all the prophets. It is also known as *tabara*, meaning “purification.” In Brunei and neighboring countries where this procedure is followed, the boy undergoes circumcision between 10 and 12 years of age. It is, thus, a puberty rite, separating the boy from childhood and assigning him the new status of manhood. In certain cases it is performed in a clinic or hospital. Festivities, music, special foods, and the presence of a large number of guests are all part of the occasion. While the actual event is taking place, one may hear the praises of Allah being uttered, partly to induce a religious ambience, and partly (as some observers suggest) to muffle the boy’s cries of pain. However the procedure is relatively safe, and those who perform it are usually specially trained.

❁ MARRIAGE

In Brunei, whose culture has strong Malaysian influences, marriages are lavish affairs. The bride and groom are treated as “king and queen” for a day. The prewedding meeting between the bride’s and the groom’s parents determines the dowry that is to be given to the bride as well as the date of the marriage. A henna application ceremony is held prior to the wedding. The bride’s palms and feet are decorated with dye from henna leaves. Sometimes this is followed by several changes of costume, called *tukar pakaian*.

Marriage is a contract, and its solemnization is normally presided over by a *kadbi*, a religious official. The Akad Nikah or Solemnization of Marriage ceremony is, in effect, a verbal contract between the bride’s father, represented by the *kadbi*, and the groom. A small sum of money seals the contract. This token amount is distinct from the dowry or bride price, which the groom offers to the bride.

The simplicity of this ritual is in sharp contrast to the tremendous responsibilities of the groom toward his bride, which is reinforced in a brief lecture on marriage and its responsibilities, delivered later by the *kadbi*. The groom is also reminded that, should he fail to provide both spiritual and physical sustenance for his wife, the marriage may be dissolved if a complaint is made to the Syariat Court.

The solemnization is usually conducted by the *kadbi* in the presence of witnesses after both partners are asked separately for their consent to the marriage. Gifts are then exchanged, and there may be a recitation of the Koran. Gifts from the groom are checked to ensure everything is in order. These gifts are then displayed in the bridal chamber. This is followed by parties and feasts hosted by the groom’s and bride’s families.

❁ DEATH

In Brunei when a Muslim is nearing death, those around the person are called upon to comfort the person and remind him or her of God's mercy and forgiveness. They may also recite verses from the Koran. It is recommended that a dying Muslim's last words should be the declaration of faith: "I bear witness that there is no God but Allah." After the person has died, the people pray for the departed and begin preparations for burial. The eyes of the deceased are closed, and the body is covered temporarily with a clean sheet. It is forbidden for those in mourning to excessively wail, scream, or make wild gestures.

It is customary among Muslims to bury the deceased as soon as possible after death, avoiding the need for embalming or otherwise disturbing the body of the deceased. In case of an unnatural death, a postmortem may be performed if need be, but it should be done with the utmost respect for the dead. The family members wash the body with clean, perfumed water, after which it is wrapped in sheets of clean, white cloth (*kafan*).

The deceased is then transported to the site of the funeral prayers (*salat-l-janazah*). These prayers are commonly held outdoors, in a courtyard or public square, not inside the mosque. The community gathers, and the imam (prayer leader) stands in front

of the deceased, facing away from the worshippers. The funeral prayer resembles the daily prayers, with a few variations. (For example, there is no bowing or prostration. Most of the prayer is said silently, except for a few words.)

The corpse is then taken to the cemetery for burial (*al-dafin*). While all members of the community attend the funeral prayers, only the men of the community accompany the body to the graveyard. The deceased is laid in the grave on his or her right side, facing Mecca. Erection of tombstones, elaborate markers, placing of flowers, or other mementoes is discouraged.

The friends and family of the dead person observe a three-day mourning period. They practice austerity and avoid wearing decorative clothing and jewelry. Widows observe an extended mourning period (*iddah*) for four months and ten days. During this period a widow is not allowed to remarry, move away from her home, or wear fancy jewelry and clothing.

Further Reading

Graham Saunders, *History of Brunei* (Oxford: Routledge, 2002); Ranjit Singh, *Brunei, 1839–1983: The Problems of Political Survival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); David K. Wright, *Brunei: Enchantment of the World* (New York: Scholastic, 1991).

~ Bulgaria ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Southeastern Europe, bordering the Black Sea, between Romania and Turkey
Size	42,823 sq. mi.
Capital City	Sofia
Flag Description	Bulgaria's flag has three horizontal bands of equal size, displaying the following colors: white (top), green, and red.
Independence	September 22, 1908 (from the Ottoman Empire)
Population	7,450,349 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary democracy
Nationality	Bulgarian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Bulgarian (84%)
Major Language(s)	Bulgarian
Major Religion(s)	Bulgarian Orthodox (83%); Muslim (12%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Martenitsa, March 1; Liberation Day, March 3; Labor Day, May 1; Snake's Day, May 1; Bulgarian Army Day, May 6; Education and Culture Day, May 24; Botev Day, June 2; Unification Day, September 6; Independence Day, September 22; Revival Leaders' Day, November 1

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Not much is known about Bulgaria's ancient history, but recent social and political changes have made it possible to begin exploring the hundreds of prehistoric sites found there. Bulgaria abounds in archaeological monuments, many of which are still unknown to the international scholarly community, while others are being discovered every year. There are numerous Neolithic, Chalcolithic (Copper and Stone Age), and Bronze Age settlement mounds, which complement similar monuments found throughout the Balkans and northwestern Asia Minor. There are also significant remains of Classical, Hellenistic, and Roman urban centers, settlements, and temples, as well as more than a hundred Thracian tombs, with remarkable architecture and artistic decoration.

It is believed that what is now known as Bulgaria was a part of Thrace, an area in southeastern Europe (which also included Turkey, eastern Serbia, and northeastern parts of

Greece). The inhabitants of this region were called Thracians and were of Indo-European descent. According to the Greek poet Homer, the Thracians promised to fight alongside the Mycenaean Greeks in the legendary Trojan War but did not fulfill their pledge. As a result, following the Trojan War, the Greek warrior Odysseus raided Thrace to punish them for failing to honor their promise.

Bulgaria is also thought to be the land of the Greek legend of Orpheus. It is believed that the Greeks borrowed the mythical figure of Orpheus from a Thracian ritual called the Orphic Mysteries, about which not much is known.

Around 46 B.C.E. the Romans conquered Bulgaria and began inhabiting the region they called Moesia. Sometime later in the sixth century C.E. Slavic nomads and farmers came to settle in the wastelands and were followed by a Central Asian Turkic ethnic group known as the Bulgars, who began migrating into this region around the seventh century from the northern coast of the Black Sea. The Bulgars were a nomadic Turkic steppe people, more like the Huns or Mongols, and expanded their chiefdoms by raiding neighboring tribes. They

were ruled by khans (which is also the title for rulers of Mongolia and Turkey), a hereditary position.

The Byzantine Empire recognized Bulgar rule over the region between the Danube River and the Balkans (southeastern Europe) in exchange for a yearly tribute. Thus by the late seventh century the Bulgars had established their khanate (a region ruled by the khan), and Asparukh (d. 700) became the first emperor of Bulgaria. Initially the Bulgars faced constant opposition from the Slavs, who had entered Bulgaria long before the Bulgars and also outnumbered them. Over time the Bulgars absorbed the Slavic way of life, adopted the Slavic language, and in 865, under the rule of King Boris I, they embraced Orthodox Christianity.

The most ambitious Bulgarian king was Czar Simeon I (also known as Simeon the Great; d. 927), who was the son of Boris I (d. 907), the first Christian ruler of Bulgaria. He waged a war against the Byzantine Empire in an attempt to become the emperor of the Greeks and Bulgars. With the approval of Pope Formosus (?816–96), he even declared himself czar (or emperor) of Bulgaria and Greece.

After the death of King Simeon I, the Bulgarian Empire slowly disintegrated. The Byzantine Emperor John I Tzimisces (924–76) invaded the eastern part of the Bulgarian Empire and declared it a Byzantine protectorate. The Bulgarians suffered immensely under the Byzantine Emperor Basil II (958–1025), who defeated Czar Samuil of Bulgaria (958–1014) in 1014 in Balasita and ordered the massacre of thousands of Bulgarians. He also ordered his forces to blind more than 14,000 Bulgarian prisoners before sending them back to Bulgaria. As a result of his atrocities, he earned the nickname *Voulgaroktonos* or “Slayer of Bulgars.” Bulgaria was under Byzantine rule from 1018 to 1186.

In the late 12th century the power of the Byzantine Empire was on the decline. Taking advantage of this, Peter Asen, a Bulgarian noble of mixed descent (Cuman Bulgarian, and Vlach), led a revolt against the Byzantine Empire and declared himself Czar Peter II (r. 1040–41). He reclaimed some of the region under Byzantine rule, but the combined Hungarian, Serb, and Cuman (nomadic west Turkish tribes) forces prevented him from reclaiming the original territories of the Bulgarian Empire.

Under King Ivan II (r. 1218–41) the status of Bulgaria as a regional power was restored, and he expanded the kingdom, annexing the whole Balkan Peninsula, except for Greece. In 1242 Mongols raided Bulgaria and defeated the Bulgarian ruler. As a consequence Bulgaria was forced to pay an annual tribute to the Mongol ruler to prevent further raids. By 1280 the Bulgarian kingdom was reduced to a small state situated on the southern bank of the Danube River.

In the 14th century Bulgaria came under the rule of the Ottoman Turks. They did not force the Bulgarians to convert to Islam, but since non-Muslims were not allowed to serve in the army of the sultan, a new custom of “tribute of children” was

Greek Legend of Orpheus

In Greek mythology Orpheus is an important figure because he taught humanity the skills of writing, medicine, and agriculture. He is looked upon as a great poet and the inventor of the lyre. It is believed that his music and his singing could stop a river in its course and hypnotize wild beasts. Greek mythology also states that he initiated the cults of Apollo and the Thracian god Dionysus (god of wine), practiced magical arts, and taught astrology.

started. According to this custom every Christian community had to raise one out of five sons as a Muslim, and he was enrolled in the Janissaries, the elite armed force of the sultan.

Austria encouraged rebellion in Bulgaria in 1595 and 1688, but the revolts were quickly suppressed by Ottoman forces. In the 18th century the Russians, supported by the Bulgarians, fought with the Ottoman Turks over domination in the region. A peace treaty signed between Russia and the Ottoman Empire gave Russia the right to interfere in the internal matters of Bulgaria to safeguard the interests of its Christian subjects. In 1876 the Bulgarians staged an insurrection against the Ottoman rulers in what became known as the April Uprising. It was brutally crushed, and more than 30,000 Bulgarians were massacred.

The atrocities of the Ottoman Turks invited strong reactions from the international community. Russia intervened and called a conference at Constantinople in December 1876, which was attended by delegates from Great Britain, Italy, France, Germany, and Austria-Hungary, along with Russia and the Ottoman Empire. In order to find a peaceful solution to the Bulgarian problem, the formation of a Bulgarian state, made up of a small principality in the northern parts of the Balkan Mountains and including the entire Bulgarian region under Ottoman rule, was sanctioned. When the Ottomans refused to accept this plan, Russia with the backing of the European powers declared war on the Ottoman Empire in 1877. By January 1878 Russian forces had gained control over a major portion of Bulgaria, and the forces of the Ottoman Empire were ultimately defeated. In accordance with the Treaty of Berlin (1878), which was signed between the European powers and the Ottoman Empire, a principality of Bulgaria was created between the Danube River and the Stara Planina mountain range. It included Sofia and the ancient capital of the Bulgarian Empire Veliko Turnovo.

After the Bulgarian state was formed Bulgarians began drafting their country's constitution, and Stefan Stambolov (1854–95), a participant in the April Uprising and a prominent member of the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee, was elected

prime minister. In 1885 a coup supported by Bulgarians in Eastern Rumelia, which had been under the administration of the Ottoman sultan, brought about the unification of Eastern Rumelia and Bulgaria.

In October 1912 the First Balkan War broke out, and the Allied forces of Serbia, Bulgaria, Montenegro, and Greece invaded Macedonia and Thrace, which were under Ottoman rule. The Ottomans were defeated by the alliance and lost a considerable portion of their empire. However Bulgaria, which had suffered the heaviest human casualties in the war, demanded a larger share in the territories that were conquered by Serbs. The Serbs refused to give up their part and joined forces with Greece, offering Bulgaria the region of Thrace in return for its help. The two nations fought jointly against the Bulgarian forces, and soon Bulgaria lost all the territories it had won in the battle against the Ottoman Turks.

In 1915 during World War I, Bulgaria sided with its archrival the Ottoman Empire and joined forces with Germany and Russia against the Allied powers, which were supported by Serbia, Romania, and Greece. Bulgaria declared war on Serbia and Romania and reclaimed all the territories it had lost during the First Balkan War. However by September 1918, Greece, along with the Allied Forces, had defeated Bulgaria and forced Czar Ferdinand (1861–1941) to sign a peace treaty.

This treaty demanded that Ferdinand abdicate in favor of his son Boris III (1894–1943). In 1920 new elections were held in Bulgaria. They were won by the Agrarian Party leader Aleksandar Stamboliyski (1879–1923), who was sworn in as prime minister of Bulgaria. But in May 1934, after a military coup led by Kimon Georgiev (1882–1969) and backed by Czar Boris III, all political parties were abolished, and Czar Boris III took total control of Bulgaria.

In 1941 Bulgaria allied itself with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy and allowed German forces to use it for an invasion of Greece and Yugoslavia. The Fascists defeated the two countries and, as a token of appreciation for its support, gave the Thrace region of Greece and a major part of Macedonia to Bulgaria. Bulgaria also declared war on Britain and the United States, but, due to Russian popularity in the region, refrained from declaring war on the Soviet Union. In 1943 Simeon II became czar after the sudden and suspicious death of his father shortly after a dinner meeting with Adolf Hitler. Czar Simeon II (b. 1937) was only six years old when he assumed the throne, so his uncle Prince Kyril of Bulgaria (1895–1945) and two others were appointed regents. In 1944 Kyril and the other regents were removed by a Soviet-backed coup. Kyril was soon tried and executed, as were many members of Bulgaria's educated governing classes.

Simeon, however, was allowed to stay on the throne with regents appointed by the new Communist government, which also appointed Georgi Dimitrov (1882–1949), a Bulgarian Communist, prime minister of Bulgaria. After the monarchy was abol-

ished in 1946, following a rigged referendum that claimed 95 percent approval, the royal family went to Alexandria, Egypt, where Czaritsa Giovanna's (1907–2000) father, Victor Emmanuel III of Italy (1869–1947), was living in exile. In 1951 the Spanish government of Francisco Franco (1892–1975) granted asylum to the exiled Bulgarian royal family. In 1949 Dimitrov died, and an extreme Stalinist Vulko Chervenko (1900–80) was sworn in as the new prime minister.

When the Russian leader Stalin (1879–1953) died in 1953, Nikita Khrushchev (1894–1971), who disagreed with many of Stalin's views, took over the USSR. In 1956 the Stalin puppet Chervenko was replaced by Todor Zhivkov (1911–98) as chairman of the State Council of Bulgaria, while another Bulgarian Communist Anton Yugov (1914–91), was appointed prime minister.

After Yugov retired in 1962 Zhivkov became prime minister. In 1971 he promoted himself to the position of president and made Stanko Todorov (1920–96) prime minister. However Zhivkov's autocratic regime was growing increasingly corrupt and erratic. In the 1980s Bulgaria adopted a policy of forcing the minority Turks to adopt Bulgarian names instead of their Turkish names. Those who refused were persecuted, and thousands fled.

In 1989 people began demonstrating against the oppressive regime of Zhivkov, receiving widespread support from the Communists themselves. Eventually Zhivkov and his party gave up their right to rule Bulgaria, and in June 1990 the first free and fair elections since 1931 were held in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), a moderate wing of the Communist party, won the elections and assumed power in 1991.

Between 1992 and 1997 the government of Bulgaria went back and forth between the Bulgarian Socialist Party and anticommunist regimes. However neither party did anything substantial to revive Bulgaria's failing economy. As in other post-Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the transition to capitalism was more difficult than expected, and the backward condition of Bulgaria's industry and infrastructure was exposed. Discontent among the people against the two parties grew rapidly, and there were widespread demonstrations because of massive unemployment and lack of development.

In 1996 Czar Simeon II returned from exile and, using the name Simeon Saksoburggotski, started a new political party called the National Movement for Simeon II. This party won a landslide victory in the June 2001 elections, and Simeon Saksoburggotski was sworn in as the prime minister of Bulgaria. Under his rule Bulgaria is slowly trying to achieve economic stability, although unemployment and inflation remain high. In 2004 Bulgaria became a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), an international organization for mutual defense, and it is expected to join the European Union (EU) before 2010.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in southeastern Europe, Bulgaria is flanked by Turkey and Greece to the south, Romania to the north, Macedonia, Serbia, and Montenegro to the west, and the Black Sea to the east. The main topographical features of Bulgaria include: the Danubian Plateau (a region between the Danube River and the Balkan Mountains); the Balkan Mountains (also known as Stara Planina or Old Mountains); the central Thracian Plain; and the Rhodope Mountains. The Rila Mountains and the Pirin Mountains lying in the Rhodope mountain region, are the most striking topographic features of the Balkan region. The Rila mountain range is home to the highest peak in the Balkan Mountains Mount Musala, which stands 9,760 feet high. The second highest peak in Bulgaria Mount Vihrenm, which is 9,563 feet high, is located in the Pirin mountain range.

The important rivers of Bulgaria include the Danube, the Struma, the Maritsa, and the Mesta. The Sofia Basin (15 miles wide and 60 miles long) is home to the capital city of Sofia and its surrounding areas.

Bulgaria has a temperate climate that is characterized by wet, cold winters and hot, dry summers.

Renowned for its rose oil, Bulgaria has the largest rose plantations in the Kazanluk region and is called “The Valley of Roses.” Bulgaria has more than 250 native plant species that are not found anywhere else in the world, including the Balkan violet, the Rile primrose, the Rhodopean tulip, and the Bulgarian blackberry. A wide variety of mushrooms, raspberries, strawberries, blackberries, blueberries, and other fruits can be found in Bulgaria’s forests.

❁ ECONOMY

The Bulgarian economy has suffered immensely due to the lack of development of its infrastructure and the absence of progrowth economic policies. There is massive unemployment throughout the country, and inflation is high. However, the present government of Bulgaria, under the leadership of Simeon Saksokoburggotski (the former Czar Simeon II), is trying to revive the failing economy and has introduced a number of reforms. Privatization of industry is being encouraged, and the government is making investments in developing basic infrastructure facilities. It is also conducting talks with the members of the European Union (EU) and is expected to benefit from the economic policies of the EU after it joins that organization.

Some of the important industries in Bulgaria include food processing, chemicals, construction, machine building, electricity, and nuclear fuel. The agricultural produce of the region includes fruit, tobacco, vegetables, wine, barley, wheat, and sugar.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Bulgaria’s population is dominated by ethnic Bulgarians, who constitute 84 percent of the country’s

population. However, a significant number of Turks, Macedonians, Greeks, and Armenians also live in Bulgaria. The culture is a blend of the Bulgar, Thracian, and Slavic cultures.

Bulgarian is the official language of the country and is widely spoken in Bulgaria. It is a southern Slavic language and uses the Cyrillic alphabet. The various ethnic groups in the region speak their own languages.

Most Bulgarians are Bulgarian Orthodox Christians (83 percent), while 12 percent are Muslim. Minority religions—Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and people of other faiths—practice their religions freely.

Bulgaria does not have a national dress; people in different parts of Bulgaria wear their own distinctive traditional costumes. For example in the Thrace region and mountainous part of Bulgaria, women prefer to wear the closed tunic, known as the *soukman*. In the northern parts of the Stara Planina and in the Danube Plain, women wear a *bruchnik* (double apron). Men generally choose between a *chernodresnik* and a *beloldresnik*, which are black or white robes.

The musical instruments used by Bulgarian performers, also used by musicians throughout the Balkan region, include the *kaval* (flute), *tambura* (a stringed instrument), *tapan* (two-sided drum), *gaida* (bagpipe), *zurla* or *zurna* (a woodwind instrument), and *gadulka* (violin).

Most of the traditional Bulgarian dances, called *boro*, are performed as line dances or circle dances. However some dances can also be performed by individuals. The traditional dances are not very popular among the Bulgarian youth and are usually reserved for weddings and village festivals.

Traditional Bulgarian artisans are renowned for their wood carvings, handicrafts, copperware, beautifully designed rugs, and ceramics.

❁ CUISINE

Bulgarian cuisine includes a wide variety of tasty and spicy delicacies. Bulgarians feast on salads, bean soup, *kebabcheta* (a spicy meat dish), *kavarma* (a tasty and

The Cyrillic Alphabet

The Cyrillic alphabet, also known as *azbuka* (derived from the old name of the first letters), is an alphabet used to write six Slavic languages: Belarusian, Bulgarian, Russian, Serbian, Macedonian, and Ukrainian. In addition many other languages spoken in Asia, Eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union use it. In Bulgaria it is widely believed that Saint Clement of Orhid, a disciple of Saint Cyril and Saint Methodius and a Bulgarian scholar, was the inventor of the Cyrillic alphabet. However others credit Saint Cyril as its actual inventor.



spicy dish made from pork and veal liver), and peppers stuffed with cheese and egg.

Every region also boasts its own specialties, such as Danube fish soup, Bansko-style *kapama* (vegetables and meat stewed in an earthenware vessel), Thracian *katmi* (a delicious pancake), Rhodope *cheverme* (roasted lamb), and Dobroudjanska *banitsa* (cheese pie).

Coffee and white and red wines are favorite beverages in Bulgaria.

Fun Fact

It is believed that the health of an individual throughout the year will depend on the kind of life found near the place where the *martenitsi* is tied. If a worm is found near the *martenitsi*, it means the individual will enjoy good health and success throughout the year. An ant symbolizes good health throughout the year, but success will require hard work. A spider symbolizes bad health and lack of success throughout the year.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

New Year's Day is celebrated on January 1 in Bulgaria. Prior to 1916, Bulgaria followed the Julian calendar, which recognizes the new year as beginning in January. In 1916 Bulgaria adopted the Gregorian calendar, which is in use throughout most of the Western World. In Western Bulgaria, the Central Balkan region, and along the Danube River, a ritual called *ladouvane* (or maiden's rite) is performed on New Year's Eve. This ritual requires young girls to get up early on the morning of December 30 and drop their finger rings, along with barley and oats (since all are considered symbols of fertility), in a huge vessel. Then all the rings are tied together with the stem of a perennial plant, such as ivy or basil. The vessel is filled with water and kept in the open, under the starry night sky, until New Year's Eve. On December 31, the young girls perform a ritual dance around the huge vessel, and then an astrologer reveals their futures to them.

On New Year's Day, Bulgarians feast on *banica*, a flaky cheese pie, and usher in the new year with the ringing of church bells.

❁ MARTENITSA

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 1

Martenitsa is an ancient Bulgarian festival that commemorates the establishment of the Kingdom of Bulgaria in 681. Also since the spring season begins in the month of March, it has been a Bulgarian tradition to celebrate spring on March 1.

On this day Bulgarians wear small, neatly woven red-and-white woolen dolls, either on their wrists or affixed to their clothes. Called *martenitsi* or *pizho* and *penda*, these represent happiness and prosperity. The purity of the white snow that will soon be gone and the onset of spring, with its sunny days, are reflected in the red and white colors used to make the *martenitsi*. Bulgarians are supposed to wear these dolls until they see a stork. The stork is considered the harbinger of spring. After seeing the stork it is customary to remove the *martenitsi*, although the tradition of removing them varies from region to region. Some tie the *martenitsi* on a fruit tree to transfer their good luck and prosperity to the fruit-bearing tree, while some tie it to a stone, which transfers the good fortune to the stone.

Bulgarians believe the word *mart* in the term *martenitsi* refers to a fictional angry old woman named Baba Marta (meaning Grandma Marta), who suffers from mood swings. Bulgarians offer red and white colors or *martenitsi* to Baba Marta to please her, lest her mood swings prolong the cold weather and delay the onset of spring.

See also Volume III: SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ LIBERATION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 3

This day commemorates the formation of the first autonomous Bulgarian state within the Ottoman Empire on March 3, 1878, as a result of the Treaty of Berlin. This treaty was signed by the European powers and the Ottoman Sultan, after Russian forces defeated the Ottoman Turks in Bulgaria.

Bulgarians had suffered immensely under the oppressive rule of the Ottoman Turks, and after thousands of people were massacred by the sultan's army, the international community intervened and decided to create an autonomous state of Bulgaria. The Ottoman Turks refused to grant Bulgaria autonomy, so Russia backed by other European powers invaded Bulgaria and defeated the Turks. Eventually a peace treaty was signed between the sultan and the European powers, which led to the formation of the autonomous state of Bulgaria.

In the interim Prince Alexander of Battenberg (1854–1921), a nephew of Russian Czar Alexander II (1818–81), was chosen as the governor of Bulgaria, while the Ottoman Turks were allowed nominal rule over the region. However after the Bulgarian state

was formed, Bulgarians began drafting their country's constitution, and Stefan Stambolov (1854–95), a prominent member of the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee, was elected prime minister.

Liberation Day celebrations take place throughout the country and are observed with cultural festivals and programs showcasing the rich historical and cultural heritage of Bulgaria. All public and private institutions are closed.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

The earliest origins of a celebration on May 1 (also called May Day) are ascribed to pagan celebrations that were practiced by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages. The May 1 observance of Labor Day, or Worker's Day, was set by the Socialist Second International in 1889 in order to show solidarity with the U.S. American Federation of Labor (AFL), which had called a general strike in 1890 demanding an eight-hour workday.

It is a public holiday, and all private and public institutions are closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ SNAKE'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Bulgarians also celebrate Eremia or Snake's Day on May 1. They believe snakes will bite people who work in fields on this day. However young Bulgarian women go to the fields on Snake's Day to pick garlic cloves and bring them home. It is believed that these garlic cloves will help ward off evil. Also people living along the Toundja River plant cabbages in the fields on this day, since they believe that the cabbage heads will become firm and tight, just like the snake's coils.

It is a public holiday, and all private and public institutions are closed.

See also Volume III: SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ BULGARIAN ARMY DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 6

Bulgarian Army Day, originally St. George's Day (Gergyovden), commemorates the sacrifices made by the Bulgarian armed forces over the years to uphold the integrity and sovereignty of Bulgaria. On May 6, celebrations begin with a religious ceremony in which the flag of the Bulgarian armed forces is blessed and prayers are offered asking God to grant victory to the armed forces in the event of war. Then, a grand military parade takes place in the capital city of Sofia, which is presided over by the president and prime minister.

May 6 has traditionally been observed as St. George's Day to mark the death of the Christian saint St. George, who died on May 6, 303. Since the formation of the first Bulgarian state in 681, he has been revered as the patron saint of the Bulgarian Army, thus the merging of the two holidays. St. George was a devout Christian and a soldier in the Roman army, who was tortured and killed by fellow Romans when he refused to give up his faith on the orders of his Roman superiors.

St. George's Day in Bulgaria is known as Gergyovden and commemorates the end of spring and the onset of summer. It is observed with great enthusiasm by the peasants and farmers in Bulgaria. The name comes from *georgius*, an ancient Greek word that means "farmers." According to legend, during the pagan era a town lived in fear of a dragon. Although the townspeople tried to appease him by offering animals, he declared that he would not settle for anything less than human flesh. The people of the town submitted to their fate and began offering one human every day to protect the others. Soon, it was the turn of the king's daughter, but before the dragon could kill her, St. George appeared and killed the dragon. Since then, St. George has been the patron saint of farmers.

In eastern parts of Bulgaria, the youth of the village go to their fields on the eve of Gergyovden and drive away the corn pests and also get wet in the dew



Bulgarian guardsmen march in Sofia, on May 6 during a military parade on Alexander Battenberg square. On May 6 the national feast Gergyovden (St. George's Day) is celebrated as Bulgarian Army Day.

(AP Photo/Dimitar Deinov)

Fun Fact

In Bulgaria Father Christmas (Saint Nicholas or Santa Claus) appears on January 1 and gives presents to children. Greeks attribute the qualities of St. Nicholas to St. Basil, whose death anniversary is observed on January 1

(Bulgarians believe this is good for health). Then they gather branches from pear trees and use them to decorate the doors of their barns, homes, animal pens, and cattle-sheds. Following this, they light candles and drink three sips of water for good health.

See also Volume III: SPRING FESTIVALS

EDUCATION AND CULTURE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 24

Bulgarians celebrate May 24 as Education and Culture Day. It is also known as the Day of Slavonic Literacy and celebrates St. Cyril and St. Methodius. These saints are believed to have invented the Slavonic language and its literature.

St. Cyril and St. Methodius were brothers and devout Christians who belonged to a renowned Christian family in Thessalonica. The saints introduced Bulgaria to Christianity and convinced the king of Bulgaria Boris I (852–89) to embrace the new religion, along with his subjects. It is believed that St. Cyril invented the Glagolitic alphabet, which had 38 letters, 24 of which resembled those used in the Greek language. The brothers began teaching the Slavonic language in the region. Many believe that St. Cyril's disciple Saint Clement of Ohrid simplified the Glagolitic alphabet and created the Cyrillic alphabet, naming it in honor of his teacher. Disciples of these saints spread the use of Slavonic languages in other Slavic countries. Pope John Paul II declared St. Cyril and St. Methodius copatrons of Europe on December 31, 1980.

On this day people offer prayers in honor of these saints in local churches. Also the government of Bulgaria organizes a number of educational and cultural programs throughout the country to create awareness about the Bulgarian language (one of the Slavonic languages) as well as to encourage Bulgarians to take pride in their rich cultural heritage.

BOTEV DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 2

This day commemorates the death of the Bulgarian revolutionary and poet Kristo Botev on June 2, 1876. Kristo Botev was a *voevode* (revolutionary) who fought against the oppressive rule of the Ottoman Turks in Bulgaria. On June 2, 1876, Botev, along with 200 other rebels, launched an attack against the Ottoman Turks with the intention of liberating Bulgaria from their rule. He was killed during this attempt. In his honor as the clock strikes noon on

June 2, air-raid sirens are switched on all over Bulgaria, and people observe a moment of silence for all the freedom fighters who died for Bulgaria. Concerts are organized in different parts of the country; and there are readings of poems written by Botev.

UNIFICATION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: September 6

This day commemorates the union of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia. In accordance with the Treaty of Berlin (1878), signed by the European powers and the Ottoman Empire, a principality of Bulgaria was created between the Danube River and the Stara Planina, which included Sofia and the ancient capital of the Bulgarian Empire Veliko Turnovo. Prince Alexander of Battenberg (1857–1893), a nephew of Russian Czar Alexander II, was made prince of the region.

An autonomous province of Eastern Rumelia, which was an integral part of the Kingdom of Bulgaria, was formed between the region Stara Planina and Rhodope Range (a mountain range in the southern part of Bulgaria), and a governor was appointed by the Ottoman sultan to administer the region.

However, the Bulgarians were not happy with this division and secretly supported a revolt by the Bulgarians living in Eastern Rumelia against the sultan's governor. As a consequence in 1885 a successful coup, backed by Bulgaria, ended the reign of the Ottoman Turks in the region, and on September 6, 1885, Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia were unified.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: September 22

This day commemorates the declaration of independence by the Republic of Bulgaria on September 22, 1908. After declaring independence Czar Ferdinand of Bulgaria formed an alliance with Serbia, Montenegro, and Greece to launch a unified attack on Ottoman forces in Macedonia and Thrace, which led to complete autonomy.

Independence Day celebrations are observed by the raising of the national flag of Bulgaria in the capital city of Sofia by the prime minister. Military parades, official speeches, and cultural programs are also part of the Independence Day celebrations.

REVIVAL LEADERS' DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 1

The Bulgarian National Revival commemorates a period of intellectual and spiritual realization among the leaders of Bulgaria and their attempts to make Bulgaria a politically independent and socially organized nation. Since it is a public holiday, all public and private institutions are closed on November 1.

Religious Holidays

❁ ST. BASIL'S DAY

Observed by: Bulgarian Orthodox Christians
Observed on: January 1

St. Basil's Day is observed in remembrance of the death of St. Basil on January 1, 1379. Also known as Basil the Great, he is considered one of the three holy hierarchs of the Eastern Orthodox Church. (Gregory Nazianus [329–89] and John Chrysostom [347–407] are the other two.) Gregory Nazianus (329–89), Gregory of Nyssa (335–c. 394), and St. Basil (330–79) were also called Cappadocian fathers, part of a fourth-century monastic family led by St. Makrina the Younger (330–79). Under the guidance of their sister St. Makrina, these three men were given a proper education and lessons on meditation and were collectively designated as Cappadocian fathers. Their mission was to demonstrate to Greek-speaking intellectuals that the Christian faith was not antiphilosophical and that Christians could hold their ground while conversing with Greek intellectuals.

On this day many devout Bulgarians attend local churches and offer prayers in honor of St. Basil.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Bulgarian Orthodox Christians
Observed on: January 6

The Feast of the Epiphany is a Christian celebration of the three astrologer-kings of ancient Persia (Caspas, Balthasar, and Melchior) who visited the infant Jesus in Bethlehem. It also celebrates the early life of Jesus prior to his baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist.

This is one of the most important Christian holidays in Bulgaria, and it is marked with special prayers and reading of psalms. Considered a symbol of life and purification, water is consecrated and then sprinkled on devout Christians to absolve them of their sins.

In Bulgaria an Epiphany ritual involves throwing a consecrated cross into ice-cold rivers or ponds. Young men and soldiers, blessed by the Orthodox clergy, dive in these waters to retrieve the cross. The person who retrieves it and kisses it is proclaimed the godfather of the village after receiving blessings from the local priest. Next the cross is carried to every home in the village to bless each house and its inhabitants. According to Bulgarian beliefs this ritual chases away evil and brings good health and prosperity.

Military flags and military units are also consecrated on Epiphany, a ritual that began in 1879.

Since this is also considered a day of baptism (referring to Jesus' baptism) the day is also known as the Day of Holy Baptism, and many people get baptized on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EPIPHANY

❁ ST. JORDAN'S DAY

Observed by: Bulgarian Orthodox Christians

Observed on: January 6

In Bulgaria people also celebrate St. Jordan's Day or Voditzi (derived from the word *voda*, which means "water" in Bulgarian) on January 6. It marks the end of a 12-day period called Pogani, or the Unclean Days. Orthodox Christians believe evil and dark forces walk the Earth during these 12 days. In different parts of Bulgaria rituals are performed that are meant to ward off evil and purify villages and their residents.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ ST. JOHN'S DAY

Observed by: Bulgarian Orthodox Christians

Observed on: January 7

The day after Epiphany is celebrated as St. John's (or St. Ivan's) Day in honor of St. John the Baptist, who baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. St. John is the patron saint of more than 50 traditional churches in Bulgaria and is one of the most revered saints in the country. In churches all over Bulgaria, his icon is placed beside that of Jesus. On this day Bulgarian churches hold a liturgy and consecration, and people who have the name "John" are also blessed on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EPIPHANY

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Bulgarian Orthodox Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Orthodox Good Friday (Veli Potek in Bulgarian) falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday in Lent. It commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. Many Christians observe a fast during Lent, starting on Ash Wednesday (the first day of Lent, 40 days before Good Friday), and Orthodox Christians continue to observe a partial fast until Easter. Some Christians fast on the first and last days of Lent, Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

On Good Friday devout Bulgarians attend a Good Friday service in local churches to remember the life and teachings of Jesus. Many buy new pottery dishes. In the city of Orhid, pumpkins are planted on Good Friday, since people believe that pumpkins planted on this day will be very sweet. Also in the city of Samokov young girls bake sweet donuts made with honey and sugar, called *sladko*, *blago*, *pogache*, or "sweet bread."

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

Fun Fact

On Epiphany young women wash their faces with the holy water of Epiphany in the hope that it will make them prettier.

EASTER

Observed by: Bulgarian Orthodox Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter celebrates Jesus' Resurrection from the dead. It falls on the first Sunday after the month of Lent. Because Christians call Jesus the "light of the world," candles are part of the Easter Vigil and midnight services before Easter. In Bulgaria after attending midnight services people rush into the streets with burning candles in their hands, which symbolize Jesus' return from the dead. People also smash eggs on the walls of the church. These eggs are dyed with colors during Easter week. Most eggs are dyed red. Bulgarians believe in a biblical legend that says Mary took some eggs and bread wrapped in a shawl to the site of the Crucifixion after Jesus' death. Grief-stricken at the sight of her son's Crucifixion and the blood streaming from his wounds, she knelt down and wept bitterly. Her tears and the blood from Jesus' wounds dropped on the shawl and eventually on the eggs and bread, thereby coloring them both. It is believed that this was the start of the tradition of coloring eggs.

On Easter red-colored eggs are rubbed against the cheeks of children to wish them good health throughout the year. Before Easter lunch, Bulgarians play a game that involves raw eggs. In this game two opponents stand facing each other holding raw eggs in their hands and begin hitting each other's fists trying to break the other's egg. It is believed that the person whose eggs remain intact will enjoy good health and success in the coming year.

Roast lamb and a special Easter bread are the traditional dishes in Bulgaria. Easter games and celebrations continue even on Easter Monday, which falls on the first Monday after Lent.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

ST. PETER'S DAY

Observed by: Bulgarian Orthodox Christians
Observed on: June 29

The feast of St. Peter, the first pope of Rome, is observed on June 29 to commemorate his death on June 29, 67. He was one of Jesus' twelve disciples. Christians believe that St. Peter holds the keys to heaven, and after death those Christians who have not sinned will meet St. Peter at the gates of heaven.

On St. Peter's Day people in Bulgaria offer prayers in honor of the saint. A ritual related to St. Peter's day involves the slaughter of a black chicken at the doorstep of one's house. It is believed that the ritual ensures a year filled with good health and prosperity for those who live there.

In the evening people with the names "Peter," "Petra," and "Kamana" receive special blessings from the local priests, since they have the same name as the saint.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

ST. PAUL'S DAY

Observed by: Bulgarian Orthodox Christians
Observed on: June 29

The Feast of St. Paul is celebrated on June 29. St. Paul is considered the most important apostle of Jesus and the best interpreter of his teachings. On this day Bulgarians do not work, light fires, or bake bread because of a popular belief that, if a fire is lit, it might spread to the fields and burn the crops to ashes.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

ST. ELIJAH'S DAY

Observed by: Bulgarian Orthodox Christians
Observed on: July 20

The Feast of St. Elijah is celebrated on July 20. It is traditional to slaughter the oldest rooster in the house in honor of St. Elijah (also referred to as St. Elijah the Thunderer). On this day, many Bulgarians also honor Peroun, the pagan god of thunder and lightning, who is still worshipped by Slavs.

People sharing names with St. Elijah, such as "Iliya," "Iliyana," "Ilka," and "Ilko" receive special blessings from priests in their local churches.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

THE TRANSFIGURATION

Observed by: Bulgarian Orthodox Christians
Observed on: August 6

The Feast of the Transfiguration is considered one of the 12 great feasts in the liturgical calendar followed by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. According to biblical stories, it is believed that on the night of the Transfiguration a miraculous event occurred on Mount Tabor (a hill near Nazareth). Jesus, along with his three disciples Peter, James, and John, had climbed Mount Tabor and begun praying. It is believed that at that moment Jesus became transfigured, and his face shone with the radiance of the Sun, while his white clothes also shone brilliantly. Then Moses and Elijah (or Eling) appeared and began talking to Jesus about his coming death. Around the same time, a cloud appeared in the sky, and God's voice proclaimed Jesus as his son and asked the disciples to listen to his teachings.

On the night of the Transfiguration, Bulgarians believe that God appears in the sky, and the gates of heaven are visible. However only those people who have never sinned can see these things, and God fulfills their wishes. Many Bulgarians remain wide awake throughout the night of the Transfiguration, hoping to catch a glimpse of God and the gates of heaven.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Bulgarian Orthodox Christians
Observed on: August 15

The Assumption commemorates the Virgin Mary's Assumption into heaven. In Bulgaria devout Christians attend a special Assumption Day service in honor of her heavenly elevation. On this day the first-picked and church-sanctified fruits such as watermelons and grapes are consumed, along with honey for good health. These also symbolize a good harvest. A popular Bulgarian proverb states that, "By Virgin Mary's Day, straw becomes wheat, and after Virgin Mary's Day wheat becomes straw." Thus Bulgarians complete their threshing activities by Assumption Day.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY; HARVEST FESTIVALS

❁ ST. DEMETRIUS DAY

Observed by: Bulgarian Orthodox Christians
Observed on: October 26

The Feast of St. Demetrius, a Christian saint, is observed on October 26. In Bulgaria it is also celebrated as Dismissal Day. According to legend St. Demetrius is the patron saint of winter and cold weather and is considered the elder brother of St. George, the patron saint of farmers. St. Demetrius is pictured as an old man, with a long, white beard (people believe that snow falls from his beard), who rides a red horse.

In northern parts of Bulgaria, this date is celebrated as Dismissal Day, since it marks the beginning of winter, when most agricultural activities will cease, all the helping hands hired for farming activities will be dismissed from their duties (temporarily), and work arrangements for the next year will be settled.

Many devout Christians in Bulgaria offer prayers in their local churches in honor of St. Demetrius.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ ST. MICHAEL'S DAY

Observed by: Bulgarian Orthodox Christians
Observed on: November 8

St. Michael's Day is observed on November 8. St. Michael is also referred to as St. Michael the Archangel, or St. Rangel, by Bulgarians. Orthodox Bulgarians believe that he is the only advocate for the soul of the deceased in the kingdom of God. He is sometimes referred to as St. Michael, the Soul Reaper, and it is believed that people, as they near death, see him. It is popularly believed that people who die with smiles on their faces were visited by St. Michael and that he gave them a golden apple in exchange for their soul.

On this day ritual breads, similar to those prepared for burials and commemorations, are baked.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ ST. NICHOLAS DAY

Observed by: Bulgarian Orthodox Christians
Observed on: December 6

St. Nicholas is one of the most revered and celebrated saints. Popularly known as Santa Claus, he is considered to be the great patron of children. St. Nicholas is believed to be the ruler of water and all its inhabitants. In Bulgaria St. Nicholas, or St. Nicholay, is looked upon as the protector of sailors and fishermen, and there is an icon of St. Nicholas on every Bulgarian ship or boat. A story relates that St. Nicholas once helped a sailing boat packed with sailors by closing a hole in the boat with a live carp, thus saving them from drowning.

This date also marks the end of the autumn fishing season, so fishermen offer the fish caught on this day to St. Nicholas. After eating the first fish caught, they carry the rest of the fish home. Also wives of sailors immerse icons of St. Nicholas in the sea to ensure their husbands' safe return.

Ribnik, a carp dish baked with rice or wrapped in a casing of dough, is a favorite delicacy served on this day. *Ribnik* is baked with two loaves of bread and is then either blessed at home or at church. The carp is used because it is considered the servant of St. Nicholas. Before eating the food, the head of the family lights some incense sticks and waves them over the bread. Then he lifts the baked bread and breaks it into two pieces, keeping one half on the table and sharing the other half with everyone present. The fish head, which is in the shape of a cross, is buried inside the house to ward off evil, or is sewn in the caps of little children to protect them from evil. The food is kept on the table for the entire day and is shared with friends and neighbors.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Bulgarian Orthodox Christians
Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world because it celebrates the birth of Jesus. In Bulgaria Christmas celebrations begin on Christmas Eve and last until St. Stephen's Day on December 26. On Christmas Eve, Bulgarians prepare a special 12-course meal, and the woman of the house lights incense sticks,

Fun Fact

Bulgarians believe that if someone borrows salt on Christmas and fails to return it, he or she will have eye trouble. If an individual's ear aches on Christmas, it means that an angel has passed by. If such things happen one must make the Sign of the Cross three times and whatever is wished for will come true.

Fun Fact

Rose oil is called "the liquid gold of Bulgaria" because it is very expensive. It costs approximately three times the price of gold. Also more than three tons of roses are required to extract just over two pounds of rose oil.

which she carries through the house. The family awaits the arrival of carol singers, who are members of church choirs. Christmas caroling is an ancient Bulgarian tradition called *sourvakari*. Bulgarians believe carolers bless the house with their presence.

On Christmas day families get together and celebrate the birth of Jesus with feasting, singing, and dancing.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ FESTIVAL OF ROSES

Observed in: Kazanluk (Valley of Roses)

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First week of June

The Festival of Roses is an annual festival that takes place in the Bulgarian town of Kazanluk, located in an area known as the Valley of Roses. People from all over the world flock to Bulgaria to witness these festivities. They watch the farmers pick roses glistening with dew, see the extraction of rose oil in the factories, and get to taste the special rose jam. An exhibit of a wide variety of roses is also part of the festival.

The festival holds a special attraction for young girls because the Queen Rose Beauty Contest is held at the beginning of the festival each year, and the most beautiful girl is crowned the queen of roses. Later the queen of roses gives the award for the most skillful rose picker of the year to the winner of the annual rose harvesting ritual, which takes place in the yards of the Institute of Kazanluk. A host of cultural and dance activities are also organized during the Festival of Roses, reflecting Bulgaria's cultural heritage.

Rites of Passage

❁ DEATH

The death of a person in Bulgaria is announced by the ringing of church bells, followed by wailing and mourning. After someone dies all the windows and doors in his or her house are kept open so the soul can leave. Also cups are placed upside down, and all the portraits and mirrors are covered with cloth.

In preparation for burial the body is washed with soap and water or water scented with basil leaves. The eyes of the deceased are kept closed, since Bulgarians believe that leaving the eyes open may cause the death of someone else in the family. The body is dressed in new clothes; young men and women are dressed in their wedding clothes for burial. The body is then placed under a canopy, since it is believed the soul will appear in front of God along with the canopy in which the deceased will be buried.

A special kind of bread is prepared that everyone at the funeral eats. Apples, breads, and dried fruit are buried with the deceased to provide food in the afterlife. Sometimes even money is placed in the pocket of the deceased. Also a number of rituals are performed to prevent the dead person from turning into a vampire, including burying a cross, a religious icon, or an incense stick with the body.

Further Reading

Barbara A. Cellarius, *In the Land of Orpheus: Rural Livelihoods and Nature Conservation in Postsocialist Bulgaria* (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004); R. J. Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Stavreva Krilka, *Bulgaria*, 2nd ed. (New York: Benchmark Books, 1997).

❧ Burkina Faso ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Western Africa, north of Ghana
Size	105,869 sq. mi.
Capital City	Ouagadougou
Flag Description	The flag of Burkina Faso has equal horizontal bands of red and green with a yellow five-pointed star in the center.
Independence	August 5, 1960 (from France)
Population	13,925,313 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary republic
Nationality	Burkinabé (singular and plural noun)
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Mossi (over 40%); other indigenous tribes (including Gurunsi, Sénufo, Lobi, Bobo, Mande, and Gurma Fulani)
Major Language(s)	French (official); African languages belonging to Sudanic family spoken by 90% of the population
Major Religion(s)	Islam (50%); indigenous beliefs (40%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; International Women's Day, March 8; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day, August 5; Republic Day, December 11

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

Burkina Faso has been populated since prehistoric times (12000–5000 B.C.E.), first by hunter-gatherers, then by the Bobos, farmers who migrated to this region from Mali. Traces of relatively permanent structures indicate that settlements were already in place between 3600 and 2600. Burial remains dated between 1500 and 1000 reveal the development of systematic spiritual beliefs as well as the use of ceramics, iron, and polished stones. Dogon relics have also been found in central and northern regions, but the Dogon left in the 15th century to settle in the sandy cliffs of Bandiagara, the capital of the Fulani Macina (also Massina) Empire. Around the same time, the empire-building Mossis from Ghana invaded the area and, after securing its borders, developed courts of law, administrative bodies, ministerial positions, and a cavalry to protect their realm. The cavalry proved to be critical in resisting the hostile advances of their Muslim neighbors and explains why, even today, Burkina Faso is one of the few West

African countries that is not predominantly Muslim. In the southwest region of Burkina Faso (as well as in the Côte d'Ivoire) the remains of high walls have been found, but it is not yet known who built them.

In 1898 the French took over Burkina Faso, which was then known as Upper Volta. In 1904 they integrated it into French West Africa, but it became a separate colony in 1919, with François Charles Alexis Édouard Hesling as the first governor. In 1932 the French subdivided the land, giving little bits to Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), Niger, and Mali. They also “blackbirded” (kidnapped for use as plantation laborers) the people of Upper Volta and transported them to the nearby French colony of Côte d'Ivoire to work the plantations there. In 1947 Upper Volta was returned to its 1932 boundaries.

In the middle of the 20th century, when colonial rule was being challenged all over Africa, the people of Upper Volta also demanded their independence. Maurice Yaméogo (1921–93) of the majority Mossi group became the first president of liberated Upper Volta in 1960. His rule, thought by many to be unjust, was followed by two decades of military coups until a young and much-loved socialist Captain Thomas

Who Were the Blackbirders?

Blackbirders were colonists of the 19th and early 20th centuries who kidnapped people from their colonies (the blacks in Burkina Faso) for forced labor on their plantations. The victims, called *kanakas*, were abducted and forced to work on sugar and cotton plantations in Australia, Fiji, and the Samoan Islands. They were given nominal wages and often promised a return to their homes.

Sankara (1949–87) came to power. In 1984 he renamed Upper Volta Burkina Faso, which means “a land of honest people,” instituted wide-ranging reforms, and came down heavily on the tribal leaders and the elite of the country. In 1987 he paid for these reforms with his life. Captain Blaise Compaoré (b. 1951), a close associate of Sankara’s, came to power after helping to overthrow him.

Compaoré reversed all the policies that Sankara had initiated to benefit the disadvantaged. After the murder of journalist Norbert Zongo in 1998, the people held Compaoré responsible, and he became even more unpopular. Although the unhappy Burkinabé population missed Sankara and railed against Compaoré, he remained president in the early years of the 21st century.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Burkina Faso, one of the smallest countries in West Africa (about twice the size of the U.S. state of Colorado), is divided into 45 provinces. The population density is high, especially in the south and central parts. Most of the country (located at the edge of Sahel) is a vast central plateau with semi-arid, infertile soil. Its landscape is gently undulating, with a few hills, the last remains of a Precambrian massif (a block of the earth’s crust displaced without internal

change). The southwestern area is a huge sandstone massif bordered by sheer cliffs 490 feet high.

Burkina Faso is landlocked by Togo, Ghana, and Benin to the southeast, Mali to the west, Côte d’Ivoire to the south, and Niger to the north. The northern part is desert with scarce vegetation, and this condition continues into the Sahara Desert to its north. The south has sugarcane fields and forests, where the slaves were forced to work. The east has green woodlands and undulating plateaus.

The French gave Burkina Faso its colonial name, Upper Volta, because of its three principal rivers, the Mahoun (Black Volta), Nakanbe (White Volta), and Nazinon (Red Volta), which flow through the central plateau. The Sourou is their main tributary. These rivers, which converge in Ghana, are impassable, being either completely flooded during the rainy season or dried up. Desertification and deforestation are the biggest threats to the country’s natural resources. Desertification has been speeded up by the droughts the country has experienced since 1970. For instance, there is a treeless 43-square-mile area around the capital city of Ouagadougou.

There are two seasons in Burkina Faso: the dry season (from November to May) and the wet season (from June to October). The time between March and June is perhaps the hottest. The dusty Harmattan winds that blow between December and February make people irritable and the atmosphere hazy. These winds are so called because they pick up dust while blowing over the Sahara Desert and deposit it in many West African countries, including Burkina Faso. People prefer to stay indoors until these winds stop blowing.

ECONOMY

Burkina Faso is a poor country. Around 80 percent of the country’s population is engaged in subsistence farming on the 14 percent of land available for agriculture. (Less than 10 percent is arable without irrigation.) Its fertility depends on the vagaries of the monsoons and the fragile quality of the soil. Overgrazing and deforestation have caused a lot of desertification and soil degradation, making soil quality even worse than it used to be. This, in turn, has determined patterns of human settlement, population density, and the entire economy. Cotton is the main crop, although sorghum, millet, maize (corn), peanuts, and rice are also grown. The business sector of the economy remains government-dominated and unprofitable. Though the government’s currency devaluation policies in 1994, along with the assistance of international agencies, led to an increase in exports and economic growth, Burkina Faso’s strained relations with its southern neighbor Côte d’Ivoire have adversely affected its economy. Many Burkinabés are suffering, and hundreds of thousands seeking employment in nearby countries, including Cote d’Ivoire and Ghana, have been expelled and are now refugees.

National Day of Forgiveness

In December 1998, a famous journalist Norbert Zongo and three of his friends were traveling about 50 miles away from Ouagadougou when they were shot dead, and their vehicle was burned. This tragic incident aroused the people’s anger, and the government used extreme violence to curb the rising antigovernment feeling after the journalist’s murder. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), activists, students, women’s groups, and later even bureaucrats, all united to protest and pressure Compaoré’s government to punish the culprits. March 30 then became the National Day for Forgiveness, as the government encouraged the people to forgive the crime. Whether anyone was ever punished for the murders is unknown.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Despite coming from nearly 60 different ethnic groups, the people of this country are all Burkinabé at heart. The dominant groups are the Mossi (whose people have royal ancestors), the Bobos (who reside around the cities), the Sénufo, the Lobi, and the Fulani. Burkina Faso is one of the few western African countries that has remained predominantly non-Muslim. Most of these ethnic groups are non-Muslim and retain the animist beliefs of their ancestors. Some—mostly in the central part of the country, in the capital city Ouagadougou—are Christians. The Muslims are scattered in the remaining areas such as the second largest city of Bobo-Dioulasso. There are a number of foreign missionary groups (Muslim and Christian), who continue to proselytize, but religious affiliation is not a big issue; even the ruling party is composed of people from all religions.

The Mossi, Lobi, and Bobo boast several unique art forms, among them, elaborately carved masks, which are an important part of the lives and culture of most Africans. The masks are symbolic in nature and an integral part of customs, beliefs, and traditions. They are worn to mark important occasions—such as funerals, initiations, village purification ceremonies, and market day dances—as they have been for centuries. The Mossi tribe is famous for wearing huge (seven-foot high) red or white antelope masks while guarding certain fruits or at funerals. The Bobos wear striped butterfly masks in red, white, and black in order to tempt the deity Do (the son of god) while performing fertility ceremonies. The Lobis are known for preserving African traditions, including *dyoro*, the initiation ritual for young boys. They believe that their wooden carvings protect their families, which makes them hard to find on the market and, as a consequence, highly valued.

Each of the 60 different ethnic groups of Burkina Faso has its own musical tradition. The Mande people, who live in the southwest, are famous for their playing the *balafon*, a type of xylophone. Their *balafons* are usually made of wood, and vary depending on their makers; the Bwa, Sénufo, and Dagara peoples, for example, have their own distinctive types. The Fulani, who live in the northern region, are renowned for their complex vocal music, usually accompanied by equally intricate clapping percussion (a type of percussion provided by hand clapping).

The *bendré* is a very old type of membranophone—a percussion instrument made with a goat or sheepskin stretched taut across the open top of a hollow gourd—that may have been introduced during the reign of King Naaba Oubri, the founder of Ouagadougou. The music of the *bendré* is sacred, and different sounds can be produced by the lead drummer (*benaaba*) by striking the center or along the edges.

A stringed instrument popular throughout West Africa at least since the Malian Empire of the 13th

century is the *kora*, which combines the features of the lute (it is played with the right hand) and the harp (it has perpendicular strings and a resonator). The resonator is half of a gourd with goat or calfskin stretched across it, perforated by two handles. At least some of its popularity is due to the fact that it is capable of being played in several different indigenous musical scales.

Although Burkina Faso has not yet produced a type of music for which it is known, it has produced a number of international stars in the world music scene, including Jean-Claude Bamogo (reggae), Tidiani Coulibaly and the Dafra Stars (well-known during the 1970s for their blend of Cuban music with West African), and Koudbi Koala's Saaba, who have popularized traditional Mossi music. Coulibaly and the Dafra Stars had to withdraw from their musical careers when they were unable to replace equipment provided by the state, putting an end to their performances of indigenous dust dances. A biannual event must have some of the credit for bringing Burkina Faso's musicians to the world's attention, the *Semaine Nationale de la Culture* (National Culture Week), a music festival started in 1983.

The Mossi storytellers, the *griots*, are also known as *djeli* (“praise-singers”) in Burkina Faso and, while they may have added some modern musical instruments to their performances such as electric guitars, they remain most important in their traditional role as oral historians. When called upon, they recite tribal histories and the genealogies of kings.

❁ CUISINE

The staple foods of Burkina Faso include millet, sorghum, rice, corn, peanuts, potatoes, beans, yams, and okra. Although meat is a rare treat in this poor country, protein is provided in the diet by eggs and fish, which are plentiful in the country's lakes and rivers. Most dishes in Burkina Faso are served with a sauce made from eggplant, okra, peanuts, fish, mutton, tomatoes, or beef. A stiff white gruel made of millet, sorghum, or corn flour, called *to*, usually accompanies a sauce. (In Bissa the porridge is called *wu*, while in Mooré it is known as *sagabo*.) A nutritious meal can be planned around pounded yams and plantains. A popular snack food sold by street vendors in towns is peanut rings, made of peanut butter with most of its oil squeezed out by hand, then rolled into rings and deep-fried. The peanut oil is saved for general cooking needs.

Néré seeds are highly valued because they figure prominently as seasoning in the many sauces favored

Fun Fact

The Harmattan winds that dominate the Sahara Desert are a continental part of the globe-encircling trade winds.

Fun Fact

The same instrument can have many different names, depending on the ethnic group and the language it speaks. The *bendré*, for example, is called a *bara* in Mali and a *dumaa* by the Hausa of Benin.

FESPACO Film Festival

Even though Burkina Faso is one of the poorest countries of the world, it is rich in theater, art, and film. When it comes to showcasing high-level filmmaking talent in African countries, it is West Africa's pampered child. The highly popular Le Festival Panafricain du Cinéma et de la Télévision de Ouagadougou (Panafrican Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou, or (FESPACO Film Festival) is held late in February in Ouagadougou every odd-numbered year. Many FESPACO award-winning directors have gone on to win prestigious awards at the Cannes Film Festival. Burkina Faso's second largest city Bobo-Dioulasso hosts La Semaine Nationale de la Culture (National Culture Week) in April of the even-numbered years. Both contemporary and traditional forms of music, dance, and theater are featured at this popular cultural extravaganza.

by the Burkinabé, and the fermented seeds are also ground and rolled into balls called "African stock cubes," or *soumbala*. Bush rat is a delicacy (with or without sauce) in rural areas. The Burkinabé love yogurt and curdled milk products, and dates are very popular in the northern desert areas.

Although water is the usual liquid, *dolo*, a millet beer, and *bissap*, a drink made with hibiscus flowers, are often available in towns. A popular local soft drink called Zoomkoom (in Mooré *zoom* means "flour" and *koom* means "water") is made from a mixture of millet flour and water seasoned with ginger, lemon, and a lot of sugar.

Fun Fact

There is just one national newspaper in Burkina Faso, and it is only published in French.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

New Year's Day is one of the most celebrated holidays in the world, and in Burkina Faso there are celebrations all over the country. New Year's resolutions and vows of becoming more self-sufficient are accompanied by new hopes for prosperity. The day is marked by feasting and parties with family and friends.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 8

This is a day of great significance for women around the world but especially for those living in develop-

ing nations. On Women's Day in Burkina Faso, women's rights groups renew their campaign in support of women's causes here. These groups include many autonomous international organizations such as Médecins sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders), which works to make medicines and treatment available to poor and victimized women. In 2003 the UNESCO Director came to Burkina Faso to give a lecture on the role of women in the sustainable development of African nations. Pauline Kaboré, one of the first women of Burkina Faso to benefit from a UNESCO literary program at the Center for the Education of Girls and Women in Africa (CIEFFA), was given a bronze medal on this day in 2003. She herself became a trainer and has devoted her life to the cause of emancipating other African women. She has set an example for women all over the world, especially in the countries of Asia and Africa, showing them the significance of the contributions they can make to their countries.

Every year similar developmental programs are held in Burkina Faso to highlight the plight and progress of the women of the country. In 2005 a global march to highlight women's rights was launched on International Women's Day. It was scheduled to finish in Ouagadougou in October 2005. Women from many third world countries participated. Their aim was to spread awareness about violence against women and the relevance and importance of gender equality throughout the 50 countries they visited during the march.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day to commemorate the important role played by workers. The May 1 observance of Labor Day has its origins in the international socialist movement of the 1880s. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union the American Federation of Labor demanding an eight-hour workday.

In Burkina Faso all government offices, schools, and institutions are closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 5

When independence from French rule was obtained in 1960, Maurice Yameogo (of the Mossi tribe) became the country's first president. Burkinabés celebrate their independence by staging military parades, public speeches, and flag-raising ceremonies.

❁ REPUBLIC DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 11

On December 11, 1958, the French colony of Upper Volta, now Burkina Faso, became a self-governing, independent republic within the French community. In spite of its history of political upheavals and changes in constitution, Republic Day remains the country's most important holiday. The most popular way of celebrating the holiday is drinking, and idle mopeds can be seen lined up outside the bars.

Religious Holidays

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

This is an important festival for all Muslims because it commemorates Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son Ishmael to please God. In Burkina Faso on this day the Revolution Square (in the heart of the capital city of Ouagadougou) is filled with the noise of great rejoicing and festivities as thousands of Muslims gather to commemorate the end of the holy pilgrimage, or hajj, which is also marked on this day. The hajj to Mecca is a pilgrimage that every Muslim is expected to undertake at least once in his or her lifetime. This festival is also known as Tabaski, or La Fête du Mouton (French for the "Festival of the Sheep") in West Africa. The sheep refers to the ram that God substituted for Ibrahim's son at the last minute, thus sparing Ishmael's life. Prayer services and feasting are the order of the day for Muslims in Burkina Faso.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA, ISLAM

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus three days after his Crucifixion. This holiday, along with its satellite feasts and observances, is a very important Christian festival. Easter observances include attending special church services, giving gifts to children, wearing new clothes, and decorating and hunting for eggs, a symbol of rebirth, and the arrival of spring taken from ancient pagan fertility rites.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT

❁ MOULOUD

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month on the Islamic calendar

This day commemorates the birthday of the prophet Mohammad. For Muslims in Burkina Faso this is a very significant day. Cities and towns are decorated for the occasion, and sweets, distributed. Families and friends spend time together, and an air of brotherhood, love, and friendship prevails. Conservative Muslim sects disapprove of such celebrations because they believe they violate Muhammad's teachings and take attention away from devotion to Allah.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOUD

❁ ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Forty days after Easter

The Feast of the Ascension is a day of special celebration for Christians all over the world. It commemorates Jesus' Ascension to heaven, which is believed to have occurred 40 days after his Resurrection from the dead on Easter.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

❁ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: August 15

The Christian Feast of the Assumption commemorates the Virgin Mary's elevation to heaven. It is an important festival for Catholics, because it reaffirms their belief in Jesus, who said that all devout Christians would find a place in the glory of heaven. This day is marked by feasts and prayer services in Burkina Faso's churches.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

The holy month of Ramadan comes to an end on this day and so does fasting. Muslims gather in mosques, offer prayers, and give alms to the poor. It is one of the most celebrated Muslim holidays. On this holy day, Muslims return to their daily lives after a month of fasting each day from dawn until dusk, and thank Allah for helping them to make it through the period of fasting and abstinence. Everyone wears new clothes and exchanges gifts with friends, relatives, and acquaintances.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus on this day by attending church, exchanging gifts with relatives and friends, and expressing sentiments of love, peace, and goodwill. They usually have decorated Christmas trees and colorful lights in their homes.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Rites of Passage

COMING OF AGE

As in several other African countries, Burkinabés mark the transition from childhood to adulthood with circumcision for boys and genital cutting for girls.

Although female genital mutilation is illegal here, all but a few of the country's 50 ethnic groups practice female genital mutilation (FGM), and it is estimated that in the 21st century 70 percent of the country's women have undergone the procedures. Girls of the Mossi tribe are kept in seclusion during the circumcision period and taught about their motherly and wifely duties. This is followed by feasting and celebration. Among Muslim Burkinabés, female genital cutting is usually performed while the girl child is being named. Recent legislation outlaws FGM, and the government campaigns widely against the practice. The National Committee for the Fight against Excision (CNLPE) was set

up in 1990 and carries out extensive educational work.

The boys of the Fulani tribe go through a test of their strength and manliness before being initiated into adulthood. This involves a ritual called *sorro* that requires hitting each other with sticks, during which they cannot show any pain.

MARRIAGE

Because of widespread teenage pregnancy and complications, the government has worked to eradicate the practice of marrying young girls to older men. Traditionally the groom's family pleads for the girl's hand, and if she and her family accept, the ceremony takes place.

Polygamy is common in the rural areas of Burkina Faso. The wives live in separate quarters from their husband and take turns cooking and enjoying the "wifely rights" of being with the husband. Fulani women are not allowed to utter the name of their in-laws or their first-born children.

Further Reading

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❧ Burundi ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	In Central Africa, northwest of Tanzania
Size	10,745 sq. mi.
Capital City	Bujumbura
Flag Description	The flag is divided into four triangles; the top and the bottom ones are red while the triangles on the left and the right sides are green. There are two white diagonal bands that separate the red and green triangles, forming an X. A white circle is superimposed on the middle of this white cross, with three red six-pointed stars inside.
Independence	July 1, 1962 (from Belgian administration, under UN trusteeship)
Population	6,370,609 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Burundian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Hutu (Bantu, 85%); Tutsi (Hamitic, 14%)
Major Language(s)	Kirundi and French (both official); Swahili
Major Religion(s)	Catholic (62%); Indigenous beliefs (31%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Day of Unity, February 5; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day/National Day, July 1; Victory of the UPRONA Party, September 18; Anniversary of Prince Rwagasore's Assassination, October 13; Ndadaye Day, October 21; Republic Day, November 28

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

From the 16th century Burundi was an independent monarchy, but little else is known about its history. Some legends say that Ntare Rushati, who founded the first Burundi dynasty, came from Rwanda during the 17th century, while more reliable sources say that he came from Buha and started his kingdom in the region of Nkoma.

In the 19th century European nations were scrambling to colonize the richest parts of Africa for themselves, and Burundi initially fell to the Germans in 1903, becoming part of German East Africa. Following World War I in 1919 the Belgians gained control of both Burundi and neighboring Rwanda. After World War II Burundi became a UN Trust Territory, although Belgium continued to control the nation's

affairs. The unhappiness of the Burundians under Belgian domination led to several military coups, paving the way for Burundi's eventual independence in 1962.

Independence, however, far from ending political instability in the region, only served to intensify the antagonism of the two hostile ethnic groups, the Hutu and the Tutsi. Since the minority Tutsi dominated the bureaucracy (including the civil service) and the army, the majority Hutus were left feeling powerless.

In 1993 a Hutu banker, Melchior Ndadaye (1953–93) of FRODEBU (Front for Democracy in Burundi) won 60 percent of the popular vote in Burundi's first democratic presidential election since independence in 1962 and replaced President Pierre Buyoya (b. 1949), a Tutsi. However within 100 days Ndadaye was kidnapped and assassinated in a coup d'état by the Tutsi military, triggering civil war. Thousands of Tutsi civilians were massacred by the enraged Hutu, and the Tutsi military retaliated by slaying hundreds of thousands of

Who Are the Tutsi?

The Tutsis (also known as Watutsi or Batu) were the cattle-rearing peoples of Central Africa who originated in Ethiopia and migrated to Burundi and Rwanda. In the places they settled they developed kingdoms headed by a *mwami*, or king. The Tutsis were aristocrats who controlled their Hutu compatriots, a situation that eventually led to extreme ethnic violence in Burundi, Rwanda, and Congo.

Hutu. After still more turmoil and bloodshed Buyoya resumed power in 1996 the result of a coup. In 1998 he revised the constitution, enlarging the National Assembly (the lower chamber of Parliament) and introducing a system with two vice presidents, one Tutsi and the other Hutu.

Nonetheless in spite of these efforts at compromise, since 1993 an estimated 200,000 people have been killed in ethnic violence in Burundi, and 800,000 refugees have been forced to flee to Tanzania, while the number of internally displaced people (IDP) remains around 525,000. The IDP are those people who have fled their homes as a result of war and human rights violations. These people are not technically refugees because they have not crossed the international border. The number of IDP is rising in the war zones, and the problem is, in fact, graver than that of refugees. These people often run away to inaccessible areas in order to survive; however their status only makes it more difficult and sometimes impossible, to help them.

There is an acute shortage of electricity, water, food, and medicine. Approximately one out of every 10 adults has HIV/AIDS, and only half the children are fortunate enough to get an education. The Hutu rebels and the FDD (Forces for the Defense of Democracy) stage ongoing guerrilla warfare, and the government supports 61 detention camps for the Hutu. The war has had other effects as well. Burundi is a source country for children trafficked for the purpose of forced soldiering. The capital city and foreign nationals are the usual targets of the rebels.

Attempts at peace became slightly more effective in 2000, when a draft accord was signed under sponsorship of Nelson Mandela, the former president of South Africa. However there are many more issues to be negotiated before the conflict can be resolved to the satisfaction of those involved.

On August 19, 2005, Pierre Nkurunziza (b. 1963), chairman of the National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD), running unopposed, became president. The CNDD was an ethnic Hutu rebel group that has transformed itself into a political party. Its victory generated hopes that government will be able to transform this country.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Burundi is a landlocked country with Tanzania to the east and south, the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the west, and Rwanda to its north. The central region is made up of plateaus sloping toward the Tanzanian east as well as the valley of the Malagarasi River, where coffee, tea, and plenty of savanna grass are grown. The Nile's southern tributary brings life to valleys and hills draped in banana groves, eucalyptus trees, cultivated fields, and pastures.

The climate of Burundi is that of a tropical highland, though temperatures fluctuate with changing altitudes. The average temperature is 72°F in the central plateau region, while it can rise to 81°F in the capital city of Bujumbura. The annual cycle of seasons includes a long dry season from June to August, a short wet season from September to November, a shorter dry season from December to January, and another long, wet one from February to May.

ECONOMY

About 90 percent of the population depends on subsistence-based agriculture, though food shortages are common. Growing and selling coffee constitute the economic spine of Burundi (80 percent of total foreign exchange). This effectively means that Burundian foreign exchange is dependent on fluctuations in the climate (for coffee growth) and the international market (for demand) for coffee. It is through Bujumbura, a major shipping center, that coffee and items such as, cotton, leather hides, and tin ore are exported via river. Because the nation has been engrossed in major ethnic wars since 1993 it has been impossible for the warring, victimized, and displaced farmers and herders to perform well on the economic front. The 250,000 dead and 800,000 displaced have had a devastating impact on the economy. There is also a shortage of medicines and electricity because the manufacturing sector is poorly developed, and there is a general lack of resources. Burundians make shoes, blankets, and soap, assemble imported components, and process food items on a small scale.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Burundi is a Central African nation closely linked with Rwanda, geographically, historically, and culturally. Although it is one of the smallest countries in Africa, it is one of the most populous, with a density of nearly 280 persons per square mile. Three ethnic groups live in Burundi: The largest tribe (about 85%) is the Hutu, who are farmers; the Tutsis, who raise cattle, represent between 10 and 15 percent of the population; the Twa people (the remaining 1 percent) are hunters-gatherers.

In spite of their small numbers the Tutsi have controlled the government through most of the

nation's history. Originally however Burundi was a kingdom that was ruled by people belonging to both tribes. They spoke the same language and lived together in the same area. Inter-marriage between the Hutu and the Tutsi was commonplace. Their differences in earlier times were manifested in socioeconomic terms. Being Hutu or Tutsi had to do more with one's social status (in terms of the social hierarchies) than with ethnic identity. In their language (Kirundi), the word *butu* implies a subordinate position in society or denotes a farmer or herder. Some Europeans exploited these social distinctions for colonial gain. Years of strife between the two tribes has increased local hostility and eradicated human rights in the country. Due to the constant violence, many people are forced to live in camps.

In spite of decades of a genocidal civil war Burundi is home to the internationally known Master Drummers of Burundi, former royal percussionists. The Master Drummers inspired the first WOMAD (World of Music, Arts, and Dance) festival in 1982, igniting the world music scene. Burundian men's folk songs are also notable for their *inanga* accompaniment. (The *inanga* is a stringed instrument much like the zither.)

Though ethnic differences persist, people remain trusting and interdependent within their families, and children are taught to take care of their elders. Each extended family lives in an enclosed compound called a *rugo*, which is surrounded by high hedges or walls made of reeds. Each *rugo* contains beehive-style huts, although these are being increasingly replaced by rectangular clay homes.

The Kirundi language offers a rich oral literature of riddles, poetry, tales, and proverbs, much of which has been translated into French. The tradition has remained oral since all literate Hutus were executed in 1972 in a bid to curb their progress in writing and recording the literature of their own lives.

❁ CUISINE

The people of Burundi rely on red kidney beans, rice, cassava (manioc), corn, and sorghum as their staple foods. Beans are eaten at least once a day. Burundians also commonly eat yams, plantain, maize, and peas. There are abundant fish available from Lake Tanganyika, but meat and milk from cows is scarce.

Burundian food is stewed, boiled, or roasted over wood fires. Since deforestation is a major problem in Burundi, procuring wood for cooking is becoming increasingly problematic.

People living in urban centers have access to a wider variety of food, though restaurants remain few and are accessible only to the privileged. In Gitega and Bujumbura restaurants serve French, Greek, and Asian food (*chapattis*, rice, and spicy curries, for example).

A homemade banana wine called *urwarwa* is served with meals celebrating special occasions. *Impeke*, a home-brewed beer made from sorghum,

Hutu and Tutsi

The Hutus are traditional farmers who tend to be short, dark people belonging to the Bantu ethnic population, whereas the Tutsis are descended from pastoralist ancestors and tend to be taller, fairer, and slimmer. When ethnic violence broke out between the Hutus and the Tutsi, many deaths resulted from mistaken identity, as the physical stereotypes of the two groups are not entirely reliable indications of ancestry.

and Primus beer are also popular drinks. As a symbol of unity close family members and friends drink *impeke* from the same large container using straws.

Most Burundians make their own containers using the shells of various kinds of homegrown gourds for cooking, eating, and storing food. They also make drinking vessels and storage bins out of gourds.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

This is Burundi's most popular holiday, and the celebrations begin a week before January 1. Everyone cleans and decorates their homes. People purchase new clothes if possible and come together to feast and socialize with family and friends. The day is usually celebrated with drumming and dancing, with the young and the old, men, women, and children participating with equal zeal.

❁ DAY OF UNITY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 5

Living Conditions of Burundians

Burundi is an extraordinarily poor country. About 93 percent of the people live in rural areas, and only half of them have access to safe drinking water or sanitation facilities. Three people out of a thousand have telephones and access to newspapers. Only seven out of a thousand can afford their own television sets.

Fun Fact

Rearing livestock is a status symbol, and people who can afford to raise cows, sheep, and goats do not wish to eat them.



Traditional musicians march during Labor Day celebrations on May 1 at the Bujumbura stadium, Burundi. (AP Photo/Karel Prinsloo)

Fun Fact

Traditionally, Burundians do not have desserts or sweets with or following meals.

This day commemorates the hope of reconciliation between the Tutsi minority, who have been Burundi's historical rulers, and the Hutu, the majority tribe that was finally elected to power. Observances of Unity Day began in 1991, and two years later the country's first freely elected president Melchior Ndadaye replaced President Buyoya. Ndadaye's rule, however, lasted only a few months. He was killed in a coup, which was followed by bouts of ethnic violence, even though Ndadaye's party had seats in the military government that came to power. President Buyoya returned to power in 1998, and in his Unity Day speech of 1999 invited all Burundians—both those who have fled the country and those who are rebelling against the government—to unite in the monumental task of nation-building.

Fun Fact

Traditionally, Burundians were known for their hospitality. Any traveler who sought food and shelter for the night would be welcomed into a Burundian household. But the ethnic civil war and the subsequent environment of mutual hatred and mistrust have drastically affected this tradition.

People find it difficult to trust neighbors, and trusting strangers is even more difficult.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, May Day, or Workers' Day in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in their societies. It was declared a day of observance by the Second Socialist International in 1889, and first celebrated in 1890. The date was selected to coincide with a general strike in the United States called by the American Federation of Labor to win an eight-hour

workday. In Burundi all government offices and business establishments, as well as schools, are closed. The day is characterized by labor union rallies, seminars, meetings, and speeches.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

INDEPENDENCE DAY/NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 1

On the first day of July 1962 Burundi obtained independence from a Belgian-administered UN Trust that governed Burundi after World War II. To celebrate their freedom every year several hundred people gather at the capital's City Park in front of the United Nations' peacekeeping mission headquarters. There they observe the celebrations, which include drumming, dancing, a military parade, and a marching band. Former rebels give speeches, as do prominent politicians. For reasons of security armed gunmen are stationed around the park to protect the celebrants.

Thus this day is also a reminder to Burundians of the challenges of returning to normalcy after 11 years of civil war. The fact that so many foreign troops (first from the African Union's peacekeeping mission and later from the UN peacekeeping mission) are needed in Burundi is upsetting for most citizens. Though the ceremonies last a whole day and briefly distract the hostile groups of the city, Burundians live with the reality of major socioeconomic and security problems that have yet to be resolved.

VICTORY OF THE UPRONA PARTY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: September 18

Prince Louis Rwagasore, the son of Mwami (King) Mwambutsa IV, was a leader of the anti-colonial movement and founder of the nationalist movement, Union for National Progress (UPRONA). In September 1961 Rwagasore and UPRONA, on a platform calling for full independence from Belgium, won 80 percent of the vote in parliamentary elections. The day after the election Rwagasore was named prime minister with a mandate to lead the country to independence. Two weeks later he was assassinated, dying eight months before independence was won. In remembrance of these events there is a Mass in the Bujumbura Cathedral, and garlands are laid on the burial chamber of the prince. The recorded speech of the prince on winning the mandate for independence (on September 18, 1961) is also played for the benefit of citizens. On September 18 the Tutsi-dominated UPRONA party celebrates its election victory in Burundi on this date in 1961, which paved the way for independence.

UPRONA continued to be the nation's only political party until 1992, when a multiparty political system gained support. In spite of a defeat in the 1993 elections UPRONA was restored to power later as the result of a coup.

❁ ANNIVERSARY OF PRINCE RWAGASORE'S ASSASSINATION

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 13

Prime Minister Prince Louis Rwagasore became an undisputed symbol of unity when he married a Hutu woman even though he himself was a Tutsi. He was the eldest son of King Mwambutsa IV (1912–77), leader of the UPRONA (Union of National Progress) party and an intellectual who was educated in Belgium. When the country was to gain its independence from Belgium in 1962, the assumption was that Prince Rwagasore would lead the new government. However he was assassinated shortly after being elected, triggering unprecedented ethnic violence in Burundi. The loss of a charming leader and a descendent of the royal family, who had the legitimacy and personality to rule, threw the country into turmoil. With Rwagasore's death and a revolution in neighboring Rwanda (where majority Hutus had come to power), an influx of angry and frustrated Tutsi refugees from Rwanda brought out the ethnic hatred and suppressed violence of people in Burundi. On the anniversary of the prince's assassination Burundians lay garlands on the tomb of their cherished prince.

❁ NDADAYE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 21

This day commemorates the assassination of Burundi's first elected Hutu leader. The presidential election of July 1993 was effectively a two-party affair. Hutus, led by Melchior Ndadaye of the Frodebu party, won the election to the highest post in the country for the first time. However Ndadaye was assassinated on October 21, 1993. A Tutsi president replaced Ndadaye, and the Tutsi continued to hold power in the early years of the 21st century. Because of the ethnic enmity and the fact that the Tutsis are in power, this day is quietly observed with a simple wreath-laying ceremony at Ndadaye's tomb.

❁ REPUBLIC DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 28

On this day in 1966 the First Republic of Burundi (1966–76) was established, and the UPRONA party was declared the only legitimate party in the country. Prime Minister Michael Micombero (1940–83), a Tutsi, overthrew Mwami Charles Ndizeye Ntare V (1947–72) to establish Tutsi supremacy.

Religious Holidays

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

For Christians Easter is considered the most important Christian festival, and its numerous celebrations and observances form the core of the liturgical year, which begins around the time of the vernal equinox in the Northern Hemisphere (the autumnal equinox in the Southern Hemisphere) and stretches out into summer in the Northern Hemisphere (winter in the Southern Hemisphere). Easter celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus three days after his Crucifixion. Christians believe Jesus was the Son of God and died on the Cross to redeem humanity from sin. Apart from its religious aspect the Resurrection symbolizes the resurgence of hope and a fresh lease on life for all human beings. Christian Burundians observe this day by attending special Easter church services.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Forty days after Easter

This day is celebrated to commemorate Jesus' Ascension into heaven, and it is one of the 12 great feasts for faithful Catholics. Burundians wear new clothes and attend church to remember Jesus' Resurrection and his message of universal love and forgiveness.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

❁ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: August 15

This day celebrates the Assumption of the Virgin Mary into heaven. In the Roman Catholic Church, this day is called the Feast of Assumption. The emphasis is on Mary's elevation to paradise, which happened just as Jesus had promised all people. The story of Mary's Assumption is not found in the Bible, but in folklore and apocryphal stories. The written records of this event go back as far as the third century. Burundians visit the Shrine of Our Lady of Peace in Mugera and hold prayer services to commemorate this day. People are reminded that Mary was an apostle of peace and love and that Christians need to ignore the ethnic differences in Burundi and live by Christian principles instead.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

❁ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: November 1

This day celebrates all Christian saints. Both Eastern and Western Christians commemorate the feast on November 1. Burundians pray for all great Christians, whether or not they have become saints. Believers thank these pure, faithful Christians and pray to God to live as they did.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

This Christian holiday celebrates the birth of Jesus and is one of the most widely observed holidays in the world. Special church services, feasting, and gathering with family and friends mark the day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Rites of Passage

❁ COMING OF AGE

Circumcision for boys, a sign of adulthood, is widely practiced in Burundi. Genital cutting for girls, though illegal in some areas, is still fairly common, and is considered a sign of virginity and sometimes a status symbol. These circumcisions and genital cuttings are generally done in unhygienic conditions and without any medical supervision.

Female circumcision is widely criticized by Western industrialized countries, and many African nations have banned this coming-of-age ritual, which mutilates a girl psychologically as well as physically. Circumcised women often face painful problems during menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth. Some eventually die from the recurring infections that result from the procedure.

❁ MARRIAGE

For the 93 percent of Burundians who live in rural areas, polygamy is common, despite city laws that prohibit it and Christians who preach against it. In some areas, fining polygamists is a good source of revenue for the government.

For a man to have as many wives as cattle is a kind of a status symbol, as well as a sign of wealth. Second wives have a second-class status in the household, and first wives have great power in determining how they are treated. If the first wife decides to go to court, she is likely to win the case, along with a good part of her husband's property. Property (as in a house) belongs to an entire family, and a husband cannot sell the family house without obtaining the consent of his children and wife.

In southwestern Burundi, men are so scarce—some were expelled to Tanzania, most went to war—that the women give cattle to woo men into marriage (a reversal of their own tradition). Some men justify their polygamy by saying that they are rehabilitating widows by marrying them. Women's groups in Burundi that have staunchly opposed polygamy seek to educate women about their rights and advocate financial independence for women.

Further Reading

René Lemarchand, *Burundi: Ethnocide as Discourse and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); René Lemarchand, *Burundi: Ethnic Conflict and Genocide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001); Filip Reyntjens, "Again at the Crossroads: Rwanda and Burundi, 2000–2001" (*Current African Issues*, No. 24 (Sterling, Va.: Stylus Publishing, 2001)); Roger Southall and Kristina Bentley, *African Peace Process: Mandela, South Africa, and Burundi* (Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council, 2005).

❧ Cambodia ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Southeastern Asia, between Thailand, Vietnam, and Laos, bordering the Gulf of Thailand
Size	69,900 sq. mi.
Capital City	Phnom Penh
Flag Description	The Cambodian flag has three horizontal bands: two blue (on at the top, the other on the bottom), with one red (double width); a white three-towered temple representing Angkor Wat is centered in the red band.
Independence	November 9, 1953 (from France)
Population	13,607,069 (2005 est.)
Government	Multiparty democracy under a constitutional monarchy
Nationality	Cambodian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Khmer (95%)
Major Language(s)	Khmer (official, 95%)
Major Religion(s)	Theravada Buddhist (95%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; National Day, January 7; International Women's Day, March 8; Chaul Chnam, Mid-April; Labor Day, May 1; Chrat Preah Nengkal, Early May; International Children's Day, June 1; Queen's Birthday, June 18; Paris Peace Agreement, October 23; Birthday of King Norodom Sihanouk, October 30–November 1; Independence Day, November 9; Bon Om Tuk, Early November; UN Human Rights Day, December 10

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

There is scant information about the inhabitants of Cambodia prior to 1000 B.C.E. It is believed that the earliest peoples subsisted on a diet of fish and rice and lived in houses built on stilts. However, war, vandalism, looting, and the violence since the 1960s have destroyed many archaeological sites and made continued excavations impossible.

From the first to the fourth centuries C.E. major parts of Cambodia were integrated into the Southeast Asian kingdom of Funan, which played a vital role in developing the political institutions, culture, and art of later Khmer states. Starting with the leadership of Fan Shih-man (r. 205–25), the

Funanese extended their control and by the third century inhabited the region around the lower Mekong River. An Indian Brahmin, however, gained control of Funan in the fourth century, bringing Hinduism, the Indian legal code, and a central Indian alphabet to the region.

Khmers from a rival northern state retook Funan in the sixth century and, as the Khmer Empire grew more powerful, Cambodia once again dominated Southeast Asia. The capital of the new empire was Angkor, which remains among the world's greatest architectural accomplishments. The Angkor Borei region in Takeo province, for example, is famous as the cradle of one of the earliest civilizations in mainland Southeast Asia, and it is said to have contained multiple urban centers. Among these are Oc Eo (in modern Vietnam) and Angkor Borei (in modern Cambodia). Brief excavations at Oc Eo in the 1950s revealed a complex system of water control and rich material

culture, but vandalism has largely destroyed the site. Angkor Borei faces the same threat of destructive vandalism seen at Oc Eo.

It was the Angkorian era, which began in the eighth century, that raised the kingdom to the height of its artistic and religious power. The Thai kingdom of Ayudhya sent troops to Angkor in 1431; for the next century and a half, the Khmers were plagued by dynastic rivalries and continual warfare with the Thais. The Spanish and Portuguese, who had recently become active in the region, also played a part in these wars until resentment over their power led to the massacre of the Spanish garrison at Phnom Penh in 1599. A series of weak kings ruled Cambodia from 1600 until the French arrived in 1863.

Since 1802 Cambodia had been subordinated and jointly governed by Vietnam and Siam (now Thailand), and Cambodian kings could not be crowned without representatives of both kingdoms present. In 1860 King Ang Duong (1796–1860) died and his eldest son Norodom (1834–1904) was to succeed him, but the royal family nearly destroyed itself and the country was torn by rebellions. In 1861 Norodom, still uncrowned, fled the capital Oudong and a year later fled to Bangkok. After some political manipulation and the signing of a treaty that made Cambodia a French protectorate in 1863, the French forced King Norodom to sign another treaty in 1884 that turned his country into a colony.

The next four decades were generally peaceful. In 1941 the French installed 19-year-old Prince Sihanouk (b. 1922) on the Cambodian throne, a mistake on their part. The years after 1945 were filled with violence, strife, and considerable political turmoil. Around this time French colonial power was waning due to the Franco-Viet Minh War raging in Vietnam and Laos. Cambodia seized the opportunity and declared its independence from France in 1949, which became official in 1953, and King Norodom Sihanouk ascended the throne.

The Geneva Conference of 1954 led to an armistice providing for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Cambodia. An agreement between France and Cambodia in December of that year severed the last strings of French control over Cambodian policy. Cambodia withdrew from the French Union in 1955 and was admitted into the United Nations later that year.

King Norodom Sihanouk abdicated in March 1955 in favor of his father Norodom Suramarit (1896–1960). Sihanouk subsequently formed the Popular Socialist party and served as premier. After Suramarit's death in 1960, Sihanouk's mother Queen Kossamak Nearireak assumed power, and Norodom Sihanouk assumed the new office of chief of state. (Interestingly, although other queens are listed, most "king lists" for Cambodia indicate that during the period between Suramarit's death and the first democratic elections (1960–93), the throne was unoccupied.) Throughout the 1960s Norodom Sihanouk struggled to keep Cambodia neutral as the neighboring countries of Laos and South Vietnam came under

increasing Communist attack (due to the ongoing Vietnam War). Sihanouk permitted the use of Cambodian territory as a supply base and refuge by North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops, while accepting military aid from the United States to strengthen his forces against Communist infiltration.

In 1975 the Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot (1925–98), seized control of Phnom Penh. The Khmer Rouge renamed the country Democratic Kampuchea and established Pol Pot as the premier. Immediately following the takeover, Phnom Penh was evacuated, and the populations of the country's urban areas were forced to move to rural areas and pursue agriculture. About a million and a half people died from harsh treatment, starvation, and execution by the Khmer Rouge over the next four years. Members of the upper, middle, and educated classes, as well as suspected enemies of the Khmer Rouge, were victims of the genocide. This destruction came to an end only with an invasion and occupation by Vietnam in December 1978, which drove the Khmer Rouge into the countryside but also started a civil war.

In 1987 talks began in Paris to try to settle this conflict. A peace treaty was signed by all of Cambodia's warring factions (including the Khmer Rouge, a Vietnamese-supported government led by Premier Hun Sen [b. 1952], and the followers of Norodom Sihanouk) on October 23, 1991. Sihanouk denounced the Khmer Rouge, who had resumed guerrilla warfare, aligned himself with Premier Hun Sen, and again became head of state.

Cambodia's first democratic elections were held in May 1993, supervised by a large United Nations peacekeeping mission. Royalists won most of the seats. Hun Sen's party came in second, and a coalition government with co-premiers—Prince Norodom Ranariddh (b. 1944), Norodom Sihanouk's second son, and Hun Sen—was formed. The Khmer Rouge, who had boycotted the elections, continued armed opposition, retaining control of substantial territory in the northern and western parts of the country. A new constitution reestablished the monarchy, and in September 1993 Sihanouk once more became king.

In 1996 the Khmer Rouge split into two factions, one of which came to an agreement with the government. Pol Pot was ousted and imprisoned by the remaining Khmer Rouge in 1997 and died in 1998; the Khmer Rouge subsequently lost most of its power. After fighting arose in July 1997 between the factions of Hun Sen and Prince Ranariddh, Hun Sen's forces declared victory and Ranariddh fled the country. He was replaced by Ung Huot (b. 1947). Prince Ranariddh returned to Cambodia in March 1998 and became an opposition candidate in the legislative elections held in July. Hun Sen's party (the Cambodian People's party) was the official winner of the disputed election, so he became the sole premier, while Prince Ranariddh became the president of the national assembly. Hun Sen has since continued to consolidate his control of the country.

Cambodia joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1999. Elections in July

2003 failed to give Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party the two-thirds majority needed to form a government, but the liberal and royalist opposition parties denounced the results, rejected a two-party coalition, formed the Alliance of Democrats, and insisted that the alliance be the basis for a three-party coalition. At present H. M. Preah Bat Samdech Preah Baromneath Norodom Sihamoni (b. 1953) is the titular ruler of the country.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

About 20 percent of the land area of Cambodia is used for agriculture. It lies completely within the tropics with its southernmost points slightly more than 10° above the equator. Cambodia shares international borders with Thailand and Laos on the west and the north, and Vietnam on the east and the southeast. The Gulf of Thailand lies to the southeast of the country. It has a coastline of 270 miles.

The dominant features of the Cambodian landscape are the Tonle Sap (Great Lake) and the Bassac River systems and the Mekong River, which crosses the country from north to south. The central plains are surrounded by densely forested and sparsely populated highlands, comprising the Elephant and Cardamom Mountains of the southwest and western regions; the highest mountain in Cambodia is Phnom Aural. It is 5,810 feet high and lies in the eastern part of this range.

The Mekong, Cambodia's largest river, dominates the geography of the country. The river originates in mainland China, flows through Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand before entering Cambodia. After traversing the country it continues further southeastward to its lower delta in Vietnam and to the South China Sea. Cambodia has a typical monsoon type of climate. There are two distinct seasons—a dry season from November to April, followed by six months of rain. Rainfall is highest between May and June and September and October. Temperatures may soar up to 104°F in April, while January is the coldest month of the year.

❁ ECONOMY

Cambodia is one of the world's poorest nations. Even before being plunged into civil conflict in the 1970s, Cambodia lacked significant industrial development and was largely dependent on agriculture. The country was self-sufficient with respect to food and produced exportable surpluses of its principal crops of rice and corn. Civil unrest, however, not only disrupted Cambodia's fledgling manufacturing industries, it severely damaged road and rail networks, virtually destroying every aspect of Cambodia's economy. Rice had to be imported, and production of its most profitable export crop, rubber, fell sharply.

The Khmer Rouge government had nationalized all means of production in Cambodia. Money and private property were abolished, and agriculture

Pol Pot

Pol Pot was born on May 19, 1925, in Prek Sbauv, Cambodia. As a young man he received his higher education in France, where he also had the opportunity to study left-wing politics. In 1953 he returned to Cambodia and joined the Communist Party, which he headed a decade later. Between 1975 and 1979, Pol Pot presided over a Communist regime in Cambodia known as the Khmer Rouge. His harsh utopian policies, partly inspired by Communism in China, forced 1.5 million Cambodians to their deaths due to malnutrition, illness, or sheer overwork. At least 200,000 more were executed as enemies of the state. The Cambodian revolution was one of the most murderous of the 20th century.

was collectivized. (Ownership was transferred to the people as a group, represented by the state.) The Khmer Rouge Four-Year Plan was a fiasco. Rice production rose slightly, but between 1976 and 1978 hordes of people died from malnutrition, overwork, and mistreated or misdiagnosed diseases. The Khmer Rouge executed almost anyone whom they suspected of being an enemy of the regime. The atrocities of the Khmer Rouge period nearly obliterated Cambodia's labor force.

After the Khmer Rouge was overthrown in early 1979, conditions gradually started improving. By the mid-1990s Cambodia had again achieved self-sufficiency in rice production and began to export small quantities. The country's infrastructure improved gradually in the 1990s, largely due to massive infusions of foreign assistance. Other sectors of the economy were less fortunate, however. By 1995 the country's economy as a whole was performing at only 40 to 50 percent of its pre-1970 capacity.

The poor, however, remain vulnerable to traffickers. In the 21st century Cambodia is a source, destination, and transit country for men, women, and children trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Cambodia's population consists of many ethnic groups, but the Khmer are the largest segment. Other groups include Vietnamese, Chinese, Thai, and Burmese, as well as various hill tribes. The Khmer account for 80 percent of agricultural workers, while the Vietnamese and Chinese dominate the business sector of the economy.

Cambodia's official language is Khmer. The Khmer language is nontonal but has incorporated many words from Sanskrit and Pali. The Khmer alphabet uses 33 consonants, 24 dependent vowels, 12 independent vowels, and diacritic markers. Vowels may be written before, after, over, or under a con-

Fun Fact

Buddhists believe that human beings were created on the seventh day of the new year, so everyone adds a year to his or her age and celebrates on the seventh day of New Year's.

sonant symbol. Vietnamese and Chinese dialects are also spoken. There is interpolation from European languages, particularly French, into Chinese terms and phrases. Fifty percent of Cambodia's population is illiterate.

The state religion of Theravada Buddhism was first introduced to Cambodia during the days of the great Angkor kingdom. It prospered, and for centuries monks were the only literate people. They resided in rural communities and performed the role of teachers. During the Khmer Rouge regime, Buddhism, including its architecture and its monastic communities, was almost totally wiped out and many of the temples and monasteries were destroyed. It was only after the political turmoil subsided that Buddhism was restored to its former importance in Cambodia although the days of architectural splendor may be over.

Cambodians greet each with a bow and a prayer-like gesture called a *sompeab*, which is initiated by the younger or lower-ranking person. Handshakes are also becoming more acceptable for greeting Cambodians. Level-headedness and calm behavior during a critical situation are extolled as virtues. Displays of bad temper or getting involved in brawls in public are frowned on. Because they are Buddhists, Cambodians do not celebrate their birthdays, and most people do not even know when they were actually born.

Cambodia's classical dance is derived from Indian court dance, which traces its origins to the *apsaras* (dancers). The traditions of Thailand and Java (in Indonesia) also influenced the music and dance of Cambodia. In the classical Cambodian dance, women, dressed in brightly colored costumes with elaborate headdresses, execute graceful movements accompanied by a local percussive ensemble known as the *pinpeat*. These orchestras include drums, gongs, and bamboo xylophones. In Cambodia's villages, the locals attend dramas performed by masked actors. Young and old enjoy traditional shadow plays performed by using black leather puppets to enact scenes from legendary tales. Folk dancing, popular in rural Cambodia, is performed to the accompaniment of drumbeats.

❁ CUISINE

Traditional Cambodian food is in many ways similar to its Chinese, Thai, and Vietnamese counterparts with a heavy emphasis on rice, noodles, salads, and spicy soups. There are two basic types of rice: an aromatic one that is used most often and a sticky rice found in many dessert dishes that are made with fruit such as *duran*. After rice, fish is the second most important food item. Cambodians eat it fresh, dried, smoked, or fermented in fish sauce or a paste (called

prabok). When *prabok* is not used, a fermented shrimp paste (*kapik*) is often used. People also eat chicken, pork, and beef. A popular Khmer fish dish called *amok* is made with catfish steamed in a savory curry with a coconut base. Pork is used to make the popular sweet sausages called *twab ko*. There are a variety of curries (*kari*), including a sweet green fish curry and a spicy red chicken curry. Cambodians also serve a dish similar to fondue called *yao bon*, which is made with beef, shrimp, spinach, napa cabbage, and mushrooms that are dipped in a curry sauce instead of melted cheese.

The most common condiments and garnishes include ginger, lemongrass, chili, coriander, and mint. Cambodians love desserts, which they prepare with fruit or rice, often cooked in coconut milk and sweetened with palm sugar.

People use Western cutlery, chopsticks, and their fingers for eating. Rice flour is often used in cakes and pastries. In the cities the French influence is most evident. A variety of French breads and pastries—even the popular French frogs' legs—are widely available. Lunch is the main meal of the day and includes soup, which Cambodians consume simultaneously with rice, vegetables, and fish or meat.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

Although Cambodians have their own New Year's holiday (a three-day festival around the middle of April in the Gregorian calendar), they still observe the Western New Year as a public holiday as well, a custom probably traceable to Cambodia's history as a French colony. Cambodians spend this day with friends and family.

❁ NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 7

This is a very important day in the political history of Cambodia. It commemorates the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge by Vietnamese troops in 1979, bringing to an end an era of bloodshed, massacre, genocide, and terror. In Cambodia the day is celebrated with parades and public speeches.

❁ INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 8

This holiday is observed globally by women around the world in order to honor women's lives and draw

attention to women's issues, especially violence against women, unequal pay and living conditions, and international prostitution. It is commemorated at the United Nations and is also an official holiday in many countries, including Cambodia. In Cambodia women's groups hold workshops and seminars to raise awareness about women's rights.

❁ CHAUL CHNAM

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Mid-April

The Cambodian New Year, according to the lunar calendar, generally falls in mid-April at the end of the harvest season and is a three-day festival. Cambodian families visit *wats* (temples) on each of the three days, where they make offerings in hopes of good fortune for the New Year. On the first day of Chaul Chhnam, families clean and decorate their homes. On the second day it is traditional to give gifts (mainly new clothes) to one's elders and to the poor. On the third day the royal family visits the king in Phnom Penh to swear allegiance and wish him good health. Throughout the festival, it is traditional (especially for children) to splash one another with water and talcum powder. There are cultural events and sports competitions, including boxing matches, horse and elephant races, and a royal procession. The streets of towns and cities are decorated with lights.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day in many countries. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of Socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world, and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

After more than 100 years, it is still an important occasion to honor workers and laborers for their invaluable contributions to their societies. In Cambodia, where it is a public holiday, the day is celebrated with speeches and processions organized by the workers and the trade union leaders.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ CHRAT PREAH NENKAL

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Early May

This public holiday is Cambodia's harvest festival. On this occasion a man and a woman from the royal family come out into the fields where they harness two cows to plough and sow a furrow. The cows are

then released and allowed to feed from any of seven silver trays containing rice, corn, wheat, beans, grass, water, and alcohol. The choice of the cows predicts the coming growing season. If the cows eat the rice, corn, wheat, or beans, the next harvest will be bounteous; if they eat the grass, the crops will suffer that year. If they drink the water, it is a sign that rain will be plentiful. If they drink the alcohol, however, it is an omen of bad times to come.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

❁ INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 1

The origin of International Children's Day can be traced back to the 1925 World Conference for the Well-Being of Children, which took place in Geneva, Switzerland. Representatives from 54 countries attended the conference and produced the "Geneva Declaration Protecting Children," which focused on eradication of poverty, prevention of child labor, promotion of education, and other issues related to the welfare of children around the globe. Although the date of the observance may vary from one region to another, June 1 remains the most popular day, when the observance is celebrated in more than 21 countries.

In Cambodia too on this day children's welfare organizations and social workers hold seminars and conferences focused on improving the lives of the country's children. Games and sporting events are also held for the children themselves, at which they receive prizes and food packets.

❁ QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 18

Queen Norodom Monineath Sihanouk is the consort of the former Cambodian ruler Norodom Sihanouk. Cambodians celebrate the birthday of their former queen on June 18. The capital city of Phnom Penh is festooned with portraits of the royal couple, and people gather in the streets to wish her majesty a long life. All businesses are closed on this day.

❁ PARIS PEACE AGREEMENT

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 23

This date commemorates the official end of the brutal civil war in 1991. The international talks regarding the future of Cambodia made progress when all the warring factions signed a treaty on this date. As a result of the treaty, the United Nations assumed the government's administrative functions and

worked to implement democratic elections. In Cambodia the day is commemorated by civic ceremonies in the capital.

❁ BIRTHDAY OF KING NORODOM SIHANOUK

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 30–November 1

The octogenarian H. E. Norodom Sihanouk occupied the throne of Cambodia during one of the most turbulent periods of its political history. The people still venerate their former ruler, who abdicated the throne to his son on October 7, 2004. Sihanouk ruled Cambodia as its king from 1941 to 1955 and 1991 to 2004. Born on October 31, 1922, he has used the official title of king father of Cambodia since his abdication.

On the occasion of the former monarch's birthday (a three-day celebration), Phnom Penh's main streets and public parks are decorated with lights, and portraits of Sihanouk are displayed throughout the city. Newspapers carry illustrated articles about the former king, and the national television station broadcasts films and other programs. The royal palace is open to the public on Sihanouk's birthday, and there is a huge fireworks display in front of the royal palace in the evening.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 9

On November 9, 1953, the country achieved independence after nearly 100 years of French colonial rule. The day is mostly celebrated in the capital of Phnom Penh. The present monarch makes a public appearance, mingling with the crowds, and the prime minister inspects a guard of honor on this occasion. The capital city is gaily decorated, and a festive atmosphere prevails; there is also a big parade with floats and marching bands that passes by the royal palace.

❁ BON OM TUK

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Early November

This holiday celebrates the end of the rainy season and the reversal of the flow of the river Tonle Sap, the lifeblood of Cambodia. This unique natural phenomenon is celebrated throughout Cambodia. Every year in June, when monsoon rains cause the Mekong River to rise, excess water begins to flow into the Tonle Sap River. This causes the river to reverse its flow and drain into Tonle Sap Lake. The flow reverses again in the month of November, leaving behind vast quantities of fish. This

provides a grand feast for Cambodians. The highlights of the festival are the three days of boat races, a tradition dating back to Angkorian times. Each boat is paddled by up to 40 oarsmen and elaborately decorated with serpent (*naga*) heads carved into the bow. Rural people travel to Phnom Penh to enjoy themselves and to compete in the races. Although there are similar boat races in other parts of the country, the biggest and most spectacular are those in the capital city. A carnival atmosphere surrounds the boat races, which are celebrated with food stalls, live music, dancing, and fireworks displays.

❁ UN HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 10

On December 10, 1948, the nascent United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which has become a universally accepted charter for defending and promoting human rights. Human Rights Day is celebrated around the globe. The declaration states that "All human beings are born with equal and inalienable rights and fundamental freedoms."

Religious Holidays

❁ MAKKA BUCHA

Observed by: Buddhists
Observed on: February

On the full Moon day of the third lunar month (generally corresponding to February in the Gregorian calendar), Cambodians commemorate the sermon the Buddha delivered to 1,250 enlightened monks who had gathered to hear him. This event is marked by candlelit processions around the main shrines of all the temples (*wats*) in the country.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM

❁ VESAK

Observed by: Buddhists
Observed on: Last two weeks of May

This day, known locally as Vesaka Bochea, marks the three major events in the life of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha (the founder of Buddhism): his birth, his enlightenment, and his Mahaparinirvana (the quitting of his worldly body, or salvation). In Cambodia, as in other Buddhist countries, the faithful celebrate by carrying gifts of food and flowers to the local temples (*wats*), where they pray for good fortune and prosperity throughout the coming year.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM; VESAK

❁ BONN DAK BEN

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: September–October

For two consecutive weeks Cambodian families remember their departed relatives by making offerings at the temples (*wats*). The 15th day of the festival, on the full Moon, is called Pchum Ben. This day is the most important of all. On this day Cambodians offer rice cakes (*ben*) and money to the monks and pray for the appeasement of dead souls. This ceremony closely resembles the *pind daam* ceremony of the Hindus (especially in India). A *pind* is a ball or lump of rice offered to the dead souls, to the accompaniment of chants and recitations from the Buddhist scriptures.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM

Regional Holidays

❁ ANGKOR WAT FESTIVAL

Observed in: Siem Reap

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November–December

This festival was introduced to boost tourism in Cambodia and to reveal to the rest of the world the rich architectural treasures that are languishing and

threatened due the impoverished condition of the country. The Angkor Wat—the largest religious monument in the world—was originally built as a Hindu funerary temple in the early 12th century and was later rededicated as a Buddhist temple. An architectural marvel with exquisite carvings and ornamentation, it is considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Events include Buddhist ceremonies, concerts, and dance performances.

Rites of Passage

The official religion of Cambodia is Theravada Buddhism. The customs, practices, rites, and rituals of this sect vary from one country to another as well as from the other two schools of Buddhism, Mahayana and Vajrayana (Tantric). However, the basic rites are the same in most countries.

❁ BIRTH

Since most Cambodians are Buddhists, they practice the Buddhist rituals related to birth. When the expectant mother goes into labor, the family chants and recites passages from the Buddhist scriptures. The recital of prayers is intended to allay her fears. They may be also be uttered by her spouse to relieve his own anxiety.



Traditional Cambodian dancers perform at the closing ceremony of the annual Angkor Wat Festival in Siem Reap. Thousands of visitors crowd inside the temple grounds to watch performances by troupes from India, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia on a special stage built atop the ancient stone causeway that leads to the nearly 900-year-old temple. (AP Photo/Ou Neakiry)

❁ COMING OF AGE

The Buddhist monasteries and the monks who reside in them play a dominant role in the lives of the people in all Buddhist societies, including Cambodia. It is a common practice among Buddhists to have at least one son in the family (generally the oldest) ordained as a monk. The initiation ceremony of a boy into the monastic order is an important rite of passage, symbolizing the transformation of the boy into an adult. The initiation is accompanied by an elaborate celebration and festivities attended by the boy's parents, siblings, relatives, and friends. After the guests depart, the boy is tonsured and takes his monastic vows. He leaves home and takes up residence in the monastery (which might last anywhere from a few days to a few weeks), during which time he practices all the rituals of Buddhist monastic life. When the boy returns to his normal domestic life, he is considered an adult. He may relinquish domestic life and enter the monastery again in the future if he so chooses.

❁ MARRIAGE

In most Buddhist countries, including Cambodia, the couple's parents traditionally arrange the marriage. The underlying idea is that the parents, drawing from their life experiences, are best qualified to make the most suitable match for their offspring. It is also believed that, because marriages forge long-term links between families, the decision should be made by the elders in the families. Astrologers are consulted by the parents to fix an auspicious day for the formal wedding ceremony. In recent years, particularly in urban areas, young people have begun to rebel against these traditions, preferring to choose their own partners.

The wedding ceremony takes place in the bride's home. Although monks are usually invited to grace the occasion, they do not conduct the ceremony and are not crucial. Instead, a male relative of the bride is in charge of the ceremonies. All the rituals are performed before an image of Buddha profusely adorned with flowers and sticks of incense. The bride and groom exchange vows, promising to honor and respect each other. The couple present rings to each other; then the thumbs of their right hands are tied together. Alternatively, their wrists may be tied together with a silk scarf. This symbolizes their union as husband and wife. At the end of the ceremony, everyone present shares a celebratory

feast. Sometimes the wedding celebrations go on for several days. Later at their convenience, the newlyweds visit the nearest monastery to seek blessings from the monks and respectfully listen to a sermon of the Buddha's teaching about an ideal married life.

❁ DEATH

A Buddhist funeral is a simple and solemn ceremony. Buddhists are not rigid about whether the body should be buried or cremated. They believe that when a person dies his or her soul is reborn somewhere else very shortly afterward. Only the *Arahants*, who have conquered all passions, will be released from the perpetual cycle of life, death, and rebirth and attain salvation (*moksha* or *nirvana*).

In Cambodia, while the dead body is being prepared for the funeral, the monks chant in order to release good energy. They also accompany the family members to the cremation or burial ground. After the ceremonies are over, the members of the bereaved family offer food and candles to the monks. This is done to satisfy the lingering spirit of the dead person, helping him or her toward a good reincarnation.

During the 14-day festival of Bonn Dak Ben (September–October), Cambodian families remember their deceased relatives by making offerings at the temples (*wats*). The 15th day, a full Moon day called Pchum Ben, is the most important day of all. On this day Cambodians go to the monasteries to offer rice cakes (*ben*) and money to the monks and pray for the appeasement of the dead souls.

Further Reading

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Cameroon

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Western Africa
Size	183,568 sq. mi.
Capital City	Yaounde
Flag Description	The flag has three vertical bands of equal size in green, red, and yellow. There is a five-pointed yellow star centered in the red band.
Independence	January 1, 1960 (from France)
Population	16,380,005 (2005 est.)
Government	Unitary republic; multiparty presidential regime
Nationality	Cameroonian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Cameroon Highlanders (31%); Equatorial Bantu, Kirdi, Fulani, and Northwestern Bantu (48%)
Major Language(s)	English and French (official); 24 major African language groups
Major Religion(s)	Indigenous beliefs (40%); Christians (40%); Muslims (20%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Youth Day, February 11; Labor Day, May 1; Republic Day/National Day, May 20

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Not much is known about Cameroon's history prior to the arrival of Europeans. It is believed that the Pygmy Baka tribe, one of the oldest cultures in some parts of Africa, inhabited the region. The highlands of Cameroon are considered to be the cradle of the Bantu language, although the Bantu were gone by the time Europeans found the region. The country owes its name to the Portuguese, who arrived in the area in 1472. At the sight of giant shrimp, they shouted with delight, "*Camarões, camarões!*" (Portuguese for "shrimp"); thus the region was named Cameroon. The Portuguese, however, did not stay in the area long. In fact for the next 400 years, the northern region of Cameroon was a battlefield for empires such as the Kanem-Bornu in Chad, while the southern region was the hub of the slave trade.

At the time of the arrival of the Germans in the late 19th century, the Fulani Empire in Sokoto (Nigeria) controlled the northern area of Cameroon. Shortly afterward Germany took charge of the region. Although they built schools, plantations, and railways, the Germans treated the plantation workers bru-

tally. In fact on one of the plantations, one-fifth of the workers in a single year were reported to have died due to overwork.

On June 28, 1919, after the German defeat in World War I, the French established their control over 80 percent of the region, and it became known as French Cameroon, while the British took control of southern Cameroon and a small area in the north. In 1960 French Cameroon was granted independence after the people of the region expressed their desire to be a free country.

Ahmadou Ahidjo (1924–89), a northerner, became the first president of the new republic. He entered the political scene of Cameroon in the 1940s during the pre-independence era and played an active role in persuading the French to grant independence to the region.

A rift between the northern and southern Cameroonians led to a bloody battle, which was finally stopped by French military intervention. The northern Cameroonians of British Cameroon expressed their desire to be part of Nigeria and voted accordingly in 1961. The rest of the region (the southern part of British Cameroon and French Cameroon) came together and formed a unified republic in 1972. In 1975 Ahidjo was once again voted to power and began making investments in agriculture, health care, roads, education, and

the like. But he also established an autocratic regime, which led to an era of repression. All political parties were banned, and their leaders imprisoned. In 1982 Ahidjo resigned and appointed Paul Biya (b. 1933), a southerner, to be his successor.

The next year, Biya decided to split Cameroon's Grand North into three provinces, the Adamawa, the North, and the Extreme North and dismissed the ministers who had served in Ahidjo's cabinet, charging that several had been involved in an attempt on his life. The alleged plotters were tried and found guilty in 1984. Ahidjo escaped to Paris and, shortly thereafter, northern members of Cameroon's Republican Guard attempted a coup, but also failed.

In 2002, a dispute between Cameroon and Nigeria over the ownership of the Bakassi Peninsula was resolved by the International Court of Justice, which decided in Cameroon's favor. The region had been a source of friction between the two countries because oil had been found there.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The boot-shaped nation of Cameroon is located in the western part of Africa. It is flanked by the Central African Republic and Chad to the east; the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon lie to the south; Nigeria borders Cameroon in the north and west, with the Atlantic Ocean along the western coast.

Topographically, Cameroon has three distinct parts: the northern savannahs (grassland dotted with trees, grasses, shrubs, and other forms of vegetation), northwestern hill regions, and the eastern and southern rainforests. A major portion of the country's population is concentrated near the towns of Bafoussam and Bamenda with their fertile volcanic soil. Mount Cameroon is the country's most striking topographical feature.

The region is also reported to have serious volcanic activity as was evident by the leak of poisonous gas from Lake Nyos in 1986, which killed 1,700 people. The Bénoué, the Wuori, the Sanaga, and the Nyong rivers flow through Cameroon.

Rainfall varies from region to region. While the extreme north receives scanty rainfall, heavy down-

pours are commonplace in some parts there. In fact, Cameroon is known to have one of the wettest climates on Earth with an average rainfall of 152 inches. The average maximum temperature varies from 70°F to 75°F, while the average minimum temperature remains between 66°F to 70°F.

❁ ECONOMY

Following independence, Cameroon's economy boomed for a considerable period of time. Exports reached an all-time high, and the country was one of the most prosperous nations in Africa. However, in the mid-1980s, faulty economic policies, accompanied by a drop in the prices of its principal commodities such as coffee, cocoa, and oil, and inflation forced the country into a decade-long recession.

The government tried to revive the economy by initiating pro-market economic reforms, and the International Monetary Foundation and the World Bank are assisting but continue to press for additional reforms, including increased transparency in budgeting, privatization, and poverty reduction programs. Another problem the government must find ways to deal with is the traffic in people for purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor and prostitution. Cameroon is a source, transit, and destination country for women and children trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor. Most trafficking is internal and children are at greatest risk.

❁ LIFESTYLE AND CULTURE

Cameroon is home to more than 130 ethnic groups. The five most prominent among them are: Kirdi and Fulani in the north, the Bamoun and Bamiléké in the west, and the Ewondo around Yaoundé. The Bamiléké enjoy a formidable position in the western region and are one of the largest communities in Doula. They are organized into more than 80 political units, each led by a chief who is the custodian of ancient customs and traditions. Also, there are a number of secret societies in each unit that share responsibility for the preservation of ancient rituals.

The Punu tribes live in small villages along the Ogowe River Basin. Each village has several lineages, and its head inherits the leadership of the village matrilineally (by descent through the female line). In contrast, the Bamoun have a single ruler they refer to as "sultan."

Although English and French are the official languages, Cameroonians prefer to use their native dialects. The three main language groups of the region are the Semi-Bantu languages of the west, the Bantu languages of the south, and the Sudanic languages of the north.

Each ethnic group has its own way of life and culture and adheres to its traditions and customs. Even today, 40 percent of the population still holds onto its indigenous beliefs, including vodun. The influence of Christianity and Islam is also evident,

Secret Societies

Masks are an integral part of *kwifoyn*, the tribal secret societies in Cameroon. Membership in these societies is reserved almost exclusively for men, and members of the *kwifoyn* take great pride in serving these societies. They are the custodians of Cameroon's ancient traditions and customs and ensure that people adhere to the traditional way of life. They also preside over ceremonial rituals that honor the ancestral spirits.

however. Christians make up 40 percent of the population; Muslims account for 20 percent.

For the indigenous cultures of Cameroon, music and dance are an integral part, especially in religious observances and rituals such as initiation and funerals. *Makossa* is the most popular style of music in Cameroon. It originated from a popular dance form in the Cameroonian city of Doula, known as *kossa*. It is an adaptable form of music that can be easily played on the guitar and thumb pianos. *Bikutsi* is another popular type of dance and music that is traditionally sung in Yaounde. Sculpture, woodcarvings, and wooden masks are some of the popular art forms of Cameroon. The masks made by the Punu tribe are famous for their size, style, and designs. These masks are almost 12 inches tall and 8 inches wide. Since white has been traditionally associated with antiwitchcraft powers, most of the Punu masks are white.

❁ CUISINE

In Cameroon, *feuille*, or manioc leaves (also called cassava and yucca), features prominently on the menu and is a chief ingredient in most traditional sauces and stews. Sauces are traditionally accompanied with *riz* (rice) and a mashed potato-like substance that appears in three forms: *couscous*, *fufu*, or *pâte*. These dishes can be made from corn, rice, manioc leaves, or even banana. Grilled chicken and fish are popular meats in Yaounde, and there are many stewlike dishes that combine meat and greens with a peanut butter sauce.

Bananas are a major cash crop in Cameroon, and they are used in numerous ways; when very ripe, they can be mashed and used to make banana bread. Yams are a staple food in many African countries, and Cameroon is no exception. The word *yam* comes from the Fulani people of Cameroon and the Congo, whose word for 'eat' is *nyami*. Unlike the yams or sweet potatoes in the United States, African yams are white or pale yellow in color. Both yams and plantains are sliced about one-quarter-inch thick and fried, and can be found for sale as snack foods in markets throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Depending on one's taste, they can be coated with powdered ginger and/or cayenne before frying and then salted, sprinkled with salt and hot sauce (Tabasco works!) after frying, or, if a sweet snack is preferred, they can be sprinkled with sugar and cinnamon.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western (Gregorian) calendar and is celebrated as New Year's Day

Vodoun

Vodoun (or Voodoo) is probably one of the world's oldest religions; it is thought to be nearly 10,000 years old. Although its essential wisdom originated in different parts of Africa long before the Europeans embarked on the slave trade, the structure of Vodoun, as we know it today, originated in Haiti during European colonization. The word *voodoo* comes from the West African word *vodoun*, which means "spirit." This Afro-Caribbean religion incorporates rites and rituals of many African ethnic groups including the Fon, Nago, Ibo, Dahomeans, Senegalese, Haussars, Caplaous, Mondungues, Mandinge, Angolese, Libyans, Ethiopians, and the Malgaches.

in Cameroon. Festivities begin on New Year's Eve, the last day of December of the old year, when people gather in public places and participate in mass celebrations. Dance, music, food, and drinks flow freely as people party all night to welcome the new year. All government offices, schools, and colleges are closed on January 1.

❁ YOUTH DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 11

Youth Day, which recognizes the importance of youth in society and the contributions of young workers, is celebrated in Cameroon on February 11. On this day, special programs are held to educate the young people of Cameroon about their society and how their actions will shape the future. Special workshops, exhibitions, debates, and other related programs are organized to educate them about their duties and responsibilities, as well as to create awareness of health issues such as AIDS, smoking, and drinking. The prime objective of these programs is to create a morally strong and responsible younger generation.

The Role of Masks in Rituals

According to ancient beliefs, masks act as a regulatory tool, ensuring control over society and law and order. Masks are an integral part of tribal rituals followed by the tribal secret societies (*kwifoyn*). A member of the *kwifoyn* feels privileged when granted the right to own a mask. The Kom tribesmen, who inhabit the northwestern region of Cameroon, wear their masks on their heads, instead of on their faces.

✿ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day in many parts the world to commemorate the important role of workers. The May 1 celebration of Labor Day has its roots in the international socialist movement which declared the holiday in 1889 to coincide with a general strike called for May in 1890 by the American Federation of Labor in the United States to demand an eight-hour workday. Labor Day is celebrated with great enthusiasm in Cameroon. Because it is a national holiday, all schools, colleges, and public and private institutions remain closed. Celebrations take place in different parts of the country and are marked by parades and speeches.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

✿ REPUBLIC DAY/NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 20

On May 20, 1972, the Republic of Cameroon came into existence after the unification of French Cameroon and the southern parts of British Cameroon. Thus, May 20 is celebrated as National Day or Republic Day in Cameroon, and huge celebrations are planned weeks in advance. Crowds gather in different parts of the country to celebrate. Official speeches, military parades, folk dancing, and music are highlights of this day. People sing patriotic songs and pay tribute to the freedom fighters who laid down their lives for the country.

Religious Holidays

✿ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Last Friday of Lent

This Christian festival commemorates the crucifixion of Jesus. It has been in the Christian liturgical calendar even longer than Easter has although no one is sure why it is called “Good” Friday. Some have suggested that the use of *good* in the name goes back to Old English and means “God’s Friday,” while others interpret *good* to mean something like “observed as holy.” This observance is also known as Black Friday and Sorrowful Friday, and in Eastern Orthodox churches it is called Great Friday.

For many years Good Friday was primarily a Catholic observance, but many Protestant churches now hold special services. Cameroon is home to both Roman Catholics and Protestants, and on Good Friday, devout Christians attend special church services that focus on the life and teachings

of Jesus. Choirs singing hymns are a highlight of the celebrations while plays based on Jesus’ life are also staged. In Cameroon, some faithful Christians fast on Good Friday. When they eat, it is generally fish instead of meat.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; GOOD FRIDAY; EASTER

✿ EASTER AND EASTER MONDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday and Monday following the month of Lent

Easter and Easter Monday are celebrated to mark Jesus’ resurrection on the third day after his crucifixion. It celebrates victory over death and the regeneration of life. Observed by Christians the world over, in Cameroon both Protestants and Roman Catholics celebrate Easter. Family get-togethers and egg-rolling competitions for children are a part of Easter Monday celebrations. People take home holy water given out at church and sprinkle it around their houses to bless them.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

✿ MOULLOUD

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

Alternate Names: Maulid, Mawlid al-Nabi

Mouloud commemorates the birth of the prophet of Islam, Muhammad. Also known as Mawlid al-Nabi, this day is celebrated in the third month of the Islamic year. For Muslims all over the world, this is a day of great joy and celebration because Muhammad is the most revered prophet among the Muslims and is regarded as a great leader and guide. In Cameroon, devout Muslims offer morning prayers at the local mosque accompanied by their friends and family. The imam (male leader of prayer in a mosque) gives discourses on the teachings of Islam and the prophet’s unwavering commitment to Allah. People greet each other on this joyous occasion and attend a lavish feast with friends and family.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULLOUD

✿ ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Forty Days after Easter

Ascension Day is a day of special celebration for Christians all over the world. It commemorates Jesus’ ascension to heaven, 40 days after his resurrection from the dead (Easter). In the Eastern Orthodox Church Ascension Day is one of the Twelve Great Feasts.

On this day in Cameroon, devout Christians

attend special church services and offer special prayers and reiterate their commitment to follow the path shown by Jesus.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY

❁ ASSUMPTION DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: August 15

Assumption Day commemorates the assumption of Mary, the mother of Jesus, into heaven. According to one legend, when Mary was on her deathbed at the age of 73, all the apostles visited her, except St. Thomas, who arrived a little late. However, when he arrived, Mary's body was nowhere to be found because she had been resurrected. It is believed that her soul and body were united at the Tomb in the Valley of Jehoshaphat (Mary's Tomb) and St. Gabriel took Mary's soul to heaven. Roman Catholics attend a special mass in local churches and offer prayers to the holy mother Mary while devotional hymns are sung by the choir.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Muslims all over the world observe a month-long fast during the holy month of Ramadan. It is believed that Allah himself revealed the Koran, the religious book of Muslims, to Muhammad during Ramadan. Hence, it is the holiest of the holy months for devout Muslims. The fast is observed from dawn until dusk and consumption of food and water, as well as sexual intercourse, is strictly forbidden during this period. In Cameroon, many restaurants are closed during the day and only open after dusk. Smoking and drinking are also strictly forbidden during Ramadan.

Eid al-Fitr, also known as Djoulde Soumae, marks the end of Ramadan and fasting on this day is strictly forbidden in the Koran. Muslims rise early on this day and eat a light meal. They dress in new clothes and pray in the mosques, thanking Allah for his benevolence. After religious services, Cameroonian Muslims feast and enjoy big celebrations.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijja, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha is celebrated in honor of Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his own son on God's command. However, just as Abraham was about to kill

his son Ishmael, God replaced the young boy with a ram. In Cameroon, schools, colleges, and government institutions remain closed on Eid al-Adha (Tabaski). In the morning, Muslims offer prayers in the local mosque with friends and family. Then, a big feast is prepared and people exchange gifts.

In the north and northwestern parts of the country, a parade of the Marabouts is the main highlight of these festivities. Marabouts are village wise men and fortune tellers who are held in high esteem in this region. Also, the holy pilgrimage (*Hajj*) takes place during this month. All Muslims who are physically and financially able to do so are directed by the Koran to undertake this journey at least once in their lifetime. It is the fifth pillar of Islam. At the end of the journey, the pilgrim must make a sacrifice and the men also have to have the top of their heads shaved.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

❁ CHRISTMAS EVE/DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas is a day of celebration for Christians all over the world because it is the established date for Jesus' birth. As in other African countries, Cameroon celebrates a Christmas filled with sunshine because it is in the Southern Hemisphere. A week before Christmas, the preparations for the big day begin. Christian Cameroonians buy new clothes, gifts, and decorate their houses with Christmas trees. On Christmas Eve, families attend church services and celebrate by singing and dancing through the night. All public and private institutions remain closed on Christmas.

On Christmas, gifts are exchanged between friends and family members and a lavish feast is enjoyed.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ MOUNT CAMEROON RACE

Observed by: General Public

Observed in: Mount Cameroon

Observed on: January 2

Mount Cameroon, situated in the western part of the country, is a stratovolcano, locally known as Mount Faka, or the Chariots of the Gods. A stratovolcano is a tall conical mountain made up of hardened volcanic ash and lava. The Mount Cameroon race is an annual event held on January 2, the day after New Year's. It is the first cultural event of the year in Cameroon and is one of the most difficult footraces in Africa as the 26-mile stretch requires an athlete to go up and down the 10,000-foot mountain. Every year, thousands of participants from all over the world arrive to participate.

✿ GBAYA ANNUAL FISHING FESTIVAL

Observed by: All Gbaya Villages

Observed in: Cameroon

Observed on: March

On a signal given by the *wabdo*, a representative of the Gbaya secret society, everyone throws packets of *do* into the Mbere River. *Do* is a mixture of various

bark and “rounded” plants that intoxicates the fish; their eyes become brighter and they lose their sense of direction. Thus disoriented, they drift toward the dam and hurdles the people have set up downstream. The intoxicated fish are easy to catch and the Gbaya fill their baskets until the effects of the *do* begin to wear off. The fish are dried and smoked beside the river, and then there is a great feast in the village, with the chief receiving the largest share. All the villagers receive a dish, as do the village ancestors, to thank them for a good harvest as well as to show hope for an equally good harvest of fish in the next year.

Fun Fact

In 2003, history was made in the Mount Cameroon race when a one-legged man, Ngeve Zache Etutu, became the first disabled person to successfully complete the challenging race.

✿ CAMEROON INTERNATIONAL THEATRE FESTIVAL

Observed by: General Public

Observed in: Yaounde

Observed on: November

The Cameroon International Theatre Festival (CITFEST) is an annual event held in Cameroon’s capital, Yaounde. Founded in 1990, CITFEST was initiated by noted Cameroonian actor and director, Ambroise Mbia, who was appointed the Secretary General of the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC), which took place in Lagos (Nigeria) in 1977.

The objective behind the event is to facilitate the exchange of cultural ideas and traditions as well as to showcase and promote traditional African performing arts. This event serves as a gateway to ancient African performing art forms such as dance, music, theater, and costume. The main events include workshops on dramatic writing, stage directing, seminars on the role of theater in Africa, performances, and exhibitions.

✿ LELA FESTIVAL

Observed by: Bali and Bafut peoples

Observed in: Western Cameroon

Observed on: December

In Western Cameroon, the dry season, which lasts from November until March, many festivals and

funeral observances are scheduled. The Lela Festival is a three-month-long dance festival hosted by the chief (*fon*). The Bali and Bafut ethnic groups wear their most colorful traditional costumes and sing songs tracing their ancestral heritage and histories. They also offer sacrifices to their ancestors. If the ancestors are pleased, the people will have more fish, more children, and fewer deaths in the coming year.

✿ NGONDO FESTIVAL

Observed by: General Public

Observed in: Doula

Observed on: December

The annual Ngondo Festival showcases Cameroon’s folk culture and diversity, particularly in dance and music, and attracts huge crowds. Every year in December, Doula, Cameroon’s largest city, takes on a carnival-like atmosphere with exhibits of handicrafts, canoe races, choral music, and ritual dances and songs with messages from the ancestors at the bottom of the sea. The locals, people inhabiting the coast, which stretches across the Francophone part of Cameroon as well as the Anglophone side, reconnect with their ancestors in a mystical dialogue that takes place in deep water. *Ngondo* means “people of the water,” and this festival pays homage to one of nature’s fundamental elements, water. The focus is on the Wouri River, which every three to four years yields a harvest of *mbeaa toe*, the shellfish that gave its name to Cameroon, and there are special rituals honoring the deity of the Wouri River. This festival also honors the deities that live in the sea, the *Miengu*, half men, half spirits, who reign over the oceans, the seas, and the rivers and bring prosperity to the Sawa people.

Rites of Passage

✿ BIRTH

In Cameroon, women depend on experienced midwives to help them through the process of delivery. The birth of a child is a time for celebration. Within 10 days of its birth, the child is named after the circumstances in which he or she was born, or after a prominent relative belonging to the father’s or the mother’s side of the family. The names are often unisex. Also, after birth, a girl’s ears are pierced while the boy is circumcised in accordance with tradition.

Twins are considered very special—a gift of the gods—in Cameroonian society; so a ritual to persuade the children to stay on Earth is performed. A special shrine is erected in their honor by the *taangyie*, the father of the twins, inside the mother’s house. A special chicken dish is prepared to feed the children. Meanwhile, the *maangyie*, the mother of the twins, performs a ceremonial dance outside the house. The tribal chief sends two cups, which are hung over the twins’ heads, and strands of precious beads that are strung around their necks.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Coming of age initiation rites for both boys and girls are well-kept secrets among most of the ethnic groups in Cameroon, and ethnic groups forbid members to describe the rituals to outsiders, especially Westerners. For this reason, not much is known about them.

Both sexes are taken deep into the forest, to a secret place, for the rituals, which last several days. Among the Baka (formerly called Pygmies), boys to be initiated are undressed, washed, shaved, and then have palm oil rubbed on their bodies. After these procedures, they are taken to a special hut, and the rituals, some of them dangerous, begin. Phases of the rituals that are “public” include dances and processions. The boys spend about a week in the hut, a period when they are not allowed to eat, sleep, or drink very much. Toward the end of the initiation period, each boy comes face-to-face with the Spirit of the Forest, who kills them and then brings them back to life as adults.

In Bafoussam, the ritual marking the transition from childhood to adulthood occurs every two years during November–December; a girl is not considered to be a woman unless and until she has gone through the Rhe Nian Nian, whatever her social status. The entire initiation lasts for nine weeks, but the girls spend nine days in the bush with their initiators, while the villagers’ most significant dances are performed daily in the chief’s yard. When the Nian Nian (initiated woman) emerges from the forest on the 10th day, a grand feast is held to welcome her. In Baleng (a subdivision of Bafoussam), the initiation ritual is held at the end of every leap year. It is estimated that 20 percent of the women of Cameroon have been infibulated as part of the initiation rites. (Infibulation involves the complete removal of the clitoris, labia minora, and most of the labia majora. The vaginal opening is then sewn almost completely shut. It is done, according to its advocates, to increase the man’s pleasure; at the same time, it not only robs women of their capacity for pleasure but makes the act of intercourse extremely painful. The cutting is often done with a piece of shell or broken bottle, which leads to frequent infections. This is not a one-time operation. After intercourse or childbirth, the vaginal opening is sewn shut again.)

❁ MARRIAGE

Child marriage was once an integral part of Cameroon’s culture. The promising of the bride was a fairly simple ritual. A prospective groom or his father would place a log of wood on a fire. If the parents of the newborn girl agreed to the proposal, then the log of wood would be allowed to burn and the girl was considered engaged to the suitor. The bride

price was also negotiated at the time that the marriage was fixed.

Among the Bangwa tribe, marriage is finalized only after the payment has been made. Also, since child marriage was the norm, the Bangwa girl would go to her husband’s place after reaching physical maturity. In earlier times marriages were lavish affairs, but due to escalating costs, modern couples prefer a simple ceremony and seek the blessing of their elders.

❁ DEATH

In Cameroon, per ancient traditions and customs, the cause of death is always considered both natural and unnatural. The belief in supernatural forces is widespread, and witchcraft and vodun are an integral part of Cameroonian cultures.

Traditionally, the dead of a village were buried right behind their homes. The burial of a chief or a noble person would be rather lavish, while the death of a commoner was a simpler affair.

The Bangwa tribes believe in life after death and that souls assume the form of spirits and ghosts to avenge their death. They believe the dead souls spread death and disease among the living if they are not ritually pacified. According to Bangwa religious belief, souls go either to heaven or hell, and both these places are under the ground. The sky is considered to be the home of witches. Because of this the Bangwa tribe found it difficult to accept the Christian belief that heaven was located somewhere up in the skies.

Further Reading

Ralph A. Austen and Jonathan Derrick, *Middlemen of the Cameroons: The Duala and Their Hinterland, c. 1600–c. 1960* (New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Jean-Germain Gros, ed., *Cameroon: Politics and Society in Critical Perspective* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2003); Jacob A. Ihims, *A Century of Western Education in Cameroon: A Study of Its History and Administration (1844–1961)* (Bamenda, Cameroon: Unique Printers, 2003); John Mukum Mbaku, *Culture and Customs of Cameroon* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2005); Victor Julius Ngoh, *Cameroon: From Federal to Unitary State, 1961–1972* (Limbe, Cameroon: Design House, 2004).

Fun Fact

Labi, spoken only during the initiation rites of the Gbaya, Mbum, and some Sara-Laka peoples, is an Adamawa language of the hilly regions of Cameroon.

Fun Fact

The “marriage payment,” or “bride price,” has to be made to the family of the bride either in cash or in the form of goats, salt, and hoes, according to the custom of the particular tribe.

Canada

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	North America, between the North Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans, north of the United States
Size	3,855,103 sq. mi.
Capital City	Ottawa
Flag Description	The Canadian flag has two narrow vertical bands of red, one on either side of a wider white band; a large red maple leaf is centered in the white band.
Independence	1867 (from the United Kingdom)
Population	32,805,041 (2005 est.)
Government	Confederation with parliamentary democracy
Nationality	Canadian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Caucasian (67%); mixed background (26%)
Major Language(s)	English (59%); French (23%); both official—Inuit, official in Nunavut territory, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavik, an Inuit area of Quebec
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (43%); Protestant (23%); none (16%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Victoria Day, late May; Canada Day, July 1 Labor Day, early September; Thanksgiving, early October; Remembrance Day, November 11; Boxing Day, December 26

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The First Peoples, thriving Native American and Inuit groups, have inhabited parts of what is now called Canada for at least 10,000 years. The name *Canada* probably comes from the Iroquois word *kanata-kon*, meaning “to the village.”

The first Europeans to arrive were probably the Vikings, who are thought to have sent several expeditions to northern areas of the North American continent around 1000 B.C.E.

Archaeological evidence of a settlement was found at L'Anse aux Meadows (from the French, meaning “Jellyfish Cove”) in 1960, a site on the northernmost tip of the island of Newfoundland. There the remains of a Viking village were discovered, including dwellings, tools, and other implements that positively identified it. The Viking settlement dates back to more than 500 years before Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) and has the earliest European structures found in North America.

The Vikings may have sailed there and fished there centuries earlier, and English explorer John Cabot had spotted Newfoundland in 1497, but it was the French who began to settle the territory they called “New France.” When French explorer Jacques Cartier (1491–1557) sailed to the Gulf of St. Lawrence in 1534, he claimed the land he found for France.

The earliest French settlements were established at Quebec City (1608) and Montreal (1642; originally called Ville Marie). Many of the early French settlers worked in the fur trade, forming lucrative economic alliances with Native American groups. Others hoped to find their fortune in gold and silver or by discovering new trade routes to Asia.

The territory was sparsely populated, though, and British settlers to the south began encroaching on French territory. The Maritime Provinces, including Acadia (now eastern Quebec, the Maritime Provinces, and northern New England), were particularly contested during the 18th century, and France and England fought a series of wars that involved Canada, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly, beginning in the late 17th century. By the end of the French and

Indian War in 1763 Britain had won nearly all of New France. The French population of Quebec, however, retained the rights to their own language, religion, and civil law.

During the American Revolution many colonists loyal to Britain, called “United Empire Loyalists,” moved north to Canada, increasing the British presence in the area. Fur traders and explorers continued westward until, in 1793 Sir Alexander Mackenzie (1822–92) reached the Pacific Ocean. In 1839 Britain combined the territories of Upper Canada (Ontario) and Lower Canada (Quebec) as their Canadian colonies. These colonies gained the right to internal self-government in 1840, although Britain continued to decide Canadian foreign policy until 1931, and Canada did not technically reach complete independence until 1982, when it obtained the right to amend its constitution.

On July 1, 1867, Britain’s North American provinces were united as the Dominion of Canada in the British North America Act (BNA). This event is marked each year on the national holiday of Canada Day. The British sovereign continues to be the nominal head of Canada’s government, although all political power is held by the nation’s parliament and prime minister.

Canada’s recent history has been marked by disputes over the continued French character of the province of Quebec, where 80 percent of the population is of French descent. On June 3, 1987, the Meech Lake Agreement was signed. It would have given Quebec constitutional protection to maintain its French language and culture within an otherwise English-speaking nation. However, the agreement was subject to ratification by the nation’s other provinces, and, as critics complained that it did not offer similar protections to other minority groups and appeared to give Quebec the right to override elements of the country’s constitution unilaterally, the measure failed. This sparked the rise of a powerful separatist movement in Quebec. In a referendum on October 30, 1995, a proposition to secede from Canada was defeated, but only barely, by the voters of the province.

Canada has worked to make amends to the Native American groups who lost their land and independence as French and British settlers took over their territory. On January 7, 1998, the government formally apologized to the groups for 150 years of abuse and, on April 1, 1999, the vast territory of Nunavut (“Our Land”) was carved out of Canada’s Northwest Territories province as a homeland for the Inuit nation.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Canada is bordered by the Arctic Ocean to the north, Alaska and the Pacific Ocean to the west, the North Atlantic Ocean to the east, and the United States to the south. It is the world’s second largest country in terms of area but has only one-tenth the population of the United States. Almost three-quar-

ters of all Canadians live within 100 miles of its southern border, because much of the rest of the country has harsh terrain and a severely cold climate. The Rocky Mountains and dense forests in the west make that region a tourist destination. Vast prairies and fertile fields of wheat and other grains characterize the nation’s midsection. The largest cities and major industrial centers lie near the Great Lakes, and, to the east, fishing villages and beaches line Canada’s Atlantic coast. The massive territory of the north is largely an Arctic wilderness.

As befits a country that is so large, the climate varies greatly, from the bitter cold of the north, where some islands have permanent icecaps and summers are short and cool, to the more temperate conditions of southern Canada’s wheat fields, and the generally humid weather of the southeast.

❁ ECONOMY

Canada has a free market economy led by service industries and manufacturing, although the occupations of its colonial settlers—farming, fishing, logging, and fur trapping—continue to provide valuable exports. The country’s main stock exchange is in Toronto. Canada is a major producer of oil, natural gas, and hydroelectric power, as well as a mining center, exporting minerals including copper, gold, iron ore, nickel, potash, uranium, and zinc, as well as diamonds, which have been found recently in the far north.

Fun Fact

Inuktitut, which means “like the Inuit,” is the language of the Inuit people; it belongs to the Eskimo-Aleut family of languages. Inuit is spoken from western Alaska to eastern Greenland, in all areas north of the tree line. Unlike most indigenous American languages it has widespread official support, especially in Canada, where it is taught in Inuit schools.

The United Empire Loyalists

In 1783 shortly after the end of the American Revolutionary War and the creation of the United States, about 35,000 people, called “Tories” by their former countrymen and “United Empire Loyalists” in Canada and England, moved to Nova Scotia and the unsettled lands north of Lake Ontario to start their lives again. Their resettlement resulted in immediate changes for the British colonies of Canada: the Atlantic province of Nova Scotia and the inland colony of Quebec had to be reconstituted. The forests west of the Bay of Fundy, initially included in French Acadia, had been merged with Nova Scotia. In 1784 these lands were made a separate colony called New Brunswick. At the same time Cape Breton Island was separated from Nova Scotia (a division reversed in 1820).

Fun Fact

Long before the Europeans found Canada, First Nations peoples discovered the food properties of maple sap, which they gathered every spring. As early as 1700 the maple leaf was serving as Canada's national symbol. On February 15, 1965, it was incorporated into Canada's flag.

Fun Fact

In French, *tourtière* means "pie pan."

Canada is also a leading lumber and paper producer and wheat exporter. Manufacturing cars, planes, and other transportation equipment is another important economic area. The government has an active role in Canada's economy; for example it provides free health services to all workers. Provincial governments own utilities and broadcasters. Foreign investment and ownership of Canadian businesses is widespread, especially from the United States, but also from Germany, Japan, and the United Kingdom. On January 1, 1994, Canada, Mexico, and the United

States entered the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), eliminating tariffs (taxes on imports) in the region. The United States is Canada's largest trading partner by far, although many citizens worry about its neighbor's outsize influence on its economy and culture.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Canadian culture is an uneasy blend of influences. Forty percent of Canadians trace their ancestry to the British Isles, while almost a third descend from Britain's historic rival France. Most of the French descendants reside in Quebec, where French is the official language. The Quebec legislature has passed several laws mandating the use of French in government and business. Court challenges and other rulings have changed those laws, but the province still requires French lettering to be larger than English on all bilingual advertisements. Influences of both cultures dominate the Canadian way of life, although the

country's government has worked to recognize all cultures within its borders, including Indian and Pakistani, Chinese, African, and West Indian, as well as Inuit and other First Nations people.

Almost two-thirds of Canadians are Christians (45 percent of the population is Roman Catholic). Other groups include Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, and Sikhs, and an impressive 16 percent report they have no religious affiliation.

Winter sports such as hockey and skiing are popular with many Canadians, as is lacrosse, which was played by First Nations people long before the Europeans arrived. The government has preserved wide stretches of territory as national parks for wilderness preservation as well as vacationing and recreation. The nation also has extensive networks of libraries and museums. Literature thrives in both French and English, and Canada has also become a center for film production.

The Canadian calendar includes many secular and religious holidays and festivals, when people can take time off from work and join their families in celebration of their history and culture.

❁ CUISINE

Beef is a staple of the Canadian diet, with steak and roast beef both popular dishes. Chicken, lamb, pork, and fish and other varieties of seafood are also popular. Lobsters are harvested along the Atlantic shore of Nova Scotia, fresh cod comes from the Grand Banks, and salmon are caught off both the Pacific and Atlantic coasts.

As residents of a wheat-producing nation, Canadians eat bread at most meals. Potatoes, beans, carrots, lettuce, and peas are common vegetables, as is hot soup. Canadians enjoy drinking coffee, tea, milk, wine, and beer. Favorite desserts include pies—apple, blueberry, peach, and rhubarb—and maple syrup finds many culinary uses. On major holidays such as Christmas and Thanksgiving families traditionally sit down to a turkey dinner. On Christmas in Quebec, where French cuisine predominates, many families share a meat pie known as *tourtière*.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

Canadians celebrate the first day of the calendar year, as do people in countries around the world. Banks, schools, and businesses are closed. On the night of December 31, or New Year's Eve, Canadians gather to celebrate the start of the new year at midnight. Celebrations continue on New Year's Day. Privately, many Canadians make resolutions on New Year's Day to improve themselves in some way or to break bad habits.

Famous Canadian Artists and Entertainers

Women

Margaret Atwood (b. 1939)
Neve Campbell (b. 1973)
Céline Dion (b. 1968)
Jillian Hennessy (b. 1969)
Margot Kidder (b. 1948)
k. d. lang (b. 1961)
Sarah McLachlan (b. 1968)
Joni Mitchell (b. 1943)
Alanis Morissette (b. 1974)
Carrie-Anne Moss (b. 1967)
Anne Murray (b. 1945)

Men

Dan Akroyd (b. 1952)
Paul Anka (b. 1941)
Raymond Burr (1917–93)
John Candy (d. 1994)
Jim Carrey (b. 1962)
Michael J. Fox (b. 1961)
Graham Greene (b. 1952)
Keanu Reeves (b. 1964)
William Shatner (b. 1931)
Donald Sutherland (b. 1934)
Neil Young (b. 1945)

Tourtière: Pork Pie for Christmas

Serves 6

Ingredients:

2 large potatoes, peeled and cut into chunks
 1 lb. ground pork
 1 clove garlic, minced
 1/4 tsp. ground ginger
 1/2 c. onion, finely chopped
 1/2 c. beef broth
 1/4 tsp. ground savory
 1 bay leaf
 1/8 tsp. ground cloves
 pinch of cinnamon
 salt and pepper (to taste)
 2-crust piecrust

Preparation:

Cut up potatoes and cook in boiling water 20 minutes or until soft. Drain and mash. Brown the pork, and drain the excess fat. Stir in remaining ingredients, 1/2 tsp. salt and 1/4 tsp. pepper. Cover and simmer 20 minutes, stirring often. Remove and discard bay leaf. Stir in potatoes; allow mixture to cool. (Preheat oven to 400°.) Roll half the pastry into a 12-inch circle. Line a 9-inch pie plate with pastry. Trim pastry even with rim. Fill with meat mixture. Roll out remaining dough. Place over filling; trim to 1/2 inch beyond rim. Seal, flute, and cut small slits in the top. Cut out decorative shapes from dough scraps and place on top (optional). Bake at 400° for 30 minutes.

❁ VICTORIA DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Monday on or before May 25

On Victoria Day Canadians mark the birthday of Queen Victoria of England, their ruler from 1837 to 1901, who was born on May 24, 1819. As members of the British Commonwealth, Canadians mark



The Canadian Air Force Snowbirds fly past the Peace Tower on Parliament Hill during Canada Day celebrations in Ottawa on July 1. (AP Photo/CP, Tom Hanson)

their sovereign's birthday each year but have never stopped celebrating Victoria's day, which has been a state holiday since 1952. On Victoria Day Canadians celebrate the birthdays of both Victoria and their current sovereign, no matter when the current sovereign was born. People gather with friends and family to watch fireworks in cities across the country.

Although this is an official holiday in Quebec (because it is a national holiday), Québécois are not particularly excited about celebrating Canada's ties to the British monarchy. For this reason the Quebec National Assembly made May 24 a provincial holiday—National Patriots Day (in French, Journée nationale des patriotes), to commemorate the English-Canadian and French-Canadian patriots who fought British colonial power in the Lower Canada Rebellion (1837). Prior to 2003 May 24 was celebrated in Quebec as Fête de Dollard, after Adam Dollard des Ormeaux (1635–1660), a New France colonist who died a martyr's death when he, with 16 volunteers, was killed by the Iroquois.

Since 1901, May 24 had been celebrated throughout the British Empire as Empire Day. In 1952 the Statutes of Canada were amended to move the holiday to the Monday before May 25. From 1953 on, Empire Day was made the date of the Queen's official birthday in Canada, and the connection was made permanent in 1957. Then in 1958, Empire Day became known as Commonwealth Day.

❁ CANADA DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 1

On Canada Day Canadians celebrate their country with patriotic displays. The holiday was known as Dominion Day from 1879 until it got its

Fun Fact

Several years of intensive exploration in Canada's Northwest Territories led to the discovery of dozens of kimberlite pipes under Lac de Gras, filled with remarkable diamonds, in beautiful, exceptionally white stones.

Fun Fact

In the Yukon Canada Day is also the day for the annual Yukon Gold Panning Championship. Each competitor is given a bucket of gravel containing a few gold flakes. The winning panner extracts the most gold in the shortest time and receives a trip to the World Gold Panning Championship.

current name in 1982. It marks the day when Britain's North American provinces were united as the Dominion of Canada under the British North America Act (BNA).

Canadians gather for public celebrations across the country. In Ottawa nearly 350,000 people turn out annually for a concert on Parliament Hill, followed by fireworks. In other provinces Canada Day Committees plan local events that are funded by seed money from the national government.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada Day is known as Memorial Day, and citizens commemorate the many soldiers from the

province who lost their lives in the World War I Battle of Beaumont Hamel, part of the Battle of the Somme.

☪ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First Monday of September

Canada's version of Labor Day got its start with a workers' demonstration in Toronto on April 15, 1872. Labor Day continued to be observed in the spring until it was moved to its current date and declared an official holiday by Parliament in 1894. Many European countries celebrate Labor Day on May 1. In Canada banks, government offices, and schools are closed, and many families enjoy a last long summer weekend.

The idea for the holiday of Labor Day is often credited to a pair of Americans who organized the first Labor Day parade in the United States in 1882, but Canadians maintain that the event got its start here with the demonstration organized by the Toronto Trades Assembly, a labor organization. At the time unions were illegal in Canada, and 24 leaders of a printers' union were held in jail for going on strike to gain a nine-hour workday. Nearly 10,000 people came out to cheer the labor unionists that day. A few months later, a similar event took place in Ottawa, where seven unions organized a mile-long parade in support of better working conditions.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

Fun Fact

The tradition of wearing poppies on Remembrance Day to commemorate Canada's war dead derives from the 1915 poem "In Flanders Fields," by Canadian Lt. Col. John McCrae. The poem concludes, "If ye break faith with us who die/We shall not sleep, though poppies grow/In Flanders fields."

☪ THANKSGIVING

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Second Monday of October

Canada's Thanksgiving has its origins in celebrations that predate the country's settlement. For centuries European farmers had marked the harvest time with festivals of thanksgiving and brought those traditions to the Americas. In 1578 English navigator Martin Frobisher held a ceremony in Newfoundland to give thanks for surviving the long journey across the Atlantic Ocean, a tradition that was continued by settlers in that region. Thanksgiving in the United States, commemorating the Massachusetts Bay Colony's first harvest in 1621, also influenced Canada's holiday, as colonists loyal to Britain, known as the United Empire Loyalists, brought the tradition to Canada when they left the American colonies in advance of the Revolutionary War.

Canada's first official Thanksgiving holiday was celebrated on April 5, 1872, because the Prince of Wales had recovered from a serious illness. In 1879 Parliament declared Thanksgiving a national holiday. The date has changed over the years, until it took its current place on the calendar in 1957.

Canadians mark the holiday by gathering with families for a traditional turkey dinner.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS; THANKSGIVING

☪ REMEMBRANCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 11

Remembrance Day takes place on November 11, the date of the armistice that ended World War I in 1918. It continues as a national holiday today to remember all Canadians who have lost their lives in wars and peacekeeping operations. Since 1921 many Canadians have pinned a blood-red poppy to their clothing on the holiday as a symbol of remembrance. Associating poppies with war dead is a tradition that dates back to 19th-century Europe. On Remembrance Day the trumpet or bugle call known as "Last Post," similar to the American "Taps," is sounded at official ceremonies.

☪ BOXING DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 26, if a weekday, or first weekday following December 26

Boxing Day originated in England in the mid-19th century as a day for members of the upper classes to give boxes of fruit, clothing, or money to servants and other workers, much as businesses today often give holiday bonuses. Since the gifts were presented in boxes, the day took the name Boxing Day. In churches it is traditionally the day when alms boxes are opened and distributed to the poor.

Today it is a national holiday in Canada, the United Kingdom, and several other countries that were formerly a part of the British Commonwealth. Family and friends often gather together, and many people donate time or money to the poor. It is also one of the biggest shopping days of the year in Canada, since stores have major post-Christmas sales.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Religious Holidays

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

This Christian festival commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus, and it is the central holiday on the Christian calendar. It has been in the Christian liturgical calendar even longer than Easter has, although no one is sure why it is called Good Friday. Some have suggested that the use of *good* in the name goes back to Old English and means “God’s” Friday, while others interpret *good* to mean something like “observed as holy.” This observance is also known as Black Friday or Sorrowful Friday, and in Eastern Orthodox Churches it is called Great Friday.

In Canada Good Friday is a national holiday. Many Christians attend a special service mourning Jesus, which traditionally lasts from noon until 3 P.M., representing the last three hours of darkness, while Jesus suffered on the Cross. Some Christians observe Good Friday as a fast day in mourning for Jesus. When they eat, it is generally fish instead of meat.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter, which celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus after his Crucifixion, is the most important holiday on the Christian calendar, and the culmination of the religion’s Holy Week including Good Friday, a national holiday in Canada that takes place two days prior. Easter also marks the end of the 40-day period of Lent. The date of Easter is based on the lunar calendar and can occur on any Sunday between March 22 and April 25. Depending on the denomination churches hold services on Saturday evening, at sunrise on Sunday, or on Sunday morning. Families gather on Easter Sunday for a festive meal, often featuring lamb, a symbol of Jesus, “the Lamb of God.” Symbols of the holiday include lilies, candles, and hot-cross buns.

Easter is also a celebration of spring, and Easter eggs and Easter bunnies, while having no direct con-

nection to the story of Jesus, are both symbols of fertility appropriated from European pagan religions. Many families paint hard-boiled eggs and hide them for children to find in an Easter Egg Hunt. Many people also wear new clothes on Easter, another symbol of the new life promised by Jesus’ Resurrection. In some communities people put on their finest clothes for an annual Easter Parade.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

ROSH HASHANAH

Observed by: Jews

Observed on: September or October

Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year, observed over two consecutive days during which Jews attend services marking the beginning of 10 days of repentance and spiritual renewal, culminating on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. *Rosh Hashanah* means “head of the year.” The date of the holiday, which like all Jewish festivals begins at dusk the previous day, is based on the Jewish lunar calendar, and can vary widely. In Jewish tradition Rosh Hashanah begins God’s annual judging of all human beings, when he decides who will live and die in the year ahead, a judgment made final on Yom Kippur. During services, a ram’s horn, called a shofar, is blown to call congregants to repentance. When families gather to share a meal on the holiday, many dip apples in honey, a tradition symbolizing hope for a sweet year ahead.

See also Volume III: JUDAISM; ROSH HASHANAH; YOM KIPPUR

YOM KIPPUR

Observed by: Jews

Observed on: September or October

Yom Kippur is the holiest day on the Jewish calendar. The date of the holiday is based on the Jewish lunar calendar and can vary widely. It is a fast day devoted to atonement for the sins of the past year, and a day on which Jews believe that God completes his judgment of humanity, deciding who will live and die in the year to come. The evening before the holiday Jews attend a special service and begin their fast. The next day they attend services throughout the day until sundown, when the shofar, a ram’s horn, is blown to mark the end of the 10 days of repentance that began on Rosh Hashanah.

See also Volume III: JUDAISM; ROSH HASHANAH; YOM KIPPUR

EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic lunar calendar

Fun Fact

Caribou is the traditional drink of the winter carnival. Recipes vary but usually include brandy, vodka, sherry, and port. Its invention is credited to a Quebec City bar called Ti-Pere, and it has been a part of the festival since its beginning.

During the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, the ninth month on the Islamic calendar, many Muslims do not eat or drink between sunrise and sundown, focusing their attention on study of the Koran. In Islamic tradition the prophet Muhammad received the first of the revelations that make up the Koran during Ramadan.

Eid al-Fitr, the joyous Feast of Fast-Breaking, takes place on the first day following Ramadan. The date is based on the Islamic lunar calendar, so the date varies (the Islamic calendar makes no adjustments to remain aligned with the Western solar calendar, so holidays move gradually through the entire solar year). On the first day of Eid al-Fitr, children dress in new clothes and receive gifts, and families share a special meal, often featuring sweet foods made with dates and honey.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas, which marks the birth of Jesus, is an official holiday in Canada, and all businesses close. As a multicultural country settled by people from

around the world, Canada's Christmas traditions include a mix of customs—Santa Claus (or Père Noël), Christmas trees, mistletoe, holiday lights, and gingerbread houses. In Quebec and other regions of Canada the tradition of a Nativity crèche dates back to the first French settlers. Crèches depict the infant Jesus or scenes from his life and those of the saints. Over the past century more individual families have assembled or purchased their own crèches as part of their home celebration.

Catholic families gather in churches for Mass, and then in their homes to exchange gifts and enjoy a festive meal. Many Canadian churches celebrate three services on Christmas, and it is tradi-

Fun Fact

In 1917 two ships, one filled with explosives, collided in the harbor at Halifax, Nova Scotia, causing an explosion that leveled part of the city and killed nearly 2,000 people. The people of Boston quickly sent supplies and emergency workers. As a way of saying thanks, the people of Nova Scotia have donated one of the province's finest trees to serve as the city's official Christmas tree in Boston Common.

tional to visit the church crèche after the day's final services.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ QUEBEC WINTER CARNIVAL

Observed in: Quebec
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January–February

More than one million people attend the world's biggest winter celebration, a two-week event featuring an international ice-sculpting competition, evening parades, and a famous canoe race across the St. Lawrence River. Celebrants traditionally wear red hats and fringed belts reminiscent of the kind worn by Native Americans of the region. The Carnival begins on the last Friday in January and runs for 17 days. It shares its origins with traditional Catholic pre-Lenten celebrations such as Mardi Gras. Quebec's first winter Carnival took place in 1894. After starts and stops the first official version was in 1955.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL

❁ FAMILY DAY

Observed in: Alberta
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Third Monday in February

Family Day is an official holiday only in Alberta. It is meant to recognize the values of the pioneers who settled the region and to celebrate home and family. The provincial legislature organizes events for families in major cities like Calgary and Edmonton. The date coincides with President's Day in the United States. Businesses have the option of giving employees a holiday on Family Day or on the Civic Holiday in August. Those with close ties to American suppliers and partners often choose Family Day as their company holiday.

❁ DISCOVERY DAY

Observed in: Newfoundland and Labrador
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Monday closest to June 24

On June 24, 1497, explorer John Cabot (né Giovanni Caboto) reached the Newfoundland region in his ship *The Matthew*. He explored the area for almost a month before returning to England. In 1498 he set off on a new voyage to the region but was never heard from again. Today residents of Newfoundland and Labrador mark Cabot's arrival by observing Discovery Day instead of the midsummer Civic Holiday many other provinces celebrate.

Since the 500th anniversary of the voyage in 1997, it has also been referred to as Cabot 500 Day.

❁ QUEBEC NATIONAL DAY (FÊTE NATIONALE)

Observed in: Quebec

Observed by: French Canadians

Observed on: Monday closest to June 24

On Quebec National Day French Canadians honor the province's patron saint John the Baptist. This feast day was once a solemn religious holiday when the Roman Catholic Church controlled much of the region's daily life. Today it is primarily a secular holiday, a day for Québécois pride, parades, and civic celebrations.

❁ CALGARY STAMPEDE

Observed in: Calgary

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July

The Calgary Stampede, attended by more than one million people annually, is one of the world's largest rodeos, and calls itself "the greatest outdoor show on Earth." It is also a carnival and agricultural fair. The fair got its start in 1886, and the first stampede was held in 1912. In 1923 it was established as an annual event. Today the 10-day festival is held annually in early July.

❁ CIVIC HOLIDAY

Observed in: Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Northwest Territories, Nova Scotia, Nunavut, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First Monday in August

The first Monday in August is a holiday in all Canadian provinces except Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Yukon Territory. The holiday goes by different names in different provinces, but the goal is the same everywhere—a long midsummer weekend for workers and families. Alternate names include: Heritage Day (Alberta), British Columbia Day (British Columbia), New Brunswick Day (New Brunswick), Simcoe Day (Ontario), Natal Day (Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island), Saskatchewan Day (Saskatchewan).

The concept got its start in Toronto in 1869, when the city council authorized a midsummer "day of recreation." In some locations, the day is filled with parades and fireworks. However it is not a national holiday, so official closings and observances vary from region to region, although most workers in observing provinces are given the day off.

❁ REGATTA DAY

Observed in: Newfoundland and Labrador

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First Wednesday in August (weather permitting)

The Royal St. John's Regatta has been held each year on Quidi Vidi Lake in Newfoundland and Labrador's capital since at least 1826, and it is the oldest continuing annual sporting event in North America. Tens of thousands of people attend the regatta and its accompanying festival, which is a public holiday in the province. However unlike other holidays, Regatta Day cannot be officially declared until the St. John's Regatta Committee determines that weather conditions are ideal for racing.

❁ DISCOVERY DAY

Observed in: Yukon Territory

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Third Monday in August

On August 16 or 17, 1896, George Washington Carmack and two aboriginal men discovered gold on Rabbit Creek in the northwest Yukon Territory, kicking off the furious Klondike Gold Rush. For a time remote Dawson City was the biggest city west of Winnipeg and north of Seattle but, when the gold ran out, the population shrank. Today the Yukon marks Carmack's find by observing Discovery Day instead of the midsummer Civic Holiday many other provinces celebrate.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

Canadian families of different faiths welcome their children into their religions in different ways. Roman Catholics and other Christian faiths christen infants in the church through the ritual of baptism, a symbolic washing with water that signifies the child's entry into the religion. At these ceremonies children are also formally named, although in practice most children receive their names before the ceremony. Other denominations such as Baptists do not baptize infants because they believe that baptism must always involve a public statement of faith by the person to be baptized.

Jewish boys are circumcised, usually on their eighth day of life, in a ceremony known as the Brit (or Bris) Milah. The ceremony can take place in a synagogue but often occurs in a family's home and is performed by a person called a mohel (also moyel). The circumcision is considered a sign of the covenant between God and the Jewish people established with the patriarch Abraham. Muslim families also circumcise infant boys.

❁ COMING OF AGE

When Jewish boys reach the age of 13, many take part in a ritual known as a bar mitzvah. Some denominations hold a similar ceremony for girls called a bat (or bas) mitzvah. The name literally means “son (or daughter) of the law,” and the event marks a young person’s entry into the adult community, including his or her responsibility for following all of the commandments of the religion. While no ceremony is required, many young people spend months studying a passage from the Torah that they will read in Hebrew in the synagogue on the day of their bar/bat mitzvahs. Families typically throw large parties after the bar/bat mitzvah. Some Jews believe that these parties have become a conspicuous display of wealth that overshadows the spiritual aspects of the day.

In a similar vein many Christian young people take part in a ceremony called a “confirmation,” which usually involves the rites of baptism. For Roman Catholics confirmation brings the grace of the Holy Spirit; for Protestants, it reinforces the entry into the faith promised at baptism. In many churches, such as the Roman Catholic and Lutheran, confirmation for young people also represents the culmination of several years of religious study.

❁ MARRIAGE

Weddings are important legal and religious events for Canadian couples. Almost 150,000 couples get married in Canada each year, although about 70,000 couples end their marriage each year through the legal process of divorce. While some immigrant cultures retain the practice of arranged marriage, almost all Canadians choose their own spouses. Like other Western nations Canadians have debated laws permitting same-sex couples to marry and take on the legal benefits and responsibilities and benefits of marriage. Most laws pertaining to marriage in Canada are set at the provincial level, where marriage licenses are issued. In 2005 Canada’s parliament legalized same-sex marriage, even though several provinces were already allowing it.

While some Canadians choose to be married in civil ceremonies, marriage is an important religious ceremony for followers of most of the world’s religions. Christian and Jewish couples are married by either a priest, minister, or rabbi, and all these faiths’ ceremonies involve a public declaration of commitment to the marriage, the presence of witnesses, and the exchange of rings, the latter a custom dating back at least to Roman times. Many couples write their own vows as substitutes or additions to traditional wedding liturgy. Roman Catholic weddings

take place during Mass, and the couple receives Communion.

❁ DEATH

Canadian death customs share many elements with customs from around the world, such as the public announcement of a death, a funeral ceremony, and a burial. These long-standing customs are designed to show respect and pay tribute to the dead, and to offer comfort to survivors. Canadian funeral directors usually prepare bodies for burial through the embalming process, because funerals often take place several days after a death. However the Jewish funeral preparation differs, since tradition requires burial no more than two nights after a death and forbids embalming. In advance of a funeral many families hold an all-night vigil beside the corpse. Christians call this custom a “wake”; other religions use different names for similar practices. Most Canadian funerals involve a public ceremony at a funeral home followed by the public burial of the deceased in a coffin at a cemetery.

Cremation has gained in popularity in Canada in recent years. Cremation is the traditional practice of Buddhists and Hindus, although Judaism and some Christian denominations discourage it. In the case of burials, a second, shorter graveside ceremony is often held in advance of the burial, after which many families return to a relative’s home to share a meal.

Further Reading

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∞ Cape Verde ∞

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Group of islands in the North Atlantic Ocean that are part of Western Africa, west of Senegal
Size	1,557 sq. mi.
Capital City	Praia
Flag Description	The flag is blue with a red-on-white horizontal band in the lower half of the flag. Off-center to the left, a circle of ten yellow stars encompasses the upper and lower blue bands.
Independence	July 5, 1975 (from Portugal)
Population	418,224 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Cape Verdean
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Creole (mulatto, 71%); African (28%)
Major Language(s)	Portuguese (official); Crioulo (a blend of Portuguese and West African)
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (62%); indigenous beliefs (23%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day, July 5

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The Cape Verde Islands were uninhabited when the Portuguese discovered them in the 15th century. The islands became a renowned center for trade (including the slave trade) by the 16th century, and by the 19th century they were used as important ports of call during transatlantic travel.

The islands became a colony of Portugal in 1495, an overseas province in 1951, and an independent nation in 1975. The constitution was established in 1980 and revised in 1992, 1995, and 1999. A multiparty democratic system was introduced in 1991 (with the Movement for Democracy [MPD] winning elections) making Cape Verde one of the most stable democracies in Africa.

The prime minister, president, and members of the General Assembly are elected, and judges on the Supreme Court are appointed by the other three branches of government. The African Party for the Independence of Cape Verde (Partido Africano da Independência de Cabo Verde [PAICV]) was

formed after hopes of aligning with Guinea Bissau were dashed in 1980, following a coup there. PAICV won the February 2001 general elections. They were opposed by the other three major parties grouped under the banner of Democratic Alliance for Change (DAC), and made up of the PCD, PTS, and UCID parties. In the early years of the 21st century groups of the DAC continue to retain seats in the National Assembly.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The Cape Verde archipelago is a group of ten islands and eight islets (very small islands) located in the Atlantic Ocean, 385 miles off the coast of West Africa. It includes two groups of volcanic islands that are mountainous and surrounded by reefs and cliffs. Nine out of 10 islands of the archipelago are inhabited as are five of the islets. The islands are divided into two groups: the windward group to the north (Barlavento) and the leeward group to the south (Sotavento). The largest island (in the Sotavento group) is São Tiago (or Santiago), which covers about 382 square miles. Fogo (also in the Sotavento group) has an active volcano of the same name. There have

Cape Verde Hurricanes

These hurricanes are among the most intense in the world and have this name because they originate near Cape Verde and move westward in August or September each year. There are about two such powerful hurricanes every year that develop in the ocean around these islands.

been seven volcanic eruptions on Mt. Fogo (*fogo* means “fire”) since 1760, the last one being in 1995. At 9,281 feet high Mt. Fogo is also the highest point in the islands. Santo Antão is the greenest of them all, owing to very heavy rainfall. The other islands are dry and hilly, making them difficult to farm.

The climate in these islands is one of the most pleasant of any West African country. The warmest month is September, averaging 81°F, and the coolest month is February, averaging 70°F. Due to the vast expanse of sea currents around the islands, they naturally tend to be cooler than most landlocked or western coastal areas. The islands are almost always under the influence of the dry northeast winds. There is virtually no rainfall, except for a period from August through October, when an average of 1.6 inches a month is recorded. These rains can fail for years at a time.

The Cape Verde islands are especially popular for their marine life, chief among them being blue humpback whales, dolphins, parrotfish (a brilliant blue-green fish), moray eels, barracuda, porpoises, and loggerhead, hawksbill, and green turtles. The corals and colorful fish are a big attraction in the waters off Sal, a famous tourist island of Cape Verde. The Cape Verde petrel, brown booby, Raza Island lark, tropic bird, frigate bird, and Cape Verde warbler are among the species of birds found there. Among the reptiles inhabiting the islands are the giant Cape Verde gecko and the Cape Verde skink (a variety of lizard).

ECONOMY

Cape Verde was given this name because it was very green (*verde* is Portuguese for “green”) due to the

Islands of Cape Verde

Sal, a desert island that is quite popular with tourists, has an international airport. São Tiago is another popular island, where the capital city Praia is located. São Vicente is the second most important island and contains the liveliest city of Cape Verde: Mindelo. The picturesque city of Mindelo is perched on a rocky plateau called Platô. Tourists love this place for its beaches on the northern end. It has more nightclubs and bars than Praia and is a tourist hotspot.

dense vegetation. This is also one of the reasons that it attracted Portuguese colonizers who set up sugar plantations and cotton mills that were worked by slave labor. However agriculture has been in continuous decline due to soil erosion, deforestation, and desertification.

One of Cape Verde’s greatest problems has been soil erosion. Its adverse effects began to be seen in the early 19th century, mainly the result of overgrazing by the goat population. Since independence a nationwide campaign to prevent soil erosion has been undertaken, which includes planting drought-resistant varieties of trees (acacia trees now cover 7 percent of the land surface), building small dikes, and utilizing better ways of farming.

Cape Verde has to import 85 to 90 percent of its food requirements, and this is the main cause of the country’s trade deficit and dependence on foreign aid. Because of its strategic location (close to the north south sea routes), Cape Verde has turned into an important communication station as well as an important air-refueling site. In the early years of the 21st century the main revenue generating sectors of the economy were related to transport, commerce, public services, and tourism. These contribute 72 percent of the total gross domestic product (GDP).

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Culturally each island group is distinct, reflecting their geographic separation. In the 15th century the Portuguese brought slaves from mainland Africa to work the island plantations. Consequently most Cape Verdeans are a mix of African and European ancestry.

Portuguese is the official language here, though many speak Crioulo, a mix of Portuguese and West African tongues.

Cape Verde also boasts a rich heritage of Crioulo music and literature. Prior to 1975 a Crioulo literature dealing with liberation and independence thrived. However post-independence, writers began focusing on racial discrimination and the group emigrations of those called Americanos, inhabitants who had fled to America. Kaoberdiano Dambara (b. 1937) and Onésimo Silveira (b. 1935) are famous writers who still write in Crioulo and Portuguese, respectively.

The capital city of Praia has a popular dance form, *funana*, which uses foot-stomping beats. *Morna* is the slow way of singing the national song, whereas *coladeira* has a fast beat. Stringed instruments, such as the viola, guitar, violin, and the *cavaquinho* (a small arm-sized guitar) are prominently used. Drums are also popular. Cesaria Evora (b. 1941), with a worldwide following, is the most celebrated musician on the islands. Popularly known as “the barefoot diva” because of her propensity to appear on stage barefoot, she has worked tirelessly for the disadvantaged women and children of her country.

Since about 60 percent of the people are Roman Catholics, the church is a powerful institution on these islands. It owned the largest pieces of land on

the islands at the time of independence, though succeeding land reforms did reduce its economic power slightly. While most people are Roman Catholics, many also believe in witches and make regular visits to healers. Nuno Miranda was a renowned spiritualist and traditional healer of the 20th century, whose followers came from all classes of Cape Verdean society.

Historically due to the lack of resources and irregular, scanty rainfall, many inhabitants (around 500,000) have immigrated to the United States and European countries.

❁ CUISINE

Catchupa, the national dish of Cape Verde, is a stew made of beans, hominy (kernels of corn that have been soaked in a caustic solution and then washed to remove the hulls). *Catchupa rica* is *catchupa* with meat and is prepared for special occasions, such as wedding ceremonies. Eating *catchupa* is a symbol of one's social and economic standing. Those who cannot afford meat eat *catchupa pova* containing fish, which is inexpensive and abundant. Greens are grown in gardens along with *mandioca* (similar to cassava leaves) and beans to feed and fatten the pigs for consumption during festivals.

The staple food item is corn, which is usually served finely ground. *Xerem*, dried corn pounded in a mortar to the fineness of rice, is the staple of feasts. And *kuskus* (Arabic, couscous), ground finer still and steamed in a distinctive ceramic pot called a *binde*, is a special treat served hot with butter and milk (*kuskus ku leite*) or molasses (*kuskus ku mel*). Yams, plantains, and cassava are other common foods. *Canja* is a thick chicken soup, whereas *caldo do peixe* is a traditional fish soup, painstakingly prepared using cassava, tomatoes, potatoes, yams, pumpkin, and plantains. A popular sweet dish *azucarinhas* is made from guava, papaya, banana, and corn laced with sweet syrup for enhanced flavor. One of the islands called Boa Vista is famous for its cheeses.

Pastel com diablo dentro, which means "pastry with the Devil inside," is a famous dish made with onions, tomatoes, and fresh tuna wrapped in a pastry made with corn flour and boiled potatoes. This is then deep-fried and eaten hot. Banana *enroladas* (deep-fried bananas wrapped in pastry) is another favorite. *Manga de conserva*, which is an unsweetened, sour, chutneylike mango dish, is also popular in Cape Verde.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

Music, singing, and dancing are important elements of New Year's celebrations in the Cape Verde Islands. There is a good deal of revelry and feasting to welcome in the new year.

Catchupa

Any place becomes home to Cape Verdeans if they can find *catchupa*. It is the staple food on these islands that some spend as much as four hours preparing. For Cape Verdeans scattered around the world, it is always a special occasion when friends gather to share a well-made kettle of *catchupa*. These festive occasions are called *catchupada*. What goes into a kettle of *catchupa* may depend on whether it has been a year of rain or a year of drought. In a good year there will always be greens, *mandioca* (cassava), potatoes, maybe squash, yams, and plenty of pork meat. In a dry year there will be some corn, a handful of beans, and a piece of salt pork.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role in their societies that workers play. The May 1 observance of Labor Day has its origins in the international socialist movement of the 1880s. The day was designated as an international observance in 1889 to coincide with an 1890 general strike in the United States called by the American Federation of Labor (AFL) to win an eight-hour workday. Businesses, schools, and government offices are closed in Cape Verde.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 5

Cape Verdeans observe this day with pride and enthusiasm, since it commemorates their independence from Portuguese rule in 1975. As an independent nation Cape Verde can boast of its record as one of the most stable democratic governments in Africa. Independence Day is a national holiday with businesses, schools, and government offices closed for the day. Many Cape Verdeans also attend church to commemorate this day.

Religious Holidays

❁ CARNIVAL

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Tuesday before Lent

This is a traditional holiday in many countries (especially those with Roman Catholic populations). It is the last chance for revelry before Lent,

the 40-day Christian period of austerity. People usually wear fancy costumes made especially for this day and parade in the streets. Parades, music, and masks are characteristic of the holiday, often called Mardi Gras (which means “Fat Tuesday” in French), and the day is considered the biggest annual show on the islands, full of color and people dancing through the streets. Strings of colorful beads of various shapes and sizes, doubloons (old gold Spanish coins), and outlandish costumes are traditional props used in the celebrations.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

This Christian festival commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. It has been in the Christian liturgical calendar even longer than Easter has although no one is sure why it is called Good Friday. Some have suggested that the use of *good* in the name goes back to Old English and means “God’s” Friday, while others interpret *good* to mean something like “observed as holy.” This observance is also known as Black Friday or Sorrowful Friday, and in Eastern Orthodox Churches it is called Great Friday.

People fast during the day and attend special prayer services with readings from the Gospel, recounting events in the life of Jesus leading up to his Crucifixion. This a solemn day marked by minimal socialization, distractions, and noise. The hours from noon until three in the afternoon are the hours in which Jesus was crucified. An unusual quiet marks this day in Cape Verde.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

This Christian holiday, marking the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead, is accompanied by celebration and feasting. Easter is celebrated for two days in Cape Verde—Sunday and Monday—both of which are national holidays with businesses and schools closed. On Easter Sunday Catholic Cape Verdeans attend special Easter Masses. The Monday holiday includes egg-rolling competitions for the children. Easter Egg Hunts are also popular; children must find colorful chocolate or candy eggs that the adults have hidden inside or outside their homes.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: August 15

This Christian holiday commemorates the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (mother of Jesus) into heaven. Catholic Cape Verdeans attend Mass and light candles in honor of Mary.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

ALL SAINTS’ DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: November 1

This day is celebrated in honor of all Christian saints, both known and unknown. Catholics usually attend church for a special Mass followed by a feast.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS’ DAY; CHRISTIANITY

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Like Christians all over the world, Cape Verdeans celebrate Christmas to mark the birth of Jesus. After church services there is a lot of music, singing, dancing, feasting, and an exchange of gifts.

See also Volume III: CHRISTMAS; CHRISTIANITY

Regional Holidays

TABANKA

Observed in: São Tiago and Fogo

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May

The islanders of Fogo and São Tiago celebrate the African feast of Tabanka each year because this was the time of the year when the slaves were given some liberty, and they used the occasion to celebrate with revelry and feasting. The word *tabanka* means an “association of mutual help” or a “brotherhood.” Its original meaning “small village” is still current in Guinea-Bissau and other countries along the west coast of Africa, but that sense was lost on Cape Verde because the African slaves were not allowed to live among their ethnic groups.

People dress up as royalty of earlier times, blowing conch shells and horns and playing drums. Throughout the festival people are supposed to embrace humor. Even if somebody dies, humor is regained immediately after the funeral ceremony. Interestingly a local law forbids intimate relations between husbands and wives during this festival.

❁ THE FEAST OF ST. PHILIP (SÃO FILIPE)

Observed in: All islands (especially Fogo Island)

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Every island celebrates a saint's day devoted to its own patron saint. São Filipe (Fogo's largest city) draws crowds of people from all over the island on May 1 to celebrate the Feast Day, or Name Day, of their patron St. Philip. The feasting is elaborate and attracts huge, enthusiastic crowds. Three women using a big ceremonial mortar pound corn to the rhythm of drumming and singing around them. A goat or lamb is slaughtered for supper, and a *mastro*, a replica of a ship's mast, is erected and strung with branches of coconut palm or wild olive. The *mastro*, blessed with a magical charm, is placed at the entrance of the church to the beating of drums, clapping, and chants, which are typically African in nature and content. The *mastro* tradition can also be seen in the feasts of Santo Antão, Santo Andre, São Pedro, and São João on the islands of Santo Antão and Brava.

❁ FEAST OF SÃO JOÃO

Observed in: Brava region

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Usually mid-year

In the Feast of São João *kola* (or *cola*) dancing breaks out during the high moments of the feast, which begins dramatically with exploding fireworks. The dance involves a gentle bumping of the abdomens of the dancers. Eating, drinking, and singing love songs are the main activities. There is also quite a bit of fortune-telling with playing cards. A bonfire is lit to drive away evil forces from the land, which can be a peasant's only source of wealth. In the evening people (especially the young) dance hand-in-hand around the bonfire, bending over it occasionally for good luck.

In Santo Antão Island, the northernmost island, people bring along the first harvest, which is sold off later to benefit the church. In Brava (the smallest island) the fruits are tied to the ceremonial *mastro* ("ship mast") and for anybody to take home once the celebrations are over.

Rites of Passage

❁ COMING OF AGE

The Batuku festival is celebrated on almost all islands though most predominantly on São Tiago. It calls for special mention as it initiates young women

and is also a part of the wedding ceremonies on some islands. The most experienced woman dances in the middle with gyrating hip movements. The *batxudas* (or *badjudas*, meaning "the young girls") follow it up with their own sensual gyrating hip movements, acknowledging their adulthood and desire to get married. It is traditional for the girls to cover their faces with their hands and close their eyes as a sign of modesty while dancing.

❁ MARRIAGE

The Batuku dance, which follows a call-and-response pattern in its later part, is traditionally performed at weddings. Women sing songs in a mocking manner, advising the to-be-married couple, and emphasizing that their single days are about to be over. This dance is an essential part of the marriage ceremony on some of the islands, such as Santo Antão and São Nicolau.

Further Reading

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Fun Fact

Flags hold great importance for the ritual-loving people of these islands.

For instance before being paraded around on horseback, flags are dipped in the sea and blessed by the local church. Before independence, only the influential people in society were allowed to parade the flags, but not so anymore.

Fun Fact

In the São João celebrations, some islanders wear a model ship costume and go from house to house asking for gifts. The ship bears a Portuguese Cross and is symbolic (like the *mastro*) of what happened between them and the colonizers historically (*carjenas*, which were pirate ships, used to come and steal their wealth). The national flag has replaced the Portuguese flag.

~ Cayman Islands ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	The Caribbean Sea, halfway between Cuba and Honduras
Size	101 sq. mi.
Capital City	George Town
Flag Description	The flag of the Cayman Islands is blue, with the flag of the United Kingdom in the upper hoist-side quadrant and the Caymanian coat of arms centered on the outer half of the flag; the coat of arms includes a pineapple and turtle above a shield with three stars (representing the three islands) and a scroll at the bottom bearing the motto “He Hath Founded It Upon The Seas.”
Independence	N.A. A British crown colony
Population	44,270 (2005 est.)
Government	British crown colony
Nationality	Caymanian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Mixed race (40%); white (20%); black (20%); other ethnic groups (20%)
Major Language(s)	English
Major Religion(s)	Christian
National Holiday(s)	New Year’s Day, January 1; Discovery Day, May 16; Queen’s Birthday, late May; Constitution Day, July 4; Annual Pirates Week, October; Remembrance Day, November 11

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

It is not known for certain who the original inhabitants of the Cayman Islands were. In 1503 Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) spotted a swarm of turtles around Cayman Brac and Little Cayman and named the islands Las Tortugas The Turtles). By the time Sir Francis Drake (?1540–96) and his band of privateers got to Grand Cayman in 1586, the islands were commonly known as Caymanas, after a Carib word for crocodiles (*cayman*). For the next century or so the Caymans were the territory of pirates and turtle-hunting sailors, very conveniently, since there were no permanent residents until the 1660s, when a few deserters from the British army came over from Jamaica. In 1670 the islands became possessions of the British Crown under administration from Jamaica. Britain, however, ignored the pirates’ use and abuse of the Caymans.

One of the major early occupations on these islands was wrecking, salvaging the remains of ships that ran aground on the islands’ many reefs. The most famous of these disasters is the Wreck of the Ten Sails, which occurred when a ship struck a reef in 1794, causing a chain reaction involving nine other vessels. According to legend the Caymanians went to such lengths to aid the shipwrecked travelers that a grateful British King George III (1738–1820) granted the islands tax-free status in perpetuity.

After slavery was abolished in 1834 most freed slaves remained on the islands. The export of cotton, mahogany, and sarsaparilla (mostly to Jamaica) emerged as the main industries until tourism and banking overshadowed them in the mid-20th century. Thatch rope, however, was the dominant land-based industry in Cayman for many years. Since the Silver Thatch Palm (from which raw material for the ropes was obtained) was extremely resistant to salt water, ropes made from it were much favored by fishermen and turtle hunters.

The largest demand came from Cuba and Jamaica.

Divers put the Cayman Islands on the international tourist map as early as the 1950s. The islanders, however, were slow to relinquish their isolation. By the next decade they were more receptive to foreign capital, and they began designing the tax structure that would make Grand Cayman a center of offshore banking (there are more financial institutions there than in New York City) and a sound infrastructure that would make it a capital of Caribbean tourism.

The islands placed themselves directly under the British Crown in the 1960s. Since then political contests have been waged by “teams” (parties are prohibited), though there have been few major issues and little sentiment for independence. Several marine parks, bird sanctuaries, and other nature reserves were developed and maintained during this period. In 1998 tourist numbers hit the 400,000 mark for the first time. The semi-independent country is the fifth largest financial center in the world.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Grand Cayman, the largest and most populous of the three islands, and the sister islands, (namely, Cayman Brac and Little Cayman), which lie east-northeast of Grand Cayman, are separated from each other by a channel 6.8 miles wide. The total landmass of the three islands is 101 square miles. Grand Cayman occupies 47 square miles, Cayman Brac, 8.7 square miles, and Little Cayman, 6.2 square miles.

The three islands are limestone outcroppings, the tops of a submarine mountain range called the Cayman Ridge, which extends west-southwest to the Sierra Maestra range off the southeast part of Cuba to the Misteriosa Bank near Belize. There are no rivers or streams on the islands because of the porous nature of the limestone rock. It is this lack of runoff that gives the surrounding Caribbean Sea exceptional clarity, often to a depth of well over 120 feet. All three islands are surrounded by healthy coral reefs, which lie at the top of dramatic walls and drop-offs close to shore, creating ideal conditions for diving and sport fishing.

February is the coolest time of the year, with temperatures ranging from 64° to 73°F at night and 73° to 86°F during the day. The hottest months are usually July and August, when temperatures can reach highs of 86° to 90°F. Relative humidity varies from 68 percent to 92 percent. The rainy season starts in May and lasts through October, with May and October usually the rainiest months. March and April are usually the driest months of the year.

❁ ECONOMY

Despite the fact that about 90 percent of the islands’ food and consumer goods is imported, Caymanians enjoy one of the highest standards of living in the world. From the earliest days economic activity in

Buccaneers

The word *buccaneer* is commonly defined as “a pirate, someone who robs at sea or plunders the land from the sea without having a commission from any sovereign nation.” The first recorded use of the French word *boucanier*, which was borrowed into English, referred to a person on the islands of Hispaniola and Tortugas who hunted wild oxen and boars and smoked the meat in a barbecue frame known in French as a *boucan*. This French word came from a Tupi word (Tupi inhabited the coastal areas of Brazil) meaning “a rack used for roasting or for storing things, or a rack-like platform supporting a house.” The original barbecue makers seem to have subsequently adopted a more remunerative way of life—piracy—which accounts for the new meaning given to the word.

the Cayman Islands was hindered by its isolation and limited natural resources. The harvesting of sea turtles to provide supplies to ships in the area was the first major economic activity on the islands, but turtle populations were depleted by the 1790s. Agriculture, while sufficient to support the small early settler population, has always been limited by the scarcity of available land.

Swifter methods of transportation and telecommunications in the 1950s led to the emergence of what are now considered the Cayman Islands’ “twin pillars” of economic development: international finance and tourism. In 2002 more than 40,000 companies, including 600 banks, were registered in the Cayman Islands. Forty-three of the world’s largest banks have a substantial presence in the Cayman Islands. Tourism represents about 70 percent of gross domestic product and 75 percent of total export earnings. Unspoiled beaches, duty-free shopping, scuba diving, and deep-sea fishing draw almost a million visitors to the islands each year.

Sarsaparilla

The word *sarsaparilla* comes from the Spanish *sarza*, meaning “a bramble,” and *parilla*, “a vine,” which allude to the thorny stems of the plant. All parts of this plant, including the stem prickles, can be used. The roots, which are rich in starch, can be cooked and eaten. The root is usually dried and ground into a powder used in making cakes, puddings, sweet drinks, and jellies; it is even used in soups. A beer resembling root beer is made from the roots.

Fun Fact

The government of the Cayman Islands refuses access to the islands to cruise ships on Sundays, Good Friday, and Christmas Day.

✿ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The majority of Caymanians are of African and British descent, with considerable interracial mixing. Grand Cayman has been heavily influenced by the U.S. lifestyle and values, especially the capital of George Town and the resorts along Seven Mile Beach. In the smaller villages and on the other two islands, Little Cayman and Cayman Brac, the culture is more West Indian, although the British influence is clearly perceptible. English is the only language spoken on the islands, and the Queen's birthday is celebrated every June with a parade and a 21-gun salute. West Indian traditions find expression in *soca*, calypso, and reggae music, which commonly emanates from clubs, bars, and local jeeps.

The Cayman Islands' most celebrated personality is the nonagenarian painter familiarly known as Miss Lassie. Born in 1914, Miss Lassie did not begin painting until encouraged by a spiritual experience in 1984. Her vibrant "markings" (as she calls them) are mostly representations of biblical scenes as envisioned in her dreams.

There are a lot of churches in the Caymans, where devout Christians worship regularly. Sunday is generally meant for church going, and even casual visitors are welcome to attend the services. Strait-laced manners, politeness, and other traditional British attributes are amply evident in the islands' culture and ethos.

✿ CUISINE

Due to the Caymans' historical connection to Jamaica it is commonplace to find an array of jerked meats among the island's specialties. This method of grilling meats originated with the Arawaks and involves cooking heavily spiced, marinated meats by smoking them over hardwoods, notably pimento, in enclosed barbecue grills. The pimento tree is the source of allspice, a popular Jamaican flavoring. Allspice finds its way into most jerk recipes.

Another popular dish is conch, served as ceviche—sliced thin and marinated in lemon or lime with bits of tomato and onion. Turtle, though not as popular as it once was, remains a part of traditional Cayman cuisine, often prepared in stews or as steaks. "Cayman-style" simply refers to any fish caught fresh from the sea and sautéed with black pepper, onions, and green peppers. Typical side dishes are plantains, yams, and rice and peas. Heavy cake is a favorite dessert. Made of a grated cassava root, it is sweetened with sugar and has the consistency of fudge. One can find an abundance of local fruits, including mangoes, grapefruits, coconuts, and breadfruit. Though most restaurants specialize in continental or international fare, items of tradi-

tional Caymanian cuisine are occasionally featured on menus.

Public/Legal Holidays

✿ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

For the people of the Cayman Islands, the new year is a symbol of hope and a fresh lease on life. People commonly make resolutions for the coming year. New Year's Day is celebrated with families and friends with parties and a good deal of dancing.

✿ DISCOVERY DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 16

The Caymanians celebrate the discovery of the islands by Christopher Columbus on May 16, 1503. The celebrations invariably include a reenactment of Columbus's discovery of the sister islands, storytelling, and catboat activities by the Veterans' and Seamen's Society of Cayman Brac and Little Cayman. Other events include sightseeing trips on the dive boats from both Brac Reef and Tiara Beach resorts; kayak, boat, and Jet-Ski™ races; treasure hunts for adults (underwater) and children (on the beach) are organized.

✿ QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Monday on or before May 25

Since the Cayman Islands are a British colony, the birthday of the British monarch assumes great importance. The occasion is celebrated in June every year, with a full-dress military parade and a 21-gun salute, followed by an open house and garden reception held at Government House. Aviation Week, the largest aircraft event in the Caribbean, featuring everything from educational seminars to air shows, always coincides with the Queen's Birthday celebrations. Hence the islanders and visitors have the opportunity to enjoy a long weekend.

✿ CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 4

When Jamaica achieved independence in 1962 the Cayman Islands chose to maintain their status as a British Crown Colony. In 1971 the islands received their first governor and the present constitution was adopted in 1972. The people of the Cayman Islands commemorate this historic occasion on July 4.

❁ ANNUAL PIRATES WEEK

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October

The annual Pirates Week festival, held in the last week of October, kicks off the winter tourist season. Caymanians relive the islands' early days when they were havens for ruthless pirates who stopped by to make merry and bury their treasures in the desolate parts of these islands. The festivities include days and nights of pirate parades, costume contests, music, fireworks, sports competitions, and craft fairs. The star attraction is a mock invasion by hordes of rowdy pirates, who arrest the governor in George Town harbor, followed by a float parade of colorful costumes and local steel drum bands. In the evening the roads are closed in George Town, the capital city, as the entire Big Cayman Island parties the night away, dancing to the rhythm of local and guest bands. Each day during the week the districts of West Bay, Bodden Town, East End, Northside, and George Town take turns hosting district heritage day, with local skills and crafts on display, along with a lavish feast and an evening of live music.

❁ REMEMBRANCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 11

Remembrance Day, or Armistice Day, marks the official end of World War I on November 11, 1918. In fact it commemorates the historic occasion of the signing of a treaty, at Compiègne, France, to stop the ongoing war between the Allies (Russia, France, Italy, Great Britain, Japan, and the United States) and central powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey). Over the years it has become an occasion to honor the dead of subsequent wars, too. On this day the people of the Cayman Islands observe a minute of silence at 11 A.M. as a mark of respect. Veterans' organizations hold parades to pay homage to the soldiers who died in various wars.

Religious Holidays

❁ ASH WEDNESDAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: First day of Lent

On Ash Wednesday devout Catholics attend church and have their foreheads marked with ashes in the shape of a cross. According to the Old Testament, ashes were believed to have been used for two purposes: as a sign of humility and mortality; and as a sign of sorrow and repentance for sin. In the Cayman Islands the day is commemorated with religious services. Ash Wednesday is also the beginning of Lent, a 40-day period of fasting.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday commemorates the day on which Jesus was crucified. In the Cayman Islands religious services are conducted with traditional devotion and fervor. This is a solemn occasion, and people spend the entire day attending public readings of Gospels, Psalms, and singing hymns from scriptures.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER AND EASTER MONDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday and Monday after Lent

Easter marks the Resurrection of Jesus on the third day after his Crucifixion. In the Cayman Islands local residents celebrate the sunrise on Easter morning with special prayer services, which are held at various locations throughout the country. Easter is an official holiday in the Cayman Islands. Special novenas (prayers) are said by Catholics, and colorful Easter processions are some of the spectacular events organized annually on this day. Easter Monday is also celebrated in the same manner; people rejoice in the Resurrection of Jesus, which symbolizes renewed hope and the resurgence of life. Easter Monday is also an official holiday on the Cayman Islands.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 24–25

On Christmas the people of the Cayman Islands attend church, visit friends and relatives, and exchange gifts. Christmas carols are sung. Festive meals are enjoyed in the company of friends and relatives.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 26

Outdoor activities and events, notably cycling, are the high points of this holiday on the Cayman Islands. The next working day after the festivities (December 27) is also an official holiday, giving the islanders a long holiday for fun-filled activities with family and friends.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY

Regional Holidays

✿ BATABANO

Observed in: Grand Cayman and Cayman Brac
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April

This Carnival-like event is an annual affair, usually held after Ash Wednesday. The heart and soul of Batabano is the Mas' Bands (groups in elaborate costume). While many of the costumes have traditionally been inspired by the Caymans' magnificent marine environment, with interpretations ranging from manta rays to sea anemones, designers have begun to utilize their costumes to comment on social issues, both local and worldwide. Thousands of locals and visitors flock into the streets every year to celebrate Batabano. Steel pans provide the rhythms, and revelers in costumes created from a plethora of textures and colors fill the streets. The energy is electrifying. Communities and districts join together to create the floats and Mas' Bands compete for prizes. The local equivalent on Cayman Brac is known as Brachanal, held a week after Batabano.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL

✿ TASTE OF CAYMAN

Observed in: Grand Cayman
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July Bank Holiday Weekend

This annual event takes place during the July Bank Holiday Weekend in Grand Cayman and brings together more than 50 of the most popular restaurants on the Island to let locals and visitors have a real "Taste of Cayman." Saturday evening sees this gourmet fund-raising event offer samples of every

imaginable type of cuisine. There is live music throughout the evening, and children's entertainment including face painting, pony rides, and dance competitions. This is followed by a Chili Cook Off on the Bank Holiday Monday, where teams compete to produce the best chili-based dish. Everyone is invited to join in both the cooking and the tasting. The winning team gets a chance to fly to Reno, Nevada (United States) to compete in the "World Chili Cook Off."

✿ CAYMAN FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS—CAYFEST

Observed in: Grand Cayman and Cayman Brac
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April

With diverse activities celebrating and showcasing the arts and culture of the Cayman Islands, Cayfest begins with a traditional boat launch at the seaside extravaganza. The festival offers open-air and indoor events on both Grand Cayman and Cayman Brac, featuring local bands, drama and dance productions, arts and crafts demonstrations and displays, native cuisine, and other demonstrations of local talent, such as photo, culinary, and singing competitions.

Further Reading

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Central African Republic

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	In central Africa, north of Democratic Republic of Congo, south of Chad, west of Sudan, and east of Cameroon
Size	240,536 sq. mi.
Capital City	Bangui
Flag Description	The Central African Republic flag has equal horizontal bands of blue (top), white, green, and yellow (bottom) with a vertical band of red in the center. On the hoist side of the blue band is a five-pointed yellow star.
Independence	August 13, 1960 (from France)
Population	3,799,897 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Central African
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Baya (33%); Banda (27%)
Major Language(s)	French (official); Sangho (lingua franca, based on a local Bantu language, and the “national language”); tribal languages
Major Religion(s)	Indigenous beliefs (35%); Protestant (25%); Roman Catholic (25%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year’s Day, January 1; Boganda Day, March 29; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day, August 13; Anniversary of the Proclamation of the Republic, December 1

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

From the seventh century C.E. on, overlapping empires inhabited what is now C.A.R. Initially they included the Kanem Bornou, Ouaddai, Baguirmi, and Dafour groups, who had their base in the upper Nile and Lake Chad. Other sultanates later took over, and slave trade became common. The traffic in slaves ran across the Sahara Desert and through to West Africa.

Although Rabah, the Egyptian Sultan, controlled Oubangui in 1875, this changed when in 1885 the Germans, French, and Belgians arrived. A convention with the Congo Free State granted the French possession of the right bank of the Ouban-

gui River, and in 1894 Oubangui became a French possession. The French, having defeated Sultan Rabah (d. 1900), had established control throughout the country by 1903. The Ubangi-Shari territory became part of neighboring Chad in 1906. In 1910 French Equatorial Africa took control of Ubangi-Shari, along with Chad, Congo, and Gabon. Minor revolts followed in the wake of that consolidation. Barthelemy Boganda (1910–59) led the assembly in C.A.R. A Catholic priest, he was well known for his fight for African emancipation in the assembly. The country declared its independence from France on August 13, 1960.

From 1965 to 1969 the Central African Republic witnessed many coups under the self-declared emperor Jean Bedel Bokassa (1921–96). In 1993 Ange Felix Patasse (b. 1937) defeated David Dacko (1930–2003) and Kolingba (b. 1936),

Fun Fact

Between 6000 and 4000 B.C.E. Cyclopean stone tombs were built in the region of the Central African Republic. It is not known who constructed them.

both former C.A.R. presidents, and ended 12 years of military rule. This government supported democratic reform, but another disastrous period of political and social unrest followed in 1996 and 1997. Still Patasse returned to power after the elections. There was another military coup in March 2003.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The Central African Republic lies on a plateau between the Congo and Chad basins. Geographically the region is marked with plateaus and some scattered hills in the southwest and the northeast parts of the country. The Oubangui River and the Bangos Mountains are the most striking physical features.

The country has a tropical climate. Its two major seasons are a dry season and a rainy season. The rainy season starts in March and continues until October; the dry season begins in November and continues through February. The harvest rains fall from July to September. January and February are the driest months. Natural hazards occur in the form of floods and hot and dry winds. Natural resources are abundant; diamonds, oil, gold, uranium, timber, and hydropower are the country's main resources. However Central Africa faces several problems including poaching, deforestation, and the encroaching desert.

ECONOMY

The majority of the country's revenue comes from agriculture and forestry. Half the gross domestic product (GDP) is derived from the agricultural sector. Sixteen percent of earnings come from the timber industry, and diamonds contribute to 64 percent of export earnings. The main agricultural

The Bush Meat Crisis of Central Africa

Wildlife poaching for both commercial purposes and consumption is adversely affecting the wildlife throughout Africa. In the Central African Republic the situation is no better. This illegal bush meat trade could prove to be an economic and health threat for coming generations. In 1999 the Bush Meat Crisis Task Force was founded. It now has a large group of professionals working in various parts of Africa with the single aim of preserving wildlife. It focuses on keeping a tally of the wildlife population, fund-raising, and preservation.

crops include cotton, coffee, tobacco, yams, millet, manioc (also called cassava or yucca), timber, and corn. Textiles, logging, diamond mining, and assembling bicycles and motorbikes are the country's major industries.

The Central African Republic faces certain endemic problems, such as the lack of a skilled workforce, its landlocked position, and poor transportation facilities. Coups, internal conflict, and confrontations between the government and dissidents also contribute to the unsteady economy. Unequal distribution of income is a major cause of worry. Though nations like France have come forward to help, they can only meet about half of the humanitarian needs. Since C.A.R. is also one of the poorest countries of the world, the health hazards are quite daunting. Malnutrition, AIDS, and other diseases are widespread.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

In the Central African Republic, the Banda and the Gbaya of the southwestern region form the largest ethnic groups. The Zande live in the southeast, the Aka Pygmies in the southwestern forests, the Mbororo in the western plains, and the Sara live in the north. Groups such as the Mondjombo, Banziri, Bouraka, Sangho, Yakoma, Bangou, and Dendi live along the Ubangi River. There has been a great deal of intermarriage among different ethnic groups. French is the official language of the country, but Sangho (also spelled Sango) is spoken by people along the Oubangui River and is the national language of the Central African Republic. Christians, animists, and a minority of Muslims are the major religious groups.

People in C.A.R. give great importance to clothing. For women loose tops are popular with a cloth wrapped around the hips as a skirt. Men's clothes are also loose and are printed with colorful African designs. There are tie-dyed and batiked clothes and handmade fabrics decorated with wood-block prints. Most women dress conservatively, since the standards set for women are more inflexible than those set for men.

In terms of literature the Central African Republic boasts a rich oral tradition. Stories, riddles, proverbs, and other inherited wisdom are the foundation. The legends of the Gbayas (also known as Bayas) have received special attention, and efforts are being made to translate their works into French. Musical instruments such as drums, *ngombi* (a bow harp with ten strings) or *sanza* (traditional guitar) accompany the songs and recitations.

Among the country's most inspiring landmarks are the enormous statues that stand at the Beforo Monument outside the town of Bouar. They are believed to have been carved by prehistoric people about whom very little is known. They are quite large and must have required significant ingenuity and strength to put in place.

❁ CUISINE

Rice, *foutou* (mashed plantain and cassava), and *fufu*, fermented cassava (cassava is an annual crop with starchy tuberous roots), served with grilled meat and sauce form the staple diet of Central Africans. The Portuguese introduced cassava into Africa from Central and South America in the 16th century. It was widely planted in Africa in the 19th century, because it can tolerate both drought and insects, making it an ideal famine food. Cassava can also be left in the ground for up to two years without spoiling after it matures, without any attention from a farmer. Spinach stew, made with tomatoes, peppers, chilies, onions, and peanut butter, is a popular dish.

Another popular stew is groundnut stew. It has okra, chicken, and ginger as the main ingredients. *Gozo* is a cassava paste that is fried. The local people also consume a cassava leaf salad. *Bouiller* is a favorite porridge made of rice. Capitaine fish is a delicacy. A great deal of ginger beer is consumed by the Central Africans.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

New Year's Day is a national holiday in C.A.R., and educational institutions, government offices, and businesses are closed. Central Africans celebrate the day with parties and family gatherings involving a lot of food and drink.

❁ BOGANDA DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 29

Boganda Day commemorates the death of Barthelemy Boganda, a famous pre-independence

The Banda Music of Central African Republic

For the Banda people of the Central African Republic all festivals, social, and religious events are accompanied by music. They use wooden trumpets called *ongos* at their initiation rites and other rituals. The *ongo* produces an elaborate polyphonic sound.

nationalist in the Central African Republic and the leader of the Central African independence struggle. Boganda died in a plane crash on March 29, 1959. He had served as the prime minister of the Central African Republic from December 8, 1958, until his death. Founder of the Movement for the Social Evolution of Black Africa (actually Mouvement d'Évolution Sociale d'Afrique Noire, or MESAN), he is also well known for his efforts to unite the people of Central Africa.

Throughout this day people conduct prayer sessions, and the various political parties meet to remember the great leader of their country.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

This day is a public holiday in many countries, including the Central African Republic, where it is considered labor union day. In 1889 the international socialist movement declared May 1 to be International Labor Day; it was scheduled to coincide with a general strike, planned by the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in 1890 in the United States to win the eight-hour workday. The May 1 observance of Labor Day has always been more radical than the early September version in the United States, which is advertised as a “workers’ holiday,” not an occasion for demonstrations and protests. It is sometimes referred to as May Day or Workers’ Day.

Spinach Stew

Serves 6

Ingredients:

- 2 small onions, chopped
- 2 Tbs. cooking oil
- 2 tomatoes, peeled and sliced
- 1 green bell pepper, chopped
- 2 pounds fresh spinach, chopped, or 2 10-ounce packages frozen spinach
- 1 tsp. salt
- 2 chili peppers, sliced, or ½ teaspoon ground cayenne pepper
- 4 Tbs. peanut butter

Preparation:

In a heavy skillet or stew pot, sauté onions in moderately hot oil until golden. Stir in tomatoes and green pepper. After a minute or so, add spinach, salt, and hot pepper. Cover, reduce heat, and simmer for five minutes.

Thin the peanut butter with several tablespoons of warm water to make a smooth paste. Add paste to the pot. Continue cooking for another 10–15 minutes, stirring frequently, and being careful not to let the mixture scorch. Add small amounts of water as needed so the stew does not stick to the pan.

Serve with rice or fufu.

Labor Day is a national holiday in C.A.R. and all public and private institutions remain closed on this day. Members of trade unions participate in meetings and marches.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 13

The former French territory of Oubangi-Shari became the Central African Republic on August 13, 1960. Barthélemy Boganda was elected the first prime minister of the country. The ruling Mouvement d'Évolution Sociale d'Afrique Noire (MESAN) was the main party. Since then the country has passed through some trying times—coups, internal violence, bloodshed, and corruption. This day honors the people who lost their lives in the struggle to win freedom for the nation. There are Independence Day parades, and prominent leaders address the nation on the economic, political, and social situation. Concerts, dance performances, and craft displays are part of the festivities.

❁ ANNIVERSARY OF THE PROCLAMATION OF THE REPUBLIC

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 1

Celebrations are held on this day to mark the country's attainment of nationhood. After World War II a rebellion broke out in the country that ultimately forced the French to grant self-government to the people of the Central African Republic. On December 1, 1958, under the French the country voted to become an autonomous republic and on August 13, 1960, achieved independence. The Central African Republic became the Central African Empire in 1976. Marshal Bokassa, who had headed the republic since 1965, was now called "emperor." But his leadership was marked by widespread violence and after a coup in 1979, former President David Dacko assumed power again. The country then regained the name of the Central African Republic. The day is celebrated with cultural activities, and schools also sponsor writing and art contests and special lessons to teach the children about their nation's history.

Religious Holidays

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter, the most important Christian holiday, celebrates the Resurrection and return of Jesus on the

third day after his Crucifixion. Christians attend Easter church services on this day and enjoy a family meal.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

The Christian holiday of Christmas marks the birth of Jesus. In contrast to celebrations in most countries there is no traditional Christmas Day dinner in the Central African Republic; instead, the celebration is on Christmas Eve. Christmas festivities focus on children. Children gather at a neighbor's house for tea. Along with tea (served with hot milk), they are typically offered fruit *samba* (punch), *makaras* (different types of small cakes), and *bon bons* (candy). The children then gather around a crib under the Christmas tree and sing traditional songs and hymns in Sangho and French. At night they lie in their beds, waiting for Saint Nicholas (Santa Claus) to place gifts under their pillows.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

Celebrating the birth of a newborn is an elaborate affair in the Central African Republic and always includes a feast and singing. There is a call-and-response song that is sung during birth ceremonies:

"Ei-ob mama ti mbi, ti mbi aso mbi"

("Ei-Oh mother of mine, my belly hurts me.")

The response:

"Kanda be ti MO!"

(Literally, "Tie up your heart," but meaning, "Tough it out.")

People of this country do not always give the child the father's name. It is more important to give a meaningful name perhaps referring to an event, the place of birth, or a mark of affection or admiration. In urban areas today parents have started giving the child the father's name, in addition to a special meaningful name.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Although the practice of ritual female genital cutting (FGM) has raised serious human rights questions throughout the world, FGM is prevalent in approximately 10 of the C.A.R.'s 48 ethnic groups, and 50 percent of the women in C.A.R. have undergone FGM. There has been a law against the practice since 1966, and the government has taken a number of measures against the practice. Yet in spite of its cruelty and the danger of infection, it continues to be performed in the Central African

Republic during infancy or adolescence. The procedure is usually carried out on girls between 4 and 12 years of age. The Central Africans celebrate the initiation ceremony with gifts in the form of money, jewelry, and clothes. Grand feasts are hosted for family members and friends. Cows, chickens, and goats are slaughtered for the feast.

Male circumcision takes place at puberty and is of utmost importance, since it enables a boy to complete his transition from boyhood to manhood. Skilled and experienced elders of the community perform the circumcision ritual in the Central African Republic.

Further Reading

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Chad

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Central Africa
Size	495,755 sq. mi.
Capital	N'Djamena
Flag Description	Chad's flag has three equal vertical bands of blue (hoist side), yellow, and red.
Independence	August 11, 1960 (from France)
Population	9,826,419 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Chadian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	In the north and center (most are Muslims): Arabs, Gorane (Toubou, Daza, Kreda), Zaghawa, Kanembou, Ouaddai, Baguirmi, Hadjerai, Fulbe, Kotoko, Hausa, Boulala, and Maba; in the south: Sara (Ngambaye, Mbaye, Goulaye), Moundang, Moussei, and Massa
Major Language(s)	French (official); Arabic (official); Sara; 120 other languages and dialects
Major Religion(s)	Islam (51%); Christianity (35%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Independence Day, January 11; Labor Day, May 1; Africa Day, May 25; Republic Day, November 28

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

In prehistoric times fragmented tribes occupied Chad. Their cave paintings and skulls can be seen here. In the eighth century C.E. the Berbers settled in Chad and established rule over the local tribes. Muslim traders, who carried on commerce with the local population, introduced Islam to Chad in 1085. By the 16th century three kingdoms flourished: the Kanem Bornu, the Bagirmi, and the Ouaddai. The Kanem Bornu Empire was the largest of the three. It built its power by annexing territories dominated by smaller local kingdoms.

Between 1883 and 1893 Rabih al Zubayr (?1840–1900), the Sudanese ruler, conquered all three kingdoms. Then, in 1891, Chad became a French colony. The French overthrew the Sudanese ruler and merged Chad into the French Equatorial area, along with Ubangi Shari (now known as the Central African Republic), Congo, and Gabon.

The region remained a French colony until 1960. In World War II it was the first French colony to join the Allies.

After the war in 1946 Chad became an autonomous republic under French governance. The first premier François (Ngarta) Tombalbaye (1918–75) spearheaded a freedom movement, which ultimately succeeded in winning Chad its independence. It attained independence in 1960.

Among the French colonies in Africa, Chad was the most neglected of all. The French focused mostly on the southern part of the country where they had cotton plantations. As a result Chad's south developed considerably, while the people of the north lost out on educational opportunities and development. And when Chad won its independence, the people of the south dominated. Chad's early years of independence were not peaceful, and decades of civil war, inter-tribal violence, and repeated Libyan invasions ensued. Guerilla warfare prevailed in Chad, and French troops had to be brought in to settle a long-standing dispute between the government and the rebels.

From the Muslim north what was to be a long drawn-out civil war broke out in 1965 over taxation. This became the first of several attempts by Libya to press its historical and cultural claims to Chad, Muammar al-Gadhafi (b. 1942) invaded in 1975 and captured a portion of Chad; two years later Libya

invaded the rest of the country. General Felix Malloum, who had been Tombalbaye's chief of staff, led a coup against Tombalbaye in 1975 in which Tombalbaye was killed. Malloum installed himself as president and prime minister. In 1978 Hissene Habre (b. 1942) was made prime minister, but he lasted only a year because Malloum's regime collapsed in 1979. The civil war continued throughout Malloum's tenure.

Chad was still in a state of chaos in 1979, when nine rival groups came together to form a new provisional government. Goukouni Oueddei (b. 1944), also a former rebel leader, headed it. In 1980 conflict broke out again, and Hissene Habre of the Forces Armées Nationales du Tchad (Armed Forces of Chad, FANT) ousted Oueddei, abolished the position of prime minister, and declared himself president of Chad, installing a regime of terror and more killing. Thousands of tribes Habre thought hostile to the regime were destroyed, and many of Habre's political opponents were executed.

The president of Libya came up with a proposal for merging Chad with Libya in 1980. When Chad refused Libya withdrew from interfering in the country's affairs, only to invade again in 1983, this time entering from the northern side. The French sent its troops to defend Chad from the Libyan invasion. In 1987, with military support from France and the United States, Chad's troops successfully forced most of the Libyan troops from the country.

However, during this period, vicious rivalries between various ethnic groups like the Zaghawa, the Gorane, and the Hadjerai had resulted in violent clashes. In April 1989 the country's leader was Habre, a Gorane. After renewed violence broke out, Idriss Deby (b. 1952), one of the leading generals from the Zaghawa ethnic group, defected and fled to Sudan. As the leader of a Zaghawa rebel group the Patriotic Salvation Movement, he intensified attacks on Habre and other Goranes. People in Chad hated Habre's brutal regime of terror and genocide and, with the backing of Libya, and with no resistance from the French troops stationed in Chad, Deby led a successful coup against Habre and declared himself dictator in the country in December 1990. Thereafter, Habre went exile to Senegal.

Until the civil war ended in 1996 Chad faced many problems ranging from ethnic warfare to the Libyan invasion. After declaring himself the new president of Chad, Déby dissolved the legislature. In 1994 a new constitution was drafted, and in 1996 multiparty elections were conducted. Déby won these elections.

In northwestern Chad, however, a rebellion led by Déby's former defense minister Youssouf Togoimi (b. 1953) broke out in 1998. Togoimi's movement was called the Movement for Democracy and Justice in Chad. Although there has been a willingness to move toward democratic reform in the region, an ethnic oligarchy is still in power there.

In 2001 Déby was reelected, but his regime has been criticized for mismanagement, numerous civil rights abuses, and corruption. The government has

consistently neglected to prosecute security force personnel accused of killings, rape, torture, arbitrary arrest, and detention. Lengthy pretrial detention remains a problem, and incarceration is a life-threatening experience. Violence and societal discrimination against women is common, and female genital mutilation (FGM) is widespread. Although Déby and Togoimi declared a ceasefire in 2002, conflicts persisted.

Eventually, the southeast-based rebels approached the government and signed a peace treaty.

In the 1980s Chad was declared the poorest country in the world. The World Bank helped Chad by providing \$200 million to construct a pipeline to connect Chad's oil fields to those in Cameroon. It was considered a first step toward economic development. According to the agreement signed between Chad and the World Bank, 80 percent of the profits would be allotted to health, education, and social welfare. The country's prospects are good because of its oil resources, and its treasury is expected to increase by 50 percent. Chad faces a new major problem, however—refugees. Due to the conflict in neighboring Sudan, refugees have been compelled to come to Chad where they struggle with hunger, lack of medical aid, and epidemics in numerous refugee camps. Though Chad falls in the developing nations' category today, its people continue to fight a grim battle for survival.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Situated in central Africa and the south of Libya, Chad has a tropical climate. It is a landlocked country, three times the size of Texas. It shares its borders with the Central African Republic, Cameroon, Niger, Sudan, and Nigeria. At one time Lake Chad which borders both Chad and Cameroon, was the second largest lake in Africa. Early in the 21st century, however, it was 10 percent smaller than its original size.

Chad has four climate zones: arid plains in the center, deserts in the north, dry mountains in the northwest, and tropical lowlands to the south. Chad faces many environmental hazards. The harmattan winds in the north are hot and dry and are followed by droughts and plagues. The average temperature is over 100°F. The rainy season begins in June and lasts until September.

❁ ECONOMY

Chad has impressive oil fields that have been discovered on the northern side of Lake Chad. A Cameroon–Chad pipeline, with investment from ExxonMobil (40 percent) and other major oil companies, promises to make the country one of the world's leading oil exporters. The citizenry of Chad is, however, dubious about the wealth oil promises to bring into this poor country. In October 2003 when President Idriss Déby opened the multibillion dollar facilities in the southern Doba basin, civic groups called

The Baggaras of Chad

The second largest group in western Sudan is the cattle-herding tribes, who spill over into eastern Chad. They are collectively called the Baggaras. The Rizaygat, Shuwia, Taisha, Habbaniya, and Humr/Messiria are the main Baggara tribes. They follow the rituals of the Sunni Muslims, but they prefer calling their religion the folk Islamic faith. They are concerned about the evil eye and protect their cattle from the envious eyes of other people. They often tie a necklace or bracelet (with Koranic verses inscribed on them) around their bodies to protect themselves from witch doctors. Baggaras

are conservative Muslims and are strict in their adherence to praying five times a day facing Mecca.

The way these cattle-herders travel is seasonal. They make tents from grass, sticks, and mats. Women and men in these communities cannot eat together if they are not married. Men are allowed have up to four wives, but due to financial constraints, most men have only two or three wives and several children.

The women wear loose-fitting dresses, called *tobes*. During festivals women adorn themselves with jewelry. The amount they wear represents their family's social status and the wealth they possess.



for a national day of mourning as a silent protest against the ongoing violations of basic human rights in Chad, as well as against insecurity and falling living standards. Armed attacks on citizens, murders, rapes, extortion, and robberies continue to take place. In addition, the constant and lengthy cut-offs of water and electricity and the deterioration in basic sanitation services are a growing threat to public health."

Chad is also rich in natron, a complex of sodium carbonate used by the Egyptians in mummification. This has been found in the Lake Chad and Borkou areas. In addition, uranium deposits, gold, and wolframite have been found in many areas.

However, the country and its people are currently dependent on foreign capital for development. Chad's economy has long been handicapped by its landlocked position, high-energy costs, and a history of instability. Most of the people in Chad are engaged in subsistence agriculture. Other main fields of labor are forestry, fishing, and animal husbandry. There are major hazards to the economy caused by the country's geographic isolation, bad infrastructure, and continuing political uncertainties.

Fun Fact

A *balafon* is a pentatonic (a five-toned scale) or heptatonic (a seven-toned scale) xylophone of West Africa, with 18 to 21 keys. The keys, made of rosewood, are suspended on a bamboo frame over gourd resonators of graduated sizes. This arrangement produces a continuous nasal buzzing sound due to small holes of spider paper in the gourds.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Chad is a culturally diverse nation with many rich tribal heritages. Arabic and French are the two official languages of the country, and many Chadians speak several languages. In addition to the official languages there are hundreds of other tribal languages that are widely spoken.

Each of Chad's ethnic groups follows its own religious beliefs and customs. The music of each is different and so is the folklore. The cultural tales of

the south are totally different from those of the north. Black African and other non-Muslim groups constitute a large part of the population. There is also a sizable Catholic population.

In the south the Sara, Ngambaye, Moundang, and Massa predominate. Most of them are Christians. The Sara group is the biggest ethnic group in Chad, with an interest in the educational opportunities provided by the French. The people of the Sara tribe occupy many major civil positions of the country.

A unique social structure is the main characteristic of the Maba tribe. They rely on friendships for aid. People belonging to the *griots*, the singers responsible for recounting histories and genealogies, play traditional music to earn their living. The people from central Chad are nomadic.

The northern portion of the country, inhabited by the nomadic Muslim tribes, is called the heart of Sahara. The Toubou tribe is dominant here. They are Muslims and descendants of Berber migrants (indigenous inhabitants of the Maghrib region, located north of the Sahara desert and west of the Nile River). In 1982 the Toubou people numbered 1.5 million and controlled Chad. Very clan-oriented, these people are herders who prefer to be independent. They are also considered strong on the battlefield.

CUISINE

Millet, a versatile grain that can be prepared in numerous ways, is the staple food of Chadians. Chadians make pancakes or balls with it, which are then dipped in sauces and eaten. They also use it as a paste. In the northern parts of Chad millet is called *aiysh*, and in the south, *biya*. Another staple food is sorghum, and rice is popular in some areas. Wheat and corn are not easily available.

Pork is famous in N'Djamena and the southern areas, but Muslims do not eat pork, so in the north, there is a great demand for beef and chicken. Live-stock herding is common in these areas.

Chad's lake and rivers supply a variety of fish. *Capitaine* (Nile perch) is the most widely available.

Music of Chad

Chad is ethnically diverse, and each region has its own genre of music and dance for which it is known. The Fulani tribe, for example, is well known for its music in which single-reeded flutes are played. The *griots* (praise-singers) use the five-stringed *kinde* (a bow harp), and different varieties of horns. In the region of the Tibesti Mountains, the folk music of the Teda people features men's stringed instruments and women's vocal music. Stringed instruments like the *keleli* are used to "speak for" male performers, since it is considered inappropriate for a man to sing in front of an adult woman. Lutes and fiddles are also popular, and a group calling itself "Tibesti"

popularized the southern style of music called *sai*.

Traditional Chadian instruments include the *hu hu* (a stringed instrument with calabash loudspeakers), the *kakaki* (a tin horn), maracas, lutes, *kinde*, and horns. A ceremonial type of horn is still used among the elite: *Waza* is a musical ensemble that plays long royal trumpets, used in coronations and other upper-class ceremonies. Other regional varieties of music include the flute and drum music of the Kanembu and the *balafon* (a xylophone), whistle, harp, and *kodjo* drums of the Sara people, while the Baguirmians are known for their superb drum and zither music, as well as a folk dance featuring a mock battle in which dancers wield large pestles.

Other common varieties in these regions are tilapia, eel, and carp. A mud-dwelling catfish called *balbout* is available during the rainy season. *Banda*, a large smoked fish, is also a major part of Chadian cuisine. In Chad, fish are dried, salted, or smoked before they are sold. *Salanga* is a product that is made from dried or salted fish. Chad exports *salanga*, *balbout*, and other varieties of fish and fish products to both Cameroon and Nigeria.

Chadians combine fish and meat in one pot, making a single dish out of them. Kebabs are also popular, as are omelets served with rice and meat, and all kinds of fruit juices. Dates also figure prominently in the cuisine of Chad.

throughout the world. It is believed that Julius Caesar declared January 1 as New Year's Day since this was the day on which Roman citizens assumed new duties. Each year a festive spirit reigns as people organize parties, parades, and celebrations that begin on New Year's Eve.

New Year's is celebrated with great enthusiasm in Chad. On New Year's Eve people attend private parties or mass celebrations and usher in the new year with singing, dancing, and partying. On January 1 all government offices, schools, and colleges are closed.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 11

Chad attained its independence peacefully on August 11, 1960, after being under French rule for almost 100 years. Chad was granted the status of an autonomous republic by the French on November 28, 1958. When efforts to form a federation with three French Equatorial African states didn't work out, it became an independent republic.

Because heavy rains in August often marred the celebrations and festivities, the government

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western (or Gregorian) calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day

The Kirdi of Chad

The Kirdi are a group of tribes living in the southwestern regions of Chad. In earlier times, all the people belonging to this group were pagans, and the word *kirdi* means "pagan." Today, however, many have embraced Islam. The Kirdis believe in one God, but they pray to their ancestors because they think the ancestors will talk to God for them.

Each tribe in this group speaks its own dialect of the Chadic language Biu-mandara. The group consists mainly of farmers who cultivate crops like millet and

maize (corn). They also grow plants used for medicinal purposes and engage in hunting and other activities. Women participate in household activities, make clay objects, play with the children, and raise small crops.

As soon as the children attain puberty, the young men are given separate huts. After marriage, they live in them with their wives. Polygamy is allowed, but men in these groups are generally monogamous. The Kirdi people like music and dance, favoring instruments such as horns, harps, and drums.

shifted the observance to January, and Chad's independence is now celebrated on January 11 instead of August 11. On Independence Day most Chadians participate in Independence Day parades and many kinds of cultural activities that always include dance and music.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

While the earliest origins of May Day are ascribed to pagan celebrations practiced by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages, conflicting opinions exist about the origins of Labor Day and its association with May Day. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

Apparently the international socialist movement specifically chose May 1 to commemorate the AFL general strike. Although that event was postponed, May 1 was kept as the day for the observance. The United States made efforts to discourage the May 1 commemoration because of its socialist associations, so it celebrates a much less radical workers' holiday in September.

In Chad Labor Day is a national holiday, and all public and private institutions remain closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

AFRICA DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 25

Africa Day, also known as Organization of African Unity Day (OAU Day), commemorates the historical decision of 32 nations to unify their efforts to form a united Africa on May 25, 1963. In the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa 32 countries of the African continent came together in 1963, and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was formed. This day marks the unwavering commitment of African nations to foster a spirit of camaraderie and to work together for the overall development of the continent.

The idea to form a unified African organization was the brainchild of the President of the Independent state of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah (1909–72) and the Emperor of Ethiopia Haile Selassie (1892–1975). Kwame Nkrumah was a Marxist-Socialist who studied in U.S. universities and returned to Ghana to participate in the independence movement. He was the champion of nonviolent protest against British rule in the region. When Ghana was granted independence he was sworn in as

the independent nation's first president. Haile Selassie, the last emperor of Ethiopia, led his country to victory against the Italian occupation during World War II, and worked with Kwame Nkrumah to foster a spirit of unity among all African countries.

At present there are 53 member nations in the OAU. The OAU has been instrumental in ending colonial rule in Africa and has also played a key role in resolving regional disputes and internal conflicts and wars in Africa. The OAU intends to promote peace, human rights, and unity among all African nations.

In Chad Africa Day is a national holiday. It is commemorated with seminars and workshops, all of which focus on problems faced by Africa and development activities taking place on the entire continent as a whole.

REPUBLIC DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 28

Chad was under French domination for nearly a century. On September 28, 1958, France held a referendum on territorial autonomy. The results favored the dissolution of French Equatorial Africa and the granting of autonomy to the four constituent states: Chad, Gabon, Central African Republic, and Congo (Brazzaville).

Accordingly, on November 28, 1958, the French government made Chad an autonomous republic within the French Overseas Community. Since then November 28 has been celebrated as Republic Day in Chad. Because it is a national holiday, all shops, offices, and educational institutions are closed on November 28.

Religious Holidays

EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha is an important festival for Muslims all over the world because it celebrates Ibrahim's (Abraham's) unquestioning obedience to God when he was told to sacrifice his young son Ishmael in order to obey God's command. According to the Koran, Ibrahim was holding the axe over Ishmael's head when God's voice told him to sacrifice a ram instead. Muslims honor Ibrahim for his willingness to do God's will.

Muslims in Chad observe Eid al-Adha by going to their local mosques to offer prayers with their friends and relatives. Then a sheep or a goat is sacrificed, and a lavish feast follows. Some portion, usually one-third, is distributed among the poor.

Eid al-Adha also marks the end of the pilgrimage, or hajj, to Mecca that every Muslim is required to undertake at least once in his or her life.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent. This Christian festival commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. It has been in the Christian liturgical calendar even longer than Easter has although no one is sure why it is called Good Friday. Some have suggested that the use of *good* in the name goes back to Old English and means “God’s” Friday, while others interpret *good* to mean something like “observed as holy.” This observance is also known as Black Friday and Sorrowful Friday, and in Eastern Orthodox Churches it is called Great Friday.

In Chad people attend prayer services, and the life and teachings of Jesus are remembered. In bigger towns special communal Good Friday services are held and attended by thousands of people. The service is followed by cross-bearing processions that imitate Jesus’ last journey.

Consumption of meat, alcohol, and other indulgences are strictly prohibited during the 40 days’ fasting of Lent. Many people also fast on Good Friday, while others eat a light meal. It is a day filled with sadness. Gospels and plays showcasing the life of Jesus are a regular feature during Holy Week in Chad.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a Christian feast that celebrates their belief in Jesus’ Resurrection from the dead. It is sometimes known as Resurrection Day. This is a day of utmost importance because the fundamental teaching of Christianity is that Jesus, through his death, freed all humanity from the burden of sin.

The holiday falls on the first Sunday after the month of Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. They often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to pray and participate in special services.

The word “Easter” is derived from the name of the Germanic goddess Eostre or Eastre. She was the revered mother goddess of the Saxon people who lived in northern Europe. Easter eggs, associated with Eostre’s rituals and symbols of new life, are now associated with the Christian festival.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

MOULoud

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

The birthday of Muhammad, the prophet of the Muslims, falls in the third month of the Islamic year Rabbi al-Awwal. For Muslims all over the world, this is a day of great joy and celebration, since Muhammad is the most revered prophet among them.

In Chad Muslims celebrate Mouloud by joining with their friends and family to pray at their local mosque. The imam, or religious head, speaks about the teachings of the prophet and urges Muslims to follow his path. His devotion to Allah is a source of inspiration for all Muslims in attendance.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULoud

ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: August 15

Assumption Day commemorates the Virgin Mary’s Assumption into heaven. According to legend when Mary was dying at the age of 73, long after Jesus had ascended to heaven, all the Apostles visited with her before her death except St. Thomas, who arrived too late to speak with her. Moreover when he did arrive, her body could not be found because she had been raised up to heaven. Christians believe that her soul and body were united at Jehoshaphat (Mary’s Tomb), and St. Gabriel took her soul to heaven.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

ALL SAINTS’ DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: November 1

All Saints’ Day is a Christian feast that honors all the saints (known and unknown) of Christianity. It is believed that All Saints’ Day celebrations began after the consecration of the Pantheon at Rome to the Blessed Virgin by Pope Boniface IV (r. 608–15). The Feast of All Saints has been celebrated on November 1 since the time of Charlemagne (742–814). Later it was declared a holy day of obligation (an observance considered mandatory for all Catholics) by Louis the Pious (778–840) at the instance of Pope Gregory IV (r. 827–44).

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS’ DAY; CHRISTIANITY

EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, which is the ninth month in the Islamic

calendar. Muslims break a month-long fast on this day. On Eid al-Fitr Muslims in Chad wear new clothes and, in the company of their friends and relatives, go to offer prayers in their local mosques to thank God for his kindness. They greet each other with joy and love and enjoy lavish meals of sweets and other delicacies.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world. It celebrates the birth of Jesus, whom they believe was the Son of God. Christians in Chad attend services on Christmas Eve along with family and friends and sing Christmas carols.

On Christmas Day a number of sports activities and competitions are held all over Chad. Christmas festivities last for nearly a week and culminate with the New Year's celebrations.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

One of the earliest tribes in Africa to convert to Islam was the Bagirmi Fulani, a branch of the Fulani tribe that occupies the Bagirmi region of south-central Chad. Children hold a vital position in their social life, because the Fulanis believe that people live for generations through their children. For them children represent the future. If a Fulani dies without seeing his or her children, he or she is considered to have died a sad death, so a child's birth is always celebrated with a grand feast.

When the people of this tribe welcome the first son into the family, the naming ceremonies are elaborate. According to them a man's features and his name will last as long as he has a son. The child is expected to bring with him all the happiness and prosperity that the family will enjoy in the future. Relatives and friends from all over the locality and the neighboring regions join the family on this occasion.

❁ COMING OF AGE

The Sara group of Chad has important initiation rites that mark a boy's transition from childhood to adulthood. Different groups follow different rites, but the most popular in Chad is *yondo*, a male initiation ceremony. The *yondo*, which symbolizes male authority and male bonds, takes place every six or seven years, and boys from all the Sara villages come for the rites.

Elders from their families often accompany the initiates. Sons or brothers who have completed their initiation ceremony attend but stay in a different house. Women must stay away altogether.

During *yondo* elderly males take the initiates to the bush area for a predetermined period of time. The boys are taught about their tribe's way of life and learn tribal secrets. In earlier times these rites used to go on for months, but the celebration has been shortened. The ritual of circumcision is also a part of *yondo*. Following the rites, initiates do not return to their actual homes.

Though there are coming of age ceremonies for women, too, these celebrations are shorter and less elaborate. Female genital mutilation, or FGM, is practiced in all areas of the country. There is no law specifically prohibiting FGM, and 60 percent of the women in Chad have undergone the procedure. Furthermore, the government has shown little interest in trying to eradicate the practice. Household responsibilities and moral values are taught to girls during these procedures.

❁ MARRIAGE

Among the Muslims in Chad women usually marry in their teens. In most of the groups men have more than one wife. In some groups the bridegroom's family pays a bride-price in order to get the woman their son wants to marry; in other cases the woman enters the man's home bringing a dowry in the form of cash, jewelry, and gifts.

The wedding ceremonies in the northern parts of Chad are interesting. In these areas, a mock ceremony is staged after marriage in which the bride is stolen from her family. After this performance the girl's family observes a mock mourning ritual.

❁ DEATH

In Chadian society ancestors play a vital role in bringing the living and the dead closer. They act as the link between the real world and the supernatural. It is believed that ancestors can interfere in people's daily affairs. People who died in the recent past are more likely to interfere, since they do not leave the Earth immediately after death. For a certain period of time they will wander between the Earth and the other world. Therefore, many rituals are conducted to satisfy the dead and ask them to leave. It is an aid in forgetting the grief caused by the death of this person and also in restoring social order. Many rites take place to relieve the spirits.

Among the Sara there is a belief that lightning and water spirits encourage violent deaths and also inspire other spirits to interfere in the day-to-day activities of their relatives. These spirits may come and live with the family or children. They can also take different forms or enter the bodies of living individuals. Since the spirits can cause harm, rites must be conducted to appease them. In this tribe the New

Year is celebrated on the first new Moon after the harvest. On this day major hunting activities take place and whatever is caught is offered to the ancestors.

In many villages the village chief holds supreme power, since he is believed to be the messenger between the living and the dead. In centralized societies the ruler of a particular community is expected to possess divine powers and to have a link between the natural and the supernatural.

Further Reading

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Religion in Chad

The intricate system of relationships among the living and the dead, animals, plants, other natural phenomena, and the supernatural all inspire the animistic religions of Africa. It is believed that life forces animate all things. The relationships are all ordered, and humans are part of that order. Antisocial acts or bad luck disturb the world's balance, and the balance must be restored through sacrifices, prayers, and libations.

Ancestors are given considerable importance in Chadian society and beliefs, because they bridge the gap between the living and the dead. Chadians also believe in spirits and especially fear the spirits of the Sun, lightning, and water.

Paul Nugent, *Africa Since Independence, A Comparative History* (New York: Macmillan, 2004).



Chile

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	South America, in the southwest, bordered by the Pacific Ocean, Argentina, Bolivia, and Peru
Size	292,260 sq. mi.
Capital City	Santiago
Flag Description	The Chilean flag has two horizontal bands of equal size; the upper one is white and the lower one, red. On the hoist side of the white band is a blue square containing a white five-pointed star.
Independence	September 18, 1810 (from Spain)
Population	15,980,912 (2005 est.)
Nationality	Chilean
Major Ethnic Group(s)	White and white-Amerindian (95%)
Major Language(s)	Spanish; Aymara; Mapuche
Major Religion (s)	Roman Catholic (89%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Navy Day, May 21; Reconciliation Day, September; Independence Day, September 18; Armed Forces Day, September 19; Columbus Day, October 12

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Although other accounts may eventually prove to be accurate regarding Chile's first inhabitants and their origins, contemporary thought posits that the original inhabitants of Chile were Amerindians who had gradually worked their way south from the Bering Straits about 10,000 years ago. The people of this Stone Age culture, called the Chinchorro, established themselves in fertile valleys along Chile's coast, and remnants of such a population are still living in the far southern tip of the country. The Chinchorro fished northern Chile's waters from 6000 to 1600 B.C.E., and the mummies they left behind are telling surprising stories to 21st-century archaeoparasitologists.

Although the Incas attempted to extend their empire south into northern Chile during the 15th century, the Chinchorros fiercely opposed their efforts and the Incas were forced to abandon the project.

The Portuguese navigator Ferdinand Magellan (1480–1521), seeking a southern passage to the Pacific (the

Strait of Magellan), first saw Chile in 1520, when his ships navigated the channel that would become the Strait of Magellan.

Diego de Almagro (1475–1538), accompanied by his band of Spanish conquistadors in 1535, who traveled south from Peru in quest of gold, were the next Europeans to reach Chile. Like the Incas before them, the local population repulsed their encroachment.

It was not until 1541 that the first permanent European settlement Santiago was established by one of Francisco Pizarro's (1475–1541) lieutenants. The Spanish failed to find the gold and silver they were seeking, but the agricultural value of Chile's central valley attracted them, and Chile became part of the Viceroyalty of Peru, which encompassed most of Spain's South American colonies. In the course of their gradual conquest of the continent the Spaniards found hundreds of thousands of Indians from various cultures in what is now called Chile, who survived primarily through slash-and-burn agriculture and hunting.

The European conquest of Chile was very gradual, and the indigenous cultures successfully beat the foreigners back time after time. In spite of these setbacks the Europeans per-

sisted. Indigenous people as well as mestizos, inhabitants of mixed indigenous and Spanish parentage, were used as laborers on the huge estates of the Spanish rulers. In 1553, 1598, and 1655, massive Mapuche insurrections destroyed many of the fledgling colony's major settlements and, with each uprising, the southern border of the colony was pushed farther north. The Spaniards went south as far as the Río Biobío, where the Mapuche tribes held them back. The abolition of slavery in 1683 helped to defuse some of the tensions between the colonists and the Mapuche, and some mutually beneficial trade became possible. In the north, however, the indigenous inhabitants were overcome by a different enemy—infectious diseases brought by the Spanish—to which they had no natural immunity.

The 1820s witnessed the culmination of South America's—and Chile's—struggle for independence from Spain. Bernardo O'Higgins (1778–1842), Chile's most famous patriot, became supreme director of a Chile that was only a fraction of the country's eventual size. After winning the War of the Pacific in 1883 against Peru and Bolivia, Chile added the Atacama Desert to its territories. Commerce and industry grew and led to a civil war in the 1890s, when the working class and the nouveau riche challenged the wealthy landowners' hegemony.

The liberals and conservatives continued alternately to dominate Chile's government until the 1960s, when the Christian Democrats came to power. They introduced social reforms of various

kinds but were ousted by the radical left government of Salvador Allende (1908–73). This regime introduced radical measures, including the state takeover of many private enterprises and the wholesale redistribution of income.

On September 11, 1973, General Augusto Pinochet (b. 1915) led a bloody coup; many believe this was accomplished with the backing of U.S. agencies. Allende died during the coup; the official explanation was that he committed suicide. What followed was systematic genocide on a massive scale. During the coup as many as 80,000 people were estimated to have been killed. Pinochet's rule finally ended in 1988, when a referendum ousted him. In 1989 Christian Democrat Patricio Aylwin (b. 1918) came to power. Democracy nominally returned to Chile, though Pinochet continued to wield enormous influence until he was arrested in London. He was initially pronounced too ill to stand trial; but in 2001 a Chilean court stripped him of his immunity, a move confirmed by Chile's Supreme Court in 2004.

President Eduardo Frei (b. 1941) took the drastic step of accelerating human rights tribunals and inquiries into Pinochet's past. In this, however, he faced strong resistance from the military. Frei has made some progress in alleviating poverty. Ricardo Lagos (b. 1938), Frei's public works minister, succeeded him in 1999 as the first socialist since Allende to become president, winning election by a narrow margin.

The Chinchorro Mummies

The Chinchorro mummies, exhumed from the Atacama Desert (one of the driest places on Earth), are the oldest ever purposely created and go back 7,000 years, millennia before the Egyptians thought about mummifying their dead. (The oldest Egyptian mummy found is just 3,000 years old.) The Chinchorro mummies—eviscerated, dried, stuffed, fitted with wigs, and covered in colored clay—resemble modern art more than they do human beings. And it seems they loved their dead extraordinarily because they kept them nearby and spent considerable time repainting the mummies and continually touching up their work.

But something was wrong with the Chinchorros' health although they lived in a land free of pollution, at least the lethal sort that modern people must live with. They were bothered by numerous ailments, and 25 percent of their offspring died before they reached the age of one. More than one-third of the mummies had infections that ate away their leg bones, and one in five Chinchorro women had bones so porous that the vertebrae splintered from

the weight of her flesh. On average the Chinchorros had a life expectancy of just 25 years.

For much of the 20th century scientists thought that most of the parasites common to Europe and Asia could not have survived the trek across Beringia, the temporary land bridge that enabled Asians to cross to what is now North America and populate the Western Hemisphere. The mummies left behind by the Chinchorros, those of ancient seal hunters in Alaska, prehistoric cave painters in southern Texas, and Inca corn farmers have, however, contradicted this assumption. Scientists now know that a host of parasites not only survived the Beringian cold, but others also awaited the immigrants as they explored the forests and coastline of their new home. The hunters died from heart failure caused by armies of nematodes that invaded their muscles. The intestines of foragers in the U.S. Great Basin were pierced by thorny-headed worms, and the throats, mouths, and lips of farmers in the Andes were ulcerated and rotted by protozoans. Life in the Americas for indigenous peoples before the Europeans arrived was not only brief but painful.



Easter Island

Easter Island, called Rapa Nui (“Great Rapa”) in Polynesian or Isla de Pascua (“Easter Island”) in Spanish, is called Te Pito te Henua (“Navel and Uterus”) by its inhabitants, descendants of the Polynesians who first settled it. Located in the south Pacific Ocean, Easter Island, one of the most isolated inhabited islands in the world, belongs to Chile although it is located 2,185 statute miles west of continental Chile. In 2002 it was home to 3,791 (2002 census), 3,304 of whom live in its capital city Hanga Roa. The island is famous for its numerous *moai*, thousand-year-old stone statues now located mostly along the coastlines.

The history of Easter Island can be related with the aid of a reconstructed king list, which also provides events and approximate dates since the fifth century. The island at one time supported a relatively advanced and complex civilization, but it apparently degenerated drastically during the 100 years before the arrival of Europeans. The Polynesians brought bananas, taro, sweet potato, sugarcane, and paper mulberry, as well as pigs and chickens with them.

European contact with the island began in 1722 on Easter Sunday when Dutch navigator Jakob Roggeveen (1659–1729) found it. By the mid-19th century the population was about 4,000 inhabitants, but by 1877 deportation of the people to Peru and Chile and the diseases brought by Westerners had reduced the population to a mere 111. The native Rapanui have since gradually recovered.

Modern Easter Island has virtually no trees, but the island was once home to subtropical moist broadleaf forests with a range of trees, shrubs, ferns, and grasses. The disappearance of the trees apparently coincides with a decline of the civilization. Excavated middens reveal a sudden drop in quantities of fish and bird bones as the islanders were unable to build boats for fishing, and the birds no longer had places for their nests. Chickens and rats became leading items of diet, and there is evidence of cannibalism based on human remains associated with cooking sites, especially in caves.

The survivors came up with new traditions to mete out the remaining resources. In the cult of the

birdman (*manutara*), a competition was held every year: A representative of each tribe, chosen by its leaders, dove into the sea and swam across to Motu Nui, an islet, to find the season’s first Sooty Tern egg. The swimmer who returned first with an egg gained control of the island’s resources for his tribe for the coming year. Not every swimmer returned from these races, because the sea teemed with sharks.

Easter Island is probably most familiar as the site of hundreds of stone statues, called *moai*, whose creation and origins puzzled many for years. It is now thought that most of the *moai* were carved during a brief burst of creative megalithic activity, and archaeologists think that ceremonial site construction and statue carving occurred primarily between about 1100 and 1600. The most widely accepted theory of the statues’ origin is that they were carved by the Polynesian ancestors of the modern inhabitants (Rapanui) when the island was still forested, and resources were plentiful. It is possible that some statues were being carved when Jacob Roggeveen found the island. Most *moai* were carved out of a unique compressed volcanic ash or tuff found in only one quarry Rano Raraku. Work there seems to have been abandoned abruptly, because half-carved statues were simply left in the rock, approximately half of the known *moai*. The abrupt halt to an occupation that had so engrossed an entire population suggested some devastating event that ended the island’s customary life and traditional culture. Although many of the statues were still upright when Roggeveen arrived, by the mid-19th century all the statues had been overturned, although no one knows for sure why.

Some evidence suggests that statues were still being carved and continued until the population was drastically reduced when they were captured and removed by whalers and slave-raiders in the 19th century. The raiders succeeded in one thing: They destroyed almost all of the island’s oral traditions and the people’s knowledge of their culture, a devastation that will continue to complicate any efforts to put together a coherent historical understanding of Easter Island.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Chile occupies a thin strip on the western edge of the South American continent. It extends some 2,671 miles from north to south, between the Pacific Ocean and the mountains. It shares its eastern border mostly with Argentina and its northern border with Peru and Bolivia. Chile also claims Easter Island, Juan Fernández, and half of the southern island of Tierra del Fuego.

Although its width barely exceeds 124 miles, its

enormous length and variations in altitude lead to extreme variations in climate. It features snow-capped mountains, river canyons, and plains. These include the famous Atacama Desert, which has been described as one of the most inhospitable regions on Earth and is so dry that no rainfall has ever been recorded there. Another region is the storm- and snow-prone region of Patagonia. And of course Chile’s coast features beaches and bays perfect for holidays by the shore.

As to climate the northern region features arid

but temperate weather. The heartland enjoys a Mediterranean climate. Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego in the south are wind-, rain-, and snow-prone due to the influence of the Humboldt Current, a frigid stream of water that originates in Antarctica and brings cold air and cloudy, foggy weather to the coastal regions and into the river valleys. The rainy season in the heartland lasts from May until August.

❁ ECONOMY

Chile's copper exports have played a major role in its economic health, and it is a regional economic leader with high levels of foreign trade. In 1999 due to many factors—including a drop in exports (a result of the global financial crisis) and a severe drought—Chile experienced negative economic growth for the first time in more than 15 years. Unemployment remained a problem in the years that followed, but by the end of 1999 exports and economic activity had begun to recover.

Chile's agricultural products include fruit, wheat, corn, garlic, asparagus, and beans. It also produces beef, poultry, wool, and fish. Its main industries are copper, other minerals, foodstuff, iron and steel, wood and wood products, cement, and textiles.

Chile is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor. Most victims are Chilean minors trafficked internally for sexual exploitation.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The indigenous cultures of Chile have been virtually silenced by Europeans. In the middle and early modern Inca Empire northern Chile figured prominently as a cultural center, and the indigenous Mapuche and other Araucanian cultures blossomed in the central and southern regions. Those cultures, however, were dominated by the Spanish during the colonial period, and additional European influences, largely from Britain and France, started to make their influence felt during the 19th century and have continued. Chile's national dance is the *cueca* (short for *zamacueca*), which first appeared in the early 19th century. A traditional Chilean song, though not a dance, is the *tonada*, which originated in music brought with them by Spanish colonists. The *tonada* is distinguished from the *cueca* by an intermediate melodic section and a clearer melody.

In the mid-1960s native musical forms became linked to political activism and reformers like Chilean socialist Salvador Allende and his Popular Unity government. During Pinochet's rule, folk music served as a vehicle of protest, especially overseas. During the military dictatorship in the 1970s any form of public expression opposed to the junta was repressed, and protest songs were secretly played and circulated. In the late 1980s and after the return of democracy in the 1990s, new musical bands began to appear.

Spanish is Chile's official language, though a handful of native languages are still spoken. In the north there are more than 20,000 Aymara speakers; and in the south about half a million Mapuche speakers. Inhabitants of Easter Island, numbering about 2,000, speak the Polynesian language Rapa Nui. Chile's culture has been greatly influenced by the European incursions. Many Chilean intellectuals have been educated in Paris, and European influence is reflected in their art and literature. Chilean poets Gabriela Mistral and Pablo Neruda both won Nobel Prizes.

Roman Catholics constitute nearly 90 percent of the population.

❁ CUISINE

Seafood, beef, fresh fruit, and vegetables predominate in Chile's cuisine. *Lomo a lo pobre*, an enormous beefsteak with chips and two fried eggs, is a specialty. The *parillada* is a mixed grill of intestines, udders, and blood sausages. *Curanto* is a hearty stew of fish, shellfish, chicken, pork, lamb, beef, and potatoes. *Humitas* (corn tamales) and a variety of potato- and flour-based breads are popular. Chile also produces some of South America's finest wines.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

Chileans celebrate the New Year with warmth and gaiety. In fact the entire holiday beginning with Christmas is one of extremely high spirits. Many welcome the new year on the beaches, since the Southern Hemisphere is at the peak of its summer.

New Year celebrations involve food, drink, music, dancing, and, above all, nonstop parties. Several traditions distinguish Chilean celebrations from those observed elsewhere. One is *cola de mono* (monkey's tail), a beverage made from *aguardiente* (a strong alcoholic drink), coffee, milk, sugar, cinnamon, and egg yolk, which is traditionally drunk in the course of the festivities.

Another important aspect of Chilean New Year celebrations is fireworks displays. The city of Valparaíso is especially famous for them: Roman candles

Fun Fact

Magellan named the 373-mile-long passage the Estreito ("canal") de Todos los Santos, or All Saints' Channel, because All Saints' Day, 1 November, occurred while the fleet traveled through it.

Fun Fact

Excavation of shell middens (ancient garbage dumps) and analysis of the Chinchorros's bone chemistry indicates that 90 percent of their diet came from the Pacific Ocean.

are set off high above the bay, and people crowd the nearby hills to get the best view.

Chileans have several superstitions associated with the occasion. One involves eating lentils at midnight for good luck; another concerns walking around with a suitcase to increase one's chances to travel.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

✿ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May Day is an important occasion all over South America but even more so in Chile in keeping with the nation's long background of leftist thought and politics. Since the end of the right-wing Pinochet regime Labor Day has been restored to its former significance.

In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world, and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with a strike called by the U.S. labor union the American Federation of Labor demanding an eight-hour workday. Chile's association with the occasion is very old. Demonstrations have been held on that day as far back as 1890, the first time May Day was observed. In modern times Chile pays tribute to workers and working people both officially and unofficially, with speeches, rallies, and public meetings.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY



Mapuche Indians, wearing their traditional clothes and playing their ancestral musical instruments, perform a ritual dance during a ceremony marking Columbus Day in Santiago, Chile, on October 12. (AP Photo/Santiago Llanquin)

✿ NAVY DAY

Observed by: General Public

Date: May 21

Chile celebrates May 21 as Navy Day or Glorias Navales Day, paying tribute to its naval forces. This day also commemorates the Battle of Iquique, which the Chilean Navy fought against Peru in 1879 during the Pacific War of 1879–84. The day's fighting started badly for Chile. Its ship *Esmeralda* was sunk, and naval hero Arturo Prat Chacón (1848–79) was killed in action. Soon, however, the Chileans gained the upper hand, virtually destroying the Peruvian navy. Chile observes the day with military parades, speeches, and commemorative services. In addition, many events, such as yacht and bicycle races, as well as marathons, are also organized.

✿ RECONCILIATION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First Monday in September

The day was instituted in recent times after the brutal regime of Pinochet was overthrown. It recognizes the terrible oppression and denial of human rights suffered by ordinary citizens. It is a day of quiet reflection and mourning for the tens of thousands who died during the Pinochet regime.

✿ INDEPENDENCE DAY AND ARMED FORCES DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 18 (Independence Day), September 19 (Armed Forces Day)

Chileans observe September 18 as Independence Day. On this day in 1810 they proclaimed independence from Spain (although they fought for eight more years to actually gain it). The next day is observed as Armed Forces Day. The day is set aside to honor the military and their past victories. In effect it amounts to a continuation of the Independence Day celebrations.

The occasion spawns a week of *fiestas patrias* (literally “patriotic parties”), where Chileans gather to celebrate their country, culture, and independence. Parades, music, dances, drinking, and eating traditional Chilean food are all part of the festivities. The armed forces stage a large parade in Santiago attended by the president. A prominent feature of the parades is displays by *huasos*, or traditional Chilean cowboys.

Many fiestas take place in *ramadas*, temporary open pavilions with thatched roofs, traditionally made from tree branches. *Ramadas* usually contain a dance floor, a place for a band, and tables for eating. *Fondas*, or refreshment stands, offer Chilean dishes. *Empanadas*, *anticuchos* (shish kebabs), and *chicha* (an alcoholic drink) are very popular. Many dance com-

petitions also take place, with the national dance, *la cueca*, being the most popular.

❁ COLUMBUS DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 12

In Chile Columbus Day is observed on October 12. Traditionally associated with Columbus's discovery of America, it has also in recent times begun to be recognized as Native American Day, acknowledging the cruelty of the conquest and oppression of indigenous peoples by European conquerors.

Chile also celebrates this day as Día de la Raza (Day of the Race), recognizing the mixed indigenous and Hispanic heritage of the continent. Colorful pageants, processions, music, and other cultural activities play an important part in the events.

Religious Holidays

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

This Christian festival commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. It has been in the Christian liturgical calendar even longer than Easter has although no one is sure why it is called Good Friday. Some have suggested that the use of *good* in the name goes back to Old English and means "God's" Friday, while others interpret *good* to mean something like "observed as holy."

For many years Good Friday was primarily a Catholic observance, but many Protestant Churches now hold special services from noon until three in the afternoon on this day to recall Jesus' last hours on the Cross. Many of the faithful fast on this day; when they eat it is generally fish instead of meat. Radio stations in Chile broadcast special "mourning" programs until Easter Sunday morning when Jesus' Resurrection is celebrated.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter marks the Resurrection and return of Jesus on the third day following his Crucifixion. Easter is a joyful occasion, celebrating rebirth and redemption. In Chile, people attend early morning church services. Afterward children engage in Easter Egg Hunts. Picnics and beach outings are also common because this observance falls in the autumn in Chile.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ CUASIMODO FESTIVAL

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: First Sunday after Easter

Cuasimodo celebrations are typically Chilean and rooted in custom rather than the precepts of Christianity. In colonial times it was traditional on the first Sunday after Easter for priests to take Communion to the houses of the aged and the sick, who had been unable to attend church during Easter. In those days priests would often be attacked on the way, so they began to venture out with groups of guards, mostly *huasos* or Chilean cowboys. After the priests performed the sacrament, the day would end with rodeos and horsemanship contests.

Over time this has become a festival in its own right. At the finish of the day an open-air Mass celebrates the Eucharist. Spectacular color, song, and excitement predominate. Naturally horsemanship displays are a big part of the occasion.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

❁ ST. PETER'S AND ST. PAUL'S DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: Late June/Early July

In Chile, the feast days of St. Peter and St. Paul hold special significance for fishermen (St. Peter, himself a fisherman, is the patron saint of fishermen). In villages all along Chile's coastline, Chilean fishermen decorate their boats and take the image of their patron saint out to sea to pray for good weather and large catches. Often this is done at night with candles and flares burning.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: November 1

November 1 is celebrated as Día de Todos Santos, or All Saints' Day. This Christian festival over time has combined with preexisting indigenous festivities. The large pantheon of Christian saints is honored on this day, with each town celebrating its own patron saint with special services and prayers.

November 1 is also significant in South America because it marks the beginning of spring in the Southern Hemisphere. The rains return, and the Earth blooms. It is believed that the souls of the dead also return to reaffirm life. During this time doors are opened to guests. Hosts serve traditional Chilean dishes, particularly the favorites of their deceased relatives.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Chilean Christmas festivities start with decorating a tree with ornaments, tinsel, and candy. The Christmas Eve meal in Chile consists of chicken soup with potatoes, onions, and corn. For Catholics, attending Midnight Mass is customary. The main Christmas dinner, a midday meal on Christmas day, includes turkey, chicken, meat, salad, and rice. *Rompon*, a concoction of milk, eggs, and alcohol, is drunk, as is *cola de mono* (literally “monkey’s tail”), a beverage made of milk, eggs, coffee, cinnamon, and *aguardiente* (a strong alcoholic beverage). People also eat a Christmas pudding containing dried fruit.

Chile’s gift-bringer is called Old Man Christmas, and he climbs through windows rather than down chimneys. Since Christmas falls in the summer season, people go to the beach, the park, and other outdoor places on Christmas.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ FESTIVAL OF THE VIRGIN OF THE SONG

Observed in: North Chile

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July

This five-day festival is held in honor of an indigenous woman who converted to Catholicism and to whom miraculous powers are attributed. It is celebrated across the north of Chile. The Atacama Desert hosts perhaps the most famous celebration, which is attended by thousands of people.

The festival features both Christian and Inca traditions, as well as Andean music, dance, and costume. Particularly dramatic are the scores of colorfully dressed dragon-dancers with their horned masks and swirling capes.

❁ FESTIVAL OF LA VIRGEN DEL ROSARIO

Observed in: Andacollo

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 22–24

La Virgen del Rosario, also known as la Virgen Morena or Dark Lady, is the patron saint of miners. Since mining is one of the most important industrial activities in Chile, it is not surprising that the saint, and also the festival, should assume national significance. According to some, its roots lie in the Quechua deity Anta-Coya, who was later subsumed into Catholicism.

Every year from December 22 to 24, hundreds of thousands gather at the town of Andacollo, in Norte Chico. Particularly popular events are cockfights and horse races.

Further Reading

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China

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Eastern Asia, bordered by the Bay of Korea, the East China, the Yellow, and the South China Seas
Size	3,705,407 sq. mi.
Capital City	Beijing
Flag Description	The Chinese flag is red with a large yellow five-pointed star and four smaller yellow five-pointed stars (arranged in a vertical arc toward the middle of the flag) in the upper hoist-side corner.
Independence	N.A. (China has always been an independent country)
Population	1,306,313,812 (2005 est.)
Government	People's Republic
Nationality	Chinese
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Han Chinese (92%)
Major Language(s)	Chinese; primary dialect, Mandarin
Major Religion(s)	Taois; Confucianis; Buddhism; Muslim; Christian (religious practices are discouraged by the government)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; CCPS Birthday, July 1; National Day, October 1

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Given a recorded history dating back to 1500 B.C.E., China is among the world's oldest civilizations. It is also the most populous nation in the world. Chinese history probably began around 5,000 years ago, and covers several different states and cultures of East Asia that have followed one after the other for the past 4,000 years. The country's earliest political organization is not known, but Chinese legends claim the region was once ruled by godly beings who taught the earliest people about hunting and agriculture, and gave them the gift of life. From 2205 until the 20th century, China was governed by a succession of dynasties, and its history is one of a series of divisions and unifications with periodic times of peace, war, and dynastic upheaval.

The first of these was the Xia Dynasty, said to have remained in power from 2205 until around 1818 B.C.E. There

is no archaeological evidence of the Xia Dynasty, although several Neolithic sites have been claimed to be such. The Chou Dynasty (c. 1122–221 B.C.E.) is said to have succeeded the Xia. During this period the practice of Confucianism began, and the principle of a "mandate of heaven" was established, which held that the right to rule was given to the just and denied to the evil and corrupt. This later led to the Taoist view that heaven's wrath is expressed through natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, and insect plagues. The Chou Dynasty is usually divided into three periods: the Western Chou period (1122–771), the period (722–481), and the Warring States period (481–221). The states of Jin and Jiu emerge as major competitors in the struggle to control an empire in China. A four-tiered class structure emerged: the lesser nobility (including scholars), the peasant farmers, the artisans, and the merchants. This was also the period of the Hundred Schools of Thought, when several schools of political philosophy emerged, including the four main schools: Confucianism, Taoism, Mohism, and Legalism.

Fun Fact

The Chinese were among the few civilizations to develop a writing system (ideogrammic) independently. The others were the Sumerians (cuneiform), Indians (Sanskrit-Devanagari), Mayans and Egyptians (hieroglyphics).

The Jin emerged victorious at the end of the Warring States period. The Chinese were first united under the Jin Dynasty (238–21). Prince Cheng named himself as the first Jin emperor and unified China under a central bureaucracy. The Jin standardized the writing system and completed the Great Wall that still surrounds China. The Jin Dynasty ended in 207, lasting only 14 years.

The Han Dynasty (207 B.C.E.–9 C.E.) that followed, was started by a man of humble origins Han, Kao Zu (or Liu Ping; 256 or 247–195). It engaged heavily in military conflicts. It created three economic regions, which led eventually to the formation of the Three Kingdoms. They ended up competing for control of the country. This period also witnessed the flowering of Buddhism and the fine arts. Stability came to China when it was reunited under the Sui Dynasty (581–618), and it continued under the Tang Dynasty (618–907). This was probably the most glorious period of Chinese history. Through military victories, China restored its control of the silk routes and became internationalized. Under the Tang emperors Buddhism flourished and split into two distinct schools: the Chan

(Zen) and Pure Land (Chinese Buddhist).

Under the Song Dynasty (960–1279) that followed, Confucianism experienced a revival, and China enjoyed tremendous urban and commercial growth. It was during this period that the Italian explorer Marco Polo (1254–1324) visited and wrote about China's incredible prosperity and its wealthy cities. The Yuan Dynasty (1280–1368), founded by Gublai Khan (1215–94), grandson of the famous Mongol ruler Genghis Khan (1162–1227), established a capital at what is now Beijing and militarized the nation's administration. Subsequently the Buddhist novice Hongwu (1328–98) established the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) with two capitals, one at Beijing, the other at Nanjing.

In 1511 the Portuguese became the first European traders to reach China, and by 1557 they had established a trade mission in Macau. It was not until 1760, however, that other European merchants, principally from Britain, gained access to China's markets. The trade that followed tended to favor China, since the British bought more silk and tea than the Chinese did wool and spices. In 1773 the British decided to try to improve their trading position by selling opium to the Chinese. In 1839 a war erupted over the rampant addiction of the Chinese that resulted from this narcotic trade.

The Opium Wars, as they came to be known, continued until 1860, when treaties favoring the British led to the secession of Hong Kong.

Zhongguo

The Chinese refer to their nation as *Zhongguo*, which can be translated as “Middle Kingdom” or “Central State,” perhaps alluding to China as the center of its known world, with lesser tributary states around it. The name has not been consistently used throughout Chinese history because of its cultural and political associations. During the Warring States period, for example, it described only the states of the Yellow River (Huang He) Valley, and excluded the Jiu and Qin states, although the concept of “China” as the center was continually redefined as the country's political sphere of influence expanded territorially, and its culture came to incorporate foreign influences.

Zhengguo quickly came to be understood as including the Yangtze and Pearl River systems and, by the era of the Tang dynasty it had taken in regimes such as the Xianbei and Xiongnu, formerly characterized as “barbarian.” The People's Republic of China (PRC) controls Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet, while the Republic of China (ROC) controls Taiwan (also claimed by the PRC). Those regions are often included as part of *Zhengguo*, although their claims remain politically controversial.

Before and through the end of the Han Dynasty, the term *Zhongguo* could be understood to refer to the area immediately surrounding the imperial domain, those territories controlled directly by central authorities, or what is now called the North China Plain. With the influx of northern nomads, after the end of the Han Dynasty occurred, the meaning of *Zhongguo* lost its geographical reference and developed the more abstract sense of “political legitimacy” when it became necessary to distinguish the northern and southern areas. The northern Wei regime called itself *Zhongguo* and referred to the southern dynasties as *yi*, (“barbarian”). The southern dynasties, only recently separated from the northern, began to call them *lu*, which meant “criminal.”

The English term *China* (and the prefix *sino-*) is thought to go back to the Qin Dynasty, which unified the country and standardized the writing system. The name *China*, like *Zhongguo*, can be used to refer narrowly to China proper or, more broadly, to include Inner Mongolia, Manchuria, and Tibet. It is also used to refer to the People's Republic of China (PRC) or Taiwan (ROC), which causes some political problems. In most contexts it makes sense to refer either to “mainland China” or Taiwan.

Opium Wars

The Opium Wars, also called the Anglo-Chinese Wars, resulted in a series of humiliating military defeats for China. They also represent a sordid and vicious period in European history. The key player in the prelude to these wars was a brilliant and highly moral Chinese official named Lin Ze Hsu (1785–1850). Lin had become deeply concerned about the problem of opium addiction that threatened to destroy Chinese society in the 19th century.

Lin's concern put him in conflict with the British, who, through the British East India Company, were shipping large quantities of opium into Canton in exchange for tea and Chinese manufactured goods. The British could produce the opium in India since it was a British colony; by the 1830s they had established a major drug-trafficking business. This trade produced a country filled with drug addicts, as opium parlors proliferated throughout China. Moreover, the British traders generously bribed Canton officials in order to keep the opium traffic flowing. The effects on Chinese society were devastating.

Lin maneuvered himself into an appointment as the Imperial Commissioner at Canton. His express purpose was to cut off the opium trade at its source by rooting out corrupt officials and cracking down on British trade in the drug. He took over in March of 1839 and, within two months, took action

against Chinese merchants and Western traders, shutting down all the traffic in opium. He did this by destroying all the existing supplies of opium and writing to Queen Victoria of Britain requesting that the British cease all opium trade.

The British, despite Lin's eloquent letter, refused to stop the opium trade. In response Lin threatened to cut off all trade with Britain and expel all the British from China. This led to the Opium Wars, which started when Chinese boats attempted to turn back British merchant vessels in November of 1839. Although this was a low-level conflict, it inspired the British to send a fleet of warships in June 1840. The Chinese, with old-style weapons and artillery, were no match for the British gunships, which ranged up and down the coast shooting at forts in addition to fighting on land. The Chinese were stunned by the technological superiority of the British land armies and suffered humiliating defeat.

The first of the Opium Wars ended in 1842, when the Chinese were forced to accept an ignominious peace under the Treaty of Nanking. In 1856 a second war broke out when the Chinese searched a British ship the *Arrow* in Guangzhou. The French joined the British in combat, and their combined forces led to the occupation of Guangzhou and Tianjin, compelling the Chinese to accept the treaty of Tianjin (1858), to which Russia and the United States were also parties.

Subsequently Western nations carved China into "spheres of influence." With respect to trade the United States proposed an Open Door Policy, and the Chinese agreed. Soon after China was forced to relinquish all of its colonial possessions. Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia were ceded to the French, Burma to the British, and Korea and Taiwan to Japan.

The first half of the 20th century was a period of utter chaos in China. Intellectuals searched for a new philosophy to replace Confucianism, while warlords competed for imperial power. In southern China, Sun Yat Sen's (1866–1925) Guomindang (GMD), or Nationalist Party, established a base and began training a National Revolutionary Army (NRA). At the same time, talks between the Soviets and prominent Chinese Marxists resulted in the formation of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1921. Hopes of the CCP aligning with the GMD ended when Sun Yat Sen died in 1925, and Jiang Jie Shi (Chiang Kai-shek) (1887–1975), who favored a capitalist state supported by a military dictatorship, made his political debut in Beijing.

There was a split among the Communists, dividing those who focused on urban revolt and

those who believed victory lay in uniting the countryside. By 1930 Mao Zedong (also Mao Tse-tung; 1893–1976), who established his forces in the mountains of Jinggang Shan, had marshaled a 40,000-person guerilla army. Although Jiang Jie Shi mounted four campaigns to exterminate the goerillas, each engagement resulted in a Communist victory. In 1931 Japan took advantage of the chaos in China and invaded Manchuria. Jiang Jie Shi did little to resist the Japanese and by 1939 they had overrun most of eastern China.

The defeat of the Japanese in World War II left China in the grip of civil war. On October 1, 1949, Mao Zedong declared the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Jiang Jie Shi and his followers fled in defeat to Taiwan, however, the United States continued to recognize him as the legitimate ruler of China. Meanwhile, although the PRC assumed power over a virtually bankrupt nation, an era of great confidence began to emerge. By 1953 inflation was arrested, industrial production had been restored to prewar levels, the redistribution of land was implemented, and China's first Five-Year Plan was launched. Next Mao initiated the Cultural Revolution (1966–70) and attempted to



Fun Fact

The Great Wall was built to hold back the Hsiung Nu, a desperate nomadic people.

enhance his personal image. He published a book titled *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* (usually referred to as “The Little Red Book”) and initiated a purge of his opponents. Universities were closed, intellectuals were killed, and temples were ransacked, all in an effort to wipe out China’s capitalist past and solidify the power of the Communists.

After Mao’s death in 1976 Chinese politics again saw conflict between moderates Zhou Enlai (1898–1976) and Deng Xiaoping (1904–97), and radicals and Maoists led by Mao’s widow Jiang Qing (1914–91). When Zhou died in 1976 the radicals prevailed. A public uprising against Jiang Qing and her associates led to further repression, and Deng disappeared for a time. However he returned to public life in 1977 and formed a standing committee of the Chinese Communist Party.

With Deng in charge China signed the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration (Britain agreed to return Hong Kong, a British colony since 1842, to China) and set out on a course toward economic reconstruction. However in the absence of political reform, general dissatisfaction with the Communist Party, soaring inflation, and increased demands for democracy led to widespread social unrest. This unrest climaxed in the student demonstrations of 1989 that led to the bloody Tiananmen Square massacre.

On July 1, 1997, British colonialism in China came to an end when Hong Kong was officially returned to China. Under what Deng Xiaoping labeled “one country, two systems,” Hong Kong embarked on one of the boldest experiments of the 21st century: capitalism under a Communist regime. In the mid-1990s China’s leadership passed to Jiang Zemin (b.

1926). Jiang charted a new course based on economic growth, and his successor Hu Jintao (b. 1942) instituted an even more aggressive program of economic modernization, exemplified in his decision to have China join the World Trade Organization (WTO).

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

China is located in the eastern part of Asia, on the west coast of the Pacific Ocean. It is the third largest country in the world (after Canada and Russia), with a total land area of nearly 4 million square miles. The distance from east to west measures over 3,231 miles and, from north to south, over 3,417 miles.

With a land border of 13,759 miles, China shares borders with 14 countries: Korea in the east; Russia in the northeast and the northwest; Mongolia in the north; India, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Bhutan, and Nepal in the west and southwest; and Burma, Laos, and Vietnam in the south.

The coastline of China extends more than 8,700 miles. Across the East China Sea to the east and the South China Sea to the southeast, are Japan, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia. More than 5,000 islands are scattered over China’s vast territorial seas, the largest being Taiwan. One territorial sea and three neighboring seas altogether constitute nearly 3 million square miles.

China is a mountainous country with two-thirds of its total land area covered by mountains, hills, and plateaus. The highest mountain in the world, Mount Everest (29,035 feet), is located on the border between China and Nepal.

China has numerous rivers. The inland river system accounts for 36 percent of the total area in China. The Yangtze, Yellow, Heilongjiang, Pearl, and Huaihe are the major rivers. The Yangtze is the longest river in China and the third longest in the world, with a total length of 6,300 miles and a drainage area of more than one million square miles. It is an arterial waterway connecting such important cities as Shanghai, Nanjing, Wuhan, and Chongqing. The entire landmass of China has approximately 2,800 natural lakes with a total area of more than 49,709 square miles.

ECONOMY

Until the 1990s China was insular, and the rest of the world had little concrete knowledge about its economic and industrial condition. Around this time, however, it underwent rapid industrialization and restructured its economy. Thereafter it opened its doors to the world for trade purposes. During the recent past China has accounted for one-third of global economic growth, twice as much as the United States. In 2004 China’s official growth in gross domestic product (GDP) surged to nearly 10 percent. Even this may underestimate the true rate, however, which some economists calculate was as high as 13 percent.

China’s skyrocketing growth has helped to boost other economies with its huge hunger for imports, which surged by 40 percent in 2004 alone. While America’s industrial output has shrunk in the recent past, China’s has increased by almost 50 percent. As a result, its demand for commodities has skyrocketed, driving up prices. In the early years of the 21st century China accounted for one-third of the growth in global oil consumption and 90 percent of the growth in world steel demand. Ever since China signed the WTO treaty, its products have been flooding the open markets of neighboring countries, including India.

Fun Fact

In Nepal, Mt. Everest is called Sagarmatha, which means “goddess of the sky,” while in Tibet it is known as Chomolungma, “mother goddess of the universe.” In 1999 the world’s highest mountain had added an additional six feet to its stature.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

It has been said that every third person in the world is Chinese. In fact despite its stringent birth-control measures, China boasts the largest population in the world. Chinese society is still quite conservative, with deep-rooted traditions and a strong gender bias in this male-dominated country. The Chinese typically observe elaborate customs, rites, and rituals and are very conscious of symbols of social status, often regardless of wealth. Chinese are famous for their exquisitely beautiful calligraphy, painting styles, and a variety of ethnic handicrafts.

The Chinese calendar has no names for the months; rather, they are identified numerically in the order of their occurrence. The Chinese calendar is lunar-based, with the start of the lunar year determined by the cycles of the Moon. As a result, the beginning of the year can fall anywhere between late January and the middle of February. The calendar is also cyclical. Each year in the 12-year cycle is named for an animal, such as the rooster, tiger, rabbit, and snake. The Chinese believe that people born in a particular year will possess the traits of the animal that rules that year.

❁ CUISINE

Chinese cuisine is renowned throughout the world not only for its delicious taste and beautiful presentation, but also for its sheer variety and abundance. Food and cooking are considered integral parts of the nation's culture. Chinese chefs strive for harmony of sight, smell, taste, and texture, so that each dish is unique. The flavors must not overpower, yet must be strong enough to be tasted by the diners. In hot dishes a strong aroma stimulates the diner's appetite. Fragrances from fresh ginger root, garlic, or chili pepper are blended with wine, aniseed, cinnamon, peppercorn, or sesame oil. Soy sauce, sugar, vinegar, and other seasonings are used discreetly.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 1–2

In China the New Year (as it is calculated according to the Gregorian calendar) is not celebrated on as large a scale as the more important Chinese New Year, which falls about a month later. Still in China the Western New Year is a two-day, paid holiday for all employees. Parties are held almost everywhere, including parks, dance halls, and restaurants.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

International Labor Day is very important in China, since workers form the theoretical backbone of Communism. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of Socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. This was an attempt to coordinate this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

This day is as important as both New Year's celebrations and is a paid holiday for all employees. People enjoy themselves by hosting parties. The workers and trade union activists also organize parades and processions on this day. More often than not, this public holiday spills over into the two consecutive days that follow.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ CCPS BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 1

This is a day of immense significance in China's modern political history. It commemorates the founding of the Chinese Communist Party in Shanghai in 1921. It is a public holiday, featured in major front-page articles and special editorials in the government-owned newspapers and radio and television stations.

❁ NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 1

This day celebrates the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. There are official flag-raising ceremonies and parades, and the streets of Beijing are illuminated with white and colored lights. During the day many people attend parties in parks, followed by fireworks and special television programs during the evening. The public holiday continues for the next two days (October 2 and 3). In Hong Kong this day features the famous National Day Cup horse races.

Religious Holidays

❁ CHINESE NEW YEAR

Observed by: Chinese (except Muslims and Christians)
Observed on: First of the first month of the Chinese calendar

Of all the traditional Chinese festivals, the New Year celebrations are the most elaborate and colorful. Preparations for the Chinese New Year start well in advance of the actual day, and the Chinese devote a

significant portion of the last month of the year getting ready for it. According to tradition every corner of the house must be swept and cleaned thoroughly. Spring couplets, poetry written in black ink on large vertical scrolls of red paper, are pasted on the sides of doors and gateways. These couplets express good wishes for the family in the coming year.

During the month preceding the New Year, Chinese bid farewell to Zao Jun, the Kitchen God, the guardian of the family hearth as well as the inventor of fire. It is believed that Zao Jun leaves the house on the 23rd of this month to report the behavior of the family to the Jade Emperor. Therefore on the evening of the 23rd, families bid a ritual farewell to the deity with a delicious dinner, sweetmeats, and honey, so that what Zao Jun reports about the family will be “sweet.”

The last days of the old year are the appropriate time to pay off one’s debts. On the last day of the old year it is also customary for people to cook enough to last the next two days. Tradition stipulates that all food be prepared before New Year’s Day, so that scissors, knives, forks, and other sharp utensils can be put away to avoid “cutting” the luck it is hoped the New Year will bring.

On New Year’s Day, the Chinese congratulate each other on having passed through another year. It is traditional to wear new clothes, and everyone is supposed to be on his or her best behavior: no telling lies, raising one’s voice, using abusive language, or



Lion dancers perform during the opening ceremony of the Temple of the Earth fair on the eve of Chinese New Year in Beijing. (AP Photo/Greg Baker)

breaking anything on the first day of the year. The Chinese also give New Year’s presents that are similar in spirit to Christmas presents, although they tend to prefer items such as fruit and tea.

This holiday, more than any other Chinese holiday, stresses the importance of family. It is a time for family reunions and visiting friends and relatives.

See also Volume III: CHINESE NEW YEAR

❁ LANTERN FESTIVAL

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Fifteenth of the first month of the Chinese calendar

The Lantern Festival marks the end of the Chinese New Year season. It takes place halfway through the first month of the Chinese calendar. This festival is largely celebrated in the rural areas by farmers. Lantern exhibits, lion and dragon dances, and eating *tang yuan* (round boiled sweet dumplings made of rice, with delicious fillings) are featured.

❁ DUAN WU FESTIVAL

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Fifth of the fifth month of Chinese calendar

This festival honors the memory of Chu Yuan (Zhu Youan), a great patriot poet of the former state of Jiu during the Warring States period (475–221), who drowned himself to protest his emperor’s decision to submit to the aggressive neighboring state of Jin. For fear that fish would consume Chu Yuan’s body, the people of Jiu took to their boats and started throwing rice dumplings wrapped in bamboo leaves into the river, where he had drowned himself to encourage the fish to eat the rice dumplings rather than the poet’s body. In modern times a dragon-boat contest preserves the legacy of that historic incident. People also conscientiously observe the custom of feeding the fish.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

The major responsibility for a pregnant woman’s care is assumed by her mother-in-law, not her husband. In Chinese culture ancient customs, beliefs, and traditions play an important role in protecting the pregnant woman and her baby from complications. The Chinese fear evil influences as well as the natural phenomena of miscarriage, stillbirth, and birth defects.

Many customs relate to the behavior and environs of the pregnant woman. Chinese women are taught to avoid using foul language and torturing, striking, or killing animals during pregnancy. Argu-

Origins of the Lantern Festival

One explanation traces this festival to ancient times, when Taiyi, the god of heaven and one of Taoism's most important gods, was worshipped. The Chinese then believed Taiyi controlled the destiny of the human world. He was very powerful and commanded 16 dragons. It was he who decided when to inflict drought, storms, famine, or pestilence on human beings. Beginning with Jin Shi Huang, the first emperor to unite China, all subsequent emperors ordered splendid ceremonies in Taiyi's honor annually. They would ask the god to bring favorable weather and good health to the land. In 104 B.C.E. Emperor Wudi of the Han Dynasty proclaimed this holiday one of China's most important, and the celebrations lasted throughout the night.

Yet another account relates this festival to when Buddhism first entered China during the reign of the

Emperor Mingdi of the Eastern Han Dynasty in the first century. Initially Buddhism did not have much influence on the Chinese people. One day, however, the Emperor Mingdi had a dream about a mysterious golden man in his palace. When he was about to ask the mysterious figure who he was, the figure rose to the sky and disappeared in the west. Because of this, Emperor Mingdi felt a need to send a scholar to India (which is west of China) on a pilgrimage to locate Buddhist scriptures. After traversing thousands of miles the scholar finally returned with them. Emperor Mingdi ordered that a temple be built to house a statue of Buddha and to serve as a repository for the scriptures. Because followers believe that the power of Buddha can dispel darkness, the emperor ordered his subjects to display lighted lanterns during what was to become the Lantern Festival.

ments and disputes are also to be avoided, because they may harm the fetus. It is considered bad luck to name an unborn baby since this implies eagerness on the part of the parents for a child of a particular sex.

A pregnant woman is encouraged to continue working since this is supposed to make both labor and delivery easier. However tradition prohibits working with glue or other adhesives because they are thought to cause birth complications. Likewise hammering nails is believed to cause deformity in the fetus.

The production of a male heir is of paramount importance in Chinese culture. Male offspring are essential for ancestor worship and the continuation of the family lineage. Girls have traditionally been considered as only "temporary" family members, while male offspring "belong" to the family their entire lives.

The Chinese often consult a holy man or shaman if a male offspring is not born after several attempts. According to prevalent Chinese superstitions a couple should eat certain types of food for the seven days leading up to conception to get the child of their choice: tofu, mushrooms, carrots, and lettuce for a boy; pickles, meat, and fish for a girl.

❁ MARRIAGE

Because China is a patriarchal society in which the perpetuation of the family is paramount, marriage is an important institution, and there are many intricate customs associated with it. Chinese men tend to marry quite late, since they need to save enough money for the wedding. It can be very expensive, especially in the case of socially prominent families. Failure to provide a lavish wedding is likely to lower the status of the family, bring criticism from rela-

tives, and cause shame for all concerned. This relates to two important components of Chinese culture: to display wealth and prosperity conspicuously and to avoid embarrassment.

In Chinese culture a marriage is not simply a love match between two people, but an establishment of a relationship between two families as well. If the parents are not happy with the lineage and status of the other family, the wedding will not take place. However arranged marriages, in which the match is made by the parents or relatives of the bride and groom, are now rare and viewed as old-fashioned. Marriage today is usually based on the young people's own choices. However once the couple has decided to marry, the arrangements are taken over by the parents (or older relatives), reverting to tradition.

The first stage of the wedding involves information gathering on the part of the groom's family, who seeks to learn more about the reputation and lineage of the bride's family, as well as the character of the bride. Before the families meet, the groom's family will make discreet inquiries among friends and acquaintances. When a meeting (only between the elders of the two families) does occur, the bride's family tries to learn as much as possible about the status and wealth of the groom's family, as well as ensure that their daughter is not likely to be maltreated.

If both families are satisfied with the match, the groom's parents will send an elderly female representative to negotiate the marriage. The representative is expected to discuss the size of the bride's dowry, a suitable date, and other details of the wedding. It is considered inappropriate, however, for the groom's representative to try to bargain; her job is to ask the bride's name and date of birth in order to give this information to an astrologer who will set the wedding date.



If a death occurs in either family the wedding is usually postponed for a stipulated period of time, since it is not considered appropriate to hold a wedding during a period of mourning. A postponement may also occur if the wedding arrangements cannot be completed within a specified period or the couple wishes to wait. In these instances an engagement prior to marriage may be acceptable if the bride's parents' consent to it. Chinese engagements are not a binding commitment but merely an indication of intent. The engagement is usually a simple affair with an exchange of rings (worn on the third finger of the left hand), and the engagement is for an unspecified time period.

A few days before the wedding, the bride receives gifts from her friends and relatives, articles that will be useful to her in the traditional role of wife and homemaker. The bride's wedding dress combines the colors red, yellow, and white, which are considered auspicious. Black, blue, and gray may not be worn by either the bride or groom since these colors signify grief and bring bad luck to the marriage.

On the wedding day the groom visits the bride's house. An elderly woman (*sam bob*) is appointed to ensure that all customs are observed and to guide the couple through the ceremony. While the groom is at the bride's home a small reception is held at his house for relatives, friends, and neighbors. As a part of the wedding rites, the groom's house will be brilliantly decorated in red. (The bride's family may hold a similar banquet for their own relatives the day before the wedding. The groom attends this party with some of his own relatives in order to become acquainted with the bride's wider social circle).

At the start of the wedding ceremony the couple bows three times at the ancestral altar to pay homage to the ancestors and also to seek their blessings. Next the bride's parents serve tea and present the couple with a red packet (*ang bow*). Tea is then served by the newlyweds to the elder siblings and other senior relatives of the bride. The couple bows while serving the tea as a sign of respect and gratitude.

The wedding banquet is not an obligatory part of the ceremony; its inclusion depends largely on the traditions of the bride's family and its financial status. It is often held on the wedding night and is the climax of the event. Traditionally wedding banquets were held in the home or compound, but they often take place in restaurants and hotels subject to the mutual convenience of both parties.

Guests at the wedding banquet will customarily bring a red packet (for the couple) and sign a guest-book. They will also formally introduce themselves to the members of both families. Alcoholic drinks—uncommon in Chinese culture—are considered compulsory at this event, and the wedding couple often drinks a toast at every table. The wedding ends with the signing of the marriage register, which makes the marriage legal. The couple will then depart for the groom's house. In case a death has

occurred in either neighborhood, an alternative route must be found to avoid passing a coffin or hearse since they are considered bad omens and portend calamity in conjugal life.

When the bride has crossed the threshold of the groom's house, she becomes part of the groom's family. Here the ancestor worship and tea serving ceremonies are repeated. After the ceremonies the bride is taken to the bridal chamber by her bridesmaids, where she retires for the night with her new spouse. Traditionally the room contains a potty and a baby bath as it is thought that these will hasten conception.

In the Chinese family system the wife lives with the husband's family and is deemed the "property" of her husband's family and no longer part of her own. Traditionally Chinese couples with the same surname are not supposed to marry. Cousins are not allowed to marry, because the Chinese fear such a union will produce deformed children. Even if the bride and groom have no known relatives in common, it is believed that if they share the same name, they stem from the same ancestral lineage and so should not marry.

DEATH

In China, there are several different funeral traditions. In one of these funeral rites extend over a 49-day period, of which the first 7 days are the most important. Prayers are said every 7 days for 49 days if the family can afford it; if the family is too poor, then the period may be shortened to between 3 and 7 days.

When a Chinese father dies his eldest son becomes the head of the family. If the eldest son passes away his second brother does not assume leadership of the family. Leadership passes to the eldest son of the eldest son, or the grandson of the father. He must assume the responsibilities and duties to the ancestors on behalf of the family. The head of the family should be present for at least the first and preferably the second, prayer ceremony. The head of the family should also be present for the burial or the cremation.

In the second tradition the prayer ceremonies take place at 10-day intervals. There are four of these ceremonies before the final burial or cremation. At the end of 100 days one additional prayer ceremony may be held, but it is not as necessary or important as the first four.

Most Chinese Buddhists believe that there is an intermediate period between death and rebirth. In Sanskrit it is called *Antarabhava*; in Tibetan it is called the *Bardo*. This interim period is important, because it influences the form the rebirth will take. If the family provides the appropriate prayers and memorial services, it ensures the deceased a good rebirth. Usually, it is the responsibility of the deceased's daughters to bear the funeral expenses.

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Colombia

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Colombia is in the northern part of South America. Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, and Venezuela border it in the south and east, Panama lies to its northwest, and the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea lie to its west.
Size	439,736 sq. mi.
Capital City	Bogotá
Flag Description	The Colombian flag has an entirely yellow top half; the bottom half has equal horizontal bands of blue and red.
Independence	July 20, 1810 (from Spain)
Population	42,954,279 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Colombian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Mestizo (58%)
Major Language(s)	Spanish
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (90%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day, July 20; Battle of Boyacá, August 7; Columbus Day, October 12; Cartagena Independence Day, November 14

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Colombia's first inhabitants were Amerindian settlers from North and Central America including the Tayrona, Sinu, Muisca, Quimbaya, Tierradentro, and San Agustín. Around 1200 B.C.E. the first wave of Amerindians from Central America arrived in Colombia, bringing with them maize (corn), followed by a second wave in 500, and a third between 400 and 300, shortly before the Arawaks moved into the region from other areas of the continent. By 1000 B.C.E. Amerindians had developed the political system of *cacicazgos* (in Spanish *cacique*, in Taino *cacike*, or in Arawak *kassequa*, all meaning "chieftain.") with a pyramidal structure of power, especially the Muisca, or Chibcha people. Next to the Incas theirs was the largest political system of South America. They were farmers, artisans, and skilled goldsmiths; their dwellings were circular, made of wood and thatch. In Chibcha, *muisca* means "people." Their

sacred sites such as Guatavita and Iguaque Lakes remain, and their cultural artifacts—goldwork, pottery, burial chambers, and rock paintings—can still be seen today.

Toward the end of the first millennium C.E. the Caribs moved to the mainland from their island homes, forcing the Chibcha to move into the higher elevations.

In 1499 Alonso de Ojeda (1466–1516), a former companion of Christopher Columbus (1451–1506), landed on the Guajira Peninsula with his own ships, accompanied by Amerigo Vespucci (1454–1512). The Indians initially tolerated the Spaniards but rebelled when the Spanish tried to enslave them. When Ojeda returned to Spain in 1500 he sold the captive Amerindians.

The Spaniards soon conquered a large part of what was to become Colombia, and Cartagena was founded in 1533. In 1544 the territory became a part of the Viceroyalty of Peru, made up of most of the Spanish territories in South America. This changed in 1739 when it was incorporated into the territory of New Granada.

In 1819 Simón Bolívar (1783–1830) and his liberation army secured independence for the region, which included Colombia. This was followed by 10 years of confederation with Venezuela and Ecuador. Regional differences among the three, however, finally destroyed the union. A lengthy period of unrest ensued.

Two parties were formed: the Conservative and the Liberal. Their rivalry led to no fewer than 50 insurrections and 8 civil wars in the 19th century alone. The 1899–1903 “War of a Thousand Days” led to a period of relative peace. But in 1948 war broke out again, and nearly 300,000 people were killed. After some time the conflict began taking on revolutionary overtones; so the Conservatives and the Liberals agreed to a power-sharing arrangement in 1957.

This two-party era came to an end in 1974, although a modified version of the two-party system continued for another 17 years. Resentments over the two parties’ monopoly of power fostered the growth of left-wing guerilla groups such as the National Liberation Army (ELN), Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and the April 19 Movement (M19). Also growing in power were the drug cartels of Medellín and Cali and the paramilitary death squads they financed.

By 1990 escalating violence brought the country to the point of collapse. In 1991 a new constitution came into effect, which strengthened government control. In the same year Pablo Escobar (1949–93), head of the Medellín cartel, surrendered to authorities. He escaped the next year but was killed in December 1993. In 1995, Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela (b. 1940), leader of the Cali cartel, was arrested, but this hardly affected the drug trade. In 1998 the conservative Andrés Pastrana (b. 1954), who had led a campaign against politicians’ drug cartel connections, won the elections.

In 2002 the moderate-right independent Álvaro Uribe (b. 1952) won a landslide victory. Known for his staunch opposition to guerillas, Uribe had survived 15 assassination attempts even before he became president. In spite of setbacks in the early years of the 21st century he remained popular and continued his efforts to rein in the guerillas and drug cartels.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Colombia is the fourth largest country in South America. The western part of the country is mostly mountainous; a part of the Andes Mountains is located here. This is also the location of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, the world’s highest coastal mountain range. Colombia’s tallest mountain is the Pico Cristóbal Colón, at 18,946 feet. The Serranía de la Macarena is an isolated mountain formation rising 3,000 feet from the eastern plains. Over 50 percent of the lands east of the Andes are lowlands or covered by thick rain forest. The jungle of the Pacific coast holds a world record for the highest rainfall.

Chibcha Spiritual Beliefs

Like other Amerindian groups the Chibcha’s spiritual beliefs were pantheistic, and their *zeques* (“shamans.”) functioned as both healers and oracles. Their most important gods were the solar god Bochica and Chibchacum, who protected the people, farmers, and traders. Chia, the goddess of the Moon, may have been Bochica’s consort. Chibchacum was also the god of earthquakes. The Chibcha believed that Bochica had designated Chibchacum to carry the world on his shoulders. Whenever he tired of carrying the Earth on one shoulder, he shifted it to his other shoulder, a motion that caused earthquakes.

❁ ECONOMY

Colombia has two economies: the legitimate official one and that of the huge underground drug trade, which is apparently linked to the international traffic in women and girls for sexual exploitation and prostitution. The country produces coffee, bananas, rice, tobacco, corn, sugarcane, and cocoa beans. Its coffee is one of the best in the world. Among the industrial goods it produces are textiles, processed foods, beverages, chemicals, and cement. In addition to oil, its mines produce coal, gold, and gems such as emeralds.

Prolonged conflicts and weak domestic and foreign demand have hurt Colombia’s economy. Oil and coffee, Colombia’s main exports, face an uncertain future. Existing oil fields are close to depletion, while coffee production and demand are both depressed. On the other hand early 21st-century economic reforms have been well received by international financial institutions, and investor confidence seems to be growing. Colombia is the third largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid, but much of that aid is earmarked for fighting the drug trade, not for helping the people.

Colombia is a major source and transit country for women and girls trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The Colombian government estimates that 45,000 to 50,000 Colombian nationals engage in prostitution overseas, and a majority of them are trafficking victims.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The majority of Colombia’s people are of mixed Spanish, African, and indigenous descent. Spanish is

Fun Fact

Lake Guatavita is among the places believed to have been responsible for the legend of El Dorado, a myth that lured Spanish conquistadors eager for gold and wealth. It is said that the local people threw all their wealth into the lake so the Spaniards could not get to it.

Simón Bolívar

Simón Bolívar, widely regarded as El Libertador (“The Liberator”) of South America, was born in what is now Caracas, Venezuela, into an aristocratic family. Following the death of his parents, he left for Spain in 1799 to finish his education. Bolívar returned to Venezuela in 1807, and joined the resistance juntas in South America. When the Caracas junta declared its independence from Spain in 1810, Bolívar went to England on a diplomatic mission. He returned to Venezuela in 1811, but in 1812, junta leader Francisco de Miranda (1759–1816) surrendered, and Bolívar was forced to flee.

In 1813 Bolívar led the invasion of Venezuela and retook Caracas on August 6, where he was proclaimed *El Libertador*, beginning the Second Venezuelan Republic. After the rebellion of José Tomás Boves (1782–1814) in 1814 and the fall of the republic, Bolívar returned to what is now Colombia and entered Bogotá, recapturing the city from the dissenting republican forces of Cundinamarca, now a department of Colombia. Again, however, after a number of political and military disputes with the government of Cartagena, Bolívar had to flee. This time to Jamaica, where he sought help from Alexan-

dre Pétion (1770–1818), the leader of Haiti.

With Haitian help Bolívar landed in Venezuela and captured Angostura in 1816 (now Ciudad Bolívar). After the famous Battle of Boyacá in 1819 Colombia became another territory free from Spanish control, and in 1821 a federation covering much of Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, and Ecuador was created, with Bolívar as president and Francisco de Paula Santander (1792–1840), as vice president. Further victories in 1821–22 secured Bolívar’s rule over Venezuela and Ecuador, and he took over the task of fully liberating Peru. In 1824 the Peruvian congress named him dictator of Peru, and later that year the Spanish forces were decisively defeated. At the Congress of Upper Peru in 1825 the Republic of Bolivia was created in honor of Bolívar, who drafted a new constitution for the new nation. Internal divisions and strife, however, plagued the newly independent regions of South America, and Bolívar was unable to quell the unrest and rebellions.

After several attempts to hold the antagonistic interests together and an attempt on his life in 1828, Bolívar finally resigned the presidency in 1830, intending to leave the country for exile in Europe or the Caribbean, but he died from tuberculosis on December 17, 1830, in Santa Marta, Colombia.

Colombia’s official language. About 65 indigenous languages and nearly 300 dialects are still used, mostly in outlying areas. English remains little known and is rarely spoken.

Pre-Columbian art includes sculpture, pottery, and goldwork. Basket making fuses pre-Columbian designs with modern techniques. Inevitably Colombian music features traces of its varied ethnic backgrounds. African rhythms of the Caribbean, the Cuban salsa, and Andean music are all popular. Nobel Prize Winner Gabriel García Márquez (b. 1928) is the greatest figure of Colombian literature, but also prominent are younger writers such as R. H. Moreno-Durán (b. 1946).

Catholicism remains the dominant religion. In recent years, however, several Protestant denominations such as the Anglican, Lutheran, and Mormon faiths have significantly increased their numbers, as have various smaller religious sects through missionaries.

❁ CUISINE

Chicken, pork, potato, rice, and beans are key ingredients in Colombian cuisine. *Ajiaco*, a

soup made with chicken and potato, is a specialty of the Bogotá region. Santander is famous for *hormiga culona*, which is made of fried ants. A specialty of Tolima is *lechona*, a whole suckling pig, which is spit-roasted and stuffed with rice and dried peas. Colombian coffee is famous the world over.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR’S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

In Colombia the New Year is celebrated with parties, music, dancing, and lots of food and drink. In addition, Colombians practice a ritual of “Burning Mr. Old Year.” Each family makes a rag doll representing the old year. In it they stuff all kinds of rubbish and discarded things, including fireworks. Some make it a point to add things that have brought grief to the family. At midnight the doll is burned to signify letting go of the past year and making a fresh start in the coming year.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Fun Fact

The Chibcha language was dominant in the region, creating communication problems for the conquistadors in their quest for gold and converts to Catholicism. In 1783 to rid themselves of this obstacle, the Spanish prohibited the use of indigenous languages.

Ajiaco

Serves 4

Ingredients:

2 Tbs. butter
 1 tsp. cayenne pepper
 1 c. unsalted chicken stock
 4 ears yellow corn, shucked and sliced into 1-inch thick wheels
 1 3-lb. chicken, cut into bite-sized pieces
 2 tsp. sweet paprika
 1 c. minced onion
 3 c. milk
 2 large yucca, peeled and cut into 1-inch-thick chunks
 Juice of one lime

Preparation:

In a 6-quart pot, melt the butter over medium heat.

(Do not allow the butter to burn.) Cook chicken pieces in the butter until the flesh is no longer pink. Using a slotted spoon, remove the chicken and place in a bowl. Next, put onion, garlic, cayenne, and paprika in pot and cook while stirring, until onion is translucent and colored with the paprika. Add stock, milk, yucca, corn, and chicken to the pot. Bring the contents almost to a boil then reduce heat, cover and simmer, stirring every now and then, for about 1 hour, or until yucca is tender. Remove from heat and stir in lime juice.

Serve with slices of Cuban or French bread that has been broiled until golden. Frozen corn on the cob or fresh frozen kernels can be substituted if fresh corn is not available, but the fresh corncob seems to impart a nice flavor to this dish. If you are wondering what to do with the wheels of corn, just pick them up with your fingers and nibble around the rims.

Labor Day commemorates the important role played by workers in their societies. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with a strike called by the U.S. labor union the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

Colombia has a long history of labor activism. In the past workers have played a significant role in challenging the two-party monopoly on power held by the Conservatives and the Liberals. In recent times, the rise of left-wing guerilla organizations has only added to the importance of the labor movement as a stabilizing influence. Labor Day is an important event for Colombians, marked by processions, pro-labor demonstrations, public meetings, and lectures.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 20

This day commemorates Colombia's epic struggle against the Spanish conquerors. Like most South American countries, Colombia had to overcome tremendous odds to win its independence. Although Colombia declared independence from Spain on July 20, 1810, that date merely marked the beginning of its struggle. Not until 1819 was complete independence finally achieved. The day is celebrated with military parades, processions, and parties. Government offices, schools, and many businesses are closed on this day.

BATTLE OF BOYACÁ

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 7

This holiday commemorates one of the most memorable battles in the Colombian struggle for independence. On this date in 1819 Colombian freedom fighters, equipped with little more than lances, knives, and spades, successfully fought off the Spanish army. They won partly because of their belief in their cause and partly because of the



Colombia's president kisses a girl during a ceremony to celebrate the anniversary of the Boyacá battle, the decisive victory over the Spanish monarchy forces that won the country its independence in 1819, in Tunja, 20 miles north of Bogotá, August 7.

(AP Photo/Fernando Vergara)

tactical superiority of their generals, led by the legendary Simón Bolívar.

The occasion is observed as a public holiday and is celebrated with speeches and parades.

❁ COLUMBUS DAY

Observed by: General Public, indigenous communities

Observed on: October 12 (observed on the following Monday if the 12th does not fall on a Monday)

Colombia observes October 12 as both Columbus Day and the Day of the Race. On the one hand the name Colombia derives from Columbus. Hence honoring his memory is a matter of priority for Colombians, and the anniversary of his discovery of America is an important occasion here.

In recent times, however, Columbus's "discovery" has been associated with the cruelty and oppression European conquerors perpetrated on the indigenous populations of South America. For this reason, especially among the South American nations, it is also celebrated as Día de la Raza (Day of the Race). In this way the Hispanic heritage of the continent, as well as the influences of indigenous races on Colombia's ethnic and cultural composition, are given recognition. Colombia celebrates the occasion with pageants, processions, music, and other cultural activities.

❁ CARTAGENA INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 14

The city of Cartagena was important to Colombia's independence movement. In the days of Spanish rule, it was a major commercial center and among the richest towns in the Western Hemisphere. As a result it was subject to frequent raids by marauders. Finally the Spanish king had the city extensively fortified.

This, however, was not enough to protect Cartagena from its own people. On November 11, 1811, Cartagena declared its independence from Spain. In 1815, the Spanish, under General Pablo Morillo (1778–1837), recaptured the city. In this battle more than a third of the inhabitants were killed. The valor they showed has become a Colombian legend. Simón Bolívar himself named the city Ciudad Heroica ("Heroic City") in recognition of its inhabitants' bravery. The occasion is observed as a public holiday, marked by processions and speeches. In addition, there are numerous parades throughout the country.

Religious Holidays

❁ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: January 6

Epiphany is a national holiday in Colombia. It marks the end of the long Christmas season and is observed to commemorate the Three Kings (or Three Wise Men) who journeyed to Bethlehem to pay homage to the infant Jesus. In Colombia the day features religious processions and festivities with dancing in the streets. Children reenact stories from the Bible, and some Colombians exchange gifts on this occasion instead of at Christmas.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS; EPIPHANY

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

On this day Christians commemorate Jesus' Crucifixion. Colombians observe it as a national holiday. Because of the solemn nature of the occasion religious ceremonies rather than festivities mark the day. People attend church services, at which oratorios and cantatas are often performed. In many places the Crucifixion story is reenacted.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Unlike Good Friday, Easter is a day of fun and gaiety because it celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus three days after his Crucifixion. Some Colombians attend dawn church services. Although Easter Egg Hunts were not originally a part of the celebrations in Colombia, they have become popular in recent years. Adults hide eggs all over the house and give children clues about where to find them. Sometimes, children are also given gifts. Picnics and parties, especially for children, are common.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

❁ ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Forty days after Easter

The Feast of the Ascension, as the name suggests, celebrates the belief of Catholics and some other Christian Churches that Jesus ascended into heaven 40 days after his Resurrection on Easter. In Colombia special

Masses are held to commemorate the event.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

✿ CORPUS CHRISTI

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Sixty days after Easter

The Christian festival of Corpus Christi celebrates the actual presence of Jesus' blood and flesh in the Eucharist. Special Masses are held in Catholic churches throughout Colombia. After Mass Catholic Colombians place statues of Mary, Jesus, and various saints on long logs and carry them in a parade through the streets.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CORPUS CHRISTI; EASTER

✿ SACRADO CORAZÓN (SACRED HEART) DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: June 21

This day is observed by Catholics in Colombia to pay homage to Jesus' all-encompassing love for humanity. It is marked by solemn worship and special Masses.

✿ ST. PETER'S AND ST. PAUL'S DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: June 29

St. Peter was the founder of the Roman Catholic Church who was martyred. St. Paul, another of Jesus' disciples, was similarly martyred. In Colombia, this day is most observed by fishermen, because St. Peter was a fisherman. For this day Colombian fishermen decorate their boats and take the image of their patron saint out to sea. They usually do this at night and burn candles and flares. There are also special Masses in churches and religious processions.

✿ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: November 1

On November 1, Catholics observe Día de Todos Santos, or All Saints' Day. In the Roman Catholic Church, where saints have a special status, it is considered one of the mandatory observances in the calendar. Prayers are offered in memory of all saints, including ordinary individuals who led lives of exemplary virtue and piety.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

✿ IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: December 8

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception celebrates the Catholic belief that Mary, Jesus' mother, was herself free of original sin when she was born, making her a suitable mother for Jesus. It is an extremely significant occasion in the predominantly Catholic Colombia. The Christmas season begins the previous night, when families light candles in Mary's honor.

The day itself is a national holiday, celebrated with displays of lights. Each household tries to light at least a hundred candles on curbs and sidewalks in front of the house, and city streets and parks are illuminated with large powerful lights as well. Special Masses are also conducted on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS; IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

✿ CHRISTMAS EVE/DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

The Christian feast of Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus on the date established by the Catholic Church. Colombians celebrate Christmas lavishly. Public areas are decorated with lights and huge Nativity scenes, and special concerts are given. In Bogotá an enormous festival is held at the Parque Central Simón Bolívar. It is sponsored by both government and private agencies.

In their homes Colombians start decorating trees about 10 days before Christmas. They also set up Nativity scenes between December 16 and December 24 and gather around them at night to pray and sing carols. On Christmas Eve families gather to eat and dance. Popular items on the menu include *ajiaco* (a potato and chicken soup), chicken, and *natilla* (a corn-based dessert). At midnight people wish each other Merry Christmas and exchange gifts. Traditionally the infant Jesus was considered to be the giver of gifts, but in recent times the legend of Santa Claus has gained popularity as well.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

✿ DAY OF THE BLACKS/DAY OF THE WHITES

Observed in: Pasto

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 3–5

Pasto holds a unique festival each year in January. The first day is observed as Día de los Negros, or

“Day of the Blacks,” and people customarily blacken each others’ faces with grease. The next day, they celebrate “Día de los Blancos,” or Day of the Whites, and throw white flour or talcum powder at each other.

❁ BARRANQUILLA CARNIVAL

Observed in: Barranquilla
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: February/March

Carnival is a final big celebration before the Christian period of fasting and austerity known as Lent. During the four days of their Carnival, the people of Barranquilla take to the streets for a dazzling display of color, music, and infectious dance rhythms.

For several Saturdays before Carnival begins, dance troupes parade through the streets. At the end of January the Carnival proclamation, a law stating that everyone must enjoy themselves, dance, and party wildly, is read. The Saturday of the event itself features a parade of floats. La Gran Parada is a day of masks and disguises. The queen of the Carnival and her entourage dance through the streets, accompanied by the best Carnival bands. Monday features an Orchestra Festival. Tuesday signals the end of Carnival and the beginning of the 40-day Lenten observance.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; LENT

❁ MEDELLÍN FLOWER FAIR

Observed in: Medellín
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 11

The Medellín Flower Fair is the city’s most important cultural event. It is also an occasion of considerable economic significance, since Colombia is a major flower exporter. This event is always held during the first two weeks in August. The main features of this festival are spectacular parades and processions involving elaborate floral displays. The biggest

parade takes place every year on August 11, which is a local holiday.

Other events include flower-arranging competitions, vintage car parades, lots of live music and dancing, and a beauty pageant. The festival also features exhibits of orchids, other flowers, and local crafts.

Rites of Passage

❁ DEATH

To most Colombians the basic Christian rites of baptism, Communion, and marriage mark the turning points in their lives and help to establish their identities as social beings. Among Colombian Catholics, the rite of extreme unction, one of the seven holy sacraments, is commonly administered at death. This involves the priest praying in Latin and touching various parts of the deceased’s body with cotton balls dipped in holy oil. The ritual is intended to prepare the dying person’s soul to leave the world calmly and peacefully.

Further Reading

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Comoros

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	An island archipelago in the Indian Ocean at the northern mouth of the Mozambique Channel, approximately two-thirds of the way between northern Madagascar and northern Mozambique
Size	838 sq. mi.
Capital City	Moroni
Flag Description	The flag of Comoros has horizontal bands of yellow (top), white, red, and blue, all of equal width with a green isosceles triangle based on the hoist. In the triangle is a white crescent with the convex side facing the hoist and four white stars placed vertically in a line between the points of the crescent.
Independence	July 6, 1975 (from France)
Population	671,247 (2005 est.)
Government	Independent republic
Nationality	Comoran
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Antalote; Cafre; Makoa; Oimatsaha, Sakalava
Major Language(s)	Arabic and French are the official languages; Shikomoro (a mix of Swahili and Arabic)
Major Religion(s)	Sunni Muslim (98%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Anniversary of OAU, May 25; Death Anniversary of President Ali Soilih, May 29; Independence Day, July 6; Death Anniversary of President Ahmed Abdallah, November 26

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Beginning in the 14th century, the islands of Comoros attracted explorers from Indonesia, the Persian Gulf, Africa, and Madagascar. In 1505 Portuguese explorers, the first Europeans, landed on Njazidja. A flourishing trade developed with subsequent expeditions, and this group of islands played a vital role in the thriving economy of the western Indian Ocean. Domoni, situated on the island of Nzwani (Anjouan), was a major center for trade from the 15th century. Trade was in full swing even with nations as far away as Japan. Merchants, sailors, and pirates made frequent visits to these islands. The Nzwani (Anjouan) Island was the favorite place

for refueling and obtaining provisions. When the Suez Canal opened, these islands lost their importance as the main trade route changed, and the islands are mostly referred to as “the forgotten islands.”

Between 1841 and 1912 the French established their control over the islands of Grand Comore, Anjouan, Mayotte, and Moheli and handed over the administration of the region to the Governor General of Madagascar. Portuguese, French, and Arab traders established a plantation economy in the region. Even today Comoros uses one-third of its land to produce crops for export.

Under French rule, the native population suffered brutal treatment. Protests and uprisings were crushed and dissent was silenced. In the mid-20th century, however, France began to soften its stand in the wake of World Wars I and II. By 1947 Comoros had become an independently administered French

The Islands

Nzwani (or Anjouan) is often called “the pearl of the Indian Ocean.” It is a beautiful island that lures tourists to its beaches, hillsides, and rivers. Nzwani is the most populated island of Comoros. It has a volcanic peak called Mount Ntingi, which is covered with forests of mahogany, ferns, and wild orchids. Oils such as *ylang-ylang*, *palma rosa*, orange flower, and jasmine are exported from Comoros. In the 16th century sultanates in the Arabic style developed here. The chief who ruled the sultanate was called *fani*. There was occasional rioting and wars between the sultans. When the problems became serious, many *fanis* sought help from the Europeans, primarily the French. The French seized the opportunity and under the pretext of offering protection declared Nzwani a French Protectorate by 1866. Nzwani was one of the three islands to gain independence from the French in 1975.

colony. In 1961 Comoros was granted greater internal political autonomy *also* *Volume* by France, but the people of Comoros insisted on total independence. France was initially reluctant, which led to widespread protests and demonstrations against French rule.

In 1973 an agreement was reached between France and the islands of Grand Comore, Moheli, and Anjouan, according to which the islands of Comoros would be granted total independence by 1978. The island of Mayotte, preferring to remain a French protectorate, did not participate in these negotiations.

In a sudden move on July 6, 1975, the Comoran parliament passed a resolution severing all ties with France and declaring unilateral independence. Once again the representatives of Mayotte did not participate in these proceedings and refused to join the independent state of Comoros. Referendums in Mayotte were held in 1974 and 1976, and the people of Mayotte voted in favor of French protection. Even today the Union of Comoros has administrative control over Grand Comore, Moheli, and Anjouan, while Mayotte remains under French administration. Since independence Comoros has witnessed 19 coups; many of them had the support of the French government,

The Perfume Islands

Because two-thirds of the world’s perfume essence comes from these islands, some have called Comoros “the perfume islands.” In addition, the incredible history of these islands has given Comoros another interesting name—“the fantasy islands.” The islands are full of stories of pirates, sultans, kings, and queens.

which continued to seek control over the region.

All three islands have had their share of problems. Following growing economic instability and political unrest caused by the coups, the islands of Moheli and Anjouan declared independence from Comoros in 1997. The government of Comoros used force to try to reclaim the rebellious islands but failed. In Grand Comore after the death of the last democratically elected president, Mohamed Taki Abdoukarim (b. 1936), on November 6, 1998, a provisional government was placed in power under acting President Tadjidine Ben Said Massoude (1933–2004). On August 2, 1999, a military coup led by Colonel Azali Assoumani (b. 1959) ousted the provisional government, and Assoumani declared himself the president of Comoros. He maintained a firm grip on the region, despite several attempted coups; as of the early years of the 21st century, he remained the president.

On August 1, 1999, Anjouan also experienced political upheaval after the resignation of its first president Foundi Abdallah Ibrahim (?b. 1922). He handed over the reins to Said Abeid (b. 1941), a national coordinator. On August 9, 2001, however, a coup led by naval officers ousted his government, and a military junta led by Mohamed Bacar (b. 1962) assumed control of the island. Several coups were attempted against Bacar, most of which were led by Abeid; but each failed. Elections held in 2002 on the island of Anjouan legitimized Bacar’s claim to the presidency, when he was unanimously elected president of the island.

The island of Moheli entered into negotiations with the government of Comoros, and elections held in 2002 placed Mohamed Said Fazul (b. 1960) at the helm when he won the presidential elections with an overwhelming majority. The new constitution adopted in 2002 by all three islands granted greater autonomy to the islands of Grand Comore, Moheli, and Anjouan and gave each island the right to elect its own president. Thus the Union of Comoros came into being. President Azali Assoumani was elected as the overall president of the union, but his powers are restricted to security and finance on the islands of Moheli and Anjouan.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Comoros is an island archipelago located off southern Africa at the northern end of the Mozambique Channel. The oldest of these islands—Maore (Mayotte)—remains a French territory. The remaining three islands make up the Union of Comoros: Njazidja (Grande Comore), Mwali (Moheli), and Nzwani (Anjouan). These islands are sometimes referred to as The Union of Comoros Islands and Mayotte, or the Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoros.

All the islands are volcanic, and low hills and steep mountains are prominent features. Njazidja (Grand Comore), closer to the African mainland, has a huge active volcano and the residents live in

constant fear that it will erupt. In the early 21st century, Mayotte is claimed by Comoros, but remains under French control, because the citizens of the island prefer this arrangement.

The islands have a tropical marine climate. The annual average temperature in Comoros is 77°F. Cyclones pose a threat during the rainy season, which lasts from November until May. Crop cultivation on slopes without proper terracing techniques has resulted in soil erosion, and deforestation is a problem as well.

❁ ECONOMY

The Union of Comoros is one of the poorest countries in the world. It has poor transportation links; natural resources are limited; and widespread illiteracy stifles economic growth. Unemployment is high. Agriculture is the main sector of the economy, followed by fishing, hunting, and forestry. Most of the products are exported, but the country is not self-sufficient in food production. Without foreign aid, this group of islands would not be able to sustain itself. The main imported goods are petroleum products, cement, rice, foodstuffs, and transportation equipment. These are mostly imported from France, Thailand, Japan, and Kenya. Perfume oil, copra, cloves, vanilla, and *ylang-ylang*—the oil of a tropical tree used to make perfume—are exported mainly to France, Germany, and the United States. The islands are the world's largest producer of the essence *ylang-ylang* and the second largest producer of vanilla.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Many settlements over the past 1,000 years have created the mixed population of Comoros. Today the Union of Comoros is a vibrant mix of Malagasy (Malay-Polynesians), African mainlanders, Shirazi Persians, and Arab traders. There are Indians and French Creoles too. Though there are rarely ethnic clashes, inter-island rivalries run strong. Sunni Islam is the dominant religion of Comoros. The official languages are Arabic and French. Shikomoro, the dialect of the islands, is used in everyday communication. Children attend Islamic schools. State education is compulsory for seven- to sixteen-year-olds, and 76 percent of the children attend primary school. Only 25 percent of the country's youth, however, receive a secondary education. In villages, people live in homes made of palm fronds. Only the rich build concrete houses.

Chirumani is a colorful cotton garment worn by most women. As a cosmetic a yellowish paste made from sandalwood and coral that is applied to the face for a better complexion is popular among the women. The main celebrations are those related to weddings, but Islamic festivals are widely observed.

The music of Comoros is colored by influences from Madagascar, East Africa, the Middle East, and

southern India. There is a wide range of solo and choral musical styles in Comoros. Gongs, tambourines, oboes, zithers, five-stringed lutes, and drums are some of the instruments commonly used. Music accompanies all kinds of social occasions.

❁ CUISINE

African, Indian, Arab, and French cooking influences are evident in the cuisine of Comoros. The recipes use a variety of spices widely grown in the islands: cinnamon, cardamom, vanilla, pepper, coriander, cloves, and nutmeg. Rice and meat are the staple foods. Plantains, cassava (manioc), and couscous are other important foods. Spicy sauces generally accompany meals. *Poulet au coco*, chicken cooked with greens and rice, is a common dish. *Langouste à la vanilla*, or lobster cooked in vanilla sauce, is a delicacy. Kebabs are popular, and seafood is ubiquitous. On special occasions Comorans enjoy barbecued mutton. Fruits are also widely available on the islands. *Trembo*, a homemade brew of coconut milk and fruit juice, is a common drink.

Fun Fact

The name *Comoros* is derived from the Arabic word *kamar* (or *kumr*), which means "moon." This name was first applied by Arab geographers to Madagascar.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Date: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Gregorian (Western) calendar January 1 is celebrated as New Year's Day. A festive spirit reigns as people plan parties and celebrations that begin on New Year's Eve. January 1 is a national holiday in Comoros, and all public and private institutions are closed.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day in many parts of the world. This day commemorates the contributions made by workers. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers, and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor, demanding an eight-hour workday. In Comoros Labor Day is a national holiday and all public and private institutions are closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ ANNIVERSARY OF OAU

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 25

The Organization of African Unity (OAU) was formed on May 25, 1963, at Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. On this day 32 African countries affirmed their commitment to build a united Africa. This day is also known as Africa Day.

Kwame Nkrumah and Haile Selassie were the founding fathers of the OAU. As more and more countries in Africa broke free of centuries of colonial exploitation and brutality, there was a need to foster a spirit of unity among the African nations as well as work toward overall development of the continent. With this aim the OAU came into being. Initially, only 32 countries were a part of the OAU. In the early 21st century, there are 53 member nations in the OAU. The OAU has been instrumental in ending colonial rule in Africa and has also acted as a peacemaker and negotiator in solving regional disputes, internal conflicts, and wars in Africa.

Like most OAU member nations Comoros observes a national holiday on May 25. Seminars and meetings are held on this day to discuss matters of interest to African nations and further African solidarity.

❁ DEATH ANNIVERSARY OF PRESIDENT ALI SOILIH ❁

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 29

This day commemorates the assassination of President Ali Soilih (1937–78) in a coup led by the former president of Comoros, Ahmed Abdallah (1919–89) in 1978. President Soilih had assumed power in 1975 after leading a coup against President Ahmed Abdallah, the first president of the independent Comoros. President Soilih hired a group of French mercenaries under the leadership of Bob Denard (b. 1929) to oust Abdallah. Ali Soilih introduced socialist economic policies in the region and encouraged the younger generation to play a vital role in society. The tables were turned on him, and he was assassinated on May 29, 1978, in a coup led by former president Abdallah, ironically, with the help of Soilih's former ally Bob Denard, who had helped in deposing Abdallah earlier.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 6

By 1912 the French had established their rule over the islands of Moheli, Grande Comore, and Anjouan, and the region was under the administration of the French governor of Madagascar. After World War II, however, the people of the region

increased their demands for independence. In 1947 Comoros Islands became a separate administered colony, but the people insisted on complete independence. Although the French were reluctant to grant full independence, they partially relented and granted autonomy to the region in 1961. This move also failed to appease the proponents of independence, and violent riots ensued. On July 6, 1975, Comoros won full independence.

Independence Day is marked with official parades, cultural festivals, and public speeches, which pay tribute to the freedom fighters who died during the independence movement.

❁ DEATH ANNIVERSARY OF PRESIDENT AHMED ABDALLAH

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 26

This day commemorates the assassination of President Ahmed Abdallah on November 26, 1989. Ahmed Abdallah was the first president of independent Comoros and was well known for his anti-French stance. He was the president of the General Council (1949–53) when Comoros was a French colony. His first tenure as president was cut short by Ali Soilih, who hired a band of French mercenaries led by Bob Denard to oust the president. However he reclaimed power in 1978 by forging a friendship with the same Bob Denard and turning him against his former ally Ali Soilih. In his second tenure as president, he abolished all political parties.

Abdallah ruled the country until 1989 when a military coup led by Soilih's half-brother Said Mohamed Djohar (b. 1918) ousted him. He was shot dead on November 26, 1989, in the capital city of Moroni.

Religious Holidays

❁ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

El am Hejir marks the first day of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar. It is believed that on this day in 622, Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina (about 200 miles to the north of Mecca) and founded the first Islamic state in Medina. There is no specific religious ritual required on this day, but Muslims contemplate the general meaning of Hegira, and regard this as a good time for New Year's resolutions.

Celebrations are relatively low-key compared to the more prominent celebrations that take place during the two Eid festivals, Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr. The majority of Muslims on Comoros are

Sunni who have little connection with Muharram and do not celebrate the occasion. The Shia Muslims, however, celebrate this event with much more enthusiasm.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

❁ ASHURA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

Ashura commemorates the martyrdom of the grandson of Muhammad Hussein bin Ali, the third imam of the Shia Muslims, and other martyrs who sacrificed their lives in the Battle of Karbala, which took place in what is now Iraq in 680 between Sunni and Shia Muslims. The Syrian caliph Yazid overwhelmed Hussein and his followers. Hussein was decapitated, and his severed head was carried back to Damascus on a spear. It is the defining religious event for Shia Muslims, who strive to live and, if necessary, to die like Hussein. They believe that a model life can revive Islam and banish tyranny and oppression from the world.

Ashura means “ten,” referring to the day on which it is observed—the 10th day of the Islamic month of Muharram. In countries with large Shia populations, Shia end their 10-day observance with a large procession that reenacts Hussein’s funeral. Some of the Shia men flagellate or ritually cut themselves. They believe that inflicting bloody wounds on themselves will connect them with Hussein’s suffering and guarantee their salvation on the Day of Judgment.

In Comoros Ashura is confined mainly to the Shia community. Since the majority of Muslims in Comoros belong to the Sunni sect, it is a low-key holiday. The Mourning of Karbala is a major festival among the Shia Muslims; for Sunni, however, it is a voluntary day of fasting.

See also Volume III: ASHURA; ISLAM

❁ MOULoud

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

The anniversary of the birth of Muhammad, the founder of Islam, falls in the third month of the Islamic year. With the exception of conservative sects, this is a day of rejoicing and celebrations for Muslims all over the world. Conservative Muslims do not celebrate anyone’s birthday, including that of Muhammad, because they believe such celebrations distract the faithful from the worship of Allah.

Mouloud is celebrated with great enthusiasm in Comoros. On this day, Muslims offer prayers in honor of the revered prophet and reiterate their commitment to adhere to the principles of Islam and follow the path shown by Muhammad. While in other Islamic nations the reading of the Mawlidi (the

story of Muhammad’s birth) is a solemn practice held in a mosque, in Comoros the reading takes place in huge public gatherings in the streets. The streets are thoroughly cleaned and decorated before the readings take place. Elders of the community take turns reading parts of the Mawlidi and even recite their own poems, written in honor of Allah and Muhammad.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULoud

❁ SHAB-E-MIRAJ

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twenty-seventh of Rajab, the seventh month of the Islamic calendar

Shab-e-Miraj commemorates Muhammad’s night journey and ascension to heaven, where Allah revealed the “Salat,” or “Salah” (a Muslim prayer that is performed five times a day) to Muhammad. On this day Muslims in Comoros narrate the story of Muhammad’s ascension and revelation. According to the story on this day two archangels visited Muhammad while he slept. They purified his heart and filled it with faith and knowledge. Then within a single night, he traveled from Mecca to Jerusalem on a winged creature named Buraq. When he arrived in Jerusalem he ascended to heaven and met earlier prophets and God. The “Salat” was revealed to him, and he was given instructions that were to be followed by all Muslims. Muslims also offer prayers in the mosque and thank Allah for showing them the right way of life.

See also Volume III: ISLAM

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid means “celebration.” Islam has two *eid* festivals, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. Eid al-Fitr marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, the month of austerity during which devout Muslims fast from dawn until dusk. Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar. The first three days of Shawwal are called “the *eid* days.” Muslims in Comoros buy new clothes for the occasion. They wake up early in the morning and offer prayers in their local mosques. Greetings are exchanged, and friends and family come together to celebrate with a special feast. Charity to the poor in the form of food and money plays an integral part in the day’s observance.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

The second of two *eid* festivals celebrated by Muslims, the Eid al-Adha observance falls at the end of the hajj and honors Ibrahim's (Ishmael) willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac at God's command. Just as Ibrahim was about to kill his son, God replaced the young boy with a ram. On this day Muslims in Comoros offer prayers to Allah. Sacrificing goats or sheep is also part of Eid al-Adha celebrations. The meat is shared with friends, family, and the poor.

The holy pilgrimage, or hajj, also takes place during this month. All Muslims who are physically and financially able to are directed by the Koran to undertake this journey at least once in their lifetime, and the journey is the Fifth Pillar of Islam.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

Rites of Passage

✿ BIRTH

In Comoros, an expectant mother is taken to her parents' house to give birth. A midwife takes care of the woman during labor and attends to the child when it is born. Immediately after birth Muslim prayers are uttered in the infant's ears. The naming



A groom stands in front of some of the 5.5 pounds of gold jewelry he will give to his bride in Hantsambou, outside Moroni, capital of the Comoros Republic. A gift of as much as 17 pounds of gold jewelry, as many as nine days of celebrations, as well as a bride price of up to \$40,000 are hallmarks of the traditional "grand wedding" on Grande Comore, the largest of the three islands that comprise the Comoros Republic. (AP Photo/Rodrique Ngowi)

ceremony is held on the sixth day after birth. After the child is born the mother is restricted from saying prayers, touching the Koran, or entering a mosque for 40 days. The child is placed in a cradle on the 40th day. A rite called Ukikais is performed in some places. Two goats, which must be more than one year old, are sacrificed in the child's name. Only the meat of the goat is taken, and its bones, skin, head, and feet are buried under the Earth. A prayer is offered to God when the meat is ready to be served. The child's head is shaved. The hair is thrown into a river or buried. Sometimes wealthy parents weigh the hair and distribute silver or gold to poor people according to the weight of the hair.

✿ COMING OF AGE

At the age of six or seven, male children are circumcised. Among some Muslims, however, they are circumcised soon after birth. The barber generally performs the task, and the child is usually given some opiate for the pain.

For girls between the ages of nine and 13 coming of age is a big celebration. They are kept in seclusion for seven days. During this time a girl is allowed to eat only fish, bread, butter, and meat. She is given a warm bath in the evening. A grand feast is arranged, and close relatives and friends are invited to join the celebration. Gifts are given to the girl and everybody joins in this happy occasion.

✿ MARRIAGE

In Comoros wedding festivities may continue for an entire week. The celebrations include music, dancing, feasting, and exchanging gifts. A lot of jewelry is given to the bride. Relatives and friends gather from all over to take part in the celebration. The dance of the bulls is an important part of these festivities. Men come together in one of the main squares, where two bulls are brought to fight with each other. The men try to touch the bulls without getting hurt. The majority of the villagers gather to watch. They shout encouragements and advice to their favorite dancers.

The concerts that take place during weddings are called *twarab*. There are both private and public ceremonies. The whole community joins in these festivities, which end with gift-giving and feasts. The musicians and dancers invited to perform also receive gifts and money. Wealthy men may have more than one wife but must provide a house for each.

✿ DEATH

Muslims in Comoros follow Islamic rites for death and burial. The Koran is read out loud when an individual is nearing his or her death, and a few drops of *sarbat* (flavored water) are also given to the person.

After death the body is washed, dressed in new clothes, and wrapped in a shroud. The bier is carried to the mosque on the shoulders of the pallbearers. Relatives take turns carrying the bier, a highly prestigious job. Women do not attend funerals. At the mosque the priest or *kazi* recites verses from the Koran. The corpse is then laid in the grave and covered with earth. Two tree branches or saplings are planted near the grave, and the opening chapter of the Koran is read. On the third and 40th days after the death, relatives meet and share a meal remembering the dead person.

Further Reading

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❧ Congo, Democratic ❧ Republic of the

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	West Central Africa, bordered by Angola, Republic of the Congo, Zambia, Tanzania, Uganda, Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi the Central African Republic, and the Atlantic Ocean
Size	905,568 sq. mi.
Capital City	Kinshasa
Flag Description	The flag is light blue with a big five-pointed yellow star in the middle. Along the hoist, there are six small yellow stars in a vertical line.
Independence	June 30, 1960 (from Belgium)
Population	60,085,804 (2005 est.)
Government	Dictatorship
Nationality	Congolese (singular and plural)
Major Ethnic Group(s)	More than 200 ethnic groups with the Bantu-speaking tribes (Mongo, Luba, Kongo) and the Mangbetu-Azande (Hamitic) dominating (45%)
Major Language(s)	French (official); Lingala (a lingua franca trade language); Kingwana (a dialect of Swahili or Kiswahili); Kikongo; Tshiluba
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (50%); Protestant (20%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Martyrs' Day, January 4; International Women's Day, March 8; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day, June 30

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

Evidence suggests that the region was inhabited as early as 10,000 years ago. Pygmies, the original inhabitants of this region, lived in the equatorial forests located in the north and northeast of the country. Hunting, gathering, and fishing were their main occupations.

Around 2,000 years ago the Bantu began migrating into the region and started exerting control. They forced the pygmy groups to move south and organized themselves in small states ruled by chiefs or elders. Some of these states shaped themselves into empires; prominent among them were

the kingdoms of Kongo, Luba, Kuba, and Lunda. As a result the Democratic Republic of the Congo is home to more than 250 tribes, and the Bantu continue to dominate. Atrocities committed against the pygmy tribes continue in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The European influence in the region began in the late 15th century. The first European to enter the Congo was a Portuguese navigator Diogo Cão who reached the mouth of the Congo River and sailed upriver to the north. The Portuguese established relations with the king of Kongo and brought the slave trade with them.

The explorations of the Congo undertaken by explorers Henry Stanley (1841–1904) and David Livingstone (1813–73) caught the attention of the Belgian King Leopold II (1835–1909). He commissioned Henry Stanley to sign treaties

with the tribal kings on his behalf and establish his authority in the region. In 1885 King Leopold's claim on Congo was formally recognized by the other European powers in a special ceremony at the Berlin West Africa Conference of 1884–85. Leopold not only ruled Congo, but also he was its personal owner.

Ironically, although the region was named the “Congo Free State,” the local population was treated brutally and forced into slavery on the rubber plantations. Between 1885 and 1908, a large number of Congolese were mercilessly killed by Leopold's armed forces. Estimates vary between 3 and 22 million people killed; many researchers say more than 10 million is the most likely number. The population, which was estimated to have been between 20 and 30 million when Leopold took control, was reduced to about 8 million by 1908.

The international community was shocked by the brutality and carnage and pressured Leopold to stop these atrocities. Finally the Belgian parliament took the Congo Free State under its wing and declared it a Belgian colony, renaming it the “Belgian Congo.” Around the same time, the Congolese initiated their own struggle for independence, and by 1950 the people of the Congo started nationwide demonstrations against foreign rule. On June 30, 1960, Congo won its freedom, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo was born.

Patrice Lumumba (1925–61) became the first prime minister, and Joseph Kasavubu was declared president of the Republic. During the period of the first republic (1960–65), a series of gruesome events rocked the country. Vested Belgian interests stirred up the already existing ethnic rivalries, thereby creating problems for the newly independent nation, including a mutiny in Katanga, the assassination of Lumumba, and volatile rebellions in many parts of the republic, which resulted in the intervention of the United Nations. Colonel Joseph Mobutu (1930–97) assumed power and in 1965 declared himself its supreme leader, beginning the period of the second republic (1965–97).

In accordance with his ideology of authentication, which held that the Zairian tradition favored a single authoritarian leader, he banned all political parties and also renamed the country “Zaire.” Unfortunately, he also plunged the nation into an economic crisis and created growing discontent among the general public. The human rights situation reached its nadir in the 1980s, and opposition leaders became prime targets. In 1990 under mounting international pressure, Mobutu reinstated a multiparty political system regime and declared the formation of the third republic. Nevertheless between 1990 and 1997, the country witnessed a sharp increase in ethnic violence as riots raged in different parts of the region. At the same time thousands of refugees from war-ravaged Rwanda began entering Zaire. An insurgence caused havoc in the region, and the government was unable to crush it.

The insurgents, led by Laurent Kabila (1938–2001), launched a full-fledged war against

Mbuti (Pygmies)

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is home to several groups of pygmies. Many Congolese believe that these pygmies have divine powers, especially due to the secretive nature of their rituals related to Jengi, the forest spirit. Pygmies have cordial relations with their immediate neighbors and speak in a language that is close to the neighbors'. They are dark-skinned and have an average height of less than 59 inches.

the Zairean army and took control of Zaire by May 1997. Following his victory Laurent Kabila was sworn in as the president, and the country was renamed the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Kabila's attempts to revive the economy failed and he, too, displayed dictatorial tendencies by banning all opposition political parties. Moreover reports involving Kabila in ethnic killings of Rwandan Hutu in Rwanda and Uganda also surfaced, which indicted Kabila, along with the Tutsi militants, as an active accomplice in these executions.

The Rwandan Hutu militants were living as refugees in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, having fled their country due to the rise of a Tutsi-led government, which had engaged in the wholesale slaughter of Hutus. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo these Rwandan Hutus, along with Congo's ethnic Hutus, launched a program of organized executions of ethnic Tutsis in the Congo. In retaliation Congolese Tutsis joined with Tutsis in Rwanda and Uganda and launched a counteroffensive under Kabila's direction. This sparked an ethnic war, which resulted in indiscriminate killing of Hutus as well as Tutsis.

With Kabila's involvement in the ethnic violence exposed, some ethnic Hutus in the Congo led a failed mutiny against him in 1998. Meanwhile Uganda and Rwanda began extending support to the insurgents and opponents of Kabila's regime, while Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Angola supported the Kabila regime, escalating the violence into a full-scale regional conflict.

Fun Fact

Since 1885 the Democratic Republic of the Congo has had seven names: Congo Free State (1885–1908), Belgian Congo (1908–60), Republic of the Congo-Leopoldville (1960–64), Democratic Republic of the Congo-Leopoldville (1964–66), Democratic Republic of the Congo-Kinshasa (1966–71), Republic of Zaire (1971–97), and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (since 1997). It is often referred to as “Congo-Kinshasa” to differentiate it from “Congo Brazzaville,” or the Republic of Congo.

Fun Fact

Elements of Kikongo have survived among the descendants of slaves in the Americas such as the language of the Gullah people of South Carolina.

President Kabila was assassinated on January 16, 2001, by one of his bodyguards. His son Maj. Gen. Joseph Kabila (b. 1971) was elected the new president. He has made attempts to end the regional conflict and has signed peace agreements with the warring groups.

Although the war is over, sporadic eruptions of violence continue and the wounds inflicted on the region and its people will take some time to heal. Recommendations to avoid entering the country continue in the 21st century because of the violence and the instability of its government.

In 2003 the International Human Rights organization caught the attention of the world by reporting that widespread acts of cannibalism were being committed against the endangered pygmy groups living in the forests of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Many Congolese believe that pygmies are both subhuman and powerful and that by eating their flesh they will also become powerful. This myth has spelled doom for the pygmies, who are being systematically exterminated. The cannibals are using their vital organs as charms. Rampant raping and killing of pygmy women is also a cause of great alarm. The Movement for the Liberation of Congo, a member of the transitional alliance government and its allies, has been identified as the main perpetrator.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in the central part of Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is surrounded by Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Tanzania to the east; Zambia to the southeast and Angola to the south; the Atlantic Ocean and the Congo Republic to the east; the Central African Republic to the north; and the Sudan to the northeast. It straddles the equator; two-thirds of the country lies in the Southern Hemisphere and one-third in the Northern Hemisphere. The capital Kinshasa is the largest city.

The country has a largely tropical climate. Tropical forests cover the central plains. They are flanked by dense grasslands that extend beyond the Congo River in the north, plateaus and savannas in the south and southeast; and mountainous terraces in the west. Mt. Margherita, at 17,762 feet, is the highest peak. The nation's transport system is largely dependent on its rivers. Bomu and Ugami are the main rivers in the north, and the Congo River flows through the western part of the country. While the river basins are hot and humid, the southern highlands are cool and dry.

ECONOMY

Since 1985 despite the fact that the Democratic Republic of Congo possesses great natural resources, the economy has suffered immensely due to incessant war and genocide, bad governance, and poor economic policies. The Congo War has eaten up the government's revenue and dramatically reduced the national output. Lack of infrastructure, ongoing ethnic conflicts, corruption, devastating famine, and disease are the major hindrances in the development of the economy. Moreover, the country has mounting foreign debts, all of which make reviving the economy, halting the illegal traffic in its citizens, and bringing peace to the war-weary country particularly daunting tasks.

The country remains a source country for men, women, and children internally trafficked for forced labor and sexual exploitation. The vast majority of the trafficking occurs in northeastern and eastern Congo, regions that are outside effective government control. Armed groups continue to abduct and forcibly recruit Congolese men, women, and children to serve as laborers, porters, domestics, combatants, and sex slaves. Civilians are also forced to provide labor for armed groups and the Congolese military (FARDC).

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

There are more than 250 ethnic groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with the Bantu-speaking people forming the bulk of the population. The Nilotic-speaking population resides in the north while scattered groups of pygmies live in the northeast. Also thousands of refugees from neighboring countries, who fled their war-stricken nations, have settled here.

Although French is the official language, the people prefer to speak their native languages, primarily Kiwanga, Lingala, Kikongo, and Tshiluba, but with 250 ethnic groups, each with its own language or dialect, communication among the groups is often difficult. More than 50 percent of the inhabitants are Roman Catholic, while 20 percent are Protestant. Muslims make up 10 percent of the population. A considerable number of people are affiliated with an indigenous Christian church known as Kimbanguism, which fuses the beliefs of Christianity with traditional African ones. Kimbanguism (The Church of Christ on Earth) is a branch of Christianity founded by Simon Kimbangu (1889–1951), an African preacher. The Belgian authorities treated the faith with suspicion and imprisoned Simon Kimbangu for most of his life (he died in prison). Kimbanguism gained membership of the World Council of Churches in 1969.

The pygmy populations are as varied as the

Nkisi Nkondi

Nkisi (pl., *ninkisi*, or *nkishi/minkishi*), which means “sacred medicine,” refers to a variety of objects believed to contain spiritual powers. The peoples who live in the Congo Basin, especially the Bakongo and the Songye, believe that the extraordinary powers possessed by some people come from some kind of communication with the dead. *Banganga* (sing., *nganga*) are healers, diviners, and mediators who protect the living from witchcraft and give them remedies against diseases caused either by witchcraft or the demands of *bakisi* (“spirits”). They use the *minkisi*, which are mostly containers made of pottery, gourds, horn, shells, or other objects capa-

ble of holding spiritually charged substances, to control the powers of *bakisi* or the dead.

Minkisi serve many purposes. A wooden figure called *nkisi nkondi* has a face, feet, and hands, and its power can be activated by driving nails or iron blades into it. The *banganga* use these figures (also known as fetishes) to harness spiritual forces to weaken enemies, drive away illnesses, and provide protection against thieves. The increasing belief in witchcraft and sorcery reflects the country’s social decay caused by war and poverty. Many of the street children roaming the Congo’s cities were cast out of their families after being denounced as witches. These homeless “witch children” often live in cemeteries, coming out only at night, and follow occult practices.

other cultures, and different groups speak different languages, most of which are related to the languages spoken by neighboring non-pygmy populations. Evidence shows, however, that at one time the various pygmy groups shared a common language. This is reflected in the word *jengi*, a common term used by all the pygmy groups, to refer to the forest spirits.

Although Kinshasa is a city of more than five million people, most Congolese reside in rural areas. While urban Congolese generally prefer to dress in Western attire, rural people still wear the traditional attire of their ethnic groups.

Among the Kongo women who live in the western part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo dress and body art in the form of distinct and elaborate scarifications have traditionally symbolized beauty and status. In the modern era, scarification is becoming obsolete, but the patterns have been captured on beautifully carved sculptures of nursing women called *phemba*. *Phemba* sculptures are used to ward off evil during delivery and to protect the health of the newborn child.

Traditional forms of art still survive in rural areas, including the Kongo art of carving wooden figures, which is called *nkisi nkondi* (also referred to as power sculptures).

The traditional music of the pygmies is vocal and rich in polyphonic harmony. The songs they sing are based on themes concerning their rural lives and especially their hunting and gathering skills.

❁ CUISINE

The most popular dish in the Democratic Republic of Congo is *moambé*, a spicy stew of peanuts, palm oil, and chicken served with yams, native *loso* rice, or most commonly *fufu*, a paste of mashed manioc

(cassava). Common foods include yams, bananas, plantains, fruits, and fish.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR’S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1, New Year’s Day, marks the first day of the first month of the Western (or Gregorian) calendar. In most countries celebrations begin on December 31, also known as New Year’s Eve. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the festivities are somewhat muted, given the present state of the country’s economy. Since this is a national holiday, all government offices and private and public institutions are closed on January 1.

Exotic Dishes

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is home to a number of interesting delicacies, albeit for an adventurous palate. They include monkey, *bonobo* (a kind of ape), gorilla, chimpanzee, crocodile, snake, tortoise, and okapi (a giraffe-like creature found in the Ituri forest of DRC) as chief ingredients. However, the fear of Ebola virus has made the people wary of consuming monkey meat, since simians can be affected with this virus. Because the Ituri forests are rebel strongholds, hunting of okapi has been similarly affected, and hence okapi rarely makes it to the dining table currently.

Fun Fact

The Mongandu people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo do not eat *bonobos* (an African ape) because they consider them too humanoid to be eaten. They believe that when humans are not watching them, these apes stand upright on their hind legs just like people.

MARTYRS' DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 4

The Independence Martyrs' Day pays tribute to those who died in order to secure the independence of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. During the colonial period, which lasted until 1960, the region was ruled by Belgium. During the oppressive regime of King Leopold II, many people were brutally killed. Voices of protests and dissent were crushed, yet the brave Congolese intensified their resistance and persisted in their fight for independence.

On this day the Congolese remember those who sacrificed their lives for freedom.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 8

International Women's Day has its origins in the late 19th- early 20th-century labor struggles. Its modern observance dates back to 1975 when the United Nations began sponsoring the holiday. In

the Democratic Republic of the Congo the day is often used as an opportunity to highlight humanitarian and civil rights issues affecting women. These include rape, female genital mutilation, and the struggle for fair wages and decent workplace conditions.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Labor Day is called Working Day. It is a national holiday and schools, government offices, and businesses are closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 30

The Democratic Republic of the Congo, formerly



For International Women's Day in 2002, women walked out of kitchens, jobs, and schools to sing and dance around the eastern Congolese town of Kindu, 702 miles northeast of Kinshasa, demanding an end to Congo's 3 1/2-year civil war. (AP Photo/Rodrique Ngowi.)

known as Zaire, was declared an independent nation on June 30, 1960. The country was a Belgian colony for almost eight decades, and brutality and slavery were the predominant features of colonial rule. Independence Day commemorates the sacrifice made by thousands of Congolese who refused to be suppressed by the cruel regime. The freedom struggle for a free Congo was a fight for justice, equality, and the right of self-governance, which had long been denied its people. The incipient desires for independence took the form of small anti-Belgian demonstrations and culminated in a nationwide fight for freedom. The Belgian forces failed to silence these voices of dissent, and Belgium finally acceded to the demands of the Congolese people. Official speeches and military parades are the highlights of the day.

Religious Holidays

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated by Christians to mark Jesus' Resurrection, symbolic of the victory over death and the renewal of life. It falls on the first Sunday after the 40-day fasting period of Lent and is one of the most important Christian festivals of the year. Congolese Christians wear their best clothes to attend special church services on this day, followed by large family meals.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ CHRISTMAS EVE/DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas is a day of celebration for Christians since it commemorates the birth of Jesus. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Christians all over the country attend church services on Christmas Eve and sing carols along with the church choirs.

In times prior to the state of civil war, homes were adorned with lights and Christmas trees on Christmas Day, and there was a festive atmosphere everywhere. People wore new clothes and offered prayers in churches. In the afternoon a lavish feast was prepared with all the traditional delicacies on the menu. People exchanged gifts and greetings. In the early 21st century, however, with the country's economy in a shambles and the wounds of the regional conflict still fresh, Christmas celebrations in this region have been muted.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Rites of Passage

✿ BIRTH

Although the pygmy groups do not have special birth rituals, they practice a form of foster parenting requiring that individuals other than biological parents take care of a newborn child. This care comes mainly from female relatives, such as sisters, aunts, grandmothers, and even other members of the village.

Newborn infants in pygmy tribes spend 40 percent of their time in the first three weeks of their new lives away from their mothers; they are often cared for by their siblings or female relatives. This is supposed to foster a special bond within the family.

✿ COMING OF AGE

The coming-of-age ceremony is integral to many cultures around the world. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, different tribes perform different initiation ceremonies for boys and girls. The Bambuti pygmies, who reside in the Ituri forest, call the initiation ceremony for girls *elima*. When a tribal girl starts to menstruate, there is a big celebration since the event represents hope for the survival of the family and the tribe. The *elima* is a time of festivities, and the initiate lives in a special hut made for her, along with some of her friends. The ritual lasts for a period of one or two months, and a female relative is chosen to impart lessons on sex and adult womanhood. Traditional songs and dances, history lessons, and lessons on motherhood are part of the training. Excision of the clitoris is practiced by groups who live in the northern equatorial part of the country. There is no law in the Democratic Republic of Congo against female genital mutilation, and it is estimated that 5 percent of the women in the country have been infibulated.

At night when the girls sing together, the men hang around the hut and often sing along. Flirting is also permitted. On the final night of the ceremony, initiates adorn their bodies with white clay, paint, and apply perfumed oils and herbs. It is a night of rejoicing and is marked by dancing. The next day the girls complete their initiation period and are eligible for marriage.

Among the Baka pygmies, the initiation ceremony for men involves meeting with the Jengi (forest) spirit in a very secretive affair, which they are forbidden to discuss. Male circumcision is practiced among the Bantu-speaking tribes and is considered an important ritual that helps a boy make a swift transition to manhood.

✿ MARRIAGE

Exchanging gifts is the hallmark of traditional marriage in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Negotiations regarding gifts begin between families shortly after a marriage has been fixed. These gifts are known as bride-price and consist of livestock and money. The term *bride price* does not have a negative connotation, since it indicates the husband's ability to take care of his bride and his family. In the local Swahili language, it is called *mali*, which means "the worth." It is also called *lobola* or "dowry" in many parts of Africa. Young men spend years trying to accumulate enough money to pay the *mali*. Also in many parts of the region, nonpayment of *mali* often results in rejection of marriage proposals. Until the *mali* is paid, the groom cannot take his bride home.

However, the ongoing civil war in the country has rendered most of the people penniless, so few families can pay the *mali*. Traditional marriage rites are being abandoned because most young people are eloping (to ensure that payment of *mali* does not become a hindrance in their marriage), much to the displeasure of their parents and tribes.

DEATH

The older tribes do not consider death a natural phenomenon. Instead, they believe that death occurs when someone invokes the power of supernatural forces by acts of sorcery, witchcraft, and vodun. They also believe that the soul becomes a ghost or

evil spirit and will avenge its death. Hence special rituals are practiced to pacify these spirits and protect the living from their wrath. During funerals, people wear masks because they believe that masks drive away the evil spirits. Along with the traditional African beliefs, there coexists a strong belief in a Christian God. But funeral celebrations tend not to center on this God but rather honor elders and ancestors. When an elder dies, other elders of the tribe perform a special ceremony in his honor, and the entire village participates. It is believed that ancestors can be appeased by making offerings to honor them and by following and honoring the traditional way of life. Most tribes retain their traditional funeral rites and customs.

Further Reading

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~ Congo, Republic of the ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Western Africa, between Angola and Gabon, bordering the South Atlantic Ocean
Size	132,047 sq. mi.
Capital City	Brazzaville
Flag Description	The Republic of the Congo flag has a broad diagonal yellow stripe that divides an upper green triangle and a lower red triangle.
Independence	August 15, 1960 (from France)
Population	3,039,126 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Congolese
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Bakongo (48%); next three ethnic groups (Sangha, MBochi, Teke: 49%)
Major Language(s)	French (official); Lingala and Monokutuba (lingua franca, trade languages); many local languages and dialects (of which Kikongo is the most widespread)
Major Religion(s)	Christian (50%); animist (48%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; President's Day, February 5; International Women's Day, March 8; Marien Ngouabi Day, March 18; Independence Day, August 13–16; Children's Day, December 25; Republic Day, December 31

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

First settled by Mbuti (formerly known as Pygmies) Congo was later settled by Bantu groups that also occupied parts of present-day Angola, Gabon, and Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire), forming the basis for ethnic affinities and rivalries among those states. Several Bantu kingdoms—notably those of the Kongo, the Loango, and the Teke—built trade links leading into the Congo River basin. In 1482 the Portuguese located the Congo River and were soon using it for trade in slaves and ivory. For centuries the Congo River was a conduit of trade and conflict among various African groups and European colonizers, but only in 1880 did the

French assume dominion over the colonial territory they called French Congo (or Middle Congo). In 1908 France collected various territories—Gabon, Chad, Oubangui-Chari (modern Central African Republic), and the Congo—into French Equatorial Africa (AEF), with Brazzaville as the federal capital. The following decades saw increasing discontent over continuing exploitation by the French.

During World War II the AEF administration sided with Charles de Gaulle (1890–1970) rather than with the Vichy regime in France, and from 1940 to 1943 Brazzaville became the symbolic capital of Free France. The Brazzaville Conference of 1944 began major reforms in French colonial policy including the end of forced labor, French citizenship for colonial subjects, decentralization of power, and the beginnings of self-government.

Middle Congo became the Republic of the Congo in 1960 when it proclaimed independence without leaving the French Community. Fulbert Abbé Youlou (1917–72) served as the country's first president, but he was deposed in 1963, overthrown in a three-day uprising called *les Trois Glorieuses* (or "Three Glorious Days"), led by labor and competing political parties; every member of his government was arrested or removed from office.

The military briefly seized control and installed a civilian provisional government headed by Alphonse Massamba-Débat (1921–77). Under the 1963 constitution Massamba-Débat was elected president for a five-year term; he named Pascal Lissouba (b. 1931) prime minister. But Massamba-Débat's term came to a sudden end in 1968, when army officers led by Captain Marien Ngouabi (1938–77) toppled the government. After a period of consolidation under the newly formed National Revolutionary Council (NRC) Ngouabi (now a major) assumed the presidency on December 31, 1968. One year later President Ngouabi proclaimed Congo to be Africa's first "people's republic" and announced the decision of the National Revolutionary Movement to change its name to the Congolese Labor Party (PCT).

Then early in 1977 President Ngouabi was assassinated, and a Military Committee of the Party (CMP) was named to head an interim government with Colonel (later General) Joachim Yhombi-Opango (b. 1939) serving as president. Only two years later in 1979 Yhombi-Opango was removed from office by the Central Committee of the PCT after being accused of corruption and deviating from party directives. The PCT then appointed Vice President and Defense Minister Colonel Denis Sassou-Nguesso (b. 1943?) to serve as interim president.

By the early 1990s after years of poor economic performance and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Congo authorities changed their political and economic views, and the country's first democratic elections took place in 1992 with Pascal Lissouba (b. 1931) becoming the country's first democratically elected president. The Republic of Congo has struggled with its experiment in democracy, enduring ethnic unrest and a civil war in 1997 and restoring democracy and peace in its tenuous accord with opposition forces in 2003.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Congo is located in central West Africa, spanning the equator. It has Gabon to its west, Cameroon and Central African Republic to its north, Democratic Republic of the Congo to its south, and a small coastline with the Atlantic Ocean on the southwest side. The small coastal part of the country has grasslands, whereas the central and southern part form plateaus. The land rises toward Gabon, with tropical rain forests becoming more frequent toward the northern zone, where the land is covered with tropical rain forests that are richly nourished and flooded

during monsoon by the tributaries of the Congo River, most notably the Ubangui and Sangha Rivers.

The average temperature ranges from 70°F to 81°F, with an average rainfall of 43 inches annually. The temperatures remain high, and the weather is humid in areas closer to the equator. The rainy, tropical season lasts from March until June, followed by the dry season from July until October.

ECONOMY

Forestry was the backbone of Congo's economy before the oil and petroleum industries took over. Congo is now one of the biggest petroleum producers in the entire African region. During the 1980s the gross domestic product of Congo rose by 5 percent, by far the highest in any African country. This growth can be attributed to the rising oil revenues that fueled internal development, and Congo has yet to tap its offshore oil reserves.

Electricity is provided by the Sounda Gorge hydroelectric power project and by the electric utility *Société Nationale d'Electricité*. Mining has also become an important activity over the years, though the biggest chunk of foreign exchange comes from oil-based activities (fourth largest in sub-Saharan Africa).

The agriculture sector consists primarily of subsistence farming. Cassava (manioc) is the main food crop, with cocoa and coffee forming the main cash crops, along with sugar and tobacco. A big portion of the country is home to tropical rain forests, so the timber industry also provides a major source of export revenue. There is a small manufacturing industry base for utilizing forestry and agricultural products. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund continue to support the economic reform program of Congo. Poor infrastructure and public health problems, however, tend to pull down the economy.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The majority tribe the Bakongo or Kongo has inhabited the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), the Democratic Republic of Congo (Kinshasa), and Angola for centuries. (The first two countries are often referred to as Congo-Brazzaville or Congo-Kinshasa.) In the late 15th century the Portuguese arrived on the western African coast. From the time of their arrival there was a great deal of tension between the Portuguese and the Bakongos, particularly in relation to Portuguese efforts to convert the indigenous people to Christianity. Today the Bakongos often combine traditional and Christian beliefs. They believe in spirit cults and the active role of ancestors in their lives. Ancestors are seen as mediators between the living and the spirit worlds.

Rural Congolese lead a traditional life: Men rule over women, and the gender roles are rigidly defined. Men hunt, clear forests, and make all the

Bush Meat

Bush meat, the product of the illegal killing of wildlife, is one of the least documented wildlife problems in Africa, but it probably involves more people and endangers more species than is currently known. Bush meat also plays an important socioeconomic role in Africa, and highlights a critical conflict between attempts to save endangered species and their habitat and the needs of African peoples for nutritious foods. In African communities bush meat is regarded as an available food resource and the demand for it is high.

As the populations of African countries continue to expand, especially in the arid and semi-arid regions, the demand for bush meat will most likely continue to grow as well. More than 90 percent of Africa's rural populations depend upon corn (maize) as their staple diet and consume less than half of the protein needed to maintain health. The combination of protein-poor diets and poverty has resulted in many people being malnourished as well

as the world's highest infant mortality rates. Given such inadequate resources, wild animal meat has become critical both as a source of protein and as a means of producing a cash income from selling the skins and ivory. As populations rise and species disappear, the standard of living of many African people will deteriorate even further.

With bush meat resources in decline, not only is a larger and more diverse range of species being targeted, but commercial trade is also gradually replacing subsistence use in most areas. An emerging trend is that rising prices are stimulating the harvesting of a dwindling resource. One consequence has been increased hunting pressure on many protected areas, where bush meat harvest is now the number one illegal activity. Increased efforts to improve hunters' catch has also led to the increased use of more effective and, in most cases, unsustainable hunting techniques, such as night torching, long-line wire snaring, and shooting with semiautomatic weapons.

necessary decisions. Women are supposed to fetch water, tend fields, cook, care for the family, and do the housework. Married women cannot use banking facilities, are seldom allowed to work in offices (when they do they are paid less than men), cannot get a passport, and cannot rent or sell property without their husbands' permission.

The wood carvings of the Kongo and Teke tribes, mostly realistic figures representing their ancestors, are highly valued. Some of the special figures are fetiches based on the belief that a spirit inhabits them.

The Republic of the Congo is rich in literary works as well as in art. Sylvain Bemba (1934–95) was a famous journalist of his time who wrote novels and plays on his African experiences. In *The Man Who Killed a Crocodile*, for instance, Bemba writes about a local schoolteacher who confronts the village people about the ill-treatment of a woman of the village. He talks about the power of education in undoing injustice. Sony Labou Tansi (1947–95) is another writer known for his insightful examination of local politics. Gerald Felix Tchicaya U. Tamsi (1931–88) was one of the greatest Congolese poets; his works probe the social and political disappointments of the people of Africa.

❁ CUISINE

The traditional Congolese way of eating involves serving food on banana or cassava leaf plates. Cooking in *liboke* ("leaves") is a common practice, adding a distinctive flavor to any dish cooked this way. A Congo-Brazzaville National Culinary Team (also

called Team Bana Liboke) has as its goal to make Congolese cuisine and eating habits famous. A popular sweet dish is baked bananas, though mangoes are commonly available, too. The more affluent Congolese eat two or three meals a day, but most households prepare just one meal, which is eaten in the evenings. Common people cook in one pot to save fuel and take turns picking out a handful of rice (or any other cereal or grain), which they eat like a ball with sauce/stew. The stew is called *mwamba* and can be made of fish, lamb, meat, or chicken. It is eaten with cassava, *fufu* (a corn flour preparation), or rice. Common Congolese dishes include *pili pili* (chicken), *saka saka* (cassava), *mabuke* (freshwater fish), and *fumbwa* (vegetable stew). Cooked termites are delicacies in some places, while caterpillars, roasted crickets, and grubs are relished in other areas. Bush meat is often grilled crocodile, smoked monkey, or smoked antelope.

It is customary in Congo-Brazzaville to spill some drink on the floor before consuming it as a libation for thirsty ancestors.

Curious Food Facts

In the hot tropical forests of Africa mangoes, bananas, and pawpaw are in plentiful supply. The people usually relish meat, chicken, and eggs with these fruits, along with corn biscuits or rough maize. Bananas are cooked in various ways and are an important food item. Ostrich eggs are highly valued because one egg can feed an entire family.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

December 31 is not only New Year's Eve, but also Republic Day in Congo Brazzaville. New Year's Day brings families and friends together to celebrate a better and more prosperous new year. All offices and establishments are closed on both December 31 and January 1.

PRESIDENT'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 5

Home Cooking

In parts of sub-Saharan Africa people are so frightened about the possibility of being poisoned that they consume only bottled drinks. In the book *The Fetish Folk of West Africa* (1912), Robert Milligan wrote about some African women adding poison (available in many varieties) while preparing food, so people prefer homemade food.

In 1977 the assassination of President Ngouabi led to an interim government headed by Colonel Joachim Yhombi-Opango. He was later charged with corruption and removed by the Central Committee of the Congolese Labor Party, which simultaneously replaced him with then-vice president and defense minister Colonel Denis Sassou-Nguesso as interim president. This day is observed as President's Day, when the current leader of the country first became president on February 5. Official ceremonies mark the day.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 8

An annual event on March 8, International Women's Day commemorates, among other relevant historic events, the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire (New York, 1911), where more than 140 women lost their lives. On International Women's Day on March 8, 2000, in the presence of government officials, UNDP, and UNESCO, about 2,000 women participated in a march that started from the Palais du Parlement (Parliament House), in Congo Brazzaville. The purpose of the march was to collect at least 10 million signatures of supporters so that their demands could be raised in the United Nations. Their main demand was to bring about an end to poverty and violence against women worldwide. That year there was a host of other events such as televised talk shows, radio and

press interviews, debates, and discussions and signing of support cards.

Typically workshops and seminars are held on International Women's Day. Humanitarian organizations such as Médecins sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders) hold awareness and healing camps for treating and giving aid to the women of the Republic of the Congo, especially those who have been raped and victimized.

MARIEN NGOUABI DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 18

This day commemorates the memory of President Marien Ngouabi, who came to power following a coup he led in 1968. Ngouabi was assassinated, allegedly by a suicide commando, on March 18, 1977. The perpetrators of the crime were tried in court and some of them were executed, though the motivations for the assassination remain unclear. Colonel Joachim Yhombi-Opango was named to lead the interim government, but he was soon removed from office and replaced by Vice President and Defense Minister Colonel Denis Sassou-Nguesso as interim president. Nguesso would continue to serve as president into the early 21st century. This day is an official holiday in the Republic of the Congo.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 13–16

By 1958 French Equatorial Africa had dissolved, making the four constituent African nations autonomous members of the French Community. Middle Africa became the Republic of the Congo. In 1959 the Republic of the Congo adopted a diagonal tricolor flag. It declared full independence on August 15, 1960. The administration of its first president Fulbert Abbé Youlou was overthrown in 1963 in a three-day uprising called Les Trois Glorieuses ("Three Glorious Days"), and Republic of the Congo's three-day celebration of independence takes its name from that uprising, as does its national anthem adopted in 1969. All offices and public institutions are closed, and the long holiday is devoted to flag-raising ceremonies, parades, and other large public gatherings.

CHILDREN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 25

Children's Day was first observed in the United States in 1856, and by 1868 it had become a national celebration scheduled on the second Sunday in June. Now it is observed in countries around the world, although the date on which it falls differs from one

country to another. In the Republic of the Congo the holiday is observed on December 25, and children are given opportunities to participate in a variety of social, cultural, and governmental activities.

❁ REPUBLIC DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31

On December 31, 1968, Captain Marien Ngouabi and other army officers toppled President Massamba-Debat's civilian provisional government before it could complete its full term. A year later on this same day Ngouabi declared Congo as Africa's first "people's republic" and renamed the National Revolutionary Movement the Congolese Labor Party. Since then December 31 has been officially celebrated as Republic Day in the Republic of the Congo.

Religious Holidays

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a Christian feast that celebrates Jesus' Resurrection from the dead three days following his Crucifixion. It falls on the first Sunday after the 40-day fasting period of Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. Devout Christians attend special church services on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 24–25

The Christian festival of Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus. In the Republic of the Congo most cannot afford lavish celebrations, but those who can enjoy a feast of roasted beef or mutton. Families and friends gather in churches to celebrate Christmas. In Pointe-Noire visitors to the church receive gifts of food, such as tomatoes, fruit, exotic vegetables, and even live catfish from members of the church. Church services include skits and other performances by children.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

Since having children is a sign of prosperity, Congolese families are generally large, and childbirth is marked with celebration and rejoicing. Though the

government has undertaken several family-planning programs, by the 1990s each woman had six children on an average. However women living in the cities now find it expensive to have so many children, and the average number of children fell to about three per woman in 2004. Childbirth, however, remains a special occasion. According to a custom the maternal uncle names the boy child, while the aunt or mother names a girl.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Secret societies oversee many indigenous African ceremonies and rituals, including coming-of-age rites. The practice of concealing rituals developed because slave masters prohibited them. Traditions were kept secret in order to preserve them. In Congo when boys and girls are on the cusp of puberty, they are kept in seclusion for several days while undergoing initiation rituals. Boys must pass tests of strength and endurance to become adult men, whereas women learn lessons particular to their adult responsibilities. Boys are circumcised to symbolize their entry into adulthood. Genital cutting, or female genital mutilation, a highly controversial practice in the west that has been banned in many countries, is still practiced in the Republic of the Congo. Masked dances and feasting mark this occasion as the young have been initiated successfully into their adult roles and into identities.

❁ MARRIAGE

In earlier times the parents of prospective couples arranged most marriages, but this practice has fallen out of favor. The groom pays a bride price to the girl's parents and takes it back in case of a divorce. There is a tradition of exchanging gifts, followed by a civil ceremony, and culminating for Christians with a church ceremony. Marriages involve much feasting, dancing, and merrymaking, which may last for days, particularly in the rural areas. Some ceremonies incorporate broom-jumping after the wedding. Symbolic of homemaking, broom-jumping also signifies moving "over" or "sweeping away" the past and moving into a new life after marriage. Pouring wine on the floor as an offering invites the ancestors to witness the wedding and underscores the importance of heritage and family.

❁ DEATH

The Pygmies of Africa's Congo see death as a sharp delineation. They pull down the hut over the dead person and move away with their camps while

Fun Fact

Traditionally for any indigenous religious ceremonies or functions, diviners (spiritualists endowed with special powers) wear hembra face-masks and a costume called nsaka, made of taoraco bird feathers or dried banana leaves.

the family mourns. The dead person is then essentially erased from memory and never mentioned again. Widows may sometimes roam about naked or wear small aprons, which are traditionally worn by unmarried girls. People soon return to their normal lives. Most Bakongos believe that when people die their last bit of strength gets left behind in the cup or plates they touched last. The children of the deceased are encouraged to touch these utensils, and it is expected that what they need to know from the deceased will be revealed in dreams. The deceased is placed in the grave facing east and no grass is allowed to grow on the grave.

The grave is decorated with seashells, expressing the belief that seashells enclosed the soul's immortal presence and represented the sea, the land of demise, and purity.

Further Reading

John F. Clark, ed., *The African Stakes of the Congo War* (New York: Macmillan, 2002); Fantu Cheru, *African Renaissance: Roadmaps to the Challenge of Globalization* (London: Zed Books, distributed by Palgrave, 2002); Tobias Debiel and Alex Klein, eds., *Fragile Peace: State Failure, Violence, and Development in Crisis Regions* (London: Zed Books, 2002).

Costa Rica

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Central America, bordered by both the Caribbean Sea and the north Pacific Ocean, between Nicaragua and Panama
Size	19,730 sq. mi.
Capital City	San José
Flag Description	The flag of Costa Rica has five horizontal bands of blue (top), white, red (double width), white, and blue, with the coat of arms in a white elliptical disk on the hoist side of the red band; above the coat of arms, a light blue ribbon contains the words, “America Central” and, just below it, near the top of the coat of arms, is a white ribbon with the words, “República Costa Rica.”
Independence	September 15, 1821 (from Spain)
Population	4,016,173 (2005 est.)
Government	Democratic Republic
Nationality	Costa Rican
Major Ethnic Group(s)	White, including mestizo (94%)
Major Language(s)	Spanish (official); English
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (76%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year’s Day, January 1; Rivas Battle Day, April 11; Labor Day, May 1; Guanacaste Annexion, July 25; Independence Day, September 15; Columbus Day, October 12

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Costa Rica is situated between North and South America and has shared the cultures of both, dating back to pre-Columbian times. The excavations in the Cordillera Central mountain range have yielded spear points of two distinct types: a variation of the Clovis point known in North America; and the Magellan type (the fishtail) known in South America. These date to the Pleistocene megafauna period, 1.8–1.6 million to 10,000 years ago, when the Americas were populated by large animals such as the giant sloth, mammoths, mastodons, saber-toothed cats, giant condors, and dire wolves. Interestingly, some of the pottery artifacts are Mayan in nature, with their cylindrical shapes, woven patterns, and the slab tripod feet.

Christopher Columbus (1451–1506 C.E.) stopped at Costa Rica for 17 days in 1502 on his fourth and final voyage. He was so impressed by the gold decorations worn by the friendly

locals that he promptly dubbed the country Costa Rica, the “rich coast.” Despite the lure of its apparent wealth, settlements did not begin until 1522. For the next 300 years Costa Rica was ruled by Spain as part of the Captaincy General of Guatemala. Costa Rica, like its other colonized neighbors, suffered the effects of European invasion, and the indigenous population dwindled quickly because of its lack of immunity to the diseases contracted from European conquerors.

The absence of major gold deposits or any other valuable mineral resources allowed Costa Rica to remain a largely forgotten territory. Eventually, however, the Spanish turned to agriculture, and Costa Rica was the first nation in Central America to grow coffee and bananas on a commercial basis. The government gave free land to anyone willing to grow coffee for export—an enlightened step that moved away from the common pattern of keeping wealth in the hands of a few. This cultivation brought wealth and prosperity to many, and a more outward-looking perspective.

In 1821 Costa Rica was one of the countries included in the declaration of freedom from Spain pronounced by Guatemala.

Fun Fact

A large animal of the Pleistocene era found in South and Central America, but not in North America, was the giant armadillo (Glyptodont).

The news did not reach Costa Rica until a month after it was first announced. In 1824 Guanacaste Province became a part of Costa Rica, preferring it to Nicaragua. After this brief assimilation into the United Provinces of Central America, Costa Rica declared its sovereignty in 1838.

One of the landmark events of Costa Rican history took place in 1856, a period remembered for economic and cultural growth. During the term of coffee-grower-turned-president Juan Rafael Mora (1814–60), U.S. adventurer William Walker (1824–60) invaded Costa Rica with his army of recently captured Nicaraguan slaves. Mora organized an army of 9,000 civilians that succeeded against all odds and defeated Walker, forcing him out of the country. One of Mora's soldiers became a national hero—Juan Santamaria (1831–56)—the humble but very brave soldier who died in the 1856 battle. Santamaria is honored each year on April 11, which is known as Rivas Battle Day (or Juan Santamaria Day).

Costa Rica enjoys the distinction of being the only Central American country without an army. There have been only two periods of violence in the nation's history—the dictatorship of Federico Tinoco (1870–1931) in 1917–19, and the armed uprising in 1948 led by José Figueres (1906–90). The latter was a 44-day civil war that left 2,000 dead. The provocation was a disputed presidential election, and the immediate results of the bloodshed were the establishment of universal suffrage and the abolition of the military. The Constitution of 1949 gave women and blacks the right to vote.

In 1987 President Óscar Arias (b. 1941) received the Nobel Peace Prize for his attempts to spread Costa Rica's example of peace to the rest of Central America. His regional peace plan in 1987 formed the basis for the Esquipulas Peace Agreements.

Io on Earth

Poas Volcano (8,871 feet), active since well before records started in 1828, has had three major periods of activity since, 1888–95, 1903–12, and 1952–54. Occasional geyser eruptions continue, and from 1989 to 1991 gas emissions caused acid rain. At the present time the spectacular crater is a bubbling and steaming cauldron but is not thought to pose an imminent threat. At one time the volcano had two crater lakes, but the second crater lake drained away in 1989, leaving in its place a pool of liquid sulfur. This is the first such found on Earth, but liquid sulfur lakes can indeed be found on Io, one of Jupiter's moons. The remaining crater lake,

Laguna Botos, is full of boiling sulfurous water. Poas's huge crater is 4,265 feet wide and nearly 1,000 feet deep.

Poas is a composite volcano or stratovolcano, a steep-sided, symmetrical cone of alternating layers of lava flows, volcanic ash, cinders, blocks, and bombs. The essential feature of a composite volcano is a conduit system through which magma rises to the surface from a reservoir deep in the earth's crust. As material erupts through the conduit it accumulates, and the volcano increases in size as lava, cinders, and ash are added to its slopes. Lavas either flow through breaks in the crater wall or issue from fissures on the flanks of the cone.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

This country is one of mountains, coastal plains, and more than 100 volcanoes. Four volcanoes, two of them active, rise near the capital of San José in the center of the country; one of these, Irazu, erupted destructively in 1963–65. The climate is both tropical and subtropical, not extreme. The dry season lasts from December to April and the rainy season from May to November. The highlands are cooler than the plains. Costa Rica is a peaceful country characterized by an amazing natural beauty and the residents' love of horses. One-fourth of the land has been preserved as protected areas and national parks, and many of these are favorite picnic spots, including dormant volcanoes where the craters have metamorphosed into cold-water lakes. As a matter of fact, one of the dormant craters of Poas Volcano holds a cold-water lake that is the source of the Sarapiquí River.

ECONOMY

Costa Rica's stable economy is founded on tourism, agriculture, and electronics exports. Poverty has been substantially reduced over the past 15 years, with a strong social safety net for its people. Foreign investors remain attracted by the country's political stability and high educational levels, and tourism continues to bring in foreign money. Costa Rica recently concluded negotiations to participate in the U.S.–Central American Free Trade Agreement, which, if ratified by the Costa Rican legislature, would result in economic reforms and an improved investment climate.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

More than 75 percent of Costa Ricans are Roman Catholics. In practice most church attendance takes place at christenings, funerals, and marriages. Easter is the most important holiday, and during Semana Santa ("Holy Week") the nation comes to a standstill.

Rompopo

Serves 3–4

Preparation Time: 30 min.

Ingredients:

- 1 c. milk
- 1 c. evaporated milk
- 3/4 c. rum (or more to taste)
- 3 large egg yolks
- 1/2 c. sugar
- 1/4 tsp. nutmeg, grated
- 1/4 tsp. cinnamon
- 2 cloves
- 1/2 c. coconut, grated

Preparation (30 minutes):

Mix milk and evaporated milk in a bowl. Whisk yolks and sugar in large bowl to blend. Gradually whisk in milk mixture. Place mixture in a saucepan. With a wooden spatula, stir mixture over low heat until bubbles subside and mixture thickens slightly (do not boil), about 12 minutes. Cover and refrigerate until chilled.

Blend rum into eggnog mixture just before serving and sprinkle with freshly grated nutmeg and coconut. Serve cold.

Small villages have their own way of celebrating, and they add to the occasion the blessing of oxcarts, horses, and trucks. The Ticos, as Costa Ricans refer to themselves, are a happy, fun-loving people. The myriad celebrations include the National Chocolate Festival at Esparza in Puntarenas and the feast days of the patron saints of villages and towns. During these holidays many people walk to the city from all parts of the country. While some choose to party during religious holidays, most prefer a family gathering.

Independence Day is the most significant non-religious holiday in Costa Rica. Every town has its



Costa Rican schoolchildren dressed in period costume march in a parade to celebrate Rivas Battle Day in Alajuela, Costa Rica, on April 11. Juan Santamaria is known for burning out the army of U.S. citizen William Walker and his filibusters in the Battle of Rivas, Nicaragua, in 1856. (AP Photo/Kent Gilbert)

own formal official celebration including parades of young children, bands, and majorettes. People carry the national flag and wear the national colors: red, blue, and white.

❁ CUISINE

Costa Ricans have their own unique style, even when it concerns food: the *gallo pinto* (rice and beans preparation) takes all of 10 minutes to cook and is enjoyed for breakfast, lunch, or dinner while the *vigoron* (a pork preparation borrowed from neighboring Nicaragua) requires an hour and is sold by hawkers near the ports. It is also cooked in most coastal homes. No celebration is complete without *rompopo* (Costa Rican eggnog).

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, called Año Nuevo here, are public holidays in Costa Rica. New Year's Eve is a worldwide celebration, marking the end of one year and the beginning of the new. The mood is joyous on New Year's Eve, and the revelry continues until midnight, the moment of transition into the new year. Most Costa Ricans prefer to be with friends and family.

On the first day of the year Costa Ricans seek to ward off bad luck by cleaning their homes. Celebrations around the country include street parties, music, dancing, and public feasts. A big dance is organized in San José's Parque Central (Central Park), and festivities conclude with a magnificent display of fireworks.

❁ RIVAS BATTLE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 11

Rivas Battle Day is a national holiday in Costa Rica, commemorating the 1856 victory over William Walker, an American adventurer and his Nicaraguan slaves. On this day Spanish farmers under the leadership of Juan Rafael Mora, the president of Costa Rica, routed the invaders, who were forced back to Nicaragua. Walker was ultimately imprisoned and executed in Honduras.

This day is also known as Juan Santamaria Day (Día de Juan Santamaria) in honor of Juan Santamaria, the barefoot soldier who fought and lost his life at the battle of Rivas. The weeklong celebrations include parades with bands, music concerts, dances, and a cattle fair at Alajuela.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Labor Day honors the contribution of all workers and is observed in many countries of the world. The May 1 observance of Labor Day (also known as Día de los Trabajadores or May Day) has its origins in the international socialist movement. The first May Day/Labor Day occurred in 1890, set internationally by the Second International to coincide with an American Federation of Labor general strike in the United States to demand the eight-hour workday. Thereafter, International Labor Day became (and remains) more radical than the U.S. Labor Day observed in September.

At Puerto Limón there are lavish celebrations including huge parades in tribute to those who died in Chicago's Haymarket riots in support of workers' rights in 1886. Costa Ricans celebrate their day of rest by attending music festivals, marches, cookouts on the beach, and by listening to an address delivered by the president on this occasion.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ GUANACASTE ANNEXION

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 25

Costa Rica gained independence from Spain in 1821, and in 1824 Guanacaste province chose to join Costa Rica rather than Nicaragua. This day is celebrated as Guanacaste Annexation Day, Anexión de Guanacaste, or just Guanacaste Day. It is a country-wide holiday, but the most vibrant celebrations are held in Guanacaste province with bullfights, rodeos, cattle fairs, and fireworks.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 15

After centuries of Spanish colonial rule Costa Rica and other Central American nations declared their independence from Spain in 1821. To celebrate that event students and government officials bring the Freedom Torch from Guatemala to Costa Rica. The torch arrives in Cartago on September 14 at 6 A.M., and the national anthem is sung throughout the country. On the 15th, the nation celebrates with colorful parades and public monuments are decorated with flags, torches, shields, and commemorative plaques. The nocturnal Desfile de Faroles ("Parade of Lanterns") is one of the most important events of Independence Day, or Día de la Independencia, enthusiastically attended by university students, who make the lanterns themselves. Celebrations at San José are the most widely attended.

❁ COLUMBUS DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 12

Columbus Day, also referred to as Día de la Raza, Day of Race, or Discovery Day, commemorates Christopher Columbus's discovery of the Americas. In recent years there has been a reexamination of Columbus's legacy in light of the European colonizers' brutal treatment of the indigenous peoples of the Americas. Commemorations in many Latin American countries now emphasize native peoples and traditions as much as, if not more than, the person of Christopher Columbus.

The Carnival of Costa Rica, held on this day, includes dancing, music, and much food and drink.

Religious Holidays

❁ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: January 6

Epiphany commemorates the arrival of the Three Kings (or the Magi) at Bethlehem to honor the birth of Jesus. They bore gifts of frankincense (symbolizing the prayers of the world), myrrh (symbolizing Jesus' sacrifice and death), and gold (a gift fit for a king). In Costa Rica, where the holiday is often called Three Kings' Day, entire neighborhoods gather for a special prayer for the baby Jesus. This prayer is based on the rosary. Christmas carols are sung, and later coffee, cakes, and other delicacies are served.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS; EPIPHANY

❁ ST. JOSEPH'S DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: March 19

St. Joseph is the patron saint of the capital city of Costa Rica San José. He is also the husband of the Virgin Mary and as such the protector of Mary and her child. He is regarded as the protector the church (the spiritual home of Christians) and of the worldly home. On Día de San José, Costa Ricans visit the area of Poas Volcano to attend special Masses and religious ceremonies. Traditionally stuffed artichokes, pasta, and fish are served on this occasion with breads, cookies, pastries, cakes, and other baked goods. Fava beans and breads are exchanged as gifts—fava, because these beans saved the drought-hit Sicilians from starvation, and Joseph's bread, to ensure plenty. In San José there are cattle shows, bullfights, rodeos, and horse races held on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Thursday before Easter

Maundy Thursday is a Christian festival marking Jesus' Last Supper with his Disciples. On this day the streets in downtown San José remain quiet on Maundy, or Holy Thursday. Banks, public offices, and stores are closed. People prefer to walk or ride horseback rather than use vehicles. Special Masses are held in remembrance of the Last Supper. The cuisine is specific: *dulce de chiverre* (sweet preserves), *arroz con leche* (sweet rice), eggnog, quesadillas, *rosquillas* (round sweet breads with a hole in the middle), and *polvorones* (shortbread cookies), as well as various seafoods.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday marks the day that Jesus was crucified and is a day of contemplation and mourning. It is also known as Holy Friday, Great Friday, Mourning Friday.

In Costa Rica Good Friday Mass includes the darkening of the church—by dimming the lights or blowing out candles—as a symbol of the darkness of the event. In Costa Rica many businesses choose to close for the entire week, while Good Friday itself is a holiday for all. The extended weekend allows Costa Ricans to go to the beach or the mountains.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

On Easter Christians believe that Jesus rose from the grave on the third day after his Crucifixion, as he had promised his followers. The term *easter* is derived from the name of Eostre, a Teutonic goddess of light. Easter is sometimes called Eostre or Pascha. The word *pascha* is of Greek origin but does not refer to suffering. The reference is to the Hebrew festival of Passover (Pesach), when the angel of death “passed over” the homes of the Jews exiled in Egypt.

Easter Sunday in Costa Rica is a balance of piety and parties. The more religious Costa Ricans stay at home or participate in religious celebrations that include Masses and processions. Others choose to spend their time on the beach.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT

❁ CORPUS CHRISTI

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: Thursday after Trinity Sunday

Corpus Christi is celebrated to commemorate the institution of the Eucharist. The Feast of Corpus Christi was established as an official church holiday in 1261 by Pope Urban IV (r. 1261–64). In Costa Rica the Feast of Corpus Christi begins with early morning Mass followed by a religious procession with the statues of Jesus and Mary as the centerpieces. Corpus Christi is most strongly observed in Pacayas and Cartago.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CORPUS CHRISTI

❁ ST. PETER'S AND ST. PAUL'S DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: June 29

St. Peter and St. Paul are considered the greatest of the Christian missionaries and are credited with shaping the Catholic Church. St. Peter is the patron saint of fishermen, and St. Paul is the patron of musicians; so both saints are revered in this country, where fishing and music are both important aspects of everyday life.

In Costa Rica the holiday is known as Día de San Pedro y San Pablo or Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul. The day is celebrated with a Morning Mass and the blessing of boats and nets, followed by coffee and refreshments and games for children.

❁ VIRGIN OF LOS ANGELES

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: August 2

The Virgin of Los Angeles, also known as the Virgin la Negrita, is the patron saint of Costa Rica. Her legend can be traced back to Cartago in 1635. A mestizo (mixed descent) woman came upon a stone statue of the Virgin and child standing on a large stone. She took the image home and placed it in a basket. The next day, again while collecting firewood, she chanced upon a stone snake on the same large stone. She took this image home as well but found the first one missing. The next day the Virgin and child image was once again standing on that stone, and when she reached home with it, the snake image was missing. The latter reappeared on that stone the next day. This state of affairs continued, and the frightened young woman finally consulted a priest. He took the images with him, and the same events recurred. They understood that the Virgin wanted a church to be built at that spot and the church was built, the first in the country. In 1824, the Virgin la Negrita was declared the patron saint of Costa Rica. This holiday is also known as Día de la Virgen de Los Angeles, Feast of the Patroness of Costa Rica.

This day marks the most important pilgrimage in the country. Pilgrims walk from San José to Cartago and, once there, they cover the last leg of the pilgrimage on their knees.

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas, or Mass of Christ, celebrates the birth of Jesus, whom Christians believe to be a savior. The word “christmas” is derived from the Old English *cristes maesse*.

In Costa Rica this is a time for celebrations and parties, sharing and reflecting. Posada processions, symbolizing Joseph and Mary’s search for accommodations, proceed through the streets beginning nine days before Christmas. The Christmas season continues through the rest of December and into January with fiestas, parades, rodeos, choral and dance festivals, street fairs, and bull runs.

Children decorate cypress trees with colored strips, balls, and a gold star symbolizing the star of Bethlehem. Another popular feature is the Portal—a Nativity scene constructed of mosses and grass, colored sawdust, cypress twigs, black paper, and figurines representing Jesus in the manger. Most homes throughout the country, as well as commercial and public buildings, are decorated with multi-colored lights. For employees the Christmas season includes the *aguinaldo* (Christmas bonus).

The Christmas Choir Festival takes place during the first week of December in San Jose and involves

both choral singing and worship. Church choirs, community choruses, and professional ensembles perform favorite carols, old and new, around the country and at the National Theater in San Jose.

New clothes, a candlelight service in church, and the Misa de Gallo (Midnight Mass) mark Christmas Eve in Costa Rica. A traditional supper of chicken and pork tamales follows, accompanied by eggnog and rum punch.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ SAN ISIDRO LABRADOR’S DAY

Observed in: San Isidro

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 15

Saint Isidro Labrador (1562–1635) is the patron saint of farmers and animals. Born near Madrid, Spain, into a poor family, Isidro was always God-fearing and kind, and drawn to the recitation of the scriptures. He worked the fields as a day laborer but never left for work without listening to the *Santa Misa*. He was invariably late for work, and the other laborers complained to their master. The employer saw that Isidro was indeed late but that the oxen were working anyway as if the laborer were there to guide them. Pope Gregory XV (r. 1621–23) canonized him in 1622. Costa Ricans in San Isidro honor the saint on Labrador’s Day. A priest blesses crops and animals, and events include cattle shows, bullfights, and oxcart parades, along with flower exhibits and fairs. Other names for this holiday are Día de San Isidro Labrador, Festival of St. Isador the Farmer

❁ CARRERA DE SAN JUAN

Observed in: San Juan

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 17

Carrera de San Juan (also called San Juan Day or San Juan Marathon) is held in honor of St. John of the Cross (1542–91). He and the mystic St. Teresa (1515–82) were the founders of the Discalced Carmelites. St. John was born John of Yepé. He led a rigorous life, wrote beautiful poetry, and was recognized only after his death. His relics are considered miraculous: His dead body, still uncorrupted, bears images of the Virgin, of different saints, and of Jesus on the cross, depending on the beliefs of the viewer.

The most prestigious race in Costa Rica is held on this day, and participants have to run a distance of almost 14 miles of very difficult terrain from El Alto de Ochomongo (near Cartago) to San Juan de Tibás. There are also other events associated with this festival, such as parades, dances, and cultural programs.

Rites of Passage

❁ MARRIAGE

Marriages in Costa Rica are based primarily on Roman Catholic traditions, interspersed with a few indigenous customs. Costa Ricans are conservative in family matters, and most Costa Ricans still live in their parents' home until marriage. Engagement parties and weddings are attended by immediate and extended family as well as large numbers of neighbors, friends, and their families. The bride wears an elegant white gown, and the groom is formally attired in black. The marriage vows are followed by the exchange of rings.

The traditional painted oxcarts of Costa Rica have a role to play in the wedding ceremony. The following custom originated among farming and other communities that made use of the cart. A single rosary, representing the "soft yoke of love," is placed around the necks of the couple. Symbolically just as two oxen must pull together for the cart to move, the couple must work together if their marriage is to succeed. The cart will not move if the oxen pull in different directions or at different rates.

The contractual nature of a marriage and the material goods a couple will share are symbolized by the groom giving some coins to his bride with the words, "These coins represent the material wealth we shall own and share." The bride takes the coins

with the response, "I receive these coins and will care for our physical well-being." This establishes the understanding that the husband is the principal provider for the family, and the wife is the caretaker.

❁ DEATH

Catholic customs are observed at death. Funerals are usually held at funeral parlors. A Mass is held at church, after which everybody proceeds to the cemetery. The burial is a somber occasion, and dark dresses and ties are usual, although not mandatory. Calla lilies are typical funeral flowers. A Mass is held every day for nine days after death, as well as one month later. People offer condolences in person (at the church itself, if need be), by telegram, by card, or by telephone.

Further Reading

Mavis H. Biesanz, Richard Biesanz, Karen Z. Biesanz, *The Ticos: Culture and Social Change in Costa Rica* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999); R. Fernández Guardia, *History of the Discovery and Conquest of Costa Rica* (New York: Gordon Press, 1978); Ronald N. Harpelle, *The West Indians of Costa Rica: Race, Class, and the Integration of an Ethnic Minority* (Ithaca, N.Y.: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001); Jeffrey Quilter, *Cobble Circles and Standing Stones: Archaeology at the Rivas Site* (Iowa City, Ia.: University of Iowa Press, 2004).

❧ Côte d'Ivoire ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Western Africa, bordering the North Atlantic Ocean, between Ghana and Liberia
Size	124,503 sq. mi.
Capital City	Yamoussoukro
Flag Description	Côte d'Ivoire's flag has three vertical bands of equal size: orange (hoist side), white, and green.
Independence	August 7, 1960 (from France)
Population	17,298,040 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic; multiparty presidential regime established in 1960
Nationality	Ivoirian(s)
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Akan (42%); other indigenous groups including Voltaiques or Gur, Northern Mandes, Krous, Southern Mandes (55%)
Major Language(s)	French (official); 60 native dialects, with Dioula the most widely spoken
Major Religion(s)	Muslim (35–40%); indigenous (25–40%); Christian (20–30%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day, August 7; Day of Peace, November 15; Félix Houphouët-Boigny Remembrance Day, December 7

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

The dominant ethnic tribes of present-day Côte d'Ivoire began arriving in the region at the beginning of the 17th century C.E. The Kru tribe migrated to Côte d'Ivoire from Liberia in 1600; around the same time the Lubi and the Senoufo arrived from Burkina Faso and Mali and established settlements. The Akan people, including the Malinke from Guinea and the Baoulé from Ghana, did not begin migrating to Côte d'Ivoire until the 18th century.

Portuguese explorers reached the coast in the 15th century and began trading in slaves and ivory, but European penetration into the interior was delayed until the 1830s. The first French contact in the region was in 1637, when French missionaries landed at Assinie along the Gold Coast (modern-day Ghana) and began spreading Christianity. They made contact with tribes in Côte d'Ivoire but had little success among the local tribes, which did not welcome foreigners.

In the mid-19th century the fighting among tribes over territorial issues gave the French an opportunity to establish

their presence in the region. During the period 1843–44 French Admiral Bouet-Williaumez signed a number of treaties with the kings of Assinie and Grand Bassam (a city in Côte d'Ivoire). He offered them French protection against their rivals and declared these regions a French protectorate. More French missionaries, explorers, and traders began arriving in Côte d'Ivoire, and soon the entire region was completely dominated by the French.

On March 10, 1893, Côte d'Ivoire was declared a French colony, and Captain Louis Gustave Binger (1856–1936), the French explorer who explored the Gold Coast region extensively, was appointed the first French governor of Côte d'Ivoire. Binger led the fight against the Malinke chief Samori Ture (c. 1830–1900), who strongly opposed French rule in the region. In 1898 French forces captured Samori Ture and largely quelled the Malinke rebellion, although the Baoulé tribe continued guerilla warfare against French forces until 1917.

Between 1904 and 1958 the French colony of Côte d'Ivoire was an important part of the Federation of French West Africa along with Niger, Senegal, Guinea, Upper Volta (Burkina Faso), Mauritania, Dahomey (Benin), and French Sudan (Mali). During this period the local inhabitants were

forced to work on plantations for long hours under abusive conditions. Production of coffee, cocoa, and palm oil crops steadily increased until the region became a major exporter of coffee, cocoa, and bananas in West Africa.

The brutal treatment meted out by French forces caused discontent among the inhabitants and sowed the seeds of the independence movement.

In 1944 Félix Houphouët-Boigny (1905–93), the son of a wealthy Baoulé chief and a cocoa farmer, formed the first agricultural union of African cocoa farmers in Côte d'Ivoire. Known as the *Syndicat Agricole Africain*, it championed the cause of local farmers and the people of Côte d'Ivoire. After World War II Baoulé was elected as a representative of Côte d'Ivoire in the French National Assembly, and during his tenure (1946–59) he played a significant role in abolishing forced labor in Côte d'Ivoire by bringing the woes of its people to the notice of the French leaders. Houphouët-Boigny also served as the first African minister in the French government for a term of three years.

In December 1958 Côte d'Ivoire was granted autonomous status within the French Overseas Community, and in April 1959 Félix Houphouët-Boigny was sworn in as the prime minister of Côte d'Ivoire. On August 7, 1960, Côte d'Ivoire obtained complete independence from French rule, and Houphouët-Boigny was sworn in as the first president of the independent nation. Abidjan, a commercial center, was named the political capital of Côte d'Ivoire. During his tenure as president Houphouët-Boigny introduced pro-agricultural policies, and the country's economy thrived. Coffee production increased, and Côte d'Ivoire became the third major producer of coffee after Brazil and Colombia. By 1979 Côte d'Ivoire had assumed the rank of the world's leading coffee producer, as well as the leading African exporter of palm oil and pineapples. Côte d'Ivoire's success in agriculture earned it the title the "Ivoirian Miracle."

Houphouët-Boigny, however, was an authoritarian leader, and there was no freedom of the press in Côte d'Ivoire under him. He declared Côte d'Ivoire a one-party state, and his party, the *Parti Democratique de la Côte d'Ivoire* (PDCI), controlled the government. He spent millions of dollars in the development of his village Yamoussoukro and made it the new capital of Côte d'Ivoire.

The economy of Côte d'Ivoire suffered immensely after the country was hit by a series of droughts in the early 1980s. In addition crime and corruption in Côte d'Ivoire increased steadily, adding to the woes of the president. Meanwhile in order to deal with recession, Houphouët-Boigny took loans from the international monetary organizations. Yet the country's economy did not improve, and Côte d'Ivoire's international debts mounted.

Despite growing discontent among the citizens Houphouët-Boigny remained president until his death on December 7, 1993.

His successor was Henri Konan Bédié (b. 1934),

Houphouët-Boigny's loyal deputy. Under his rule all opposition party leaders were sent to jail, and all the military officers who did not agree with his policies were dismissed. On December 24, 1999, Bédié was ousted in a coup led by Robert Guéï (1941–2002), a former military commander, who had been dismissed by Bédié. This was the first coup d'état in Côte d'Ivoire.

As president Guéï promised the people that democracy would be restored in the region by 2000. He ran in the 2000 elections against the presidential nominee of the *Front Populaire Ivoirien* (FPI; Ivoirian Popular Front), Laurent Gbagbo (b. 1945). However when Gbagbo was declared victorious, Guéï refused to step down as president, and many people were killed, including citizens of other countries, in the riots that erupted all over the city. The worst single act of mob violence occurred on October 26, 2000, in *Blokosso Village* and resulted in the deaths of at least six men, including one Guinean.

Another presidential candidate and a Muslim opposition leader was Alassane Outtara (b. 1942). He had been disqualified from the presidential elections by the Supreme Court of Côte d'Ivoire because of his *Burkinabé* nationality. (Only one of his parents is a citizen of Côte d'Ivoire.) Muslims in the northern parts of the country violently protested this decision, and riots broke out.

On September 19, 2002, troops in the northern parts of the country rebelled against Gbagbo's government and gained control of a major part of the country. Hundreds of innocent people lost their lives in the fight between government forces and the militias, which included mercenaries and warlords from neighboring Liberia and Sierra Leone. The international community took notice of the situation, and France sent peacekeeping forces into the region. In January 2003 a peace agreement was signed between rebel leader Guillaume Solo and the president of Côte d'Ivoire Laurent Gbagbo. It stipulated that a united government would be formed in Côte d'Ivoire with equal representation for the rebels. But the rebels did not keep their promise to disarm their forces until October 15, 2004.

Côte d'Ivoire has remained divided between the rebel forces and the government, and the region has continued in a state of quasi war. On November 6, 2004, nine soldiers of the French peacekeeping forces and an aid worker were killed in an air strike by Côte d'Ivoire. In retaliation French forces launched an air strike at Yamoussoukro and

Fun Fact

Houphouët-Boigny is said to have been Africa's number one producer of "show" projects. He spent so many millions of dollars to transform his village Yamoussoukro into the new capital that it became the butt of jokes.

Fun Fact

To indicate its seriousness about being addressed as Côte d'Ivoire, the government passed a national law that forbids the country's name to be translated.

Deforestation

Côte d'Ivoire is cutting down rain forests faster than any other country on Earth. The only forest that remains untouched is the Tai National Park, which is home to more than 250 endemic species of trees and such endangered animals as the pygmy hippopotamus.

destroyed all the airplanes belonging to the Ivoirian Air Force. French nationals in the cities of Abidjan and Yamoussoukro were evacuated by French forces after fighting broke out between the French peacekeeping forces and local Ivoirians. Widespread protests against French forces continue in Côte d'Ivoire, and the government of Laurent Gbagbo remained on the sidelines, its hands full dealing with the economic slump, rebels, and regional violence.

Although named Côte d'Ivoire by the French, the nation has also been known, in other languages, as Ivory Coast (English), Elfen-

beinküste (German), and Costa de Marfil (Spanish). In October 1985 the government appealed to the international community to address the nation uniformly as Côte d'Ivoire.

🌸 GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in Western Africa Côte d'Ivoire is flanked by Guinea and Liberia to the west, Ghana to the east, Burkina Faso and Mali to the north, and the Gulf of Guinea (North Atlantic Ocean) to the south. Topographically Côte d'Ivoire is flat, except for the Man region in the western part of the country, which is marked by a number of small hills. The Ébrié Lagoon begins at the Ghanaian border and covers the eastern coast. This is the most densely populated area of the country.

The Sassandra, Bandama, and Komoé are the main rivers in Côte d'Ivoire. Mont Nimba, which rises 5,750 feet, is the highest mountain in the country.

The northern parts of the country experience semi-arid weather conditions, while the southeastern parts enjoy an equatorial climate, and the central parts have a tropical climate. The three main seasons of Côte d'Ivoire are: warm and dry (November to March), hot and dry (March to May), and hot and

Man region

The Man region, located in the west-central part of Côte d'Ivoire, offers a panorama of sprawling green hills. A beautiful waterfall La Cascade runs into a bamboo forest westward of Man town. One can also find the second highest peak in Côte d'Ivoire Mont Tonkoui, at a distance of 9.3 miles north of La Cascade. The region is famous for its unique village masks and the performance of the Yacouba stilt dancers during the Festival of Masks.

wet (June to October). The annual average temperature is 79°F. However humidity drops progressively from the coast toward the north. Thus while the south experiences an average relative humidity of 85 percent, humidity in the north is only 71 percent.

🌸 ECONOMY

More than 70 percent of the country's population is engaged in agriculture, which is the main source of revenue and the backbone of the nation's economy. The country's principal exports are cocoa, coffee, pineapples, tuna, and tropical woods (timber). Côte d'Ivoire continues to be one of the world's largest producers and exporters of coffee, cocoa beans, and palm oil, despite the devastating droughts in the 1980s. Such exports have enabled the government to repay a considerable portion of Côte d'Ivoire's foreign debt.

Côte d'Ivoire has an excellent infrastructure, with road networks, rail connections, and telecommunication services. This facilitates its connection with neighboring countries, making Côte d'Ivoire the preferred choice of other West African countries for establishing trading posts for their operations. The government's policy of encouraging direct foreign investment has also played a major role in reviving the economy of Côte d'Ivoire.

The ongoing dispute between the rebels and the government has had little impact on the economy. Both sides acknowledge the benefits of a strong economy, and neither side wants to jeopardize the country's economic health. Although the rebels have captured cocoa plantations in many parts of the country, production remains undisturbed.

🌸 CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

In Côte d'Ivoire people belonging to different faiths for the most part coexist peacefully. The government of Côte d'Ivoire also contributes regularly to the development of places of worship for different religions. Between 25 and 30 percent of the country's population are Christians, while 35 to 40 percent practice Islam. Approximately 25 to 40 percent of the population adhere to traditional animist beliefs.

Ivoirians believe in the power of magic and credit it with warding off evil, making *juju* priests (medicine men) highly sought-after. They give *gris-gris* necklaces (special charm necklaces that keep the evil spirits at bay) and are also fortune-tellers who are often consulted about impending dangers.

Among all the ethnic groups in Côte d'Ivoire the Senoufo hold on most strongly to their traditional beliefs. Children are taught about the tribal history and their way of life from a very young age, and they are expected to uphold the values and beliefs of the Senoufo.

French is the official language of Côte d'Ivoire, but most tribes prefer to speak their native language. Dioula is the most widely spoken native dialect.

Traditional village entertainers, known as *griots* or praise-singers, make use of musical instruments made from animal skins, gourds, and horns. They sing folk songs, which tell about the glorious past of different tribes and their leaders, as well as comment on the present situation in Côte d'Ivoire. The country is well known for its artistic creations as well, especially masks. The peoples of Côte d'Ivoire produce a wider variety of masks than those of any other African nation, and every ethnic group has its own sets of masks. Masks represent the souls of deceased people, lesser deities, or caricatures of animals.

One of the most famous festivals in Côte d'Ivoire is the Festival of Masks (Fêtes des Masques), which takes place in the Man region during the month of November. Villages in the region hold special dance contests in which participants have to wear the masks of their tribes and give dance performances. The purpose of the festival is to pay homage to the forest spirits who are said to be embodied in the special masks as well as to determine and honor the best dancer in the village.

The three groups known for their outstanding wooden carvings are the Baoulé (an Akan group that migrated from Ghana into the eastern area of the country), the Dan or Yacouba (a tribe from the rain forests), and the Senoufo (people who migrated from the north in the 17th century).

❁ CUISINE

The influence of neighboring countries on Côte d'Ivoire's cuisine is evident in the reliance on grains and tubers in the traditional diet. A favorite Côte d'Ivoirian side dish is *attiéké*, a couscous made from manioc (cassava), which is generally served with fish or *kedjenou*, a chicken dish cooked with vegetables and sauce. One of the most popular dishes, often available at small, open-air restaurants on the beaches, is *maquis*, braised chicken and fish smothered in onions and tomatoes. *Aloco*, another popular dish, consists of ripe bananas cooked in palm oil and spiced with chilies and steamed onions. *Aloco* can be eaten by itself or with grilled fish.

The local palm wine called *Bangui* is a popular beverage in Côte d'Ivoire.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western (Gregorian) calendar January 1 is celebrated as New Year's Day throughout the world. A festive spirit reigns as people organize parties and celebrations beginning on New Year's Eve. Since it is a national holiday in Côte d'Ivoire, all public and private institutions are closed on January 1.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world, and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

On this day leaders from trade unions all across Côte d'Ivoire assemble in the capital of Yamoussoukro and hold meetings with the president and the minister of labor, at which they present lists of workers' grievances to be addressed by the government. This is a national holiday, with schools and businesses closed for the day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 7

Côte d'Ivoire was under French domination from the mid-19th century until 1958, when the country was made an autonomous republic within the French Overseas Community. On August 7, 1960,

Masks

Baoulé facial masks depict individuals with characteristic marks on their faces or unique hairstyles. They look very real and are traditionally used in memorial celebrations. The masks of the Senoufo people are extremely stylized and are used to show respect for village life. Depictions of an antelope, warthog, and hyena combine to make the very popular "fire-spitter" helmet mask (also called *wohdec*). The warthog mask is used to drive away evil spirits.

The Senoufo people trace their origin to the hornbill, which represents fertility in their mythology. The fact that hornbills mate for life and share the raising of their young makes hornbills highly regarded among the Senoufo people. The figure of a long hooked beak touching a potbelly signifies the continuity of life to future generations and is worn on the head in celebrations and dances. The harvest is typically celebrated with village masquerades.

Fun Fact

A mask is believed to have a soul or a living force, and a person changes into the entity represented by the mask after wearing it. Therefore only certain powerful individuals or families are allowed to own a mask, and it is considered dangerous for most other people to wear it.

Côte d'Ivoire achieved independence from France, and Félix Houphouët-Boigny was sworn in as the first president of independent Côte d'Ivoire.

On this day the president of the nation presides over Independence Day celebrations in the capital city of Yamoussoukro. After the customary raising of the national flag the president addresses the nation and reports on the progress made in the past year. A host of activities, such as youth concerts and soccer matches, are also held as part of the celebrations.

☼ DAY OF PEACE

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 15

The Day of Peace marks the adoption of a resolution by the UN Security Council on November 15, 2004, prohibiting the use of armaments in Côte d'Ivoire. This step was taken in order to restore peace in the war-ravaged country. Since September 2002 the war between rebels in the north and the government of Côte d'Ivoire has caused widespread destruction throughout the country, and hundreds of innocent people have lost their lives as a result of this ongoing conflict. Eventually, UN Peacekeeping Forces led by France entered Côte d'Ivoire to restore peace and order. International leaders acted as mediators between the government and the rebels, and a peace agreement was signed in January 2003, resulting in an 18-month ceasefire. However in early November, when the Ivoirian troops broke the ceasefire by attacking the rebels, the Security Council imposed a year-long sanction on the country, banning the use of weapons. Since it is a national holiday, all public and private institutions are closed.

☼ FÉLIX HOUPHOUËT-BOIGNY REMEMBRANCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 7

This holiday marks the death of the first president of Côte d'Ivoire Félix Houphouët-Boigny, who died on December 7, 1993. He was president of Côte d'Ivoire from 1960 until his death. The son of a wealthy Baoulé chief, Houphouët-Boigny brought the problems of forced laborers in Côte d'Ivoire to the notice of French authorities and played a vital role in the abolition of forced labor in the country. After independence he became the country's first president, and during his rule agricultural production in the country reached new heights. Houphouët-Boigny was commonly known in the West as the "Sage of Africa" or the "Grand Old Man of Africa." In 1989 UNESCO created the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize for "safeguarding, maintaining, and seeking peace." On this day Ivoirians pay tribute to their first president, remembering his life and legacy.

Religious Holidays

☼ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

The Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha commemorates the unwavering faith of Ibrahim (Abraham) in Allah and his willingness to sacrifice his son at God's command. Muslims believe that God visited Ibrahim in a dream and instructed him to sacrifice his own son, Ishmael. When learning of the dream, Ishmael asked his father to follow God's command. Ultimately God relented and substituted a ram for the sacrifice.

Ivoirian Muslims commemorate this event by sacrificing a goat, sheep, or camel, an act signifying their willingness to follow God's commands and to give up things important to them. A third of the meat of the sacrificial animal is given to the poor, another third goes to neighbors and relatives, and the final third is consumed by the family.

This is also the month that the holy pilgrimage or hajj is undertaken. In this month all able-bodied Muslims are directed by the Koran to undertake this journey at least once in their lifetimes.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

☼ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

El am Hejir, also called Islamic New Year marks the first day of the Islamic calendar. It is believed that on this day in 622 C.E. the prophet Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina and formed the first Islamic state. On this day Muslims in Côte d'Ivoire attend mosques and pray to God. The story of Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina, known as the Hegira, is narrated. Devout Muslims also give alms to the poor on the Islamic New Year.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

☼ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Last Sunday of Lent

The Christian holiday of Palm Sunday falls on the last Sunday of Lent and begins Holy Week. It commemorates Jesus' return to Jerusalem a few days prior to his execution. In those days it was customary to cover in some manner the path of persons considered highly honorable as a mark of respect. It is believed that on his arrival in Jerusalem Jesus was greeted by followers who laid palm fronds in his path as he entered Jerusalem. Thus the day came to be known as Palm Sunday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

The Christian holiday of Maundy Thursday, also known as Holy Thursday, commemorates the day on which Jesus washed the feet of his apostles before sharing a meal referred to as the Last Supper. Maundy Thursday falls on the last Thursday in Lent (the Thursday before Easter). It is called Maundy Thursday because *maundatum* (a Latin word meaning “commandment”) is the first word that was spoken by Jesus before he began washing the feet of his disciples. It was reported that Jesus said, “*Mandatum novum do vobis,*” which means “A new commandment I give to you.”

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER, HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

The Christian holiday of Good Friday commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. A somber, solemn occasion, it falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent (a 40-day period of fasting and penitence). On Good Friday devout Catholics in Côte d’Ivoire attend a special Good Friday Mass in their local churches and pray to God.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER, GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a Christian feast celebrating Jesus’ Resurrection from the dead. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent. In Côte d’Ivoire Easter is an important festival. The local churches are decorated with ribbons to celebrate Jesus’ Resurrection. Devout Christians attend church with friends and family. Singing and dancing are part of the celebrations as people swing joyfully to the rhythm of drumbeats. People greet one another on this day and share a special Easter dinner that consists of roasted or boiled rice served with meat or chicken.

Among the Baoulé Easter is the time to reunite with family and resolve family issues. The Baoulé are predominantly farmers who settled in the fertile regions of the country and are scattered all over Côte d’Ivoire. Easter Sunday and Monday occur during the dry season, allowing the farmers who have settled far away from their extended families to go back home to reunite and rejoice during Easter celebrations.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER MONDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Monday after Easter

The first Monday after Lent is celebrated as Easter Monday. On Easter Monday Christians in Côte d’Ivoire visit their friends and families, and the Easter celebrations continue.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

❁ MOULLOUD

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

The birthday of Muhammad, the holy prophet of the Muslims, falls in the third month of the Islamic year. For many Muslims worldwide this is a day of great joy and celebration. On this day Muslims in Côte d’Ivoire offer special prayers in honor of Muhammad and thank Allah for his benevolence for sending them his messenger. The life and teachings of the prophet are remembered, and his unwavering faith in Allah serves as an inspiration for all Muslims. Giving alms to the poor is also associated with Mouloud in Côte d’Ivoire.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULLOUD

❁ ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Forty days after Easter

The Feast of the Ascension is a day of special celebration for Christians all over the world. It commemorates Jesus’ rising up to heaven 40 days after he was resurrected from the dead on Easter. Devout Christians attend special church services on this day.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY

❁ PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fifty days after Easter

Both the Sunday and Monday of this holiday celebrate Pentecost, the day on which the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles. In Greek *pentecost* means “the fiftieth day.” The holiday is so named because it takes place 50 and 51 days after Easter.

It is sometimes referred to as Whitsun for the white garments that were worn by those who were baptized during the apostles’ vigil. Whitsunday and Whitmonday have been celebrated since the third century.

Many scholars believe that many of the tradi-

tions and celebrations associated with this holiday were borrowed from pagan celebrations of the arrival of spring.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; PENTECOST; SPRING FESTIVALS

ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: August 15

The Christian Feast of the Assumption commemorates the Virgin Mary's Assumption into heaven. The Feast of the Assumption is a very important festival for Catholics because it reaffirms their belief in Jesus, who said that all devout Christians would find a place in the glory of heaven.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day is a Christian feast honoring all the saints (known and unknown) of the Roman Catholic Church. Devout Christians in Côte d'Ivoire attend special church services on this day.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

The Muslim feast of Eid al-Fitr marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan. During that month Muslims all over the world observe a fast that lasts every day from dawn until dusk. The fast ends after the sighting of the new Moon, and Eid al-Fitr is celebrated the very next day. Fasting on Eid al-Fitr is strictly forbidden by the Koran.

In Côte d'Ivoire devout Muslims offer prayers in the mosques on Eid al-Fitr and then visit their friends and families to exchange presents and good wishes. Besides feasting and praying, families in the city of Abidjan also indulge in fun family activities.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world. It celebrates the birth of Jesus. Christians in Côte d'Ivoire attend church on this day and gather for special family meals.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

CARNIVAL IN BOUAK

Observed in: Bouak
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March

Bouak, the second largest city in Côte d'Ivoire, is famous for its big and colorful Carnival, which takes place in March. People from all walks of life take part in the music, dancing, parades, and feasting. The Carnival, like others around the world, precedes Lent; it is a time of indulgence before the period of Lenten austerity begins in preparation for Easter. The origin of the Carnival can be traced back to the need to finish all meat and dairy products such as eggs and butter before the onset of the fasting season of Lent.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT

FÊTE DU DIPRI

Observed in: Gomon
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April

The Fête du Dipri is celebrated in the village of Gomon, which lies 62 miles northeast of Abidjan. It is an annual festival held during the month of April. At midnight women and children of Gomon walk out naked from their huts and perform religious rites to ward off evil, nullify evil spells, and purify the village and its inhabitants. The rites are carried out exclusively in the darkness of the night. They are shrouded in mystery, and the residents of Gomon are forbidden to discuss these sacred rites with outsiders.

At the end of the ceremonies the village chief comes out of his hut to the sound of drumbeats and announces their completion. Before sunrise all the villagers return to their huts, believing now that the village will be protected from all kinds of evil for at least another year.

Rites of Passage

BIRTH

The birth of a child is a time for joy and religious celebrations in Côte d'Ivoire. When a woman becomes pregnant children in her family and the village are expected to respect her and treat her well. This special treatment is meant to ensure that during her pregnancy she is not disappointed or frightened by any person or situation. Neighbors cook special meals for her, because good food is considered important to the health of the mother and child. Ivoirians also believe that if she is not fed properly the pregnant woman will either have a miscarriage or



A line of initiates fights to hold back a crowd as The Warrior, the generation's leader, enters the Blokossi neighborhood of Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, during the festival of generations. Every three years, young men of the Ebrie ethnic group publicly mark their coming of age, becoming the new warriors of their people. (AP Photo/David Guttenfelder)

her child will be born with scars all over its body.

Tradition in Côte d'Ivoire requires that the women return to her mother's house in the seventh month of pregnancy. After resting for a minimum of one month after giving birth to her child, she returns to her husband's house.

❁ COMING OF AGE

The oldest ethnic group in Côte d'Ivoire is the Senoufo group, which supports secret societies responsible for preparing children for adulthood, educating them about their tribe's folklore, history, culture, and way of life. The Poro cult is for the boys, and the Sakrobundi cult is for the girls. The education period lasts for seven years and ends with an initiation ceremony, which includes circumcision for the boys. Initiates perform a ritual dance known as the Dance of the Leopard Men, which completes the transition from childhood to adulthood.

In spite of the fact that Côte d'Ivoire has banned female genital mutilation, it is still widely practiced, and it is estimated that 60 percent of the women in the country, including Muslims, have had their clitorises excised. Girls in the 4- to 15-year age group have their clitorises removed in the belief that doing so builds character and helps them become better women and wives.

Among the Dan tribe circumcision takes place during the rice-harvesting season. Girls who have

been excised are considered the pride of their families and are showered with gifts and new dresses.

The mask used in the rites of passage for teenagers is that of Djoanigbe, who is looked upon as a guide, teacher, and source of enlightenment in the lives of the young people. There are two ways by which a person can learn to use the mask: through birth into a mask family or through nomination to be a mask-wearer. If the ancestors have chosen a child to become a mask-wearer, then the parents of the child are expected to recognize this and provide

Djoanigbe

Meman Djianfa is believed to have been the founding king of the state of Djoa, which is made up of 18 villages. Their mask traditions originate from their concept of *yu*, the spiritual force present in all things. Djianfa's followers believe that he had special powers through which he communicated with animals. These animals saved the people from dangerous situations and protected their land. The night before Djianfa's death his spirit appeared to his people asking them to cut off his head after his death the next day and bury the rest of him. The blood that flowed from him is believed to have given birth to the river Yanflo (the river of success), his tomb became the mountain Kromanro, and his head became the mask of Djoanigbe.



Fun Fact

Although it was always owned and worn by a man, Kpelie represents the concept of feminine beauty and fertility. In addition to its use in funerals the Kpelie mask is used at initiation in the societies for boys, adolescents, and adults, and at harvest festivals to thank the ancestors for a good crop.

guidance to their child to follow the command. Only initiated men are allowed to wear the masks and can only pass the secret on to another initiated man—never to a woman. The initiation ritual lasts for seven days.

❁ MARRIAGE

After the completion of the initiation ceremony, a girl is considered ready for marriage. Arranged marriages are the norm in this country, and relatives play a central role in suggesting good matches. The prospective groom's family arrives at the bride's

house with the marriage proposal. If the bride and her family accept the proposal, then kola nuts (an indigenous nut found in Africa, also used in making cola drinks) are presented to the bride's family, after finalizing the bride-price.

Different tribes have different marriage ceremonies; however, payment of bride-price is a common factor in all marriages. In some tribes on the day of the wedding, the groom and his family, dressed in their best clothes, arrive at the bride's home with clothes, shoes, and other gifts, which are neatly wrapped. Then they make the payment of the bride-price. Kola nuts and sweets are exchanged between the two families, and the celebrations begin. In the meantime the bride, wearing a beautiful wedding dress and a veil covering her face, is surrounded by her friends and female relatives in her room.

In the evening as the time of the wedding ceremony nears, the bride is escorted to the wedding area by an elderly woman. Here the bride sits barefoot on a stool, and the elderly woman wipes her face with a cloth dipped in gourd juice. Then using a sponge and straw, the woman scrubs the arms and legs of the bride. In the background women sing wedding songs accompanied by clapping and dancing.

After the elderly woman cleans the bride she helps her get off the stool, and the wedding is complete. The bride is then escorted back to her room by women, and a few minutes later the groom enters the room and takes her to his house.

❁ DEATH

In Ivoirian cultures funeral rites are based on the notion that those who die and are buried make the Earth fertile with their souls. Hence the soil belongs to the ancestors. The tribes in Côte d'Ivoire bury their dead in accordance with their tribal rituals. Among the Senoufo tribe the presiding priest of the funeral ceremony wears a Kpelie mask and leads the funeral procession, escorting the spirit of the deceased to the land of the dead.

The tribes in Côte d'Ivoire believe that after death the deceased takes the form of a spirit and along with other ancestral spirits becomes the guide and protector of its people. Hence special sacrificial offerings are made to these spirits on special occasions, such as death anniversaries and festivals, to show respect as well as to seek their blessings and protection against evil.

Further Reading

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~ Croatia ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Southeastern Europe, between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovenia, bordering the Adriatic Sea
Size	21,831 sq. mi.
Capital City	Zagreb
Flag Description	The Croatian flag has red, white, and blue horizontal bands with the Croatian coat of arms (red and white checkered) in the center.
Independence	June 25, 1991 (from Yugoslavia)
Population	4,495,904 (2005 est.)
Government	Presidential/parliamentary democracy
Nationality	Croatian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Croat (90%)
Major Language(s)	Croatian (96%)
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (88%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Antifascism Day, June 22; National State Day, June 25; Homeland Thanksgiving Day, August 5; Independence Day, October 8

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

During the sixth century C.E. the Croats migrated from Ukraine and settled in the area now known as Croatia. The Croats established their own settlements and ruled themselves. In the 11th century Croatia entered into a union with Hungary and agreed to accept its authority. Despite being responsible to the Hungarian monarch, Croatia retained the freedom to choose its own leaders. In the 14th and 15th centuries Croatia was the pawn in wars between Venice and Turkey; during this time the greater part of Croatia came under Turkish rule. In the 16th century Croatia approached the Habsburgs of Austria for protection. By the end of the 17th century Croatia was freed from Turkish rule but remained under Austrian influence until 1918.

After the defeat of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in World War I Croatia became a part of the nation of Serbs, Croats, and

Slovenes that was named Yugoslavia in 1929. Belgrade was declared the capital of this new union. In 1941 Germany invaded Yugoslavia and installed a Fascist puppet government called the Ustase. The new government attempted to eradicate all Serbs from Croatia, and over one million Serbs, Jews, Muslims, and Romas were brutally murdered.

A fierce war followed between the antifascist forces led by the Communist Party and the Ustase. Nearly a million people lost their lives. After World War II Yugoslavia, ruled by the Communists, was named the Federal Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia.

In the late 1980s Croatia began seeking freedom from the Yugoslavian confederation and an end to Communist rule. In June 1991 it declared its independence. Almost immediately the Serbs within Croatia rebelled and fighting broke out. The Yugoslav People's Army intervened in support of the Serbs. Heavy fighting continued for six months and led to massive destruction and loss of life. To end the violence the United Nations (UN) deployed a protection force in Serbian-held Croatia in December 1991. After a series of cease-fires the

Fun Fact

Originally from India, Romas, formerly known as Gypsies, are an oppressed minority in Croatia.

Serbs were forced to leave Croatia. In December 1995 Croatia signed the Dayton Peace Agreement, which provided for a permanent cease-fire.

In 1992 the Republic of Croatia became a member of the United Nations. Croatia applied for membership to the European Union (EU) in 2003 and was accepted as an official candidate country in 2004.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Croatia is shaped like a horseshoe. It has common borders with Slovenia, Hungary, Serbia and Montenegro (both Serbian and Montenegrin parts), Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Italy. Croatia includes approximately 1,185 islands and a 3,626-mile-long coastline along the Adriatic Sea. Because of the country's unusual shape it experiences two types of climate on the mainland. The coastal areas have a climate that is largely Mediterranean, with warm and sunny summers and mild winters. The northern and eastern territories of the country

experience a more continental type of weather. This climate is distinguished by hot summers and very cold winters. These areas also get snowfall in winter.

Fun Fact

Croatians call their country Hrvatska.

The Croatian terrain is diverse and consists of flat plains, mountains, highlands, lakes, and islands. Dinara (nearly 6,000 feet high) in the Dinaric Alps is the highest point. The Sava, the Drava, and the Danube are the main rivers flowing through the country. There are oak forests in the mountains of Lika and Gorski Kotar. Croatia boasts well-preserved national parks where spotted lynx, deer, bears, wolves, reptiles, and birds abound.

ECONOMY

When Croatia was a part of the former Yugoslavia its economy was among the most prosperous in the region. With the dismantling of Yugoslavia, war, and the struggle for independence, Croatia was thrown into economic crisis. Following peace and a series of economic reforms the economy has stabilized. The Croatian economy is service based, and tourism plays a significant role in contributing to the gross domestic product (GDP).

Did You Know?

Croatia is the birthplace of the fountain pen. Cravats (neckties) originated in Croatia. The Dalmatian dog originally belongs to the region of Dalmatia, Croatia. Marco Polo, the world-famous traveler, was born in Korcula, Croatia

The country also has some industries such as chemicals, fertilizers, steel, textile, and cement. It maintains good trade relations with its neighbors, including Germany, Italy, and Slovenia. Croatia imports machinery, fuels, and electrical equipments, while exporting textiles, foodstuff, and chemicals.

LIFESTYLE AND CULTURE

A long history has given rise to a diverse and rich culture with strong artistic and literary traditions. The Croatian sculptor Ivan Meštrović (1883–1962) is well known in the international art arena. Notable Croatian writers include Marin Držić (1508–67) and Miroslav Krleža (1893–1981), who wrote *Banners*, a saga about Croatian life. The country has produced three Nobel Prize winners, among them two scientists and the renowned writer Ivo Andrić (1892–1975).

Croatian music is a lively mixture of cultures and styles. The *kolo* is a Slavic round dance (a folk dance performed in a circle) accompanied by tunes from Roma-style violins or the *tambura*, a Croatian mandolin. The music from Croatia's Dalmatian coast has a distinct Italian sound and is accompanied by the guitar and accordion.

Croats enjoy the abundant use of fabrics, laces, and colors in their traditional costumes. An overwhelming majority of Croats are Roman Catholics.

Although religious expression was suppressed during the Communist era Catholics have revived their faith and attend church devotedly. Apart from Greek Orthodox Christians there are a number of Muslims and some Jews in Croatia. The Croats are also avid sports fans. Soccer occupies a special place in Croatia. Basketball and handball are other sports that have a popular following.

CUISINE

Croats normally consume simple, easy-to-prepare dishes. There is a very strong Italian influence in Croatian cuisine. Croats largely use seafood, meat, and cheese to make dishes, such as *cevapcici* (sausages), *raznjici* (grilled meat), *sarma* (rice and meat rolled in cabbage leaves), and *djuvec* (stew). Bread and salads accompany most meals.

Almost every region of Croatia has its own wine that is unique to that area. Croatian *pivo* (beer), *spricer* (wine with mineral water), *slivovica* (plum brandy), and Turkish coffee are popular beverages in the country.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 (in Croatian, Nova Godina) marks the beginning of the Western (Gregorian) calendar and is celebrated as New Year's Day all over the world. Many Croatian cities have fireworks on New Year's Eve. Traditionally Croatians make personal New Year's resolutions and enjoy a festive meal with family and friends on this day. It is a national holiday and schools and offices remain closed.

❁ LABOR DAY

Celebrated by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day, in many parts of the world. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union the American Federation of Labor (AFL) demanding an eight-hour workday.

This day is celebrated as the National Day of the Token Strike in Croatia. On this day in 1995 the four largest labor unions joined forces to protest changes in labor laws. Workers commemorate this day by organizing parades in the streets of Croatia.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ ANTIFASCISM DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 22

In 1941 German and Italian Fascist forces invaded Yugoslavia and installed a Fascist puppet government called the Ustase. On June 22 the anti-Fascist forces, led by the Communist Party, launched an uprising against the invaders. A fierce war followed in which nearly a million people lost their lives. On this day, which Croatians call *Dan antifašističke borbe*, they commemorate the anniversary of the uprising against the German and Italian Fascists.

❁ NATIONAL STATE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 25

Against the backdrop of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the breakup of the former Communist bloc Croatia declared its sovereignty and independence from Yugoslavia on this day in 1991, which they call *Dan državnosti*. The implementation of the declaration was delayed by a three-month moratorium at the request of the European Community (EC). Schools and work places remain closed.

Croatian Nobel Prize Winners

Lavoslav Ruzicka (1887–1976) for Organic Chemistry in 1939

Ivo Andrić (1892–1975) for Literature in 1961

Vladimir Prelog (1906–98) for Organic Chemistry in 1975

❁ HOMELAND THANKSGIVING DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 5

Called *Dan domovinske zahvalnosti*, the liberation of Knin from ethnic Serbian rebel forces on this day in 1995 is celebrated as Homeland Thanksgiving Day by Croatians. The city of Knin, an important military landmark in Croatia, served as a fortress and the center of ethnic Serbian rebels opposing the Croatian Republic in the 1990s. In 1995 the Croatian flag was unfurled here to symbolize a new beginning. To commemorate this event the president and representatives of the government lay wreaths and light candles in memory of the fallen Homeland War soldiers at Zagreb's central cemetery.

Fun Fact

Marin Držić wrote five letters to the powerful Medici family in Florence in which he tried to persuade them to help him overthrow the government in his home town of Dubrovnik. The Medicis didn't even bother to respond.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 8

Croatia celebrates Independence Day (in Croatian, *Dan nezavisnosti*) to commemorate the parliament's unanimous vote to sever all constitutional ties with

The Glagolitic Alphabet

The Glagolitic alphabet, or Glagolitsa, is the oldest known Slavonic alphabet. It was created by St. Cyril around 862–63 for translating the Bible and other texts into Old Church Slavonic (OCS). The name comes from OCS *glagolu*, meaning "word" (which was also the name for the letter *g*). *Glagolati* also means "to speak," so the Glagolitsa letters are poetically referred to as "the marks that speak."

Fun Fact

Croatians have their own script, the Glagolitic alphabet, which is more than a thousand years old. The Croats were the only European nation to be given special permission by Pope Innocent IV (r. 1243–54) in 1248 to use their own language and the Glagolitic script in their liturgy.

the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) on this day in 1991. The parliament met in a secret location because of fears of attacks by the Yugoslav army and Serbian rebels. Independence had been declared on June 25, but the implementation was delayed in a three-month moratorium requested by the European Community (EC). The moratorium expired on October 7, and the next day independence became a reality.

Religious Holidays

❁ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: January 6

The Christian Feast of Epiphany (in Croatian, *Bogojavljenje*) celebrates the three Wise Men from the East who visited the infant Jesus in Bethlehem. In Croatia Christmas celebrations end on this day.

Priests visit all the houses in their parish and bless the families. Croatian families remove the Christmas decorations and dismantle their Christmas trees on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EPIPHANY

Fun Fact

Croatian families decorate their Christmas trees with *licitar* hearts, a special heart-shaped edible decoration.

❁ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Last Sunday before Easter

The Christian holiday of Palm Sunday, which falls on the Sunday before Easter, commemorates Jesus' return to Jerusalem a few days prior to his execution. In those days it was customary to cover the path of highly honored persons as a mark of respect. According to the Bible Jesus was greeted by admirers who laid palm fronds in his path as he entered Jerusalem. Thus the day came to be known as Palm Sunday. It also marks the beginning of Holy Week. In Croatia Palm Sunday is marked by a solemn procession of devout Catholics holding palm branches in their hands. The procession is followed by a special Palm Sunday Mass.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Last Thursday before Easter

The Christian holiday of Holy Thursday, also known as Maundy Thursday, commemorates the day on which Jesus washed the feet of all his apostles before sharing a meal known as the Last Supper. It falls on the Thursday before Easter. It is also called Maundy Thursday because *maundatum* (a Latin word meaning "commandment") is the first word that was spoken by Jesus before he began washing the feet of his disciples. It was reported that he said, "*Mandatum novum do vobis*," which means, "A new commandment I give to you."

In Croatia all churches conduct special prayer services. The priests, while celebrating Mass, reenact the scene from the last supper Jesus shared with his disciples. They wash the feet of 12 chosen parishioners just as Jesus is supposed to have done. The faithful pray during this day, and the mood is somber.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Last Friday before Easter

The Christian holiday of Good Friday commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. A somber, solemn occasion, it falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent (40 days of fasting and penitence). In Croatia Roman Catholics observe a fast on Good Friday, and a ritual, called Stations of the Cross, is performed. It recalls Jesus' final journey, in which he carried the Cross to the place of the Crucifixion. Good Friday is a day of fasting and abstinence in Croatia.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a Christian feast celebrating Jesus' Resurrection from the dead three days after his Crucifixion. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent. On Easter in Croatia families attend church and then celebrate at home. Children receive specially decorated chocolate Easter eggs, called *pisance*, from their parents and grandparents. In Croatia feasting and exchanging greetings and Easter eggs continue into the next day Easter Monday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ CORPUS CHRISTI

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Sixty days after Easter

The Christian Feast of Corpus Christi commemorates the institution of the Eucharistic Feast in the Mass, a ritual offering of sacred bread and wine, transformed, according to Catholic doctrine, into the body and blood of Jesus. Corpus Christi is celebrated by Catholics all over the world sixty days after Easter on the Thursday following Trinity Sunday, which is the Sunday following Pentecost. The word Eucharist is derived from a Greek word *eucharisto*, which means “to rejoice or give thanks.” On this day in Croatia the faithful attend church and participate in religious processions in the streets.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CORPUS CHRISTI

✿ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: August 15

The Christian Feast of the Assumption (in Croatian, *Velika Gospa*) commemorates the Virgin Mary’s ris-



An elderly Croatian woman pays her respects to the dead at the grave of her relatives at the Sestine cemetery in Zagreb on November 1, the Catholic holiday of All Saints’. (AP Photo/ Hrvoje Knez)

ing up to heaven. On this day in Croatia devout Catholics attend special church services.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

✿ ALL SAINTS’ DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: November 1

All Saints’ Day (in Croatian, *Dan svih svetih*) is a Roman Catholic feast honoring all the saints (known and unknown) of Christianity. In Croatia faithful Catholics lay flowers at the tombs of their deceased relatives and attend special Masses.

See also Volume II: ALL SAINTS’ DAY; ALL SOULS’ DAY; CHRISTIANITY

✿ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Roman Catholics, Protestants

Observed on: December 24–25

The Christian festival of Christmas (in Croatian, *Božić*) celebrates the birth of Jesus. In Croatia Christmas celebrations begin on St. Nicholas’s Day (December 6) when children leave stockings outside their homes hoping to receive gifts for having been good throughout the year. Children are warned that those who have been bad will be kidnapped by the Devil Krampus, a Teutonic woods spirit, an ogre-like trickster who may eat human flesh. He is usually described as living out in the woods with his aged grandmother who combs his hair to put him to sleep at night.

On December 24 Croatian families attend church and offer prayers in a special Mass before Christmas. They return home to have a gala feast, during which they slice a cake specially made for the occasion. As a part of Croatian tradition families place three candles in the center of sprouting wheat. This remains on dinner tables until the Feast of Epiphany.

On Christmas Day the festivities continue with church services and the consumption of special Christmas foods and sweets. Friends and relatives visit each other and exchange gifts, and children open gifts brought by Saint Nicholas. Families gather at lunch or dinner to share a festive meal that often features roast turkey, pork, or other meat dishes. Special Christmas breads containing honey and nuts, known as *badnji krub*, are made during this season. Croatians stick candles in the center of this bread and use it to decorate their tables. A Christmas manger with figures of Joseph, Mary, and the baby Jesus, along with shepherds and the three Wise Men, are also placed in all churches in Croatia.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS; EPIPHANY

Regional Holidays

✿ SPLIT SUMMER

Observed in: Split

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July–August

Split Summer is one of the oldest summer festivals held in Croatia. This festival of drama, dance, music, and other performing arts has been held in the town of Split since 1954. The festival aims at promoting the rich cultural heritage of Croatia. Participants from across the world flock to Split to enjoy different genres of music and art.

Rites of Passage

✿ BIRTH

Traditionally when a child is born, the mother and child are given a chicken, eggs, wine, and other food items that are considered healthy for the young mother. If the child is a boy he is often named after his paternal grandfather; if it is a girl she is frequently named after her paternal grandmother. Children are also often named after Christian saints. The tradition of godparents is still prevalent in Croatian families. Godparents are the child's spiritual guides. They are responsible for helping the

child grow in the Christian faith and often play an important role in all Christian sacraments such as the first Communion and confirmation.

✿ MARRIAGE

Most Croatian weddings are lavish affairs. In Croatia a marriage signifies the coming of age of a couple. The bride cuts her hair and the groom shaves his beard as symbolic rites of passage. The haircut symbolizes the bride's new role in life. This is also meant to serve as a disguise to hide from evil spirits. After the wedding ceremony the bride is handed a handkerchief. This signifies her transition from a maiden to a matron. The wedding reception following the church service is often attended by a large number of guests.

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~ Cuba ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Group of islands between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean; 93 miles south of Key West, Florida
Size	42,803 sq. mi.
Capital City	Havana
Flag Description	The Cuban flag has five equal horizontal bands of blue (top and bottom), alternating with white; a red equilateral triangle on the hoist side bears a white, five-pointed star in the center; design influenced by the U.S. flag.
Independence ica	December 10, 1898, from Spain; May 20, 1902, from the United States of America
Population	11,346,670 (2005 est.)
Government	Communist state
Nationality	Cuban
Major Ethnic Groups(s)	Mulatto (51%); white (37%)
Major Language(s)	Spanish
Major Religion(s)	Officially an atheist state. Prior to Fidel Castro's presidency: Roman Catholic (85%)
National Holiday(s)	Liberation Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; National Revolution Day, July 26;

Introduction

🌸 HISTORY

Cuba's original inhabitants were the Siboney—hunter-gatherers and fishermen—who were later joined by the Taino—a farming people related to the Arawak Indians of South America. Christopher Columbus (1451–1506 C.E.) was the first European to find Cuba on October 28, 1492, but it was Sebastián de Ocampo (d. c. 1514) who identified Cuba as an island and mapped it. In 1514 Spaniard Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar (1465–1524) conquered Cuba and established seven settlements there. The presence of Europeans had an adverse effect on the native population—which is true in general of every people unlucky enough to encounter them—who by 1570 had largely succumbed to the diseases the Spanish brought with them and to the ruthlessness of the invaders.

Sugar, tobacco (of Cuban cigar fame), coffee, and bananas (over 30 varieties) were the major crops from the beginning,

but sugarcane soon became the most important. Slaves from the African continent were caught and brought in to work the sugarcane fields. The first railway in Latin America was built in 1837 to connect Havana and the plantations. Cuba was a rich territory by any measure. Because few Spanish women cared to live in Cuba during the first two centuries of Spanish occupation, there was much commingling between the European men, indigenous peoples, and people of African descent, and this accounts for the mixed ancestry of most of Cuba's population today.

The push for independence from Spain had a major turning point in 1868 with the Grito de Yara declaration that initiated the First War of Cuban Independence, also known as the Ten-Year War, from 1868–78. In 1895 the Cry of Baire (named for the village near Santiago, where the war was proclaimed) signaled the Second War of Independence.

Two momentous events occurred in 1898: The autonomous Cuban government came into being on January 1, and the American warship USS *Maine* entered Havana harbor and mysteriously exploded on January 25. The sinking of

Fun Fact

The Republic of Cuba includes the island of Cuba, which is the largest island in the Caribbean and the westernmost island of the Greater Antilles.

the *Maine* resulted in the U.S. declaration of war on Spain and its demand that the Spanish withdraw from Cuba. The Spanish-American War saw the defeat of Spain on December 10; the Spanish flag was lowered and the American flag flew over Cuba for the next three years. Cuba gained sovereignty on May 20, 1902.

A series of incompetent governments and dictators led to a rebellion in 1953. This was the beginning of Fidel Castro's (b. 1926) political career as he sought to oust Fulgencio Batista (1901–73)—the Cuban dictator. The first attack on the Moncada Barracks in 1953 was a failure, but the revolutionaries succeeded in 1959. The charismatic Argentinian Marxist Che Guevara (1928–67) was at Fidel Castro's side. The government assumed complete control over all areas of the economy, but this would-be utopia of equality-and-wealth-for-all concealed a harsh reality: political repression. In spite of brutal government controls, however, the arts flourished.

Fun Fact

Mogotes are loaf-shaped mountains of limestone worn away by seeping water.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Cuba, a group of islands located south of Key West, Florida, is the largest country in the Caribbean. It enjoys a tropical climate and fertile plains, coral reefs and coral islands, natural harbors, and white beaches. The islands that comprise the country of Cuba include the main island (Cuba), the Island of Pines (Isla de Pinos in Spanish), now known as the Isle of Youth (Isla la Juventud); Sabana; Colorados; Jardines de la Reina; Canarreos, and several smaller ones. *Mogotes* are unique to Cuba. These are steep hills shaped like haystacks that form the Sierra de los Órganos mountain range that reaches a height of over 1,000 feet.

Of Cuba's many rivers only the Cauto and Sagna le Grande are navigable, but the others offer excellent fishing. Cuba is also home to the city of Trinidad, designated a World Monument by UNESCO in 1988.

Cuban Dances

The rumba is a 16th-century dance form that eventually gave rise to a host of others, including *danzón*, Cuban *son*, and *naningo*. *Danzón* is a slow, precise dance, ideally covering the smallest area possible. Cuban *son* combines elements of Spanish and African dance that gave rise to salsa. The

mambo, another precise dance, comes from the Haitian word for a voodoo priestess, although there is no such dance in Haiti. Perez Prado introduced the mambo to the world in 1943 at the Tropicana club in Havana. The triple-step in mambo evolved into the cha-cha-chá, which became popular in the United States in 1954.

ECONOMY

Under Fidel Castro's Communist administration the government of Cuba owns and runs most of the means of production. Officially about 75 percent of the workforce is employed by the government, though some economists place the figure closer to 90 percent. The only private employment covers about 200,000 farmers and about 100,000 small business owners of a population of 11 million. Cuba benefited from trade with and subsidies from the Soviet Union prior to that country's dissolution. Beginning in the late 20th century Cuba began again to court tourism as a source of income.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The father of Cuban independence José Martí was a writer of renown. But music is Cuba's greatest contribution to the arts. An amalgam of Spanish, African, and other influences, Cuban music is indeed inspiring—the rumba gave birth to the mambo, which led to the cha-cha-chá, salsa, *danzón*, *son*, and others.

In the 1960s political messages and artistic expression found perfect expression in *nueva trova*, the musical movement based on the troubadour style of the Middle Ages. The rhythms of Cuba are definitely African, but the lyrics and melodies retain a Spanish flavor.

The cultural melting pot saw new additions in the last two centuries. Chinese laborers arrived in Cuba in the 19th century, while Americans, Russians, and more Spaniards joined the mix in the 20th century. The traditional Roman Catholicism of the past gave way to an officially atheist state as Cuba adopted the tenets of orthodox Communism. The pope's visit in 1998 led to a relaxation of the ban on religion, and Christmas is once again celebrated openly. A majority of Cubans are Catholic but continue to practice spiritism and other African beliefs, including *Santería*. Nowhere is this merging of beliefs better reflected than in the December 17 pilgrimage to a chapel near Havana, which honors both San Lázaro and the African deity Babalu Aye, the *orisha* who governs epidemics and heals infectious diseases. Many of Babalu Aye's worshippers pray to him to heal them of HIV/AIDS in the 21st century.

Festivities reflect the mixed history and culture of Cuba, and anniversaries of military events coexist with Spanish traditions. People prefer to enjoy holidays like Christmas Eve (*Noche Buena*) at home

with their families, while Carnival is a time for parties and unrestrained revelry. Dancers and musicians take to the streets for the float-parades, cheered by spectators who dance along in bright costumes and papier-maché masks.

❁ CUISINE

The famed *cocina criolla* (“creole kitchen”) of Cuba is part Spanish and part African, combining the African favorites—roasted meats, beans, and tomatoes—with the Spanish preference for rice, oranges, and lemons. A French planter who arrived from Haiti in the 19th century introduced the rice-and-kidney-bean dish *moros y cristianos*, also known as *congrí*. It has been likened to the population mix of Cuba. *Ajiaco*, a stew much like Colombia’s chicken and potato soup, is another classic Cuban dish.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ LIBERATION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 1

Liberation Day commemorates the victory of 1959 when President Fidel Castro’s troops marched into Havana, proclaiming an end to the military dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. This is the most important



Cuban President Fidel Castro waves a Cuban flag on July 26, in Santiago de Cuba, eastern Cuba, during an anniversary celebration of the audacious armed attack he led on the Moncada Barracks when he was just 26 years old. (AP Photo/Jose Goitia)

public holiday in Cuba. There are military shows and colorful parades across the country. Cities and towns acquire a festive look as local people decorate the streets with lights and city councils organize cultural events and musical concerts.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

Labor Day (May Day) is a celebration of the rights of labor unions and workers all over the world. Although the roots are in the pagan spring festivals that celebrated the new season and the fruits of agricultural labor, the May 1 observance of Labor Day has its origins in the international socialist movement. The first May Day/Labor Day occurred in 1890, set internationally by the Second International in 1889 to coincide with an American Federation of Labor general strike in the United States demanding the eight-hour workday. Thereafter international Labor Day became and remained more radical than the U.S. Labor Day celebrated in September.

The May Day parade held at the Revolution Plaza in Havana attracts large numbers of locals and visitors alike. The Cuban government, in line with its Communist ideals, holds Labor Day to be one of the most important government holidays, as a reminder of humanitarian ideals and the right to equal opportunity.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

Fun Fact

Every year Cuba’s most important parade pays homage to San Lázaro. For some he is the healer saint, for others, the African divinity Babalu Aye. On foot, on their knees, or rolling along on the ground, thousands of pilgrims live a night of frenzy and immoderation, giving themselves up to ecstasy and pain.

Santería

A blend of ancient West African beliefs (primarily those of the Yoruba) and Catholicism, Santería is based on the belief that the world is divided into two realms: the invisible realm of heaven and the visible one on Earth. The Santería universe is composed not of objects, but of dynamic forces in continuous motion. These forces are represented by *ashe*, the growth impulse and the movement toward completeness and the divine. The divine is understood as the remote, all-powerful creator Olodumare (or Odumare), who cannot be understood. He manifests a part of his nature through the forces of the visible world, personified by the multidimensional beings known as *orisha*. The *orisha* are essentially guardian angels or guiding forces produced by Olodumare.

Fun Fact

Danzón, the official music of Cuba, originated from a European-influenced ballroom dance played by Cuban ensembles for the upper class in pre-Castro Cuba

NATIONAL REVOLUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 26

This is a major holiday in Cuba and marks the beginning of the Cuban Revolution on July 26, 1953. On this day Fidel Castro and his brother Raúl (b. 1931) led an unsuccessful attack by 160 guerillas on the Moncada Barracks, near the city of Santiago de Cuba. This was the headquarters of the 1,000-strong Maceo regiment and also the dictator Fulgencio Batista's second largest fortress in Cuba.

Celebrations continue from July 25 to July 27 and are hosted in turn by each of the 14 provinces. The national anthem the "Bayamo Song" is followed by the "Internationale" the workers' anthem. Parades, public meetings, and cultural events are held. During Havana's turn at hosting the day celebrations include a march to the Moncada Barracks and parades along the Malecón, Havana's famous waterfront boardwalk.

INDEPENDENCE WAR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 10

Fun Fact

Cuba's most famous drink may be the Cuba Libre, which means "free Cuba." In Miami, the drink is called *la mentira*, "the lie," by Cuban Americans.

On October 10, 1868, Carlos M. Céspedes (1819–74) issued the Grito de Yara ("Cry of Yara") that began the Ten-Year War against colonial rule. The newly freed slaves joined the revolution that would ultimately lead to independence. The Cuban revolutionaries fought against great odds: The Spanish troops were vastly superior in number and training and received 90,000 rifles from the

United States. Cuba became independent (of Spain) on December 10, 1898, but was under U.S. control for three years, finally emerging as a sovereign nation on May 20, 1902. The day is celebrated with parades and symposia in remembrance of the historic occasion.

Religious Holidays

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas, the anniversary of the birth of Jesus, is a major Christian festival. According to the Christian gospels Jesus was born in a manger in Bethlehem in

Jerusalem, to the Virgin Mary and her husband Joseph. Cubans celebrate Christmas Eve with family and friends over a traditional dinner of roast pork, fried mashed plantains, yucca (the tuber also known as cassava or tapioca, a dietary staple in Cuba), homemade desserts, and *congrí* (a dish of rice and black beans). There is a special Mass and prayer gathering where people light candles and pray for good fortune and prosperity.

Christmas is celebrated with family dinners complete with the special dish of stuffed turkey marinated in liquor, Christmas trees decorated with lights and ornaments, and gifts and cards are given to loved ones.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

HAVANA CARNIVAL

Observed in: Havana
Observed by: General public
Observed on: July–August

A month-long festival of musical shows, Latin dances, fireworks, and colorful masquerades, the Havana Carnival is an unbridled celebration. People participate in colorful processions and dance to the rhythms of calypso. The festival features various competitions, notably fusion music played by traditional and modern jazz artists. Major celebrations are organized at the Malecón, Havana's picturesque waterfront boardwalk. The parades here are always a big attraction mainly because of the *munecones*—huge satirical effigies of politicians and celebrities carried in these parades. The *faroleros*, or dancers, hold aloft multicolored torches that resemble streetlights and can be constantly rotated.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; LENT

FIESTAS SANJUANERAS

Observed in: Trinidad
Observed by: General public
Observed on: End of June

Trinidad in Sancti Spiritus province is the quintessential colonial city, complete with brick streets in its historic area, where cars are not allowed. The city was declared a World Monument in 1998 by UNESCO. Fiestas Sanjuaneras is held on the first Wednesday after the Festival of San Juan on June 24. If the 24th falls on a Wednesday, then this feast begins on the same day. The festival celebrates the sugarcane harvest and was traditionally a time when slaves were allowed to enjoy themselves. This week-long festival features bullfighting, music, dancing, feasting, and drinking. *Sanjuaneras* refers to the festival participants.

❁ FIESTA DEL FUEGO

Observed in: Santiago de Cuba

Observed by: General public

Observed on: July

Santiago de Cuba is the capital of the province of the same name and the only Cuban city to be officially declared “heroic” because of the people’s participation in the independence struggle. The Fiesta del Fuego is a celebration of the Caribbean and fittingly held in the first capital of Cuba. Each year the festival focuses on a different Caribbean country.

All-night dancing and Cuban Havana Club Rum contribute to the street party atmosphere of this weeklong festival. Exotic dancers, local and popular bands playing traditional music, theater, painting and sculpture exhibitions, film screenings, and local crafts are featured throughout the week.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

Following the Christian custom children are baptized in church. The Cuban government guarantees a liter of milk per day per child, from birth to seven years of age.

❁ COMING OF AGE

In Cuba a girl’s puberty is cause for joy, because she is now eligible for marriage. The ceremony is known as the *quinceanera* (“celebration of budding womanhood”) and is traditionally held on her 15th birthday. It is usually as elaborate as a wedding, complete with formal flower arrangements, lavish parties, gowns, rented formal wear, limousines, photo sessions, catered dinners, and dance parties.

❁ MARRIAGE

Marriage ceremonies are Christian in nature, and Cubans need to provide proof of baptism in order to marry within the Catholic church. The wedding ceremony takes place in the church or the “wedding house.” Foreigners are not permitted to get married in Cuban churches. Once the marriage has been solemnized the marriage laws are read to the couple and they sign the register.

❁ DEATH

Cubans view funeral rites with great reverence. They hold wakes for 48 hours before the Catholic funeral Mass and burial. A funeral is treated as a community event and matters of social position become secondary as far as funeral rites are concerned. Members of the family, the community, and religious groups all donate money and other necessities for the burial. Funeral proceedings are photographed.

Further Reading

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Cyprus

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Island in the Mediterranean Sea, south of Turkey in Western Asia
Size	3,571 sq. mi.
Capital City	Nicosia
Flag Description	The Cypriot flag is white with a copper-colored silhouette of the island above two green crossed olive branches in the center.
Independence	August 16, 1960 (from United Kingdom)
Population	780,133 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Cypriot
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Greek (77%); Turkish (18%)
Major Language(s)	Greek; Turkish; English
Major Religion(s)	Greek Orthodox (78%); Muslim (19%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Greek National Day, March 25; Greek Cypriot National Day, April 1; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day, October 1; Ochi Day, October 28

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The rich Cypriot cultural diversity is the result of the country's 9,000-year-old tumultuous past. Cyprus has hosted settlers ranging from ancient Phoenicians, to Assyrians, Egyptians, Persians, Macedonian Greeks, and Romans. The oldest remains of Cypriot settlements date back to the Neolithic Age. Civilization grew and flourished in this region over time. During the Bronze Age it became wealthy due to extensive trade, which brought the Greeks, among other traders, to Cyprus. Ancient Cyprus witnessed its golden era under Alexander the Great (356–23 B.C.E.) Several generations of Greek settlers brought with them the Greek language, religion, and customs, and Greek influence continues to play a major part in the Cypriot way of life.

Gradually Cyprus came under Roman control. It became a part of the province of Syria in the Roman Empire. During this period Saints Paul (fl. mid-first c.) and Barnabas (fl. mid-first c.) traveled to Cyprus and introduced Christianity to the

region. Cyprus was a part of the Byzantine Empire from 395 to 1191 and one of the first countries ruled by the Christian Emperor Constantine (d. 337). The island was valued by the emperor because the tomb of St. Barnabas is situated here.

Geographically Cyprus is in Western Asia (or the Near East), but politically and culturally it is considered European. Historically Cyprus, due to its position as a bridge between three continents (Europe, Asia, and Africa) as well as its two religions (Christianity and Islam) has been a pivotal locale, especially during the Crusades.

King Richard I (1157–99) of England captured Cyprus, married the Cypriot Berengaria of Navarre (c. 1165/1170–1230), in Limassol, and proclaimed her queen of England.

However King Richard sold Cyprus to the Knights Templar, who established the Lusignan Dynasty there. The Knights Templar was a powerful military order formed in 1118 as a result of the First Crusade to protect the kingdom of Jerusalem from Muslim forces as well as to ensure the safety of European Christians who visited the holy city of Jerusalem.

Greek Orthodox Christianity was officially replaced with

The Crusades

The Crusades refer to a series of military campaigns undertaken by Christians at the instance of the pope to reclaim the Holy Land (Palestine) from Muslim domination. The Holy Land is claimed by three monotheistic religions: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. The Crusades took place between the 11th

and 13th centuries and include nine major campaigns as well as many smaller crusades against the Muslims and sometimes even other Christian forces. (The Fourth Crusade was waged against Constantinople and the Albigensian Crusade against the Cathars of southern France.) The Crusaders, zealous Christians, also massacred many Jews.

the Catholic faith for a short while and, under the rule of this dynasty, the island flourished as one of the richest countries in the region. In 1489 the last Lusignan queen Catherina Cornaro (1454–1510) ceded Cyprus to the powerful city-state of Venice. The island was to function as a bastion against the Ottoman Empire in Turkey, which conquered Cyprus in 1571 and ruled the island until 1878, when the British began to show interest in its strategic location.

The British formally annexed Cyprus when the Ottoman Empire entered World War I in 1914. Turkey renounced all claims to Cyprus under the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923; subsequently the island was declared a British Crown colony in 1925. This vitally strategic island remained a British colony throughout World War II. In 1955 after losing hope of attaining freedom from British rule peacefully, the Armed Liberation Struggle broke out. Cyprus won its independence after five years of struggle. According to the Zurich-London Treaty Cyprus became an independent republic on August 16, 1960. However the two sovereign base areas of Dhekelia and Akrotiri were retained by the United Kingdom.

Peace continued to elude this country. In 1974 Turkey invaded Cyprus and occupied most of the northern part of the island. Even though such international bodies as the UN General Assembly, the Non-Aligned Movement, the British Commonwealth, and the Council of Europe condemned this action, Cyprus continues to be a divided nation with two governments in the early years of the 21st century. The city of Nicosia is the only divided capital in the world. Tassos Papadopoulos is the president of the Southern Greek Cypriot Republic, while Rauf Denktaş was replaced by Mehmet Ali Talat as president of the TRNC in 2005.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Cyprus lies in the far eastern Mediterranean Sea close to Turkey, Syria, Egypt, and Greece. The nation covers an expanse of 5,748 square miles and is the third largest island in the Mediterranean Sea. The main relief features of Cyprus are the two large mountain ranges separated by the Mesaoria Plain. The Kyrenian Range lies in north Cyprus, and the Troodos Massif is in the center of the republic.

Mount Olympus is the highest point on the island. The three main rivers are the Yialias, the Pedhieos, and the Serraghis.

Cyprus enjoys a typically Mediterranean climate, with hot summers and dry winters. It is sunny almost all of the year. Rainfall is scarce, and the island has often seen drought years. Cypriots do enjoy a fair amount of snowfall in the higher altitudes of the Kyrenian and Troodos mountain ranges.

The island has a variety of plants and animals that are found nowhere else in the world. Citrus and olive groves, pine-forested mountains, and numerous flowering plants abound, and it is often described as a botanist's paradise. The mountainous areas of the island are home to a variety of Cypriot fauna. Large numbers of griffon vultures, fox, fruit-eating bats, sea turtles, and mouflons (wild sheep with big curling horns) can be seen here. The coastal areas of Cyprus shelter various species of fish, crabs, sponges, and other marine animals. Cyprus is also a popular layover for millions of birds during their migration from Europe to Africa and back.

❁ ECONOMY

The Cypriot economy is small, yet diverse and prosperous. The island enjoyed a rise in gross domestic product (GDP) during the late 1980s, only to suffer a lag after that due to the Gulf War. Tourism suf-

Fun Fact

Berengaria of Navarre is traditionally described as “the only English queen never to set foot in the country,” but she sent several envoys to England seeking payment of the pension that she was due as Richard’s widow but that King John was not paying her. King John owed her more than £4,000 (about US\$7,200) when he died.

Fun Fact

The name *Cyprus* is derived from some non-Indo-European word for copper, most probably the Sumerian term *kabar*, and refers to the large deposits of copper ore on the island. Through overseas trade the island has already given its name to the Classical Latin word for the metal, which appears in the phrase *aes Cyprium*, meaning “metal of Cyprus,” later shortened to *cuprum*.



Young schoolgirls from Turkmenistan dance during celebrations to mark the 25th anniversary of Turkey's military invasion of Cyprus, in the Turkish part of Nicosia, Cyprus, on July 20. (AP Photo/Burhan Ozbilici)

Fun Fact

The actual dividing line between the Cypriot Republic and the TRNC in Nicosia is known as the Green Line, because a British soldier marked it on the map using a green marker when the island was first being divided.

ferred a major setback during this period. In spite of such losses, the World Bank named Cyprus a developed country during the mid-1990s. The major industries are tourism, the cultivation of fruits and vegetables, wine production, cement, clothing, and shoe manufacturing. The service sector contributes 62 percent to the GDP and is very important to Cyprus. Agriculture contributes 6 percent to the country's GDP. The major crops are potatoes, vegetables, barley, grapes, olives, and citrus fruits.

Cyprus possesses excellent ports such as Famagusta, Kyrenia, Larnaca, Limassol, and Paphos, and has been a crucial trading center since ancient times. The country enjoys good trade relations with many nations, including Russia, Bulgaria, the United Kingdom, Greece, Japan, Germany, and Turkey (North Cyprus only). The island exports cit-

rus fruits, potatoes, grapes, wine, cement, clothing, and shoes and imports consumer goods, petroleum, lubricants, food and feed grains, and machinery.

Cyprus is a destination country for women trafficked from Eastern and Central Europe for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Traffickers who force women into prostitution continue to recruit victims fraudulently telling them they can work as dancers in cabarets and nightclubs on short-term "artiste" visas, in pubs and bars on employment visas, or illegally on tourist or student visas.

The Cypriot economy is prosperous but highly susceptible to the vagaries of the tourism industry and the region's political instability. The Turkish Cypriot economy is much smaller than that of its Greek counterpart, because it is not recognized by international bodies and depends on Turkish patronage. Greek Cyprus was admitted to the European Union (EU) in 2004, and efforts to reunite the two regions of the country continue.

✿ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Cyprus is truly a divided nation. The cultural differences between the northern and southern regions of the island are very pronounced. While northern Cyprus reflects everything Turkish, the south exudes an essentially Greek culture. Ancient Greek temples, medieval frescoes, and Roman mosaics abound. Pottery, traditional copperware, weaving, and Lefkara lacework also reflect the region's rich Greek heritage.

The music and dance forms here, moreover, differ significantly from those of Greece. Instruments such as the violin and *laouto* (a four-stringed lute played with the quill of an eagle or vulture) are used for accompaniment. Most dance forms are performed as a suite and face-to-face. Dancers often

The Cyprus Mouflon

The Cyprus mouflon is a rare type of wild sheep that can only be found in Cyprus, where it is believed to have lived for more than 8,000 years. The mouflon is the largest wild animal that lives on the island. It is to Cypriots what the kangaroo is to Australians—an easily recognizable icon that appears in a stylized form on coins, postcards, and the Cypriot national airline emblem

perform during wedding ceremonies, depicting the traditional courtship rituals conducted by young Cypriot villagers.

Cyprus enjoys a high degree of freedom of worship. Although the majority follows Greek Orthodox Christianity, other Christian denominations and other faiths, such as Islam, are found here. The Cypriot Church ranks fifth in eminence among the Orthodox Churches, after the patriarchates of Constantinople (Istanbul), Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. Thus it ranks above the patriarchates of Russia, Greece, Serbia, Romania, and others.

Since Cyprus is close to the Holy Land, it is not surprising that it is one of the earliest countries to have adopted Christianity. One of the earliest methods of spreading Christianity in this country was through monasteries set up across the island. Many of these monasteries, situated in the midst of orchards and vineyards, can still be seen today. Some have been producing wine for centuries.

❁ CUISINE

Cypriot cuisine is essentially Mediterranean. Traces of European and African influences are present, but Greek and Middle Eastern influences are prevalent. Regional herbs, local ingredients, and olive oil characterize Cypriot cooking. Seafood and meat are especially popular.

Cyprus is famous for *kleftiko* (oven-baked lamb) and *mezedes* (snacks). The *mezedes*, “little delicacies,” are small plates of savory dips, vegetables, fish, or meat dishes. These dishes are much more than traditional hors d’oeuvres and often compose a major part of the Cypriot meal. Apart from the classic Greek food, it is easy to identify variations of Greek salads, moussaka—the traditional Greek dish of ground meat and eggplant—and souvlaki, kebabs of pork, lamb, and chicken. Other Cypriot dishes include *loukanika* (sausages soaked in red wine and smoked), *koupepia* (grape leaves stuffed with minced meat and rice), *tava* (a tasty stew of meat, herbs and onions), and *lountza* (smoked pork) served in sandwiches. Popular seafood dishes include calamari (octopus in red wine), *barbouni* (red mullet), and sea bass. Cypriots also enjoy vegetable preparations of potatoes in olive oil and parsley, pickled cauliflower and beets, zucchini, *kolokasi* (a sweet potato-like root vegetable), and asparagus.

Cypriot desserts are mostly made of fresh fruit, served alone or with a selection of sweet pastries. Fruit preserved in syrup is also popular. *Loukoumades* (Cyprus doughnuts with honey syrup), *daktyla* (ladyfingers with almonds, walnuts, and cinnamon), and *sbiamali* (orange semolina cakes cut into squares) are also preferred sweet dishes in the country. A traditional sweet treat known as *loukoumia* (sugar-coated gelatin cubes flavored with rose water) is a favorite.

The traditional Cypriot wines are rich and strong. The island’s sherries are also favorites.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR’S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western (Gregorian) calendar January 1 is celebrated as New Year’s Day throughout the world. On New Year’s Eve Cypriot children dress as Father Christmas and wander through the streets singing traditional songs. Families gather around fires and play a game with olive leaves (Agie Vasili Vasilias). Most families bake a special cake with a coin hidden in it called Vasilopitta to celebrate New Year’s. When the cake is cut, the person who finds the coin is supposed to have good luck in the year ahead.

New Year’s Day also coincides with St. Basil’s Day. Traditionally, it is on this day that St. Basil brings children presents rather than on Christmas.

❁ GREEK NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 25

Greek National Day celebrates the beginning of the Greek revolt for independence from the Ottoman Empire on March 25, 1821. Greece attained its independence in 1829.

The day is celebrated in Cyprus with parades conducted by students, scouts, and other organizations. Interesting events such as dancing and athletic competitions are usually held during the afternoon.

❁ GREEK CYPRIOT NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 1

This is the anniversary of the start of the liberation

Cypriot Wine

Cyprus, with a 4,000-year-old tradition of winemaking, occupies a unique place in the history of wines and the development of the wine trade. Archaeologists have found evidence suggesting that Cyprus supplied wine to the pharaohs of Egypt and to the ancient Greeks and Romans. The famous Cypriot Commandaria wine is known to be the oldest wine in the world. This wine was matured in huge earthen jars. While pouring the contents out, ancient Cypriots always left a certain amount of the wine as residue. This residue helped the new wine mature. In a way the old wine became the mother of the new. For this reason Commandaria was known as *mana*, the Greek word for “mother.” This tradition continues to this day.



struggle of the Greek Cypriots (the National Organization of Cypriot Combatants, or EOKA) against British colonial rule in 1955. The island of Cyprus was declared a British Crown colony in 1925. In 1955 after losing hope of attaining freedom from British rule peacefully, the Armed Liberation Struggle broke out. Cyprus won its independence after five years of war against the British.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

The May 1 observance of Labor Day was first decreed in 1889 by the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, to recognize the importance of workers around the world. It scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year 1890. It coordinated this observance with a strike called by the U.S. labor union the American Federation of Labor (AFL), which was demanding an eight-hour workday.

In Cyprus on Labor Day there are parades and labor union meetings. It is a national holiday and government offices, schools, and shops are closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 1

On August 16, 1960, after a five-year struggle, the United Kingdom granted independence to Cyprus. On October 1 of the same year the Republic of Cyprus came into existence. Since then Greek Cypriots have celebrated their independence day on October 1. Cypriot Independence Day is celebrated with a military parade in Nicosia and an open reception at the presidential palace in the evening. All offices and schools remain closed on this day.

The Turkish Republic of North Cyprus (TRNC) celebrates November 15 as Independence Day.

OCHI DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 28

Ochi Day commemorates the Greek resistance movement during World War II, which fought to protect Cyprus from the Axis powers of Italy and Germany. This day is the anniversary of General Ioannis Metaxas's (1871–1941) refusal to allow Italy free passage to invade Greece. It is said that the war would have been prolonged if it were not for his resistance.

Just like Greece, Cyprus celebrates this day with a lot of pomp and show. Military parades, naval parades, special church services, and other celebrations are held on Ochi Day. Most businesses, and schools are closed.

Religious Holidays

EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: January 6

The Christian Feast of Epiphany celebrates the Three Wise Men from the East who came to Jerusalem looking for the newborn Jesus. On Epiphany the archbishop of Nicosia leads a huge procession of followers to the seaside where a ceremonial baptism is performed. The archbishop throws a cross into the water, and youngsters then dive into the sea to retrieve it.

Christian Cypriots attend church services and enjoy elaborate feasts. *Loukoumades* is a popular Cypriot sweet dish prepared on this day. Citrus fruits are also harvested during this time of the year.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EPIPHANY

GREEN MONDAY

Observed by: Eastern Orthodox Christians

Observed on: Last Monday before Lent

Green Monday is the last Monday before the start of the Eastern Orthodox Great Lent in Cyprus. Great Lent is a 40-day period of fasting, so named to differentiate it from the Advent fasting period, which is called Little Lent.

Great Lent is a period of self-denial and is observed with strict abstinence from all animal products (meat, dairy products), wine, and olive oil. Orthodox Christians also make a sacrifice during this period such as giving up a favorite food or other pleasure. Great Lent always begins on a Monday between February 15 and March 21. It is set at seven weeks before Pascha, or Easter, and is also called Clean Monday.

Green Monday is set aside for fun and relaxation, and many Cypriots enjoy picnics in the mountains on this day. It is a national holiday in Cyprus with government offices, schools, and businesses closed.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; LENT

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

The Christian holiday of Good Friday commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. A solemn occasion, it falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent (a 40-day period of fasting and penitence). On Cyprus young girls decorate the sepulcher in church with flowers. This sepulcher is then taken around in procession during the evening church service.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

The Christian festival of Easter celebrates Jesus' Resurrection from the dead three days after he was crucified. The computation of the day of Easter is, however, completely different between the Julian calendar used by the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Gregorian (Western) calendar and does not correspond in any straightforward way.

Jesus' Resurrection is the central event of the Orthodox Church and is understood in absolutely literal terms. Jesus was crucified and died, descended into Hades, battled death, and won. Through these events he released mankind from the bonds of hell and then came back to the living. That each individual human may partake of this immortality, which would have been impossible without the Resurrection, is the main promise held out by God according to Orthodox Christian tradition. In one way or another every holiday of the Orthodox ecclesiastical year relates to the Resurrection. Every Sunday of the year is dedicated to celebrating the Resurrection, and most Orthodox believers will refrain from kneeling or prostrations on Sundays in observance thereof.

This is one of the biggest Greek Orthodox festivals in Cyprus. Cypriots bake special Easter breads, pastries, and cheese pies called *flaounes*. They also paint eggs red, in accordance with a very old Cypriot tradition, and attend the midnight Easter vigil in churches. A bonfire, known as a *lampradjia*, is lit in front of every church. The faithful greet each other, eat the traditional *avgolemono* soup (an egg and lemon rice soup), and crack Easter eggs against one another. (Two people knock Easter eggs, and the one whose egg doesn't break is supposed to have good luck.) The main Easter meal is *souvla* (barbecued lamb or goat), which is served when the Lenten fast is broken.

The date of the Christian celebration of Easter is linked to the ancient Jewish celebration of the Passover. The Jewish people, moreover, followed the Persian/Babylonian calendar, and their new year commenced with the spring equinox. It is probably no coincidence that most of the pagan societies settled in the Mediterranean region also had major religious celebrations at or following shortly after the spring equinox. A common point of these spring religious festivals was a god whose own death and rebirth symbolized the death and regeneration of life during this time of the year. There are stories of a few gods in pagan religions who were believed to have died only to be reborn.

Before the egg became closely linked with the Christian festival of Easter, it was closely associated with various spring festivals. The Romans, Gauls, Chinese, Egyptians, and Persians all regarded the egg as a symbol of the universe. In pagan times the egg represented fertility and the rebirth of the Earth. After the long, harsh winter, the Earth burst forth with signs of new life just as life emerges from eggs.

The Roman Catholic Church changed the symbolic meaning of the egg, as well as the pagan spring celebrations, in order to make it easier to win converts to Christianity.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

✿ EASTER MONDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Monday after Easter

The first Monday after Lent is often celebrated as Easter Monday. In Greek Cyprus Easter is celebrated on both Sunday and Monday. Easter Monday is a national holiday with schools and businesses closed for the day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

✿ PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fiftieth day after Easter

Both the Sunday and Monday of this holiday celebrate Pentecost, the day on which the Holy Ghost descended upon Jesus' disciples. The holiday is usually called Pentecost because it takes place 50 and 51 days following Easter Sunday; in Greek *pentecost* means "fiftieth day." It is sometimes referred to as Whitsun, however, referring to the white garments that were worn by those who were baptized during the disciples' vigil. Pentecost also coincides with a celebration of Noah's Flood, which is called Kataklysmos ("deluge").

In Cyprus the weekend is filled with festivities including fairs and traditional dances. Some beaches take on a carnival-like air on this weekend. Schools and shops remain closed on these days.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; PENTECOST

✿ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: August 15

The Christian Feast of the Assumption commemorates the Virgin Mary's Assumption into heaven. On this day devout Eastern Orthodox Christians attend special church services.

The Virgin Mary, who is held in very high regard by the Orthodox Church, is more commonly referred to as the Theotokos, loosely translated this means "the Mother of God." This term has tremendous theological significance to Orthodox Christians, since it was at the center of the so-called

Fun Fact

Until recently the ancient sickle dance (*dhrepanin*) was still seen at festivals including the celebration of the Kataklysmos, a festival held at Pentecost. A dance in which virtuosity is given full rein, the *dhrepanin* forms part of the Kataklysmos cycle as a competitive dance always performed solo.

Traditional Cypriot Marriages

Traditionally Cypriots followed the system of arranged marriages. The alliances were generally forged via a matchmaker. Opportunities for the young themselves to meet were rare and restricted. They socialized at church, in the presence of their parents, at the village fountain, and during “Sunday afternoon walks,” when girls and boys strolled separately. Romantic love was not reason enough to marry in traditional Cypriot society. Divorce and separation were rare because the system of marriage and dowry was so rigid that neither partner could opt out of the marriage easily.

Christological debates of the fourth and fifth centuries. Whether a believer was willing to refer to the Virgin as Theotokos was a test to determine whether he or she was orthodox.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

The Christian holiday of Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus. Cypriots typically celebrate Christmas from St. Nicholas Day (December 6) through the Feast of the Epiphany (January 6). It is not uncommon for Greek Orthodox Cypriots to fast for the 40 days prior to Christmas, especially avoiding meat and dairy products. This fasting period is called Little Lent to distinguish it from Great Lent, the 40 days of fasting before Easter. Cypriots bake special Christmas cakes and pastries for the holiday. Children go door-to-door singing carols, many of which date back to the days of the Byzantine Empire and are given coins or sweets. Orthodox Churches display creches, or manger scenes, for the holidays.

Christmas is a religious holiday in Cyprus, and festivities are often solemn and reverent. The holiday has become more commercialized in recent years, but it is still more religious here than in many other countries. The Cypriot town of Paphos has a live reenactment of the events surrounding Jesus’ birth.

Christmas Day festivities are family-centered, with church services and special Christmas feasts that often include roast turkey. Traditionally children receive their gifts from St. Basil on New Year’s Day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26

The second day of Christmas, known here as St. Stephen’s Day, is a legal holiday in Cyprus. It is seen

as a day of rest after Christmas. On this day Cypriots honor St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr who was stoned to death shortly after Jesus’ Crucifixion.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

PROCESSION OF ST. LAZARUS

Observed in: Larnaca

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April

St. Lazarus was the first bishop of Larnaca. Cypriots believe that he was resurrected from the dead by Jesus and sailed from Bethany to Cyprus where he lived for 30 years. Cypriots conduct a special prayer service to honor their patron saint. This is followed by a procession of the saint’s icon from St. Lazarus Church through the town’s streets.

KYPRIA WINE FESTIVAL

Observed in: Limassol

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September–October

Cyprus is world famous for its vineyards and the wine produced here. The Kypria Wine Festival is a tribute to these fruits of Cyprus. Limassol, the wine-making center of Cyprus, hosts this 12-day festival of free-flowing locally produced wines. Visitors are treated to barrels of free wine and get to see the traditional processes of pressing grapes and preparing wine, making it a major tourist attraction. Music and Cypriot dance are an integral part of this festival.

Rites of Passage

MARRIAGE

Cypriot weddings are relatively informal, unlike weddings in other European cultures. A large number of people are often present to take part in the affair. Having 3,000 wedding guests is not unusual in Cyprus. Formal invitations are not distributed; everyone is invited verbally.

The wedding is solemnized in a Greek Orthodox Church, where the bride and the groom, along with the wedding party, attend a special prayer service. The service may be long, but it is not formal. Guests often wander in and out of the church without hesitation. The bride and groom, bedecked with flowers, are made to stand in the center of a circle, and the priest and other participants dance around them.

The wedding reception follows the church cer-

emony and can continue until the early hours of the next day. The reception often takes place in a big hotel, where guests gather to congratulate and bless the couple. The father of the bride usually gives a house or some ancestral property to his daughter.

Further Reading

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❧ Czech Republic ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Central Europe, southeast of Germany
Size	30,450 sq. mi.
Capital City	Prague
Flag Description	The Czech Republic's flag has two horizontal bands of equal size displaying the following colors: white (top) and red with a blue isosceles triangle based on the hoist side.
Independence	January 1, 1993 (Czechoslovakia split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia)
Population	10,241,138 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary democracy
Nationality	Czech
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Czech (81%)
Major Language(s)	Czech
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (39%); atheist (40%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Restoration of Czech Independence Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Victory Day, May 8; Jan Hus Day, July 6; Czech Statehood Day, September 28; Czech Founding Day, October 28; Struggle for Liberty and Democracy Day, November 17

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

At an unnamed site in the Czech Republic, evidence of prehistoric weaving has been found in clay fragments that range from 24,870 to 26,980 B.C.E. with the bones of mammoths and many smaller animals. No evidence was found that people were there later. At this time Alpine glaciers and the huge Scandinavian ice sheet were advancing on Central Europe, so the people who did the weaving had to leave. Sites with late Neolithic Corded Ware and potsherds finds of the Moravian middle Neolithic "painted pottery" culture are also being excavated. The ceramics, notable for their well-preserved painted decoration forming recognizable rectilinear and curvilinear patterns, as well as the conspicuous number of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic clay figurines, were found in a circular ditched enclosure with four gates.

The remains of an early Slavonic settlement known as Pohansko hillfort, inhabited between the sixth and eighth

centuries C.E. was probably a clustered agriculture settlement divided into separate granges. Within the granges large extended clans, themselves divided into smaller nuclear families, lived and worked communally. Over three centuries the settlement shifted and was rebuilt several times.

Such archaeological and circumstantial historical evidence indicates that the Slavic tribes first moved into Bohemia in the sixth century, having reached Moravia and Slovakia somewhat earlier. These tribes adopted Christianity and united for a short period to form the Great Moravian Empire from 830 to 906. The empire was made up of western Slovakia, Bohemia, Silesia, and parts of eastern Germany, southeastern Poland, and northern Hungary. At the end of the ninth century the Czechs separated to form the independent state of Bohemia.

Around 870 Prince Bořivoj (fl. ninth century) of the Premysl (also spelled Przemysl) Dynasty (named after the most revered ancestor of Czechs, Premysl or Przemysl) established the Prague Castle as his seat of power, but he was unsuccessful in bringing the various tribes together. In 950 the German

King Otto I (or Otto the Great), the first holy roman emperor, invaded Bohemia and made it a part of his empire. (The term Holy Roman Empire did not come into usage until several centuries after Otto's accession; the Holy Roman Empire was a successor state to the empire founded in 800 by Charlemagne.)

However in 1212 the Premysls united the warring factions in the country; the Premysl Prince Otakar I (1198–1230) was granted permission by the emperor of Germany as well as by the pope to rule over Bohemia, and was granted the status of king. He was succeeded by his son Prince Otakar II (c. 1230–78), who married a German princess Margaret of Babenberg (d. 1266; sister of the duke of Austria and the last ruler of the Babenberg Dynasty Frederick II, (1219–46), and thus became the duke of Austria. By virtue of being a duke of Austria Otakar II established control over a major part of Austria. However after the death of Frederick II, he met with fierce opposition from the emperor of Habsburg Rudolf (1218–91) who was also the godchild of Frederick II. In 1278 a battle was fought between Bohemia and Habsburg, and Otakar II was killed on the battlefield.

“The golden age” of Bohemia began under the auspices of the king of Luxembourg Charles IV (1316–78). He was the son of John the Blind of Luxembourg (1296–1346) and Queen Elizabeth (1292–1330), the heir to the throne of Bohemia after the death of her brother and the last male ruler of the Premysl dynasty King Wenceslaus III (1289–1306). Charles IV was a great patron of the arts, and he founded the Charles University of Prague in 1348. During his reign Prague developed into one of the most beautiful cities in Europe, liberally dotted with impressive buildings in the Gothic style.

In the 14th and 15th centuries a Czech named Jan Zizka (c. 1370–1424) led a church-reform movement called the Hussite Revolution that was influenced by the teachings of Jan Hus (b. 1369), a religious reformer. The Roman Catholic Church often viewed his teachings as antipapal, since he spoke openly against the hierarchical tendencies as well as corruption and the accumulation of wealth prevalent in the Roman Catholic Church. In 1414 Jan Hus was summoned by the Council of Constance, an ecumenical council of the Catholic Church, where bishops had assembled to discuss and settle issues related to church practice and doctrine. After listening to the views of Jan Hus, the council declared him a heretic, and, in 1415 he was burned to death.

The death of Jan Hus marked the beginning of widespread protests by the Hussites against the Roman Catholic Church. The fight between the pro-church demonstrators and Hussites soon led to a series of wars, known as the Hussite Wars, fought between 1420 and 1434, and to the killing of German Roman Catholics in Prague by Bohemian Hussites. Hus's death and the succeeding violence also led to the reformation of the Catholic Church in Bohemia.

In 1440 Ladislaus the Posthumous (1440–57), whose name was chosen because he was born four months after the death of his father the king of Bohemia Albert II, 1397–1439), became king of Bohemia. During this period attempts were made by George of Poderbrady (d. 1471), a Bohemian noble and supporter of the Hussites, to unite the Hussites and the Czech Reformed Church, and Catholic sympathizers in the region were driven away from Prague. In 1457 Ladislaus died of the plague, and in 1458 George of Poderbrady was elected the new king of Bohemia, despite the pope's protests. George Poderbrady also became the first European king to denounce the Catholic faith. He ruled over the region until his death.

In 1526 after the Hussite King Louis II (1506–26) was defeated by the Ottoman Turks in the Battle of Mohacs, the Bohemian nobility elected Archduke Ferdinand I (1529–95), a Habsburg ruler, as the king of Bohemia. After he became the emperor following the death of his brother Charles V (1500–58), Ferdinand started spreading Catholicism in Bohemia and even imprisoned the bishops of the Czech Reformed Church and many Hussite leaders. This purge was carried on into the 17th century by the Holy Roman Emperor Matthias (?1557–1619) and led to growing friction between the royalty and the Hussites.

Thus on May 23, 1618, as a mark of protest against the rule of the emperor, two Habsburg councilors were thrown out of one of the windows of Prague Castle by the Bohemian people. This incident was the catalyst for the Thirty Years' War (1618–48) between the Bohemians and the emperor, which ended unfavorably for the Bohemians when the emperor emerged victorious at the end of the war. As a consequence Bohemians were forced to accept Germanization and the Catholic religion for the next three centuries, a condition that persisted into the 19th century.

In 1867 after suffering a series of defeats in Prussia and Italy, the Habsburg Dynasty, ruled by the King of Bohemia Franz Joseph (1830–1916), struck a deal with Hungary to strengthen his position in Europe, which led to the establishment of the dual monarchy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Under the dual monarchy the native Bohemians suffered immensely and were denied the right to have any say in the governance of their country. All policies were made in the interests of the Hungarians, Germans, and Austrians, and many Czechs were deprived of their basic rights

Fun Fact

The term *Bohemia* is apparently derived from the Boii, a Celtic tribe dominant in Eastern Europe in Classical Roman times.

Fun Fact

Prague has earned many nicknames such as the “city of a hundred spires,” “the golden city,” the “mother of all cities,” and “the heart of Europe.” Since 1992 UNESCO has declared many historic places in Prague as World Heritage Sites.

Velvet Revolution and Velvet Divorce

The days after the November 17 demonstration have become known as the Velvet Revolution, because there were no casualties or major bloodshed. The demonstration ended the 42 years of Communist rule in 1989, when once again there was a call to reform politics and return to a democratic form of government. The Slovak nationalist movement arose toward the end of 1991 and sought independence for Slovakia. When it became clear that the general elections of June 1992 could not solve the problems of the two republics, Czech and Slovak leaders decided to split their states into two fully independent nations. On January 1, 1993, the Czechoslovakian federation was dissolved, and two separate independent countries were born: the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The “Velvet Divorce” was a term used widely in the media to describe the peaceful dissolution of Czechoslovakia into these two independent countries of Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

But this repressive rule failed to wipe out the Czech national identity. In the 19th century Bohemia and Moravia decided to unite and fight the Habsburgs. The city of Prague was the torchbearer of the revolt that had begun to sweep through Europe. The idea of an independent Czech state began to form in the 20th century and intensified during the course of World War I. The Czechs and the Slovaks decided to set up a single federal state of two independent republics in 1918. This resulted in the formation of the Republic of Czechoslovakia. Eventually due to the slow pace of development and the fact that they were not granted their own federal state, the Slovaks wanted to break away. The large number of Germans in Bohemia also cherished their own dreams of a greater Germany. In 1938 under

the Munich Agreement Hitler took advantage of this fact and annexed the Sudetenland, a region along the Moravian and Bohemian borders that had a large German populace. This upset the Czechs, who immediately began to prepare for war. The German forces invaded Czechoslovakia and wreaked havoc on the underground resistance movement. Although Bohemia and Moravia suffered little damage, tens of thousands of Czech and Slovak Jews lost their lives in con-

centration camps.

On May 5, 1945, the city of Prague rose against the Germans and emerged victorious, thereby reestablishing Czech autonomy and independence. The Communists emerged as the majority party in the 1946 elections, winning 36 percent of the vote. Communist authorities established a repressive, authoritarian regime and during the 1950s Communist economic policies brought Czechoslovakia to the brink of bankruptcy.

In the 1960s things began to improve. Liberalization took place and Alexander Dubček (1921–92), a former leader of the Slovak party, became the president. He represented the people’s desire for complete democracy or “socialism with a human face.” The Soviet Union would not tolerate any threat to Soviet-style Communism and brutally crushed the “Prague Spring.” This was the name given to an uprising in 1968, which was a short-lived attempt at freedom from state control. Dubček was exiled, and thousands of prodemocracy party functionaries were expelled. The Communist regime was once again in control and remained in power for almost two more decades.

On November 17, 1989, the Communist youth movement in Prague carried out a peaceful prodemocracy rally. The police cracked down severely on the demonstrators, but the protests continued. Led by the dissident playwright Václav Havel (b. 1936), the democracy movement ultimately forced the Communist government to step down. Havel was subsequently elected president of the republic. The period between November 17 and December 29, 1989, which saw the Communist regime thrown out of Czechoslovakia, is known as the Velvet Revolution for its lack of violence.

In the meantime the Slavs were beginning to agitate for a separate republic, and the leaders of Czechoslovakia decided to split the nation into two parts. On January 1, 1993, Czechoslovakia ceased to exist and the Czech Republic and the Republic of Slovakia came into being. Václav Havel was sworn in as the first president of the Czech Republic.

The Czech Republic joined NATO in 1999 and the European Union (EU) in 2004.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The landlocked Czech Republic is bordered by Poland to the north, Germany to the northwest and west, Austria to the south, and Slovakia to the east. The Bohemian Massif, a ring of mountains that encloses the Bohemian Plateau, dominates the landscape. This imposing landform is 3,000 feet above sea level. The two main rivers are the Elbe and the Vltava. The highest peak is the Sněžka (“Snow Mountain”) in the Giant Mountains on the Polish border, part of the Sudetes mountain range, at 5,256 feet. To the west Bohemia is made up of rolling plains, hills, and plateaus encircled by low hills. To the east Moravia is extremely hilly.

The Czech Republic has a temperate climate

Fun Fact

The Royal Route, which connected the Royal Court and Prague Castle, retraces the coronation procession made by Bohemian kings and queens in the Middle Ages. In 1458 George of Poděbrady was the first king to walk this route; the stroll, which starts at Powder Gate in the Old Town and finishes at Matthias Gate in front of the castle, takes 90 minutes.

marked by cool summers and cold and snowy winters. The warmest month of the year is July, while January is the coldest. Winters are bitterly cold in the mountains and usually last from December through February. Temperatures can fall below freezing even in the lowlands. In the western region of Cheb the mean annual temperature is 45°F; in Prague during summer, the temperature can reach 91°F, while in winter the temperature can be as low as 1°F.

❁ ECONOMY

The economy of the Czech Republic has begun to bounce back with the help of sound economic policies, and it is regarded as one of the most stable economies among the post-Communist states.

The Czech Republic is a source, transit, and destination country for women and children trafficked from Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Moldova, Lithuania, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, China, and Vietnam into and through the Czech Republic mainly for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

Tourism is a good source of revenue, and Czech industries include power engineering, metallurgy, car manufacture, glass, leather, plastics, chemicals, ceramics, and beer. Growth has also received a boost from exports to the EU, and Germany in particular. Foreign investment has shown a steady upward trend and inflation has been brought under control. Deficits in the current account have hovered around five percent of the gross domestic product. There have been concerted efforts to privatize banking, telecommunications, and energy. The economy has almost made a full recovery from the recession since mid-1999. The shops are well stocked, and the cities have an air of prosperity.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

By nature the Czechs are straightforward, even-tempered people. Despite their turbulent history and the repressive nature of Communist rule, they have achieved a high degree of development in art, architecture, music, and literature and produced world-renowned musicians, composers, and writers.

The Czech Republic is famous for its grand and opulent architecture and possesses some of the finest Baroque, Renaissance, and Art Nouveau buildings in Europe. Less well known, but equally deserving of praise, are the illuminated manuscripts, religious sculpture, marionettes, and puppet theater. Czech Puppet Theater is regarded as one of the finest in the world.

The most famous Czech writer Franz Kafka (1883–1924) was a member of a circle of writers in Prague at the beginning of the 20th century. Some of the more recent writers of great talent and influence include Milan Kundera (b. 1929), Ivan Klima (b. 1931), and Josef Skvorecky (b. 1924). Milan Kundera wrote about life under the Communists, and his notable works are *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984) and *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*

Václav Havel

A leading playwright, Václav Havel became the president of Czechoslovakia in 1989. The Communists threw him into prison twice, and his plays were banned. He came to represent human rights, democracy, and peaceful resistance, not only in his country, but also throughout the world. He left office in February 2003 after having served as president for 13 years. Though he started out as an extremely popular figure in Czech politics, some of this luster was dimmed by his perceived shortcomings as a leader over the years. His first publicly performed play was *The Garden Party* in 1963.

(1979). Jaroslav Siefert (1901–86) won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1984. Former Czech president Václav Havel, a playwright, has written several books about Czech history and politics. *Disturbing the Peace* (1991) and *The Art of the Impossible* (1998) are among his works.

Czech music, like Czech art and architecture, is of an extremely high standard. It encompasses the entire spectrum from classical to jazz. Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904) is generally regarded as the greatest Czech composer. He was an apprentice butcher who possessed a prodigious talent that resulted in works such as his *Symphony from the New World*, which he composed in the United States while lecturing there. Following World War II Czech jazz musicians were the foremost in their field, until the Communist regime put an end to their playing. Some immigrated to the United States and became successful there. However, the jazz scene has picked up again in the years following the Velvet Revolution.

❁ CUISINE

Czech cuisine is generally quite rich and, despite a move toward eating lighter food, traditional favorites still have a loyal following. Czech cuisine is partial to the use of meats and usually has a high content of fat, calories, and sugar. A meal frequently starts with a soup (*polévka*). Some popular soups are potato, garlic, and sauerkraut (fermented white cabbage). A meat dish (*maso*) and a side dish (*příloha*) follow the soup. Chicken, pork, and beef are the most popular meats and are often served with a sauce. Mackerel is a popular choice for grilling over an open fire. On Christmas Eve carp is usually served. As far as side dishes go, the

Fun Fact

In 1993 the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that the name Czechia (Česko) is to be used in all situations other than formal official documents and the full names of government institutions, but this has not caught on in English usage.

Fun Fact

In the Czech Republic parents customarily choose their child's name from a list of 400 first names, so Czech people celebrate not only their birthday, but also their name day. Every day of the year one or two names are celebrated.

popular choices include mashed or boiled potatoes, French fries, bread dumplings, potato dumplings, and potato salad.

Czech cuisine offers a wide range of desserts (*moučníky*). They are generally rather rich and fatty, and the ingredients often consist of butter (*máslo*) and whipped cream (*slehačka*). The favorites among them are crepes (*paláčky*) filled with jam (*džem*) or strawberries (*jahody*) and whipped cream, blueberry dumplings (*borůvkové knedlíky*), apple strudel (*jablečný závin*), and ice cream sundaes (*zmrzlinový pohár*).

A Czech meal is incomplete without the national beverage, beer (*pivo*), served with it. Other popular beverages are orange juice, apple juice, and soda. Czechs also like to drink tea with sugar and lemon, and coffee with or without milk or cream.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western (Gregorian) calendar and is celebrated as New Year's Day all over the world, with revelry beginning on the evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve). In the Czech Republic a special New Year's Day meal consists of pork and lentils. The Czechs believe that eating pork will bring good luck throughout the year, while consumption of lentils will ensure good health and prosperity.

❁ RESTORATION OF CZECH INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 also commemorates the formation of the Czech Republic in 1993 after the dissolution of former Czechoslovakia into two independent states: the Republic of Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Since then January 1 is also celebrated as Day of the Restoration of Czech Independence in the Czech Republic. On this day the president of the Czech Republic presides over the Independence Day celebrations in the capital

city of Prague. Raising the national flag of the Czech Republic, a parade by the armed forces, patriotic songs, and cultural festivals are highlights of the Independence Day celebrations. People also pay homage to those who died for the Czech Republic.

Day of Restoration of Czech Republic is a national holiday in the Czech Republic, and all public and private institutions are closed on this day.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers. The earliest origins of May Day are ascribed to the pagan celebrations observed by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union the American Federation of Labor (AFL) demanding an eight-hour workday.

On Labor Day Communists and Social Democrats organize rallies in different parts of the Czech Republic. Since the fall of Communism in the former Czechoslovakia, however, the people of the Czech Republic do not participate in these parades in large numbers.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ VICTORY DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 8

Victory Day commemorates the victory of Allied Forces in Europe after Germany signed an unconditional treaty of surrender on May 8, 1945, bringing an end to World War II. During World War II German forces invaded Bohemia and Moravia, and the region came under Nazi rule. At the time thousands of innocent Czechs and Jews were sent to concentration camps and brutally killed by the Nazis. The Soviet Union, one of the members of the Allied Forces, launched an attack on German forces in Slovakia, Bohemia, and Moravia. However in May 1945, U.S. forces entered the region and liberated the city of Plzen from Nazi rule and, eventually, all of western Bohemia. Around the same time, a civilian uprising took place in Prague, which resulted in the defeat of the Nazi forces by the Czechs.

On this day war veterans, including American and Russian soldiers who helped in the liberation of the country during World War II, are honored in special celebrations that take place all over the country. In different parts of the Czech Republic memorials have been constructed in honor of all those

Fun Fact

Fish and poultry are not consumed on New Year's Day, because the Czechs believe that eating fish causes good luck to swim away, and if poultry is consumed, one's good luck in the New Year will fly away.

soldiers of the Allied Forces who died liberating the region from Nazi occupation. Wreath-laying ceremonies and speeches by war veterans and Czech leaders are part of the Victory Day celebrations.

❁ JAN HUS DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 6

Jan Hus Day commemorates the death of Czech reformer and thinker Jan Hus (1369–1415), who was burned at the stake. Jan Hus was rector (or head) of the Charles University in Prague and was vocal regarding corruption and the accumulation of wealth and power, as well as the hierarchical tendencies that had become endemic to the Roman Catholic Church. He also propagated the use of the Czech language in the university, which caused major discontent among German students studying there.

In 1414 three bishops assembled at the city of Constance at the behest of the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund (1368–1437) and Pope John XXIII (the antipope, r. 1410–15) to form the Council of Constance. They summoned Jan Hus and after listening to his antihierarchical and antipapal beliefs, declared him a heretic. By order of the council Jan Hus was condemned and burned at the stake on July 6, 1415. Centuries later on December 18, 1999, the late Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005) apologized on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church for the execution of Jan Hus.

On this day the Czech people pay homage to the life and legacy of this great revolutionary, a symbol of Czech nationalism and identity. The Hussite Church all over the country organizes special prayer ceremonies in honor of Jan Hus, which are attended by both Catholic and non-Catholic leaders.

❁ CZECH STATEHOOD DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 28

This day commemorates the death anniversary of the patron saint of the Czechs St. Wenceslaus (903–35), who was murdered by his brother Boleslas on September 28, 935. Wenceslaus was the son of the Duke of Bohemia Vrastilav I and was the prince of Bohemia. Although his father was a Christian, his mother Dragomir, like most Czechs at that time, was a believer in pagan gods. When Wenceslaus, at the behest of his grandmother St. Ludmilla (c. 860–921), embraced Christianity, his mother became furious and began plotting to kill him. After becoming the king of Bohemia following the death of his father, Wenceslaus sent his mother into exile and began spreading Christianity in Bohemia.

In 935 under the pretext of celebrating the feast of Saints Damian and Cosmas, Wenceslaus was invited to attend church services by his brother

Boleslas and was killed by him while they were on their way to the church. He died as a Christian martyr, was canonized as a saint, and, thus, became the patron saint of the Czech Republic and its people. The Feast of St. Wenceslaus is celebrated on September 28, and since the year 2000 it has also been celebrated as Czech Statehood Day.

On this day huge celebrations are held in the Prague Castle, and special prayer services are organized in town halls and churches all over the Czech Republic in honor of the patron saint of the nation. It is a public holiday, and all private and public institutions are closed on September 28 as a mark of respect to St. Wenceslaus.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ CZECH FOUNDING DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 28

Czech Founding Day commemorates the establishment of the independent nation of Czechoslovakia on October 28, 1918. From 1867 until World War I Bohemia had been under the rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which meted out unfair treatment to the Czechs and denied them their basic rights. The Czechs and Slovaks revolted against the empire in 1918 and with the support of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson they formed the independent state of Czechoslovakia, freeing themselves from the oppressive rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.



Former Czech president Vaclav Havel carries flowers to lay them at the St. Wenceslas statue in downtown Prague in official ceremonies marking the anniversary of the foundation of the independent Czechoslovak state on October 28, 1918. (AP Photo/Tomas Zelezny/CTK)

Czechoslovakia was formed on October 28, 1918, and continued as the country of Czechs and Slovaks until its dissolution into the independent states of the Czech Republic and the Republic of Slovakia in 1993. In the Czech Republic October 28 is celebrated as Czech Founding Day. On this day brave citizens of the Czech Republic are honored in a special ceremony held in Prague, and the spirit of Czech nationhood is celebrated. Because it is a national holiday, all public and private institutions are closed.

STRUGGLE FOR LIBERTY AND DEMOCRACY DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 17

This day commemorates two events that occurred on this day, separated by 50 years. These are the anti-Nazi demonstrations held on November 17, 1939, in which nine Czechs were killed by the occupying German forces, as well as the anti-Communist demonstrations, which were held on November 17, 1989, in the capital city of Prague.

On November 17, 1989, the peaceful demonstrators protesting against the corrupt Communist government in Czechoslovakia were brutally injured by the police who wanted to silence the voices of democracy. This historic event paved the way for widespread demonstrations in the country against the oppressive Communist regime and also marked the beginning of the end of Communist Czechoslovakia. The days after November 17 came to be known as the Velvet Revolution.

Since 2001 November 17 has been celebrated as Struggle for Liberty and Democracy Day. At the Prague Castle, the president of the Czech Republic joins fellow Czechs in paying tribute to all those who died for the cause of democracy and salutes the spirit of the Czech people, who protected the sovereignty and integrity of the nation.

Religious Holidays

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection from the dead three days after his Crucifixion. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. The origin of Easter celebrations can be traced back to as far as the end of the first century C.E.

In the Czech Republic after attending the special Easter prayer service in their local churches, every region in the Czech Republic celebrates this day in its own traditional way. Czechs visit their friends and family and gather for a special Easter dinner. One Easter tradition is the baking of gingerbread in the

shape of a lamb for Easter dinner. Young girls also decorate Easter eggs, which they intend to give to boys on Easter Monday, when they come to their homes to sing hymns. Also a nationwide Easter egg contest is held in the Czech Republic in which the most beautifully decorated Easter eggs receive special prizes. Red eggs are also exchanged between friends and family members to wish one another happiness, good health, and prosperity.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

EASTER MONDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Monday after Easter

Easter Monday falls on the first Monday after Easter. In the Czech Republic Easter Monday is also celebrated as the day of *pomlázka* (whip), a ritual that can be traced to the early European pagans and that involved the whipping of women, girls, and livestock by men. The purpose was to chase away evil and bad spirits and ensure a healthy and prosperous year ahead.

Today young boys gently whip girls on their legs and also douse them with water. While whipping them thus, the boys sing an Easter song asking the girls to give them Easter eggs. As a reward for protecting her against evil spirits by whipping them away, a girl hands an Easter egg to a boy as well as ties a ribbon on his *pomlázka* (the whip made from birch or willow branches). Although eggs are still given as gifts on Easter in many villages and towns all across the Czech Republic, nowadays ribbons, bread, and brandy are often given to the young boys as a token of gratitude.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

ST. CYRIL AND ST. METHIDIUS DAY

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: July 5

This day commemorates the arrival of Saints Cyril (827–69) and Methodius (826–85) to Greater Moravia on July 5, 863. Saints Cyril and Methodius were brothers and devout Christians who belonged to a renowned Christian family in Thessalonica. They began spreading Christianity and the Slavonic language in the Slav countries, including Bulgaria and Greater Moravia.

Prince Borivoj of the Premysl dynasty was introduced to Christianity by St. Methodius, the bishop of Greater Moravia (Moravia) in 874. It is believed that St. Cyril invented the Glagolitic alphabet. Both the brothers began teaching the Slavonic language in the region. Many believe that St. Cyril's disciple St. Clement of Ohrid (c. 840–916) simplified the Glagolitic alphabet and created the Cyrillic alphabet, naming it in honor of his teacher. Disciples

of these saints spread the use of Slavonic languages in other Slavic countries.

Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005) declared St. Cyril and St. Methodius copatrons of Europe on December 31, 1980. On this day people offer prayers in honor of these patron saints in local churches.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas is a day of celebration for Christians all over the world because it marks the birth of Jesus. In the Czech Republic, some Czechs also observe the earlier Advent holiday, St. Nicholas Day, on December 6. Children believe that, if they hang their stockings on December 5, Svaty Mikulas (St. Nicholas), accompanied by his angel and Devil, will bring fruit, nuts, and sweets to good children. The angel will help him; the Devil will swat bad children and leave coal or onions and potatoes.

Christmas celebrations, however, begin in earnest on Christmas Eve (December 24) and last until St. Stephen's Day on December 26. On Christmas Eve people start decorating Christmas trees and making preparations for Christmas dinner. In accordance with Czech traditions Christmas Eve dinner is not served until the first star makes its appearance in the night sky. The meal consists mainly of fresh carp, potato salad, mushrooms, and fish soup. A special Christmas pastry called *vanocka* is served for dessert. After dinner, family members assemble around the Christmas tree, sing Christmas carols, and wish each other "Veselé Vánoce," a "Merry Christmas." Children are also allowed to open their gifts on Christmas Eve. Then they proceed to local churches to attend a special Christmas Eve Mass.

On Christmas Day (December 25), Czechs visit their friends and family and exchange gifts and greetings.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Christmas Superstitions

Czechs believe that some food items assume mystical powers during Christmas. Some of their Christmas food superstitions are:

- Eating garlic for strength and protection and honey to ward off evil at Christmas dinner.
- On Christmas Eve if hens are fed poppy seeds, barley, or wheat, they will lay plenty of eggs in the coming year.
- On Christmas Eve if apples are given to goats, their milk will be sweet, and if *vanocka* is fed to the cows, they will give plenty of milk in the coming year.

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26

In the Czech Republic December 26 is observed primarily as the Feast of St. Stephen. St. Stephen is considered to be the first martyr of Christianity; he was stoned to death by Roman rulers for speaking in favor of Jesus and his disciples. However, reminiscent of Boxing Day traditions also, the poor in the Czech Republic go from door to door singing Christmas carols and receive food or money. It is a day of relaxation for most Czechs.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Fun Fact

Children in the Czech Republic believe that the presents are given by the baby Jesus (Jezisek), who, like Santa Claus, receives wish lists and letters from little children.

Regional Holidays

❁ BOOKWORLD PRAGUE

Observed by: General Public

Observed in: Prague

Observed on: May

BookWorld Prague is an annual book festival held in the capital city of Prague. The festival began in 1995 and is held at the Prague Exhibition Grounds. It attracts renowned literary figures, as well as new writers from all over the world, who flock to Prague to attend this unique festival. BookWorld Prague provides an opportunity for writers to interact with each other and discuss the art of writing. The festival also serves as a writers' conclave where current trends in language and literature are discussed. The festival provides an opportunity for aspiring writers to showcase their works to the literary world as well as promote them to publishers, literary agents, printers, and others.

- Tradition requires that every person sitting at the Christmas dinner table cut an apple in half and show both the halves to everyone present. If the core is star-shaped, it implies that everyone present will have a happy and prosperous year. However if the core has a four-pointed star, it implies that a person among them will either fall sick or die in the coming year.
- On Christmas Eve a pregnant woman will know if she will give birth to a male or a female child, depending on the first person who visits her house on Christmas Eve.

❁ INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS MUSIC

Observed in: Prague

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November

This is an annual international festival held in the Old Town Square at Prague, featuring Christmas and Advent Music. Choirs from all over the world participate in this four-day event, each group competing for the most coveted award the Petr Eben Prize instituted in honor of the distinguished Czech composer Petr Eben. The competition takes place in four categories: male, female, children, and mixed. Each choir is given 15 minutes to present its program of Advent and Christmas music. Special concerts are held over a period of four days during the festival. At the end of the fourth day, the judges declare the winner, who is awarded the Petr Eben prize, and award many other prizes.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Rites of Passage

❁ MARRIAGE

The Czech Republic has many colorful and wonderful wedding traditions that go back through the ages, mainly drawing from the regions of Bohemia and Moravia. An ancient tradition during weddings in the Czech Republic required the friends of the bride to sneak into her back yard, plant a tree sapling, and decorate it with neatly painted eggshells and colorful ribbons. It was believed that the bride would live as long as the tree. On the eve of her

wedding the bride's friends weave a wreath of rosemary, the symbol of remembrance, and remind her of the importance of love, wisdom, and loyalty in a marriage.

The traditional Czech wedding is a test for both the groom and the bride. A chopping box and axe and a bottle of wine are kept at the threshold of the bride's house for the groom's test. If he picks up the axe, it means that he will prove to be a good husband; if he picks up the bottle, it means he will be a drunkard. The bride is tested when she enters her husband's house for the first time. A broom is kept in the room's corner; if the bride notices it and swiftly cleans the room, she will prove to be a good housewife.

Fun Fact

At Czech weddings guests often throw peas, rather than rice, at the departing wedded couple.

In another traditional practice the bride and groom's friends throw nuts, grain, coins, or figs outside the newlyweds' house. It is done to please the gods who, it is hoped, will shower blessings on the couple. Nieces of the couple or daughters of their friends lead the wedding parade to the church and scatter flowers before them. This stems from a pagan belief that flowers attract the goddess of fertility.

Friends form an aisle for the newlyweds to walk through. They try to make the walk difficult, which is seen as a fun gesture but has the underlying meaning that the couple must overcome all difficulties in marriage and still walk together. After the wedding ceremony the groom's friends pull a rope across the church door. The rope is decorated with flowers, ribbons, and empty bottles and they allow the couple to continue their journey if they are paid off by the groom. This means that the groom has to pay off the sins of his youth.

According to Czech tradition the groom carries his bride over the threshold of their home. Romantic as it may seem, the main idea is to ward off the evil spirits that lurk under the threshold. There is also the ritual of the groom's friends kidnapping the bride after the wedding reception to signify the bride's separation from her parents and the beginning of a new partnership. If the groom does not find her he has to pay a ransom. Traditionally small buns called *kolaches* are baked a few weeks before the wedding. They are given to relatives, friends, and neighbors as an invitation to the wedding reception. *Kolaches* should have at least three kinds of filling to show the culinary art of the housewife.

A special Czech wedding dance is the *kolibka*. In this dance the chief bridesmaid holds a plate in her arms as if it were a baby. Guests throw coins onto the plate to start a nest egg for the couple's future offspring.

Further Reading

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Denmark

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Northern Europe; on a peninsula north of Germany, bordering the North Sea and the Baltic Sea; the islands of Fyn and Sjaelland are also included in the Kingdom of Denmark
Size	16,639 sq. mi.
Capital City	Copenhagen
Flag Description	The Danish flag has a red background with a white cross that extends to the edges. The vertical part of the white cross is off center near the hoist side.
Independence	Organized as a unified state in the 10th century; declared itself a constitutional monarchy in 1849
Population	5,432,335 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional monarchy
Nationality	Dane (Danish)
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Danish (95%)
Major Language(s)	Danish; English; Greenlandic (an Inuit dialect); Faroese; German
Major Religion(s)	Evangelical Lutherans (95%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Queen Margrethe's Day, April 16; Dybbøldagen, April 18; Prince Frederik's Birthday, May 26; Constitution Day, June 5

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Archaeological evidence suggests that Denmark was inhabited as early as 100,000 years ago. However, it was only around 12,000 B.C.E. that settlements began to appear in the region. Before the arrival of Scandinavians, mummified bodies found in peat bogs indicate that Denmark was home to Celts. Early inhabitants were mainly nomadic hunters who crossed the region while hunting reindeer and other animals. Around 3000 they began practicing agriculture and animal husbandry in addition to hunting.

Due to climatic changes during the Iron Age (400 to 1 B.C.E.), the winters in the region became colder, which limited agricultural activities. As a result many tribes migrated south into Germanic regions. However around the same time, other tribes in Denmark began extracting iron from the ore found in peat bogs. Trade activities (especially with the Roman

Empire) flourished as local tribes put their knowledge of iron to use and began creating a wide variety of iron tools, weapons, and coins. Around the fifth century C.E. many tribes from different parts of Europe began migrating toward Denmark. Prominent among them were the Danes, a tribe living in Terra Scania, a region in the southern parts of Sweden, who began migrating to Denmark to take advantage of the flourishing iron trade. Modern inhabitants of Denmark can trace their cultural and linguistic origins back to the ancient Danes.

In 808 the Danish earthen defense structure (the Danevirke, "Dane's work"), which stretches from the swampy moors of West Jutland to the town of Schleswig, was initiated by the Danish King Godfred (or Gudfred, d. 810) according to written sources. In 1969–75 excavations identified three building phases of the main structure of Danevirke, from between 737 and 968, around the same time as the new Runic alphabet was introduced.

Until the 11th century the Danes, together with Norwegians and Swedes, were known as Vikings. They colonized,

Fun Fact

The Runic alphabets, an ancient writing system of Northern Europe, consist of letters called runes. Formerly used to write Germanic languages, mainly in Scandinavia (the Futhork, named for its first six letters: *F, U Th, A, R,* and *K*) and the British Isles (which was called the Futhorc), the earliest runic inscriptions date from c. 150. Although this alphabet was generally replaced by the Latin alphabet as a result of the rise of Christianity (by c. 700 in central Europe and by c. 1200 in Scandinavia), it continued to be used until the early 20th century.

raided, and traded in all parts of Europe, exploring as far west as North America, according to archaeologists and historians. If Norse sagas are accurate around 1006 the first conflicts between Europeans and native peoples may have occurred at L'Anse aux Meadows in what is now Newfoundland. When Vikings tried to establish settlements along Newfoundland's coast, the indigenous people they met, described in the sagas as *skraelings* or *skraelingars*, were so hostile that they abandoned the effort. It is likely that the natives who expelled the Vikings were the Beothuk inhabitants of Labrador and Newfoundland, probably the descendants of an Algonquian group.

Between the eighth and the eleventh centuries the Vikings ruled Denmark. Under the Vikings Denmark became a great power, exercising control over the Jutland Peninsula (a peninsula that divides the North and Baltic Seas and forms the continental part of Denmark as well as the northern part of Germany), the southern part of present-day Sweden, and the island of Zealand (largest island of modern-day Denmark, also known as Sjaelland). Many small kingdoms were established within Denmark during this period.

King Harold Bluetooth Gormson (935–86), the son of a former Jutland chieftain Gorm the Old (r. ?948–?58) brought all these small kingdoms under his rule and established a unified kingdom of Denmark in 980. Gormson is thought to be the first king of Denmark.

According to legend Harold was visited by a German missionary, who asked him to embrace Christianity. Harold put him through an ordeal of fire, which involved walking nine steps holding red-

hot iron rods in both hands. The missionary passed the test, so Harold and the entire kingdom of Denmark embraced Christianity.

Harold's son Sweyn Forkbeard (?986–1014) and grandson Canute the Great (1018–35) conquered many neighboring regions and ruled an expanding empire, which now included the kingdoms of Denmark, England, and Norway. However after the death of Canute the Great, natives of England and the Vikings of Norway began to rebel against the Vikings of Denmark and, following a series of violent battles, the English and Norwegians broke free from Danish rule. Canute's nephew Sweyn Estridson (1020–74) managed to preserve the kingdom of Denmark and established good relations with the archbishop of Scandinavia.

In the 12th century Valdemar the Great (1131–82) became the king of Denmark and made it into a powerful territory by annexing other territories, as well as establishing trade relations with regions along the Baltic Sea. However in the 13th century the successors of Valdemar the Great fought among themselves over the right to rule Denmark; in the process the kingdom and its economy suffered immensely. The close relations between the monarchy and the popes of Rome came under criticism from the nobility, as well as from commoners who blamed royalty for the economic problems of the country.

In the 14th century Margrethe I (1353–1412), the daughter of the king of Denmark Valdemar Atterdag (c. 1320–75) married King Håkon VI (1340–80) of Norway. After the death of King Håkon VI and the premature death of their son Olaf III, Margrethe I became the queen of Denmark. A good administrator Margrethe unified the kingdoms of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden (which included the Faroe Islands, Finland, Iceland, and Greenland), known as the Kalmar Union.

However the Swedes, who were unhappy with the extravagant spending of Danish kings on wars, rebelled against the Danish monarchy. In 1523 the Swedes elected Gustav Vasa (1496–1560) as their king, and the Kalmar Union was dissolved (although Norway remained under Danish rule). In 1536 Christian III (1503–59) was sworn in as the king of Denmark and Norway. He was greatly influenced by the teachings of Martin Luther (1483–1546), a German theologian and founder of the Lutheran Church. Luther challenged the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church and asked Christians to return to the teachings of the Bible. His protest started the Protestant Reformation, which aimed to reform the corruptions and errors of the Catholic Church. King Christian III introduced Lutheranism in his kingdom and forced Roman Catholic bishops and priests to convert to Lutheran beliefs and practices.

In the 17th century King Christian IV (1588–1648) became king of Denmark. The region of Oresund (the name of a strait separating Scania and Zealand), which connects the Baltic Sea to the Atlantic Ocean, formed the backbone of the trade

The Vikings

The word *viking* (from the Norse word *vik*, which means “bay” or “creek,” and the suffix *-ing*, meaning “coming from”) is a native Scandinavian term used to refer to the seafaring Norse, often considered pirates, who regularly raided the European coasts, raping and pillaging as they went. Countries raided by the Vikings between the eighth and the eleventh centuries included the British Isles and Scandinavian countries including Denmark, France, Sweden, and the southern parts of Norway.

route for northern European countries exporting goods to markets along the Atlantic Ocean at this time. Since Oresund was under Danish rule every passing ship had to pay a toll to pass through it, and the wealth of the Danish kingdom soared, particularly as trade and thus traffic increased. Denmark also profited from the Eighty Years' War (1568–1648) in the Netherlands, because fleeing skilled artisans and traders immigrated to Denmark, bringing their expertise with them. Denmark's prosperity during King Christian IV's reign made him the most celebrated Danish monarch. After his death in 1648 Denmark, under King Frederick III (1609–70), declared war on Sweden in 1658, but the Swedish forces were far too powerful for the Danes. Eventually Sweden won the war. A peace treaty was signed between the Danish and Swedish forces according to which Denmark handed over three of its richest provinces Hallandia, Scania, and Blechingia.

During the Napoleonic Wars (a series of wars fought between the French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte [1769–1821] and the British between 1804 and 1815), Denmark formed an alliance with the French. Sweden, on the other hand, supported Britain. In 1807 British naval forces created havoc in Denmark by bombarding Copenhagen and inflicted further humiliation by capturing the Danish fleet. Denmark surrendered, and a peace treaty was signed between Denmark and Britain. As a reward for Swedish assistance, Britain gave the Swedish crown the right to rule Norway. The Norwegians revolted against this move and quickly declared their independence by electing their Crown Prince Christian Frederick (Christian VII; 1749–1808) as their new king.

In the 1830s the desire to become a republic gained momentum in Denmark; on June 5, 1849, the reigning monarch of Denmark King Frederick VII (1808–63) declared the kingdom a constitutional monarchy. The king became the head of the executive branch, while the legislative branch was composed of the Folketing (representatives elected by the people) and the Landsting (representatives elected by the landowners).

During World War I (1914–18), although Denmark remained neutral, the financial instability in Europe due to the war greatly affected the Danish economy. During World War II Denmark was invaded by Nazi Germany and remained under German occupation until the Allied forces liberated the country at the end of World War II. During German occupation Danish Jews were not sent to concentration camps but faced the threat of deportation. In 1943 most Danish Jews were relocated to Sweden.

Political reforms in Denmark began in 1953. A new constitution abolished the colonial status of Greenland. The country abandoned the policy of neutrality in war, and the constitution also authorized the abolition of the Landsting (upper house of elected representatives).

Denmark became a member of the United Nations and was one of the founding members of

Kalmar Union

The Kalmar Union included the Kingdoms of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, which were unified under a single monarch Queen Margrethe I in 1397. In 1389 a war was fought between the Kingdoms of Denmark and Sweden, in which King Albert of Sweden (b. 1338) suffered defeat at the hands of Danish forces. The treaty between the two kingdoms required Albert to pay a tribute of 60,000 silver marks to Queen Margrethe I within three years of his release. When he failed to make the payment, Danish forces invaded Sweden, and Queen Margrethe I established authority over the region. In 1397 in the Swedish town of Kalmar, the Kingdoms of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway were declared unified under the rule of Queen Margrethe I.

the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In 1973 it voted to join the European Coal and Steel Community, which later became the European Union (EU). However Danish voters rejected the proposal of having a unified currency and common defense as proposed in the Maastricht Treaty. In 1993 Denmark voted in favor of the treaty, after these two aspects were removed. In 2000 Danish voters again rejected the proposal of a single EU currency (Euro), even though the monarchy and businesses were in favor of a unified currency for the EU. Denmark continues to be a constitutional monarchy under the ruling monarch Queen Margrethe II (b. 1940).

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

A northern European country, the Kingdom of Denmark occupies the peninsula of Jutland between the North Sea and the Baltic Sea and includes 405 smaller islands. Sweden, Germany, and Norway are the countries neighboring Denmark. Among the 405 islands, only 82 are inhabited. The islands of Zealand (Sjælland) and Funen (Fyn) are the largest. Most islands are connected by bridges such as the Great Belt Bridge, which connects Funen with Zealand, and the Oresund Bridge, which connects Zealand with Sweden. Ferries also provide transportation to and from some islands.

Most of Denmark is flat. Almost 20 percent of the land is located at or near sea level, and a major portion of the arable land consists of wetlands. About 12 percent of the kingdom is covered with forests. Denmark has four main rivers, namely the Guden, which flows through the northern part of the country, the Stor, in the southern part, and the Varde and Skjern Rivers, which flow through the central part.

Denmark has a temperate climate, which is

Fun Fact

After the unbroken line of succession of Japan's emperors, Denmark has the longest unbroken line of succession in the world.

Fun Fact

Between the summer months of May and August, when the weather is pleasant, daylight lasts for more than 18 hours.

characterized by cool summer months and mild winters. In summer the daily average temperature is around 67°F, while in winter the daily average temperature is around 34°F.

ECONOMY

The Kingdom of Denmark has a robust economy. Although 65 percent of the country's arable land is devoted to agricultural activities, manufacturing industries (machinery and equipment, shipbuilding, and chemical production) contribute four times more than agriculture to the country's economy. Potatoes, grains, and sugar beets are the main agricultural products.

The Danish, krone is still the official currency of Denmark. Denmark carries on trading activities with most European countries, but Germany is its biggest trade partner. The main export items of Denmark are meat and meat products, fish, fuel, dairy products, chemicals, machinery and equipment, and ships.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The lifestyle of the Danish people can be described in one word—*hygge* (cozy and snug). Danish people like a relaxed lifestyle, and, although they are reserved by nature, they are comparatively more welcoming than their north European neighbors, the Norwegians and the Swedes. They enjoy a stress-free lifestyle, spending time with friends in local beer bars, pubs, and coffeehouses.

Danish is the official language of Denmark, although other languages, such as English, Greenlandic, Faroese, and German, are also spoken. More than 95 percent of the nation's population is Danish. However the country is also home to people of Somali, Iranian, Turkish, and German descent. Almost 95 percent of Danes are Evangelical Lutherans, while 3 percent are followers of other Protestant denominations and Roman Catholicism, and 2 percent are Muslim.

The Little Mermaid

The Little Mermaid pined to become a human in order to be with her sweetheart, but her love ended in disappointment and heartbreak. She is an unforgettable figure from one of the most widely read fairy tales by Hans Christian Andersen (1805–75), and she has been immortalized in the famous statue overlooking Copenhagen Harbor. The statue was created by a Danish sculptor named Edvard Eriksen (1876–1958). The statue of the Little Mermaid has become a symbol, not only of the city of Copenhagen, but also of the entire country.

Denmark was home to one of the world's most beloved literary figures Hans Christian Andersen (1805–75), who wrote hundreds of fairy tales, such as "The Little Mermaid," "The Ugly Duckling," "The Emperor's New Clothes," "Thumbelina," and "The Snow Queen," to name but a few.

The fiddle and accordion are integral parts of Danish folk music, although many Danish bands also use guitars. Some of the traditional Danish instruments used by shepherd boys include the village horn (*byhorn*), a cylindrical drum known as the *bytromme* (or town drum), and *rumlepote* (rumbling pots).

CUISINE

Fish, potatoes, and meat form the basic diet of the Danish people. Favorite Danish dishes include gravlax (salmon cured in dill, salt, sugar, and aquavit, often served with sweet mustard sauce), *fleskesteg*, or roasted pork, and *bevid labskovs*, a stew made by boiling pieces of beef with potatoes, pepper, and bay leaves. An open sandwich called *smørrebrød* (or buttered bread) and the pastry called *wienerbrød* (Vienna bread), popularly known as *Danish* in other parts of the world, are extremely popular in Denmark. Danish butter cookies are also famous worldwide. Tea, coffee, beer, spirits, and wine are the favorite beverages in Denmark.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western (Gregorian) calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day throughout much of the world. Though the Gregorian calendar dates only to the late 16th century, January 1 was considered New Year's Day as early as the times of Julius Caesar, when it was the day on which Roman citizens assumed new duties. Each year a festive spirit reigns as people organize parties and celebrations on New Year's Eve.

In Denmark it is a good sign to find your door littered with a pile of broken dishes on New Year's. Old dishes are saved all year, and, in accordance with tradition, Danish youth go to their friends' homes around midnight on New Year's Eve to bang on their doors and smash and strew pieces of broken pottery, signifying a farewell to the old year and welcoming the new one. Many broken dishes signify that you have many friends. Singing, dancing, and feasting follow. Special New Year's parties are held in local pubs, bars, and restaurants as the Danish people welcome the new year. Also on New Year's Eve, the reigning monarch of Denmark greets the Danish people in a televised speech.



Fireworks are displayed over the Town Hall in central Copenhagen on January 1. Every year crowds gather in front of the Town Hall to celebrate New Year's Eve and await the last strokes of the Town Hall clock ending the year. (AP Photo/POLFOTO, Pelle Rink)

❁ QUEEN MARGRETHE'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 16

Queen Margrethe II, the ruling monarch of Denmark, was born on April 16, 1940. Denmark observes April 16 as a public holiday in her honor. On this day people waving the Danish flag (called Dannebrog) gather at a square in front of the palace in Amalienborg. At noon the palace doors are opened, and Queen Margrethe II, joined by the entire royal family, comes out on the balcony and waves to the cheering crowd. Birthday songs and joyful music are played by the Royal Guard Music Corps. Another highlight of the celebration is the parade of the Royal Guards in front of the palace. On this day the Royal Guards wear special celebratory attire consisting of red jackets and blue trousers that are worn only for special occasions.

❁ DYBBØLDAGEN

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 18

This day commemorates a historic battle fought between Denmark and Prussia in Dybbøl, Denmark, on April 18, 1864. The war began after Denmark declared Schleswig (a contested province between Germany and Denmark) a Danish state. This act violated the treaty signed between Denmark and the German Confederation (association of Central European states), which gave Austria and Prussia the right to rule over Schleswig-Holstein after the first

Battle of Schleswig in 1460. The Battle of Dybbøl was fought between Denmark and Prussia and, even though Danish forces fought valiantly, they eventually lost the war to Austria-Prussia.

On this day the military flag as well as the national flag of Denmark, known as Dannebrog or "honorable cloth," flies at half-staff on government and military buildings and institutions as a mark of respect for the soldiers who lost their lives in the Battle of Dybbøl.

❁ PRINCE FREDERIK'S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 26

Crown Prince Frederik Andre Henrik Christian, born on May 26, 1968, is the oldest son of Queen Margrethe II of Denmark. In honor of his birthday the Kingdom of Denmark observes May 26 as a public holiday. Public and private institutions are closed on this day.

❁ CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 5

This holiday commemorates two significant events: It marks the signing of the first constitution of Denmark on June 5, 1849, which declared the kingdom of Denmark a constitutional monarchy. It also commemorates a modified constitution adopted on the

same day in 1953. Because it is a national holiday all schools and private institutions are closed, while public and government offices remain open only until noon. The day is observed with political speeches.

Religious Holidays

HOLY WEEK

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Week before Easter

The Christian holiday of Palm Sunday falls on the Sunday before Easter and begins a week that many Christians refer to as “Holy Week.” Palm Sunday commemorates Jesus’ return to Jerusalem a few days prior to his execution. In those days it was customary to cover the path of people considered highly honorable as a mark of respect. It is believed that on his arrival in Jerusalem Jesus was greeted with palm fronds by his followers, who laid them in his path as he entered the city. Thus the day came to be known as Palm Sunday.

In the Kingdom of Denmark Palm Sunday is marked by solemn processions, led by clergy, of devout Christians holding palms in their hands. The processions are followed by special Palm Sunday services.

Other important days in Holy Week include Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and, of course, Easter Sunday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

Maundy Thursday, also known as Holy Thursday, is an important Christian commemoration of the day on which Jesus is supposed to have washed the feet of all his apostles before sharing a meal known as the Last Supper. It falls on the Thursday before Easter. It is called Maundy Thursday because *maundatum* (a Latin word meaning “commandment”), is the first word that was spoken by Jesus before he began washing the feet of his disciples. It was reported that Jesus said, “*Mandatum novum do vobis*,” which translates as “A new commandment I give to you.”

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

The Christian holiday of Good Friday commemo-

rates the Crucifixion of Jesus. It is observed as a solemn occasion. It falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent (an austere season of fasting and penitence). Some devout Christians observe a fast during Lent (the 40 days before Good Friday). However, many Christians fast only on Ash Wednesday (the first day of Lent) and Good Friday. In Denmark a ritual called the Stations of the Cross is performed, a reenactment of Jesus’ final journey of carrying the Cross to the place of his Crucifixion. Also on Good Friday the national flag of Denmark flies at half-staff for the entire day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; GOOD FRIDAY

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a Christian feast celebrating Jesus’ Resurrection from the dead. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. On Easter in Denmark the entire family gathers to celebrate Jesus’ Resurrection. Exchanging gifts with friends and family, *gækkebrev*, and Easter eggs are all part of Easter celebrations in Denmark. Children send *gækkebrev*—anonymous letters written in poetic form—to their family members. The goal of the letters is to get Easter eggs. Recipients have to guess the names of the *gækkebrevs*’ writers. If the recipients do not guess correctly, they have to give the senders decorated chocolate Easter eggs. The Easter celebrations continue through Easter Monday, the first Monday after Easter and a public holiday in Denmark.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

COMMON PRAYER DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fourth Friday after Easter

This Christian holiday falls on the fourth Friday after Easter. In ancient times the Danish people continued fasting on a number of holy days, even after Easter. In 1686 Common Prayer Day, also known as Store Bededag, was instituted to replace the different days of penance and fasting observed after Easter with a single day.

It is customary for the Danish people to eat white bread with butter on the night before Store Bededag. On Common Prayer Day people offer prayers and eat hot wheat muffins. Public and private institutions remain closed on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT

✿ ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Forty days after Easter

The Feast of the Ascension is a day of special celebration for Christians all over the world. It commemorates Jesus' rising to heaven 40 days after he rose from the dead on Easter. Devout Christians attend church services on this day. Ascension Day is a constitutional holiday and a flag day in Denmark, where government institutions fly their flags to commemorate the day.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY

✿ PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fifty days after Easter (Pentecost Sunday);

Pentecost takes place 50 days after Easter. The holiday celebrates the descent of the Holy Ghost on the disciples. This was considered a great miracle: Parted tongues of fire accompanied by a strong gust of wind descended on the apostles, marking them as fit preachers of the Gospel to all corners of the world.

Many scholars believe that many of the traditions and celebrations associated with this holiday were borrowed from pagan celebrations of spring in western Europe. Homes are often decorated with green branches and flowers. In Christian tradition this is the 50th day after Easter and has been celebrated since the first century. (*Pentecost* in Greek means "fiftieth.")

In many countries, including Denmark, this is a two-day holiday. In some countries the holiday has been called Whitsunday and Whitmonday since the third century. This name comes from the white garments worn by those baptized on this day.

It is a Danish custom for people to go to the woods with friends and family for a picnic on Saturday and watch the sunrise on Whitsunday. Whitsunday carnivals are held in many parts of Denmark.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; PENTECOST

✿ ST. MARTIN'S DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: November 11

St. Martin's Day originally commemorated the birth of St. Martin (also known as St. Martin of Tours, 316–97), a beloved Catholic saint. Martin of Tours started out as a Roman soldier, was baptized, and became a monk. According to legend, when the people of Tours (France) expressed their desire to have St. Martin as their bishop, he showed little interest in the proposal and tried to escape the crowds by hiding among the geese. However the geese gabbled

and gave his hideout away. Since that day people believe that because of their betrayal the geese are punished and so became the traditional meal on the Feast of St. Martin.

St. Martin's Day is a harvest festival that became well integrated into the folk calendars of Danes and other northern Europeans. It often represented the beginning of winter and the end of the fiscal year, a time when debts were settled, new aldermen appointed, and new contracts formed.

Situated when winter begins, many pagan fertility and light celebrations are connected with this holiday, such as the Martin's fires (bonfires and burning wheels,) and the Martin's singing. When evening falls children, carrying Martin's lanterns and torches, parade through the streets singing about the generosity of St. Martin. These processions often end with the lighting of a bonfire. Finally the children go from house to house and recite verses, for which they are rewarded with sweets or, more so these days, with money. In some areas the story about St. Martin sharing his cloak with a beggar in the cold of winter is reenacted.

St. Martin's Day retained its importance even as saints' days were deemphasized after the shift from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism. Contributing to its persistence in the festive calendar was its association with the birthday of the great Protestant reformer Martin Luther (1483–1546) on November 10. Danish Lutherans (the majority of Danes) and other Protestants celebrate Martin Luther's birthday by feasting on roasted wild goose or duck and drinking new wine or brandy. In many parts of the country a soup is made with the leftovers.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; HARVEST FESTIVALS

✿ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christians celebrate Christmas on December 25 to mark the birth of Jesus. In Denmark Christmas celebrations begin on Christmas Eve (December 24), and last until December 26. On December 24, families attend church and offer prayers in a special service. After services, families gather around Christmas trees with lit candles. They form a circle around the tree and sing traditional Christmas carols. On Christmas Eve gifts are exchanged. Dinner includes roast goose or duck with gravy, cooked red cabbage, and potatoes. Red wine or Christmas beer (sweet beer with low alcohol content), along with apple juice, are also served. Cookies, apple dumplings, and coffee round out the meal.

On Christmas Day the Danish people visit their friends and families and exchange more gifts and greetings. Families typically gather for a special mid-day Christmas feast.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

✿ TONDER FESTIVAL

Observed in: Tønder
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August

The Tønder Festival which takes place in the town of Tønder, Denmark, in August, is one of the largest folk festivals in Europe. The Tønder Festival is a major event for lovers of folk music and dance. This five-day-long celebration attracts folk musicians, dancers, and performers from all over the world, and many renowned musicians perform. Most of the townspeople volunteer to ensure that all the visitors (Danish as well as foreigners) feel at ease and enjoy the festival.

As a special treat for the volunteers who are unable to attend the musical concerts held during the festival, a special concert is given in which the musicians perform again just for the volunteers.

✿ NATFILM FESTIVAL

Observed in: Copenhagen
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November

The Natfilm Festival is an annual international film festival that takes place in the Danish capital city of Copenhagen in November. The biggest film festival in Denmark, it features important international films and provides a platform for Danish filmmakers to showcase their films. Although the film festival promotes Danish filmmakers, it also offers critical exposure for independent filmmakers from Asia and America.

Rites of Passage

✿ BIRTH

Danish women place their trust in midwives to ensure the delivery of healthy children. Even today it is estimated that one in three children are born at home in Denmark. Among the world's industrialized nations Sweden and Denmark have the lowest infant mortality and maternal death rates. The ritual of baptism—which formally introduces the child to Christianity—takes place at infancy.

✿ MARRIAGE

In Denmark weddings are formalized in churches. During the wedding ceremony the bride and the

groom exchange wedding vows in the presence of God, the priest, and the assembled group of friends and family. Then the bride and groom, along with the maid of honor (from the bride's side) and the best man (from the groom's side), sign the marriage certificate. The priest puts the seal of the church on the document and signs it, thereby solemnizing the marriage. Prayers and hymns are also part of the wedding service.

After the wedding ceremony there is a reception. Cornucopia cake, or a Danish marzipan ring cake, which is made from almonds, candies, and fruit and decorated with sugar work, is the traditional wedding cake in Denmark. Some cakes also feature a portrait of the bride and the groom on them. Assembled guests enjoy dancing, singing, and feasting at the wedding reception.

✿ DEATH

The Danish observe Lutheran Christian rites to bury their dead. After reading passages from the Bible, the dead body is cleansed, dressed, and placed in a coffin. Then the coffin is taken to the church, where a service is held in the deceased's honor. The body is buried and flowers placed at the gravesite.

In many parts of Denmark graves belonging to the Viking age have been found. The burial rituals of the Vikings were different from Christian burial rites. The deceased was buried with an essential item that might be required in the afterlife; the object depended on the wealth and status of the deceased. For example a rich man was often buried with luxury items, while a poor man was buried only with a knife. Many wealthy Viking women in Denmark were buried in wagons. Food and drink was also buried along with the dead body to provide sustenance in the afterlife.

Further Reading

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❧ Djibouti ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Eastern Africa, bordering the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, between Eritrea and Somalia
Size	8,880 sq mi.
Capital City	Djibouti
Flag Description	Djibouti's flag has two equal, horizontal bands of blue (top) and light green (below) with a white isosceles triangle on the hoist side, bearing a red, five-pointed star in the center.
Independence	June 27, 1977 (from France)
Population	476,703 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Djiboutian(s)
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Somali (60%); Afar (35%)
Major Language(s)	French (official); Arabic (official); Somali; Afar
Major Religion(s)	Muslim (94%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day, June 27

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

The Republic of Djibouti (formerly called French Somaliland) was the last of the African French colonies to gain its independence in 1977. The country experienced rising ethnic violence throughout the 1970s. The Afars (a tribe of northern Djibouti, culturally linked with Ethiopia) and the Issas (a tribe of southern Djibouti, culturally linked with Somalia) did try peaceful governance by forming the first inter-ethnic party in 1976. However Ali Aref Bourhan (b. 1934; an Afar who ruled the territory by allying with the French) lost his position when the people elected Hassan Gouled Aptidon (b. 1916; of the Issa tribe) for three six-year terms.

A 10-year civil war ensued. Although a tentative 1994 peace accord granted concessions to the Afars, ethnic conflict between the two tribes continued. Ismael Omar Guelleh (b. 1947), known for his pro-French stand, was elected to power in 2000 with his uncle Gouled's support. He signed the final peace accord on May 12, 2001, officially ending the civil war between the government and the armed factions of the Afar rebels.

❧ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Djibouti is a volcanic desert with most of its land unfit for cultivation. Mt. Moussa, the highest point in the country (6,768 feet), is located among the minor mountain ranges found toward the Ethiopian Highlands. The largest lake, Lake Abhe, lies on the Ethiopian border. The climate is hot and dry most of the year, with temperatures reaching 106°F in July. Rainfall is as little as five inches annually. The coastline is 500 miles long and is one of the most advantageous features of Djibouti's geography.

❧ ECONOMY

Djibouti utilizes its strategic location at the mouth of the Red Sea, an important shipping nexus for goods entering and leaving the East African highlands. The economy is essentially service based. Djibouti mainly exports coffee and animal hides, but its service activities (the banking sector and port facilities—transporting, communicating, warehousing, international transshipment, and refueling) provide most of the country's earnings. Its main imports are mostly food products, petroleum, and manufactured goods. Almost three-quarters of

the labor force are engaged in subsistence agriculture, but most dwell in the city while periodically tending livestock in the rural areas. Since unemployment is rampant, along with a high population growth rate (including refugees and immigrants), Djibouti has to depend heavily on external aid (especially from France).

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The two major ethnic groups of Djibouti—the Afars of the north and the Issas of the south—have battled fiercely in the late 20th century. Because these groups have traditionally lived as pastoral nomads and do not adhere to political boundaries, Djibouti has a huge problem of tens of thousands of refugees of both groups arriving from Somalia and Ethiopia. The years of brutal civil war, extreme poverty, and the dire refugee situation have all taken their toll on celebrations in Djibouti.

The culture is a mix of French colonial and modern Arabic influences. The most consistently observed holidays are the Muslim holy days.

CUISINE

Having traditionally been pastoral nomads Djiboutians rely extensively on sheep and goats for their needs. The milk and meat is consumed, and the animal skins, mostly exported. Tomatoes and dates are the main agricultural products. Most other food items need to be imported, since Djibouti lacks adequate livestock and agricultural produce for its needs.

The food is influenced by French cooking; however, the food on the streets is typically North African. It consists of chicken, fried meat, fish, lentils, or flat bread. Barbecued or baked fish with a spicy sauce is quite common. Since, as with most Muslim countries, Djiboutis do not have free access to alcohol, qat is used widely. Qat is a leaf that is chewed and is a mild stimulant. It is one of the few

Qat

Chewing qat leaves is a national pastime in Djibouti, but it is widely debated as to whether qat chewing should be banned. For instance a person who does not chew it would say that the Djiboutian economy suffers a great deal as the afternoons are spent at home or under a tree chewing qat leaves and socializing. In fact, around 25–40 percent of household income goes into qat consumption, taking money away from education and work. Those who chew it (a large majority) argue that they concentrate better after chewing the green leaf and therefore perform better at work. A unique feature of this small country, qat is the most consumed item in Djibouti and also the most sought after.

things you can always find piled under wet cloths at marketplaces. Qat is mostly imported from Ethiopia, whose airlines punctually drop qat consignments in Eritrea.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

New Year's Day is one of the most widely celebrated holidays in the world. In spite of its majority Muslim population by whom a lunar calendar is usually followed, Djibouti observes the New Year according to the Western (solar) calendar date of January 1. Because of the extreme poverty of the nation, modest celebrations are the norm.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

The May 1 observance of Labor Day has its origins in the international socialist movement. The first Labor Day, also called May Day, occurred in 1890, set internationally by the Second International in 1889 to coincide with an American Federation of Labor (AFL) general strike in the United States to win the eight-hour workday. Thereafter the international Labor Day became and remained more radical than the one in the United States. It was during the Vichy regime (1940–44) that France officially designated May 1 as Labor Day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 27

Djibouti (previously called French Somaliland) was the last French African colony to achieve independence in 1977 after nearly a century of dependency. Independence Day celebrations are held throughout the country. In the capital there is a military parade and speeches by government officials.

Religious Holidays

EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

This date marks the Islamic New Year and is the date when Muhammad fled Mecca for Medina. The

lunar calendar used by Muslims is composed of 12 months; each month has 29–30 days. Therefore the Islamic year has only 354 days, and its cycle finishes 11 days earlier than that of the Western calendar every year. The date of this and other Islamic holidays varies in relation to the Western solar calendar.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

❁ MOULOUD

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

Mouloud marks the birth of Muhammad and is also called Mawlid al-Nabi. The birthday of Muhammad is celebrated by many Muslims with elaborate feasting, parties, fairs, and parades. Stories narrating the birth of the prophet are told to children. However conservative Muslims do not believe in celebrating anyone's birthday, not even Muhammad's, because they believe it distracts one from worshipping only Allah.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOUD

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

The month of Ramadan unifies Muslims from all walks of life. The month is spent in raising spiritual consciousness through observing fasts, distributing alms, and worshipping Allah. During this month-long observance, neighbors wake each other up for *subhoor*, which means "meal before dawn." Observant Muslims visit the mosque frequently and recite the Koran often during the day. Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of the Ramadan fasting, is celebrated with three days of feasting.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Since Djibouti is an overwhelmingly Muslim country (94 percent), the major holidays tend to follow the Muslim lunar calendar. Eid al-Adha, or the Feast of the Sacrifice, celebrates Ibrahim's (Abraham's) willingness to sacrifice his son to please God. It is a four-day celebration that officially ends the holy pilgrimage, or hajj. Every Muslim is expected to have journeyed to Mecca at least once in his or her lifetime if it is physically and financially possible. Eid al-Adha is celebrated with lightheartedness, the exchange of gifts, and prayers.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

Prophet Muhammad's Birthday

This is one of the most celebrated days in Djibouti. On the prophet's birthday stories of how the prophet was born are narrated to young and old alike. It is said that the mountains and trees danced when Muhammad was born. The mountains sang, "There is no God but Allah," while the trees replied by singing, "and Muhammad is his prophet." The belief is that 7,000 angels gave Muhammad an exquisite bath in a golden pot filled with heavenly dew.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

The Muslim belief that pregnancy is a gift from God is widespread in Djibouti. Contraception, abortions, and pre-birth sex determination are all forbidden according to strict Islamic law. After giving birth the mother stays at home breast-feeding the newborn for a 40-day period called the *afatanbah*. She is assisted by female relatives and neighbors. Wearing garlic amulets and burning incense sticks are rituals intended to keep evil away from the newborn.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Both males and females are regularly circumcised in Djibouti. It is said that only after circumcision does any child become an accepted member of the adult community. Also, marrying uncircumcised partners is seen as unclean. Whereas the age of circumcision is five years for males, females are excised and infibulated between seven and fourteen years of age. For males the process is performed by medical doctors (at home or in a hospital) with pomp and show.

For girls "circumcision" (female genital mutilation, FGM) is carried out on 95 percent of the female population, although a penal code provision outlawing FGM has been in force since 1994. Among the several organizations working on the issue are the Association for the Equilibrium and Promotion of the Family (ADEPF) and the Union Nationale des Femmes de Djibouti (UNFD, National Union of Women of Djibouti), which organize workshops to raise awareness about the health risks of FGM. Both groups receive occasional media coverage. The Ministry of Health allows clinics and health training centers to distribute information about FGM.

❁ MARRIAGE

In Djibouti the marriage age for women is between 14 and 15, and for men, 18. Men may have up to four wives as the Islamic tradition allows. Men with more than one wife in the urban areas end up sus-

taining different households for different families, whereas in the countryside all the wives stay together and communally take care of the livestock and farm. To have multiple wives a man must have the financial wherewithal to support them.

❁ DEATH

When a person is fatally ill, it is considered insensitive for a physician to declare that he or she will die. A special portion of the Koran called *vasin* is recited at the dying person's bedside. A person called the sheikh (male or female) prepares the body after

death. The appropriate Muslim prayers are said after the body has been cleaned, perfumed, and draped in white. The family of the deceased is responsible for digging the grave. The death anniversary is an important commemoration of the deceased person.

Further Reading

Charles Koburger, *Naval Strategy East of Suez: The Role of Djibouti* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1992); Robert Tholomier, *Djibouti: Pawn of the Horn of Africa*, Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, Trans. (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 1981).

❧ Dominica ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Island between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean, about one-half of the way from Puerto Rico to Trinidad and Tobago
Size	291 sq. mi.
Capital City	Roseau
Flag Description	The Dominican flag is green, with a cross in the center with its arms made up of three equal bands of color: yellow, black, and white. Superimposed in the center of the cross is a red sphere with a Sisserou parrot encircled by 10 green five-pointed stars edged in yellow and representing Dominica's 10 administrative divisions (parishes).
Independence	November 3, 1978 (from United Kingdom)
Population	69,029 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary democracy
Nationality	Dominican
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Black; mixed black and European; European; Syrian; Carib Amerindian
Major Language(s)	English (official); French patois
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (77%); Protestant (15%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Commonwealth Day, March; Labor Day, May 1; CARICOM Day, July; Emancipation Day, August 1; Creole Day, Friday before Independence Day; Independence Day, November 3; Community Service Day, November 4

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

The first evidence of civilization on Dominica dates back to 3,100 B.C.E. The first settlers were the Ortoroids, who came from the South American mainland. Columbus (1451–1506 C.E.) reached Dominica on November 3, 1493, and gave it its present name, which means “Sunday” in Italian. Dominica’s history is similar to that of other Caribbean islands. The Spanish tried in vain to colonize the islands in the Lesser Antilles (of which Dominica is a part). However even their missionaries failed in their attempts to convert the local populations. The missionaries were either killed or held as hostages.

By 1727 some French families had entered Dominica as traders, lumberjacks, and farmers. Both the English and the French looked at Dominica as an island of strategic importance

and in 1761 the English attacked Dominica in an attempt to gain control of the region. In accordance with the Treaty of Paris (1763) Dominica officially became a part of Britain. The French tried to regain possession of Dominica in 1795 and 1805 but failed to recapture it. The island of Dominica remained a British colony, and the English administered the island as a part of the Leeward Islands Federation until 1939. Many sugar plantations were set up in the country during this period. In 1831 the British passed the Brown Privilege Bill, allowing social and political rights to free blacks, and three free black men were permitted to join the legislature. In 1834 slaves throughout the British West Indies were emancipated. In 1838 Dominica became the only Caribbean nation in the British Empire to have a black-controlled legislature.

Eventually Dominica was added to the Windward Islands Federation, and in 1958 it joined the West Indies Federation. In 1967 the country became an Associated State of the United

The Ortoroids

The earliest evidence of human existence in the eastern Caribbean dates back to 3,100 B.C.E. Excavations have revealed a pre-agricultural people whom anthropologists named Ortoroids because evidence of their presence was first discovered at Ortoire in Trinidad.

Kingdom. Dominica won its independence in 1978, on the 485th year of its discovery by Europeans. In 1980 it became the first Caribbean nation to have a woman prime minister—Mary Eugenia Charles (1919–2005).

Historically Dominica has been a favorite tourist destination because of its ecology and political stability. The year 2001, however, saw a reduction in the number of tourists because of the terrorist attacks on the United States, and by 2002 the country faced a deep economic and financial crisis.

Fun Fact

Dominica is one of the youngest islands in the Lesser Antilles and is still being formed by naturally occurring geothermal and volcano-related activity.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The island of Dominica is popularly known as “The Nature Island of the Caribbean” due to its spectacular and varied flora and fauna and its breathtaking natural beauty. It is the most mountainous of all the islands grouped under the Lesser Antilles; its volcanic peaks are the cones of

lava craters and include the Boiling Lake, the second largest thermally active lake in the world. (The Lesser Antilles has one of the highest concentrations of potentially active volcanoes in the world.)

Dominica’s tropical rain forests, numerous waterfalls, and rivers owe their existence to the heavy rainfall in the interior of the island. The terrain is made up of rugged highlands and mountains interspersed with fertile valleys. Dominica has a tropical maritime climate with little seasonal variation.

Crab Callaloo

Ingredients:

2 lbs. callaloo leaves, spinach, or chard
1 clove garlic, chopped
1 1/2 lbs. okra, sliced
1 qt. water
4 scallions, chopped (top and bottom)
1 Tbs. fresh parsley, chopped
1/2 lb. crab

1/2 tsp. fresh thyme, chopped
1/2 tsp. hot pepper sauce
Salt, to taste

Preparation:

Combine all ingredients into a large pot. Cover and simmer for about one hour. Remove the meat and puree the stock. Cut the meat into chunks and add to the pureed mixture. Heat over a low flame until ready to serve.

ECONOMY

The Dominican economy is heavily dependent on agriculture, with nearly half of Dominican workers engaged in farming-related jobs. Dominica’s primary exports (bananas, soap, bay oil, vegetables, grapefruit, and oranges) are mainly agricultural. The country has some industries (soap, coconut oil, tourism, copra, furniture, cement blocks, and shoes), which employ around 30 percent of the island’s workforce. The island has high rates of poverty and unemployment.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The French culture, language, customs, and religion are deeply rooted in Dominican culture, as evidenced by the prevalence of Roman Catholicism, the preference for French names, and the use of the French language. Several other cultural influences can be seen in Dominica, such as Creole society, a blend of French, African, and Caribbean cultures and people. The Creole Music Festival that takes place in the month of October is a major tourist attraction. Other celebrations such as Independence Day and Carnival are also significant.

CUISINE

Despite the varied culinary influences—African, Carib, Indian, French, and Creole—Dominica’s cuisine is simple. The menu includes plenty of fresh crabs, crayfish, agouti (a member of the rat family), and *manicou* (a variety of crab found in Dominica). Fried chicken and fish and chips are available in plenty as are Creole dishes such as goat *columbo* (a stew) and *callaloo* soup (a creamed spinach-style soup), as well as other common Caribbean items such as curry-filled flat bread. The most famous national dish is the ubiquitous mountain chicken, which is actually made of the legs of a giant mountain *crapaud* (“toad”). A native of Dominica and Montserrat, the giant toad may only be caught between September and March to conserve its numbers. Prepared in a number of ways, it is said to taste like chicken and is usually eaten with the light locally brewed beer, Kubuli.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The Dominicans welcome the new year with parties and colorful parades. The previous year is remembered, and resolutions for the new year are made.

❁ COMMONWEALTH DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Second Monday of March

Commonwealth Day celebrates the unity, integrity, and diplomatic links between the 53 countries that are members of the British Commonwealth. In Dominica conventions and seminars on global issues, trade, and international cooperation are held to mark the day.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Labor Day is the international workers' holiday. The May 1 observance of Labor Day has its origins in the international socialist movement. The first Labor Day (also called May Day) was scheduled internationally by the Second International in 1889 to coincide with an 1890 American Federation of Labor (AFL) general strike in the United States to win the eight-hour workday. Thereafter International Labor Day became and remained more radical than the U.S. Labor Day observed in September.

In Dominica Labor Day is observed with labor union activities including meetings, speeches, and other events. Schools, universities, businesses, and government offices remain closed. In recent years people have chosen to celebrate this day with outings, picnics, and beach parties.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ CARICOM DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First Monday of July

CARICOM Day celebrates the unity of nations grouped as the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM). Member nations of the Caribbean community celebrate this day by holding conventions to commemorate the formation of CARICOM. Dignitaries deliver speeches regarding the progress and future development of the CARICOM nations.

❁ EMANCIPATION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 1

Emancipation Day celebrates the abolition of slavery in the British Empire, including Dominica. In August 1833 the British Parliament passed the Slave Emancipation Act, which gave all slaves in the British Empire their freedom, once they had served a three-year period of mandatory indentured servitude. The 1833 Act did not come into force until August 1, 1834. Although they were no longer legally slaves after this date, the enslaved people in the British West Indies were still made to work for their former masters as unpaid apprentices. They finally gained their freedom at midnight on July 31, 1838. Throughout the Caribbean and African worlds this is a major holiday, and Portsmouth in Dominica is the site of the most colorful celebrations.

❁ CREOLE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Friday before Independence Day

Creole Day is celebrated on the Friday before Independence Day to honor the Creole heritage of the majority of the Dominican population. People wear traditional Creole outfits and the different Kwéyól-speaking communities gather to enjoy traditional foods, folklore, and exhibits of traditional arts and crafts.

Fun Fact

Dominica's most famous national dish, mountain chicken, is actually a giant toad said to taste like chicken.

Fun Fact

Before Columbus's arrival the people called their island *Wai'tu kubuli*, meaning "Tall is her body."

Kwéyól

Kwéyól (Creole) is French for "indigenous." The word *Creole* can denote a person of mixed blood; it is also the name of the local language spoken by the inhabitants of the Caribbean islands. Also called "patois," this is the tongue most widely used from Louisiana in the United States to French Guyana (Cayenne) on the South American mainland and also predominates in

countries such as Haiti, St. Maarten, Guadeloupe, Dominica, Martinique, St. Lucia, and parts of Grenada and Trinidad. There are at least 11 million Creole speakers worldwide. The alphabet for Antillean Creole is a mixture of French words and African sentence structure. Primarily oral, though various written transcriptions have been developed, Kwéyól has been around for nearly 300 years.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 3

Dominica gained its independence from British rule on November 3, 1978. On Independence Day, Dominicans celebrate with military parades, community service projects, and cultural events, such as concerts and street fairs.

❁ COMMUNITY SERVICE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 4

The day after Independence Day, Dominica celebrates Community Service Day (also called Community Day), which is dedicated to helping the less fortunate by volunteering for community projects. On this day Dominicans come together to work on approved service projects that must be completed in that single day. Projects might include the painting of schools and cleaning parks.

Religious Holidays

❁ CARNIVAL

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Ten-day period prior to the start of Lent

Mas Domnik, the name given to Carnival in Dominica, has been called the “Caribbean’s most original Carnival.” Calypso shows and adventure sports begin a month before Carnival. Two days before, Bayfront City hosts the opening festivities, referred to as the Opening of Carnival City, which marks the start of the Carnival season. This is the first of many Carnival celebrations, which include beauty contests, costume parties, parades, and musical shows.

A last chance for Catholics to party before the 40-day Lenten fast Mas Domnik is a joyous occasion in Dominica. People from the various social groups put aside their differences to celebrate the grandest party of the year. During the 10-day festival a number of activities take place around the island. The calypso tents are vibrant with competition among the calypsonians as they vie for the title of calypso monarch of the year. Mas Domnik is a time for revelry, frivolity, and parties. The festival may be traced back to the days of plantation slavery. According to historians the masquerades and dances so important to Carnival were a feature of the French plantation culture throughout the Antilles, a time when families visited each other for Creole parties between Samedi Gras (Fat Saturday) and Mardi Gras (Fat Tuesday). When slavery was abolished in 1834 the freed blacks took these plantation celebrations to the streets, creating Carnival as it exists today.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; LENT

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, a part of the Christian Holy Week, is a commemoration of Jesus’ Crucifixion. On Dominica Good Friday observances are very religious and filled with important symbolism. People attend church for readings from the Gospels and Psalms. A cross is taken through the streets with the painted body of Christ affixed to it. After the afternoon service the effigy of Christ is taken to a church. A low table representing the tomb is decorated with flowers and wreaths and an *epitaphion* (a cloth icon) is placed on it. The *epitaphion* represents the body of Christ wrapped in the burial shroud. The shroud is taken in the procession for the evening prayers and placed back in the tomb at the end of the day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter, the most important holiday in the Christian calendar, commemorates Jesus’ Resurrection from the dead after being executed by Crucifixion. From the early morning Dominicans attend prayer services, which continue throughout the day. Parades and feasts are held during the day.

On Easter Monday, also known as Holy Monday, Dominicans celebrate by participating in events such as egg-rolling competitions and dousing each other with perfumed holy water.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fifty days after Easter

Pentecost takes place 50 days after Easter. The holiday celebrates the descent of the Holy Ghost on the disciples. This was considered a great miracle: Parted tongues of fire accompanied by a strong gust of wind descended on the apostles, marking them as fit preachers of the Gospel to all corners of the world.

Many scholars believe that many of the traditions and celebrations associated with this holiday were borrowed from pagan celebrations of spring in Western Europe. Homes are often decorated with green branches and flowers. In Christian tradition this is the 50th day after Easter and has been celebrated since the first century. (*Pentecost* in Greek means “fiftieth.”)

In many countries, including Dominica, this is a two-day holiday. Whitsunday and Whitmonday are the names used locally to celebrate the event. The name “Whitsun” originated in the third century and was derived from the white garments that were worn by those who were baptized during the vigil of this feast.

Whitmonday celebrates the descent of the Holy Ghost from heaven, making complete the Christian Holy Trinity (God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit). On this day people dress in their best clothes and walk in processions through the towns led by young girls in white. A country fair is held at Laudat on this holiday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; PENTECOST

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas is celebrated on Dominica in much the same way it is in many other countries of the world. Decorating of Christmas trees, the exchange of gifts and cards, and the preparation of special dishes are among the festivities. Parties at home with family and friends highlight this holiday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26

The day after Christmas is traditionally observed as Boxing Day in Great Britain and former British colonies. In some countries it is also known as St. Stephen’s Day, in honor of the first Christian martyr. The origin of this holiday can be traced to the practice in Victorian England of giving cash or gifts (usually food) to servants and those of the lower classes. Gifts among equals were exchanged on or before Christmas Day, but the less fortunate received their gifts the day after Christmas. The name of this holiday refers to the church collection boxes that were opened for distribution to the poor on this day. Dominicans celebrate this additional day off from work and school with outdoor activities, including picnics and beach outings. If the 26th falls on a Sunday, then the holiday is celebrated on December 27.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ BAND SPLASH

Observed in: Roseau

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Late January, early February

Band Splash is an opportunity for people to listen to new songs and albums being released for Carnival, and all the popular bands perform in this event. This is a highly popular musical extravaganza whose venue is Festival City, in Dominica’s capital Roseau. The event is usually held on a weekend between late January and early February. The program begins late in the evening of the first day, spilling over into the second day. The event is well attended, especially by the young, who dance away the night to the pulsating music.

❁ VAVAL

Observed in: Dublanc

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 25

Dominicans celebrate Vaval (also called Téwé Vaval) at noon on Ash Wednesday to mark the end of Carnival. Vaval represents the spirit of Carnival and is rooted in the old pagan and African traditions of the islanders. Effigies of Vaval, made out of old clothes, stuffing, and cardboard masks, made to represent the most outstanding person or event of the bygone year are paraded through the streets. These effigies are burned at night to symbolize the end of the revelry and the beginning of Lent, the 40-day Christian period of fasting leading up to Easter.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

For Dominican parents the birth of a child assures the continuation of the family line and heritage. People send flowers, cards, or gifts for the baby. Dominicans hold the Christian baptism ceremony within the first few months of the child’s life. Baptisms take place during the Sunday church service or on Sunday afternoons. Catholic children generally receive two names, one of which is that of a saint.

❁ MARRIAGE

Most marriages are celebrated according to Roman Catholic tradition. The bride wears the customary white gown, and the groom, a black formal suit. The wedding ceremony takes place at noon in a church and is known as the nuptial Mass. The bride and groom exchange vows and rings in front of their relatives and friends. The bride places her bouquet on the altar and then both the bride and the groom light a large unity candle from two smaller ones as a symbol of their new life together.

☼ DEATH

When a Dominican dies the body is washed thoroughly for the journey into the afterlife. Close friends and family members hold a wake at the home of the deceased. Thereafter the body is taken to the cemetery to be buried. At the church and graveside the funeral services consist of readings from the scriptures and prayers. At the funeral reception after the burial family members serve food and drinks to the guests. For Catholics, a Mass is held on every anniversary of the death.

Further Reading

Patrick L. Baker, *Centring the Periphery: Chaos, Order, and the Ethnohistory of Dominica* (Montreal McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994); William C. Clarke, *Notes on the Geography and History of Dominica* (Berkeley, Calif.: Dept. of Geography, University of California at Berkeley, 1962); Janet Higbie, *Eugenia: The Caribbean's Iron Lady* (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1993); Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, *Phyllis Shand Allfrey: A Caribbean Life* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996).

~ Dominican Republic ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Eastern two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola, between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean, east of Haiti
Size	18,815 sq. mi.
Capital City	Santo Domingo
Flag Description	The flag of the Dominican Republic has a white cross in the center that extends to the edges and divides the flag into four rectangles: the top ones are blue (hoist side) and red, and the bottom ones are red (hoist side) and blue; a small coat of arms featuring a shield supported by an olive branch (left) and a palm branch (right) is at the center of the cross; above the shield a blue ribbon displays the motto, <i>Dios, Patria, Libertad</i> ("God, Country, Liberty"), and below the shield, <i>República Dominicana</i> appears on a red ribbon.
Independence	February 27, 1844 (from Haiti)
Population	8,950,034 (2005 est.)
Government	Representative democracy
Nationality	Dominican
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Mixed (73%)
Major Language(s)	Spanish
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (95%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Duarte's Birthday, January 26; Independence Day, February 27; Battle of March, March 19; Labor Day, May 1; Restoration Day, August 16; Columbus Day, October 12; Constitution Day, November 6; Discovery of Hispaniola, December 6

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

When Columbus arrived on the island he named Hispaniola, he was welcomed by the Taínos, an Arawak Indian tribe, in 1492. Subsequently these harmonious conditions changed dramatically with the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors, who controlled the region with an iron hand. African slaves were brought to the island in 1503 to work on the plantations to replace the indigenous peoples whose numbers had been decimated by overwork, warfare, and disease. Over the next century French settlers occupied the western end of the island and their hold strengthened as Spanish power declined.

By the late 17th century Spain was not as formidable as in the past, and the Treaty of Ryswick of 1697 formally ceded the western part of the island to France. Finally in 1804 the western end gained independence as the Republic of Haiti. But the French who had also held on to the eastern part of the island were ousted in the Battle of Palo Hincado on November 7, 1808, when Spanish settlers, with the help of the British Royal Navy, won the eastern part of the island back for Spain.

Spain, however, proved weak during the period known in history as "La España Boba," "The Era of Foolish Spain." In 1821 the Spanish settlers declared their territory an independent state. Haitian forces occupied the whole island just nine weeks later and held on to it for the next 22 years. On February 27, 1844, the Dominican Republic gained independence

Juan Pablo Duarte (1813–76)

Juan Pablo Duarte, founder of the Dominican Republic, was born in 1813 in Santo Domingo City to a Spanish retailer and a Dominican mother. He studied law in Spain, where he was admitted to the bar. Duarte was attracted to the ideas of romanticism and nationalism as a student in Barcelona. While he was studying the eastern part of the Island of Santo Domingo, which had won independence from Spain, was conquered by the Republic of Haiti, making the island a single republic. The Haitians ruled the conquered part, inhabited largely by people of Spanish descent, with an iron hand.

Duarte, after returning to his native city, conceived the idea of freeing his country and founded

La Trinitaria, a secret society, in 1838. The organization soon spread throughout the whole Spanish section of the island. This was the beginning of the struggle for Dominican independence. A first attempt at independence in March 1843 was unsuccessful, and Duarte was compelled to leave the country. Another attempt made on February 27, 1844, however, was successful. Duarte was nominated for president by the Liberal Party in opposition to General Santana. Duarte was defeated and banished, remaining in obscurity for many years. He only returned to the island after the Dominican Republic was returned to Spanish rule in 1861. He participated in the struggle that ended in 1865 to reestablish the republic.



from Haiti. This was the culmination of a movement led by Juan Pablo Duarte while in exile. He is regarded as the hero of the Dominican independence movement. The first constitution of the Dominican Republic was adopted on November 6, 1844.

Spain reannexed the Dominican Republic in 1861, and the War of Restoration began in 1863. Finally, independence was restored in 1865.

The next 50 years witnessed 28 revolutions and 35 governments. Economic difficulties, the threat of European intervention, and ongoing internal disorders led to the U.S. occupation of the Dominican Republic in 1916 and the establishment of a military government. The occupation ended in 1924, with the formation of a democratically elected Dominican government.

In 1930, Rafael Trujillo (1891–1961), a prominent army commander, established absolute political control over the country. Under his leadership, the Dominican Republic was the only country that openly allowed the entry of European Jews during the Holocaust of World War II. However in August 1960 the Organization of American States (OAS) imposed diplomatic sanctions against the Dominican Republic because of Trujillo's complicity in an assassination attempt on President Rómulo Betancourt (1908–81) of Venezuela. These diplomatic sanctions remained in force even after Trujillo's own assassination in May 1961. In November of the same year the Trujillo family was forced into exile in France.

Toward its end the Trujillo regime became associated with the excessive use of force, and this gave rise to powerful underground movements. One of them was the July 14 Movement. Three of its members the three sisters Minerva, Maria Teresa, and Patria Mirabal (known as the "Three Butterflies") were imprisoned by Trujillo. International pressure secured their release, but they were assassinated by Trujillo's men on November 25, 1960. This date is

observed as the "International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women" in many Latin American countries.

Economic difficulties, coupled with problems in the delivery of basic services (including electricity, water, and transportation) have generated widespread discontent in the country. As a result there have been frequent and occasionally violent protests, including a paralyzing nationwide strike in June 1989. In 1990 President Joaquín Balaguer (1906–2002) instituted a second set of economic reforms. After concluding an IMF (International Monetary Fund) agreement, balancing the budget, and curtailing inflation, the Dominican Republic is experiencing a period of economic growth. The country has the largest gold mine in operation in the Caribbean.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The Dominican Republic, a Caribbean representative democracy, occupies two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola, while Haiti occupies the remaining one-third. A land of contrasts the Dominican Republic has towering mountains and rocky cliffs, rain forests, fertile valleys, cacti-studded desert terrain, 994 miles of coastline, and around 186 miles of prime soft sand beaches. The country is crossed by four rugged mountain ranges that bisect the country northwest to southeast. The largest range is the Cordillera Central with Pico Duarte, the tallest point in the Caribbean, rising over 10,416 feet. Three large fertile valleys rest between the ranges, one of which holds Lake Enriquillo in the southwest, the lowest point in the Caribbean, 131 feet below sea level and the only salt-water lake in the world inhabited by crocodiles.

The country enjoys a tropical maritime climate all the year round. The rainy season lasts from May to November, and the hurricane season from June through November.

❁ ECONOMY

Although the country has long been viewed primarily as an exporter of sugar, coffee, and tobacco, in recent years the service sector has overtaken agriculture as the economy's largest employer, due largely to growth in tourism and free-trade zones. After growing in 2002 growth again turned negative in 2003 with reduced tourism, a major bank fraud, and limited growth in the U.S. economy (the source of 87 percent of export revenues).

The Dominican Republic is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor. The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that 48,000 children are engaged in child labor in this country.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Because of several historical and sociopolitical factors Dominican society has evolved as a multicultural one. While Haiti is French in its customs and everyday life, the Dominican Republic reflects predominantly Latin American tastes and traditions. Spanish settlers gave the country their language and the Roman Catholic faith. Similarly African, European, and American civilizations have all enriched and permeated Dominican culture.

Traditional Taíno foods and medicines are in use even today. Taíno words—for instance, *hammock* and *tobacco*—are used extensively. Music and dance form the core of Dominican culture. The most popular dance form is the merengue. A little more pastoral is the *bachata*—Dominican country music, which specializes in songs about heartbreak and loss. Salsa would probably rank as the third most popular music of the Dominican Republic.

❁ CUISINE

Dominican cuisine is rich and varied. The most common meal, known as *la bandera* (“the flag”), consists of rice, beans, meat, vegetables, and *fritos versed* (green plantain fritters). The Dominican *sancocho* is a derivative of the Spanish *coccid* (“stew”), and each region of the country has its own way of preparing it. Some of the regionally famous variations include Samana's *pescado con coco* (fish with coconut sauce), *chivo de Azua* (a goat dish from Azua), and *chivo liniero* (a goat dish from the northwestern region), which has a unique taste because the goats feed on wild oregano. Consequently its meat gets seasoned while the animal is still alive.

The *casabe* (flat, round cassava bread) and *cati-bias* (cassava flour fritters stuffed with meat) are essentially Taíno foods that have come to form an integral part of the Dominican diet. Another dish the *locrio* is made with diverse ingredients; for this reason it is considered the most versatile dish of the native kitchen, allowing the chefs to create, with a

Bachata

Derived from traditional Latin American guitar music, *bachata* emerged in the 1960s. It was immediately denigrated by the media, mainstream musicians, and middle- and upper-class Dominicans, mainly because the lyrics—often about hard drinking, women troubles, illicit sex, and male bravado—were considered vulgar and worthless. While popular radio filled the airwaves with merengue and salsa rhythms, *bachata* musicians were forced to develop their own system of producing and distributing their music. Not until Juan Luis Guerra (b. 1957) won a Grammy in 1992 for his album *Bachata Rosa* did *bachata* gain legitimacy and international recognition.

little rice and whatever else is at hand (especially leftovers), an exquisite meal especially appealing to guests. *Yaniqueques* (“Johnny Cakes”) and *mangú* (a purée of boiled plantains) are also important items on this diverse local menu.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

New Year's celebrations in the Dominican Republic begin the night before on December 31, with all-night parties. Across the country various local and

Merengue

Since the 1930s merengue has been recognized as the national dance of the Dominican Republic. Although it has musical links to Cuba, the dance properly belongs to the island of Hispaniola (Haiti and the Dominican Republic). The most popular story relates that a great hero of the revolution, who had been crippled in one leg, was welcomed home with a victory celebration. It was known that he loved to dance, but due to his injury all he could do was step with one leg and drag the other to close the dance step. Out of respect everyone dancing copied him, and the merengue was born.

According to another version, however, it originated with slaves who were chained together and of necessity were forced to drag one leg as they cut sugar to the beat of the drums. If this is true the dance probably originated with the slaves of the French colonies, who are said to have combined African dances with the French minuet of the late 1700s.

international artists present live performances. Many people attend private parties on New Year's Day.

DUARTE'S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 26

On January 26, the country celebrates the birthday of Juan Pablo Duarte, the father of the country. Under his leadership the Dominicans fought for their freedom against Spain in the 19th century. This day is also referred to as Patriot's Day and is observed with many patriotic gestures, such as a flag-raising ceremony and offerings of flowers at Duarte's statue and at the Altar de la Patria, a white marble mausoleum in the center of Parque Independencia (Independence Park) in Santo Domingo.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 27

The Dominican Republic gained its independence from Haiti on February 27, 1844. The day is celebrated across the country, as La Republica Dominicana, with colorful military parades and various cultural events.

BATTLE OF MARCH

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 19

The Battle of March commemorates the historic Haitian retreat before the Santiago troops, led by General José María Inverú and Captain Fernando Velaría. The battle took place on March 19, 1844. Dominicans celebrate this occasion with epic dramas, musical concerts, and dances.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

In the Dominican Republic, all government offices, business houses, and schools remain closed to celebrate workers. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. Parades and rallies are organized all over the country to mark

the day, which is also called May Day or Workers' Day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

RESTORATION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 16

Restoration Day commemorates the restoration of the nation's independence in 1865. The country, having gained independence from Haiti in 1844, was reannexed by Spain in 1861. Various carnivals are organized on this day. People dressed in colorful costumes participate in the street dances held in Santo Domingo, Santiago, La Vega, and San Pedro de Macoris.

COLUMBUS DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 12

Columbus Day, or Discovery Day, celebrates the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the Western Hemisphere in 1492. People offer flowers and wreaths at Columbus's tomb in San Domingo. Colorful fiestas highlight the Spanish heritage of the country. More recently, as people have begun to acknowledge the destruction and cruelty of the nations that colonized the Western Hemisphere, observances of Race Day, or Día de la Raza, are also organized to commemorate the indigenous peoples and cultures of the Americas.

CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 6

Though the first constitution of the Dominican Republic was adopted in 1844; the one in effect today is an amended version enacted on November 6, 1966. Constitution Day is observed with parades and civic ceremonies. Since this is a government holiday, all schools, offices, and business establishments remain closed.

DISCOVERY OF HISPANIOLA

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 6

Meetings, assemblies, and road shows are held across the country on this holiday to celebrate the landing of Christopher Columbus on the island of Hispaniola. Columbus had originally named the island La Isla Espanola ("The Spanish Island"). The Dominican Republic occupies two-thirds of Hispaniola, and Haiti, the remainder.

Religious Holidays

❁ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: January 6

This Christian holiday, which is also called Three Kings' Day, commemorates the visit of the Three Kings, or Wise Men, to pay tribute to the infant Jesus in the manger in Bethlehem. Dominican children eagerly look forward to this day. The night before, they place boxes of grass under their beds to await the Three Kings' arrival on their camels. According to a popular belief, after the camels have eaten all the grass, the kings leave presents in the empty boxes.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS; EPIPHANY

❁ DAY OF OUR LADY OF ALTAGRACIA

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: January 21

Dominicans pray to La Altagracia, the Virgin of the Highest Grace, for her miraculous cures and for intercession in their troubles. Las Noches de Vela, or the Nights of Prayer, precedes the celebration of the Virgin's feast day in late January. The day itself is

also referred to as Nuestra Señora de la Altagracia. This celebration is a fine synthesis of African popular religion and Catholicism. Dominicans recite prayers, play music (with strong African influences), and sing hymns and dance. On January 21, thousands of people make the pilgrimage to Higüey to visit the Basilica of the Virgin.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ CARNIVAL

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Week before Lent

Carnival is the most colorful festival of the year. Not only is it a time of feasting before the Christian season of fasting known as Lent, but it also often coincides with Independence Day in the Dominican Republic. During Carnival week, people wear colorful masks and costumes, dancing, eating, and drinking in large street celebrations. Each city or town has its own unique costumes and celebrations. For example in Santo Domingo, the Devil, known as Diablo Coujelo, lashes out at bystanders with an inflated cow bladder to purge them of their sins. In Santiago the costume characters include pigs; in Cotuí there are butterflies; while San Pedro de Macorís features *collois*, or the good lawyer and businessman, who are draped with ribbons and feathers.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; LENT



A Dominican television personality, center, dressed as the Rey Momo greets people during the Carnival parade in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. (AP Photo/Andres Leighton)

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

This day commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. It is observed as a solemn occasion, sometimes called Holy Friday, Great Friday, or Mourning Friday. In the Dominican Republic, government offices, businesses, and schools remain closed on Good Friday. Loud music is prohibited at public gatherings, clubs, and discotheques.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; LENT

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

This day symbolizes the Resurrection of Jesus, on the third day after his Crucifixion. Easter is a joyous occasion. In the Dominican Republic prayer services and worship begin early in the morning. The basic idea is to recall Jesus' Resurrection before sunrise on the very same day. As in other parts of the world, the people of the Dominican Republic celebrate this day with a family meal.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

CORPUS CHRISTI

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Sixty days after Easter

Corpus Christi, or the Feast of Corpus Christi, commemorates the institution of the Holy Eucharist (receiving of the Holy Communion, the symbolic flesh and blood of Jesus, in remembrance of the Last Supper). The feast of Corpus Christi was established in 1261 by order of Pope Urban IV (r. 1261–64). It is celebrated with early morning Mass, prayers, and religious parades in the Dominican Republic. Statues of Jesus and Mary are carried through the streets in procession.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CORPUS CHRISTI; EASTER

OUR LADY OF LAS MERCEDES

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: September 24

Our Lady of Las Mercedes is the patron saint of prisons. She also happens to be the patron saint of some Spanish cities like Barcelona, as well as territories formerly under Spanish domination, including the Dominican Republic. This day, which is vari-

ously known as Feast of Our Lady of Las Mercedes, La Virgen de las Mercedes, or Nuestra Señora de las Mercedes, is dedicated to her. It is a general practice for the public to visit her shrine in Saint Cerro on a hill near the city of La Vega. The day is also celebrated by various cultural shows, competitive recitations, religious services, and hymns, African music, and traditional dances.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas, sometimes called Mass of Christ, is celebrated here beginning on Noche Buena (Christmas Eve). That is when Dominican families get together to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Roasted pig is the main dish of the Christmas feast. Christmas trees in the Dominican Republic are white, not green, so as to replicate snow-laden trees. Another deviation from the popular Christmas customs elsewhere in the world is the absence of gifts. People wait until Epiphany (January 6) to give and receive gifts.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

AZUAL CARNIVAL

Observed in: Azua de Compostela

Observed by: Taíno Indians

Observed on: March 19

The Azual Carnival is a celebration of Taíno culture and is not related to the Christian pre-Lenten celebration. The carnival is held in Azua de Compostela, located in the southwestern region of the Dominican Republic. Epic dramas and cultural events highlight the original ethos and culture of the island. The descendants of the Taíno Indians perform traditional dances, the highlight of the festival.

DOMINICAN GASTRONOMIC FESTIVAL

Observed in: Santo Domingo

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June

During the Dominican Gastronomic Festival, chefs from the most prestigious restaurants and hotels on the island display their skills in preparing local dishes. For Dominicans and visitors alike the festival is a fine opportunity to sample the diversity of Dominican cuisine. Prizes are awarded, and the funds raised are donated to charitable causes.

Rites of Passage

✿ MARRIAGE

Marriage customs in the Dominican Republic are grounded in the Roman Catholic tradition that celebrates matrimony as a holy sacrament. The ceremony consists of three biblical readings, the exchange of vows and of rings, the prayer of the faithful, the nuptial blessing, and music. The wedding rings are exchanged after the vows. The best man gives the bride's ring to the priest, who blesses it and gives it to the bridegroom. The groom then places it on the bride's finger. This procedure is repeated with the groom's ring. Brides can honor the Virgin Mary by presenting roses at her statue. The priest then pronounces them husband and wife. There may be a Mass to conclude the ceremony. Otherwise the celebration is completed with the Lord's Prayer and a blessing.

✿ DEATH

Dominicans are deeply traditional in their approach to death, although customs may vary according to

the individual, family, and church. Upon death the body of the deceased is thoroughly washed to cleanse him or her for the afterlife. Friends and family hold a wake at a funeral home on the second day after death.

A Catholic funeral is held either immediately after the wake or on the third day. The funeral service is often part of a Mass. The priest reads from the scriptures, leads the prayers, and administers Holy Communion. After the service, the family of the deceased hosts a funeral reception. A Mass marks the death anniversary one year later.

Further Reading

Germán Arciniegas, *Caribbean: Sea of the New World* (New York: Knopf, 1946); Isabel Zakrzewski Brown, *Culture and Customs of the Dominican Republic* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999); David Howard, *Dominican Republic: A Guide to the People, Politics, and Culture* (Northampton, Mass.: Interlink Books, 1999); Marianne Möllmann, *Dominican Republic: A Test of Inequality: Discrimination against Women Living with HIV in the Dominican Republic* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2004).

East Timor

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Southeastern Asia, at the eastern end of the Indonesian archipelago, between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, northwest of Australia in the Lesser Sunda Islands.
Size	5,794 sq. mi.
Capital City	Dili
Flag Description	The Timor flag is red, with a black isosceles triangle (based on the hoist side) superimposed on a slightly longer yellow arrowhead that extends to the center of the flag; there is a white star in the center of the black triangle.
Independence	November 28, 1975 (from Portugal); May 20, 2002 (from Indonesia)
Population	1,040,880 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Timorese
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Austronesian (Malayo-Polynesian); Papuan
Major Language(s)	Tetum (official); Portuguese (official); Indonesian and English are “working languages”; there are about 16 indigenous languages: Galole, Mambae, and Kemak are spoken by significant numbers of people
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (90%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year’s Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day (from Indonesia), May 20; Consultation Day, August 30; Liberation Day, September 20; Santa Cruz Massacre Day, November 12; Independence Day (from Portugal), November 28

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Not much is known about East Timor prior to the arrival of the Europeans, although there is ample evidence that Chinese and Javanese sailors and traders visited the region in quest of sandalwood and beeswax, which were found there in abundance. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive in the region of East Timor in the early 16th century. They established themselves at Lifau in 1556. Their claim to the island was disputed by the Dutch, who arrived in 1613. A treaty signed in 1859 and subsequently modified in 1893 set the border between the Dutch and Portuguese territories. The colonial powers exploited the island’s vast sandalwood resources.

During World War II Timor was also occupied by the Japanese from 1942–45. Then in 1950 Dutch Timor and the rest of the surrounding Dutch East Indies were transformed into the Republic of Indonesia. In 1975 when Portugal’s former colonies were winning their independence, fighting broke out between rival independence groups in Portuguese Timor. The Leftist Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (FRETILIN) emerged triumphant, and on November 28 FRETILIN established the Democratic Republic of East Timor, with Francisco Xavier do Amaral (b. 1937) as its president. Nine days later Indonesia’s army invaded the territory and claimed sovereignty, administering the area as Timor Province. The annexation, however, was not internationally recognized. Meanwhile the people of the area suffered greatly from acute food shortages, disease, and military repression. Warfare with FRETILIN guerrillas also continued unabated. Finally in August 1998 Indonesia and

Portugal reached an agreement that gave East Timor the right to local self-government. Indonesia was reluctant to withdraw its forces, however, and talks broke down.

In March 1999 Portugal and Indonesia agreed to let the East Timorese choose between autonomy within Indonesia or independence. In August of that year, in a UN-supervised referendum, voters chose independence. The territory descended into chaos as pro-Indonesian militias and the army unleashed a reign of terror and wanton brutality, killing supporters of independence, raping women, committing arson everywhere, and causing thousands to flee their homes. In September in light of mounting international pressure Indonesia asked the United Nations to send a peacekeeping force to East Timor. From 2000 onward the UN force assumed the administration and defense of East Timor, which became a dependent territory. A constituent assembly (assigned the important task of writing a constitution for East Timor) was elected in September 2001. In April 2002 José Alexandre “Xanana” Gusmão (b. 1946), a former guerrilla leader, defeated Xavier do Amaral and won the presidency. In May 2002 East Timor became an independent nation.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

East Timor includes the eastern half of the island of Timor, the Oecussi (Ambeno) region on the north-west portion of the island of Timor, in addition to the two islands of Pulau Atauro and Pulau Jaco. East Timor is part of the Indonesian archipelago as well as the biggest and easternmost of the Lesser Sunda Islands. To the north of the mountainous island are the Ombai Strait and Wetar Strait; to the south the Timor Sea separates the island from Australia. To the west is the Indonesian province of East Nusa Tenggara.

The island of East Timor was once part of the Australian continental shelf and is composed primarily of limestone. The island has a ridge of rugged mountains running its length. There are narrow coastal plains dotted with beaches, cliffs, and coral reefs. The region has no major valleys or important rivers. This topography, combined with the rocky soil and low rainfall, make agriculture difficult. The country experiences both food and water shortages in the dry season.

The climate of East Timor is largely tropical with hot and humid weather. The difference between the dry and rainy seasons is clear-cut. During the dry season, from May to November, the northern coast receives minimal rain, making agriculture impossible in that area. The central mountains and the south coast do receive a small amount of rain. From November to May, during the rainy season, the entire island receives lots of rain; however this often produces flooding and landslides. Typhoons are a common phenomenon in the region.

❁ ECONOMY

When the island of East Timor was colonized by the Portuguese, they exploited and ultimately exhausted its vast sandalwood reserves. In late 1999 about 70 percent of the remaining economic infrastructure was devastated by Indonesian troops and anti-independence militias. Over the next three years a massive international program, manned by 5,000 peacekeepers and 1,300 police officers, undertook a substantial reconstruction in both urban and rural areas. However economic growth was impeded in 2003 due to extensive drought and the gradual reduction of the international presence.

The country faces great challenges in its efforts to rebuild the infrastructure, to restructure and overhaul the civil administration, and to generate more jobs for young people. Agriculture holds a good deal of promise for East Timor's economy but it also faces obstacles. East Timor's coffee growers seem to have benefited from the demand for coffee in the Western world. The farmers are too poor to buy pesticides for their crops; of late however Western coffee importers (among them Starbucks) have agreed to pay high prices for the organic coffee beans grown in East Timor. The National Cooperative Business Association, with a grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), has set up a cooperative body that will help in marketing Timorese coffee abroad.

Other elements of the post-occupation, nascent economy include marble mining, offshore fishing, and tourism. Some observers have suggested establishing a casino industry to attract tourists from Indonesia where gambling is illegal.

War has left hideous scars on a once lush and beautiful island that will have to be completely healed before tourism is possible. In addition East Timor faces the challenge of eradicating illiteracy and training its youth to run the bureaucracy required for a well-functioning government.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Legends say that a giant crocodile was transformed into the island of Timor, or Ilha do Crocodilo (Crocodile Island), as it is popularly known. In spite of the lingering Portuguese influence, the East Timorese still cling to their ethnic lifestyle, spiritual beliefs, and languages.

The Portuguese colonial powers were successful in converting the bulk of the East Timorese population to Catholicism. During the colonial period a mission was established and churches were built. Today 90 percent of East Timorese are Roman Catholics.

Most East Timorese suffer the effects of poverty and squalor. A major task before the gov-

Fun Fact

In the Malay language *timor* means “east,” so the name of East Timor literally means “east east.”

ernment is to heal the wounds of war and dispel the fears embedded in the national psyche.

CUISINE

The cuisine of East Timor is greatly influenced by the culinary arts of Portugal, which administered the territory for nearly three centuries. The fact that both countries are located in maritime regions further heightens the similarity between their cuisines. East Timorese eat an abundance of seafood, including crabs and fish. Other common foods include vegetables and greens (especially cabbage), and pork as well as beef. There are also plenty of cheeses. For dessert there is an array of pastries as well as puddings that incorporate fresh fruits.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western (Gregorian) calendar January 1 is celebrated as New Year's Day throughout much of the world. The East Timorese believe in wearing new clothes to give a good start to the new year. People also organize get-togethers with family and friends. This is a public holiday in East Timor, and most government and business establishments are closed.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to rec-

ognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union the American Federation of Labor (AFL) demanding an eight-hour workday.

Labor Day in East Timor celebrates the contributions of the country's workers and laborers. The day is celebrated with processions and meetings followed by parades.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

INDEPENDENCE DAY (from Indonesia)

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 20

The people of East Timor cherish their independence from the rule of Indonesia. On this day in 2002 East Timor emerged as the youngest nation in the world (as well as one of the poorest). In East Timor the anniversary is observed with parades, processions, and the inspection of honor guards, as well as inspirational speeches by public figures.

CONSULTATION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 30

This day is of great significance in the political history of East Timor because on this day in 1999 a referendum was held under the auspices of the UN Aid Mission in East Timor (UNAMET). The general public voted for independence rather than autonomy within Indonesia. Their vote marked the first step toward the restoration of independence (originally achieved from Portugal in 1975 and then lost when Indonesia invaded and annexed East Timor), which finally came in 2002. In East Timor this day is observed with civic ceremonies, parades, and public speeches.

Pudim de Coco (Coconut Pudding)

Preheat oven to 350°F.

Ingredients:

- 3 c. sugar
- 6 eggs
- 2 Tbs. flour
- 2 c. coconut milk
- 1/4 c. freshly grated coconut (optional)

Preparation:

Slowly heat 1 cup of the sugar in a heavy skillet, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon until the sugar melts and is lump-free. When the sugar turns a caramel color, remove it from the heat and pour it into a 6-cup mold. Set aside.

Beat the eggs with the remaining 2 cups of sugar

until fluffy. Place flour in a small bowl and add 2 tablespoons of the coconut milk, one at a time, until mixture is smooth. Add the flour mixture to the remaining coconut milk, mix well, and add to the egg mixture. Pour the mixture into the mold on top of the caramelized sugar. Place the mold in a large baking pan filled with 1 inch of hot water to create a bain-marie (a cooking utensil in which hot water is used to cook food in smaller pots). Bake for 40 minutes. Remove from water bath immediately. Cool for 20 minutes, then invert onto a serving dish and chill for 6 to 8 hours. To serve, sprinkle with freshly grated coconut if desired.

(Instead of grating fresh coconut, frozen fresh grated coconut can be found in the freezer department of most supermarkets and works just as well.)



East Timorese residents wave the country's national flag during a parade in the capital of Dili, East Timor, May 20, 2002. Celebrations continued into the day from the previous night's official declaration of independence from Indonesia for the country following a long history of oppression by foreign occupiers. (AP Photo/Dita Alangkara)

✿ LIBERATION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: September 20

September 20 is observed by the Timorese people as Liberation Day, the day in 1999 that Australian-led peacekeeping troops, the International Force For East Timor (INTERFET), arrived in the country and brought an end to the violence that had followed East Timor's referendum for independence.

✿ SANTA CRUZ MASSACRE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 12

In response to the impending UN-sponsored delegation's arrival in East Timor, the Indonesian military threatened that they would kill any who dared protest against Indonesia's presence. On November 12, 1991, more than 270 East Timorese were massacred at the Santa Cruz cemetery in Dili, East Timor, by Indonesian troops.

The civilians at the cemetery were participating in a memorial procession in honor of Sebastio Gomez (d. 1991), a young political activist who had been slain earlier by the Indonesian military. At the funeral procession many Timorese held signs and banners supporting the church and Timorese independence. As the peaceful procession made its way through the streets of Dili, the capital city, more and more Timorese joined in. When Indonesian soldiers heard about the procession they marched into the cemetery and opened fire on the crowd. After the massacre the Indonesian Army cordoned off the area.

Priests, church officials, and aid workers were not allowed in. Scores of wounded Timorese were left to bleed to death on the roads and in the cemetery.

It is a cruel irony that the massacre took place after the UN-sponsored delegation had postponed its visit to East Timor. On this day East Timorese visit the cemetery and lay flowers to Gomez and all the citizens killed in the genocide.

✿ INDEPENDENCE DAY (from Portugal)

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 28

Like the celebration of its independence from Indonesia, won only after hundreds of thousands of Timorese had been killed, observances of its independence from Portugal are muted by poverty and exhaustion. Almost as soon as the Portuguese had left, Indonesia, which controls West Timor, seized the opportunity to make East Timor part of its territory and invaded, so the Timorese did not have much time to celebrate the withdrawal of its European colonizers.

Religious Holidays

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

For Christians Easter is considered the most important Christian festival, and its numerous celebrations

and observances form the core of the liturgical year, which begins around the time of the vernal equinox in the Northern Hemisphere (the autumnal equinox in the Southern Hemisphere) and stretches out into summer in the Northern Hemisphere (winter in the Southern Hemisphere). This occasion celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus three days after his Crucifixion. Christians believe Jesus was the son of God and died on the Cross to redeem humanity from sin.

Because tourism is likely to become financially important to East Timor it may become an Easter pilgrimage destination for Southern Hemisphere Christians. The island's giant statue of Jesus, built at the very end of a mountain ridge by Indonesians when they occupied the country, could be a focal point to draw people to the island for pilgrimages during Easter.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

This Christian holiday commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus, whom Christians regard as their Messiah. A solemn occasion, it falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent (a 40-day period of fasting and penitence).

Christians in East Timor observe this festival as a day of fasting. Reenactment of Jesus' procession to the place where he was crucified is an important annual ritual. Catholic Timorese generally spend the day in devotion, listening to public readings of Gospels and Psalms and singing hymns.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: August 15

The Roman Catholic Feast of the Assumption commemorates the Virgin Mary's Assumption into heaven. The Catholics of East Timor celebrate this day by attending church services.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day is a Christian feast honoring all the saints (known and unknown) of the Roman Catholic Church. In East Timor people pay homage to their respective patron saints and organize prayer services to mark the occasion.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: December 8

Since the late 17th century Roman Catholic theologians have maintained that the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus, was born with a soul free from original sin, a doctrine known as the Immaculate Conception. The Virgin Mary is the patron saint of Portugal, of which East Timor is a former colony.

This is one of the holy days of obligation of the Catholic Church, which commands that all adherents of the church attend Mass on this day. This is the time to recognize Mary and her important role in the upcoming celebration of Christmas. In East Timor on this day Catholics attend Mass. They pay homage to Mary by lighting candles and offering flowers before her image.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

The Christian festival of Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus. Catholics in East Timor traditionally celebrate Midnight Mass on the evening of December 24 to initiate the Christmas season. After Mass they enjoy sweet desserts that they share with family, friends, and guests. People decorate their homes and exchange greetings and gifts with friends and family, especially children, on this joyous occasion.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

TARA BANDU CEREMONY

Observed in: Fahilebo

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Determined by village chief

When the village chief decides that local culture needs to be reinvigorated and the value of ecologically wise land use in Fahilebo reaffirmed, he calls for the ceremony of Tara Bandu. Starting early in the morning and continuing into the small hours of the next day, the ceremony consists of dancing, drumming, chanting, and the proclamation of the rules of Tara Bandu, a season in which tree-felling, hunting, the taking of new land or wives, and the taking of other people's animals or garden produce are strictly forbidden.

Rites of Passage

✿ BIRTH

Because the area was under Portuguese rule for centuries Roman Catholicism is the predominant religion of East Timor, and Catholic rites are commonly practiced by the majority of the population. One of these is baptism, which represents one's entry into the community of the Catholic Church. It also represents the washing away of sins. In East Timor the newborn child is usually baptized by a priest in a church within a few weeks of its birth, and the event is generally celebrated with family get-togethers and special meals.

✿ MARRIAGE

In East Timor weddings generally take place in Catholic Churches. The bride is customarily dressed in white with a huge veil and floral ornaments. On the day of the wedding the bride and groom assemble at the church, along with their respective families. The couple then proceeds to the altar where the rites are conducted by a priest. The priest asks the couple for their consent to the marriage. After the couple exchanges rings there are readings from the scriptures. The priest then declares the two of them husband and wife. After the church ceremony the families of the couple organize one or more feasts to celebrate the occasion.

✿ DEATH

The East Timorese follow the practices of the Roman Catholic Church regarding death. Following a death family and friends traditionally observe a vigil, or wake. Flowers, candles, and rosary beads are placed close to the body. The body is washed, clothed, and laid in a coffin, which is taken to the church for a funeral Mass. Afterward the coffin is taken to the graveyard, where a brief graveside prayer ceremony takes place. After the coffin has been lowered into the ground those who are present symbolically throw handfuls of dust on the coffin before the grave is filled in. After the burial a Requiem Mass may be held in the church to pray for the peace of the departed soul. This ceremony is accompanied by solemn music.

Death Chant

Come, meet at the still pool and steaming waters,
the arm and canal at the tree base and spring, descend
to Lometta,
mist fellow, mists here, fog fellow, fogs here,
to descend into the white corn and yellow corn,
to descend into the white being and yam,
to descend into the gardens of Bi Lebou and Mile,
Kai, for flesh to turn about,
for water to turn around,
for women to emerge changed,
for men to emerge changed.

Although many people of East Timor have become practicing Catholics they continue to honor their indigenous spiritual beliefs as well. To the south of Dili a ridge of mountains descends to the sea. For the Timorese that ridge of mountains is the path of the spirits of the dead, and they believe that the spirits of the dead travel that path down to the sea. At the base of that last hill or mountain before the sea is Grandfather Crocodile, the lord of the sea, who receives the spirits of the dead. The spirits remain in the sea for a while, and then return to the land. The Timorese have a death ritual chant that describes the return of the changed spirits from the sea to the land and their entry into plants and their fertilization of the Earth.

Further Reading

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Fun Fact

Only two countries in Asia are predominantly Roman Catholic, East Timor, and the Philippines.

∞ Ecuador ∞

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Western South America, bordering the Pacific Ocean at the Equator, between Colombia and Peru
Size	109,483 sq. mi.
Capital City	Quito
Flag Description	Ecuador's flag has three horizontal bands of yellow (top, double width), blue (middle), and red (bottom) with the coat of arms superimposed at the center of the flag.
Independence	May 24, 1822 (from Spain)
Population	13,363,593 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Ecuadorian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Mestizo (mixed Amerindian and white, 65%); Amerindian (25%)
Major Language(s)	Spanish (official); Amerindian languages (especially Quechua)
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (95%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Anniversary of the Discovery of the Amazon River, February 12; National Community Spirit Day, February 27; Labor Day, May 1; Battle of Pichincha, May 24; Simón Bolívar Day, July 24; Independence Day, August 10; Columbus Day, second Monday in October

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

What is now Ecuador was inhabited by advanced indigenous cultures for thousands of years before the Incas conquered the native tribes in 1460. The Incas held sway until the Spanish conquistadors under Francisco Pizarro (c. 1475–1541), defeated the Emperor Atahualpa (c. 1502–33) at the Battle of Cajamarca in 1532.

Within decades of the Spaniards' arrival the indigenous population had been decimated by disease. Those who lived were forced into the *encomienda* ("royal land grants") labor system for Spanish landlords, the new elite. After nearly 300 years of Spanish rule Ecuador gained its independence on May 24, 1822. The "Republic of the Equator" was part of the South American general and patriot Simón Bolívar's vision of Gran Colombia. When Gran Colombia dissolved in 1830 Ecuador

was one of the three countries that emerged (the others being Colombia and Venezuela). Between 1904 and 1942 Ecuador lost several provinces in conflicts with its neighbors. In 1942 the country went to war with Peru. This led to the loss of a large part of Ecuador's territory, including the entrance to the Amazon River. Having been ruled by dictators and military governments from 1960 to 1980, Ecuador has had a democratically elected government for more than 20 years.

✿ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Ecuador, which includes the Galapagos Islands, is located in western South America. It borders the Pacific Ocean at the equator and is nestled between Colombia and Peru. The climate is tropical in the Amazonian jungle and in the lowlands along the coast but cooler in the higher inland areas. Ecuador must contend with frequent earthquakes, landslides, and volcanic activity as well as floods and periodic droughts.

Pichinchas Volcanoes

The Pichinchas volcanoes Guagua (in Quechua, “child”) and the older Pleistocene Rucu (in Quechua, “old one”) rise immediately west of Quito. The horseshoe-shaped summit crater is a little over one mile in diameter and 2,000 feet in

depth. Many minor eruptions have occurred since the Spanish era. The central lava dome was probably emplaced during the volcano’s largest historical eruption in 1660, which dropped a foot of ash on Quito and generated west-flank lava flows. The volcano has no permanent ice cap.

ECONOMY

Ecuador has significant oil reserves, which in the early years of the 21st century have accounted for 40 percent of the country’s export earnings. Its dependency on petroleum, however, means that fluctuations in world oil market prices can have a serious effect on the nation’s economic well-being. In 1999 Ecuador faced its worst economic crisis ever and in 2000 changed its currency to the U.S. dollar. In the 21st century Ecuador’s economy is growing, thanks to oil production, economic reforms, and opening its markets to the world.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Farra (parties) and celebrations are held frequently. Hardly a month passes without a major celebratory event. Most festivals are celebrated with long processions, colorful ceremonies, and sumptuous feasts. Because more than 90 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, most of the holidays and celebrations follow the liturgical calendar of the Roman Catholic Church. These holidays are observed most in the highland villages, where celebrations include feasting, drinking, and dancing and continue for several days. Other holidays commemorate significant political or historical events.

Ecuadorian holidays are seldom celebrated on their fixed dates. If a public holiday occurs on a weekend, it may be celebrated on the previous Friday or the following Monday to make a longer weekend. Even a midweek public holiday is sometimes celebrated on the previous Monday or the following Friday for the same reason.

CUISINE

Ecuadorian food is rich in soups and stews. Other specialties include fresh tropical fruits, cornmeal pancakes, rice, beans, eggs, plantains, and vegetables. Fresh seafood is ubiquitous. Although the everyday diet of rice, potatoes, and meat (beef and chicken everywhere, pork in the Sierra) can be bland, no Ecuadorian table is complete without *aji* (hot sauce). Each locality has its own specialties; some of the more exotic include *caldo de patas* (soup

made from cattle hooves), *cuy* (whole roasted guinea pigs), and *tronquito* (bull penis soup).

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR’S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

Ecuadorians traditionally celebrate New Year’s Eve along with *año viejo* (the old year). Dummies, representing the previous year, are stuffed with paper, sawdust, wood, and firecrackers. They are usually caricatures of local and international politicians or people in the news. The dummies are put on public display before they are burned. Women (or men disguised as women) and children dressed in black play the role of last year’s widows and ask for money or candies to arrange for the dummy’s mock funeral. If the previous year was bad, people kick the dummies before they burn them. This is done in the hope that the coming year will be better than the old one; it’s also a way for people to let off steam. At midnight on New Year’s Eve people place the dummies outside their homes and set them on fire. When the dummies are consumed the new year has begun.

Fun Fact

Atahualpa was the 13th and last emperor of the Tahuantinsuyo, or Inca Empire.

Simón Bolívar

From the very beginning Simón Bolívar (1783–1830) dreamed of an independent South America. In 1819 he established an army of around 2,500 soldiers and planned an attack on the Spanish vice-royalty of New Granada, the present-day Colombia. Simón Bolívar fought back the Spanish and was instrumental in winning independence for Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela. He became famous as the “Great Liberator.” He was also known as the George Washington of South America.

❁ ANNIVERSARY OF THE DISCOVERY OF THE AMAZON RIVER

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: February 12

This holiday started in Quito on February 12, 1542, to commemorate the discovery of the Amazon River's source. The headwaters of the Amazon are located in Ecuador. In the Quito Cathedral, there is an inscription that reads: "One can glorify Babylonia for its walls, Nineveh for its greatness, Athens for its letters, Constantinople for its empire: and yet Quito beats them all for having the key to Christianity and for conquering the world. Because to this city belongs the discovery of the Amazon River." The festival includes singing, dancing, and large public celebrations.

Fun Fact

Cotopaxi in the Ecuadorian Andes is the highest active volcano in the world at 19,388 feet. It has erupted 50 times since 1738.

❁ NATIONAL COMMUNITY SPIRIT DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: February 27

National Community Spirit Day has been celebrated in Ecuador since 1943. Public gatherings are organized to foster a sense of community and promote peace and tolerance. An important focus of this day is the idea that all kinds of people contribute to the nation, regardless of their ethnic and religious differences.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

Labor Day celebrates the economic and social achievements of workers around the world. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world, and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union the American Federation of Labor demanding an eight-hour workday.

May Day is also a spring festival with indigenous as well as European roots. In pre-Columbian times, Ecuadorians celebrated this day as the Day of Fire. Emphasizing traditional May Day celebrations, Ecuadorians decorate their homes with flowers and foliage and celebrate with songs and dances in honor of the forest gods.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ BATTLE OF PICHINCHA

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 24

In Ecuador the Battle of Pichincha is celebrated as a flag-raising event. In 1822 a large army of Colombian, Argentinean, Venezuelan, and Peruvian soldiers won this decisive battle against the Spaniards, thus liberating Ecuador from European colonial rule. On this day there are military as well as civilian parades.

❁ SIMÓN BOLÍVAR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 24

Simón Bolívar, one of South America's most heroic and well-known generals, was instrumental in winning independence for the countries of Bolivia, Colombia, Panama, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Peru. On Simón Bolívar Day the schools and universities in Ecuador arrange parties, dances, and other cultural events to honor the Great Liberator, as he is known.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 10

August 10 celebrates Ecuador's independence from Spain, won by Simón Bolívar, the Great Liberator of South America. On this day Ecuadorians organize festivals, fairs, and bullfights. The national flag is displayed all over the nation, and there is a military parade in the capital. Schools and public offices are closed and cultural events are held throughout the day. The evening is marked by public dinners.

❁ COLUMBUS DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Second Monday in October

Celebrated on the second Monday in October Columbus Day commemorates the beginning of the modern era in the Americas when Christopher Columbus made his first voyage from Spain in 1492. Parades are held in the streets of Quito and many other Ecuadorian cities. In recent years there has been a growing awareness of the European invaders' brutal treatment and enslavement of indigenous peoples throughout the Americas. In recognition of this fact most Latin American countries now recognize the culture and heritage of the native people as well on this day.

Religious Holidays

❁ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: January 6

Epiphany, or Three Kings Day, observed on the 12th day after Christmas, commemorates the three Wise Men visiting the infant Jesus and bearing gifts. It is considered the final day of the Christmas season. Traditionally the aroma of blessed and burned dried herbs fills people's homes. Holy water is sprinkled on the doorways, and the letters C, M, B (the initials of the three Wise Men, Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar) are written on front doors. The master of each house recites, "Caspar, Melchior, Balthazar, protect us again this year from the dangers of fire and water."

Most people burn their Christmas trees on this day to mark the end of the Christmas season. Children have fun going from house to house collecting candies and cookies.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS; EPIPHANY

❁ CARNIVAL

Observed by: General Public, especially Roman Catholics
Dates: Three days before Lent

Carnival

In Ecuador Carnival is celebrated most enthusiastically and attracts the biggest crowds in Ambato, where they hold a colorful parade (Fiesta de las Flores y de las Frutas, or "Flowers and Fruit Festival"). Throughout the country water balloon fights are popular during Carnival, mostly with children and teenagers. Often the balloons are filled with much messier stuff such as flour or eggs. The authorities have recently tried to ban the water balloon pranks but with mixed success.

Carnival is the last chance to kick up one's heels with abandon before the austere 40-day Christian period known as Lent. Carnival begins around the second week of February, when big parties are organized in every region of Ecuador. Children and teenagers celebrate by throwing water-balloons as well as bags filled with flour, eggs, and other messy materials.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; LENT

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: Thursday before Easter



Ecuadorean women called "Las Veronicas" participate in a Good Friday procession in Quito. (AP Photo/Dolores Ochoa)

The Thursday before Easter is called Maundy Thursday. This was the day of Christ's Last Supper. It is also known as Sheer Thursday because the churches switch to bright colors from the darker ones used during Lent. This is called *schere* (cleaning). Some priests wash the feet of 12 men to reenact Jesus washing the feet of his disciples before the Last Supper.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, the Friday before Easter, or Pascha, commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. The event is remembered with special prayer services, recounting stories from the Gospels and Psalms, and singing hymns about Jesus' life.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

For Christians Easter is the most important Christian festival, and its numerous celebrations and observances form the core of the liturgical year, which begins around the time of the vernal equinox in the Northern Hemisphere (the autumnal equinox in the Southern Hemisphere) and stretches out into summer in the Northern Hemisphere (winter in the Southern Hemisphere). This occasion celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus three days after his Crucifixion. Christians believe Jesus was the Son of God, and died on the Cross to redeem humanity from sin.

The English name for this celebration Easter was taken from the name of the pagan deity Eostre. According to the Venerable Bede, (672–735), a renowned Anglo-Saxon Christian scholar, Easter was named after Eostre (or Eastre), the Mother Goddess of the Saxon tribes of Northern Europe; she was also the goddess of fertility. After the harsh dreary winters of Northern Europe she brought the warmth of spring, fertility, and abundance. The ancient deities in all civilizations had patron animals, and the rabbit, an obvious symbol of fertility, is the companion animal of Eostre.

Christians attend special Easter church services and then spend the day with family and friends.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

CORPUS CHRISTI

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Sixty days after Easter

The Christian festival of Corpus Christi honors the miracle of the Eucharist whereby the faithful taste

wine and wafer, which Catholics believe become the blood and flesh of Jesus in their mouths. The celebration is especially popular in Tungurahua, Cotopaxi, Loja, and Chimborazo. Corpus Christi is celebrated differently in different towns. The celebrations generally involve songs, dances, and elaborately designed costumes.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CORPUS CHRISTI

ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day is a traditional Roman Catholic holiday honoring all saints, known and unknown. In Ecuador on this day people visit cemeteries and pray for the souls of their loved ones. Candles are important symbols on this day because it is believed that candlelight will illuminate the path to the other world.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

ALL SOULS' DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: November 2

All Souls' Day is a time to remember and pray for the souls of departed loved ones. The day significantly follows All Saints' Day, shifting the focus from those in heaven to those in purgatory (a state of limbo between heaven and hell). It is a time to pray for unresolved souls so that they may be received in heaven.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas (literally, the Mass of Christ) is a major holiday in the Christian calendar celebrating the birth of Jesus. In Ecuador people hold public feasts as well as private dinners with family and friends. They also decorate Christmas trees with lights and ornaments and exchange gifts and cards.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

FIESTA DEL YAMOR

Observed in: Otavalo

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 1–15

During the first two weeks of September, Otavalo plays host to people from all over the world and cel-

brates the harvest with processions, music, dancing, and fireworks, along with the traditional coronation of the Reina de la Fiesta (Queen of the Festival). People serve traditional dishes and drinks that include *chichi*, an alcoholic drink made from fermented dried corn. The culminating event is a performance by the *loeros* dancers, who enliven the festival with their strange masks and costumes.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

✿ OUR LADY OF MERCY FESTIVAL

Observed in: Latacunga Province

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 23–24

The Our Lady of Mercy Festival, also known as the Mama Negra Celebration, is one of the biggest parties of the year and is sometimes referred to as the Mardi Gras of Ecuador. Celebrated mostly in the province of Latacunga, the festival is full of people, parades, and color. The day commemorates the first revolt of black servants against their white masters under Spanish rule. The people dress in rich costumes, wear masks and headdresses, and dance in the streets.

✿ FOUNDATION OF QUITO

Observed in: Quito

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 6

The founding of Quito, Ecuador's capital, by the Spanish conquistadors in 1534 is celebrated during the first week in December with bullfights, parades, and street dances.

Rites of Passage

✿ BAPTISM

A Catholic priest baptizes a child by making the Sign of the Cross on the child's forehead and sprinkling holy water. After being baptized the infant is dressed in a loose-fitting gown and blessings are recited. The family hosts a feast to celebrate the occasion. Baptism is one of the all-important rituals required

by the Catholic Church. It is a ritual cleansing of original sin and a welcoming of the infant into the fold of the church.

✿ MARRIAGE

Ecuadorians believe January, April, and August are the best months for getting married because the blood of young men and women is thought to be very fertile in these months. The role of the godparents and parents of the wedding couple is of great importance in Ecuadorian marriages. The bride and the groom enter the church with their respective parents. After parting from their parents the bride and groom come together at the altar. The wedding ceremony includes passages from the Bible that refer to the creation of life and formation of new relationships. It is traditional for the bride and groom to thank the guests. After exchanging the vows of marriage they seal them with a kiss.

✿ FUNERAL RITES

When a person dies the body is wrapped in cotton blankets and placed outside the home. The funeral rites last for several days and are accompanied by weeping, feasting, and drinking. During this time, the coffin of the dead person is left open, and family members hold all-night vigils with the body. The mourners are supposed to wash their hands with running water after the burial and before leaving the cemetery. Once the burial rites are completed the family members host a traditional meal with mourners bringing food as gifts.

Further Reading

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Egypt

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	On the Mediterranean Sea in northeastern Africa
Size	386,662 sq. mi.
Capital City	Cairo
Flag Description	The Egyptian flag has red, white, and black horizontal bands of equal width, with a golden eagle in the middle of the white stripe.
Independence	Nominal independence in 1922 (complete sovereignty in 1956)
Population	77,505,756 (2005 est.)
Government	National Democratic Party
Nationality	Egyptian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Eastern Hamitic (99%—Egyptian, Bedouins, and Berbers)
Major Language(s)	Arabic (official)
Major Religion(s)	Muslim (94%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Sinai Liberation Day, April 25; Labor Day, May 1; Liberation Day, June 18; Revolution Day, July 23; Armed Forces Day, October 6

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Archaeological evidence suggests that Egypt was inhabited as early as 700,000 years ago. Today, Egypt is the second most populated country in Africa and combines a rich modern culture with strong roots in the ancient world. All over Egypt are temples, pyramids, statuary, and other religious art of the powerful and refined civilization that was ancient Egypt. A large majority of the population follows Islam, which was introduced by Muslim Arabs in the seventh century. In more recent times, Egypt witnessed the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, which was an effort to maintain control over the Suez Canal.

In 1798 the French, led by Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821), invaded and conquered northern Egypt. Soon after, the British sent their army, successfully capturing Egypt and ousting the French. During World War I the British, fearing that German forces might occupy the Suez Canal, declared Egypt a protectorate. During World War II the Germans invaded Egypt. The British, led by General (later Field Marshall) Bernard L. Montgomery (1887–1976), defeated the Germans, led by Field Marshal Erwin Rommel

(nicknamed the “Desert Fox,” 1891–1944) in a fierce battle at El Alamein. Meanwhile, Egypt’s nationalism was steadily gaining ground and this eventually led to a revolution in 1952.

On July 23, 1952, the military, headed by General Muhammad Naguib (1901–84), seized power. In 1953 Egypt was declared a republic. Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918–70) emerged as a rival to Naguib, and in February 1954 Naguib resigned.

Egypt expanded economically in the 1950s and 1960s with the help of Soviet technical and economic aid. Nasser tried to make Egypt the undisputed leader of a united Arab world. His main rallying cry was the denunciation of Israel and a call to other Arab nations for a united front against a state he wished to see destroyed.

In the Suez War of 1956 Egypt fought and lost to an alliance of Israeli, French, and British troops. However, the British and the French were pressured to withdraw their troops by the United States, and the crisis forced the resignation of British Prime Minister Anthony Eden (1897–1977). Another interesting result of the war was that Nasser’s standing grew enormously in the Arab world, even though he lost the war. The crisis also speeded up the process of decolonization by Britain and France.

In 1967 the famous Six Day War occurred between Israel on the one side and Egypt, Syria, and Jordan on the other. As a result of its victory in that war Israel gained control over the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, the Golan Heights, and the Gaza Strip.

After Nasser's death in September 1970, then Vice President Anwar al-Sadat (1918–81) succeeded him as president. In 1972 Sadat ordered all Soviet military personnel stationed in Egypt to leave the country and placed Soviet bases and equipment under Egyptian control. In 1973 there was another war with Israel, dubbed the Yom Kippur War. Several years of diplomatic maneuvering resulted in a peace accord, signed in 1978 in Washington, D.C., largely brokered by the United States and referred to as the Camp David Accord, named for the presidential retreat in Maryland where much of the negotiating took place. The pact was denounced by other Arab states, and on October 6, 1981, President Sadat was assassinated by Muslim extremists.

He was succeeded by Vice President Hosni Mubarak (b. 1928). President Mubarak continued good relations with Israel and remained active in the Middle East peace process. In 1989 Israel returned the last portion of the Sinai that it held to Egypt. Relations with the rest of the Arab world have improved, and Egypt was readmitted into the Arab League in 1989.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in northeastern Africa, Egypt is surrounded by Libya in the west, Sudan in the south, and Israel in the northeast. The country has shorelines on the Mediterranean Sea in the north and the Red Sea in the east. The region across the Suez Canal is the Sinai Peninsula. It is the only land bridge between Africa and Asia. Cairo, the capital of Egypt, is the largest city in Africa. The Sahara desert takes up a large part of Egypt. Summers are hot and dry while winters are moderate. The country is prone to droughts, frequent earthquakes, heavy dust, and sand storms.

The lifeline of Egypt, the river Nile, flows for 4,157 miles, meandering through nine countries: Tanzania, Kenya, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Uganda, the Sudan, and Egypt. The word *Nile* comes from the Greek word *nehios*, which means “river valley.” From time immemorial, the Nile has been associated with life and fertility. Egypt is appropriately called “the gift of the Nile.” Most of the country's population lives on the banks of the river.

❁ ECONOMY

Egypt's economy is largely dependent on agriculture, media, petroleum exports, and tourism. Approximately one-third of the population is engaged directly in farming, with many others involved with processing and delivery of agricultural

The Pharaohs of Ancient Egypt

In ancient times, the high priest of all temples was called pharaoh. He was the head of law and administration as well as the commander of the army. For the Egyptians, pharaohs were gods, and only pharaoh and priests were allowed to enter temples. The Egyptians believed that if they did not keep pharaoh happy, the crops and their very existence would suffer.

items. Much food is imported, however, and Egypt remains the largest market for wheat exports from the United States.

Egypt is a transit country for women and girls trafficked from Eastern Europe and Russia into Israel for sexual exploitation. Some victims, primarily from sub-Saharan Africa, may also transit Egypt en route to Europe. Some Egyptian males are smuggled into Europe and are reportedly subjected to involuntary servitude.

Although it has been considered a low-income country in the past, economic conditions are improving because of the government's economic reforms and liberal policies. Egypt's gross domestic product is second only to Saudi Arabia among Arab countries.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

About 90 percent of the population of Egypt is Sunni Muslim. Al-Azhar University, the oldest Islamic institution for higher studies, has scholars from every Muslim country on Earth. The rector of Al-Azhar is regarded as the world leader of the Sunni sect.

Although the official religion of Egypt is Islam, Christianity was the dominant faith before the introduction of Islam. Today Coptic Christians are the largest religious minority, and there have often been conflicts between the dominant Muslim community and the Coptic Christians. Egypt's population also includes small numbers of Roman Catholics, Greek and Armenian Orthodox Christians, as well as Protestants.

Coptic Christians

Coptic Christianity was established in Egypt by the apostle Mark in the middle of the first century. Most of the Coptic Christian population of the world is found in Egypt. The Coptic Orthodox Church is the national church of Egypt and is led by the pope of Alexandria, who resides in Cairo. The church runs a number of primary and secondary schools throughout Egypt. Traditionally the Coptic language was used in church services. More recently, preaching is in Arabic.

Painting, music, art, and literature are deeply embedded in Egyptian culture. The interiors of the pyramids (large mausoleums made of blocks of stone built to honor and house the mortal remains of the elite of ancient Egypt in their journey to the next world) were intricately painted. Belly dancing is another well-known product of the Egyptian culture.

Contemporary Egyptian painting reflects the influence of Western art. Western influence has also crept into Egyptian music in the form of pop music.

❁ CUISINE

Egyptian food tends to be simple and bland. Bread is eaten with all meals and the most common one resembles pita bread and is made of either white or whole wheat flour. The staple diet is *fuul* and *taamiyya*. *Fuul* (pronounced fool) is a white bean stew. *Taamiyya* is made with green beans, and is spicy and fried in oil.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the start of a new year in the Gregorian calendar and is a public holiday in Egypt. Cairo is known for its big New Year's celebrations, and people flock to the city from all over the Middle East for a night of revelry and parties in the streets.

❁ SINAI LIBERATION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 25

Liberation Day marks the return of the Sinai to Egypt. During the Six Day War of 1967 the Sinai Peninsula was taken over by Israel. It was eventually returned after a historic peace treaty, known as the Camp David Accord, was signed between Egypt and Israel in October 1978. This agreement is named after the American presidential retreat at Camp David, Maryland, near Washington, D.C. President Jimmy Carter mediated between the Israeli prime minister and the President of Egypt helping them to reach an understanding. This day is marked with speeches by government officials and is principally observed in the Sinai Peninsula.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Labor Day, also called May Day and Workers' Day, is celebrated in many countries of the world

as a tribute to workers. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world, and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. In Egypt government offices, businesses, and schools remain closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ LIBERATION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 18

Liberation Day, or Evacuation Day, commemorates the complete independence of Egypt after 70 years as a British colony (1882–1952). On this day in 1953 then President Gamal Abdel Nasser hoisted the Egyptian flag in Port Said. This was the last post from which British forces had been evacuated, signaling the restoration of Egypt's sovereignty. The day is marked by official government ceremonies and speeches.

❁ REVOLUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 23

Revolution Day marks the overthrow of the monarchy under King Farouk and the proclamation of the republic in 1952. The revolution was a turning point in the history of Egypt. It put an end to British rule and restored the dignity, stature, and rights of the people of Egypt.

Egyptians celebrate Revolution Day with parades in the city streets. Homes, government offices, and buildings are adorned with bright lights. Grand feasts are a part of the celebration and always include special sweets.

❁ ARMED FORCES DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 6

On October 6, 1973, Egyptian forces crossed the Suez Canal during the war against Israel. Eight years later in 1981 Egypt's President Sadat was assassinated while watching an aerial display at the Armed Forces Day parade.

The day is still celebrated in Egypt, and the Armed Forces Day parade remains an annual feature. Soldiers demonstrate their close-order drill proficiency by carrying colored flags and marching in formation. There is an elaborate air show, in which airplanes fly very close together at high speed.

Religious Holidays

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: January 6–7

The majority of Christians in Egypt belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church. In Egypt, Christmas is celebrated on January 7 because the Coptic Church follows the Julian calendar, not the Gregorian calendar used by the Roman Catholic Church. It is a very special celebration in Egypt since the holy family, fearing King Herod's persecution after Jesus' birth, had fled to Egypt from Bethlehem and lived there with the infant Jesus for almost four years. Prior to Christmas Coptic Christians fast for 40 days. During this period, no meat, poultry, or dairy products are consumed.

On Christmas Eve people wear new clothes to attend church. In Cairo at Saint Mark's Cathedral, the pope of the Orthodox Church begins prayers at 11 P.M., which are broadcast on Egyptian TV. Later everyone returns home to eat a special meal, known as *fata*. On Christmas Day they visit friends and relatives and take a kind of shortbread called *kaik* to give to their friends.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

On this day in 622 C.E. Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina, which is about 200 miles to the north. The Muslim calendar starts from this date, and the first month is known as Muharram. Egyptians celebrate this day by wearing new clothes. The children are given sweets wrapped in colored paper. Adults visit friends and family to wish them a happy new year.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Coptic Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Coptic Easter occurs in March or April according to the Coptic solar calendar. It is the most important feast for Coptic Christians or Copts because it celebrates Jesus' Resurrection. During this day the faithful follow a vegan diet. The day is spent with family and friends. Picnics are very popular, especially at the Urman Gardens in Cairo.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT

❁ SHAM EL NESSIM

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: First Monday after Coptic Easter

Sham El Nessim falls on the first Monday after Coptic Easter and has been celebrated for more than 4,500 years. Sham El Nessim literally means "sniffing the breeze." *Sham* means "smell," and *el nessim* means "air." This day celebrates the start of the harvest season.

In ancient times, salted fish, lettuce, and green onions were offered to the gods to ensure a good harvest. In modern-day Egypt, traditional food is eaten to celebrate the day. People eat a variety of salted fish known as *fiseekh*. Eggs are dyed in bright colors and symbolize the renewal of life. People pack food and go for picnics to enjoy the spring.

Although it is not essentially a Muslim holiday, Muslims and Christians alike celebrate Sham El Nessim all over Egypt.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HARVEST FESTIVALS; ISLAM; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ MOULOU

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

Mouloud marks the birth of Muhammad. In Egypt special prayers are chanted, and the cities and towns are decorated with bright lights. Pink candles are sold in the streets. These candles are usually in the shape of a horse or a doll. People wear their best clothes and meet friends and relatives to enjoy the holiday. Sweets are available all over.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOU

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

In Arabic, *eid* means "festivity." Eid al-Fitr is probably the most important Islamic holiday and marks the end of the month-long fast of Ramadan. In Egypt the festivities last for three days. Synonymous with new clothes and gifts, this day is marked with visits to mosques and cemeteries. Traditionally children receive a small amount of money, known as *eidyah*, from their elders. People greet each other by saying, "Eid Mubarak," which means, "Have a blessed Eid." Egyptians illuminate lanterns and families get together for a traditional feast.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, the Festival of Sacrifice, commemorates the willingness of Ibrahim (Abraham) to sacrifice his son to on God's command. Just as Ibrahim was about to kill his son God substituted a ram for the boy. To

commemorate that biblical event each family that can afford it sacrifices a goat or sheep and distributes a part of the meat to the poor. At this time of the year each Muslim is expected to make a pilgrimage, called the hajj, to Mecca. This is to be done at least once in a lifetime if it is both physically and financially feasible. At the end of the journey, after sacrificing a goat or sheep, the pilgrims have to shave their heads or cut off a lock. This time of the year is also considered an auspicious time for marriages.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

Regional Holidays

✿ THE FESTIVAL OF THE FERTILITY GOD MIN

Observed in: Northern Egypt
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March-April

In ancient Egypt Min was the god of fertility and sexuality. It was believed that Min could empower pharaoh to father a child. Lettuce is considered the sacred plant of this god. Wheat was offered to the deity to symbolize the start of the harvest season, and bouquets of flowers were offered to please him. There was a religious procession led by the king, after which people took part in music, dancing, and sports. The festival of Min is still celebrated at the start of the harvest season. In northern Egypt the festival is celebrated as a thanksgiving holiday with food, drink, music, and dancing. The date is set according to the lunar calendar at the start of the harvest season

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

✿ ABU SIMBEL SUN FESTIVAL

Observed in: Abu Simbel
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: February 22 and October 22

Pharaoh Ramses II (1279–13 B.C.E.) built the impressive Abu Simbel temple, which measures 108 feet high and 125 feet wide. Both sides of the temple are flanked by majestic 65-foot tall statues of Ramses II. The temple faces the east and was built at an angle such that twice a year, once on the date of the birth of Ramses II and again on the anniversary

Hymn Sung in Praise of Min

Min, Lord of the Processions,
 God of the High Plumes,
 Son of Osiris and Isis,
 Venerated in Ipu,
 Gebtu's Horus of the Strong Arm.



Egyptian Muslim women perform the morning prayers for Eid al-Adha, the feast of sacrifice that commemorates Abraham's obedience to god, outside Mustafa Mahmoud mosque in Cairo. (AP Photo/Amr Nabil)

of his accession to the throne, the first rays of the morning sun filter through the structure to illuminate the inner sanctum. The sight is breathtaking, and crowds throng the temple before sunrise on these two days to see the spectacular phenomenon. Later in the day there are celebrations on the grounds outside the temple.

Rites of Passage

✿ BIRTH

In Egypt, prior to the birth of a baby, the woman's family prepares clothes and essentials like soap and powder. All the items are put in silk bags along with gold and silver coins as gifts to be given at birth.

The Egyptians believe that the number seven is very lucky. The seventh day after the birth is called the *sebou* and is marked with special celebrations and rituals. The baby is washed and dressed in new clothes. A sheep or a lamb is slaughtered, and a grand feast is prepared. Salt is scattered in the house to keep the evil eye, bad spirits, and diseases away from the baby. The infant is placed in a cradle and carried around the house. The mother steps over the child seven times without touching it. Finally bags of

sweets and gold and silver coins are distributed to the guests.

❁ COMING OF AGE

The ritual of genital cutting (female genital mutilation, FGM) in women, when they come of age, originated in Egypt more than 2,000 years ago. In some parts of Egypt this rite is still practiced among Muslims, who derived the practice from earlier times. FGM is practiced by both Muslims and Coptic Christians in Egypt, particularly in the southern part of the country. The girls who live in these societies do not have a choice and are forced to go through with the ritual. Fully 97 percent of the women in Egypt have been genitally mutilated.

A presidential decree in 1958 prohibited FGM, making it punishable by a fine and imprisonment. In July 1996 Health Minister Ismail Sallam banned all licensed health professionals from performing FGM, but in June 1997 an Egyptian court overturned the ban. In his decision Judge Abdul Aziz Hammade stated that FGM was a form of surgery that doctors have the legal right to perform without interference from ministerial bodies. The health minister and the head of Egypt's medical syndicate have appealed the court's decision, and the Sheikh of al-Azhar, the highest religious authority in the country, has declared his support for the ban. The health minister has announced that his July 1996 ban will remain in place until the appeal process is completed.

In ancient Egypt, young boys were circumcised between the ages of 6 and 12. This process involves cutting all or part of the foreskin of the penis. Today this ritual has deep religious significance for Muslims, symbolizing a boy's initiation into manhood. The circumcision is often performed at home by a trained professional and is an occasion for big parties.

❁ MARRIAGE

In Egypt, the engagement of a man and woman involves the exchanging of rings; the groom also gives other jewelry to his wife-to-be. An elaborate feast is held to celebrate the engagement. Between the time of the engagement and the wedding itself, the couple's families prepare a new home for the couple to live in once they are married.

The night before the wedding day is called the henna night. The women go to the bride's house and sing and dance, and the bride's hands and feet are decorated with henna. On the wedding day the marriage is registered by a *maazon*, a priest who has an official license to register the marriage contract. In the evening there is a grand party where the guests eat, sing, and dance. Later the bride and groom are

taken to their new house, and green wheat is showered on them to symbolize fertility.

❁ DEATH

Ancient Egyptians believed in life after death. It was believed that, to enable the soul to pass into the next life, the body of the dead person must be preserved. This process of preservation was called mummification. In ancient Egypt a long, drawn-out ritual was followed to mummify the body of the dead.

This specialized embalming procedure usually took about 70 days. To begin the body was washed, and the hair was removed. The brains were also removed and thrown away. The body was then dried and wrapped in bandages. The mouth of the mummy was left open to enable the deceased to breathe and eat. Finally the body was perfumed, and the head was stuffed with sawdust. Artificial eyes were inserted. After elaborate religious rituals the mummified body was placed in a coffin made of reeds then put in a tomb made of bricks and wood with the name of the deceased inscribed on it. The interiors of the tombs were painted with elaborate inscriptions describing food, drink, and other essentials that the person might need in the next life.

Naturally these rituals could end up costing quite a bit of money, and only the wealthiest citizens and royalty could afford the most costly procedures. Common folk made due with much more modest ceremonies.

In modern Egypt, the more simple Muslim burial practices prevail. The body is washed, clothed in special garments, and buried.

Further Reading

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Fun Fact

Marriage between relatives is quite common in Egypt. Among ancient Egyptian royalty brothers and sisters were married to each other to concentrate wealth and power in the same family.

El Salvador

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Central America, bordering the North Pacific Ocean, between Guatemala and Honduras
Size	8,124 sq. mi.
Capital City	San Salvador
Flag Description	The flag of El Salvador has three equal horizontal bands of blue (top), white, and blue with the national coat of arms centered in the white band; the coat of arms features a round emblem encircled by the name República de El Salvador en la América Central.
Independence	September 15, 1821 (from Spain)
Population	6,704,932 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Salvadoran
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Mestizo (90%)
Major Language(s)	Spanish; Nahuatl (among some Amerindians)
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (83%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day, September 15; Columbus Day, October 12; First Cry of Independence, November 5

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Before the Spanish conquest El Salvador was home to the Pipils, speakers of a dialect of Nahuatl, whose heritage is a mix of several cultural and language groups joined by conquest and later by culture. The earliest, a nomadic people, arrived in Central America about 3000 B.C.E.

They were influenced by the Mayans, who controlled this area until the ninth century, although this mixed culture was not as complex as that found in Mexico and Guatemala. Another nomadic group the Izalco Pipil, who were related to the Toltecs and the Aztecs, may have moved into this part of Mesoamerica in the 10th century, situating themselves in what is now called El Salvador. Their stories and archaeological excavations indicate that this group may have moved south, fleeing conflict in the Toltec Empire. These later immigrants developed a nation known as Cuzcatlán (“Land

of Jewels”), incorporating some Mayan speakers peacefully as a result of trade.

The first Spanish attempt to colonize El Salvador in 1524 failed when Pedro de Alvarado (1495–1541) was forced to flee. In 1525 his second effort succeeded, and Spanish rule was established in this part of Latin America. The Spaniards called the land El Salvador (“the savior”), believing that the gold they found would increase their resources and fortunes. Unfortunately gold proved not to be as plentiful as they had hoped, and panning for it (a method of extraction from riverbeds) proved time-consuming.

The agriculture and economy of El Salvador flourished over the next two centuries. Although gold prospecting had proved futile, landowners realized the value of plantation farming and Spanish settlers seized most of the land. Local rebels were enslaved and forced to work in the fields with the African slaves.

By the late 17th century, however, Spain’s power began to diminish, and the 18th and 19th centuries saw a further decline in its powers. Napoleon’s (1769–1821) conquest of the Iberian

Xipe Totec

The Aztec god of agriculture and the changing seasons, especially springtime, Xipe Totec embodied the cycle of death and rebirth. Central to his cult was the notion that the outer “husk,” or skin, must be removed in order for the inner substance to grow. Just as a shoot of corn springs up from the kernel once its hard outer shell splits and falls away, Xipe Totec was believed to flay himself so that the people might have food. After his skin was removed he became a shining, golden god. In order to replicate

this divine miracle of growth every spring his priests offered human sacrifices to him, ensuring a bountiful harvest. The people sacrificed were flayed alive, and their skins were worn by the priests in later rituals. These sacrifices symbolized the Earth’s regeneration and the development of new life.

The cult of Xipe Totec and its sacrificial rituals is similar to the European cult of the Corn God, who must be sacrificed every spring to ensure rebirth and the fertility of the land and its people. Xipe Totec’s name means, “Our Lord, the Flayed One.”

Peninsula (Spain and Portugal) in 1808 gave the people of El Salvador an opportunity to gain their freedom. Salvadorans proclaimed independence in 1811, only to be crushed by the troops dispatched by the viceroyalty of Guatemala. Not until 10 years later in 1821 did El Salvador and the other Central American provinces finally gain their independence from Spain. After a brief period of annexation to the Mexican Empire from 1822 to 1823 under Emperor Agustín de Iturbide (1783–1824), the United Provinces of Central America was formed under General Manuel José Arce (1786–1847). This federation was dissolved in 1838, and El Salvador became an independent republic.

Frequent revolutions disturbed El Salvador’s early history as an independent. The presidents drawn from the military remained sympathetic to the conditions of the underclass, but reforms were repeatedly thwarted by opposition from the wealthier citizens. At the same time there were attempts to form a Central American union, but none succeeded.

In the 20th century, there was less civil unrest, and the years from 1900 to 1930 were relatively stable. The Depression of 1931–32 was a harsh time and led to further political upheavals. General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez (1882–1966) enjoyed the longest presidency (1932–45).

Martínez was anticommunist, as evidenced by his handling of Farabundo Martí’s rebellion.

In 1932 the Marxist Augustín Farabundo Martí (1893–1932) led a rebellion that the armed forces ruthlessly crushed. The troops’ actions were severe enough to be termed *la matanza*, “the massacre.” Thirty thousand were killed, and Martí was executed by firing squad. Thereafter the military controlled El Salvador’s politics. This was a period of guided reforms. During World War II Martínez aligned the country with the Allies.

In July 1969 El Salvador invaded Honduras in the short Football War, and the two countries clashed again in 1976. The period that followed, lasting until 1992, was one dominated by civil war and human rights abuses. Finally the Peace Agreement between the government and the rebels in 1992 ended the civil

war. The agreement was signed as part of the Chapultepec Peace Accords in Mexico and allowed the guerillas to form a political party and participate in the electoral process. The military was reined in and barred from civilian action. In 1993 investigations by the Truth Commission under UN auspices recommended the removal of human rights violators from political and military posts and the institution of judicial reforms. Amnesty was granted to certain offenders and a land-transfer program was initiated. Soldiers and former guerillas both benefited from this process.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

El Salvador is the smallest Central American country and the only one without a Caribbean coastline. Two parallel mountain ranges run east to west, dividing the country into two regions: mountains and the central plateau, and coastal plains (Pacific lowlands). The southern mountain range is made up of more than 20 volcanoes. Eruptions are rare, but earthquakes are frequent because of the range’s location at the juncture of three geologic plates. Río Lempa is the only navigable river. There are numerous volcanic lakes in the interior highlands.

The climate is tropical with pronounced wet and dry seasons; the rainy season (winter) lasts from May to October, while the dry season (summer) lasts from November through April. Temperatures vary according to elevation but change little from season to sea-

Fun Fact

Evidence of an Olmec presence in the region from at least 2000 B.C.E. exists in what is known as the Olmec Boulder, a stone sculpture of a giant head found near Chalchuapa in western El Salvador.

United Provinces of Central America

The United Provinces of Central America was formed in 1823. This federation was composed of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. Los Altos joined the federation in the 1830s.

The Football War

The Football War (or Soccer War), which took place in 1969, lasted only 100 hours. El Salvador and Honduras were playing a two-leg qualifying round for the 1970 Football World Cup and accused one another of ill-treating visiting supporters. The underlying cause was land reform in Honduras, which distributed land to Honduran peasants at the expense of some 300,000 Salvadoran peasants who had illegally immigrated to Honduras in search of farm land. The mass return of the Salvadoran peasants caused tremendous social and political upheaval in El Salvador. On July 14, 1969, the Salvadoran Army launched an offensive against Honduras. The Organization of American States (OAS) negotiated a cease-fire and Salvadoran troops withdrew in early August. The two nations signed a peace treaty on October 30, 1980, requiring them to put their dispute before the International Court of Justice.

son. While the Pacific lowlands are uniformly hot, the central plateau and mountain areas are relatively moderate. The country has many beautiful natural features; the most remarkable is the Montecristo Cloud Forest, part of the Parque Nacional Montecristo on the border shared with Guatemala and Honduras, where toucans, pumas, rare spider monkeys, two-fingered anteaters, and striped owls dwell.

ECONOMY

The Salvadoran economy has been growing at a steady, moderate pace since the signing of the Peace Agreement in 1992, which ushered in an environment of improved investor confidence and increased foreign investment. El Salvador has initiated a series of free-market policies, including the privatization of the banking system, telecommunications, public pensions, electrical distribution and some electrical generation, reduction of import duties, elimination of price controls, and enhancing the investment climate through measures such as improved enforcement of intellectual property rights.

One of the biggest challenges in El Salvador has been to offset the decline in the coffee sector—once the backbone of the economy—and to develop a more diversified economy. Another serious obstacle El Salvador must deal with is the trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation in other countries as well as a source country for forced labor.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

El Salvador's population is predominantly Roman Catholic although Salvadoran culture is a synthesis of

Catholic and indigenous traditions. During the long war with Honduras, the government targeted the church for violence because it sympathized with the poor, which was equated with supporting communism as well. Many abandoned Catholicism as a result and Protestantism, especially its evangelistic sects, provided welcome alternatives. Spanish is the national language and, although indigenous languages are no longer in daily use, there is some academic interest in preserving the Pipils' Nahuatl language.

Although most of the music heard on Salvadoran radio is standard pop fare from the United States, Mexico, or other countries in Latin America, a small underground movement exists—*canción popular* (“folk music”)—which focuses on current events in El Salvador. El Salvador's artistic sensibilities are also evident during religious and public festivals when the plazas are filled with dancers and the streets with floats and parades, musicians, and street artists; clowns and crowds alike are garbed in festive colors.

Poetry is also popular, and well-known Salvadoran writers include Manlio Argueta (b. 1935) and leftist poet Roque Dalton (1935–75). La Palma is famous for the school of art established by Fernando Llorca (b. 1949). The town of Ilobasco is known for its ceramics, while the textile arts produced in San Sebastián are much sought after.

CUISINE

The most common and distinctive Salvadoran food is the *pupusa*, a thick corn tortilla filled with soft, white cheese or refried beans. The people consume rice and beans, which when “wedded” together are called *casamiento* (“marriage”), and enjoy such regional dishes as *chicharrones* (chunks of fried pork fat). El Salvador's location on the Pacific Ocean also provides a great deal of fresh seafood, including oysters and clams. Like residents of many Pacific nations, Salvadorans often prefer to prepare their fish as *seviche*, a dish in which the fish is prepared by marinating it in lime juice and spices.

Licudados (fruit drinks), coffee (for which the country is justly well known), and *gaseosas* (“soft drinks”) are ubiquitous. Tic-Tack and Torito are vodka-like spirits made from sugarcane and should be avoided by those who wish to keep their stomach lining.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

New Year's Eve is an international holiday marking the end of one year and the beginning of the new. In El Salvador much of the emphasis is on preparations for the New Year's parties and entertainment that will continue into the next day. New Year's Eve welcomes the coming year even as it marks the end of a

Fun Fact

The Pipil brought with them the gods Tlaloc, the god of rain, and Xipe Totec, who required human sacrifices.

period of remembrance of the last year. In El Salvador, the first day of the new year is traditionally a time for family gatherings, though many Salvadorans prefer to spend the day at the beach.

✿ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

International Labor Day, also called Workers' Day and May Day, acknowledges the vital role and contributions of workers across the world. The Labor Day celebration has a tenuous U.S. origin but is associated more prominently with international socialism. The first Labor Day occurred in 1890, established in 1889 by the Second International to coincide with a general strike in the United States to win the eight-hour workday. Since then International Labor Day has always been more radical than the U.S. observance in early September. In El Salvador trade unions organize a parade in recognition of the day. Government and public enterprises, along with schools and many businesses, remain closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

✿ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 15

Independence Day in El Salvador is marked by military parades and joyful public celebrations. El Salvador officially won its independence on September 15, 1821, after three centuries of Spanish rule. The country's liberation was eventually made possible by a series of rebellions and the gradual weakening of Spain. Napoleon's conquest of the Iberian Peninsula signaled the collapse of the Spanish Empire and Spain soon lost El Salvador, Guatemala, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua.

At 7:00 A.M. on September 15 students and musical bands commence their march into the capital city of San Salvador. Students dress in blue and white uniforms representing the colors of the national flag. Special ceremonies are also held at the square, Plaza Libertadad, in downtown San Salvador. Various public events display the nations' traditional music and dances such as the merengue and salsa.

✿ COLUMBUS DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 12

Columbus Day (also called Discovery of America Day) celebrates the arrival in the Americas by Christopher Columbus. In El Salvador there are huge celebrations including fairs and festivals held in coordination with local churches. This day is also called Day of Indigenous and Aboriginal Races. In the late 20th century there was a reexamination of

the Europeans' abuses of the native peoples of the Americas, and celebrations in recent years have acknowledged the contributions of these people and their suffering under European domination. In recognition of this exhibitions of indigenous popular art, music, and rural life are also held on this day.

✿ FIRST CRY OF INDEPENDENCE

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 5

On November 5, 1811, in the capital city of San Salvador, José Matías Delgado (1768–1833, founder of the Central American Nations) vigorously demanded independence from Spanish rule. This is known as the First Cry of Independence. El Salvadorans pay homage to this great freedom fighter and also remember other patriots who were involved in the struggle for freedom.

Fun Fact

The currency of El Salvador is the colón, named after Cristóbal Colón (Christopher Columbus).

Religious Holidays

✿ ASH WEDNESDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First day of Lent

Ash Wednesday, also called Day of Ashes and Holy Wednesday, marks the beginning of the Christian period of abstinence known as Lent. On Ash



An Indian leader holds up burning incense during a ceremony with the members of the Association of Indigenous Salvadoreans (ANIS) on the Day of Races also known as Columbus Day. The group commemorated the death of their ancestors following the arrival of the Spanish in the Americas in 1492. (AP Photo/Luis Romero)

Wednesday, the faithful attend church to have their foreheads marked with ashes in the shape of a cross. In the Old Testament ashes were found to have been used for two purposes: as a sign of humility and mortality and as a sign of sorrow and repentance for sins. The day is commemorated with religious services.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT

HOLY WEEK

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Last week of Lent

Holy Week is the week preceding Easter Sunday. Beginning with Palm Sunday, the week is one of contemplation of the last week of Jesus' life on Earth. Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday are the three important days observed before Easter. During this period across El Salvador there are religious processions in which people hold aloft images of Jesus carrying the cross. There are also parades featuring colorful floats. People participate in Masses and religious services, which are held each day during this week. On Good Friday the city streets are closed to traffic and street artists re-create religious scenes on the pavements and the roads, using dyed sawdust, colored salt, and flowers. The celebrations come to a close with the special Mass and procession on Easter Sunday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

For Christians, Easter is considered the most important Christian festival, and its numerous celebrations and observances form the core of the liturgical year, which begins around the time of the vernal equinox in the Northern Hemisphere (the autumnal equinox in the Southern Hemisphere) and stretches out into summer in the northern hemisphere (winter in the Southern Hemisphere). This occasion celebrates the resurrection of Jesus three days after his Crucifixion. Christians believe Jesus was the son of God, and died on the Cross to redeem humanity from sin. After rising from the dead, Jesus traveled in various parts of the Holy Land for 40 days before ascending to heaven. Worship services begin before daybreak. Parades and feasts are held across the country.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT

FEAST OF SAN SALVADOR

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: First week of August (3 Days)

The first week of August is devoted to the celebra-

tion of Jesus, the country's patron, El Salvador del Mundo (Savior of the World). A life-size image of Jesus is taken around the local Catholic churches in the weeks before the ritual of La Bajada is performed. On the day of La Bajada there is an early morning Mass, after which the image is taken to a public place or city square. The ritual of La Bajada is then performed. This involves the lowering of the icon into a giant globe. While the icon's dark purple robes are removed inside the globe, the raucous crowd grows silent and reflective. After several minutes, the Jesus figure is slowly lifted out again in glistening white robes (symbolic of the transfiguration). A crest of El Salvador is embroidered at the base of his robe. The spectators shout, "Viva El Salvador!" (with its double meaning), and applaud as the figure rises. The liveliest celebrations are held in San Salvador, the capital city, replete with fairs, carnival rides, food, soccer games, and a display of fireworks.

ALL SOULS' DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: November 2

All Souls' Day, also called Memorial Day or Day of the Dead, is a Catholic festival in remembrance of family and friends who have departed from this world. This is a day steeped in antiquity: Seventh-century monks observed a remembrance and mass for dead monks of their order. It also has its roots in the pagan belief that dead family members return for a meal. Salvadorans visit local cemeteries to pray for their ancestors, and flowers and cypress wreaths are placed on the graves of loved ones. On All Souls' Eve candles in glass lanterns are placed around the graves or at the base of tombstones. The mood on this occasion is somber and people eat tamales, chicken or pork (sweet or salty), and sliced pumpkin cooked with brown sugar.

See also Volume III: ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

VIRGEN DE GUADALUPE

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: December 12

The Virgen de Guadalupe is an aspect of the Virgin Mary regarded as the patron of the Americas. The celebration harks back to a divine phenomenon that occurred in Mexico. The Virgin appeared to Juan Diego, a baptized Indian, on December 9, 1531, on Tepeyac hill. The beautiful dark-skinned lady revealed herself as the Virgin Mary and called him "my son." She asked that the bishop be told to build a church on the site. Diego approached the bishop and was asked for evidence of his incredible report. Diego saw the Virgin again on December 12 on the same hill and was asked to take roses from the barren hill as proof. When Diego returned to the bishop and let the roses slip from his cloak, the Virgin's image was imprinted on the fabric. The cloak is

preserved at the Basilica of Guadalupe and has remained intact.

El Salvador, like other Latin American countries, celebrates this miracle with processions, prayers, dances, and fireworks. At some churches, worshippers maintain a vigil by arriving at the church at 3 A.M. and waiting for the church to open at 4 A.M. As part of the service the priest recounts the miraculous events surrounding this day. Other names for this celebration are Day of our Lady of Guadalupe and Fiesta of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas Eve, the evening before Christmas day, is a remnant of the ancient custom of calculating a new day from sunset rather than midnight. Christmas therefore used to begin on Christmas Eve. In El Salvador celebrations begin for Catholics after Midnight Mass (*Misa del Gallo*). Children celebrate with fireworks and await the arrival of Santa Claus, who brings them presents. A majority of Salvadoran homes have an ornately decorated Christmas tree and a miniature nativity scene accompanied by scenes of ancient Bethlehem. The day is one of family gatherings and traditional dinners. There are church services, traditional Christmas songs, and poetry readings. The Christmas tree is the center of the festivities.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ SAN MIGUEL'S CARNIVAL

Observed in: San Miguel

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 13–31

San Miguel's Carnival (*El Carnaval de San Miguel*) is one of the biggest annual celebrations in the city of San Miguel. The city is brightly lit up for the Carnival and hosts myriad dances and games, while the marimba bands have people dancing in the main streets. A number of food stalls serve a wide range of dishes. The statue of Mary La Reina de la Paz is carried in a procession around the city. Celebrations conclude with firecrackers and parties that last late into the night.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY

Rites of Passage

❁ MARRIAGE

As in many other Latin American countries, marriage as a religious or civil ceremony was not prevalent in El Salvador in colonial times. Persistent poverty was probably the reason for this situation. Many Salvadoran couples, especially in rural areas, lived together in common-law or free unions. Women headed many families, and many children were born out of wedlock.

The modern Salvadoran wedding ceremony begins without the bride. The groom and the guests wait for her during the service. As soon as the wedding service starts a group of seven men leaves in seven white cars for the bride's home, where the bride is waiting for them with her family. The bride is then escorted to the church. Nuptial songs are played when she enters the church. After the marriage ceremony a small party is organized.

❁ DEATH

Salvadorans observe the Catholic Novena for nine days of mourning. According to Catholic tradition nine is the number most closely associated with grief. Friends and relatives gather at the home of the deceased for these days, and a feast is arranged on the ninth day.

Further Reading

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Equatorial Guinea

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Western Africa; borders the Bight of Biafra (a bay on the African coast in the Gulf of Guinea; it is also known as “Bight of Bonny”), between Gabon and Cameroon
Size	10,839 sq. mi.
Capital City	Malabo
Flag Description	The flag of Equatorial Guinea has three horizontal bands of equal size, green (top), white, and red. There is a blue isosceles triangle on the hoist side and the coat of arms is centered in the white band. There are six yellow six-pointed stars placed above a gray shield, which bears a silk cotton tree. Below the shield, a scroll displays the motto: “Unidad, paz, justicia” (“Unity, Peace, Justice”).
Independence	October 12, 1968 (from Spain)
Population	535,881 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Equatoguinean or Equatorial Guineans
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Bioko Island: Bubi and Fernandinos; Río Muni; Fangs
Major Language(s)	Spanish, French (both official); Pidgin English; Fang, Bubi, Ibo
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (85%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year’s Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Africa Day, May 25; President’s Day, June 5; Armed Forces Day, August 3; Constitution Day, August 15; Independence Day, October 12

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

It is thought that the Pygmies, hunter-gatherers of the equatorial rain forests, were the first inhabitants of the area now occupied by Equatorial Guinea. In the 17th century C.E. the Bantu tribes migrated into the region from the southern parts of Africa, and tribal warfare began between the indigenous Pygmies and the Bantu-speaking tribes. The Pygmies were unable to stand up to the might of the Bantus and were forced into the northern parts of the region. Today only a small number of Pygmies live in the forest regions of Equatorial Guinea.

The Bantu migrations brought the coastal tribes, sometimes called *playeros*, who came from the northeast and the Fang to the region. The Fang, in turn, may have produced the

Bubi, who emigrated to Bioko from Cameroon and the Río Muni region of Equatorial Guinea in several waves and supplanted former neolithic populations.

Fernando Pó (fl. 15th c.), a Portuguese explorer, was the first European to set foot in the region, and he paved the way for European domination. He landed on what is now Bioko Island in 1472, while seeking new routes to India. Enchanted by its beauty he named the island Floro Formosa, which means “pretty flower.” The island was later renamed for its discoverer and came to be known as Fernando Pó Island.

By 1474 the island of Fernando Pó and neighboring Annobon island were controlled by the Portuguese, who established a colony in the region. In 1778 the Portuguese entered into the Treaty of Pardo with Spain, which required Portugal to hand over the administration of Fernando Pó Island, its adjacent islets, and commercial rights to the mainland between the Niger and Ogooué Rivers to Spain in exchange for certain

South American territories. Thus began an era of Spanish domination in the region.

Spain's control remained intact until 1827, when the British, seeking to combat the slave trade, began to establish bases here between 1827 and 1843. Río Muni was declared a British Protectorate in 1843. This led to frequent skirmishes between the Spanish and the British armies over ownership of the mainland. In 1900 the Treaty of Paris resolved these disagreements, and Río Muni became a British colony while Spain was granted administrative control over the mainland territories.

Between 1926 and 1959 all the Spanish territories in the region were united, and the colony was collectively called Spanish Guinea. During their colonial reign the Spanish employed a large number of Nigerian laborers to work on the cocoa plantations, which formed the basis of the economy. They also built schools and encouraged education, so that, at one time Spanish Guinea had the highest literacy rate in this part of Africa.

In 1959 the Gulf of Guinea became part of Spain, and its name was changed to the Spanish Equatorial Region. A governor-general with both civilian and military authority was appointed. Local elections in the Spanish Equatorial Region took place that year, and the Equatoguinean representatives won seats in the Spanish Parliament. The two provinces into which the region was divided were granted limited autonomy under the Basic Law of December 1963. The region was renamed Equatorial Guinea, and, although the country was still ruled by the governor-general, the Equatorial Guinean General Assembly had the right to formulate laws and regulations.

The people of the region wanted complete independence, however, and protested against Spain's reluctance to grant the country autonomy. After mounting pressure from the UN and widespread anti-Spanish protests in the region, Spain relented and announced its decision to grant full independent status to Equatorial Guinea. Under the watchful eyes of UN observers, a public referendum was held in Equatorial Guinea on August 11, 1968, and its citizens voted unanimously in favor of a constitution that would establish a government led by a president who, in turn, would appoint the judges of the Supreme Court. Francisco Macías Nguema (1924–79) was sworn in as the first president of Equatorial Guinea in September 1968. Complete independent status was granted by Spain on October 12, 1968.

In July 1970 Macías declared the country a one-party state and abrogated key portions of the constitution in 1971. In 1972 he went a step further and declared himself president for life, establishing total control over the government. The Macías regime unleashed an era of terror in Equatorial Guinea, and more than one-third of the country's population was either killed or exiled. Education suffered as Macías ordered the closure of all schools in 1975. Religion

was suppressed, and all of Equatorial Guinea's churches were closed by 1978. Obsessed by his theory of "authenticity," which involved replacing colonial names with native names, Macías began by changing his own name from Francisco Macías Nguema to Masie Ngueme Biyogo. His name itself underwent subsequent transformations; by the end of his rule, he was called Masie Nguema Biyogo N'egue Ndong. Under his rule the island of Fernando Pó was renamed Macías Nguema Biyogo, Annabolo Island was renamed Pagalu, and the capital of Santa Isabel became Malabo. He ordered the entire population to follow his example and drop their European names in favor of native ones.

Growing discontent among the people, however, began to manifest itself in protests and demonstrations. Finally in August 1979 Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo (b. 1942), Macías's nephew, led a coup against him, and Macías was tried and then executed for his crimes. Obiang assumed presidency of Equatorial Guinea in October 1979. The original names of the islands of Bioko (also Bioco) and Annobolo were restored.

Although Obiang continued as president in the early years of the 21st century as the result of successive electoral victories, outside observers see these elections as flawed. Locally, there have been occasional boycotts by opposition parties such as the Union Popular (UP) and the Convergence for Social Democracy (CPDS).

In March 2004 the government discovered a plot to overthrow the Obiang administration. Mark Thatcher (b. 1953), the only son of former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (b. 1925), was arrested in South Africa for his alleged role in the plot. Obiang, who may be suffering from prostate cancer, has no obvious successor, a situation that has started a political struggle within the Equatoguinean elite.

In 2004 in the course of its investigation into Riggs Bank, based in Washington, D.C., where most of Equatorial

Fun Fact

The Pygmies, among the oldest cultures in some regions of Africa, are renowned for the sheer complexity of their vocal music, which is characterized by density, counterpoint, communalism, and improvisation. It has been noted that the level of polyphonic complexity typical of Pygmy music was not reached until the 14th century C.E. in Europe.

Fun Fact

Equatorial Guinea is the only country in the world that has bestowed the status of god on its presidents. In 2003 the national radio of Equatorial Guinea announced that President Obiang is a god "in permanent contact with the Almighty" and can "kill anyone without being called to account."

Guinea's oil revenues were paid, the U.S. Senate found that at least \$35 million of those revenues had been siphoned off by Obiang, his family, and several senior officials in his regime. Obiang has denied any wrongdoing. In 2005 Riggs Bank paid \$9 million to Chile as restitution for helping Augusto Pinochet conceal government funds; but no restitution has been made to Equatorial Guinea.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in Western Africa, Equatorial Guinea is made up of two provinces: Bioko Island is located in the Bight of Biafra (the eastern bay of the Gulf of Guinea) and lies off the coast of Cameroon in North Africa, while the mainland area of Río Muni is flanked by Gabon in the south and east and Cameroon in the north.

Bioko Island has three extinct volcanoes and rich fertile volcanic soil, providing the perfect environment for the growth of vines and a wide variety of trees. Farmers spend most of their time trying to prevent the vines from encroaching on their cocoa plantations. The mainland region of Río Muni, also has thick vegetation, and its forested region is home to walnut and African mahogany trees. Equatorial Guinea is home to a wide variety of wild animals such as elephants, lions, and gazelle (antelope).

The three main rivers in the region are: the Río Campo (which forms the northern boundary), the Mbini River (which flows through the central parts), and Río Muni (a part of the southern boundary). The coastal plains of Río Muni have a number of valleys, which are separated by the scattered hills of the Crystal Mountains. The Mbini River (formerly Río Benito) divides the region into two roughly equal parts.

Equatorial Guinea has a tropical climate characterized by extremely hot temperatures and humidity. While it rains heavily on Bioko Island, mainland Río Muni is somewhat drier. The annual mean temperature is 81°F.

❁ ECONOMY

When Equatorial Guinea became independent, its citizens were among the most prosperous and well-educated in Africa. When the Spanish were in power they imported Nigerian labor to develop large cocoa plantations, and used the trade revenue to build an impressive system of schools and hospitals. However the repressive Macías regime decimated the country's infrastructure through pilferage, ignorance, and neglect. Approximately 60,000 Nigerian laborers left en masse in 1976, along with most other foreigners and skilled citizens, so that the country's economy collapsed.

Compounding the workforce problems is the fact that Equatorial Guinea is a transit and destination country for women and children trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation, involuntary

domestic servitude, and other forced labor. Women and children are brought into the country from West and Central Africa, principally neighboring Cameroon, Nigeria, and Benin. Women are trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation in Malabo, where demand is high due to the booming oil sector.

Currently agriculture is still the primary occupation, employing more than half the population, in spite of the fact that the neglect of the rural economy under successive oppressive regimes has diminished the possibility of agricultural growth. Fishing is also carried out extensively in the coastal areas. The recent discovery and exploitation of large oil reserves in the equatorial region, however, may provide a much-needed boost to the economy, but government and military officials and their families own most of the country's businesses. Financial aid and concessions provided by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank were discontinued in 1993, after reports of financial mismanagement and corruption emerged. The 2004 Riggs Bank Scandal, which involved the bank's conspiracy in an embezzlement by Obiang, has not improved the prospects for Equatorial Guinea's economic future.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

In Equatorial Guinea the Bantu-speaking Fang are the dominant ethnic group. Among the Fang sorcerers are important members of the community, and the power of black magic is both feared and respected. Special ceremonies take place within the community to ward off the evil eye. One of the prominent ceremonies is the *abira*, which is performed to purge evil from the community.

The coastal areas are inhabited by the *playeros*, or "beach dwellers," peoples with a long history of intermarriage with Europeans.

The Bubi are the native inhabitants of Bioko Island; after the arrival of the Europeans their population dwindled considerably. The region is also home to the Fernandos, descendants of slaves freed by the British in the 19th century. Although Spanish is an official language of Equatorial Guinea the Fang and the Bubi prefer speaking their own languages.

Almost 85 percent of the country's population is Roman Catholic, while 15 percent adhere to traditional animist beliefs.

Polygamy is the norm and in the case of divorce, the laws of inheritance favor men. Limited educational opportunities are provided for women, and they are not encouraged to pursue higher education at all.

Equatorial Guinea has a rich cultural heritage, and song and dance are especially important. The *balele* (a passionate dance) and *ibanga* (a suggestive dance) are popular and are usually performed during cultural feasts and on special holidays. Dancing is accompanied by an orchestra of three musicians, who typically play the xylophone, drums, *sanzas* (a small thumb piano made from bamboo), and bow harps.

The traditional folklore of the Fang is called *mvvet*, which is named after the guitarlike instrument of the same name played by Fang balladeers as they recite the legends of their people. Wooden trumpets, xylophones, and drums also feature in the *mvvet* (a name given to both the folklore and the musical instrument).

❁ CUISINE

Traditional Fang cuisine features *gari* (flour made from cassava, or manioc), which is cooked into a thick porridge and served with a spicy sauce made out of insects (such as caterpillars), leaves, and crushed gourd seeds. Mushrooms, snails, yams, and plantains are also familiar culinary ingredients. Skewered and cooked beef and chicken are commonly served with rice and a spicy sauce.

Palm wine, beer, and sugarcane juice are the favorite beverages, and many Equatorial Guineans brew their own palm wine and millet beer.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western (Gregorian) calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day throughout much of the world. As is the case in many countries, the celebrations in Equatorial Guinea begin on New Year's Eve (December 31). Parties are held throughout the country as people prepare to usher in the new year. A festive spirit pervades the entire nation as people eat, drink, dance, and sing through the night. As the clock strikes midnight, and the New Year announces its arrival, the night sky is lit up with fireworks. People greet each other and celebrate with a grand feast.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Labor Day, also called May Day or Workers' Day, commemorates the important role played by workers. The May 1 observance of Labor Day was declared by the international socialist movement in 1889 and scheduled to coincide with a general strike in the United States in 1890 called by the American Federation of Labor (AFL) to win an eight-hour workday. Labor Day is a national holiday in the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, and public and private institutions are closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

Palm Wine

Palm wine is made from palm sap. The sap is not heated but is stored in plastic containers and left to ferment naturally. Fermentation usually occurs within two or three hours after the sap is collected, making the alcohol content very high. Using various processing methods the wine is extracted from the sap and stored either for personal or commercial use.

❁ AFRICA DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 25

Africa Day, also called Organization of African Unity (OAU) Day, commemorates the decision of 32 nations to form a united Africa. In the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa these countries came together in 1963 and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was formed. This day marks their commitment to foster a spirit of camaraderie, working together for the overall development and betterment of the continent. The idea to form a unified African organization was the brainchild of the then president of the independent state of Ghana Kwame Nkrumah and the Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia.

The OAU works to promote peace, human rights, and unity among all African nations.

At present there are 53 member nations in the OAU, which has been instrumental in ending colonial rule in Africa as well as playing a key role in resolving regional disputes, internal conflicts, and wars.

Africa Day is a national holiday in Equatorial Guinea, and all public and private institutions are closed. Seminars and conferences are held to discuss the major issues confronting the continent.

❁ PRESIDENT'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 5

In Equatorial Guinea June 5 celebrates the birth of the president of the nation Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo. Born on June 5, 1942, Obiang is the nephew of the former president, Francisco Macías Nguema. He started his career in the military after attending prestigious colleges in Spain. He earned the rank of lieutenant after his uncle became president. After widespread protest against the oppressive regime of Macías, Obiang led a successful coup d'état on August 3, 1979, ousting his uncle. He was hailed as a national hero.

In honor of the president's birthday, June 5 has been declared a national holiday in Equatorial Guinea. A big birthday party, with an array of cultural programs and a lavish feast, is thrown in the

president's honor. All public and private institutions remain closed on this day.

ARMED FORCES DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 3

Armed Forces Day commemorates the historic coup d'état led by Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo against the oppressive regime of his uncle, the president of the Republic Francisco Macias Nguema. This day also pays tribute to the armed forces of the country (army, navy, and air force) and honors and recognizes the achievements of the military. Armed Forces Day celebrations are presided over by the president, and military parades are the central event of the day. The military strength of the nation is showcased through army drills and display of weapons.

CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 15

Constitution Day commemorates the adoption of a constitution by the Republic of Equatorial Guinea. On August 15, 1982, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea adopted a new constitution, drafted with the help of the UN Commission on Human Rights. It declared that the republic is a one-party state in which the president is to be elected for a period of seven years; legislators remain in office for five years. The people of Equatorial Guinea voted in favor of the constitution, and the government adopted it in 1982. Another constitution, allowing a multiparty system, was enacted by national referendum on November 17, 1991, and then amended in 1995. However the 1982 constitution is still celebrated as an important step toward democracy. Since this is a national holiday all government and private institutions are closed on August 15.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 12

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea was granted its independence in 1968 by Spain. Since 1472 Equatorial Guinea had been ruled by one European power after another. From 1472 until 1778 the Portuguese controlled the region. Then in 1778 they handed it over to Spain, beginning the era of Spanish dominance over Equatorial Guinea, which lasted almost 190 years.

The local residents expressed their unhappiness over Spanish rule, and voices of dissent took the form of nationwide demonstrations and protests. In order to pacify these protestors limited autonomy was given to the region by the Basic Law of 1963. This move however failed to appease the protestors, who intensified their agitation. The international

community also took notice of the situation and began pressuring Spain to end its colonial rule.

Spain relented under pressure, and on October 12, 1968, the Republic of New Guinea came into existence. Francisco Macías Nguema became the first president of the independent nation.

Independence celebrations in Equatorial Guinea are presided over by the president and are marked by official speeches that pay tribute to those who died for the cause of freedom, military parades, and receptions for foreign guests, as well as dance and musical performances.

Religious Holidays

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

This Christian holiday commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. It is a solemn occasion, and is also called Mourning Friday, Black Friday, or Sorrowful Friday. In Equatorial Guinea, devout Catholics attend a special Good Friday Mass. The life and teachings of Jesus are remembered, and devotional hymns are sung.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

For Christians Easter is considered the most important Christian festival, and its numerous celebrations and observances form the core of the liturgical year, which begins around the time of the vernal equinox in the Northern Hemisphere (the autumnal equinox in the Southern Hemisphere) and stretches out into summer in the Northern Hemisphere (winter in the Southern Hemisphere). This occasion celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus three days after his Crucifixion. Christians believe Jesus was the Son of God, and died on the Cross to redeem humanity from sin. Easter celebrations fall on the first Sunday following the 40-day observance of Lent. In Equatorial Guinea devout Catholics attend special church services on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus. In Equatorial Guinea Christians begin Christmas shopping well in advance of the day. They buy gifts and new

clothes and adorn their homes with lights, balloons, and ribbons.

On Christmas Eve, a festive spirit prevails. Devout Catholics attend a special Christmas Eve Mass where church choirs sing Christmas carols. After church people sing and dance through the night.

On Christmas Day people visit friends and family and exchange gifts and greetings. Music and dance performances are also part of Christmas celebrations. On Bioko Island, a version of the traditional *balele* dance (a passionate Fang traditional dance) is performed during Christmas festivities.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Rites of Passage

❁ DEATH

Among the Bubi when people are on their deathbed, their friends and relatives surround them in silence. After the person dies the women leave the house and mourn outside. A group of relatives wash the body and prepare the deceased for burial. Another group proceeds to the cemetery to dig the grave. The Bubi believe in burying the dead as quickly as possible.

Further Reading

Amnesty International, *Military Trials and the Use of the Death Penalty in Equatorial Guinea* (New York: Author,

Burial Practices among the Bubi

The Bubi believe that after death the soul follows the body of the person during the funeral procession. By carrying the body to the cemetery on an abandoned road, they believe that the soul will feel disoriented and frightened and so will not dare return to the village.

In ancient times the Bubi also believed that, after the burial, the soul would roam around the village and torment its inhabitants. When the funeral procession passed through the main road of the village, all the villagers closed their doors and windows to prevent the soul from entering their homes.

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∞ Eritrea ∞

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Eastern Africa, bordering the Red Sea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Sudan
Size	46,842 sq. mi.
Capital City	Asmara (formerly Asmera)
Flag Description	Eritrea's flag has a red isosceles triangle (with its base centered on the hoist side) that splits the flag's area leaving two right-angle triangles, one on either side of the red one; the upper triangle is green, the lower one is blue; a gold wreath encircling a gold olive branch is centered on the hoist side of the red triangle.
Independence	May 24, 1993 (from Ethiopia)
Population	4,561,599 (2005 est.)
Government	Transitional government
Nationality	Eritrean(s)
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Ethnic Tigrinya (50%); Tigre and Kunama (40%)
Major Language(s)	Afar; Arabic (in coastal areas); Tigre and Kunama; Tigrinya (in the highlands); other Cushitic languages; English
Major Religion(s)	Sunni Muslim (50%); Coptic Christian (43%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; International Women's Day, March 8; Independence Day, May 24; Martyrs' Day, June 20; Beginning of the Armed Uprising, September 1

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Along with the other countries in the Horn of Africa, Eritrea (official name, Hagere Ertra) forms part of the mythical "Land of Punt" or the "Land of Gods," of whose existence the Egyptian pharaohs spoke around 2900 B.C.E. Since ancient times, Eritrea has been known for trading in gold, frankincense, ivory, ebony, and slaves. The Pygmies of central Africa are the first known inhabitants, with a history in Eritrea dating back to around 8000 B.C.E. Eritrea got its present official name only after Italians arrived in the 19th century.

Eritrea had seen many wars since it came into existence, and had already changed hands several times when it became an Italian colony in 1885. As a colony Eritrea was the jewel of the Italian Empire, and Asmara, the capital, was thought to be among the finest cities of Africa, known for its art deco, modernist, and futurist architecture.

When the Italians left in 1945 the country came under British control. In 1952 following World War II the United Nations inadvertently gave Eritrea to Ethiopia as part of a federation. As a result of the UN decision the people of Eritrea began a long struggle for independence from this imposed government. Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie (1892–1975) triggered a 32-year-long armed conflict by openly initiating war against Eritrea in 1962.

The referendum of 1993 brought with it independence for Eritrea after an exhausting battle, by which much of its economic, social, and political life was adversely affected. Even after the war, unequal trade terms, coupled with Ethiopian access to Eritrean ports, jeopardized their relations. Hostility between these two countries has continued to simmer in the early years of the 21st century, and UN security forces, trying to maintain peace between them, patrol the border area.

President Isaias Afewerki (b. 1945) of the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) has ruled the country since

The Dahlak Archipelago

During Ethiopian rule the Dahlak Archipelago was made into a national park. A group of Eritrean freedom fighters took part in diving operations here against the Ethiopians during the war of independence. The feats of these freedom fighters account for Eritrea's diving industry today. The largest island in the archipelago, called Dahlak Kebir, was used as a military base by the Ethiopians.

In addition to sailing, scuba diving, and pearl fishing, tourists come to this island to see the ancient Arab inscriptions, Islamic and Turkish ruins, quaint Afar fishing villages, and massive cisterns. A major feature of the island's history is that it was an infamous channel for exporting slaves from the mainland to Arabia. Another island, called Nacura (situated to the west of Dahlak Kebir), was used for confining prisoners during colonial (especially Italian) rule.

1993. His is the only party allowed to operate. The president has been criticized for not bringing about democratic reforms and an end to censorship in Eritrea. Eritrea currently ranks 163 out of the 167 countries in terms of freedom of the press.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Eritrea can essentially be divided into three geographical zones: the dry desertlike eastern strip (including Denakil Desert, the most inhospitable region on Earth), the fertile central highlands, which receive 24 inches of annual rainfall, and the semi-arid western lowlands. The Anseba and the Barka Rivers run through the northern portion of Eritrea, and the Gash and Tekeze Rivers flow over the Ethiopian border into the Sudan. Amba Soira Mountain, rising to approximately 9,902 feet, is the highest point in Eritrea.

The upper portion of the Gash River is called the Mareb, and Eritrea was often referred to as Mareb Mellash, which means "this side of the Mareb River," and Bahrmeder ("Sealand"). In fact Eritrea derives its name from Mare Erythrean, the ancient Greek cartographic designation for the Red Sea. The 19th-century Italian colonizers made this name official.

The central part of Eritrea has cool temperatures that average about 64°F; the western zone has moderate temperatures of about 86°F, while the temperatures on the eastern strip can reach a blistering 122°F.

Retaining the entire coastline alongside the Red Sea was a very important point in the 1993 referendum in which Eritrea gained its freedom from Ethiopia. There are more than 200 islands in the Red Sea comprising the Dahlak Archipelago, and these became part of Eritrea after its independence.

The lowest point of Eritrea (246 feet below sea level) is called Kobar Sink; it lies in the Denakil Depression. In the Kobar Sink temperatures can get as high as 122°F, and during most years there is little rainfall. Being close to the Great Rift Valley the land has been stretched at this place, and lava oozes from below to solidify it. Although some water does

seep in from above, it evaporates as steam due to the high temperatures.

ECONOMY

Historically agriculture has dominated the plateau regions of Eritrea, where rainfall is sufficient, whereas raising livestock has been the major activity on the drier eastern coastal strip. At the time of the 1952 federation, when Eritrea was entrusted to Ethiopia by the United Nations, Eritrea was more developed industrially than Ethiopia. In fact the Italians and the British colonizers had set up Eritrea to produce raw materials for export. But the nation's annexation later caused the shutting down of most Eritrean industries, some of which were moved to Ethiopia.

After 1974 Ethiopia's government placed Eritrea's industries under state control. Private enterprise was discouraged, even though economic pressures mounted as the result of continuous conflicts, famine, and drought. By the time Eritrea won independence in 1993 its economy had already been devastated, and its resources plundered, leaving 75 percent of the population dependent on external aid for food. Promoting self-sufficiency and economic reconstruction became the most important agenda for the post-independence government.

The 1998–2000 war between Ethiopia and Eritrea cost the latter's economy dearly. Social problems such as unemployment, illiteracy, and low skills are widespread; private enterprise is being encouraged to promote economic growth. However, Presi-

Fun Fact

The Egyptians traded with the land they called Punt for trees, incense, cosmetics, and "exotic" animals. They may also have gotten their Pygmy god, Bes, from the culture of Punt.

Fun Fact

During the Eritrean War of Independence, fully functional sauna rooms were discovered on Nokra Island in the Dahlak Archipelago. These were used by Russian officers (the Russians were allies of Ethiopia), despite the scorching heat.

How Asmara Got Its Name

The origins of the name *Asmara* (the capital city of Eritrea) are 700 years old and not Italian as most would presume. It is said that four clans inhabited the Kebessa Plateau: the Geza Shelele, the Geza Gurtom, the Geza Asmae, and the Geza Serenser. These four groups unified (at their wives' suggestion) to defeat the preying bandits in that area, thus evolved the name *Arbaete Asmara*, which literally means, "the four are united" in the Tirigrinyan language.

dent Afewerki has received criticism for not implementing democratic reforms.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

In spite of being an interesting mix of cultures, religions, and languages that can lead to some ethnic friction, the Eritreans have continued to stand by

each other during their ongoing struggle against Ethiopia. About half the population is Christian and the other half Muslim, though most fall into distinct ethnic and linguistic categories. There are nine major ethnic groups in Eritrea and three distinct linguistic families—the Cushitic (Hamitic), the Semitic, the Nilotic. The Cushitic-speaking groups are the Sahos (of the eastern part), Bejas (of the western part), and Afars (of the southern tip). A small group of Kunamas, of Nilotic origin, remain in the province of Gash-Setit, and they have held onto their traditional religious beliefs, which involve venerating their ancestors and worshipping their creator god, Anna.

The Semitic languages are the most widespread languages spoken, especially Tigre (25 percent of the population) and Tirigrigna (50 percent of the population). The two best-known Nilotic languages—Kunama and Baria—are spoken in the lowland areas between the Setit and the Gash rivers.

Afar, Tigre, Kunama, Tirigrigna, and Arabic are

the most common languages spoken by the people. English is used in schools, from high school on.

Ancient Geez is the basis of another language that is unique to Eritrea. The Eritrean Orthodox Church is its custodian and continues to use Geez in its services.

As a place of rich cultural diversity the capital of Asmara boasts three major landmarks: the Al Khulafa Al Rashiudin Mosque, the Nda Mariam Orthodox Church, and St. Joseph's Catholic cathedral. The tall gothic bell of the cathedral tower in Asmara is used by people to find their way in case they get lost in the city.

The National Museum has exhibits of inscribed tombstones from the Dahlak Islands and artifacts (from excavations), in addition to other objects of local interest. There is also quite a lot of dance, music, and theater activity in the city.

The annual Festival Eritrea is celebrated on the Expo grounds of Asmara in late August. On this occasion the diverse ethnic groups converge in one place for concerts, trade fairs, and conferences.

CUISINE

Despite the varied species of fish found in the Red Sea and an abundance of lobster, shrimp, oysters, and crabs, Eritreans are traditionally meat-eaters. Two popular meat dishes are *tibsi*, fried meat with garlic and onions, and *kai wat*, meat in a highly spiced sauce. The staple food items are *kitcha* and *injera*. Both are kinds of pancakes prepared differently and using different ingredients. *Injera* is usually eaten with a stew called *zigni*, prepared from anything easily available (meat, eggs, or vegetables) in a spicy tomato sauce, which has the required portions of *berebere* (a mix of various spices and seeds crushed for flavor and added to most dishes for taste). Eritreans who cannot afford meat often eat *injera* with *shiro*, chickpea porridge, instead.

Vegetables, fruit, cereals, and peanuts are abundant owing to the vast stretches of fertile land in parts of Eritrea. Desserts are not included in the traditional Eritrean cuisine.

Eritreans eat with their fingers. Food is placed on a large plate on a low table. Eating begins after the woman of the house brings a basin for hand washing.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

New Year's is cause for widespread celebrations all over Eritrea. The country's leaders make a point of emphasizing the importance of individual and national self-sufficiency. In addition the press, which is government-run, remembers the martyrs of the

Fun Fact

The ancient Geez (or Giiz) language and script are thought to have developed in the Ethiopian Highlands as a peasant language, although the origins of both remain controversial. The Ethiopian imperial court later adopted it. Now Geez is the language used for services in the Eritrean Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church as well.

Fun Fact

The staple food in Ethiopia, *injera*, is a giant pancake made from various grains (such as maize or *teff*). It is spongier than *kitcha*, another kind of pancake, and takes between two and three days to prepare. The dough, which is fermented and later baked or fried, is eaten with *zigni* (a spicy stew).

struggle for independence from Ethiopia and celebrates the country's independence. The day brings with it new hope for future prosperity and the promise of a self-sufficient nation.

❁ INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 8

In 1993 the year of independence the women of Eritrea were granted legal rights unheard of in most countries in sub-Saharan Africa. These rights include the right to get a divorce, take custody of their children, own property, and hold 30 percent of the seats in the parliament. The power they achieved is quite exceptional and is frequently cited in women's studies programs in the United States and Europe.

The year 2005 marked the 25th anniversary of NUEW (National Union of Eritrean Women). On International Women's Day that organization, along with the UNMEE (UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea) organizes lectures and public meetings in the capital city Asmara, stressing the strength of Eritrean women and the need for their further empowerment. A delegation of members of these organizations visits villages to spread awareness about International Women's Day. Statistics on the state of women in Eritrea, as well as the future roles women can expect play, are provided by these organizations.

National Anthem of Eritrea

Ertra, Ertra, Ertra

The barbarian enemy humiliatingly defeated,
And martyrdom has paid for freedom.

Decades of devotion for purpose,
Your name became challenger, miraculous

Ertra, comfort for the oppressed,
Proved that truth can win after all.

Ertra, Ertra,

A sovereign state on Earth after all.

Dedication that led to liberation

Will build up and make her green

We shall honor her with progress.

We have a word to her to embellish.

Ertra, Ertra,

A sovereign state on Earth after all.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 24

Official independence was achieved in 1993, when 99.8 percent of the population voted yes to liberation from the Ethiopia. Independence Day, or Liberation Day, is celebrated all over the country with



Young soldiers parade in Asmara during Eritrea's Independence Day celebrations on May 24. Eritrea fought a 30-year war of independence against Ethiopia, which ended in 1991. (AP Photo/Sami Sallinen)

considerable enthusiasm. Peoples' clothes and the decorations around the city reflect the colors of the national flag. The festive mood is reflected by plays, music, and dances (relating to the freedom struggle), while the city is covered with posters and signs celebrating the country's hard-earned freedom.

MARTYRS' DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 20

Martyrs' Day is celebrated to honor the 65,000 martyrs who lost their lives fighting for the liberation of Eritrea between 1973 and 1993. The day was first observed two days after a peace accord between Ethiopia and Eritrea was signed after the 1998 war. There are official ceremonies to commemorate the dead patriots.

BEGINNING OF THE ARMED UPRISING

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 1

Fun Fact

The Julian calendar, in addition to the standard 12 months, also has a 13th month, called Pagume.

This holiday commemorates the first time that Eritreans were armed and united in a confrontation with Ethiopia. In response to a show of unity and strength by Eritrea, Ethiopians declared war on Eritrea in 1962 and tried to seize it completely. Those Eritreans supporting independence, both inside and outside the country, united to form the first organized military division called the ELF (Eritrean Liberation Front).

Religious Holidays

EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

This Muslim holiday, also called the Feast of Sacrifice, celebrates the patriarch (Ibrahim's) Abraham's absolute devotion and faith in God, evidenced by his willingness to sacrifice his young son because God commanded him to do so. Prior to this festival devout Muslims who are physically and financially capable of doing so undertake a hajj, or pilgrimage, to Mecca, the central city of the Islamic faith. A hajj is required by the Koran and the fifth pillar of Islam.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

CHRISTMAS

Celebrated by: Christians

Observed on: January 6–7

Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus. The Roman Catholic Church observes Christmas on December 25 because Pope Julius I (r. 337–52), who based it on the Gregorian calendar, fixed that date in 320. However, the Coptic Orthodox Church observes it on January 7 because its liturgical dates are calculated using the Julian calendar. Prior to Christmas, which is called Leddet in Eritrea, Coptic Christians fast for 40 days. They call this period Little Lent to distinguish it from the fast of Great Lent before Easter. During Little Lent, no meat, poultry, or dairy products can be consumed.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

EPIPHANY

Celebrated by: Christians

Observed on: January 19

The roots of this observance can be traced back to the Eastern Christian Churches, and it is an important observance in Eritrea. According to the Bible three Magi (Wise Men), named Melchior, Caspar, and Balthazar, spotted a bright star in the skies on the night Jesus was born. They followed the star to Bethlehem, found the infant Jesus there, and presented the divine child with gold, frankincense, and myrrh. On the eve of Epiphany, also called Timket ("baptism") in Eritrea, Orthodox Christians assemble outdoors and participate in colorful religious processions. There is drumming and singing while they parade behind the priest to the river. Here the faithful immerse themselves, reenacting Jesus' baptism. Epiphany is usually celebrated on the 19th except leap years, when it is celebrated on the 20th.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EPIPHANY

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

For Christians Easter is considered the most important Christian festival, and its numerous related celebrations and observances form the core of the liturgical year, which begins around the time of the vernal equinox in the Northern Hemisphere (the autumnal equinox in the Southern Hemisphere) and stretches out into summer in the Northern Hemisphere (winter in the Southern Hemisphere). This occasion celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus three days after his Crucifixion. Christians believe Jesus was the Son of God, and died on the Cross to redeem humanity from sin. Apart from its religious aspect the Resurrection symbolizes the resurgence of hope and a fresh lease on life for all human beings. It occurs at the end of the 40-day abstinence period of Lent, and celebrates Jesus' Resurrection. Orthodox Christian Eritreans call it Tensae, and the devout follow a vegan diet during Lent.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ MOULOU

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

Mouloud marks the birth of Muhammad and is a joyous holiday for all Muslims, with the exception of conservative sects, who believe that observing anyone's birth (even Muhammad's) diverts one from focusing on the worship due to Allah. In Eritrea people go to the mosque to remember Muhammad's life and teachings. Afterward there are parties and feasting.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOU

❁ ORTHODOX NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: September 11

The Orthodox New Year's Day Meskerem 1, also called Keddus Yohannes, is celebrated in accordance with the Julian calendar.

Many Eritreans attend church on New Year's Eve. In addition to church services, Eritreans celebrate the new year with family get-togethers. Torches, or *boyona boye*, made of dried leaves and tall, thick sticks, are set afire in front of homes, while the old and young sing. Girls go through neighborhoods singing New Year's songs; they are rewarded with gifts of food and money. Boys welcome the new year by visiting neighborhoods and wishing families a happy and prosperous new year. Like the girls they are given food and money for their efforts.

❁ MESKEL

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: September 27

Meskel, or Mashkela, commemorates the discovery (according to Orthodox Christians) of the true Cross (the one on which Jesus was crucified). Villagers carry torches to a clearing outside their village and prepare bonfires, then the celebrations begin with singing and dancing around the bonfires.

Priests in full ceremonial dress are in attendance. They bless a cloth, then drape it over the woodpile (*damera*) before it is set on fire. It is considered a bad omen if the *damera* doesn't fall toward the east as it burns. Once the fire goes out the ashes are used to make the Sign of the Cross on people's foreheads.

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Ramadan is considered the holiest month of the Islamic calendar. It was during this month that Muhammad observed austerity and fasted for 40 days, after which the Koran was revealed to him. Eid al-Fitr, one of two Islamic Eid festivals, celebrates the end of the month-long fast that devout Muslims observe from dawn to dusk during Ramadan. Muslim Eritreans celebrate with morning prayers at mosques, followed by social visits, exchanges of greetings and gifts, and feasting to end the period of fasting.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM

Regional Holidays

❁ FENKIL

Observed in: Massawa

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Mid-February

Operation Fenkil was a crucial military and psychological watershed event in Eritrea's struggle against Ethiopia. It was in 1990 that Massawa, Eritrea's main port on the Red Sea, was liberated under Operation Fenkil. Once the EPLF (Eritrean People's Liberation Front) had freed this port city, driving the Ethiopians out of the country suddenly became a possibility.

Featured events on this day are literary contests and sports competitions, including soccer matches and camel and cycling races.

❁ FESTIVAL ERITREA

Observed in: Asmara

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Ten days bridging the last week of August and the first week of September

Festival Eritrea is an annual event, which is held by the government of Eritrea in Asmara to showcase the art, culture, and traditions of all the ethnic groups of Eritrea. The event helps foster a spirit of unity among the populace and reflects their cultural diversity. It also serves as a foundation for economic growth.

This event provides a platform to pass on the rich cultural heritage to the next generation, thereby serving as a cultural investment. A host of cultural activities, music and dance performances, exhibits, and literary events are featured. Neighboring countries are invited to participate in the festivities and share their cultures. In exchange, versions of Festival Eritrea are held in other countries to create interest in, and familiarize people with, Eritrean culture.

Rites of Passage

❁ COMING OF AGE

For Eritrean women what is euphemistically called circumcision (now called Female Genital Mutilation [FGM]) takes place at one or two months of age.

FGM is carried out by almost all ethnic groups in Eritrea, and it is estimated that 90 percent of the women must live with its consequences. No law specifically prohibits FGM. Prior to winning independence from Ethiopia in 1991, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) undertook abolition campaigns in areas under its control with the stated aim of discontinuing the practice.

Men are also circumcised in Eritrea at a young age but without the damaging consequences of what is inflicted on girls and women.

❁ MARRIAGE

If you are a foreigner visiting Eritrea, and you happen to come across a wedding ceremony in progress, you'll be welcomed to join in and made the guest of honor. Marriages are occasions when anyone who

happens to pass by gets invited to the celebration. Bands playing loudly add to the festivities. Everyone feasts on *injera*, "good food," and *suwa*, "drink," but the best part of the celebration is eating the sumptuous wedding cake.

Further Reading

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Estonia

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Eastern Europe, between Latvia and Russia, bordering the Baltic Sea and Gulf of Finland
Size	17,462 sq. mi.
Capital City	Tallinn
Flag Description	The Estonian flag has three horizontal bands of equal size with the colors blue (top), black, and white.
Independence	February 24, 1918 (from Russia); August 20, 1991 (from Soviet Union)
Population	1,332,893 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary republic
Nationality	Estonian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Estonian (68%); Russian (27%)
Major Language(s)	Estonian (official, 67%); Russian (30%)
Major Religion(s)	Unaffiliated (34%); other/unspecified (32%); Christian (28%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Independence Day, February 24; Labor Day, May 1; Victory Day, June 23; Midsummer's Day, June 24; Independence Restoration Day, August 20

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Not much is known about the ancient history of Estonia, but archaeological evidence suggests that humans began to move into the region as the ice from the last glacial era withdrew 11,000 to 13,000 years ago. The oldest settlement in Estonia, established around 7500 B.C.E., was located on the Pärnu River, near the present town of Sindi. Around 3000 or 2000, Finno-Ugric hunters arrived in Estonia from southeastern parts of Europe and established settlements. They spoke a Finno-Ugric language (which is related to Estonian, Finnish, and Hungarian) that belongs to the Uralic language family (languages spoken in the region along the Ural Mountains).

By the first century Estonians had organized themselves into small male-dominated agrarian tribal clans. There were frequent skirmishes over regional dominance between Estonian tribes and neighboring Latvian tribes.

Until the 12th century Estonians had kept Christian Cru-

saders at bay and held strongly to their pagan beliefs. In 1193 at the instance of Pope Celestine III (r. 1191–98), Christians launched Crusades against the northern European pagans.

In 1217 German Crusaders launched an attack on Latvia and, after establishing their control over the region and forcing many Latvian tribes to accept Christianity literally at the point of a sword, they began raiding the northern parts of Estonia with the assistance of Latvian tribes, who were the Estonian's archrivals.

Estonians fiercely resisted these attacks. Many tribes joined forces under the leadership of the renowned Estonian commander Lembitu (d. 1217) and launched counterattacks on Latvian territories. However in the Battle of St. Matthew's Day (September 21, 1217), fought between German Crusaders and Estonian forces, Lembitu was killed. By 1219 Danish Crusaders, led by the king of Denmark Waldemar II (1170–1241) established control over northern Estonia. By 1227 the last of the Estonian tribes was defeated by the Crusaders, and Denmark and Germanic tribes colonized Estonia. Estonians were forced to embrace Christianity and were made to work as laborers. Although there were frequent raids by Russian Impe-

Fun Fact

While it is commonly believed that the word *pagan* refers to witchcraft and satanic practices, it is derived from the Late Latin *paganus*, “civilian” and means “peasant” or “country dweller.” It acquired its negative connotations as justifications for the Crusades and the Inquisitorial witch hunts that followed.

rial forces, the Germanic tribes and Denmark maintained control of the region.

In 1558 Russia invaded Estonia and established its rule over a considerable part of the country. This sparked the Livonian Wars that were fought between Russia and the kingdoms of Poland, Denmark, and Sweden. Eventually in 1561 Sweden took control of northern Estonia and by 1582–83 the southern parts of Estonia had surrendered to Poland. However Sweden invaded the Estonian territories under Danish and Polish control and by 1625 had established control over all of Estonia.

In 1725 during the Great Northern War Russia reclaimed Estonia and established its control over the region again.

In 1819 Russia abolished serfdom (bonded laborers) in Estonia, and the peasants were given ownership of their lands. Also under Russian rule Estonians came together as one people and began rediscovering their cultural roots. The Estonian language was adopted as the language of instruction in schools, and cultural festivals were held on a regular basis starting in 1869. At the beginning of the 20th century Estonians began voicing their demand for independence from Russian rule.

After World War I and the collapse of Imperial Russia in 1918 the Russian Provisional Government decided to give autonomous status to Estonia. As a result Estonians elected leaders to the Maapäev (political assembly of leaders), but due to opposition

by some extremists in the region, they were forced to go underground.

On February 24, 1918, the Maapäev declared Estonia’s independence from Russia. Just one day later, however, on February 25 German forces invaded Estonia. They remained in the region until the defeat of Germany at the end of World War I in November 1918. As the German forces withdrew from Estonia, Russian forces declared war on the country and tried to reclaim the region, but Estonian forces held their ground. On February 2, 1920, a peace treaty was signed between Russia and the Republic of Estonia whereby the Soviet Union (Russia) relinquished all claims over Estonia and recognized its independent status.

In 1920 Estonia adopted its first constitution and a parliamentary form of government. Members were elected to the parliament (Riigikogu) for a period of three years. However in 1934 Prime Minister Konstatin Päts (1874–1956), an Estonian freedom fighter, established an authoritarian regime in the country; in 1938 he assumed the office of the president of the Republic of Estonia.

During World War II Germany and the Soviet Union signed the infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop Nonaggression Pact of August 23, 1939, which allowed the Soviets to occupy Estonia (along with Latvia, Finland, and then Lithuania) in exchange for Nazi Germany’s assumption of control over Poland. An Estonian Socialist Republic dominated by the Soviet Union was proclaimed on July 21, 1940, just a month after Soviet troops began their occupation of Estonia. However Hitler’s Nazi forces violated the nonaggression pact and invaded Russian territories, including Estonia. Russia then declared war on Germany and joined forces with the Allied powers. For its part Estonia largely supported Germany, and so many Estonian ports, harbors, and cities were bombarded by the Allied forces.

After the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II Russia reclaimed Estonia and maintained a firm grip over the country until the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991.

In 1981 the Estonian Communist Party (ECP), which enjoyed the support of the Soviet government, made Russian the official language in Estonian schools. This caused grave concern among Estonians for the survival of their own language, as well as their cultural identity. Estonians began voicing their concerns, and many political parties emerged during this period to bring these issues to the notice of the Soviet government. Eventually Estonians began protesting against Soviet forces and demand total independence. The Supreme Soviet of Estonia, the governing body of Estonia, declared Estonia’s sovereignty on November 16, 1988, and with the approval of the USSR granted official status to the Estonian language.

After the August 1991 coup in the USSR, which saw the ouster of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev (b. 1931), Estonia quickly seized the opportunity and declared its independence from the

Great Northern War (1700–21)

The Great Northern War was actually a series of wars fought between two factions: the kingdom of Sweden on one side and the kingdoms of Russia, Denmark-Norway, and Saxony-Poland on the other. After the Swedish invasion of Estonian territories, which had been held by Poland and Denmark, the Polish and Danish forces joined with archrival Russia to defeat Sweden. In 1700 the Russian coalition launched an attack on the Swedish forces in the Baltic region. This marked the beginning of a series of wars fought over a period of 21 years.

Eventually in 1721, after suffering resounding defeats on various battlefronts, the Swedish forces surrendered to the coalition and ended the Great Northern War by signing the Treaty of Nystad and a number of other treaties, known as the Stockholm treaties. At the end of the war the Russian Empire assumed the role of the dominant power in the Baltic region.

USSR on August 20, 1991. Russian Federation forces, however, remained in Estonia until August 31, 1994, when they withdrew and recognized the independent status of Estonia in response to mounting international pressure.

Since 1991 Estonia has had 11 governments and 7 prime ministers and is still struggling to maintain political stability. In 2004 Estonia became a member of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The Republic of Estonia is located in eastern Europe and is flanked by the Gulf of Finland to the north, Russia to the east, Latvia to the south, and the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Riga to the west. The islands of Saaremaa and Hiiumaa are the largest among Estonia's more than 1,500 islands.

Topographically Estonia's land is mostly flat. The highest point of Estonia is Suur Munamagi, which is 1,043 feet high and located in the southeastern part of the country. The country has more than 1,400 lakes, the biggest of which is Lake Peipsi, which is also the fourth largest European lake, with an area of 2,175 square miles.

The climate here is temperate and is characterized by wet, moderate winters and warm summers, with occasional showers. The annual average temperature of Estonia is 42°F, with an average winter temperature of 23°F, and an average summer temperature of 62°F.

❁ ECONOMY

Until 1998, Estonia's economy was heavily dependent on trade with Russia, and the Russian financial crisis of 1998 had a severe impact on the nation's economy. In 1999 Estonia joined the World Trade Organization (WTO), and with the help of progrowth policies and economic reforms it successfully revived its failing economy. Privatization of telecommunications, railways, energy, and other public sectors, increasing foreign investments, shifting of routine operations of Scandinavian countries to Estonia, as well as the use of Estonian ports by Russian oil companies as a transit point, all have made Estonia one of the strongest economies among the new countries that have joined the EU.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Estonia has a rich cultural heritage. More than 65 percent of the country's population consists of native Estonians, while the country is also home to Russians, Finns, Belarusians, and Ukrainians. Estonian is the official language.

The Estonian culture is reflected in its folklore and folk songs, which have been carefully preserved for centuries. The songs, verses, and chants are about love, life, myths, seasonal changes, farming, and harvests and touch every aspect of traditional

Estonian life. Rhythmic verses, known as *regivarss*, are extremely popular. The peculiar aspect of most Estonian folk songs is that they repeat particular lines several times, though with slight variations in the theme. The fiddle, accordion, and concertina (a free-reed instrument with features similar to an accordion) are the musical instruments widely used in Estonia.

The island of Saaremaa is known for its sculptures, many of which depict the daily life of peasants in ancient Estonia.

Estonians adhere to different denominations of Christianity, including Evangelical Lutheran, Russian Orthodox, Estonian Orthodox, Baptist, Methodist, Seventh-day Adventist, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, and Word of Life. Some ancient equinoctial heathen (pagan) traditions are still held in high regard, and the summer equinox (Jaanipäev) is a time of great celebration and festivities. Among neopagans the ancient deity Taara (related to the Norse god Thor) is again being worshipped. Estonia is also home to about 3,000 Jews, although as a result of Hitler's "final plan" few Jews survived the Holocaust of World War II, from a prewar population of about 6,000.

❁ CUISINE

Pork, garden vegetables (beans, peas, carrots), and potatoes form the core of a traditional Estonian meal. Delicacies include smoked fish and *suitsukala* (trout). During the Christmas season restaurants serve a variety of sausage made from the fresh blood of pigs. *Verevorst* (blood sausages) and *vere pannkoogid* (blood pancakes) are also served across Estonia.

In Estonia preferred beverages include *hoogvein* (mulled wine), Saare beer and Saku beer (varieties of strong and light beers made on the Estonian island of Saaremaa), tea, and coffee.

Fun Fact

In 2004 Estonia became one of the first countries in the world to adopt a flat-rate tax system. Citizens have to pay income tax at a flat rate of 26 percent regardless of their income.

Taara

Tharapita, also called Taara, Tooru, or Uku, the Estonian god of war, was the supreme deity of the Oeselians, who inhabited the island of Saaremaa. Tharapita and the names of related Finno-Ugric deities are thought to be derived from a proto-Finno-Ugric word that meant "high." The English word *Thursday* means "Thor's day," and medieval Estonians did not work on Thursdays. Thursday nights were called "evenings of Tooru," when Estonians gathered in sacred woods to dance and sing until dawn. Tharapita has also inspired an Estonian neopagan movement, known as *taaralased* or *taaraulised*, and Tartu, Estonia's second largest city, was named for their god of war.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western (Gregorian) calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day throughout the world. In Estonia a festive atmosphere envelops the nation as people attend parties on New Year's Eve and dance and sing into the new year. In many parts of Estonia people celebrate New Year's Day by sharing jokes and fortune-telling.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 24

On February 24, 1918, Estonia declared its independence from Russia. Estonia had been under Russian domination since 1721, and starting in the late 19th century there had been a growing demand for independence. Although the Russian forces were far more powerful than the Estonians, the Russian Empire collapsed during World War I, and Estonians seized the opportunity to declare independence.

Shortly after the declaration Estonia was invaded by Germany, and it had to fight twin enemies—Baltic-Germans as well as the Soviet forces. The German threat was crushed in 1919, and on February 2, 1920, a peace treaty was signed between the Soviet Union and the Republic of Estonia. In accordance with the treaty the Soviet Union relinquished its rights over Estonian territory and recognized Estonia's independence.

Celebrations are held in different parts of Estonia to commemorate this day. In the capital of Tallinn the president of the republic presides over the Independence Day celebrations, which are marked by official speeches, military parades, and a host of cultural activities. The unsung heroes of the country's freedom struggle are remembered, and their lives and legacy are celebrated.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

The earliest origins of celebrations on May 1 are ascribed to pagan festivities that were practiced by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages, hence the alternate names May Day and Spring Day.

May 1 came to be known as Labor Day or Workers' Day after the date was selected by the international socialist movement in 1889 for a demonstration. It was organized to coincide with the

1890 strike called by the U.S. labor union the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. Because of its socialist origins this was a very important holiday in the former Soviet Union and its satellite republics, of which Estonia was one.

In Estonia May 1 is a public holiday and all public and private institutions are closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ VICTORY DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 23

Victory Day, also called Day of Remembrance, commemorates the historic victory of Estonian forces during the War of Independence. They defeated the Baltic-German armed forces in the Battle of Valnna (Cëssis) on June 23, 1919, and eliminated the Baltic-German threat to establish control over Estonia.

On this day Estonians pay tribute to those freedom fighters who died to regain Estonia's independence and celebrate the Estonian tradition of fighting for freedom and democracy.

On the night of June 22 a victory flame is lit at the ancient Kloodi Pahnimae settlement in Rakvere. On June 23 in Rakvere people gather at the War of Independence Monument and place floral tributes in memory of the freedom fighters. Then they attend a special memorial. The president of the republic presides over Victory Day ceremonies, which include military parades. The victory flame then begins its journey to other parts of Estonia.

❁ MIDSUMMER'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 24

Midsummer's Day commemorates the summer solstice, the longest day of the year, which occurs on June 21 or 22. It marks the end of the sowing season and the beginning of the haymaking season. This festival originated in pre-Christian times when people believed that the forces of good and evil gather in the darkness on this night. Many people also practiced magic on Midsummer's Day.

Many Estonians gather certain herbs, believed to have magical properties, on this day. In the evening they assemble in open fields and light bonfires. The victory flame lit by the president during the Victory Day celebrations travels to different parts of the country and is used to light huge bonfires during midsummer celebrations.

It is an Estonian belief that the flames of the bonfires have a purifying effect and help ward off evil. In villages people dance and sing around the bonfires. Also in many parts of the country, small bonfires are lit and people jump over them to ensure a good harvest and avoid bad luck in the coming year.

Fun Fact

With written records of more than 133,000 folk songs, Estonia has one of the biggest collections of folk songs in the world.

St. John's Day, the Catholic feast day of John the Baptist, is also observed on June 24; it was superimposed on Midsummer's Day, and the bonfires were renamed St. John's Fires.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

❁ INDEPENDENCE RESTORATION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 20

In accordance with the nonaggression pact of 1939 Germany recognized Soviet authority over Estonia. In 1940 Soviet forces invaded the country and established control over the region, thus ending the nation's independent status. However in 1941 Germany violated the nonaggression pact and invaded Estonia. In retaliation the Soviet Union joined the Allied powers and declared war on Germany. Initially Estonians greeted German forces warmly, hoping to restore their independence. It soon became clear, however, that Nazi Germany had no intention of granting independence to the nation.

When the Soviet forces helped defeat Germany in 1944, they reclaimed Estonia. The Soviets maintained a firm grip on Estonia until the disintegration of the USSR in 1991. Throughout the period of Soviet dominance the call for independence persisted throughout Estonia, and anti-Soviet guerilla forces were the face of the violent resistance to Soviet occupation.

On August 20, 1991, independence in the Republic of Estonia was restored, and many countries around the globe gave recognition to Estonia's independence.

Religious Holidays

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

The Christian holiday of Good Friday commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. A somber occasion, it falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent (an austere season of fasting and penitence). Some devout Christians, especially Roman Catholics and members of Orthodox Churches, observe a fast during Lent (the 40 days before Good Friday). However many Christians fast only on Ash Wednesday (the first day of Lent) and Good Friday. In Estonia devout Christians attend special Good Friday prayer services and also listen to readings of Gospels that narrate Jesus' final moments before the Crucifixion.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a Christian feast that celebrates Jesus' Resurrection from the dead three days after his Crucifixion. It falls on the first Sunday after the month of Lent. The origin of Easter celebrations can be traced back as far as the end of the first century C.E. The word *Easter* is derived from the name of the Germanic Goddess Eostre, or Eastre. She was the revered mother goddess of the Saxon people of northern Europe.

In Estonia devout Christians attend special Easter services on this day. Among Russian Christians in Estonia Easter is the most important Christian festival, since it commemorates Jesus' Resurrection and represents the victory of life over death. From Good Friday until Easter, Russian Christians visit the graves of their deceased relatives and leave flowers. On Easter they prepare Pascha (also a name for Easter), a special dish made with cottage cheese, raisins, and other fruits.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Fifty days after Lent

Pentecost takes place 50 days after Easter. The holiday celebrates the descent of the Holy Ghost on the disciples. This was considered a great miracle: Parted tongues of fire accompanied by a strong gust of wind descended on the apostles, marking them as fit preachers of the Gospel to all corners of the world.

Many scholars believe that many of the traditions and celebrations associated with this holiday were borrowed from pagan celebrations of spring in western Europe. Homes are often decorated with green branches and flowers. In Christian tradition this is the 50th day after Easter and has been celebrated since the first century. (*Pentecost* in Greek means "fiftieth.")

Pentecost is sometimes known as Whitsunday. The name "Whitsun" originated in the third century and was derived from the white garments that were worn by those who were baptized during the vigil of this feast. On this day devout Christians in Estonia attend church services.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; PENTECOST

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world because it celebrates the birth of Jesus,

whom they believe was the Son of God. In Estonia Christmas celebrations begin on December 24, Christmas Eve, and last until December 26.

Estonians refer to Christmas as Jouloud. Originally Jouloud was a pre-Christian festival that celebrated the birth of the Sun (the winter solstice) and lasted for a period of 17 days, starting December 21 (St. Thomas Day) and ending January 6 (Epiphany). It was looked upon as a period of rest during the dark winter days and was marked by a great deal of feasting. The Catholic Church, eager to swell the ranks of the converted, set out to achieve this goal by taking over the sacred sites, religious symbols, and celebrations of European pagans. Winter Solstice was an important pagan winter festival.

Since 354 C.E. in the Western world, Jesus' birthday has been celebrated on December 25. This date was significant in the ancient world for many reasons. In Phrygia (former Asia Minor, modern Turkey), the Sun god Attis's birth was commemorated on December 25. The same was the case with Mithra, the Persian sun god. Saturnalia, a Roman festival honoring the god Saturn, was celebrated from December 17–24. The Catholic popes selected December 25 to attract converts by changing the object of the observances but not the substance of these pagan festivals. Only their reference was different; the symbols and activities have remained largely the same.

When Estonians embraced Christianity, they came to regard Christmas and Christmas Eve as the holiest days of the year. In ancient times people would visit saunas at noon on December 24 and then change into clean clothes. They believed that the forces of good and evil gathered in the darkness of the night on Christmas Eve, so they drew holy symbols such as crosses, wheels crossed, and pentagrams on all the doors and windows of their homes to ward off the evil spirits. Also food was laid on the table for the ancestral spirits who were believed to visit the homes and were not affected by the signs.

Fun Fact

Estonians believed that cattle could talk like humans on the night of Christmas, so they fed them Christmas bread.

There are many other old beliefs associated with Christmas. For instance it was believed that if men ate seven times during Christmas night, they would have the strength of seven men the next year.

Devout Catholics in Estonia attend a special midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. When they return home, they gather around the Christmas tree and exchange presents. Wheat cakes are placed on the windowsill for St. Nicholas (Santa Claus). Also, the Christmas supper is covered with straw to represent the manger where Jesus was born.

On Christmas Estonians prefer to celebrate with their families over a quiet Christmas dinner. Traditional Christmas food consists of pork, baked potatoes, and potato salad with red beets, pâté, and gingerbread. People drink beer, wine, and mead (fermented honey) for Christmas.

On December 26 in Estonia people have the day off from school and work. They visit their friends and family and exchange Christmas gifts and greetings.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS; EPIPHANY

Rites of Passage

✿ BIRTH

In Estonia pregnant women in villages are assisted in childbirth by elderly village women known as *babushka* or *bapka*. The *bapka* massage the woman's belly and give her sweet or soda water to facilitate the expulsion of the placenta. For the actual delivery many Estonian women prefer to lie on the straw-covered floor because they believe that it makes delivery less painful, although the woman may kneel on the floor if it is an easy delivery. The future of a newborn was predicted by observing birth omens and the child. Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday were thought to be good days on which to be born; children born on Sundays were supposed to be very happy. After the birth the baby's face is covered with a piece of the amnion (the caul), and Estonians believe the caul can be "read" to predict the child's fortune. For example a red caul indicates good luck where a black one portends misfortune for the child. If one sees an eagle on the caul when holding it up to the sun, it means the child will have good luck. At one time the umbilical cord was kept wrapped in a piece of cloth near the cradle or under the child's pillow. Amulets are tied around the child's arms to ward off evil and bring good fortune.

Estonian women in villages are reluctant to deliver their children in hospitals, since they fear that their children may not be given their cauls or that the children's cauls may be stolen. The dried caul is kept wrapped and hidden lest someone steal it. They believe that if a caul is lost or stolen, then the child will be robbed of his or her good luck and misfortune will befall him or her. Some adult Estonians wear their cauls in a small bag hung around their necks for important meetings or other events they want to go favorably.

✿ MARRIAGE

In earlier times men from the suitor's family would arrive at the house of the prospective bride with a marriage proposal. They rode on horseback and carried with them beer and a red, sweet alcoholic drink for the bride's family. The horses were generally well-groomed stallions, adorned for the occasion in order to reflect favorably on the status of the suitor's family.

One of the married men would make the proposal on the suitor's behalf and place the bottle of beer and the red alcoholic drink on the table. If the father of the bride drank from the bottle, it meant

the proposal had been accepted. If this was the case the groom's family presented gifts to the bride's family; these generally included a knife, a scarf, and an apron for the bride, an apron for the bride's mother, scarves for the bride's sisters and brothers, and a pipe or a cap for the father. Also the amount of bride price was decided and paid in silver to the bride's family as a token of thanks to the bride's family for her upbringing.

If the bride's family called off the marriage, all the gifts and the amount of the bride price had to be repaid to the suitor's family. However if the suitor's family called off the marriage, then the bride's family was allowed to keep the bride price as well as the gifts as compensation for breaking off the marriage.

The wedding ceremony began with a party during which the bride's hair was covered with a close-fitting cap (a *coif*). The young people's *cauls* were carefully stored in chests; at the time of marriage, they were sewn into the brim of the bride's headdress (the *kirkirka*) and the groom's wedding coat.

On the actual wedding day the groom's guests (*saajarahvas*) and bride's guests (*saunjarahvas*) gathered at the houses of the groom and bride, respectively. Then the *saajarahvas* went to the bride's house to claim her. However prior to their arrival, the bride would be covered with leafy birch twigs and secretly taken to the steam and sauna room, where she would be dressed for the wedding. Then the groom would arrive and take his bride home in a simple ceremony.

The next day the *saunjarahvas* arrive at the groom's house with the dowry chest and ask to meet the bride. After exchanging greetings the headdress of a married woman would be placed on her head, and she would be proclaimed a married woman. The most important rite of the wedding ceremony, it took place in a secluded area (a sauna or barn) and was only attended by the female relatives of both sides of the families. After donning the headdress the bride was given an apron to wear, since Estonian tradition required that any married woman wear one. During the "patching the apron" ritual that followed the bride would meet guests, and they would throw money into her apron to wish her happiness and prosperity. Next the bride danced either with the groom or any of his relatives. Singing, dancing, feasting, and drinking followed. The next day the bride presented gifts to the guests as tokens of thanks for participating in the celebrations. The guests estimated the value of the young wife by the number of gifts, intricacy of workmanship, and beauty of the patterns and ornaments. Ribbons and belts were also tied to cattle as a gift from their new mistress.

The traditional way of announcing the end of a wedding ceremony was to serve cabbage soup or a cabbage dish to the guests. Lack of meat during feasts was considered the end of the wedding ceremony; if the guests still did not take the hint, the bride would enter the room filled with guests with a spinning wheel and start spinning the wheel in

the middle of the room.

✿ DEATH

Earlier in their history Estonians believed that the best time to die was either in autumn, when the old leaves fell, or in spring, when the trees were covered with new leaves because they believed that dying during these seasons was easier. They thought that only evil people and witches died during the winter blizzards. Someone who died during the day and when the weather was good was considered to have died a good death.

After someone died his or her body was placed on a ladder covered with straw or on a bier, then washed with soap and water, dressed in white clothes, and the limbs were tied to the body to keep them in place. Then the straw or the bier was burned. As long as the body remained in the house, no one was permitted to take anything out. Because people feared it might anger the deceased and a member of the family might have an accident. The body was not left alone at night; while family members kept watch over the dead body they were fed boiled peas and beans sprinkled with salt. Estonian Lutherans in general no longer adhere to this practice, but it is still common among Orthodox Christians.

Before the funeral the body was placed in a coffin, and people made sure that not a single teardrop fell into the coffin, because Estonians believed that the person whose tears fell inside the coffin would also die soon. For the main funeral people were not invited, but many volunteered to participate in the ceremony. The body was carried from the house feet first, then the house was swept clean, and all garbage was thrown out immediately. In many parts of Estonia people even burned incense sticks to cleanse the air and to ensure the soul of the deceased did not return to haunt them.

The coffin was then placed on a carriage and driven across a long, winding road to ensure that the soul of the departed could not find his or her way back home. After the burial the relatives of the deceased organized a feast (a wake) in the person's honor. It was believed that, if the feast was not held, then the soul of the deceased would seek revenge, and great misfortune would befall the family. Animals had to be slaughtered for the feast, because Estonians believed that, otherwise, the animals

Fun Fact

Marriage proposals and weddings took place on the day of the new Moon and never on that of the old (full) Moon because Estonians believed that if a proposal were made on old Moon day, the bride would grow old quickly, and her face would have lot of wrinkles. However if the proposal were made at the time of the new Moon, the bride would remain young for a longer period of time. Estonians believe that the new Moon symbolizes fertility, prosperity, and good health.

Fun Fact

No one, not even the wise, could say where Toonela (underworld, where the souls of the deceased were supposed to go) was to be found.

reared by the family would die, and death and disease would strike the family. If there were any leftovers from the feast, they were poured on the ground during the wake as a mark of respect for the deceased.

The wake was followed by a period of mourning, during which relatives wore silver jewelry. Uttering the name of the deceased during this period was forbidden.

Estonian custom established the mourning period for widows at six months; for widowers it lasted six weeks.

Further Reading

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~ Ethiopia ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Northeastern Africa; bordered by Djibouti and Eritrea to the north, Kenya to the south, Somalia to the east, and Sudan to the west
Size	435,186 sq. mi.
Capital City	Addis Ababa
Flag Description	The flag has three colored horizontal stripes (green, yellow, and red). There is a light blue disk in the middle of the flag (touching all three bands) with a yellow pentagram and rays emanating behind it.
Independence	Oldest independent country in Africa, est. 2,000 years.
Population	73,053,286 (2005 est.)
Government	Federal republic
Nationality	Ethiopian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Oromo (40%); Amhara and Tigray (32%)
Major Language(s)	Amharic; Tigrinya; Oromigna; Guaragigna; Somali; Arabic
Major Religion(s)	Muslim (45–50%); Ethiopian Orthodox (35–40%)
National Holiday(s)	Adwa Victory Day, March 1; Derg Downfall Day, May 28; New Year’s Day, September 11

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Ethiopia, the land of the Blue Nile and Great Rift Valley, is the oldest independent country in Africa and is popularly referred to as “the cradle of humanity.” Ethiopia is also home to “Lucy,” in the 20th century the oldest known fossil evidence of a hominid (of the family of apes), who lived around 3.5 million years ago.

There are records of Ethiopian rulers dating back 5,000 years. Menelik I (est. 200 C.E.) was the first of the modern emperors of Ethiopia; according to legend he was the son of King Solomon and Makeda, the Queen of Sheba (the ancient name for Abyssinia).

The Ethiopian monarchy, unique among African nations, managed to avoid colonial rule (with the exception of Italian occupation from 1936–41 during World War II). Emperor Haile Selassie (1892–1975) was the last ruler of this ancient dynasty. Selassie forcibly annexed neighboring Eritrea in

1962. The war caused much hardship and ruined the economies of both countries. In 1974 Selassie was ousted by Mengistu Haile Mariam (b. 1937), who, with popular backing, rebelled against the emperor’s oppressive rule.

Haile Mariam headed a Marxist-Leninist military dictatorship, known as the Derg. It banned churches, evicted Americans, and looked to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) for economic support. Eventually, a rebel coalition called the Tigray People’s Liberation Front emerged. It aided Eritrea in regaining control over its main port and took over Ethiopia as well. Mengistu fled, and Tigrayan Meles Zenawi (b. 1955) won Ethiopia’s first parliamentary elections in 1995. Zenawi moved the country toward private sector expansion and ensuring an adequate food supply for the people.

Another two-year war between Eritrea and Ethiopia made the United Nations declare a 16-mile buffer zone between both countries to ensure peace, even though they also signed a peace accord between themselves. With the backdrop of the simmering border issues, the government in the early years of the 21st century focused on a controversial

Who Is Lucy?

“Lucy” is the fossil remains of a landmark in human evolution, the oldest relatively complete skeleton (the first species of *Australopithecus afarensis*). She is also known by the name of “Dinquinash,” and is on display at the National Museum in Addis Ababa. After discovering her, renowned paleoanthropologist Donald Johanson (b. 1943) and his crew came up with the name “Lucy” while listening to the music of the Beatles.

and ambitious project of relocating around 2 million people from the low-rainfall highlands in an attempt to improve the food and water supply problems of the country.

Fun Fact

Menelik I is believed to have stolen the Ark of the Covenant when he visited his father, Solomon, in Jerusalem, and brought it back with him to Ethiopia, where it is said to still be in a small church in the ancient town of Axum.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

A landlocked country on the eastern African front (Horn of Africa), Ethiopia shares borders with Sudan (in the west), Eritrea (in the north), and Somalia and Djibouti (in the east). It covers a land area twice the size of France and is intersected by deep gorges including the fascinating Great Rift Valley. The Blue Nile, the chief headstream of the Nile by water volume, originates in Ethiopia.

Only about 12 percent of Ethiopia is used for subsistence agriculture that clusters along the banks of the Nile River. Big portions of its forests have been cut down for fuel over the past 25 years, significantly reducing forest cover.

The climate in Ethiopia varies by location. The central highlands (plateau) have moderate temperatures averaging about 61°F, while it gets hotter toward the low-lying areas. Kiremt (the rainy season)

The Great Rift Valley

Also called the Great Earth Fissure, the Great Rift Valley (GRV) spreads over seven east African states. It comprises 2 percent of the African land area and abounds in thousands of mineral water lakes and stunning flora-fauna reserves. The rift (a 15- to 30-mile-wide break in the earth’s surface) is a deep “Y” sign cutting across the mainland. It is home to many active volcanoes and the Afar Triangle, in which three distinct land plates are pulling away from each other, creating frequent earthquakes. The GRV attracts tourists and scientists from around the world.

lasts from June to September, and there are light showers in late March. It remains dry for most of the remaining year. Vibrant flowers cover the landscape after heavy rainfalls.

Many bird and animal species may be found in Ethiopia’s 14 major wildlife reserves, referred to as sub-Saharan microcosms. The unique Rift Valley houses some of the most exquisite animal and bird species in the world, while the Blue Nile Falls continue to dazzle tourists with natural beauty.

ECONOMY

The Ethiopian economy is essentially based on agriculture, which accounts for more than half its gross domestic product (GDP). Coffee (Arabica) exports provide employment for about 80 percent of the people and account for 60 percent of Ethiopia’s total exports. Around 15 million Ethiopians depend on coffee for their livelihood, making coffee production a vital part of their social, cultural, and economic well-being. Many farmers have started exporting *qat*, a mild stimulant that is heavily consumed in neighboring Eritrea. The sales of *qat* are intended to offset losses in revenue from coffee caused by coffee’s falling market price.

The war between Eritrea and Ethiopia (1998–2000) disrupted the economies of both countries. Ethiopia subsequently suffered major droughts and had to seek debt relief from the United Nations Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) in 2001. HIPC is an agreement among official creditors to help the most heavily indebted countries obtain debt relief. The program is administered by the World Bank.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Ethiopia is a dense, complicated mixture of approximately 80 different cultures. The Oromos, the largest ethnic group, is composed of a mix of Muslims, Christians, and traditional animists. The official and most widely spoken language is Amharic. Orominya and Tigrinya are spoken in the northern and southern parts, respectively.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has dominated the life of Ethiopians since the fourth century. This tradition was essentially monastic with Orthodox clergy in nearly every town of the country. The Orthodox tradition encompasses a belief in God, Jesus, and Catholic saints, yet focuses on the Old Testament, in contrast to most Western Churches. Church services often include fortune-telling, dancing, and astrology, incorporating the widespread traditional African animist beliefs. Ethiopian traditions, which operate within a rigid religious system, give special importance to festivals and celebrations. By tradition, fasting is observed twice a week (Wednesday and Friday), and the people generally avoid consumption of dairy and meat products.



A priest carries what Ethiopian Orthodox Christians believe is a replica of the lost biblical Ark of the Covenant, during the start of the annual Timket (Epiphany) holiday, which celebrates the baptism of Jesus, in the town of Axum, Ethiopia. Local legend holds that the Ark was brought to Ethiopia by the nation's first king. Belief in the Ark is a central feature of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. (AP Photo/Karel Prinsloo)

❁ CUISINE

Injera (also *enjera*), a flat fermented pancake, is the mainstay of the Ethiopian diet. It is made from *teff*, a tiny, round grain similar to millet. *Teffa*, Amharic for “lost,” is so named because it is often lost when it is harvested and threshed because of its tiny size. One might think that *teff* would be readily and cheaply available in the markets of Ethiopia, especially because so much of the land is devoted to its production and because it is more nutritious than barley, wheat, and millet; but its availability is limited. Because of the labor-intensive harvesting and processing techniques it requires, the cost of producing *teff* is the highest in Ethiopia—another consequence of its small size.

As in Eritrea, everyone eats with their hands. The other ubiquitous food is *wat*, or *wot*, a stew made with spices, meats, and pulses, such as lentils, beans, and split peas. It is served in a large plate, and everyone uses the flat *teff* pancakes to scoop mouthfuls of the *wat*.

The southern region of Kaffa and Buno claims to be the original home of coffee, and the bean has been grown in Ethiopia for more than 2,000 years. Coffee Arabica is quite popular in the capital city of Addis Ababa. So is *tella*, the local beer, a brew made from barley or maize, supplemented with *tej*, made from honey, and *arakie*, a potent grain spirit.

Fun Fact

Ethiopia uses the traditional Julian calendar (13 months), which is about eight years behind the Western Gregorian calendar.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ ADWA VICTORY DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 1

On this day in 1896 Ethiopian Emperor Menelik II (1844–1913) defeated the Italians in the Battle of Adwa. Ethiopia was the first country in Africa to obtain its independence from European control and was still independent at the end of the 19th century. This crucial defeat at Adwa marked the fall of the Italian colonial empire. In fact for blacks all over the world this is a special day since it showed the strength of black power as capable of defeating the supposedly superior white race in a twist on the ideology of the period. Forty years later, after Italian forces of Benito Mussolini (1883–1945) had defeated Ethiopia, Emperor Haile Selassie's efforts to regain independence made him a national hero. This day is celebrated with much pride, music, and dance.

Fun Fact

The Geez script, which is used to write the Amharic and Tigrinya languages, uses a modest 231 letters. No wonder Amharic typewriters are staggeringly complex!

❁ DERG DOWNFALL DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 28

Emperor Haile Selassie's long rule came to an end when the military Derg regime toppled him in 1974. By 1991 Ethiopians had had enough of the authoritarian Derg regime, and the coalition rebel forces of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) took power.

On this day all government offices, schools, and institutions in Ethiopia are closed to mark the downfall of the Derg regime.

Fun Fact

The Blue Nile Falls, called Tissisat, in Ethiopia is one of nature's greatest spectacles in Africa.

The Ethiopian Calendar

The Ethiopian calendar is based on the old Alexandrian, or Coptic, calendar, which in turn is based on the even older Egyptian calendar. During the reign of Ptolemy III (r. 246–22 B.C.E.) a reform of the Egyptian calendar was introduced (Decree of Canopus, 238), which was made up of the intercalation of a sixth day every fourth year to bring the wandering calendar into agreement with the solar year. However, this reform was opposed by the Egyptian priests, and the idea was not adopted until 25 B.C.E., when the Roman Emperor Augustus (63 B.C.E.–14 C.E.) formally reformed the calendar of Egypt, keeping it forever synchronized with the newly introduced Julian calendar. To distinguish it from the ancient Egyptian calendar, which remained in use by some astronomers until medieval times, this reformed calendar is known as the Coptic calendar. To illustrate the slippage between the Gregorian and Coptic calendars, September 1992 in the Gregorian calendar corresponds to the Coptic date

of Maskaram 1985, a difference of seven years. The years and months of the Ethiopian calendar coincide with those of the Coptic calendar but have Amharic names.

The Ethiopian calendar consists of the following 13 months:

Maskaram (New Year): September 11–October 10

Timket: October 11–November 9

Hidar: November 10–December 9

Tahsas: December 10–January 8

Tir: January 9–February 7

Yekatit: February 8–March 9

Megabit: March 10–April 8

Miyazya: April 9–May 8

Ginbot: May 9–June 7

Sene: June 8–July 7

Hamle: July 8–August 6

Nahase: August 7–September 5

Paguemen: September 6–10

The Ethiopian government's fiscal year begins on Hamle 1 (July 8) and ends on Sene 30 (July 7).

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 11

New Year's Day, called Enkutatash in Ethiopia, commemorates the New Year as well as the feast day of

St. John the Baptist. It also marks the end of the heavy rainy season.

The Ethiopians follow the Coptic calendar, which has 12 months of 30 days (Maskaram through Nehase) and a 13th month (Paguemen) of five or six days, depending on whether or not it is a leap year. The New Year is celebrated on the first day of Maskaram, which is the equivalent of September 11 of the Western or Gregorian calendar.

The name Enkutatash comes from the gift of *enku* ("jewels") put in the treasury of the Queen of Sheba by the chiefs when she returned from her visit to Jerusalem after meeting King Solomon. On this day children

wear colorful new clothes and hand out small paintings and flowers while dancing on the roads and singing the traditional song "Abebaye hoy." Fires are lit in front of houses after dark on New Year's Eve.

In the Kostete Yohannes church of the Gondar region there is a special religious service that takes place on this day. After chanting psalms, prayers, and hymns for three days, people come out in great num-

bers in lively processions to celebrate the new year.

The Raguel Church (close to Addis Ababa and on top of Entoto Mountain) also has an impressive religious celebration on this day.

Religious Holidays

CHRISTMAS EVE/DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: January

In Ethiopia Christmas is called Genna, a name derived from a Greek word meaning "birth" or "nativity." The celebrations commence as early as 3 A.M. in special church services where priests, singers, and poets chant and sing in Geez, the ancient language still used in the Ethiopian church. Traditionally Christmas trees were not part of the Ethiopian Christmas decorations, though now they are seen in Addis Ababa and some other cities. Exchanging gifts was also not common, though children were often given new clothing. The Western gift-giving tradition, however, has begun to catch on.

Legend has it that shepherds were playing a kind of field hockey the night Jesus was born. So, traditionally Ethiopian men play *genna* (Ethiopian hockey) with curved wooden sticks and a ball on Christmas Eve. Like field hockey, the game can get rough, and at the end of it the community leader gives a prize for the best player. Genna feasting includes bread and mead—a fermented beverage

Fun Fact

Ethiopia is the only country in Africa to have developed a written language, Geez. The language is still used by Coptic priests and monks in Ethiopia and Eritrea who read from parchment Bibles in rock-hewn churches.

made of water, honey, malt, and yeast—eaten often with raw meat.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: January

The roots of this observance can be traced back to the Eastern Christian Churches. It is an important observance in Eritrea. According to the Bible, the three Magi (wise men)—Melchior, Caspar, and Balthazar—spotted a bright star in the skies on the night Jesus was born. They followed the star to Bethlehem, found the infant Jesus there, and presented the divine child with gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

The Feast of the Epiphany celebrates Jesus' childhood events leading up to his baptism by John the Baptist in the River Jordan. Starting on the eve of Epiphany, called Timket ("baptism") in Ethiopia, this three-day festival is one of the most splendid celebrations in the country. It includes colorful processions in which the symbolic Ark of Covenant is taken from churches to a nearby sacred pool, followed by an elaborate church service. There is much music and celebrating at night.

The feast of St. Michael (a very popular Ethiopian saint) is observed on the third day. For this festival the people traditionally wear crisp new white clothes, and the priest wears contrasting colors, velvets, and jewels. *Tella* and *tej*, Ethiopian beer and mead (fermented honey), are prepared along with specially baked bread, while sheep are readied for slaughter.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EPIPHANY

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

This day celebrates the end of the Hajj, the Muslims' annual pilgrimage to Mecca. After offering prayers and listening to the religious leader (imam), Ethiopian Muslims sacrifice an animal whose meat is then distributed among the poor. On this day Muslims wear new clothes, entertain friends and relatives, and visit family graves to pay tribute to the dead.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; HAJJ; ISLAM

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Ethiopian Orthodox churches, like most Christian churches, mourn the death of Jesus, whom they believe to be their savior, on Good Friday. The day is spent in silence, meditation, prayer, penance, and

fasting. Church services begin early in the morning last until about 3 P.M., intended to correspond to the time Jesus spent on the Cross.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

On the eve of Ethiopian Easter, called Fasika, Orthodox Christians attend church and light candles during Easter services that begin around midnight. After church they celebrate by breaking their 55-day-long fast (during Lent, devout Christians eat only vegetarian fare) by eating meat with *injera* (pancakes made with *teff*, grass flour), *tej* (honey wine), or *tella* (beer). Easter, like Christmas, is a time to gather with family and exchange gifts.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ MOULLOUD

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

The Muslim holiday of Mouloud, also called Mawlid al-Nabi, celebrates the birth of Muhammad and falls in the third month of the Islamic year. In Ethiopia Mouloud, or Prophet Muhammad's birthday, is celebrated with much revelry and feasting by all but the most conservative Muslims. People exchange gifts and sweets.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULLOUD

❁ MESKEL

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: September

Meskel, or mesquel, literally means "cross," and this festival, celebrating the discovery of the Cross on which Jesus was crucified, is second only to the Timket (Epiphany) festival in importance to Ethiopian Christians. According to legend, Empress Helen, the mother of Constantine the Great (306–37), prayed that she might find the sepulcher where Jesus was buried for three days before his Resurrection. The smoke of an incense burner then guided her to discover the buried Cross. The patriarch of Alexandria gave half of the Cross to Emperor Dawit I (1382–1413) of Ethiopia, who promised to protect Coptic Christians. A part of the Cross is still maintained in the Gishen Marien Monastery, 37 miles northwest of Dessie.

The ancient Meskel festival, also called Demera, dating back 1,600 years, begins when a green tree is planted at marketplaces or in town squares, and everyone brings a wooden pole

(crowned with yellow Meskel daisies), which are placed around the tree, forming a wooden pyramid. *Chibo* (torches made from eucalyptus trees) are used to start the bonfire by lighting *demera*, bundles of branches, until the trees within the pyramids are consumed by fire. The celebrants believe that the direction in which each tree finally falls will face difficult times in the coming year, and many remain until the tree has fallen to see which region is in for hard times. Ornately robed priests carrying silver Coptic crosses dance with their followers around the fires singing and chanting and carrying flaming torches. The flowering of the cross-shaped Meskel daisies also marks the end of the three-month long rainy season and the return of the Sun.

In Addis Ababa, there are exciting processions which bring people carrying burning torches to congregate at the Meskel Square in the southeast portion of the city in the evening. A huge bonfire is lit and the festivities continue until dawn. There is dancing, music, feasting, and even a special Meskel song.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

This day marks the end of Ramadan, the holy month of fasting (the fourth of the five pillars of Islam). This day is one of celebration after a month of fasting from the Fajr prayer (dawn) to the Maghrib prayer (dusk). Fasting, in Islam, is an act of drawing closer to Allah since it marks the abandonment of all worldly longings. It symbolizes a shield, which protects a Muslim from sins and ultimately *jabannum* or

“hellfire.” On this day Muslims dress in new clothes, pray in mosques, distribute alms to the needy, and exchange gifts, celebrating love and brotherhood.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

Rites of Passage

❁ MARRIAGE

Marriages in the Amhara and Tigray regions are arranged only after much negotiation between the parents of the bride and groom. Men here are married by the age of 30, whereas women are married in their late teens. Traditionally a bride must be a virgin and unrelated to the groom's family, going back at least five generations.

On the wedding day, the bride's father presents cows, sheep, honey, and wheat as a dowry to the groom. After the ceremony, following Muslim customs, food is served at the bride's house. Here the groom can eat only a special dish prepared by the mother of the bride.

Further Reading

Harold G. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia, Updated ed.* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2002); Stuart C. Munro-Hay, *Ethiopia, the Unknown Land: A Cultural and Historical Guide* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2002); Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians: A History* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2001); Daniel Teferra, *Economic Development and Nation Building in Ethiopia*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2005).



COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	An archipelago in the South Pacific Ocean, southwest of Honolulu and north of New Zealand
Size	7,054 sq. mi.
Capital City	Suva
Flag Description	Fiji's flag has a light blue background with the United Kingdom's flag in the top left-hand corner and the shield of the national coat of arms on the outer half. The shield has the image of a lion holding a cocoa pod across the top. Stalks of sugarcane, a coconut palm, a bunch of bananas, and a white dove are represented in the four sections of the shield.
Independence	October 10, 1970 (from United Kingdom)
Population	893,354 (2005 est.)
Government	Democracy
Nationality	Fijian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Melanesian with a Polynesian admixture (51%); Indian (44%)
Major Language(s)	English (official); Fijian; Hindustani
Major Religion(s)	Christianity (52%); Hinduism (38%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Queen's Birthday, early June; Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna Day, late May; Fiji Day, October 10

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Fiji was first settled about 3,500 years ago by Polynesian migrants from Southeast Asia. These original inhabitants of Fiji are now called the Lapita people after a distinctive type of fine pottery they produced, known as Lapita pottery. The Polynesians were followed by Melanesians, who arrived in Fiji about 2,500 years ago from the area around New Guinea. The Polynesians and Melanesians are believed to have been expert sailors and fishermen who lived mostly around the coastal areas. Later on the development of agriculture around 500 B.C.E increased the population and led to the formation of tribal communities.

The first European to set foot on the Fiji islands was the Dutch explorer Abel Tasman (?1603–?59) in 1643. The

British explorer Captain James Cook (1728–79) visited Fiji in 1774. In the early 19th century the discovery of sandalwood and sea cucumber in the region attracted traders to the islands. A sea cucumber is a tubular, spineless sea animal prized as a delicacy and also for its medicinal properties. Both the sandalwood and sea cucumber were highly valued in Asia, and European traders got involved in their trade in the hope of making quick fortunes.

In 1874 Fiji came under British rule. The British introduced a system of administration that prevented indigenous Fijians from working on the European-owned sugarcane plantations. That is why over 60,000 Indians were brought to Fiji by the British. They were treated as indentured servants before the practice was abolished. As a result over 40 percent of today's population is of Indian descent.

The 19th century also saw the arrival of Christian missionaries in Fiji. The majority of Fijians today are Christians.

In 1970 Fiji gained independence from the United King-

Fun Fact

Fiji is the old Tongan word for the islands, which was derived from the Fijian name *Viti*.

dom. Ethnic tensions flared up soon after that. A new constitution was drawn up that entrenched ethnic separation by providing separate electoral rolls for each ethnic group. Those tensions escalated in 1987 after elections seated a coalition government dominated by ethnic Indians. A coup led by Sitiveni Rabuka (b. 1948), a native Fijian military leader, overthrew the civilian government. A new constitution was written giving preferential treatment to ethnic Fijians. Pressure from the international community led to changes in the constitution in 1997, which eased tensions for a time.

The first election under that constitution was held in May 1999, and the Labor Party won. The party's leader Mahendra Chaudhry (b. 1942) was appointed prime minister. He was the first Indo-Fijian to occupy the position.

In May 2000 Chaudhry and his cabinet were taken hostage for 56 days by a group of disgruntled indigenous Fijians led by failed local businessman George Speight (b. 1957), who called for a new constitution that would give indigenous Fijians political supremacy. In light of growing international and domestic pressure, Speight and his men were arrested. Speight pleaded guilty to treason and was sentenced to death, but later the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment.

Because of the antidemocratic activities and coup of 2000, Fiji's membership in the Commonwealth of Nations was suspended, and, under pressure from the international community, the interim administration committed itself to holding democratic elections in 2001. The new and predominantly indigenous Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua Party (SDL), the party of the interim prime minister Laisenia Qarase (b. 1941), obtained the largest number of seats in the elections and formed a government. The Fijian Labor Party (FLP) won 28 seats but was excluded from power. The FLP challenged its exclusion, saying it was unconstitutional. The High Court and Court of Appeal upheld the FLP's

position but a power-sharing agreement could not be reached by the two parties. In November 2004, Chaudhry announced that his party would assume the role of official opposition.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Fiji is an archipelago that includes 332 islands. Of these only about 100 or so are inhabited while many others are used as fishing bases and planting grounds. The majority of the population lives on two islands: Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. Taveuni, Kadavu, Gau, and Koro are the other important islands. The international dateline runs through Fiji although most of the islands are situated just west of the line.

This island nation has a mild, tropical, maritime climate. During the summer, which is Fiji's rainy season (November to April), temperatures can reach 86°F. During the dry season (May to October), the temperature drops down to 64°F. Rainfall is usually in the form of warm, sudden afternoon showers, which go as quickly as they come. On the mountainous islands trade winds cause variations in climate and vegetation.

ECONOMY

Fiji's fertile soil yields sugarcane, tropical fruits, taro (a fleshy, starchy, underground stem, called the potato of the tropics), cotton, pineapples, bananas, wood, and coconuts. Limestone quarrying is also important. Sugar, the processing of which accounts for a third of Fiji's industrial production, is the main export. Gold, silver, clothing, copra, and processed fish are also exported. The European Union nations and Australia receive most of its exports. Imports, principally from Australia, New Zealand, and Japan, consist largely of foodstuffs, manufactures, and machinery.

Fiji has a flourishing tourism industry, a major source of foreign exchange. Roughly 250,000 tourists visit Fiji each year.

Visiting a Fijian Village

Fijians are a friendly, hospitable people. However visitors cannot simply stroll into a village since this would be considered a violation of privacy. Before visiting it is customary to purchase the traditional gift, a bundle of unpounded *yaqona* (kava). When approaching the village, visitors should not enter immediately but wait nearby until someone comes to greet them and ask the purpose of their visit. They will then be taken to the chief or *turaga ni koro*, to whom the kava should be offered. Pounded into powder, the *yaqona* is mixed with water and served.

Visitors who are accepted by the chief will be assigned a guide and host.

Once inside the village visitors should observe the following practices: They should take off their shoes when entering someone's house or any other village building; they should speak softly and not raise their voices as this might be interpreted as anger; they should not wear hats in the village because that is considered an insult to a chief; they should not touch anyone's head (also an insult.); they should show respect but be cautious about praise, since Fijians will feel obliged to make a gift of any object if visitors show too much liking for it.

Meke

Meke, traditional dances, are performed regularly in most villages. These dances are powerful and graceful at the same time, incorporating diverse elements such as the spear dance, the fan dance and the sitting dance. They are performed to the accompaniment of singing, clapping, and drum beating. The dancers usually wear grass skirts with decorative arm- and wristbands. Their bodies are oiled, their faces painted, and they wear flowers, shells, or

other ornaments woven into their hair. *Meke* are usually narratives describing important events, such as how a battle was won, a chief installed, or some other significant occurrence. Some of these *meke* are old, handed down from generation to generation. Others are created especially for an occasion. In such cases they are choreographed and put together by a *dau ni vucu*, a composer who is an individual comparable to the wandering minstrels of old England.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Fijians continue to practice many of their traditional arts and crafts, some of which have endured the destructive impact of Western influences and the relentless criticism of Christian missionaries, and some of which have been modified and embellished to satisfy the demands of tourism. Fiji has been famous for pottery since the Lapita people began trading their wares in the South Pacific thousands of years ago. Wood carving is also still important. Fijian carvers make war clubs, spears, and drinking bowls, or *tanoa*, which are in daily use in many Fijian households. Bark cloth, known in Fiji as *masi*, is used for making ceremonial robes, waistbands, and turbans. The cloth is made from the bark of the paper mulberry tree; its production is very laborious. Traditionally large and highly decorated *masi* cloths were used as ceremonial gifts, and there was much prestige associated with their ownership. The weaving of *pandanus* (a tree with long leaves in the shape of blades) leaves into mats and baskets has a long tradition too. Most village girls still learn the craft, and there are all sorts of variations in style and color (achieved by scraping the leaves, burying them in mud, and boiling them with other plants).

Fiji has a strong dance tradition, and Fijian dances are passed down from generation to generation. Traditional dance, known as *meke*, accompanies special events like births, deaths, and marriages. At times of war men performed *cibi* with spears and clubs, while women performed *dele* or *wate* dances, which sexually humiliated captured enemies.

Yaqona

Yaqona (kava) is the key ingredient in Fiji's national drink. *Yaqona* is the dried root of the pepper plant. To make the drink it is pounded into a fine powder, steeped in water, strained, and served in an elaborate ceremony on formal occasions. The drink made

from *yaqona* is used to acknowledge special occasions and end disputes and is drunk at official ceremonies. A bitter-tasting, intoxicating drink, it encourages a sense of well-being and is offered to guests as a special sign of goodwill. The drink is prepared in a special wooden bowl (*tanoa*) and drunk from a coconut shell (*bilo*).

CUISINE

Fijian cuisine is a mixture of Melanesian, Polynesian, Indian, Chinese, and Western cuisine. Staple food items include breadfruit, yam, cassava, taro root (*dalo*) and leaves (*rourou*), besides beef, pork, and poultry, and, of course, seafood. Exotic fruit such as limes, guavas, mangos, bananas, and pineapples are also popular in both sweet and savory dishes, and coconut milk (*Jolo*) is used in many dishes. Herbs and spices, such as garlic, ginger, turmeric, coriander, fenugreek, cumin, soy sauce, and chilies, are used to flavor dishes.

A typical Fijian main course consists of a dish of meat, poultry, or fish, boiled taro leaves, and cassava or taro as accompaniments. Local dishes include *kakoda* (a marinated local fish steamed in coconut cream and lime), *rourou* (a taro leaf dish), *kassaua* (tapioca, often boiled, baked, or grated and cooked in coconut cream with sugar and mashed bananas), and *duruka* (an unusual asparagus-like vegetable in season during April and May).

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western (Gregorian) calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day through-

out much of the world. Fijians celebrate the beginning of the year with enthusiasm, and the festivities can last anywhere from a week to a month in some villages. There is plenty of music, dancing, and feasting in all the major towns.

❁ QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Second Saturday in June

Fiji recognizes Britain's Queen Elizabeth II as its head of state, so her birthday is a national holiday in Fiji. Formal celebrations are held at the high commissioner's residence.

❁ RATU SIR LALA SUKUNA DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Last Monday of May

Fiji celebrates this day to honor Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna, who is considered to have been Fiji's greatest statesman, soldier, high chief, and scholar. Lala

Sukuna was a decorated war hero in the First World War. In that war Britain did not allow native Fijians to join their armed forces. In order to prove himself on the battlefield and gain the respect of the British for all Fijians Sukuna enlisted in the French Foreign Legion. He fought bravely but was wounded and forced to return to Fiji toward the end of 1915. He went back to France the following year with the Native Transport Detachment, a newly formed contingent assisting the British Army. Seeing his example the British colonial authorities changed their minds about native participation in the war. For his distinguished wartime service the French government conferred upon Ratu Sukuna that country's highest military honor the Croix de Guerre. Fijians celebrate this day with cultural shows and games.

Fun Fact

An indigenous method for preparing food is the *lovo*, a fire made in a pit lined with stones. It closely resembles the *hangi* of the Maori.

Once the stones are hot, food is buried in the pit and left to cook. Then it is dug out and eaten.

❁ FIJI DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 10

Fiji Day is celebrated each year to commemorate two important events in the country's history that occurred on the same date a hundred years apart. These are October 10, 1874, when Fiji became a colonial possession of Great Britain, and October 10, 1974, when Fiji regained its independence from Great Britain.

Religious Holidays

❁ HOLI

Observed by: Hindus
Observed on: February or March

Holi is celebrated by Hindus to relive the playful antics of Lord Krishna with his companions and consorts. It is a festival that announces the onset of spring. It is also known as the Festival of Colors because people spray each other with colored water and powder, all in a spirit of good-natured fun.

See also Volume III: HINDUISM; HOLI

❁ CHINESE NEW YEAR

Observed by: Chinese
Observed on: Twenty-fourth of the 12th month of the Chinese calendar

The small Chinese community in Fiji celebrates the Chinese New Year with traditional lion dances and parties. Dressed in new clothes, people visit friends and family and enjoy special meals.

See also Volume III: CHINESE NEW YEAR

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

This Christian holiday commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. A solemn occasion, it falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent (an austere period of fasting and penitence).

In Fiji Good Friday is a day to mourn in church. During Good Friday services, Christians meditate on Jesus' suffering and death on the Cross. On some islands there are special Good Friday processions and reenactments of the Crucifixion. The main service on Good Friday takes place between midday and 3 P.M. In many churches, it takes the form of a meditation based on the few last words of Jesus on the Cross, with hymns, prayers, and short sermons.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is the central Christian observance in the liturgical calendar because it celebrates Jesus' Resurrection from the dead three days after the Crucifixion. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. At Easter in Fiji the churches are decorated with flowers, and people sing hymns and special songs. The Monday

after Easter is a national holiday with government offices, businesses, and schools closed for the day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ MOULoud

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

In Fiji the celebrations of the Muslim holiday of Mouloud, or Mawlid al-Nabi, are subdued because the day marks the birthday of Muhammad. Muslims commemorate the event with public gatherings. At these meetings religious leaders deliver sermons about Muhammad's life. Stories are narrated about different aspects of his life: his birth, childhood, youth, and adulthood. The most important part of Mouloud focuses on his character, his teachings, sufferings, and his qualities of mercy and forgiveness.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULoud

❁ DIWALI

Observed by: Hindus

Observed on: October or November

On Diwali, also known as Deepavali or the Festival of Lights, Fijian Hindus celebrate the victory of good (Lord Rama) over evil (Ravana). Observances include worship of Lakshmi (the goddess of wealth and prosperity), cleaning and decorating houses, and settling business affairs. Fijian Hindus also offer fruits and sweets to the goddess, as well as to friends and neighbors. In the evening, families light lamps and candles in the hope that Lakshmi will enter their homes and shower them with wealth.

See also Volume III: DIWALI; HINDUISM

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

The Christian feast of Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world because it celebrates the birth of Jesus, whom they believe was the Son of God. Christmas celebrations in Fiji often last from December 24 to New Year's Day. In rural areas Christians attend church services on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day and then gather for a lavish village party. Huge communal parties are the norm in villages during this holiday. In towns and cities many Fijians go to the beach on Christmas Day for picnics and parties. Children receive gifts of toys and books from Santa Claus.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ HIBISCUS FESTIVAL

Observed in: Suva

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First week of August

The Hibiscus Festival is Fiji's biggest carnival. It is very popular with both locals and tourists. Events include parades, marching bands, sports competitions, carnival rides, and fireworks, as well as the Miss Hibiscus pageant and the renowned Hibiscus Ball.

❁ SUGAR FESTIVAL

Observed in: Lautoka

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September

The Sugar Festival is celebrated in Lautoka, which is known as the Sugar City for all the sugar it produces. Parades, marching bands, carnival rides, and fireworks mark the festival. It is a joyous time for the citizens of Lautoka, because they celebrate their unique identity. The crowning of the festival queen is the highlight of the celebrations.

❁ FIRE WALKING

Observed in: Bequa

Observed by: General Public of Bequa and Hindus

Observed on: Ten days around the full Moon day in July or August

Hindu fire walking is an annual practice (usually lasting 10 days) that coincides with the full Moon in July or August. It is a tradition that originated in southern India and was brought to Fiji by Indians during the colonial period. Fire walking is a tradition Fijians also share with the inhabitants of the island of Bequa.

Only men are allowed to be firewalkers. Traditionally there is a lot of preparation prior to the actual event. The men isolate themselves during the preparation period and must abstain from eating meat and having sex. They spend the time meditating and worshipping the goddesses Kali and Mariyamman. A pundit (Hindu priest) oversees the preparations, which can take up to 10 days.

On the final day, the firewalkers bathe in the river or sea and their tongues, cheeks, and the pundits pierce their bodies with three-pronged skewers. The firewalkers then dance to the fire pit. Their bodies are whipped during the ceremony, but they do not appear to be in any sort of pain. It is believed that if they focus on the goddess they will be free from all harm. The goddess's statue, decorated with marigold

garlands, is placed facing the pit to bless the ceremony. The men walk over the glowing coals. This takes only a few minutes. They repeat this feat five times to the accompaniment of sacred chanting and drumming.

Fire walking is also practiced by the Sawau tribesmen living in the four villages on the southern side of the island of Bequa. According to Fijian mythology the ability to walk barefoot on white-hot stones was granted by the gods to a Bequan chief, whose descendants now act as fire-walking instructors. When the ceremony is to be performed, several representatives are chosen from each village. For two weeks before the event, the participants must avoid contact with females. Also, they must not eat any coconut. Failure to observe these taboos is said to render the participant liable to severe burns during the ceremony.

A large circular pit is dug for the fire-walking event. The pit is lined with large river stones, and a huge log fire is built over them some six to eight hours before the ceremony. When the time arrives, young men of the village prepare the arena for the firewalkers. Armed with long green poles, the young men clear the burning logs from the stones, while chanting “*O-vulo-vulo*” in unison. Then bundles of leaves and grass are placed around the edge of the pit. The village men, who have prepared the pit, surround the circle, leaving only a gap for the entry of the firewalkers.

The firewalkers now emerge from their place of concealment and approach the pit. The bundles of

leaves and grass are quickly removed and the firewalkers enter the pit and walk briskly on the white-hot stones around the circumference of the pit. They appear to be immune to the heat and flames. Then, with a sudden shout, the bundles of grass and leaves are thrown on the stones, and the group huddles in the center of the pit chanting a song associated with the occasion. Around the ankle of each is a band of tinder-dry fern leaves. These bands are carefully removed and buried in the pit with four baskets of roots. The pit is then covered with earth and left for a period of four days. After four days, the pit is opened by the firewalkers. The baked roots are taken out, ground, and mixed with water. The roots are then cooked and eaten by the firewalkers. This completes the fire-walking ceremony.

Rites of Passage

✿ BIRTH

After the birth of a child on Fiji it is customary for every relative to put some money in the baby’s hand when seeing him or her for the first time.

At one month of age a baby is supposed to make his or her first appearance in church. The child is brought to the church by his or her aunt on the father’s side. The minister blesses the baby with a prayer. When the service is over, the oldest sister of the child’s mother takes the baby back home.



Men from Viseisei village in Fiji prepare a mildly narcotic drink called kava during a welcome ceremony. Partaking of the drink, prepared in a special wooden bowl and served in a coconut shell, is an important gesture of goodwill for Fijians. (AP Photo/Rick Rycroft)

Two or three months later women from the village visit and bring gifts such as clothes, mats, rugs, and soaps for the baby. The women form a circle around the baby. Then one of them steps into the middle, claps to get everyone's attention, and discusses the gifts. The women pass the baby around, and they all kiss it.

❁ MARRIAGE

On Fiji it is customary for a young man to ask the girl's father for her hand in marriage. The groom is also expected to present a valuable gift to the bride's father. Traditionally, this present should be a whale's tooth, symbolizing status and wealth. Assuming a young Fiji man receives permission to marry from the bride's father, the prospective groom is expected to prepare a lavish feast and to send it to the bride's family. Just before the wedding it is traditional for the Fiji bride to be tattooed, a sign of beauty on the islands.

❁ DEATH

When a person dies, the death is announced by loud weeping and wailing by women who assemble outside the house where the deceased has died. In between the actual death and the funeral, friends and family come to the house of the dead to pay their respects. Relatives from the deceased's maternal

family are responsible for placing the body in the casket and accompanying it the church for the service, as well as for the burial.

After the burial, a feast is held. Cattle are killed specially for this meal. The men are served first and then the women. There are more feasts organized on the fourth, 10th, 50th, and 100th days after a death (provided the family can afford them). Close friends and family all participate because it is customary for feasting to be a part of the mourning process.

Further Reading

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Finland

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Northern Europe, between Sweden and Russia, bordering the Baltic Sea, Gulf of Bothnia, and Gulf of Finland
Size	130,559 sq. mi.
Capital City	Helsinki
Flag Description	The Finnish flag is white with a blue cross extending to the edges; the vertical part of the cross is shifted to the hoist side.
Independence	December 6, 1917 (from Russia)
Population	5,223,442 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Finnish
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Finn (93%)
Major Language(s)	Finnish (92%); Swedish (6%)—are both official languages.
Major Religion(s)	Evangelical Lutheran (84%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; St. Urho's Day, March 16; Mikael Agricola Day, April 9; Labor Day, May 1; Midsummer's Eve, June 25; Independence Day, December 6

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

On the basis of conclusive archaeological evidence, human settlement in Finland began around 8500 B.C.E., during the Stone Age, as the ice from the last Ice Age was retreating. The earliest inhabitants were probably hunter-gatherers who spoke a dialect of Finno-Ugric. Ceramics were being produced from about 5300, and numerous nonindigenous artifacts, found during excavations, indicate that there was a wide-ranging trade network. Archaeologists have recovered flint from Scandinavia and Russia, chisels from Russia's Lake Omega region, and spearheads made in northern Scandinavia.

Later evidence of the culture known as the Battle-Axe or Cord Ceramic Culture (so called because cord was wrapped around pottery objects to make a design) indicates that they arrived in the region about 3200, bringing with them agriculture. From approximately 3,000 to 1,000 B.C.E., during the Bronze and Iron Ages, trade and the resulting cultural contacts the Finnish, Scandinavian, and Russian tribes continued.

Most of this information is derived from the study of excavated sites and the artifacts found there. Because there are few written records prior to the 13th century, not a lot is known about the specifics of Finnish history. Although sagas are full of stories about Finnish leaders, these are regarded as largely fictitious.

For almost 700 years, from the 12th to the 19th centuries, Finland was under Swedish rule. King Erik IX of Sweden (c. 1120–60), also called Erik the Lawgiver and Eric the Saint, brought Christianity to Finland in 1154. During this time Swedish was the predominant language, but the peasants continued to speak Finnish.

Severe famines struck Finland in the 17th century. The worst one in 1696–97 killed nearly one-third of the entire population. In a bid to annex Finland Russia waged a series of wars against Swedish-controlled Finland in the 1700s. In 1808 the armies of Russian Emperor Alexander I (1777–1825) conquered Finland. Finnish ties with Sweden were severed; to curb Swedish influence the Russians promoted the Finnish language. During the latter half of the 19th century Finland experienced a surge in nationalism, which gave rise to a nationalist movement called Fennomania.

Midnight Sun

In the regions located north of the Arctic Circle and south of the Antarctic Circle, the Sun shines continuously longer than anywhere else on Earth. This day, called a *polar day*, can last for six months at the North Pole. This phenomenon occurs because the Earth is tilted on its axis, and at the extreme latitudes the Sun remains above the horizon even after setting. The opposite phenomenon, known as *polar night*, occurs in these regions

when the Sun remains below the horizon, even after rising. The farther the observer moves away from the poles, the shorter the duration of these phenomena.

The period of midnight Sun is known to have depressing effects on human beings. People who live in Alaska, Greenland, Iceland, northern regions of Canada, Scandinavia, and Russia are prone to depression, mood swings, and suicidal tendencies during this period.

Following the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and the downfall of the czar, Finland declared its independence on December 6, 1917. With the signing of the Treaty of Tartu in 1920, the Finnish-Russian border was formalized. During this time social and economic disparities between the ruling and working classes of Finland were increasing, which led to a bitter civil war in 1918. The war was fought between the educated class, supported by the independent farmers and Imperial Germany, and the poor rural and industrial workers. Approximately 30,000 Finns were killed in the bloody civil war.

During World War II, Finland had to fight invasions from the Soviet Union in the Winter War of 1939–40 and then again in the Continuation War of 1941–44. Finland waged the Lapland War to oust the Germans from northern Finland in 1944–45. The country's war-ravaged economy emerged as a modern industrial economy toward the end of the 20th century. Finland joined the European Union (EU) in 1995. Today the per capita income of Finland is on a par with that of other Western European nations.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Finland is a land of thousands of lakes and islands, with an astounding 187,888 lakes and 179,584 islands. The land here is mostly low-lying and flat, although there are a few hills in the northern region. These areas are covered with forests, and very little land is used for agricultural purposes.

Finland shares borders with Russia, Norway, and Sweden. About 25 percent of Finland's total land area lies across the Arctic Circle, evident in the severe climatic conditions in the country. Most parts of Finland experience harsh winters and moderately warm summers. The temperature can be as low as 22°F during winters and yet get as warm as 86°F during the summer months.

Finland is one of the few countries in the world where you can experience the phenomenon of the midnight Sun. The days and nights can be very long in this country. At the northernmost point of Finland, the Sun does not set for 74 days during summer. During winters, the sun does not rise for at least 51 days.

ECONOMY

Finland has a highly developed economy and the Finnish people enjoy a high standard of living. Finland has developed wood, manufacturing material, metal, medical accessories, engineering, and telecommunications industries. Finland enjoys good trade relations with Germany, Norway, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Russia, and Sweden. The Finnish economy depends on the import of raw materials and minerals from these and other nations. The country does not export any agricultural products, but forestry is a major export industry. Finland has adopted the Euro as its official currency.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Although sparsely populated, Finland has a diverse culture. In addition to its renowned modern building design and architecture, Finnish design in furniture and glassware is famous. The country offers a wide variety of music and literature, hosting several musical festivals during the year, where modern and classical genres are showcased.

Finland's national epic, the *Kalevala*, is well known across the literary world. Elias Lönnrot compiled this epic myth in the 1830s, consisting of stories about the creation of the world, the birth of humanity, and the fight between good and evil.

Sports are extremely popular in Finland, in particular winter sports. Formula One racing, ice hockey, and track events are among other favorites. Nordic Walking, a fitness walking technique, is also a popular recreational activity in Finland. This exercise is suitable for all ages and can be practiced at any time of year. Almost half a million Finns are said to practice Nordic Walking.

CUISINE

Finnish cuisine incorporates many whole-grain products such as rye, barley, and oats. Finns also

Fun Fact

Finland's land mass is still growing at the rate of 4.3 square miles per year. This increase in area has been observed since the Ice Age.

Santa Claus in Finland

Finland is known as the residence of Santa Claus. In 1927, during a children's show on the Finnish radio, it was announced that Santa lives in Lapland's Korvatunturi "Ear" Fell, a treeless mountain in Finland, because his reindeer could not graze at the North Pole. It is said that he lives in Santa Claus Village, where there is a main post office to receive children's mail from all over the world.

consume lots of berries, such as blueberries, lingonberries, and cloudbberries. Turnips and potatoes are important ingredients in Finnish cooking.

Fish and meat are main ingredients in such popular dishes as *Kaalikärryleet* (cabbage rolls), reindeer stew, *libapullat* (Finnish meatballs), and *mustamakkara* (blood sausage). Salmon, Finland's favorite fish, is eaten raw, smoked, salted, or cooked. Finnish-made Emmenthal cheese is also very popular and is exported worldwide.

Finns prefer strong beers, wines, and spirits. The country has strict licensing and regulations regarding the sale and consumption of alcohol.

Fun Fact

In Finnish, the nation is called Suomi.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western (Gregorian) calendar, January 1 is celebrated as New Year's Day throughout the world. In Finland many cities have fireworks displays on New Year's Eve. Traditionally the Finnish make personal New Year's resolutions and enjoy a feast with family and friends.

January 1 is also known as the Name Day of Jesus and is considered a feast day by the Finnish Lutheran Church.

ST. URHO'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 16

According to legend Finland, a country rich in grapes, once suffered a plague of grasshoppers and locusts that destroyed their crops. It is said that St. Urho (pronounced *oorlho*) chased away these insects with a giant metal fork, shouting, "*Heinasirkka, heinasirkka, meine taatta hiiteen*" ("Grasshopper, grasshopper, get out of here!").

The Finnish people celebrate this event by dressing up in purple and green—purple for the grapes and green for the vines (or, according to

some, for the grasshoppers). At sunrise, they gather together, carry pitchforks, and march, chanting, "*Heinasirkka, heinasirkka, meine taatta hiiteen*" and chasing imaginary grasshoppers.

MIKAEL AGRICOLA DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 9

This day, also known as Finnish Language Day, celebrates the Finnish language. It commemorates the anniversary of the death of Mikael Agricola (1510–57), a Finnish clergyman who was the creator of written Finnish and a prominent Protestant Reformer in Swedish Finland.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

The earliest origins of this holiday are ascribed to pagan celebrations that were practiced by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages. Today it combines such varied influences as the international workers' movement, European celebrations of spring, the modern street carnival, and the Finnish enthusiasm for drinking.

The name *Labor Day* came to be associated with May 1 when in 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared it a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world, and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. In many parts of the world the holiday is also known as May Day.

In Finland, it is a time for workers to conduct parades and rallies. Moreover, even though it may still be snowing, this day also commemorates the advent of spring in Finland and is referred to locally as Vappu. Street carnivals, feasting, and drinking mead are highlights of the day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

MIDSUMMER'S EVE/MID-SUMMER'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 25–26

Midsummer's Eve, also called Juhannusaatto and Juhannuspaiva in Finland, is a celebration of the summer solstice, the longest day of the year. After Christmas this celebration is the next most important holiday of the year here. Christians changed this celebration, making it the feast day of St. John the Baptist instead.

Midsummer, however, has been important since pagan times, especially in northern Europe, where the contrast between the dark and the light seasons is dramatic. The long, cold winter nights have turned into the white nights of the Finnish summer. In the north of Finland, the Sun actually remains above the horizon all night.

In Finland the solstice is a public holiday celebrated on the third weekend of June. The Finnish flag is officially displayed all across the country from Midsummer's Eve until the next evening. All schools and offices remain closed. Pre-Christian celebrations included a fertility festival and special rituals conducted to ensure a good harvest in August.

Lighting a bonfire is the high point of Midsummer night. These bonfires used to be part of the eastern Finnish Midsummer celebrations; in western Finland they were lit on Ascension Day and Whitsunday, and in Ostrobothnia on Easter Saturday. Nowadays, Midsummer fires are lit all over Finland, except in the Swedish-speaking areas on the coast, where a Midsummer pole, similar to a maypole, is set up instead. In Finland the bonfire is called the Juhannus Bonfire; it is to be used for cleansing and warding off evil spirits.

Midsummer celebrations include lilacs, silver birches, maidens in national costume, and, flying above it all, Finland's blue and white flag because Midsummer is also the day of the Finnish flag.

Many people enjoy a relaxing day in the country. They meet family and friends for picnics, and potatoes and pickled or smoked fish are usually included in the meal. For dessert the first strawberries of the season are typically served, along with beer.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 6

Independence Day is a major celebration in Finland, and parades are held all over the nation. In earlier decades this day was mainly marked by patriotic speeches and special church services. The celebrations, however, have become a lot livelier. Streets and shops are decorated in blue and white (the colors of the Finnish flag), and cakes are baked with blue and white icing. Singers and entertainers perform special patriotic shows on this day.

Religious Holidays

❁ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: January 6

The Christian Feast of the Epiphany celebrates the Three Wise Men from the East who came to Jerusalem looking for the newborn Jesus. On this

day Finns attend church services and enjoy elaborate meals with family and friends.

The Lutheran Church in Finland has dedicated Epiphany for missionary work, while the Orthodox Church of Finland performs the blessing of water on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EPIPHANY

❁ HOLY WEEK

Observed by: Christians

Dates: Friday before Easter

The Christian holiday of Good Friday commemorates Jesus' Crucifixion. A solemn occasion, it falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent (an austere 40-day period of fasting and penitence).

In Finland this day is known as Long Friday. This name is only found in Scandinavian cultures. The Christians here observe a fast on this day, and a ritual called the Stations of the Cross is performed. This is a reenactment of Jesus' final journey to Golgotha, carrying the Cross to his Crucifixion.

In the 1980s, a Greek Orthodox observance was revived called *virpominen*. Children costume themselves as witches and go door to door reciting Bible verses and carrying willow sprigs. They are rewarded for this with money and candy. Interestingly children have been dressing up as Easter witches in Sweden for at least 100 years.

In Finland the entire family gathers together to celebrate Jesus' Resurrection. Children grow grass on plates indoors and decorate Easter eggs. Feasting and exchanging greetings and colorfully decorated Easter Eggs continue even on the next day, Easter Monday, which is the first Monday after Lent. This day commemorates the revelation of the risen Jesus to his disciples following his mortal death on the Cross.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Forty days after Lent

The Christian holiday of Ascension Day celebrates Jesus' rising up to heaven 40 days after he was resurrected from the dead on Easter. The Finnish people celebrate this day with special prayer services.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT

❁ PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fifty days after Lent

Both the Sunday and Monday of this Christian holiday celebrate Pentecost, the day on which the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus' disciples. In Greek *Pentecost*

means “the 50th day,” and the holiday got this name because it takes place 50 and 51 days after Easter.

Whitsunday and Whitmonday are alternate names derived from the white garments that were worn by those who were baptized during the disciples’ vigil. Whitsunday and monday have been celebrated since the third century. Many scholars believe that many of the traditions and celebrations were borrowed from pagan celebrations of the spring. On this day, devout Finns attend special prayer services.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT; PENTECOST; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ ALL SAINTS’ DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: November 1

All Saints’ Day is a Christian feast honoring all the saints (known and unknown) of Christianity. In Finland, All Saints’ Day is a solemn celebration in which people place flowers and candles at gravesites and attend prayer services.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS’ DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world, because it celebrates the birth of Jesus. In Finland, Christmas falls in the darkest part of the long Finnish winter. On Christmas Eve, Christmas Peace is declared from the country’s former capital of Turku. This ritual dates back to medieval days and signifies the beginning of Christmas celebrations in the country, and families gather for a special Christmas feast. Children eagerly anticipate gifts delivered by Father Christmas. Traditional Christmas decorations are made out of straw in Finland.

On Christmas Day, the festivities continue with

Finns and Saunas

Although sauna baths are not of Finnish origin, the concept of steaming your body inside a heated room for cleansing purposes has woven itself into Finnish culture over the centuries. Finns spend a lot of time in saunas. One in every three Finns owns a sauna, and it is considered a necessity rather than a luxury. Finns are known to eat, drink, cook, relax, entertain guests, and, sometimes, even finalize business deals inside saunas.

The Finns do not wear clothes when they take sauna baths because it is considered rude. Traditionally, the sauna is the place where all cleansing rituals, during all stages of life from birth to death, take place.

church services and the enjoyment of special Christmas delicacies. Friends and relatives visit each other and exchange gifts on this day.

The day after Christmas is Boxing Day. It is also the Feast of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, who was stoned to death.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS; BOXING DAY

Regional Holidays

❁ TANGO FESTIVAL

Observed in: Seinäjoki

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July

The Tango Festival, or Tangomarkkinat in Finnish, held in Seinäjoki is the biggest summer event in Finland. This is also the biggest tango festival in the world. Thousands of people visit Finland from all corners of the world to dance and listen to tango music. The Finns are reserved and quiet by nature. This South American dance form is highly expressive in nature and is a favorite among Finns for this reason. They call it a “three-minute dream with your eyes open.”

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

Traditionally, Finnish women give birth to babies in the sauna. The sauna bath plays an integral part in Finnish life and in the various rites of passage. The sauna is a heated room where people take steam baths. This is the most hygienic place in the traditional household.

The custom of giving birth in the sauna was followed religiously until World War II. The newborn and the mother would remain in the sauna, along with the midwives, for about a week. The father saw the baby for the first time when the mother and child returned home from the sauna. The eldest family member named the baby by sprinkling water over him or her. Although this custom dates back to the pre-Christian days, it was eventually replaced by a more formal baptism.

❁ MARRIAGE

Finnish weddings are normally not extravagant. However there are some nuptial customs that are found only in Finland. Weddings normally take place in summer. Traditionally, engaged couples roam the streets half-dressed and wearing masks and behaving outrageously, much to the amusement of passersby.

On the wedding day, the bride wears a crown. The wedding procession walks through an arch of

honor, and the couple stands under a specially designed canopy known as the bridal sky. Straw ornaments, mirrors, and garlands are used to decorate the wedding venue. The reception after the wedding ceremony is characterized by lively music, dance, and feasting.

❁ DEATH

When a person dies in Finland, the body is not kept in an open casket and nobody sees it. Thus, it is not cleaned or dressed in new clothes. There is also no overt display of emotion during the funeral. The only person officially allowed to speak during the ceremony is the minister. After the coffin has been

placed in the ground, people place flowers on it and say a few words or recite a poem.

Further Reading

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France

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Western Europe, bordered primarily by the Atlantic Ocean, Belgium, Germany, Spain, and the Mediterranean Sea
Size	211,210 sq. mi.
Capital City	Paris
Flag Description	The French flag has three equal vertical bands of blue (hoist side), white, and red.
Independence	486 C.E.
Population	60,656,178
Government	Republic
Nationality	French
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Celtic and Latin with Teutonic; Slavic; North African; Indochinese; Basque minorities
Major Language(s)	French (100%)
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (83–88%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Liberation Day, May 8; Bastille Day, July 14; Armistice Day, November 11

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

The history of human life in France goes back at least 32,000 years to the Paleolithic era. France is famous for its many caves containing hundreds and hundreds of beautiful paintings of various animals familiar to Paleolithic hunters. Perhaps the most well-known cave is that at Lascaux in central France, discovered in 1940 and thought to be about 16,500 years old. Among the spectacular paintings of bulls, antelopes, and horses, paleoastronomers have found what appear to be the earliest maps of the night sky as it would have looked from Earth at the time.

This ancient planetarium was found in an area of the Lascaux system called the Shaft of the Dead Man. Among the star patterns represented on the cave's walls is the Summer Triangle, with its three stars, Vega, Deneb, and Altair, the brightest stars visible during the northern summer. Seventeen thousand years ago, around the time these drawings were made, this area of the heavens never set below the horizon and would have been particularly clear at the beginning

of spring. Closer to the entrance of the cave system is a map of the Pleiades star cluster, sometimes called the Seven Sisters, above the shoulder of a bull. In the 21st century this portion of the sky is part of the constellation called Taurus the Bull, indicating that the identification of this cluster with the bull goes far back into prehistory.

But the Lascaux cave complex is not the oldest Paleolithic art gallery in France. That honor may go to a new system near Lascaux discovered at Chauvet-Pont-d'Arc in the mid-1990s by an amateur spelunker, which contains paintings dating back between 32,000 and 30,000 years. The dates identify the work as that of the Aurignacian culture (34,000–23,000), peoples whose artifacts have been found spread across the continents of Europe and Asia. The Aurignacians are known for their innovative flint-knapping techniques, body ornaments, and diverse tools.

Unlike Lascaux, where many of the animals represented were probably on the Paleolithic menu, the animals of Chauvet-Pont-d'Arc include dangerous animals—lions, bears, and rhinoceros—more than 60 percent of the animals drawn on the gallery's walls. The proposed age of this system would be enough to make it an important find. What may be more significant, however, in terms of understanding our species'

development, is the sophistication of the techniques used to portray the animals, in particular the use of perspective and shading.

Although Aurignacian hunters had projectile points made of antler, bone, and ivory, they did not use spear-throwers (atlatls) or the bow and arrow. It is not known whether they had eyed needles for stitching hides together, but none have so far been found.

During the Iron Age the Celtic Gauls arrived in France from the east. After many centuries of war and conflict with the Romans, the Gauls were defeated by the Romans under the leadership of Julius Caesar in 52 B.C.E. France, known as the province of Gaul during Roman rule, became a highly developed territory. Archaeologists have unearthed ruins of public baths and amphitheaters that date back to this period.

However this period of prosperity did not last and barbarian raids started to undermine the stability of Gaul. These barbarians were violent tribes that came from Germany. The Franks were the most powerful among them. In 5 C.E. the Franks succeeded in establishing their rule over the region. The struggle for power continued between different groups and France subsequently saw the rule of the Merovingians, Carolingians, and eventually the Capetian Dynasty.

This period is often referred to as the Gothic period and was generally a prosperous time in spite of continual wars and feuds. The Gothic period is synonymous with the grand cathedrals that are still found in France today. The church emerged as a constant and stable power, and many monasteries flourished under the Capetian monarchy. The monasteries became increasingly involved in farming and other economic activities. France was one of the major contributors to the Crusades, the series of holy wars started by Christians who sought to take the Holy Land from the Muslims. This considerably weakened the Capetian Dynasty, which was further undermined by the Hundred Year's War (1337–1453) with England. The Hundred Year's War, which was actually fought for a little over a century, inflicted great damage on both France and England. Famines and bubonic plague, social and political turmoil, afflicted France in its aftermath.

In response to war, civil strife, feudal rebellion, and banditry, King Louis XI (1423–83) and his successors began to create the institutions and amass the power of a premodern state. Louis expanded and consolidated France's borders, built up the royal army, and curtailed unruly nobles. François I (1494–1547), in 1516, secured an agreement with the pope that gave France considerable religious autonomy and created a national Catholic clergy.

The Wars of Religion, which wracked France with civil war for nearly 40 years between 1562 and 1598, were as much political as they were religious. When King Henry II (1519–49) died accidentally in a tournament in 1559, his widow Catherine de Medici (1519–89) oversaw a tumultuous 30-year period in which her three young sons (François II

[1544–60], Charles IX [1550–74], and Henri III [1551–89]) ruled in succession for brief periods. The country endured chaos, punctuated by ferocious struggles between Huguenots (Protestants) and Catholics.

With the end of the Wars of Religion, and the advent of the strong leadership of the royal advisor Cardinal Richelieu (1585–1642), France saw the rise of an absolute monarchy, epitomized by King Louis XIV (1638–1715). Known as the Sun King, he ruled from 1643 to 1715, amid great pomp and splendor.

The 18th century is known as the period of the Enlightenment in France. The philosophies of Voltaire, Rousseau, and other *philosophes* had a profound effect on Western thought, and the ideals of liberty and equality expressed during this period ultimately fueled both the American and French revolutions. The French Revolution in 1789 eliminated the absolute monarchy in France and led to the formation of the First French Republic in 1792.

Following a period of incredible bloodshed, which included the execution of the king and then countless others in the Terror, the French Revolution eventually led to the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821), who expanded the French Empire by conquering neighboring countries. Napoleon I ruled France from 1804 to 1814, after which the Bourbon Dynasty was restored to power. The period that followed is known as the French Restoration. The power of the Roman Catholic Church, which had suffered great losses during the revolution, was reestablished under the Bourbons.

The French Second Republic was established in 1848, when the monarchy was replaced with a representative government. In 1852, however, Napoleon III (1808–73) overthrew this government and established the Second Empire. In 1870 Napoleon III was overthrown, and the Third French Republic was established. During this period France pursued an aggressive colonial program, expanding its overseas territories in Asia and Africa. During

Fun Fact

Two ancient French flutes have recently been reconstructed. The first was made from a 40,000-year-old deer bone. The second, made from a vulture's bone, is a relatively young 4,000 years old.

The Empire That Was

Like most other modern colonial empires, France's colonial empire has disintegrated and given rise to several new nations in Africa and Asia. However France still controls some overseas territories. There are French territories in North and South America, as well as in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. France has the second largest Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) distributed around the world. The French EEZ covers 8 percent of the total world EEZ area, while the French homeland only occupies 0.45 percent of the total land surface area of Earth.

Fun Fact

The puppet government that served the Nazis from 1940–44 is called the Vichy regime because its capital was located in Vichy, a spa and resort town in central France. Marshall Philippe Pétain (1856–1951) was at its head. His legacy remains in the word *pétainisme*, a pejorative term for reactionary policies.

Fun Fact

Among the most industrialized nations in the world, France produces the least amount of carbon dioxide, but it relies heavily on nuclear power, which produces radioactive waste that must somehow be disposed of.

Fun Fact

Mont Blanc, in the French Alps, is the highest peak in Europe. It is 15,781 feet high.

World War I France allied with nations that opposed German power. Much of that war was fought on French soil; by the end the country had suffered a huge loss of troops and industrial capacity and had to work hard to rebuild its economy.

During World War II France and its territories were defeated by Nazi Germany in 1940; some 90,000 French troops died and nearly two million were taken prisoner. German troops occupied the country, assisted by the collaborationist Vichy regime. Under the Vichy regime some 76,000 French and foreign Jews were deported to death camps; less than 3 percent survived.

Opposing the German occupation was the leader of the Free French General Charles De Gaulle (1890–1970) and various partisan groups acting independently of De Gaulle.

France was freed by the Allied forces in 1944. Charles de Gaulle set up a provisional government and subsequently became the president of France. After the world wars France was unable to maintain its colonial empire as the 1950s and 1960s became a period of chaotic decolonization around the world.

In the 21st century France is a stable and prosperous country with a presidential democracy.

The country enjoys good relations with neighboring nations, including Germany, in spite of their turbulent past.

France is a founding member of the European Union (EU).

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

France is one of the largest countries in Europe. It shares borders with Switzerland, Germany, Luxembourg, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, Monaco, and Andorra.

France consists mainly of plains and slightly undulating hills. The Pyrenées mountain ranges are located in the south, while the country shares the Alps mountain range with Switzerland to the west. The Massif Central, one of the oldest ranges in France, is located in the middle of the country.

France has a fairly long coastline that exceeds 1,988 miles and borders the North Sea, Atlantic

Ocean, and the Mediterranean Sea. French beaches can be smooth and sandy or rocky and rough. The country has four major rivers: the Loire, Seine, Rhône, and Garonne. The Loire, the longest river in France, stretches 634 miles, from its beginning in the Massif Central until it drains into the Atlantic Ocean. The German Rhine River, situated on the Franco-German border, also forms a part of the country's system of waterways.

France has four types of climate: oceanic, semi-continental, Mediterranean, and mountain. Except for the coastal regions, marked by hot summers and mild winters, most parts of the country generally enjoy cool winters and mild summers. France also experiences strong, dry, cold winds known as *mistral*, which blow from the northwest.

ECONOMY

France is one of the major industrialized economies in Europe and, indeed, the world. The French government, although it has relaxed control over many economic sectors, still claims a major stake in railways, electricity, and telecommunication sectors. The country is blessed with a rich supply of natural resources. Among its mineral resources are coal, iron ore, potash, zinc, and bauxite. France also has sound timber and flourishing fishing industries. Aerospace, automobiles, chemicals, electronics, machinery, textiles, and tourism are other major industries in France. French farmers cultivate grains, potatoes, and wine grapes. Beef, fish, and dairy products also contribute to the country's economy.

France enjoys good trade relations with the United Kingdom, Belgium, Germany, the United States, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands. France exports transportation equipment, machinery, iron and steel, and beverages. The import list includes crude oil, plastics, and chemicals.

France is a leading member of the Group of Eight (G8) and officially joined the European Union (EU) in 1999. The French currency, the French franc, was replaced with the Euro in 2002.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The French people are generally convivial and friendly. It is customary for people to greet each other even if they are strangers but to address each other formally (as *monsieur*, *madame*, or *mademoiselle*, as the case may be). French culture has been highly romanticized over the ages. Artists and fashion designers flock to France for inspiration and exposure. Tourists consider Paris a haven for romantics. Music, literature, philosophy, art, museums, festivals, food, style, and a cosmopolitan lifestyle are synonymous with France. The French are also avid fans of sports such as rugby, soccer, tennis, skiing, and basketball. The most popular sporting events involve cycling and auto racing. France hosts the world famous Tour de France (cycling) and Grand Prix (auto racing) events.

About 85 percent of the French population is Roman Catholic. In modern France adherence to church orthodoxy has diminished, though there are still plenty of Catholic faithful who adhere to the traditions and rituals. Minority communities include Muslims, Protestants, and Jews. A large number of French do not subscribe to any religious beliefs.

❁ CUISINE

French cuisine is widely renowned. The word *gourmet* is French, and the restaurant is a French invention. Every region in France has a distinct flavor to its cooking. Classic French cuisine mainly originates from the northern parts of France. Liberal use of butter, cream, cheese, and eggs is characteristic of classic French cooking. Combinations of salads, red and white meat, freshwater fish, and red and white wine are common items on French menus. The French, however, do not prepare such elaborate and delicate dishes on a daily basis.

A normal day begins with *café au lait* (coffee with hot milk), croissants, and other breads along with butter and jam. Dishes of pork, fish, or veal often form the main course at dinner tables. Cheese and apple tarts are also included in the main meals. White wine is often drunk with fish or cheese, and red wines with red meat.

French wines are among the world's best. French wine-making has a rich and long history that dates back to pre-Roman times. Some of the most famous varieties come from the Burgundy, Rhône, Champagne, and Bordeaux regions.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western (Gregorian) calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day throughout much of the world. In France many cities sponsor fireworks displays on New Year's Eve. In French homes small bunches of mistletoe are hung above doorways, and at midnight on New Year's Eve revelers kiss each other under the mistletoe for good luck.

Traditionally the French make personal New Year's resolutions and have a feast on this day. Dishes such as *soupe à l'oignon* (onion soup with bread and melted cheese) and *dinde rôtie* (roast turkey) are often included. Many people eat pancakes for good luck. The first of January is a day for visiting relatives, friends, and neighbors and exchanging gifts. It is a national holiday and schools, government offices, and commercial establishments remain closed.

St. Mary Magdalene

St. Mary Magdalene, the sister of Martha and Lazarus of Bethany, is believed to have traveled to France. Legend has it that she wandered toward the east from Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer. When she reached the forest of Sainte Baume, she found a cave, and resolved to live in that cave for 30 years, surviving only on wild roots, berries, and prayers. She did penance for her sins and eventually died there. Christians believe that Mary Magdalene was forgiven her sins and that she was a pure soul when the angels took her to heaven.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

The earliest origins of what is now called Labor Day, Workers' Day, or May Day are ascribed to pagan celebrations welcoming the return of spring practiced by farmers, peasants, and villagers all over Europe well before the Middle Ages. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world, and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

Most countries observe May 1 as International Labor Day. It was under the Vichy regime (1940–44) that France renamed and first celebrated this day as Labor Day. French workers hold marches and rallies throughout the country on this day.

In France, the first of May is also devoted to the Virgin Mary and is known as the Day of the Lily of

Bordeaux Wines and Glasses

Bordeaux is a port city in southwestern France and a major center of the wine trade. Bordeaux wines come in a wide range of colors, from deep crimson to brick reds to amber to the golden straw-colored white wines. These wines are served in a special kind of wineglass known as a "Bordeaux glass." This wineglass, shaped like a tulip, narrows toward the bottom and has slightly curved edges. This ensures that the wine's aroma does not escape. To distinguish and appreciate the varieties and qualities of Bordeaux wines, one should take tiny sips, swishing the liquid around in the mouth and combining it with a bit of air to release its full flavor.



Pioneers of the Foreign Legion wearing their traditional leather apron and carrying axes, symbols of the challenge of building and fighting, march in the Bastille Day military parade on the Champs-Élysées in Paris. Bastille Day commemorates the storming of the Bastille prison on July 14, 1789, setting off the French Revolution that toppled King Louis XVI and put an end to the monarchy. (AP Photo/Michel Lipchitz)

the Valley. People exchange gifts and give each other lilies of the valley (*muguet*).

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

✿ LIBERATION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 8

Liberation Day, or Victory Day, *Fête de la Victoire* 1945, is the anniversary of the signing of the treaty ending World War II. This day was declared a public holiday by President Giscard d'Estaing (1974–81). In France there are special military and ceremonial parades on this day. There are also special prayer services in churches across the nation. The president visits the Arc de Triomphe and pays homage to all French soldiers. Schools, government offices, and commercial establishments are closed for this public holiday.

✿ BASTILLE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 14

Bastille Day, or *Fête Nationale* (National Festival), commemorates the beginning of the French Revolution on July 14, 1789. On this day the people of Paris stormed the Bastille prison to free the political prisoners who were held there for dissenting against the rule of King Louis XVI.

The Bastille was looked upon as a symbol of the absolute authority of the king. Thus its liberation by the people, celebrated on Bastille Day, is seen as a

victory of democracy over oppressive rule. The French celebrate this day with fireworks displays and military parades. The most famous among these parades takes place on the Champs-Élysées in Paris. Family and friends gather for parties and barbecues on this day, and firefighters organize special dance parties.

See also Volume III: BASTILLE DAY

✿ ARMISTICE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 11

Armistice Day, *Jour d'Armistice*, also known as Remembrance Day, is the anniversary of the signing of the armistice ending World War I in Compiègne, France. France, like all of Europe, suffered tremendous casualties in this war, and the day is set aside to honor the dead and wounded soldiers. In 1918 at the 11th hour of the 11th day in the 11th month, the world rejoiced and celebrated. After four years of bitter war, an armistice was signed. The “war to end all wars” was over.

In England and France, an unknown soldier was buried in each nation’s highest place of honor (in England, Westminster Abbey; in France, the Arc de Triomphe). These memorial gestures all took place on November 11, giving universal recognition of the celebrated end of World War I at 11 A.M. Since, this observance has included all soldiers who died in wars after World War I.

There are special military and ceremonial parades, and special prayer services are held in churches across the nation. The president visits the Arc de Triomphe and pays homage to all soldiers, particularly those who perished in this and later wars. All schools and offices remain closed during this public holiday.

Religious Holidays

✿ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: January 6

Epiphany, also called *La Fête des Rois* (Feast of the Kings), is the Christian feast that celebrates the visit of the Three Kings, or Three Wise Men, to the infant Jesus in Bethlehem. In France it is traditional on this day to serve a *Galette des Rois* (“cake of the kings”). A charm (often a bean) is baked into the cake. Whoever gets the charm in his or her piece is crowned king or queen and can choose a partner.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EPIPHANY

✿ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday is an important Christian holiday that falls on the Sunday before Easter. It commemorates Jesus' return to Jerusalem a few days prior to his execution. In those days it was customary to cover, in some manner, the path of persons who were considered highly honorable, as a mark of respect. It is believed that on his arrival in Jerusalem, Jesus was greeted with palm fronds by followers who laid them in his path as he walked along the streets of Jerusalem. Thus the day came to be known as Palm Sunday.

Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week. In France it is commemorated by a solemn procession of devout Catholics holding palm branches in their hands, led by the church priests, and is followed by a special Palm Sunday Mass.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: Thursday before Easter

Maundy Thursday, also known as Holy Thursday, is a Christian commemoration of the day on which Jesus washed the feet of his apostles before they shared a meal now called the Last Supper. It is called Maundy Thursday because *mandatum* (a Latin word meaning "commandment") is the first word that was spoken by Jesus before he began washing the feet of his disciples. It was reported that Jesus said, "*Mandatum novum do vobis,*" which translates as "A new commandment I give to you."

Maundy Thursday falls on the Thursday before Easter. In France churches conduct special prayer services. The priest, while celebrating Mass, reenacts scenes from the Last Supper. He washes the feet of 12 chosen parishioners just as Jesus did for his disciples. The mood is somber, and the faithful pray during this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. Observed as a solemn occasion, it falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent (a 40-day period of fasting and penitence).

French Christians observe a fast on Good Friday, and in churches a ritual called the Stations of the Cross is performed. This is a reenactment of Jesus' final journey to Golgotha as he carried the Cross to his Crucifixion.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a Christian feast celebrating Jesus' Resurrection from the dead three days after his Crucifixion. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent. In France families dress in their best clothes to attend church on Easter to celebrate Christ's Resurrection. Afterward families share large meals and children receive specially decorated chocolate Easter eggs from their parents and grandparents. Feasting and exchanging greetings and Easter eggs continue through the next day, Easter Monday, which is the first Monday after Lent and is an official holiday in France.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Forty days after Lent

The Christian holiday of Ascension Day commemorates Jesus' rising up to heaven 40 days after his Resurrection from the dead on Easter. Faithful French Catholics celebrate this day by attending special church prayer services. Ascension Day is a public and a bank holiday in France.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY

❁ PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Fifty days after Lent (Pentecost Sunday), 51 days after Lent (Pentecost Monday)

Pentecost is celebrated over a two-day period to commemorate the descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus' disciples. In Greek *Pentecost* means "the 50th day," and the holiday is so named because it begins 50 days after Easter. The names of Whitsunday and Whitmonday, which are also used in connection with this holiday, refer to the white garments that were worn by those who were baptized during the disciples' vigil. Whitsunday and Monday have been celebrated since the third century. Many of the traditions and celebrations now associated with Pentecost were taken from pagan celebrations of the spring.

The French attend special church prayer services on Pentecost. Also on this day barefoot student pilgrims walk from Notre Dame in Paris to Notre Dame in Chartres in memory of the dying wish of the famous French poet-philosopher Charles Péguy (1873–1914).

In 2005 the French government cancelled the annual Pentecost holiday, celebrated on Whitmonday.

Fun Fact

When Péguy's son Marcel fell seriously ill, he turned him over to the protection of the Virgin and "walked away," promising that if his son recovered, he would make a walking pilgrimage between Notre Dame in Paris and Notre Dame in Chartres, a good 60 miles. Marcel did recover and Péguy kept his vow. He would later repeat the pilgrimage for other causes. In the interwar years as the cult of Péguy grew in France, thousands of people reenacted this concrete devotion yearly. Many still do.

A new law mandated that workers give up the Monday holiday, while their employers paid into a government fund to improve health care for the aged and disabled. This work-ing "Day of Solidarity" was inspired by the devastation of a 2003 heat wave that killed 15,000 people, mostly elderly, and the French government hoped to raise \$2.6 billion by these means for health services. But anger emerged over the plan, fueled by discontent about economic conditions, including unemploy-

ment and budget cuts, and the inconvenience of losing an important occasion for leisure, when individuals and families schedule brief vacations. The French felt the loss of the holiday more strongly because two other annual holidays, on May 1 and May 8 (May Day and Liberation Day), each fell on Sundays in 2005, meaning there had been no days off. Strikes disrupted the country's public transportation, workers stayed away from work, and students, from school.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; PENTECOST

ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: August 15

The Christian Feast of the Assumption commemorates the Virgin Mary's Assumption into heaven. For Catholics the Feast of the Assumption reaffirms their belief in Jesus as their savior, fulfilling his promise that all devout Christians would find a place in the glory of heaven. In predominantly Catholic France the famous cathedral of Notre Dame (which means "Our Lady") in Paris observes special religious ceremonies and prayers in honor of Mary.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day is a Christian feast that honors all the saints

(known and unknown) of Christianity. The Feast of All Saints has been celebrated on November 1 since the time of Charlemagne. In France All Saints' Day is traditionally a day on which devout Catholics honor their dead by placing flowers on their graves and pray for all the saints. The most popular flowers used for this purpose are chrysanthemums. All Saints' Day is a public holiday in France.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas, a day of great joy for Christians the world over, celebrates the birth of Jesus. In France, Christmas celebrations begin on Christmas Eve (December 24), and continue until December 26. On December 24, Catholic families attend church and offer prayers in a special midnight Mass. Afterward either they sit down to a huge feast at home or in a restaurant or café that is open late.

On Christmas Day the festivities continue with church services and the enjoyment of special Christmas delicacies, and friends and relatives visit each other and exchange gifts. Children open gifts they have received from Father Christmas (Père Noël). Families gather at lunch or dinner to celebrate Christmas with a special feast. Turkey, goose, and chicken are typical centerpieces of the meal, though particular preparations differ from region to region. There is also an elaborate chocolate cake baked in the shape of and decorated like a log of wood called *bûche de noel*, made especially for this holiday. This cake has its origins in pagan Gallic celebrations.

Christmas decorations are often prepared well in advance of Christmas. The lights and decorations of Paris are world famous. A crèche, or manger scene with figures of Joseph, Mary, and the baby Jesus, along with shepherds and the Three Wise Men, are placed in all churches and some homes.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

LEMON FESTIVAL

Observed in: Menton
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: February

Menton, located on the French-Italian border, is known as the city of lemons because its income once relied on growing and selling the fruit. With time, however, the number of lemon planters dwindled, significantly reducing the city's income. The city council, in an effort to encourage growers to plant

Fun Fact

In the Provence region of France, the characters represented inside crèches need not be only biblical. Figures of butchers, carpenters, policemen, bakers, farmers, and even the mayor are frequently included! These clay figures are known as *santons*.

lemons, oranges, and other citrus fruits, decided to celebrate the Lemon Festival every February. The farmers parade huge floats of citrus fruits in the streets and have special lemon fairs where rare varieties of lemons are exhibited.

❁ CANNES FILM FESTIVAL

Observed in: Cannes
Observed by: World film industry
Observed on: May

Cannes hosts one of the world's largest and most prestigious film festivals. Selected movies from around the world are screened; while most viewings are by invitation only, a few are open to the public. Movie stars and glamour are synonymous with this festival, which has been held since 1946.

❁ LA FÊTE DE LA MAGDALENE

Observed in: Provence
Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: July 11

This day is the Christian Feast of St. Mary of Magdalene. On this day young girls visit the grotto of St. Mary of Magdalene in Sainte Baume, where they pray for peaceful and happy marriages. This ritual has been faithfully followed since the 13th century.

❁ ST. CATHERINE'S DAY

Observed in: Paris
Observed by: Fashion industry
Observed on: November 25

This festival honors St. Catherine, the patron saint of young unmarried girls. Young girls offer special prayers to this saint and celebrate with a sumptuous feast and dancing. St. Catherine's Day is usually celebrated by French fashion houses. Female workers are given the day off, and dance parties are arranged for them.

Rites of Passage

❁ MARRIAGE

Typically there are two wedding ceremonies in France: a civil ceremony and a church ceremony. The civil ceremony is very short and is conducted by the local mayor. He legalizes the wedding after reading an excerpt from the French constitution and declaring the couple husband and wife.

The second wedding ceremony is religious in nature and normally takes place inside a church, conducted by a priest in front of family and friends.

At the wedding reception, a toast is made to the newlyweds. The couple drinks from special goblets

Weddings and the French

Many wedding customs that are followed today in Western cultures trace their beginnings to French wedding traditions. The concept of the bridal trousseau (the personal outfit of a bride, clothes, accessories, and linens) originated in France. The word comes from the French word *trousse*, which means "bundle."

During wedding receptions, the guests and the couple often raise a toast. This is also a French custom. In earlier days a small crumb of toast was dropped into the couple's drink to symbolize good health.

that may be family heirlooms. Some French couples also serve a special dessert known as *croquembouche* instead of the traditional wedding cake. The revelers pop the corks on champagne bottles with a saber specially made for this purpose. This custom dates back to the time of Napoleon. In those days skilled horsemen, astride horses, would ride past ladies holding up champagne bottles and cut off the corks with sharp sabers.

After a long wedding reception the couple retires to their new home. Sometimes close friends appear on their doorstep singing and clanging pots and pans. The groom is expected to entertain his boisterous guests with snacks and drinks.

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French Guiana

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Northern South America, bordering the North Atlantic Ocean, between Brazil and Suriname
Size	35,135 sq. mi.
Capital City	Cayenne
Flag Description	French Guiana uses the French flag, which has three vertical bands of equal size, blue (hoist side), white, and red.
Independence	N.A. Overseas department of France
Population	195,506 (2005 est.,)
Government	Overseas department of France
Nationality	French Guianese
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Black or mulatto (66%)
Major Language(s)	French
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Victory Day, May 8; Abolition Day, June 10; Bastille Day, July 14; Remembrance Day, November 11

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Twenty-nine archaeological sites in the Iwokrama rain forest in central Guyana indicate significant Archaic (7000–3500 B.C.E.) and Horticultural occupations. Although no evidence of Paleo-Indians has yet been found, it will likely come to light based on what seems to be a presence in Guyana and the Amazonian basin. Archaic period sites include petroglyphs (carvings or inscriptions in rocks), sharpening grooves, and a chipping station. The varied range of sites suggests that Archaic peoples both processed local products and manufactured stone tools. Other sites show permanency of occupation, the sort of stability typical of fisheries and horticultural activities.

Guiana's petroglyphs commonly belong to the Enumerative and Fish Trap (2050–1600 B.C.E.) petroglyph traditions. Enumerative petroglyphs, mainly found in the South Rupununi savannahs, as their name suggests, provide a count of the animals caught during a hunting or fishing trip.

Around 4,000 years ago Guiana's major rivers were reduced to deep pools by a severe drought. The types of fish to be caught in the deep pools differed from one pool to the next. In order to tell other people which kind of trap to use, fish traps were drawn on rocks near specific pools so they would know the kind of fish available there. Hence the name, fish trap petroglyphs.

When Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) visited the country in 1498, he found the indigenous South American and Caribbean tribes. Columbus named the area Land of Pariahs.

By the mid-17th century, the Dutch, English, and French had all established colonies in the region.

In 1817 France took complete control of the region. Sugar and timber production were carried out by the slaves imported from Africa. When slavery was abolished in 1848 the sugar industry in French Guiana almost collapsed. In 1850 following its abolition, the French tried bringing in boatloads of Indians, Malays, and Chinese to work the plantations. Most of these immigrants ended up opening shops in Cayenne and other towns.

In the 19th century, France used French Guiana as a penal colony to reduce the cost of maintaining prisons in

Devil's Island

Devil's Island is a small island off the coast of French Guiana. Until 1946 Devil's Island was a French penal colony, renowned as one of the most horrible prisons in the world, from which escape was almost impossible. Surrounded by ocean and impenetrable jungles, only a handful of convicts ever managed to escape.

Opened by the French Emperor Napoleon III (1808–73) in 1852, Devil's Island housed political prisoners, hardened criminals, and the most notorious thieves. Prisoners were subjected to brutal treatment and kept in filthy cells. Initially the island housed only one prison; later the French built prison facilities at Kourou on the French Guiana mainland. Hundreds of prisoners were crammed in small rooms with tin roofs. Most of the prisoners died due to disease and suffocation. Food was slipped into the room, and dead bodies removed—both once a day. Due to the harsh environment of the prison and the fact that more than 80,000 prisoners died within its walls, the island earned the name Devil's Island.

Ex-convicts wrote several books about surviving Devil's Island early in the 20th century when it was still a prison. One of the best-known books written about Devil's Island is *Papillon*. It was written by an ex-convict, Henri Charrière, who was imprisoned in the penal colony in 1931 for murdering a pimp. The book provides a convict's view of the treatment meted out to prisoners and also details numerous escape attempts undertaken by the convict and his final successful escape.

Probably the most famous man ever imprisoned on the island was Alfred Dreyfus (1859–1935). His

case became a cause célèbre that stirred controversy regarding critical French institutions and issues, including the antagonism between monarchists and republicans, the political parties, the ongoing meddling of the Catholic Church in political affairs, the army's reputation, and brought anti-Semitic prejudices to the fore. Dreyfus was a captain in the French army; he was also a Jew. In 1894 he was accused of treason, secretly court-martialed and found guilty, and sentenced to life imprisonment on Devil's Island.

In spite of the fact that an outspoken anti-Semite lieutenant colonel named Georges Picquart pointed to a Major Walsin Esterhazy as the guilty party, the French army, more concerned with its image than justice, covered up its mistake, and shipped Picquart off to Tunisia as punishment. What by now was being called “The Dreyfus Affair” might have ended there but for novelist Émile Zola's (1840–1902) publication of his now famous “*J'accuse!*” (“I accuse!”).

The political right and the leadership of the Catholic Church—both fiercely opposed to the Republic—claimed the Dreyfus case was a conspiracy of Jews and Freemasons intended to smear the prestige of the army and ruin France.

Finally, in 1899 the French president pardoned Dreyfus, but it was not until 1906—12 years after the case started—that he was exonerated of the charges and restored to his former military rank. The affair, in the end, strengthened the Republic, largely as a result of the conduct of the army and the Catholic Church.

Almost 100 years after it was opened, France closed the prison at Devil's Island in 1946.

France and to bring in more settlers. Between 1852 and 1939 about 70,000 prisoners were deported from France to the various prisons of French Guiana, the most notorious of these being the one on Devil's Island. It remained a penal colony until just after the end of World War II.

In 1946 French Guiana became an overseas department of France. Paris granted the country autonomy (but not independence) in 1982, and since then the Parti Socialiste Guyanais (PSG) of French Guiana has run the country.

The people of French Guiana enjoy a high standard of living primarily because of the heavy subsidies provided by the French government. In 1968, the European Space Agency established a rocket-launching base in the town of Kourou in French Guiana.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in the northern part of South America, French Guiana is bordered by the North Atlantic Ocean to the north, Suriname in the west, and Brazil in the south and east.

Low-lying plains, hills, and small mountains characterize French Guiana's terrain. Bellevue de l'Inini, at 2,792 feet, is the highest point in French Guiana. Important rivers of French Guiana include the Maronia, Sinnamary, Mana, Oyapock, and Approuage.

French Guiana has a tropical climate with hot and humid weather conditions throughout the year. The region is also prone to thunderstorms and heavy showers during the rainy season, which lasts from January to June. The temperature in the region varies from 75°F to 90°F.

Fun Fact

Ancient inhabitants of Guiana believed that a master of animals provided the land with food, and that the souls of dead humans replenished the animal supply—showing a consciousness of the need to preserve the local resources. Such petroglyphs were a means of providing statistical information to the master of animals.

The country is home to a wide variety of flora that includes trees such as grapefruit, apricots, cinnamon, sapodillas, avocados, and rosewood as well as spices like cayenne. It is also a popular destination for bird watchers, and is known for its uniquely healthy jaguar population.

ECONOMY

The economy of French Guiana is heavily dependent on France. Forestry, fishing, and agriculture are the main economic activities of French Guiana. Rice and cassava are the important crops. Export

items include shrimp, gold, timber, clothing, and rosewood essence.

The European Space Agency, an organization that consists of the national space organizations of 16 European nations, has used the Guiana Space Center at Kourou since 1968. The Space Center is a major source of revenue, contributing about 25 percent to French Guiana's gross domestic product (GDP).

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

French Guiana is predominantly Roman Catholic. French is the national language of French Guiana although French Creole (a dialect mixing the local languages with French) is also widely spoken in the region. In addition, ethnic tribes speak their own languages such as Oyapi, Carib, Macushi, Palicur,

Wayana, Arawak, Hixkaryana, and Emerillon. The Boni Maroon are known for their intricate wood-carvings, which are popular among tourists.

In terms of ethnicity French Guiana is home to ethnic blacks, mulattoes (mixed European and African ancestry), Amerindians (descendants of the original inhabitants of the region), Maroons (descendants of escaped slaves who settled largely in the interior parts of French Guiana), whites (Europeans, mainly French), Indonesians, Vietnamese, and Chinese.

Caribbean music and dance are extremely popular in French Guiana, as are pop, rock, rap, and reggae. The biggest celebrations are the Carnivals that take place annually just before Lent. Other than Abolition Day on June 10, French Guiana's national holidays are the same as those of France.

CUISINE

The cuisine of French Guiana is greatly influenced by Chinese, Creole, Indonesian, French, and Vietnamese cooking.

Cayenne pepper, also known as *Capsicum frutescens*, is the native spice of French Guiana and is found in abundance. It is made from the dried pods of chili peppers and has a strong and pungent smell.

Bouillon d'aoura, the favorite dish of French Guiana, consists of smoked fish, prawns, vegetables, chicken, and crab, served with *aoura*, a fruit of the savannah trees. Other traditional recipes include *afada* (a spicy dish made with ripe plantains), *azowe* (a sweet snack made with corn flour, peanut flour, and sugar), *baba* (ground unhusked rice), *baka kasaba* (pastries made from cassava flour), and *saramakan chicken* (chicken and cassava stew). Drinks made from sugarcane and wines are favorite beverages. A concoction of rum, lime juice, and sugarcane syrup

Tribes of French Guiana

French Guiana is home to numerous ethnic tribes, including the native Caribs, Arawaks, and Macushi, as well as the Boni Maroons, descendants of escaped slaves. Caribs were known as "Galibi," but the Spanish corrupted the name to "Canibal," an error facilitated by the European perception of them as ferocious and warlike, furthered among colonists by the Caribs' ritual scarification. Fishing, agriculture, and basket making are traditional occupations among Caribs. The Arawaks live mainly in the tropical forest regions; forestry is their main occupation. The Boni Maroon tribes are descended from African slaves who escaped from Suriname and settled in the interior of French Guiana. They have traditionally lived as subsistence hunters and gatherers and

as farmers. They are also well known for the beauty of their artistic wood carvings.

The Macushi, a group of Amerindians widespread in northern countries of South America, have traditionally practiced sustainable harvesting of forest resources. They speak a North Carib language variously spelled "Makushi," "Makuxi," "Macusi," or "Macussi," and also known as Teweya or Teueia.

The Macushi Amerindians of Nappi are famous for their small figurines crafted from a latex known as *balata* that they harvest from the bulletwood tree. They have designed, crafted, and sold sculptures, figurines, and other objects for years. The income earned from figurines supports many Nappi families that would otherwise clear forest for farmland or other forms of subsistence.

served on ice is a popular cocktail called Ti Punch in French Guiana.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western (Gregorian) calendar and is celebrated as New Year's Day all over the world. Celebrations and revelries begin the evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve). In the capital city of Cayenne, people attend New Year's Eve parties to usher in the new year. Singing, dancing, feasting, and drinking are major highlights of the celebrations. As the clock strikes midnight, people cheer the new year's arrival. New Year's Day is a public holiday, spent quietly, recovering from the effects of the revelry.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day and is also known as May Day and Workers' Day in many parts of the world. It celebrates the importance of workers to their societies. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the contribution of workers around the world, and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. In French Guiana the observance is a public holiday with government offices, schools, and businesses closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ VICTORY DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 8

Victory Day, *Fête de la Victoire* (Feast of Victory), commemorates the official end of World War II in Europe. On May 8, 1945, Germany signed an unconditional treaty of surrender to the French and Allied forces. The day is also known as V-E Day, which stands for Victory in Europe. France was defeated and occupied by Germany during much of the war. The Germans set up a nominally free part of France known as Vichy France. French Guiana was officially loyal to the Vichy regime, although there was little contact between the two during the German occupation. In 1940 French Guiana sided with de Gaulle's government in exile and joined the fighting on the side of the Allied forces.

On this day people in French Guiana pay homage to the soldiers who lost their lives during World War II. Special memorial services are held throughout French Guiana, and war veterans march in parades.

❁ ABOLITION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 10

This day commemorates the abolition of slavery in French Guiana and throughout the French colonies on June 10, 1848. During its rule over French Guiana, France had enslaved local ethnic Amerindians and other Caribbean tribes. Most of the slaves, however, were brought from Africa to work on the sugar plantations. Cayenne was surrounded by plantations, some of which had several thousand slaves. After the abolition of slavery, many of the former slaves fled into the jungle where they set up communities similar to the ones they had known in Africa. On this day, the descendants of the former slaves celebrate their liberation. The day is marked by street fairs, art exhibits, and Caribbean dance and music performances.

❁ BASTILLE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 14

Bastille Day, the most important French national holiday, commemorates the beginning of the French Revolution on July 14, 1789. On this day, the people of Paris stormed the prison at the Bastille, which had been a potent symbol of the king's absolute authority and tyranny.

On this day the people of French Guiana gather in the capital of Cayenne, which is festooned with French flags. After an official flag-raising ceremony, there is a parade of French Guianese forces followed by official speeches and performances of French patriotic songs. A

Fun Fact

French Guiana is home to Kaieteur, the world's highest free-falling waterfall. Although the total height of Venezuela's Angel Falls is greater, its drop occurs in stages. The falls at Kaieteur, in contrast, is one huge, thunderous cataract 328 feet wide made as the Potaro River drops 748 feet straight down, nearly five times the height of Niagara Falls (177–184 feet).

Fun Fact

Papillon was Charrière's nickname, because he had a butterfly tattooed on his chest (*papillon* is French for "butterfly").

Fun Fact

The northeast and southwest trade winds converge in what is called the Zone Intertropicale de Convergence (Z.I.C.). Their convergence creates a low-pressure system between November and February that causes the rainy season in French Guiana.

Fun Fact

Because it is an overseas department of France, French Guiana is technically part of the European Union even though it is in South America. The Euro is the national currency of French Guiana.

Fun Fact

A sharp-toothed killer fish, called *aimara* in French Guianese Creole, lurks alone when stalking prey. Often growing to more than 3 feet in length, its flesh is considered a delicacy when it can be caught.

Fun Fact

Chili is the ancient Aztec name for cayenne pepper.

lot of eating and drinking marks the day's celebrations.

See also Volume III: BASTILLE DAY

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 11

Remembrance Day, also known as Armistice Day, commemorates the end of World War I on November 11, 1918, after an armistice was signed between the Allies and Germany in a railway carriage at Compiègne in France. Marshal Ferdinand Foch (1851–1929), a French army officer, was the commander in chief of the Allies who led them to victory against the German forces. The armistice treaty was signed at the 11th hour (11 A.M.) of the 11th day of the 11th month.

Because there are few veterans of World War I still alive Remembrance Day has evolved to honor the soldiers of both world wars. In French Guiana, the president of the General Council and other state officials attend a memorial service. Other highlights of the day include the observance of two minutes of silence in honor of the victims and soldiers, prayer services, political speeches, wreath-laying ceremonies, and the singing of devotional hymns.

War veterans of both world wars living in French Guiana march in parades.

Religious Holidays

EPIPHANY

Celebrated by: Christians
Observed on: January 6

Epiphany, called La Fête des Rois ("The Feast of the Three Kings") in French Guiana, celebrates the visit of the Three Kings, or Magi, to the infant Jesus in Bethlehem. In French Guiana, as in France, it is traditional on this day to serve a *galette des rois* ("cake of the kings"). A charm (often a bean or small figurine) is baked into the cake. Whoever gets the charm in his or her piece of cake is crowned the king or queen and can choose a partner.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EPIPHANY

CARNIVAL

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Last two weeks before Lent

Carnival, the biggest celebration in French Guiana, is a lively event, combining Caribbean traditions with French *joie de vivre*. In Guiana Carnival is called Tululu. Carnival celebrations, which began in 1848 after the abolition of slavery, span two weeks. They end on Mardi Gras (which means "Fat Tuesday" in French), which is the day before Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. Mardi Gras is traditionally the last burst of frivolity before the sober Christian period of abstinence and reflection known as Lent.

During Carnival in the capital city of Cayenne and other parts of French Guiana, people dress up in colorful and outlandish costumes, participate in parades, and attend the many parties that are being held. Carnival starts with the arrival of King Vaval, an effigy representing the spirit of Carnival. Vaval arrives in a canoe and is met by a large crowd gathered on the beach to welcome him. The festivities officially end with the burning of Vaval. The other important characters in Carnival are the Touloulous, the carnival queens. These women wear masks and dress from head to toe in lace and petticoats, tights, and gloves. They even disguise their voices when they speak so as not to be recognized. Like Vaval, the Touloulous embody the spirit of the Carnival with their brazen abandon.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; LENT

PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday is an important Christian holiday that falls on the Sunday before Easter. It commemorates Jesus' return to Jerusalem a few days prior to his execution. In those days, it was customary to cover, in some manner, the path of persons who were considered highly honorable, as a mark of respect. It is believed that on his arrival in Jerusalem, Jesus was greeted with palm fronds by followers who laid them in his path as he walked along the streets of Jerusalem. Thus the day came to be known as Palm Sunday.

Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week. On Palm Sunday devout Catholics attend a special Palm Sunday Mass where they receive tokens made of strips of palm frond.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Thursday before Easter

Holy Thursday, also known as Maundy Thursday, is a Christian commemoration of the day on which

Jesus washed the feet of his disciples before they shared a meal now called the Last Supper. It falls on the Thursday before Easter. It is also called Maundy Thursday because *maundatum* (a Latin word meaning “commandment”) is said to be the first word spoken by Jesus before he washed the disciples’ feet. It was reported that Jesus said, “*Mandatum novum do vobis*,” “A new commandment I give to you.”

In Catholic churches special prayer services are held. The priest, while celebrating Mass, reenacts the scenes from the Last Supper, washing the feet of 12 chosen parishioners just as Jesus did for his disciples. The mood is somber, and the faithful pray during this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

The Christian holiday of Good Friday commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. A somber, solemn occasion, it falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent (an austere season of fasting and penitence).

Most Guianese observe a fast, eschewing meat and dairy, from Ash Wednesday (the first day of Lent), for the entire 40 days before Good Friday and a partial fast until Easter. Some fast only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, marking the beginning and the end of the period of fast.

Guianese Christians attend special prayer services. Local churches stage Passion plays, reenacting Jesus Christ’s final moments before the Crucifixion. Devout Catholics fast on Good Friday, and in churches a ritual called the Stations of the Cross is performed. This is a reenactment of Jesus’ final journey to Golgotha as he carried the Cross to his Crucifixion.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a Christian feast that is observed on the first Sunday following Lent to celebrate Jesus’ Resurrection from the dead three days after his Crucifixion. On the night before Easter, French Guianese attend a midnight prayer service at their local churches and after the priest announces Christ’s Resurrection, people turn to greet one another and offer prayers to God. On Easter people visit friends and family, sharing a lavish Easter dinner.

The first Monday after Lent is celebrated as Easter Monday. It is a continuation of the Easter cel-

bration and because it is a national holiday, government offices, schools, and businesses are closed.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Forty days after Easter

The Feast of the Ascension is a day of celebration for Christians, commemorating Jesus’ Ascension into heaven 40 days after his Resurrection on Easter. On this day, special prayer services are held in churches all over French Guiana, which are widely attended.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

❁ PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fifty days after Lent

Both the Sunday and Monday of this holiday celebrate the day on which Christians believe the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus’ disciples. They are often called Whitsunday and Whitmonday, respectively. Devout Catholics attend Mass on both days. Pentecost Monday is an official holiday with government offices, businesses, and schools closed for the day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; LENT; PENTECOST

❁ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: August 15

The Feast of the Assumption commemorates Jesus’ mother Mary rising up to heaven. On this day devout Catholics in French Guiana attend prayer services in their local churches and offer prayers to the Virgin Mary.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

❁ ALL SAINTS’ DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: November 1

All Saints’ Day is a Christian feast, honoring all the saints (both known and unknown). It is an annual religious celebration, which takes place on November 1.

On All Saints’ Day, devout Catholics in French Guiana attend Mass in honor of the saints and offer prayers.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS’ DAY; ALL SOULS’ DAY; CHRISTIANITY

Fun Fact

The Emerillions are the smallest group of Guiana’s Amerindian population. They live in the Canopi region.

ALL SOULS' DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: November 2

All Souls' Day is a Roman Catholic festival held in remembrance of the departed. It is usually celebrated on November 2 unless it falls on a Sunday, in which case the commemoration is celebrated on Monday. The abbot of Cluny, St. Odilo, introduced this day in the 11th century. It follows All Saints' Day.

In French Guiana three Masses are conducted on All Souls' Day: one honoring the clerics, one honoring the departed, and the last honoring the pope. Also on this day the Guianese visit cemeteries and place flowers and candles at the graves of their deceased relatives. It is traditional to eat dishes made from lentils and peas.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

The Christian festival of Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus, whom Christians believe to be the Son of God. On Christmas Eve (December 24) French Guianese Catholics attend a Midnight Mass that includes readings from the Bible pertaining to Jesus' birth and church choirs singing devotional hymns and carols. In many churches children perform nativity plays.

On Christmas children open gifts brought by Father Christmas (Père Noël). Later the Guianese visit friends and family, and exchange gifts and greetings.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Rites of Passage

BIRTH

The birth of a child is greeted with celebrations among the Maroon tribes (such as the Aluku, also known as Boni Maroon) of French Guiana. The Boni Maroon believe in the theory of *nenseki* (transmigration of the soul), the idea that, if a soul has led a good life and dies, it returns to the world as another animal or, sometimes, as a human again.

The birth of twins, however, has traditionally evoked strong divergent reactions, depending on the tribe. While some groups deified twins, others saw them as evidence of evil forces and killed them at birth. In many cases even the mother of the twins

was killed, since it was believed that evil spirits had possessed her.

In modern Guiana the vast majority of people have embraced Christianity, and children are baptized according to Christian tradition.

COMING OF AGE

Among the Amerindians of French Guiana a girl is thought to have come of age when she has her first menstrual period. These tribes believe that the menstrual blood can attract monstrous spirits by its smell, so girls are taught how to protect themselves from evil spirits during their menses. They are advised not to go to the river, the kitchen, or to the community center, meet villagers, or even participate in any community work.

When boys, on the other hand, reach puberty, they undergo a period of rigorous training and seclusion to become what the tribes call "faith healers," or true tribesmen. They are trained to become breadwinners and also taught the ways of the governing council.

MARRIAGE

Earlier the Amerindians did not marry outside their community, but over time this has changed. Nowadays they marry freely outside their communities, and the tribes have mingled. When two Amerindian youth decide to get married, the boy's family visits the girl's home with the formal marriage proposal. If the marriage proposal is accepted by the girl's family, both sides offer each other cigarettes. Before marriage both the boy and the girl are subjected to various tests to prove their competence for marriage and its responsibilities. The boy has to prove himself as a farmer, artisan, and hunter, whereas the girl has to prove herself to be an accomplished weaver, potter, and basket maker.

Further Reading

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Gabon

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Western Africa, bordered by Cameroon, Congo, and Equatorial Guinea
Size	103,347 sq. mi.
Capital City	Libreville
Flag Description	Gabon's flag has three horizontal bands of equal size: green (top), yellow, and blue.
Independence	August 17, 1960 (from France)
Population	1,389,201
Government	Republic
Nationality	Gabonese
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Bantu including Fang, Bapounou, Nzebi, Obamba (87%)
Major Language(s)	French (official); Fang; Myene; Nzebi; Bapounou/Eschira; Bandjabi; other native languages
Major Religion(s)	Christian (50–75%); animist (25–49%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Renovation Day, March 12; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day, August 17

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Extensive archaeological research in what is now the Republic of Gabon began during the 1980s and has focused on the Ogooue River Valley because it appears to have served as a major prehistoric trade route and, much later, provided accessible routes for successive waves of Bantu-speaking peoples from Nigeria and Cameroon. The major ridge lines in Gabon are generally oriented in a north-south direction, and numerous elephant trails along the ridge lines were probably used by early humans migrating south. Artifacts found at various sites indicate that the Ogooue was inhabited by Stone Age hunter-gatherers, a succession of Neolithic peoples, and waves of Iron Age groups. (In central Africa no evidence of a Copper Age has yet been found, so the Iron Age comes right after the Neolithic phase.)

During the Stone Age, which ends around 5000–4500 B.C.E., technology apparently developed gradually in a stable population, and the acquisition of better hunting equipment, such as the bow and arrow gave hunters greater mobility and

accuracy. Most of the dating for sites and artifacts in the Ogooue Valley must be done by comparison to other sites where there is a clear stratigraphic record, but three layers at one site, which archaeologists named Lope 2, have been dated. The first, and oldest layer, was used around 10,000 years ago; the second layer evidences use about 9,000 years ago; and the third layer, the youngest, is around 7,000 years old.

Beginning during the Neolithic and progressing through the Iron Age, a variety of successive cultures indicates successive migratory waves coming into the region. The sudden appearance in the Ogooue of polished stone implements and pottery around 2500 may mean that Neolithic peoples moved into the valley from some other place.

The upper Holocene (3,000 B.C.E. to the present) shows a series of migrations of iron-working Bantu peoples from the vicinity of the Nigeria-Cameroon border into the Ogooue from 1500 to the start of the Christian era. These groups apparently replaced the inhabitants already living there although it is possible that the Neolithic peoples may have coexisted with the ironworkers. The ceramic arts are well represented by successive, often very different, styles, and the furnaces used by the ironworkers become increasingly

Fun Fact

When it became possible to import large quantities of containers from Europe, the pottery traditions that had lasted about 4,500 years in the Ogooue Valley quickly became extinct, and pottery is no longer made or used.

technologically sophisticated. Of particular interest from this period are widely distributed petroglyphs (carvings or inscriptions on a rock) found on boulders along the Ogooue River.

A form of open-air rock art was first found in the area in 1987. Since then an intensive search has found more than 1,000 petroglyphs up and down the Ogooue Valley, mostly on rounded or flat rock outcrops. Unfortunately local oral traditions and historical accounts both fail to mention these works, and the people who now inhabit the valley ignore them.

Although dating such open-air artwork is virtually impossible, from the patina on the figures and the fact that they were made with iron chisels, the petroglyphs seem to be the work of Iron Age peoples. This makes them roughly contemporaneous with the beginning of the Christian era and attributable to the several waves of Bantu speakers. Additional evidence for this interpretation is provided by an archaeological site less than 700 feet from petroglyphs on Elarmekora Hill, where pottery shards were found adorned with concentric circles identical to the petroglyphs.

The petroglyphs appear to have been carefully thought out because at least some of the figures were first roughly drawn with faint rectangular lines. The actual designs were then pecked out, probably with iron chisels, leaving thousands of tiny round depressions. A great variety of petroglyphs have been described. They fall into two broad categories: abstract designs such as triangles and the concentric circles already mentioned, and representational figures, many of small four-footed animals, suggestive of a symbolism related to hunting, lizards, insects, and, at one site, what may be fertility symbols used in initiation rituals.

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to enter the region, arriving in 1472 C.E. Gabon owes its name to the Portuguese, who named it *gabao*, after the shape of the Komo River estuary. In Portuguese, a *gabao* is “a coat with sleeves and hood.” But the Portuguese concentrated their activities on the nearby islands of São Tomé and Bioko instead of Gabon. By the 16th century the region had become a hub for slave trading and had also attracted the Dutch, French, and English, who visited the coastal regions for commercial purposes, trading in ivory and precious tropical woods in addition to slaves.

Among the European powers France was most interested in establishing a colony in Gabon and in 1839 and 1841 signed treaties with the coastal chiefs and declared the coastal region a French Protectorate. In 1849 the French founded Libreville, meaning “free city,” as a settlement for freed slaves.

Although the Congress of Vienna had abolished the slave trade in 1815 and although French naval patrols reduced the number enslaved and shipped, slaves continued to be exported from the Gabon coast until the 1880s.

France established its dominance in the whole of Gabon in 1885, but it did not officially administer control over the region until 1903. At the beginning of the 20th century private French companies began exploiting the local people and using them for forced labor. Made to work under inhuman conditions and brutally treated, the Gabonese responded to such treatment with periodic revolts and uprisings that were suppressed by French forces. French exploitation of the region’s natural resources is evident from the fact that, by the end of World War I, most of the forests of Gabon were destroyed, and most of the country’s natural resources exhausted.

Early in the 20th century the Gabonese began to intensify their freedom movement. In 1910 Gabon joined with Chad, Central African Republic, and Republic of the Congo Brazzaville to form French Equatorial Africa, a federation that lasted until 1959. After World War II, as the independence wave washed over colonies throughout the world, Gabon too pressed its demand for self-determination. The French relented, though reluctantly, and granted independence to Gabon on August 17, 1960.

Léon M’Ba (1902–67) was sworn in as the first president of the Republic of Gabon, remaining in office until his death. In that year the reins of power were entrusted to Albert-Bernard Bongo (b. 1935). He converted to Islam and assumed a new name El Hadj Omar Bongo. He also declared Gabon a one-party state and maintained his own power. Until 1990 the Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG) was the only legalized national political party in the country.

Bongo’s appointment as president coincided with rising oil prices and the discovery of large manganese and uranium deposits in Gabon. The economy boomed. With untold wealth flowing into Gabon and Gabonese confidence at an all-time high, the era came to be known as the “Gabonese Miracle.” The miracle lasted for a decade, after which the slump in international oil prices materially affected the country’s economy.

In 1990 after popular discontent had produced seven days of rioting in Port-Gentil, Bongo submitted to the demands of the Gabonese people and legalized the existence of other political parties. In the elections held since 1990 Bongo has been declared the winner each time and, in the early 21st century, amid charges of election fraud, he still held the office of president of the Republic of Gabon. In the turbulence of African politics where coups are common, Gabon is an exception: Bongo’s presidency spans more than three decades. In 2003 Bongo directed the parliament to alter Gabon’s constitution to allow him to run for president as many times as he desires.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The Republic of Gabon is located in western Africa and is flanked by Cameroon to the north, Republic of the Congo (*Brazzaville*) to the south and the east, and Equatorial Guinea to the northwest. Libreville is its capital. The Ogooue River is the lifeline of Gabon and geographically divides the country into two as it flows through Franceville and Lambarene into the Atlantic Ocean. The Cristal Mountains, almost 3,000 feet high, are located in the northern part of Gabon. The Chaillu Mountains are located in the central part of the country and are home to the highest peak in Gabon, Mount Iboundji, which stands 3,189 feet high.

More than three-fourths of Gabon is covered by dense equatorial rain forests, which are home to an encyclopedic variety of flora and fauna. From ebony to the climbing palm, rubber vines to purple hearts (hardwood tree), Gabon has a rich variety of flora. Gabon is also home to snakes, vipers, and pythons along with monkeys, baboons, crocodiles, and even endangered gorillas.

Gabon has an equatorial climate characterized by high temperatures, coupled with humidity throughout the year, and heavy rainfall from June to September. The annual average temperature is 81° F.

❁ ECONOMY

Gabon is economically more prosperous than most of its neighbors and enjoys good trade relations with America and Europe. The country has a vast amount of natural resources, both minerals and wood. Oil is the major revenue generator of Gabon's economy, in addition to timber and manganese. But the lack of proper infrastructure facilities and financing hinders the development of these resources. The country also does not have a large enough workforce and depends on immigrants to meet the labor needs of retailing, transportation, and artisanship.

Gabon has become a leader in the fight against human trafficking on the African sub-continent, and has passed comprehensive anti-trafficking legislation in recent years.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Gabon is home to the descendants of the Bantu-speaking tribes as well as a small group of Bongon, a people once called pygmies. The Bantu descendants are divided into 10 major ethnic groups. Prominent among them are the Fang, who reside in the north and northeastern parts of Gabon. The Myene people live in the coastal regions, the Eshira are based in southwestern Gabon, and the Mbede live in the southeast.

In ancient times the Fang were warriors who practiced cannibalism. This practice had stopped by the early 17th century. By the 19th century some Fang were engaged in hunting to take advantage of the growing demand for ivory, while others became

farmers, practicing slash-and-burn forest-clearing techniques. Farming is still the primary occupation of the Fang in modern-day Gabon.

Between 50 and 75 percent of the Gabonese are Christians. French is the official language, although most Gabonese converse in the native African Fang language. While Bapunu is widely spoken in the southern region, Bandgabi is spoken around Franceville.

Music and dance are integral to Gabonese culture. Specially crafted drums, the *balafone* (xylophone), and the *sanza* (a stringed instrument, also called *mbira*) are some of the popular musical instruments in Gabon. The shape of these instruments and their style of playing have remained unchanged for centuries. They are played in accordance with the traditions of each tribe and produce rhythms expressing happiness or sorrow according to the occasion. Gabonese folklore enjoys a distinct place in its culture and involves recitation of ancient tales (half-spoken and half-sung), accompanied by traditional musical instruments.

Guardian figures (wooden figurines) made by the Fang are placed on wooden boxes that contain the bones of their ancestors. These figures are intended to scare away intruders and protect the ancestral bones. It is believed that the bones contain the power of the dead and are carefully preserved.

The traditional art of carving wooden masks is a specialty of the Gabonese ethnic groups; masks play an important role in many rituals and ceremonies. The Fang believe that these masks help them keep in touch with the world of the dead. In ancient times, these wooden masks were prepared under the watchful eye of a priest, who ensured that

Fun Fact

The world's smallest crocodilians, known as "dwarf crocs," are found in the rain forests of Gabon. They grow to a length of five feet, which is small when compared to the 20- to 25-foot crocodiles found in other parts of the world. Dwarf crocodiles are an endangered species since they are being killed indiscriminately for their meat.

Fang Masks: Inspiration for Picasso and Matisse

The 20th-century painters Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse both owned Fang masks. Matisse's *Portrait of Madame Matisse* (1913) was inspired by a Fang mask. It is believed that although Matisse started the portrait with a clear picture in mind, he decided to omit the familiar features while painting the face. The painting took on a masklike representation, much like the Fang masks in Matisse's collection.

Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)* (1907), one of the great paintings in modern art, shows two female figures with masks resembling a Gabon Mahongwe mask.

the best wood was used. The entire process of crafting masks required great attention to detail since any sloppiness might anger the spirits, causing disease and death. It was believed that, after a mask was made, it assumed supernatural powers and acted as a window to the world of the spirits. Fang masks have inspired such Western artists as Picasso and Matisse.

CUISINE

Although the cooking of Gabon has been influenced by Arab, Portuguese, French, and British styles of cuisine, it remains essentially true to its indigenous roots and its recipes are typical of much West African cooking. Among the Fang and other Gabonese tribes, the traditional diet includes rice, yams, and cassava (a perennial woody shrub). Chicken is extremely popular and is a featured ingredient in many Gabonese dishes. Besides chicken, grasscutter (a large rodent), porcupine, antelope, and big forest snails are also common on the menu in many Gabonese restaurants. Porridge made of *gari* (grated fresh cassava), accompanied by a spicy sauce, is also served. *Nyembwe* (a chicken dish made with palm nuts) and stuffed crab are classic dishes of Gabon. Palm nut is also used to make cooking oil. Favorite beverages include wine made from bananas and a light beer made from millet.

Baked Bananas

Serves 8

Ingredients:

- 8 bananas, cut into three uniformly diagonal pieces
- 1 egg, beaten lightly
- 2 Tbs. orange juice
- 1/2 c. bread crumbs
- 1/2 c. vegetable oil
- sour cream
- brown sugar

Preparation:

Preheat oven to 350°F.

Combine orange juice with beaten eggs. Heat the oil in a sauce pan. Dip the bananas in the egg mixture, then coat with the bread crumbs. Sauté the bananas until they begin to brown lightly, then use a spatula to place them on a cookie sheet and bake them at 350° for five minutes.

Serve 1 banana per guest and top each with 3 Tbs. of sour cream and 1 Tbs. of brown sugar.

This is a wonderfully flexible basic recipe and many variations are possible. For example, the bananas can be dipped in the egg mixture, then either in shredded coconut or chopped peanuts and baked for five minutes. Or the bananas can be coated in a blend of cracker crumbs, curry powder, and cayenne pepper before sautéing.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Gregorian calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day. Celebrations and revelleries begin on the evening of December 31. People party all night long to welcome the new year. January 1 is a national holiday in Gabon with government offices, schools, and businesses closed for the day.

RENOVATION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 12

Renovation Day commemorates the anniversary of the founding of the Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG), which was formed on March 12, 1968. The PDG, founded by Omar Bongo, is the ruling party of Gabon and was the only legal political party of the nation until 1990. On this day speeches by government officials praise the contributions made by the PDG to Gabon's development and are followed by day-long cultural activities including traditional dance and music performances. All government offices and public and private institutions in Gabon are closed on March 12.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Labor Day, also called May Day and Workers' Day, commemorates the important role played by workers in their societies. The May 1 observance of Labor Day was decreed by the Second Socialist International in 1889 to coincide with a general strike in the United States scheduled by the American Federation of Labor (AFL) to occur in 1890 to win an eight-hour workday.

In Gabon Labor Day is a very important holiday. Workers, wearing their uniforms, parade through towns and cities. Some carry their tools and provide demonstrations of their work. For example the firemen in Gabon display their fire-fighting skills by conducting fire drills for the public.

Food and wine are also an integral part of Labor Day celebrations in Gabon. Families prepare big meals, sharing them with other workers and their families. Palm wine is a favorite beverage during Labor Day festivities. After the meal, people dance to local music.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 17

The French granted Gabon full independence on August 17, 1960, after it agreed to a treaty of cooperation with France. Independence Day, or National Day, celebrations are held in different parts of Gabon, and festivities are spread over three days, between August 16 and August 18.

The Gabonese celebrate this holiday with great enthusiasm from the capital city of Libreville to the most remote village. Official speeches, parades by the armed forces, and cultural activities such as traditional dance and music performances are integral parts of Independence Day celebrations.

Religious Holidays

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Christians celebrate Easter in remembrance of Jesus' Resurrection three days after his Crucifixion. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent. The Bwiti religion, widely practiced in many parts of the country, blends Christian practices with indigenous beliefs. The Bwiti Easter lasts for four days, beginning the Thursday before Good Friday (Maundy Thursday) and continuing until Easter Sunday. Adherents of the Bwiti religion take *iboga*, a sacred hallucinogenic plant, in the evening rituals that are a part of the Easter celebrations. People dance and sing joyfully throughout the festivities.

Easter Monday is celebrated on the Monday after Easter. Symbolizing the rolling away of the stone from the mouth of Jesus' tomb, egg-rolling competitions are a major highlight of this celebration. People compete in rolling their beautifully decorated Easter eggs down a slope or designated path.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; MAUNDY THURSDAY; LENT

✿ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: August 15

The Assumption commemorates the death and elevation to heaven of Mary, the mother of Jesus. It is also celebrated as the Virgin Mary's heavenly birthday. It is one of the most important festivals celebrated by Catholics all over the world. On this day Gabonese Catholics attend church and offer prayers to the Virgin Mary and her son Jesus.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

✿ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day is an annual Christian feast honoring all Catholic saints (known and unknown). It is an

The Bwiti Religion

Bwiti is a syncretic religion that borrows from animist beliefs as well as traditional Christian concepts. An ever-evolving religion, it has many sects, each of which has its own founding father as well as its own interpretation of Christian principles. Each sect has its own temple or place of worship, with a distinctive central axis or *akun*, which distinguishes the temples belonging to various sects. The *akun* is decorated with symbolic designs that reflect the the cosmic tree.

The Bwiti is an open religion with no secrets relating to the rites of passage, and initiates can be inducted into more than one sect without any conflict. Moreover no rivalry exists among the different sects, making it a uniquely tolerant religion.

annual religious celebration. In Gabon the life and teachings of pious saints are remembered. Gabonese Catholics attend church on this day, offer prayers to God and thank him for sending the saints to spread the message of Christianity.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

✿ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas marks the birth of Jesus, and it is celebrated with great enthusiasm in Gabon. Devout Roman Catholics attend Mass on Christmas Eve and afterward dance and sing. Drums are an important part of Christmas Eve celebrations, as people sway to traditional hymns sung to the beat of drums.

On Christmas Day Catholics attend morning Mass. Many women kneel outside the church in reverence before entering the church to offer prayers to Jesus. They wear new clothes and pray at the Nativity scene, which depicts the baby Jesus in the manger.

A special feast is prepared for Christmas, and after the meal, the day is celebrated by greeting friends and family members.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Rites of Passage

✿ BIRTH

The birth of a child is greeted with great delight in Gabon. A lavish feast is prepared, and friends and family members from far and near take part in the celebrations.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Among the Bwiti, initiation rites are a weeklong event. The key element in the ritual is the hallucinogenic *iboga*, which is used by the various Bwiti sects in Gabon. The Bwiti religion is a fusion of indigenous and Christian beliefs.

Bwiti initiation rites may only be administered by people who themselves have undergone the rituals. However, all the villagers participate in the ceremonies, and each one is assigned a specific task of singing, drumming, or dancing during the festivities. The rites are composed of three phases of symbolic acts: The first phase begins the process of symbolic death, which is completed in the second phase. The third phase represents rebirth. The ceremonies guide the initiate through these three phases and bring him back into the world (rebirth) as an adult member of the community.

This symbolic rite is performed by administering the hallucinogenic *iboga*. It is given to the initiates, and the Bwiti believe that they experience spiritual revelations after consuming this sacred plant. They achieve clarity of thought as well as peace of mind. The initiates are assumed to be in the state of “sacred knowing.” The deeper the stillness of mind, the greater the insight of the initiates. Their experiences during this period will lay the foundation for fundamental changes in their adult lives.

❁ MARRIAGE

Polygamy is part of the Gabonese social order and is a common feature of both traditional and civil marriages. However in a civil marriage the law requires

the couple to declare whether they want to have a monogamous or polygamous relationship. A common-property law governs monogamous married couples, while in polygamous relationship the property rights of wives are severely reduced in the event of a divorce or separation.

❁ DEATH

The Gabonese believe in the powers of their ancestral spirits. In ancient times people preserved the bones of their ancestors in a closed wooden box and kept a guardian figure to protect it. They believed that the bones of the ancestors held supernatural powers and hence needed to be preserved and protected.

Traditional rituals also involve removing certain body parts and cleansing the corpse before burial.

Further Reading

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~ Gambia, The ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Western Africa (bordering Senegal and the North Atlantic Ocean)
Size	4,363 sq. mi.
Capital City	Banjul
Flag Description	The Gambian flag has three horizontal bands of equal size—red (top), blue with white edges, and green.
Independence	February 18, 1965 (from United Kingdom)
Population	1,593,256 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Gambian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Mandinka (42%); Fula, Wolof, Jola, and Serahuli (53%)
Major Language(s)	English (official); Mandinka; Wolof; Fula; other native languages
Major Religion(s)	Muslims (90%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Independence Day, February 18; Labor Day, May 1; Liberation Day, July 22

Introduction

Republic of The Gambia, a former British colony, was granted the right of self-governance in 1963 and became an independent nation on February 18, 1965. The Gambia (or Gambia) is named after the river Gambia, which owes its name to the Portuguese, who carried on trade in the region and named it *câmbio* meaning “trade” or “exchange.” Gambia is the British pronunciation of the Portuguese word *câmbio*.

❁ HISTORY

The history of The Gambia can be traced back to 500 C.E. when the region was endowed with agricultural prosperity and the knowledge of smelting iron. The iron was turned into tools, cookware, and weapons and helped develop trade in the region. Between 500 and 1000, numerous stone circles were built between the Saloum and Gambia Rivers. The British Isles are well known for their ancient stone circles and menhirs, especially Stonehenge and the large ceremonial complex at Avebury, and similar stone structures are found throughout Europe, the Near East, and North America. Few, however, know about the stone circles found in The Gambia and south-

ern Senegal, which have between 10 and 24 standing stones. Although not as old as those of Europe, their construction was just as labor intensive, and the people who built them left hundreds behind. The sizes and shapes of the stones vary, though many are round with a flat top. Some are square, some have a ball cut in the top of the stone, and some smaller stones have a cup-shaped hollow on top. The largest stones found, thought to weigh as much as ten tons apiece, are at Niai Kunda.

Most of the stones are laterite, a red-brown iron-bearing sandstone, common in the area. Laterite was a perfect medium for working because it is a relatively unstable rock, which makes it easy to quarry. However, once exposed to air it hardens and is capable of withstanding considerable weathering, as The Gambia's circles attest. Lab tests performed at the University of Dakar have dated the stones to around 750 (±110), before the Mandinka moved into the region. In spite of excavations, which found human remains, not much is known about the stones, their meaning, or the symbolism implied by their differences. The circles almost certainly were communal cemeteries. Some group, or even groups, had the time, the workforce, and the desire to construct them. The reasons for the various shapes, as well as the identity of the engineers who built them, remain mysteries.

Fun Fact

King Bojang sold St. Mary's Island to the British for about US\$45, which they paid with cash, rum, tobacco, and guns.

Fun Fact

Despite the end of British rule in 1965, the queen of England, Queen Elizabeth II (b. 1926), continues to be the titular head of state of the Republic of The Gambia.

By 1000 trade had increased significantly between the countries in the northern and southern regions of the Sahara. It is believed that the region was part of the Ghana Empire and the Songhai Empire successively. Around the 14th century Gambia became part of the Mali Empire, founded by the charismatic ruler Sundiata Keita (c. 1190–c. 1255). The Mali Empire was the dominant force in the

Sahara and controlled trans-Saharan trade, which brought it in contact with the powerful Arab chieftains. The Mali Empire was influenced by the teachings of Islam and eagerly embraced the religion. But by the 15th century the influence of the Mali Empire was fading, and a group of Malinke (subjects of the Mali Empire) settled in the region near the Gambia River. They brought the teachings of Islam with them and came to be known as Mandinka. The Wolof, from Senegal, and the Fulani, the nomadic West African tribe, also began settling in the region around the same time.

The first European contact in the region came through the Portuguese in 1455, when navigators reached the Gambia River. Slavery was a part of the African culture before the arrival of Europeans. However the Portuguese spread slave trade to other parts of the world and enjoyed a monopoly in this trade until the mid-16th century when their interests were threatened by the French and British. By the end of the 16th century Portuguese rule in the region had ended, and the British and French began fighting for dominance as the slave trade was the main source of revenue in the region. It is estimated that more than 3 million slaves were exported from the region during the colonial period.

The capital city of Banjul was called Bathurst until 1973. In 1816 Tumami Bojang, the king of the Kombos, who owned St. Mary's Island, sold it to the British.

The British established Bathurst, named after Henry Bathurst (1762–1834), third Earl of Bathurst, then the colonial secretary. In 1820 the river Gambia was declared a British Protectorate. Slavery was abolished in all the colonies of the British Empire in 1834. The British tried to put an end to slave trade in the region, but were unsuccessful. In 1886 Gambia became a Crown Colony, and a year later the French and the British settled their ownership dispute in the region by defining the boundaries of Senegal (a French colony) and The Gambia.

British rule in the region continued until 1965, when the country was officially granted independence. Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara (b. 1924), the leader of the People's Progressive Party (PPP), was sworn in as the first president of the Republic of The Gambia.

The article *the* was added before Gambia and the country was named "The Republic of The Gambia." The Gambia became a republic in the Commonwealth of Nations in 1970, following a referendum. An unsuccessful coup in 1981 failed to bring a change in leadership. Also in 1982 Senegal and The Gambia signed the Treaty of Confederation, which led to the formation of The Senegambia Confederation. However, the idea of a unified culture and economy failed to win people's votes in both countries, and The Gambia withdrew from the Confederation in 1989.

Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara remained the president of The Gambia until 1994, when he was forcibly displaced by a military coup led by Lieutenant Yahya A. J. J. Jammeh (b. 1965) and the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council (AFPRC). Jammeh was named president of The Gambia, and a transitional plan for restoring democracy was announced by the AFPRC. According to the plan fresh elections took place under international supervision, and Jammeh was reelected president of The Gambia in 2001.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in the western part of Africa, The Gambia is largely surrounded by Senegal with the Atlantic Ocean toward the west.

The Gambia River is one of the striking geographical features of the region, and the flood plain is flanked by low hills. It divides the country (lengthwise) into two equal parts. Gambia owes its diverse vegetation to the subtropical climatic conditions. Mangrove forests dominate the areas along the Gambia River, while open savannahs (grasslands dotted with a wide variety of trees) and dry grasslands provide some greenery to the semi-arid Sahel region.

The Gambia has a subtropical climate, characterized by a long dry season followed by a short spell of rain. Humidity is a cause for major discomfort preceding the rainy season. The average day temperature between December and February is 75°F and 86°F from June to September.

ECONOMY

The Gambia has a liberalized market-based economy with agriculture forming its backbone. Agriculture is the primary occupation of more than 75 percent of the population. Groundnuts (similar to peanuts), corn, rice, millet, and sesame are the chief crops.

The government has initiated many economic reforms that have contributed to the development of the region. A major problem is the trafficking of people for sexual exploitation and forced labor, especially children. There is as yet no comprehensive effort on the part of the government to halt these crimes.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

More than 63 percent of the population resides in the rural areas. But each year more and more rural youth are migrating to the cities in search of employment and a better life. Even though the urban population is greatly influenced by Western ideology and values, Gambians across the country still hold onto their traditions. Indigenous dress styles (depending on the tribe or ethnic group), as well as extended families, continue to be an integral part of the society.

The Gambia is home to a wide variety of ethnic groups, each having its own customs, language, and traditions. The Mandinka are the dominant ethnic group, followed by other groups such as the Wolof, the Fula, and Serahule. It is estimated that more than 3,500 non-Africans, including Europeans and people of Lebanese origin, live in The Gambia. Despite the ethnic diversity, there is minimal ethnic violence. Approximately 90 percent of The Gambians are Muslims while 9 percent are followers of Christianity.

The indigenous people have divided their society on the basis of status. Warriors and traditional nobility are at the top, followed by farmers, traders, and tradespeople, such as blacksmiths, weavers, and so forth. The griots (pronounced “GREE oh”), the traditional storytellers are the lowest in the caste system but are held in high esteem, because they are responsible for passing on oral history and traditions and can recite a family or village history from memory. They are the custodians of the histories of the villages and their people.

Greeting each other is an important tradition of The Gambia. The Wolof and the Mandinka people have a special ritual for greeting each other that lasts for half a minute. Even in the urban areas, the greeting may be in French or English, but is never forgotten. It is an integral part of The Gambian culture.

The Gambia has a rich musical tradition. The *balafon* (similar to a xylophone), *ngoni* (a lute), drums, and *kora* (a 21-string harp) are traditionally used as accompaniments during musical performances.

The griots and poets have carried on the ancient tradition of preserving family and village histories by bringing them alive through songs and long narratives. The griots, while playing the *kora*, sing praises and recite stories of the people’s glorious past, thereby arousing a sense of pride among the ethnic groups. The griots are the living encyclopedia of Gambia’s historical past and the custodians of its rich cultural heritage. They can recite different chapters of tribal history for many hours and even for days on end.

❁ CUISINE

The Gambian cuisine offers a wide variety of traditional delicacies. These include *benechin*, a rice-based dish cooked in vegetable and fish sauce, and *plasas*, a fish or meat dish cooked with vegetable leaves in

Greeting Ritual in The Gambia

The greeting ritual begins with the Islamic greeting, *Salaam aleikum* (“Peace be with you”) and the response, *Aleikum salaam* (“And peace be with you as well”). Then questions about the well-being of family, friends, and even the village are asked. The answer is given as *Al humdulallah* (“Thanks be to God”) as everything good (or bad) is taken as God’s will.

palm oil and served with *fufu* (a starchy accompaniment made of yam or plantain; the African equivalent to mashed potatoes).

In The Gambia, it is customary for people to eat from a communal bowl. Mats are spread on the ground, and the food bowl is placed at the center. The meal is usually brought in large bowls and, if sauce is an accompaniment, then the oldest female of the house brings the sauce in another bowl. Washing hands is a ritual religiously followed prior to eating. Men sit on the mats after removing their slippers, and food is served in the large communal bowls. In the villages men eat from the same communal bowl, while women eat from their own. Little boys eat with the men, and girls eat with the women.

Fun Fact

The Republic of The Gambia is the smallest country on the African continent.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR’S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western (Gregorian) calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year’s Day. Celebra-

Chakery

Ingredients:

- 1 pt. vanilla yogurt
- 8 oz. sour cream
- 12 oz. evaporated milk
- 1 can crushed pineapple
- dash of ground nutmeg
- splash of vanilla flavoring

Couscous

Preparation:

Mix all the ingredients (except the couscous) together to make the sauce. Cook the couscous separately in water. Serve Chakery sauce over couscous.

tions begin on December 31. Gambians dance and sing all night to usher in the new year. New Year's Day is celebrated with family meals, music, and dancing in The Gambia. People visit the countryside and celebrate with their extended families and friends. All public and private institutions remain closed on New Year's Day.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 18

The Republic of The Gambia, formerly a British colony, was granted independence on February 18, 1965. A national holiday, it is a day of great pride for Gambians. The annual Independence Day celebrations take place at the National Stadium in Bakau, near the capital city of Banjur. Special programs include official speeches on patriotic themes, marching bands, and honor guards leading the parade, followed by a special Independence Day march by school students and Boy Scouts.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, May Day, or Workers' Day in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers. The May 1 observance of Labor Day has its origins in the international socialist movement and was chosen in 1889 to coincide with an American Federation of Labor (AFL) general strike in the United States for an eight-hour workday, originally scheduled for 1890. In The Gambia, government offices, businesses, and schools remain closed on this day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

LIBERATION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 22

Liberation Day commemorates the successful coup led by Lieutenant Yahya A. J. J. Jammeh and the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council (AFPRC) on July 22, 1994. The coup displaced the then-president of The Gambia, Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara, and a transitional plan for democracy was set into motion. In 1996 The Provisional Independent Electoral Commission (PIEC), which was renamed Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) in 1997, was given charge of registering voters and conducting fair and free elections in the region. In 2001–02 free elections were conducted in the region, and Yahya Jammeh was re-elected president of The Gambia. Official speeches and military parades commemorate the famous coup, which was considered the turning point in restoring power to the people of The Gambia.

Religious Holidays

EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, or the Festival of Sacrifice (also called Tabaski and Eid al-Kebir), is celebrated in honor of (Ibrahim's) Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his own son on God's command. However, just as Ibrahim was about to kill his son, God replaced the young boy with a ram. On this day, Gambian Muslims get up early in the morning to attend mosque where they offer prayers alongside their friends and family. Then they greet each other and exchange gifts. A big traditional feast of mutton is prepared for this day.

This is also the month in which the holy pilgrimage called hajj, the fifth pillar of Islam, is made. The Koran states that it is mandatory for every Muslim to undertake this journey at least once in his or her lifetime if it is physically and financially feasible.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday is always the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent, a 40-day period of fasting and austerity practiced by devout Catholics. It is a solemn Christian holiday, marking the Crucifixion of Jesus. The lights of most churches are dimmed, and there is no Communion service in Catholic churches. Christians attend special church services, listen to readings from the Gospels, and spend the day in quiet prayer and reflection.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

The Christian holiday of Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection and return on the third day after his Crucifixion. Celebrating victory over death and the resurgence of life, it falls on the first Sunday following Lent and is celebrated by Christians worldwide. In The Gambia, after church services, Easter is a day of feasting and festivities and is celebrated with great enthusiasm by Christians.

Easter Monday, the day after Easter, is a national holiday in The Gambia. In The Gambia, as in other countries, there is a special church service on this day. The shops are full of beautifully decorated Easter eggs, which are eagerly sought by children. The day is generally spent in leisure and sports activities.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ MOULOU

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

Mouloud commemorates the birth of Muhammad and falls in the third month of the Islamic year. The Gambian Muslims, along with the rest of the Islamic world, offer prayers in honor of Muhammad and talk about his life and teachings. A festive spirit rules the day and the evening skies are lit up with fireworks. A special meal is also prepared on this occasion.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOU

❁ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: August 15

The Christian holiday of the Assumption commemorates the elevation of Mary, mother of Jesus, to heaven. It is celebrated by Roman Catholics and members of Eastern Orthodox churches. Prayers and hymns in addition to a beautiful church service mark the day for Gambian Christians.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

During the holy month of Ramadan Muslims worldwide must observe a month-long fast beginning each day at dawn and lasting until dusk in order to build a stronger spirit. It is believed that the Koran was revealed to Muhammad during Ramadan.

Eid al-Fitr, or Koriteh as it is known in The Gambia, marks the end of Ramadan, and fasting on this day is strictly forbidden in the Koran. On this auspicious day Muslims wake up early in the morning and partake of a light meal. They wear new clothes and gather together to offer prayers in the mosques. Eid al-Fitr is one of two Islamic *eid* festivals (the other is Eid al-Adha) and it is a day of great joy for Muslims in The Gambia and joyful celebrations prevail all over the country.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of celebration for Christians all over the world. It marks the birthday of Jesus, whom they worship as the Son of God. It is one of the most important holidays for Christians in The Gambia. People in urban areas drive to the countryside to celebrate with their extended families.

In the week preceding Christmas people buy clothes and special gifts for friends and family. Decorated Christmas trees adorn homes and churches, and carols are sung throughout Christmas week. On Christmas Christians and non-Christians come together to celebrate this auspicious day. People pray for peace and prosperity of The Gambia and the world at large. All public and private institutions remain closed on Christmas.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ INTERNATIONAL ROOTS FESTIVAL

Observed in: Jufureh

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June–July

Every year The Gambia plays hosts to the International Roots Festival, which is held during June and July. The International Roots Festival is intended to help the black people of African descent living in America and European countries become aware of, and connect with, their African roots. Cultural programs, such as traditional Gambian folk dances and musical performances, exhibitions of folk art, and ancient crafts, are organized to highlight The Gambia's rich cultural heritage.

The Jufureh village is the ancestral home of the famous black novelist Alex Haley, the author of the best-selling novel *Roots*, which was adapted into a movie and serialized on U.S. television. Haley wrote the book while trying to find his own roots. His search took him to The Gambia, and he discovered that he was the descendant of Kunta Kinte, a Gambian who was captured and trafficked to North America to work as a slave.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

In Gambian society, birth and pregnancy are secretive affairs. During the entire period of pregnancy people refrain from talking about it and are rather discreet in their behavior. The news is kept private, because the Gambians believe that talking about it can endanger the life of the unborn child, causing some harm to befall it. After the birth of a child, certain rituals are performed to ward off evil. For example fire burns for a week in a house where a child is born, and the mother has to remain indoors.

The naming ceremony takes place one week after the child's birth. The father or his relatives have the right to name the child, and the father is responsible for inviting friends and family for festivities and

Kankurangs

The *kankurang* is a masked individual whose job is to act as a bodyguard for circumcised boys, protecting them from evil spirits. This personage originated in the 12th century. The *kankurang* appears at ceremonies covered in leaves or bark with tufts of leaves on his upper arms and ankles. His head and torso are also covered with red-orange bark. Brandishing a machete and a stick, his fierce and menacing dance is meant to threaten onlookers and inspire fear.

rituals. The naming ceremony takes place early in the morning and begins with an elder shaving the child's head or cutting a lock of hair and saying a prayer. Then the priest whispers the chosen name in the child's ear, while the griot ("praise-singer"), or musical entertainer, says it aloud for the entire community to hear. Once the name has been announced, the child's hair is buried. On this day, livestock and poultry are sacrificed, and food is offered to the guests. Later in the evening a huge feast is held followed by drumming and dancing.

COMING OF AGE

Circumcision is a ritual performed at puberty among the Mandinka, the Fulas, and the Jolas. Young boys between the ages of 8 and 12 years are circumcised in special ceremonies in accordance with the customs and traditions of the ethnic group. Ritual genital cutting (also called female genital mutilation, FGM) for girls, a highly controversial practice that has been banned in many countries, is still performed in the Gambia. The Foundation for Research on Women's Health, Productivity, and Environment (BAFROW), a Gambian women's organization, reports that seven of the Gambia's nine ethnic groups practice FGM, and estimates that between 60 to 90 percent of women in the Gambia have had these operations. Almost 100 percent of Fula and Sarahuli women have had their genitals removed.

The Wolof tribe prefers a different manner of welcoming adulthood. When they reach puberty, children spend a time in seclusion (in modern times it is only a few days) during which they are taught lessons on adulthood, tribal history, traditions, and customs, and informed of their duties and responsibilities as adults. While boys customarily wear white robes with a triangular hood, girls wear specially designed bead-dresses.

At the end of this instruction period a big ceremony is held at the village to welcome the initiates back into village life. Parents prepare special clothing for the initiates, which they wear for several days after their return.

Socializing, feasting, dancing with masks, and drumming are highlights of the initiation ceremonies.

MARRIAGE

Arranged marriages are the norm in many parts of Gambian society. The suitor, or his family, sends kola nuts (an indigenous fruit of West Africa used to make soft drinks) to the family of the bride-to-be; this is considered an official proposal. In Islamic society a marriage needs to have the consent of both the bride and groom. If the bride's family accepts the gift of kola nuts, then the marriage is considered fixed. Kola nuts are considered a symbol of purity and for this reason are used as offerings for marriages. The suitor must also give money and other gifts to the bride's family. All this is in addition to the bride price fixed by the bride's family and which the suitor has to negotiate and pay in order to win the right to court his bride-to-be.

After the bride's price has been paid, the bride's family gives a dowry to the groom, which consists of clothes, jewelry, utensils, and all the equipment needed by the newly married couple to set up their house. A religious leader performs the legal rites of Muslim marriages, which are usually performed in the bride's family home in the presence of the fathers or guardians of both the bride and the groom.

If the bride price is paid at the time of marriage, the groom can take his bride with him, and they immediately embark on their new life. Otherwise another ceremony takes place at a later date (when the bride price is paid), after which the groom may take his bride home.

Partying, dancing, and drumming are all part of the wedding celebration. All wedding guests are expected to contribute food or money to the couple, the bride's parents, and the griots ("praise-singers").

DEATH

In Gambian society the family and friends of the deceased person express their grief by sobbing and wailing. When a person discovers the death of a villager, he wails out loud to inform the other members of the community. The village elders then inform the family and friends of the death and make arrangements for the burial. The dead body is washed and dressed in a white shroud and is either placed in a coffin or on a mat. Men carry the body to the mosque where prayers are offered for the deceased. Then the body is taken for burial and the bereaved family gives money or food to the needy in the name of the dead person. The third, seventh, and the 40th day following the burial are also days for the family of the deceased to practice charity.

According to Islam the mourning period of a widow lasts four months and 10 days, during which

time she has to remain confined to the house and wear simple clothes without adornment.

Further Reading

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Study Findings of the Rights of Women as Envisaged in UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (Banjul, The Gambia: Author, 1994); Donald R. Wright, *The World and a Very Small Place in Africa: A History of Globalization in Niimi, The Gambia*, 2nd ed. (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2004).

Georgia

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Southwestern Asia; between Russia and Turkey; bordering the Black Sea
Size	26,911 sq. mi.
Capital City	Tbilisi
Flag Description	The flag of the Republic of Georgia is a red cross centered so that it creates four smaller rectangles in which there are four small red crosses; the five crosses represent the five wounds reported to have pierced Jesus' body when he was crucified.
Independence	April 9, 1991 (from the Soviet Union)
Population	4,677,401 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Georgian(s)
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Georgian (84%)
Major Language(s)	Georgian (official, 71%); Russian; Azeri; Armenian
Major Religion(s)	Georgian Orthodox (84%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Mother's Day, March 3; International Women's Day, March 8; Independence Day, May 26

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Ongoing archaeological investigations since the 1980s in the Caucasus region have identified several important caves. The Caucasus Mountains are a promising region for archaeological exploration and may provide significant information about the Paleolithic peoples who inhabited the many caves and rock shelters found there. In Russia farther north in the Caucasus there are also numerous megaliths (a large usually rough stone used in prehistoric cultures as a monument or building block) that are just beginning to be mapped and studied. So far only limited excavations have been undertaken, and even fewer completely explored and analyzed. What is so far known, however, suggests that the Caucasus may fill in gaps in the progress of early *Homo sapiens* as they moved out of Africa into the Middle East, Europe, and Asia, the development of *Homo sapiens neandertalensis*, as well as linking the arrival of *Homo sapiens* with the disappearance of the Neandertals.

Some idea of just how long humans have dwelled in the region of the Caucasus can be inferred from the Neandertal

remains found at Barakai and Matouozka Caves in the northwest, as well as the important discovery of artifacts and *Homo erectus* remains, close to two million years old, at Dmanisi in Georgia. The Caucasus Mountains form a natural barrier among the Middle East, Asia, and Europe, so various hominid species would have to have traversed them at some point during the lengthy process of dispersion.

In the eighth century B.C.E. the Greeks colonized areas of what is now western Georgia. Around the seventh century Anatolian tribes from Turkey moved into the eastern regions, assimilated with the people already there, and formed the kingdom of Iberia. Between 550 and 300, control of the area shifted among various foreign regimes, primarily the Persians, Macedonians, and the Seleucids. In 189 the Romans defeated the Seleucids and allowed the local residents to set up independent Armenian states, which united a century later to form a stronghold of the Roman Empire, with a domain extending from the Caspian Sea to central Turkey, and including a sizable portion of modern-day Georgia.

In 330 C.E. King Marian III of Georgia embraced Christianity, and Georgia became a Christian kingdom. Around 400 the expanding Byzantine Empire occupied the regions of west-

ern Armenia, including western Georgia, and Persia gained control of the eastern area of Iberia. Muslim Arabs took control in the mid-seventh century, establishing an emirate in Tbilisi. In 978 the United Kingdom of Georgia came into existence, and all the principalities of Georgia, including Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the north Caucasian territories, were unified under the kingdom by the ruling Bagrationi Dynasty of Georgia.

In 1060, however, the Seljuk Turks established their authority over most of Armenia. A large number of Armenians fled to Georgia, launched an attack, and recovered Tbilisi from the Turks in 1122, extending Georgia's borders from western Azerbaijan to eastern Turkey. However in 1236 invading Mongols, led by Tamerlane (also Timur Lenk, 1336–1406), ended this golden period of the Georgian Empire.

Subsequent centuries saw numerous attempts by Turkey and Persia to seize Georgia. In the 18th century Georgia, looking for support and protection against Turkey and Persia, agreed to be annexed by Russia. In the 19th century Georgia was absorbed into Russia entirely.

World War I and the Russian Revolution of 1917 prompted Georgia to break away from Soviet Russia. In May 1918, the Georgian Menshevik Party declared Georgia's independence. Although this independence was recognized by the Soviet government in 1920, the Red Army invaded Georgia in 1921 and annexed it. Georgia was again declared a Russian republic. In 1936 it became a separate union republic, still governed by Russia. As the Soviet Union was breaking up, Georgians stepped up protests and rebellion against Soviet rule; in April 1991 Georgia declared itself independent once more. Its independence was legitimized, however, only after the complete disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991.

Post-independence the unpopular regime of President Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1939–93) was overthrown, and in October 1992 Eduard Shevardnadze (b. 1928) was elected president. In 1993 Georgia

joined the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), a confederation of 12 former Soviet republics, including Georgia, Russia, and Uzbekistan. In the presidential elections in January 2004, Mikhail Saakashvili (b. 1967) was elected president.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Situated in southwestern Asia, Georgia lies between Turkey and Russia, bordering the Black Sea. It shares its southern border with Turkey and Armenia, with Azerbaijan in the east and Russia in the north. The Greater Caucasus and Lesser Caucasus ranges dominate its northern and eastern regions. Georgia controls much of the Caucasus Mountains and the routes through them. The Abkhazia and Ajara autonomous republics and South Ossetia are a part of the Republic of Georgia. Its capital Tbilisi is the largest city.

The topography of Georgia is diverse, with mountainous ranges in the north and eastern regions, a narrow lowland area along the Black Sea, and plains in the east. Its highest point is Mt. Shkhara at 17,060 feet. Georgian terrain is highly seismic and prone to earthquakes.

The climate of Georgia is warm and pleasant, subtropical and humid along the Black Sea coast. With the Caucasus range to its north and east, protecting it from northern winds and cold interference, the eastern plains tend to have a continental climate, while the highest mountains have snow year-round. The average temperature in winter is 34° F, and summer temperatures average 77° F.

❁ ECONOMY

The economy of Georgia suffered a tremendous setback due to warfare, corruption, and the effects of Russia's economic instability. Its economic growth was negative in the early 1990s, because of the terrible condition of its infrastructure and the failure of economic reorganization toward a market economy.



Joseph Stalin

Georgia's most famous—or infamous—native son was born Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili in the town of Gori, Georgia, on December 21, 1879. He would later change his name to Joseph Stalin and rise to the heights of power as one of the world's greatest dictators. At the time of his birth Georgia was part of the vast Russian Empire. Iosif was the third and only surviving child of a poor cobbler and a housecleaner. He attended the Gori Church School, where he excelled at his studies, winning a scholarship to the Tbilisi Theological Seminary in the Georgian capital. From there he made his way to Moscow.

In the wake of the tumultuous Russian Revolution

Stalin became the general secretary of the Communist Party of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1922 and ruled until his death in 1953. Stalin is notorious for his wartime pact with Hitler, brutal suppression of dissent, concentration camps, disastrous economic policies, and the death of millions.

In Gori Stalin remains a household name and popular figure among some; the town has a Stalin museum and one of the few statues of the dictator that remains standing in the world. In most other places in Georgia, and throughout the former Soviet Union, angry crowds tore down such statues as the Soviet Union crumbled in the early 1990s.

Numerous industries collapsed after independence, and despite having a potential for cultivation in the lowlands, farming was grossly inefficient due to post-Soviet misallocation of land and materials.

The primary occupation in Georgia is agriculture. The warmer regions produce tea, citrus fruits, tobacco, wine grapes, and rice. Mulberry trees are also grown to feed the worms for silk production. Livestock such as sheep, pigs, and poultry are common.

Georgia has rich deposits of manganese, copper, tungsten, coal, lignite, barites, iron, molybdenum, oil, and peat. There are also sizable deposits of marble, dolomite, talc, and clay. The coastal climate and soils allow for tea and citrus cultivation. Industry in Georgia is heavily dependent on raw materials from other Commonwealth of Independent States republics and from abroad. It primarily manufactures semifinished metals, vehicles, textiles, and chemicals. Despite its great potential to generate hydroelectric power, it has to rely on fuel and energy imports to cater to the domestic demands for power and energy. Georgia has to import 95 percent of its fuel requirements, mainly oil and natural gas. The nation exports citrus fruits, tea, machinery, ferrous and nonferrous metals, and textiles to Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Poland, Russia, and Turkey. Machinery and machine parts, energy and fuels, transportation equipment, and textiles are imported mainly from Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Poland, Russia, and Ukraine. Its chief trade partners are its neighbors Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Armenia.

According to a 2001 estimate 54 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, and the unemployment rate is 17 percent. Despite the severe setbacks to the economy due to civil strife, with the aid of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, Georgia has successfully achieved positive gross domestic product growth and slowed the rate of inflation.

The Georgian government lacks sufficient structures to collect tax revenues. It also has a severe energy shortfall. The start of construction on the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline is expected to attract investment and provide job opportunities.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The Republic of Georgia has a rich cultural heritage, a mix of European and Asian cultures. Georgian society is dominated by ethnic Georgians but is also home to other ethnic groups, including Russians, Armenians, Azeri, Ossetians (descendants of the Scythians and Alans), and Abkhaz. Georgia, along with its Caucasian neighbors Azerbaijan and Armenia, is a relatively young country.

Although some believe the country derives its name from its patron saint St. George, the name Georgia actually originates from the Arabic and Persian words *kurj* and *gurj*, terms that were used to

refer to Georgians by Arabs and Persians. In the Persian language, Georgia was referred to as Gurjistan, the land of the Gurjs, or Georgians. Georgians call themselves Kartvelebi, their land Sakartvelo, and their language Kartuli. These names are derived from a pagan chieftain called Kartlos, said to be the father of all Georgians.

Georgian, the official language of the country, is widely spoken throughout the country, albeit with varied dialects. The Russian, Azeri, and Armenian languages are also spoken in some pockets of the country. In the Abkhazia region of Georgia, the local language Abkhaz is the official language. The Georgian language does not use the Cyrillic alphabet like most of its neighbors but has its own alphabet consisting of 33 symbols, including 28 consonants and 5 vowels.

Georgians value close family ties, and often many generations live together in the same house. Elders are revered, and every person is expected to show modesty, respect, and love toward family and friends.

Though predominantly Georgian Orthodox, Georgians enjoy freedom of religion, and many people adhere to other Christian churches, such as Russian Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic, as well as Islam. People of all faiths are free to enter Georgian Orthodox churches, but women must cover their heads.

Georgian culture is reflected in its folk songs and dances. Folk songs have been passed from one generation to the next over the centuries. Different regions of Georgia have their own folk songs and, although most Georgian songs use three-part harmony, some labor songs sung in the Ajaria and Guria region use four-part harmony. In Western Georgia, *gankivani* (a kind of yodel) and *krimanchuli* (polyphonic-singing) are very popular. Many groups in Georgia are trying to preserve their folk music and to create interest among the younger generation in their traditional music. Today most of the folk songs are sung during *supra*. *Supra* is a ritual banquet, which is an essential part of all the major life events such as births, weddings, and funerals.

CUISINE

Some traditional Georgian dishes include *khushi* (a brothlike dish made from beef entrails), *mcvadi* (pork or mutton with tomatoes), *lobio* (kidney beans), *pkhali* (a vegetable dish made from beet leaves, pomegranate seeds, walnut paste, and spices), *khachapuri* (pie), *kupati* (roasted sausages), and *khinkali* (mutton dumplings).

Wine (especially white and dry red wines) and beer are the preferred beverages. Georgians do not drink wine without making a toast. Some of the more popular wines include *mukhuzani* (bitter but pleasant-tasting), *ojaleshi* (sweet), and *kindzmarauli* (garnet-red, honey flavored). Fruit juices and soft drinks are also popular.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western or Gregorian calendar January 1 is celebrated as New Year's Day throughout the world. Georgians traditionally celebrate the New Year with their family over a meal consisting of *gozinaki* (nuts fried with honey), turkey, and liquor. They pray for peace, happiness, and the health of their families and greet one another on this joyous occasion.

Nowadays young Georgians attend New Year's Eve parties, a relatively new development. The parties last through the night with much singing and dancing.

❁ MOTHER'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 3

Mother's Day can be traced back to the ancients, who held special festivals venerating the mother goddess. The Greeks worshipped Rhea, wife of the god Cronus and mother of all gods and goddesses, and held festivals to pay homage to her. Around 250 B.C.E. the Romans celebrated a three-day festival during the Ides of March (March 15–18). It was known as Hilaria, in deference to the Roman mother goddess Cybele. However these festivals were dedicated to mother goddesses and not to immediate relatives. It is believed that, with the arrival of the Catholic Church, this adoration was transferred to the Blessed Virgin Mary and then to mothers in general.

On Mother's Day Georgian children give flowers and gifts to their mothers and help them in their daily chores as tokens of appreciation.

❁ INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 8

International Women's Day (IWD) became an important day for celebrating the economic, political, and social achievements of women around the world. Historically the observance gained momentum during the early 20th century and was initially a day chosen by women workers to protest the conditions under which they worked. The first such protest was staged on March 8, 1857, by women garment and textile workers, and it became a traditional date for women workers to protest their long hours and low pay. The first IWD was observed in the United States on February 28, 1909, following a declaration by the Socialist Party of America. The next year, an international women's conference was held in Copenhagen and IWD was established. Among other historic

Georgian Kinship

In Georgia spiritual kinship is extremely strong. It implies that people who are not family members may share the same bond as blood relations by performing certain rituals. In Abkhazia people believe that anyone who eats from the same shared pot as the family is a member of the family, even though he or she is not related by blood. An ancient tradition of cutting fingers to proclaim oneself as the brother of a woman who has no brothers is practiced even today. Godparents, who may be relatives or friends, become lifelong family members.

events it commemorates the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire that occurred in New York in 1911, when over 140 women lost their lives because of inadequate safety measures.

In spite of its origins in workers' protest movements, the holiday quickly lost its political emphasis and devolved into a mawkish observance not much different from Mother's Day. Its political thrust was revived by the second wave of feminism during the 1960s, when protest marches and rallies on subjects such as incest and date rape became the focus. In 1975 the United Nations undertook sponsorship of International Women's Day.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 26

On May 26, 1918, during World War I, the National Convention of Georgia proclaimed Georgia's independence from Soviet Russia. Although the Red Army would invade Georgia and annex it in 1921, Georgia celebrates its independence day on May 26.

Tamada

In Georgia ancient dining rituals emphasize the importance of the *tamada*, or the person who proposes toasts before drinking. The host selects the *tamada*. He is generally a man with a good sense of humor. If there are many guests at the table the *tamada* appoints assistants, known as *tolumbashis*, and they help the *tamada* develop ideas or choose words for the toast. Toasts are proposed in a strict, predetermined order, and it is considered disrespectful to interrupt a *tamada* while he is proposing a toast. The guests are expected to listen attentively.

The *tamada* is the most important person at a dinner. If one needs to leave the table he or she has to ask the *tamada*'s permission to propose a toast in honor of the family. Only after raising a toast to the family may a person leave the dinner table.



Georgian president Mikhail Saakashvili, right, and Latvian president Vaira Vike-Freiberga, left, seen during celebrations marking Georgia's Independence Day, in Tbilisi, Georgia, May 26, 2005. The military parade, organized by Georgian authorities, was the biggest parade in this country's recent history. (AP Photo/Shakh Aivazov)

On this day thousands of Georgians assemble for the Independence Day celebrations presided over by the president of Georgia. A presidential speech and military parades mark the official commemoration. At Victory Park in Tbilisi the president and the chairman of the Georgian parliament lay wreaths on the graves of national heroes and public figures as a token of respect for their contributions to Georgia's independence.

Fun Fact
International Women's Day was the initial phase of what became the Russian Revolution.

Religious Holidays

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Orthodox Christians
Observed on: January 6–7

Orthodox Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus on January 7 because, having refused to accept the Gregorian calendar when it was introduced, they follow the Julian calendar. There is a difference of 13 days between the Julian and the Gregorian, or Western, calendar (which is the one followed by most Christians around the world and which celebrates December 25 as the day of Jesus' birth).

The Orthodox believe that the star of Bethlehem was seen in the sky on the eve of January 6, so they celebrate Christmas Eve on January 6. Georgian Orthodox Christmas celebrations last for 12 days, beginning on Christmas Eve and continuing until Epiphany (January 19).

In earlier times there was a total ban on working during the 12 days of Christmas, and people even stopped their daily chores in honor of the Nativity and baptism of Jesus. During these holy days people indulged in fortune-telling, magic rituals, and the procurement of good luck charms. Carol singers wore colorful costumes and went door-to-door singing Christmas carols. They were treated to Christmas sweets and candies by the families they visited. The carolers were treated well, because it was believed that the fortunes of the new year would depend on the generosity with which they were treated.

Since the church banned the practice of fortune-telling and magic rituals, Georgians would sneak out of their homes in secrecy and visit sorcerers and fortune-tellers in cemeteries, barns, and other deserted places. They sought their services in predicting the events of the coming year. Questions about the number of calves that would be born, the quantity of honey that would be produced by bees, as well as issues related to marriage, were the most common queries.

Traditional dishes served during the holy days included *kutya* (a honey pudding made with raisins and rice), as well as dishes made with an odd number of fish (for good luck). On the dinner table, an extra set of plates and cutlery were placed for the family members who had passed away during the past year.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS; EPIPHANY

❁ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Orthodox Christians
Observed on: January 19

The Christian Feast of the Epiphany is celebrated to remember the legend of the Three Wise Men from the East (or Magi) who came to Jerusalem looking for the newborn Jesus. The word *epiphany* means “to reveal” or “to make known,” and the day was so named because it was the Magi who revealed Jesus to the world as a king and lord.

Orthodox Christians in Georgia celebrate Epiphany on January 19. On this day devout Christians bathe in the rivers and lakes by making cross-shaped ice-holes on the frozen surfaces, because they believe that on Epiphany water assumes special powers. Consecrated water is sprinkled in homes, offices, and churches on Epiphany in the belief that it acts as a curative remedy. People also attend an Epiphany Liturgy.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EPIPHANY

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Orthodox Good Friday, a solemn holiday also known as Mourning Friday, Black Friday, and Sorrowful Friday, commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. In the Orthodox Church it is called Great Friday. Because it is one of the holiest days in the Orthodox calendar, the faithful are expected to observe a strict fast throughout the day. Communion is not celebrated on this day because it is a day of mourning; instead Orthodox Christians attend three special services in the morning, afternoon, and evening. This is an official holiday in Georgia with government offices, schools, and businesses closed for the day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

The Christian festival of Easter celebrates Jesus' Resurrection. The holiday falls on the first Sunday after the austere 40-day period of fasting called Lent. The word *Easter* is derived from the name of the Germanic goddess Eostre or Eastre. She was the revered mother goddess of the Saxon people in northern Europe, thus the holiday has a more general and ancient association with spring, fertility, and rebirth. Easter eggs have long been associated with the spring festival, and symbolize new life. The Catholic Church, in an effort to win converts from the pagan peoples of Europe, imposed their own meaning on the purpose of the observance but retained the name of the goddess as well as many of the symbols associated with her worship at the end of the first century C.E.

On Easter Sunday in Georgia Christians attend Easter services in church and afterward enjoy a large

family meal. Easter Monday is a national holiday and a time to repent for one's sins. On this day devout Orthodox Christians attend a special service in their local churches and, in the presence of priests, ask for forgiveness from the risen Jesus.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: August 15

The Feast of the Assumption commemorates the death and assumption into heaven of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Assumption Day is known as Mariamoba in Georgia, and on this day devout Georgian Christians attend a special service in their local churches in honor of Mary. This is a public holiday in Georgia with government offices, schools, and businesses closed for the day.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

❁ ST. GEORGE'S DAY

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: May 6 and November 23

St. George is the patron saint of Georgia, and the nation celebrates St. George's Day twice each year: on May 6, to mark his birthday, and on November 23, to observe his torturous death. The November 23 St. George's Day, known as Giorgoba in Georgia, was declared a national holiday following Georgia's Independence in 1918.

St. George was an accomplished warrior in the Roman Empire who had earned the title of centurion due to his courage, loyalty, and honor. He was also known as George the Victorious because of the innumerable battles he had won. Embracing Christianity he took it upon himself to protect his fellow Christians from persecution and harm. His heroism infuriated the Roman authorities, and he was asked to denounce Christianity. When he refused, he was beheaded.

On St. George's Day on November 23, devout Georgians attend special church services in honor of their patron saint.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

Fun Fact

St. George goes much further back than the Roman Empire, to pagan times when he was revered as the god of the mountains.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

Children are an integral part of society in Georgia, and the birth of a child is a joyous occasion for the

entire community. In the Abkhazia region, residents believe that a child belongs not just to his or her parents but to all the members of the family. Until 1920 when Georgia came under Soviet control, Abkhazians neither celebrated their birthdays nor kept track of their ages. Their language has words for various stages of life, but no ages are specified for when these stages begin and end.

❁ MARRIAGE

In Georgia, couples get married first in a civil ceremony that is legally binding and then participate in a solemn Orthodox church wedding. Lavish receptions following the church service are the norm, with much feasting, singing, and folk dancing.

Fun Fact

A daughter-in-law is not allowed to speak in front of her father-in-law unless he gives her explicit permission to do so. It often takes years to obtain this permission, and the event is marked by a huge feast.

In the Abkhazia region of Georgia, the groom, along with his senior relatives and friends, goes to the bride's house on the day of the wedding. There, the wedding party is treated to a lavish feast, and friends and family members wish the bride and the groom well by giving speeches and making toasts in their honor. After the party the bride rides in a car or on horseback to the groom's house. Her bridesmaids and a male relative escort her to ensure that she is respected there. In accordance with tradition the wedding takes place at the groom's house, and the bride's family does not attend the wedding.

During the wedding feast at the groom's home, the bride and groom are housed in separate rooms and kept away from the guests. When the guests are allowed to see the bride and groom, tradition requires that neither the bride nor the groom express any kind of emotion (not even a smile) in front of elders during the wedding; to do so is considered immodest. To show their respect for elders and tradition as well as to display their sense of modesty and discipline, the newlyweds do not spend the first night together after the wedding.

For a considerable period of time after marriage, it is traditional for the couple to wake up before or sleep later than everyone else in the house. They do this to ensure that the family members do not see them enter or emerge from their bedroom, as that would be considered immodest.

Women do not take their husband's surname after marriage and are protected by their father and brothers even after marriage.

❁ DEATH

In Georgia it is customary for close relatives to gather around a dying person. A bowl of clean water is placed near the bed (near a window) of the dying person. It is believed that this enables the soul to cleanse itself after leaving the body. Death is followed by a simple burial.

People visit the grieving family on the third, fourth, and fifth days after the death of the family member. Then the priest presides over the funeral feast in memory of the deceased. The mourning period lasts for a year and ends one year later on the date of the death.

On anniversaries and religious days such as All Souls' Day, family members visit the cemeteries and offer prayers, flowers, and candles at the graves of their deceased relatives and even share suppers near the graves.

See also Volume III: ALL SOULS' DAY

Further Reading

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Germany

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Central Europe, between Poland and the Netherlands, south of Denmark, bordering the North Sea and the Baltic Sea
Size	137,847 sq. mi.
Capital City	Berlin
Flag Description	The German flag has three equal horizontal bands of black (top), red, and gold.
Independence	January 18, 1871 (Unification of the German Empire)
Population	82,431,390 (2005 est.)
Government	Federal republic
Nationality	German(s)
Major Ethnic Group(s)	German (92%)
Major Language(s)	German
Major Religion(s)	Protestant (34%); Roman Catholic (34%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; National Day, October 3

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

It had long been known that both the north and south walls of western Germany's Neander Valley had many caves and rock shelters. Then in 1856 a partial humanoid cranium was found in a cave called the Kleine Feldhofer Grotte. Although no one could have predicted it then, the discovery marked the beginning of human paleontology and started the longest-standing debate in the discipline: the role of Neanderthals in human evolutionary history.

No other archaeological materials were gathered, and the cave was destroyed. However, archaeological excavations done in 1997 and 2000 have yielded additional Neanderthal bone fragments, making the Neanderthal site the first Pleistocene (1.8 million to 11,000 years old) locality to yield sequences from more than one human. Radiocarbon dates for both Neanderthal individuals indicate an age of about 40,000 years for them.

Evidence for more recent cultures in prehistoric Germany include numerous Bandkeramik villages and associated

cemeteries. The Bandkeramik peoples were the first true farming communities in central Europe, and the sites have been dated between 5400 and 4900 B.C.E. Their name refers to the distinctive banded decorations found on their pottery. The villages at Bandkeramik sites are characterized by long-houses with rectangular plans, and some were protected by surrounding ditches. The domesticated crops include emmer and einkorn wheat, peas, lentils, and linseed. Numerous cairns, menhirs, and dolmens dot the German landscape, the remains of an ancient, and dominant, Celtic presence. The Celts are now thought to be the immediate ancestors of the tribes and clans known as Germanic (or Teutonic), and the vestiges of Celtic religious beliefs and symbols can still be found in the customs of many modern German communities.

A large number of tribes from Scandinavia began moving down into Germany between 800 and 700 B.C.E. and established their settlements in the region. It is thought that the deteriorating climatic conditions in Scandinavia forced these tribes to migrate to milder climates. Animal husbandry was their main occupation. These Germanic tribes were also notorious for invading other territories and taking control of them. Around 100, these Teutonic tribes (primarily Franks, Lombards, and Visigoths) invaded the regions of Gaul, Illyria, and Italy, which were under the domination of the Roman

Fun Fact

In 1997 scientists successfully extracted and analyzed DNA sequences from both Neanderthal individuals, showing that the Neanderthals were a different species from *Homo sapiens*, who now is thought to have replaced them.

Empire. Initially the renowned Roman commander Marius (d. 86 B.C.E.) led the Roman forces to victory over the Teutons.

However from 58 B.C.E. to 5 C.E. the Romans and the Germanic tribes fought a series of wars. The Romans ultimately lost control of the region, and different parts of Germany were subsequently ruled by various empires and dynasties, such as the Frankish Empire under Charlemagne (742–814) and the Holy Roman Empire under Otto I (the Great, 912–73) of the Saxon Dynasty. (In 962 Pope John XII [r. 955–63] crowned Otto I the Holy Roman Emperor and suc-

cessor of Charlemagne, laying the foundation of the first Holy Roman Empire of the German nation.)

After the death of Otto I, Germany was ruled by three main dynasties: the Saxons, the Hohenstaufens, and eventually the Hapsburgs. It was during the rule of King Maximilian I (1459–1519) of the Hapsburg Dynasty that in 1517 German Augustinian theologian Martin Luther (1483–1546) nailed his 95 theses on the doors of Castle Church at Wittenberg.

Luther challenged what he and others perceived to be abuses and corruption in the Roman Catholic Church headed by Pope Leo X (r. 1513–21) and asked Christians to return to the teachings of the Bible. He led the Protestant Reformation, which aimed at reforming the beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church. Eventually in 1521 at the Diet of Worms, Martin Luther was excommunicated by the Catholic Church.

From 1618–48 Germany was enmeshed in the Thirty Years' War. Although this was mainly a conflict between Catholics and Protestants, it was also a result of the ambitions of various princely states within the empire. The war began with a Protestant uprising against the Holy Roman Emperor in Bohemia. When other European powers (King

Christian IV of Denmark [1588–1648], Gustav II Adolph of Sweden [1594–1632], and Cardinal Richelieu of France [1585–1642]) began interfering in German affairs by extending their support to the German Protestants, the conflict escalated into a full-fledged European war. Almost one-third of Germany's population perished, and the country was left in an impoverished state, its agriculture devastated, its commerce and industry in ruins. The suffering of the peasants would be remembered for many years. The war ended in 1648 after a peace treaty was signed between Germany, France, and Sweden. According to the treaty, a large portion of the Holy Roman Empire was distributed among the victors; the remaining states and principalities that made up the empire were given the right of self-governance.

During the Napoleonic Wars (1803–15), Napoleon I (1769–1821) attacked the states that made up Germany but was fiercely resisted, especially by the forces of the Prussian state. Eventually, after a decisive battle at Leipzig on October 16–19, 1813, Napoleon's ambition to rule Prussia ended after the Prussians defeated the French army.

In 1866 the chancellor of Prussia Otto Van Bismarck (1815–98) initiated a series of military campaigns and annexed many of the other states that now make up Germany, thereby laying the foundation for a unified Germany. After the defeat of France during the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71) on January 18, 1871, King Wilhelm I of Prussia (1861–88) was declared *kaiser* (emperor) of Germany, and this led to the unification of all of the German states into one nation.

The ambitious Kaiser Wilhelm II (1888–1918) began German colonial expansion in Asia. This put Germany in direct conflict with British, Japanese, Russian, and American interests. Moreover Germany was engaged in shipbuilding activities, which the British perceived as a threat to their dominance of the seas. This collision course with the other major imperial powers ultimately led to World War I (1914–18), during which Germany opposed the Allies (Russia, Britain, Italy, France, and the United

Diet of Worms

The name "Diet of Worms" is derived from the word *diet*, which refers to a general assembly of the estates of the Holy Roman Empire. The place where the meeting was held was called Worms.

These meetings took place between January 28 and May 25, 1521, and were presided over by the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (1500–58). Martin Luther (1483–1546) was summoned by the Emperor to appear before the Imperial Diet and agreed to do so after the emperor promised him safe passage home after the meeting. This promise was necessary because of the execution of Czech reformer Jan Hus

(1372/73–1415) by the Council of Constance (Roman Catholic Council) in 1414–18.

Luther was summoned to explain his position on the 95 theses nailed to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. The pope and the priests wanted him to retract his statements made against the Catholic Church and to renounce his teachings. Luther refused to do so and as a result was declared a heretic and outlawed by the Roman Catholic Church. Possession and reading of his writings was banned by the Edict of Worms (issued by the Diet), which was signed by Holy Roman Emperor Charles V.

States) and fought on the side of the Ottoman Empire and Austro-Hungary. Germany participated in a number of bitterly fought battles during the war and, after initial victories in certain regions, suffered immensely at the hands of the Allies. Around the end of October 1918 German naval troops in the city of Kiel refused to participate any further in the war, and soon this rebellion spread to other parts of Germany, forcing Kaiser Wilhelm II to abdicate the throne. On November 9, 1918, the Social Democratic leader Phillip Scheidemann (1865–1939) declared Germany a republic and on November 11, 1918, Germany signed an armistice in Compiègne, France, ending World War I.

The Treaty of Versailles in 1919 humiliated Germany by handing over all the German colonies to the Allies as well as by restraining German military operations, restricting its military force to just 100,000 soldiers. Also Germany and its allies were forced to accept responsibility for the war and made to pay a substantial amount as compensation to the Allies for the expenses incurred by them during the war. Friedrich Ebert (1871–1925) was sworn in as the first president of the Weimar Republic on August 11, 1919.

In 1933 Adolf Hitler (1889–1945), a volunteer in World War I and founder of the National-sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Labor Party), which was originally referred to as the N.S.D.A.P. but better known as the Nazi Party, came to power in 1933 when he was appointed chancellor of Germany. He gave a free hand to the Schutzstaffel (SS), which was a protective squadron and a paramilitary force of the Nazi Party. He banned all other political parties in Germany, had all politicians belonging to Communist and Socialist Parties arrested, and ordered them sent to concentration camps where many were put to death. These camps were administered by a new secret police known as the Gestapo. In violation of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles Hitler began recruiting troops under universal military service and reestablished the German Air Force. In 1935 he passed the Nuremberg Race Laws, which not only terminated the German citizenship of Jews, but also forbade them from marrying Germans. Jews in Germany, and eventually in the nations occupied by Germany during World War II, were subjected to brutal treatment and death. This infamous period became known as the Holocaust.

In 1939 Germany signed a secret nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union and invaded Poland, thus sparking World War II. However, in 1940 Germany violated the nonaggression pact and invaded regions occupied by Soviet forces. As a result the Soviet Union declared war on Germany and joined the Allies (Great Britain, France, and, after December, 1941, the United States) in the fight against the Axis (Germany, Italy, and Japan).

During the war German forces occupied major parts of Europe and continued the persecution of Jews wherever they went. However by 1945, the

The Holocaust

The term *holocaust* is derived from the Greek word *holokauston*, which means “a burnt sacrificial offering to God” (from *holos*, “totally,” and *kaustos*, “burned”). *Holocaust* is used to refer to the systematic annihilation of European Jews and others termed undesirable by Nazi Germany. It started in 1941 and was extensively and secretly carried out until 1945.

It is estimated that more than six million Jews were killed by Germans in concentration camps during the Holocaust. Slavs (Russians, Poles, and others), Sinti (nomadic tribes of northwestern Europe), Roma (Gypsies), mentally handicapped, gay men and lesbians, elderly people, Catholics, political opponents and dissidents, and Jehovah’s Witnesses (a sect of Christianity) were also murdered in the concentration camps.

It is estimated that a total of 26 million men, women, and children were killed during the Nazi regime.

Allied forces had succeeded in defeating the Axis powers. Hitler committed suicide, and Germany suffered immensely as the Allies bombed German ports and harbors, completely destroying the country’s infrastructure.

In 1945 at the Potsdam Conference, the Allies divided Germany into four military zones with three zones forming the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), and the Soviet-occupied zone forming the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). The former German capital of Berlin, which was located in East Germany, was split down the middle between East and West. In West Germany, democracy was restored; it benefited greatly from the American plan for the reconstruction of Europe. By 1960 West Germany had a robust economy.

In East Germany a Communist government assumed power, with the backing of Poland and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The oppressive policies of this government and lack of opportunities in the region forced many East Germans to move to the more prosperous West Germany. Eventually on August 13, 1961, in an attempt to prevent East Germans from crossing over to West Germany via West Berlin, the Communist regime of East Germany erected the infamous Berlin Wall, a concrete wall about 12 feet high. It surrounded all of East Berlin. Efforts by East Germans

Fun Fact

In 1996, a German paleontologist tripped over something in the Neander Valley. When it was dug up, that “something” was a 50,000-year-old Neanderthal musical instrument carved from the six-foot-long tip of a mammoth tusk. The 16 carefully spaced holes on the tusk’s surface suggest that the Neanderthals used an octave scale.

to cross over the wall to a better life resulted in many deaths and imprisonments.

Finally in 1989, there were widespread demonstrations in Leipzig and Berlin against the Communist government. The growing discontent and disillusionment led to its fall. As a result on November 9, 1989, East German authorities allowed many East Germans to cross over to West Germany via West Berlin and brought down the Berlin Wall.

On August 31, 1990, a reunification agreement was signed between officials of West and East Germany; the agreement came into effect on October 3, 1990, which was called the Day of German Unity (Tag der deutschen Einheit), or Unity Day.

In the 21st century Germany has one of the strongest economies in the world and is a principal member of the European Union (EU). Putting its Nazi past behind, Germany has been transformed into one of the most respected republics in the world. It is a member of the United Nations (UN), Group of Eight (G8), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). At present Germany is also seeking a permanent seat on the United Nation's Security Council (UNSC).

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in central Europe the Federal Republic of Germany is flanked by Switzerland and Austria to the south, Luxembourg and France to the southwest, the Netherlands and Belgium in the northwest, Denmark and the North Sea and Baltic Sea to the north, and the Czech Republic and Poland to the east.

The Alps are situated in the southern part of Germany, while the central parts of Germany are covered with forests. Important European rivers such as the Danube, Rhine, and Elbe flow through the region between the central uplands and the low-lying areas of northern Germany. Mount Zugspitze, located in the Alps, is the highest point in Germany and stands 9,718 feet high. The lowest point is Neuendorfer/Wilstermarsch, which is 12 feet below sea level and is located in the low-lying region of northern Germany.

Germany's climate is mainly cool and temperate. The climatic conditions in the eastern parts of Germany often display continental features and are marked by warm summers, extremely cold winters, and sparse rainfall. However in the northern and northeastern parts of Germany, the climate displays oceanic features and is characterized by heavy rainfall (throughout the year), mild winters, and cool summers. The central and southern parts of Germany experience a transitional climate marked by both oceanic and continental climatic conditions.

A wide variety of flora is found in Germany, which includes buttercups, cyclamen, orchids, pulsatilla, gentians, alpine roses, and edelweiss, as well as trees such as the birch, chestnut, oak, beech, maple, and ash. Germany is also home to a wide variety of animals and birds such as raccoons, alpine marmots, beavers, wild goat, snow hare (hare with

white fur), sea eagles, golden eagles, falcons, white storks, sandpipers, and cranes.

ECONOMY

One of the leading industrialized nations in the world, the Federal Republic of Germany is a unified democratic state composed of 16 *landes* (states). Berlin is the capital. In terms of gross domestic product (GDP), Germany is the third largest economy in the world, after the United States and Japan. According to the World Trade Organization (WTO), Germany was the largest exporter in the world in 2004, for the second year in a row. Its major export items include machinery, motor vehicles, chemicals, metals, textiles, as well as agricultural products such as hops (Germany is the second largest producer of hops, the key ingredient in beer, in the world), cabbage, apples, pears, potatoes, oats, and rye.

The service sector, including tourism, is the largest contributor to Germany's GDP. On the industrial front, Germany has the distinction of being the largest and most technologically advanced producer of trucks, automobiles, iron, steel, machine tools, and electronics. Germany is home to automobile giants such as Volkswagen and Daimler Chrysler, and global market leaders such as Siemens. In the shipbuilding industry it is also the world leader.

An important member of the European Union (EU), Germany is one of the EU countries that have accepted the Euro (common currency of many member nations of EU) as the national currency.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Germany has a rich cultural heritage. Almost 92 percent of the nation's population is ethnic German, but the country is also home to a substantial number of Italian, Greek, Serbo-Croatian, Polish, Russian, Spanish, and Turkish peoples. In addition most of the refugees of the former Yugoslavia have been absorbed by Germany.

Germany is the birthplace of the Protestant Reformation movement, and almost 34 percent of the country's population is Protestant, while 34 percent are Roman Catholic. Around 4 percent of the population adheres to Islam, while almost 28 percent adhere to other religions or are not affiliated with any organized religion.

German is the official language of the country and is the second most widely spoken language in Europe (after Russian). It is also the third most popular foreign language taught around the world, as well as in the EU.

Germans love music of all types, whether classical, rock and roll, hip-hop, or folk. Some of the most popular forms of German music include: *volksmusik* (traditional style of music that involves duets and yodeling), *neue deutsche welle* (music derived from punk rock), *krautorock* (*kraut* is British slang for German and refers to the style of music played by

experimental bands in Germany in the 1970s), and German hip-hop.

Germany is sometimes referred to as *das Land der Dichter und Denker* (the Land of Poets and Thinkers), because it is the home of such world-renowned composers as Ludwig van Beethoven, Johann Sebastian Bach, Robert Schumann, Johannes Brahms, Carl Orff, and Richard Wagner, as well as great philosophers including Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Martin Heidegger, Immanuel Kant, and Gottfried Leibniz, and scientists such as Albert Einstein, Werner Heisenberg, Heinrich Rudolph Hertz, Johannes Kepler, Max Planck, and Robert Wilhelm Bunsen. Besides being the birthplace of great poets such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Heinrich Heine, and Friedrich Schiller, Germany is also home to great engineers and inventors, including Gottlieb Daimler (of DaimlerChrysler), Ernst Werner von Siemens, Rudolf Diesel, Karl Benz, Johann Gutenberg, Nicolaus Otto, and Karl Braun. Martin Luther, the father of the Reformation movement, was also German. Famous German novelists of the 20th century include Thomas Mann, Herman Hesse, and Günter Grass, all winners of the Nobel Prize for literature.

❁ CUISINE

German cuisine is hearty. Classic dishes include *rote grütze* (fruit soup), *Helgolander Krabbensalat* (Helgoland's shrimp salad), *bulleten* (meat balls), *sauerfleisch* (meat made with fish gelatin), *soleier* (pickled eggs), *handkäs* (a dish made of sour cream and cheese), *badener schmeckensüpple* (an herb-flavored snail broth), and *spannferkel* (spit-roasted baby pig).

Germans also love cakes and desserts, and some of the favorites include *Schwarzwälder kirschtorte* (Black Forest cake), *Dresdner stollen* (a Christmas fruitcake shaped like a wrapped infant and covered with confectioner's sugar), and *welfenspeise* (a vanilla-flavored dessert made with wine), to name only a few.

The preferred German beverage is beer or wine. Other beverages include *sekt* (a kind of wine), soft drinks such as *radler* (a light beer mixed with apple juice or lemonade) and *limo* (lemonade mixed with sweetened sparkling water).

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western (Gregorian) calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day throughout the world. Germans begin celebrating the new year (Neujahr) on New Year's Eve with family gatherings, parties, fireworks, and much eating and drinking. In Germany New Year's Eve is sometimes known as Sylvester because December 31 also marks

the feast of St. Sylvester, a German pope who lived in the fourth century.

On New Year's Eve, it is a German tradition to leave a small bit of everything that has been served for dinner on one's plate and not to clear the table until midnight. This act stems from the belief that, by doing so, there will be plenty of food to eat in the coming year. Carp is an important part of New Year's Eve dinner since Germans believe that carp symbolizes wealth and prosperity.

On New Year's Eve Berlin plays host to one of the largest open-air parties in the world, with a range of entertainment that includes singing, dancing, and feasting. As the clock strikes 12, a spectacular display of fireworks lights the night sky, and people raise their glasses of champagne to welcome the new year.

An ancient German tradition associated with New Year's Day celebrations is fortune-telling. Germans play a wide variety of games focused on making yearly predictions for people. One of them, known as *Bleigießen*, involves pouring molten lead into a bowl filled with cold water. Predictions are made according to the shapes formed by the lead in the bowl. For example if the molten lead takes the shape of a heart or ring, it implies the person might get married in the coming year. The shape of a pig implies plenty of food, while a ship indicates travel or a journey.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

The earliest celebrations on May 1, Labor Day, are

German Beer

Since the eighth century B.C.E., Germans have brewed frothy alcoholic malt beverages. Germany is one of the largest brewers and exporters of beer in the world. In fact almost 20 percent of all the breweries in the world are based in the German state of Bavaria.

According to German legend the modern recipe for beer was invented by Jean Sans Peur (in English, "John the Fearless"), who came to be known as Gambrinus the king of beer for throwing a few hops in fermented malt. Over a period of time, the art of brewing was refined by German monastic orders whose monks used to drink beer during long fasting periods.

In accordance with a decree issued by Duke Wilhelm IV of Bavaria (1493–1549/50), which was announced in 1516, beer could only contain hops, pure water, and barley. This came to be known as Wilhelm's Purity Law. Later the law was modified to allow the distilling of wheat-based beer in Bavaria. German beer does not contain any preservatives, and most of the brews contain only 4 percent alcohol.



ascribed to pagan holidays observed by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages. The May 1 observance of Labor Day, Tag der Arbeit, was first established by the Second Socialist International in 1889. The date was chosen to coincide with a general strike in the United States called by the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and scheduled to take place in 1890, when the strikers planned to demand an eight-hour workday.

On May 1 political parties and trade unions across Germany organize huge rallies and demonstrations to show their solidarity with as well as support for German workers. The rallies provide a platform for workers to voice their views and concerns about issues related to their work and work environment.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 3

National Day, also called Day of Unity and Tag der deutschen Einheit, commemorates the reunification of East Germany (German territories that included parts of Berlin and the regions east of the city) and West Germany on October 3, 1990.

The annual Unity Day celebration rotates among the 16 federal states of Germany, with each state getting an opportunity to play host to the celebrations. The events are attended by dignitaries from around the world and are marked with official speeches and a wide variety of cultural activities including music and dance performances. A patriotic atmosphere pervades the nation as citizens remember the events that led to the historic reunification.

Religious Holidays

❁ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: January 6

The Christian Feast of Epiphany celebrates the Three Wise Men from the East (or Magi) who came to Bethlehem to pay tribute to the newborn Jesus. The word *epiphany* means “to reveal” or “to make known,” and the holiday is so named because it was the Magi who revealed Jesus’ birth to the world.

The Feast of Epiphany is celebrated in the predominantly Roman Catholic regions of Saxony-Anhalt, Bavaria, and Baden-Württemberg. During the octave of Epiphany, three children dress themselves as the Magi and sing carols, which are known as star songs. They are led by another child who holds a pole that has a gold star on it as a reenactment of the Wise Men’s journey to Bethlehem to see the baby Jesus.

In many villages children also carry a crib with them and leave it in a house that needs one. Using chalk, they mark the doors of all the houses they visit with the letters *CMB*, which are the initials of the Magi and are also the initials of a blessing *Christus mansionem benedicat*, which means, “May Christ bless this house.”

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EPIPHANY

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

The Christian holiday of Good Friday commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. A somber occasion, it falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent (an austere season of fasting and penitence observed by the devout). In Germany Roman Catholics participate in Good Friday services held in churches all over the country. The prayer service involves readings from the scriptures and a series of prayers, known as Good Friday prayers. A crucifix is also presented during the service, and all devout Catholics are encouraged to pay homage to it.

Special Good Friday services are also held in Protestant churches, and among German Lutherans Good Friday is an important day of worship. The two worship services of Good Friday are the Tre Ore (Latin for “three hours,” referring to the three hours Jesus is believed to have hung on the Cross) and Tenebrae, the Service of Shadows (or Darkness).

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a Christian feast celebrating Jesus’ Resurrection from the dead three days after his Crucifixion. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. The origin of Easter celebrations can be traced back to as far as the end of first century C.E., but the day, its name, and many of the symbols associated with its celebration are much older, going back to pre-Christian pagan spring celebrations. The word *Easter* is derived from the name of a Germanic goddess called Eostre or Eastre, the revered mother goddess of the Saxon people who lived in northern Europe.

On Easter Sunday devout German Christians attend a special Easter prayer service to commemorate Jesus’ Resurrection. There is a tradition of presenting beautifully decorated Easter eggs and other presents as gifts to friends and relatives. There is also a tradition of parents hiding egg-shaped chocolates, gifts, and sweets in the garden for the little children to discover.

Egg-rolling competitions are also part of Easter celebrations and take place on Easter Monday as well as Easter Sunday. During the competi-

tion children roll colored, hard-boiled Easter eggs down green, grassy slopes, and the one whose unbroken egg reaches the end of the slope first is declared the winner. Another game involves two players who hold eggs in their hands; each one tries to break the other person's egg. The player whose egg remains intact is declared the winner and receives the broken egg as well.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Forty days after Easter

The Christian holiday of Ascension Day celebrates Jesus' rising into heaven 40 days after he was resurrected from the dead on Easter. In Germany the Ascension is known as Himmelfahrtstag and Vatertag (Father's Day). Ascension Day is one of the important feasts in the Catholic calendar, and many devout Catholics attend special Ascension prayer services in their local churches and offer prayers to God.

Many colorful customs mark Ascension Day in Germany, where it is a public holiday. Citizens revel in outdoor activities and picnics. In the villages of Fienstedt, Zornitz, Gorsleben, and Krimpe, the drinking of Ascension beer is a strong tradition. According to 13th-century documents, villagers are commanded to drink beer in the memory of Countess Elizabeth of Thuringia (1207–31), who was famous for her kindness and charity to the poor and believed to have exempted the inhabitants from paying tithes. She was canonized in 1235. Her body was enshrined in Elisabeth-Kirche in Marburg, which is named for her.

Germany also celebrates Father's Day on this day, so it is also a time for men to get together and go out to the country. The city of Berlin is where this custom was supposed to have started. In the 19th century the city's men hired horse-drawn carriages to take them out of town. With the advent of modern technology, the carriage has been replaced by buses, trucks, and little steamers, all decorated with festive garlands and pennants. Food, wine, and beer are consumed heavily, and wives are not supposed to complain if their husbands come home late at night in less than acceptable condition.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

✿ PENTECOST

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Fifty days after Easter

Both the Sunday and Monday of this holiday celebrate the Christian feast of Pentecost, Pfingsten, the day on which the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus' disciples. In Greek, *pentecost* means the 50th day, and the holiday got this name because it takes place 50 and 51 days after Easter.

Pentecost has also been given the names Whitsunday and Whitmonday referring to the white garments worn by those who were baptized on this day. Whitsunday and Monday have been celebrated since the third century C.E.

For almost 2,000 years, the image of a dove suspended in air has been the symbolic image of the Holy Spirit. During the special church services held on Pentecost Sunday and Monday, a reenactment of the event takes place. It is called Heilig-Geist-Schwingen. During this reenactment, a dove, symbolizing the Holy Spirit, enters the church through a round window in the center of the church (the Heiliggeistloch). Also there is a symbolic ceremony of calling the Holy Spirit, known as *Veni Creator Spiritus*, in which an artificial dove, fastened to a wheel for easy movement, hovers over the praying congregation as a symbol of the descent of the Holy Spirit.

Scholars believe that many of the traditions and celebrations were borrowed from pagan celebrations of the spring, along with many of the rituals connected with Easter. In Germany, Pentecost Sunday and Monday observances are as much an occasion for celebrating the advent of spring as the gift of the Holy Spirit. Another ancient German tradition observed on this holiday involves bringing green leaves, flowers, and branches from the woods and decorating streets and buildings with them. While bringing the green leaves and flowers, a young man, with his face blackened and wearing a mask made of tree bark, hides underneath reeds and branches. Villagers have to guess who the person is. He is known in different parts of Germany by different names (Pfingstl in southern Germany and Wild Man in Thuringia).

Games are also an important part of Pentecost celebrations. Girls and boys in many parts of Germany play a game called *Topf schlagen* (strike the pot). In this game the child is blindfolded and has to find and break an inverted pan or a pot with a long wooden spoon or a stick. In earlier times, the winner was rewarded with *Pfingsthahn* (a rooster on a perch). However sweets and small gifts are now hidden inside the pot instead.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; PENTECOST; SPRING FESTIVALS

✿ CORPUS CHRISTI

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Sixty days after Easter

The Christian Feast of Corpus Christi commemorates the institution of the Eucharist, a Christian ritual of consuming sacred bread and wine. The word *eucharist* is derived from the Greek word *eucharisto*, which means "to rejoice or give thanks."

The Feast of Corpus Christi is known as *Fronleichnam* in Germany and is mainly celebrated by devout Roman Catholics. Special church services are held in Hesse, Baden-Württemberg, Rhineland-Palatinate, Bavaria, Saarland, North-Rhine Westphalia, Saxony, and Thuringia.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CORPUS CHRISTI

❁ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Catholics
Observed on: August 15

The Christian feast of the Assumption commemorates the elevation of Jesus' mother into heaven. In Germany Assumption Day is celebrated mainly in Bavaria and Saarland and is marked by a special Assumption prayer service in honor of Mary.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

❁ REFORMATION DAY

Observed by: Protestants
Observed on: October 31

Reformationstag, or Reformation Day, commemorates the posting of the Ninety-five Theses (written by German theologian Martin Luther) on the doors of Castle Church at Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. In this document Luther challenged the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church and the authority of the pope and asked Christians to return to the teachings of the Bible. He led the Protestant Reformation, which aimed at reforming the practices of the Roman Catholic Church.

Protestants all over the world celebrate this holiday. Red is the liturgical color of the day and is symbolic of the Holy Spirit, which descended on the disciples of Jesus on Pentecost. Protestants believe that the same Holy Spirit inspired Luther to nail his theses on the church door and thereby start the Reformation.

On this day Protestants in Germany attend church and offer prayers to God, thanking him for communicating the importance of the Gospels through his messenger Martin Luther.

Reformation Day is a public holiday in the Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia, Saxony, and Brandenburg regions of Germany.

Fun Fact
In Germany graves are decorated with flowers throughout the year.

❁ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day, in German Allerheiligen, is a Christian feast that honors all the saints (known and unknown) of Christianity. It was first introduced in 610, when Pope Boniface IV (r. 608–15) turned the ancient Roman Pantheon into a temple of the Blessed Virgin and All Martyrs. Beginning with Gregory III (r. 731–41) the celebration of a Feast of All Saints was commemorated at St. Peter's Cathedral (in Rome) on November 1. In 835 Pope Gregory IV (r. 827–44) extended this

feast to the entire church. On All Saints' Day in Germany people get together for family meals (lunches), after which they visit the graves of their dead relatives and place flowers, crosses, or wreaths made of pine or evergreens on them. Germans living in urban areas return to their native villages to observe All Saints' Day with their extended families.

In the afternoon families gather in the home again for Kaffee und Kuchen (coffee and cake). In the villages of the Bavarian region church services known as Allerheiligen Gottesdienst are held during which sermons are given on the lives of Christian saints. All Saints' Day is an official holiday in Germany. The next morning (All Souls' Day, November 2), church services are conducted with special prayers for the deceased.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ ALL SOULS' DAY

Observed by: Catholics
Observed on: November 2

The feast of All Souls' Day, in German Allerseelen, developed gradually. The first such observance is thought to have occurred with a celebration of the departed at the French monastery of Cluny in 998; the idea then spread to other monasteries and orders. Beginning in the 14th century the observance was celebrated just one day later, on November 2, but dates still fluctuate somewhat from country to country and region to region. In Bavaria and Austria October 30 through November 8 is celebrated as Seelenwoche, All Souls' Week. Halloween is a time to remember and honor the dead, and it is a time when the "veil between the worlds" is thinner than usual.

All Souls' Day is especially for the Armen Seelen, the poor souls still in purgatory who have not yet reached their full communion with God. In 835 Pope Gregory IV initiated the churchwide celebration. In the morning church services are conducted with special prayers for the deceased. Requiem Masses, cemetery processions, decorated graves with flowers and wreaths, alms and good deeds, all are supposed to shorten the time of suffering of the deceased in purgatory.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ BUSS UND BETTAG

Observed by: Protestants, especially Lutherans
Observed on: Wednesday before Totensonntag (between November 10 and 16)

Buss und Betttag, Day of Repentance and Prayer, is a Protestant holiday observed on the Wednesday before Totensonntag, the Sunday of the Dead. The first day of penance was observed by Protestants in 1532 as a reaction against the Ottoman wars.

It is a national holiday throughout Germany, with the exception of Bavaria, which has a predominantly Catholic population. On this day, German Protestants observe a daylong fast and ask God to forgive their sins. Many churches in Germany organize special church services on Buss und Betttag. The observance is also called Penance Day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ TOTENSONNTAG

Observed by: Protestants, especially Lutherans

Observed on: Last Sunday before Advent (between November 14 and 20)

Totensonntag, Sunday of the Dead, or Ewigkeitssonntag, falls on the last Sunday before Advent (the start of the Christmas season). For German Protestants it is a day to remember the dead. Some sources say that Duke August of Saxe-Gotha-Altenburg (1772–1822) instituted this holiday in 1814; others attribute its origin to the fact that Lutheran Church was unable to keep people from commemorating their dead, as they had done under Catholicism. Whatever its true origin, Totensonntag was started as an observance for Protestants, especially Lutherans, on the Sunday before the first Sunday in Advent.

On this day, German Protestants visit the graves of their family members and offer floral arrangements and prayers in their honor.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ ST. NICHOLAS DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: December 6

This day marks the death of St. Nicholas, the Bishop of Myra (a place in modern Turkey), who died on December 6, 343 C.E. St. Nicholas is one of the most revered and celebrated saints. Popularly known as Santa Claus, he is considered to be the great patron of children. It is believed that he rescued three dead children and brought them back to life.

In Germany children receive gifts, chocolates, and a variety of sweets on St. Nicholas Day. They leave their shoes outside their homes on the eve of St. Nicholas Day in the hopes that St. Nicholas will fill them with presents. It is believed that he visits those children who have been good, and they receive small gifts, candies, chocolates, and apples. Those who have not been good are given stern lectures by St. Nicholas.

In southern Bavaria beginning on St. Nicholas Day, children perform a ritual called Frauentragen, a reenactment of Joseph and Mary's search for a shelter before the birth of Jesus. During this ritual, children carry a statue of the Virgin Mary while singing hymns, enter a farmhouse, and place the statue under the crucifix. Then on the following night, they repeat the ritual and place the statue in another

farmhouse. They continue this ritual every night until the night before Christmas.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–26

The Christian feast of Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus. In Germany Christmas celebrations begin on December 24 and last until December 26. On Christmas Eve Germans decorate their Christmas trees with apples, straw stars, gilded nuts, Lebkuchen (spicy biscuits), electric lights, candles, wooden angels, and other ornaments. Neatly wrapped presents are placed under the tree. After dark parents invite their children to see the beautifully lit trees and give the children their presents. In many parts of Germany Christmas stories are often narrated or Christmas carols are sung before exchanging gifts. Many Roman Catholic families also attend Christmas Eve Mass. For dinner, carp, almonds, apples, and nuts are classic ingredients for the Christmas Eve menu.

Christmas Day is known as the first day of Christmas (der zweite Weihnachtsfeiertag). On Christmas day, Catholics attend church in the morning, if they did not go to Mass the night before. Then, they visit their friends and families and exchange gifts and greetings. In many parts of Germany a dish made from goose meat is a favorite meal served on Christmas.

The second day of Christmas, December 26, is celebrated as St. Stephen's Day (or Boxing Day) in many parts of Germany. St. Stephen was the first Christian martyr. He was stoned to death by Roman rulers for speaking in favor of Jesus and his disciples. Visiting friends and families continues on the second day of Christmas as well.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS; BOXING DAY

Regional Holidays

❁ BAMBERGER SANDKERWA

Observed in: Bamberg

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August

Sandkerwa is an annual religious festival commemorating the consecration of the Church of St. Elizabeth in Bamberg on August 24, 1354. After World War II the residents of Bamberg decided to reconsecrate the church, and since 1950 they have celebrated Sandkerwa.

The biggest attraction of the festival is an event called Fishermen's Sticking (Fischerstechen), which takes place on a Sunday and attracts participants from all over Germany. During this event two young men stand on narrow fishing boats in the middle of



A man from south of Munich, dressed in traditional Bavarian clothes, drinks out of a beer mug in one of the beer tents at the Oktoberfest in Munich, Bavaria. As many as six million visitors flock to the world's biggest beer celebration. (AP Photo/Jan Pitman)

the Regnitz River and try to push each other off using only lances. This jousting is known as sticking or *stechen*.

The Sandkerwa festivities also include carnival rides and games and plentiful drinking and dining. In every part of the town live bands play a wide variety of music. The festival ends with a spectacular display of fireworks.

Fun Fact

More than six million people from around the globe attend Oktoberfest, and around 1,320,860 gallons of beer are consumed.

✿ OKTOBERFEST

Observed in: Munich
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Mid-September–early October

Oktoberfest is an annual beer festival held in the German city of Munich during the months of September and October.

The festival goes back to the royal wedding of King Ludwig I of Bavaria (1786–1868) and Queen Therese von Sachsen-Hildburghausen (1792–1854), on October 12, 1810. The wedding celebrations included a lavish beer party and horse racing for the people. It was so popular that since then Munich has hosted the communal beer parties in large tents.

Munich sports a festive air with musical bands, guests from around the world, and the Bavarians wearing traditional costumes. The ceremonial opening of the festival takes place in September and begins with the arrival of the mayor of Munich in a festive coach, which is followed by a beautifully adorned horse-drawn brewer's cart. A big parade follows at the end of which the mayor taps the first keg

of beer and proclaims “*O’zapft is!*,” which means, “The keg has been tapped.”

After the ceremony, the festival goes into full swing. The most famous beer festival in the world, das Bierfest, also takes place during Oktoberfest and is held in a sprawling 93-acre area in Munich known as die Theresienwiese (named after Queen Therese).

The festival also features a wide variety of activities besides drinking such as amusement park rides, circus shows, food courts, carnival booths, and live bands playing a wide variety of music.

✿ OBERAMMERGAU PASSION PLAY

Observed in: Oberammergau
Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Every 10 years for five months

Oberammergau is a passion play performed for five months during the first year of each decade by the inhabitants of the village of Oberammergau in Germany. In the mid-17th century the villagers promised that, if God spared them from the bubonic plague, they would perform a play about Jesus’ life and death every 10 years. The passion play, which comprises spoken dramatic text, musical and choral accompaniment, and *tableaux vivants* (“living scenes”; the actors in these scenes remain motionless while a verbal description of what the scene portrays is read).

The *tableaux vivants* are scenes from the Old Testament including King Ahasuerus rejecting Vashti in favor of Esther, the brothers’ selling Joseph into slavery in Egypt, and Moses raising the bronze serpent in the wilderness. Each scene precedes the part of the play thought to be prefigured by the scene. The play requires seven hours for its performance, so the audience is served a meal during intermission. The play was first performed in 1634, and the most recent performance occurred in 2000.

Rites of Passage

✿ BIRTH

Until the 1700s, the first name given to most boys in southern and central Germany was Johann, although they were given different second names (middle names). To avoid confusion, they were known mainly by their second names. Similarly, the first name of most girls in the regions was either Anna or Maria, and they each had a different middle name that they were usually known by.

In northern and northeastern Germany in the mid-1800s, there was a tradition of giving a child three to five names, since the number of names reflected the family’s status. People in these regions believed that the higher the status of a family (or a person), the more names should be given to the child.

In the 21st century, German children are relieved from homework or household chores on their birthdays. Also, a special birthday cake is put on the dinner table early in the morning and an elderly member of the family decorates it with the number of candles corresponding to the child's age as well as with one extra candle for good luck. Many families also put a special wooden birthday wreath on their kitchen or dining tables. This wreath has holes that hold the candles as well a special hole to hold a life candle, which is bigger than the others. The life candle is lit every year until the child turns 12.

The candles are lit and allowed to burn the entire day. After dinner, the family gathers around the birthday cake and sings a birthday song for the child. Before blowing out the candles, the child is asked to make a wish. According to tradition, if all the candles are blown out in one try, then the wish will come true. Everyone gives gifts to the child, wishing him or her a year filled with happiness.

❁ MARRIAGE

In Germany people observe the rites of the denomination of Christianity to which they belong when they marry. Most weddings take place in a church and are solemnized in the presence of a priest or minister, family members, and friends. It involves an exchange of wedding vows and wedding rings. In Germany, the couple wears their engagement rings on the left hand. Then, following the ceremony, the same rings are moved to the fourth finger of the right hand. Engagement rings are commonly plain gold bands; rarely, if ever, a diamond.

In northern Germany, friends and family members play tricks on the bride and the groom. While they are getting married in the church, for example, friends of the couple might go to the newlyweds' house, place all the furniture on the roof, and lock the doors to the house. After the couple returns home, they are faced with the challenge of finding a way inside their locked home. After they manage to do that, they have to put all the furniture back inside their house on their own. No outside help is provided, and family and friends watch merrily as the newlyweds are made to work on their wedding day.

In the regions of Rheinland-Pfalz and Idar-Oberstein, friends and family members throw old dishes on the streets, and the bride and the groom have to sweep the streets to clean it. This is an ancient custom, and people believe that if the couple can clean the street then their marriage will be excellent.

After this ritual it is customary for the groom's best man and other wedding witnesses to kidnap the bride and take her to a local restaurant or bar. The groom rescues his bride from the "kidnappers" and also pays for all their feasting and drinking.

These rituals are followed by a wedding reception, which involves a lot of singing and dancing. In accordance with tradition the bride and the groom dance the first dance, traditionally a waltz. Then, the groom and his mother and the bride and her father dance the second dance. Later the groom's father dances with the bride's mother.

At around midnight the bride takes off her veil and hands it to the woman who is next in line to get married.

❁ DEATH

In Germany burial rituals are regulated by law. Cremation along a riverside, scattering of ashes in the rivers, burial in the backyard, and open caskets are prohibited. By law Germans must bury their dead in graveyards after leasing burial plots from the government. Germans have to pay the authorities a substantial amount to obtain these leases, which generally last for a period of 20–30 years. If the lease is not renewed when it expires the family has to remove the headstone from the burial site, and the plot is dug up and leased to another family.

Further Reading

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Fun Fact

The custom of celebrating children's birthdays started in Germany hundreds of years ago and then spread to the rest of the world. It is known as Kinderfeste (*kinder* means "children" and *fest* means "festival").

Fun Fact

Gambrinus was a legendary king of Flanders, and the unofficial patron saint of brewing. The origin of the character may have been John, Duke of Burgundy (1371–1419), whom some also believe to be the inventor of hopped malt beer.

Ghana

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Western Africa, bordered by Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Togo
Size	92,456 sq. mi.
Capital City	Accra
Flag Description	The flag of Ghana has equal red (top), yellow, and green horizontal bands with a five-pointed black lodestar (a star that symbolizes freedom and helps in finding direction, just like a polestar) centered in the yellow band.
Independence	March 6, 1957
Population	21,029,853 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional Democracy
Nationality	Ghanaian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Akan, Moshi-Dagomba, Ewe, and Ga (41%)
Major Language(s)	English (official); Akan; Moshi-Dagomba; Ewe; Ga
Major Religion(s)	Christian (63%); indigenous beliefs and Muslim (37%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Independence Day, March 6; Labor Day, May 1; 1979 Coup Anniversary, June 4; Republic Day, July 1; Farmers' Day, December 2; Revolution Day, December 31

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

A people called the Proto-Mande by archaeologists, forced to domesticate cattle in response to ecological pressures in their homeland, migrated from the Saharan highlands in the east to the Atlantic coast in the west. Archaeological research in North Africa documents the movement of semi-sedentary cattle herders from Saharan sites into West Africa. This sedentary economy resulted in a population large enough that the Mande speakers were able to spread throughout northwest and west Africa between 5,000 and 3,000 years ago. In 1471 when Portuguese sailors arrived on the coast of Ghana they were amazed by the highly structured kingdoms they encountered. This initial contact, along with the area's reputation for being wealthy, encouraged Europeans to settle in the region and to trade bronze and manufactured objects for Ghanaian gold and slaves. West Africa is famous for its gold deposits, which gave rise to the British name for this region, the Gold Coast. Gold

served as a profitable commodity and helped to expand Ghana's trade with Mediterranean countries.

British explorers and traders followed the Portuguese in the 16th century and established their control along the Gold Coast. Toward the end of the 16th century states such as Dagomba, Gonja, and Mamprusi, known collectively as Mole-Dagbane, came into being in northern Ghana. The Mande-speaking people strongly influenced these states and their people. Many settlers, such as the Sisala, Talensi, and Kasena, did not form states but were organized as clans headed by rulers. Ashanti is the best known of all the states of Ghana.

In the 17th century the Gold Coast (modern Ghana) had several small-scale principalities in which peoples belonging to the Akan cultural group lived. These Akan groups paid tribute to a group called the Denkyira. Although they were connected by trade routes, a shared language, and similar belief systems, these states were separate until the early 18th century, when Osei Tutu (d. 1717) became the Ashanti ruler and began a territorial expansion that united the states as one kingdom. Using guns purchased from Europeans with gold

and slaves, Osei Tutu first defeated the Denkyira and then, using the means at hand, convinced the other Akan groups to unite. In 1701 the Ashanti Confederacy was formed, and Osei Tutu was crowned *asantehehene*, the ruler of the Ashanti.

By 1750 Ashanti was a large empire whose borders were similar to those of contemporary Ghana. Developing an inclusive model of leadership that emphasized points of similarity and adopting traditions from throughout the territory for courtly use, Osei Tutu promoted unity among the peoples over whom he ruled and cultivated a strong national identity that has continued. It flourished as an empire and annexed the neighboring territories of Gonja, Mamprusi, and Dagomba until it came up against British colonial power in the 19th century.

In 1821 the British government took control of the region from the traders and decided to establish a colony. In 1844 the British signed an agreement with the local Fant chiefs (an ethnic group in southern Ghana), lending their efforts to colonize the region some legal status and support from the local chiefs. In 1873 the British ransacked the city of Kumasi after the Ashanti refused to accept British dominance. They captured the city and declared the Gold Coast a crown colony. Because of its wealth and strength Ashanti was one of the few African states capable of resisting the European invaders. Britain fought four wars against the Ashanti between 1826 and 1896. In 1900 the British finally won and renamed the kingdom the Gold Coast. By 1902 they had captured all the Ashanti territories and declared them a British Protectorate.

The British also fought against the Portuguese, captured the town of Cabo Couso, renamed it “Cape Coast,” and made it the capital of the Gold Coast colony.

Although British rule was centralized and authoritarian, it did offer limited powers to the Ghanaians, and the Gold Coast developed rapidly during colonial rule. The British built a new infrastructure, including Takoradi Harbor and new roads, and in 1878 they introduced the cultivation of a new commodity crop, cacao. Cacao flourished and became Ghana’s major export. In 1948 the University College of Gold Coast opened. Western education took roots under the influence of the British and helped Ghanaians find employment in the British administration.

This educated class became increasingly prominent. They were well versed in the country’s social, political, and economic structure. Soon they wanted independence. The great Ghanaian leader Dr. Kwame Nkrumah (1909–72) led the way as a founder of Pan-Africanism (the movement to recognize cultural similarity and commonality and unify all African countries) and in 1949, of the Convention People’s Party (CPP). In the wake of World War II colonies all over the world intensified their demands for independence. Kwame Nkrumah and the Convention People’s Party also increased pressure on the British government to grant independence to the

region. The British agreed, subject to the support of the Gold Coast Legislative Assembly.

In 1956 elections were held, and the Convention People’s Party emerged victorious. The British fulfilled their promise and on March 6, 1957, the independent State of Ghana came into existence. The merger of the Gold Coast and the British Togoland Trust Territory led to the formation of the Republic of Ghana on July 1, 1960.

As the first sub-Saharan country to achieve independence in colonial Africa, it enjoyed greater political and economic privileges than other African countries.

Ghana was the leading exporter of cocoa and was rich in minerals, gold, and timber. The country had good foreign currency reserves, excellent transportation facilities, high per capita income, and comparatively low national debt. Its efficient educational and parliamentary system should have helped Ghana become one of the strongest African nations. Unfortunately bad economic policies and planning caused a downslide, and the first 20 years after independence were difficult for the people.

Ghana’s powerful leader Kwame Nkrumah became the prime minister and later the president of Ghana. Dr. Nkrumah borrowed heavily for financing public projects, which included building the Akosombo Dam on the Volta River. However the dam was a financial disaster since it did not provide the promised irrigation and electrification program for more than a decade after it was operational. Moreover there was widespread corruption in the country, which further added to Ghana’s woes. Between 1966 and 1981 the country witnessed several coup d’états, which subjected Ghana to a series of six inefficient governments. Each regime seemed worse than the preceding one, and instead of improving the life of the people, these dictatorial regimes made it worse.

On June 4, 1979, Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings (b. 1947) and his Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) led a successful coup against the then-president of Ghana Lieutenant General Frederick William Kwasi Akuffo (1937–79) and assumed power as the head of state. After the successful coup Rawlings relinquished power to Hilla Limann

Fun Fact

The Ashanti ruler, known as the Asantehene, is crowned on a stool made of pure gold called the *sika dwa*. According to legend, Okomfo Anokye, a great fetish priest and advisor to Osei Tutu, caused the golden stool to fall from the sky and land in Tutu’s lap. Only the Asantehene may sit on the stool, which must never touch the ground.

Fun Fact

Yaa Asantewaa (c. 1850–1921) is a beloved figure in Ashanti history, because she led the resistance against British colonialism in 1896. Her brother, then the Ashanti ruler, made her queen mother of Edweso, a member of the Asante Confederacy.



A Ghanaian high priestess, spiritual healer, (center rear), and her assistant priestesses wear ceremonial red gowns inside the priestess's hut near Tarkwa. In a country where traditional healers far outnumber Western-trained doctors, a priestess is often the first stop for treatment.

(AP Photo/Brennan Linsley)

Fun Fact

The Ewe tribe has 600 different deities to whom they can turn in times of distress. Village celebrations and festivities honor each of these deities.

(1934–88), who had been elected to head a civilian administration. The economic situation worsened under Limann, provoking nationwide strikes against the government. On December 31, 1981, Jerry Rawlings and a group of military officers led another successful coup against the Limann government and once again assumed control of the nation. Rawlings introduced Ghana to socialist economics and implemented a number of anticorruption measures to stop economic conditions from worsening.

He also introduced various progrowth reforms and later became an advocate of a free-market economy. Jerry Rawlings's government brought Ghana greater stability and economic independence. In 2000 Rawlings stepped down as president and handed the reins of government to John Kufuor (b. 1938).

🌸 GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Ghana is located on the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa. It lies south of Burkina Faso and is flanked by Côte d'Ivoire to the west and Togo to the east. The coastal regions of Ghana have pristine beaches, while the tropical rain forests in the north, known as the Ashanti region, is home to the country's mineral deposits, timber, and cocoa. Farther north bushes and parklike savannahs (grasslands dotted with trees) and grassy plains cover the region.

The country has a mild tropical climate. The rainy season in the northern regions is between March and April. Intermittent rain falls between August and September. Ghana gets around 30 inches of rainfall every year. Temperatures soar in March, whereas August is pleasant when no significant difference is noted between the day and nighttime temperatures.

🌸 ECONOMY

Trade has been important to Ghana since the 13th century. Gold reserves and oil palms were its major sources of wealth. Europeans and North Africans exchanged their products for gold, kola nuts (obtained from native West African trees such as the *Cola nitida* or *Cola vera*, they have a high caffeine content and a bitter flavor), and slaves. Gold remained the most significant trade item. The slave trade boomed with the arrival of more Europeans, and African merchants readily exchanged slaves for guns.

The slave trade ended in the early years of the 19th century, and trade in timber, textiles, and palm oil increased. Today cocoa is a major revenue earner. Though Ghana faced an economic depression during the administrations of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah and Jerry Rawlings, a subsequent economic recovery program moved the country toward a more stable economy. Diamonds, manganese, and bauxite have also helped to boost Ghana's economy.

Arts and Crafts of the Ashanti Tribe

The Ashanti people in Western Africa established one of the wealthiest and most modern kingdoms in Africa and are highly skilled artists in many media. They have been able to maintain their culture and traditional dance, music, and art even after centuries of colonization and European influence. Their gold artwork and jewelry, for example, are world famous. The men are skilled weavers and work primarily with cotton and silk. The woven products are called *kente*. Women may pick cotton or spin materials into thread, but only men are allowed to weave. There are different patterns in weaving, each with its own name. Sometimes the pattern represents social status, a clan, a saying, or the sex of the person wearing it. Patterns are not always woven into the cloth; it can

also be stamped with many designs. Pottery, and the many processes involved in its making, is a women's skill, passed down from mother to daughter.

The Ashanti also do wood carving and metal casting, and Asante carvers are famed for their female dolls, known as *Akuaba*, which measure between 8 and 16 inches in height with a stylized, elongated body and an enlarged circular head. These dolls, blessed by priests, are supposed to enable barren women to conceive and are carried around and treated like children by Ashanti women. Once used they are kept in a shrine in the home. The Fant to the south and the Bono people to the north of the Ashanti also use *Akuaba* dolls, but the Fant dolls' heads are rectangular, while those of the Bono have a triangular profile.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

A country of 21 million people and 100 different ethnic groups, Ghana has a mix of cultures and traditions. Many of the ethnic groups are tribes from neighboring areas. The Ashanti tribe is the largest tribe in Ghana.

Ghana is home to the largest Christian population in West Africa, although many Ghanaians maintain their traditional beliefs. The latter believe in a supreme deity, yet they reason that the everyday woes of human beings are too insignificant to concern this god. For day-to-day issues lesser deities, more directly concerned with human actions are prayed to and appeased with sacrificial offerings.

Beliefs and traditions in Ghanaian society are handed down orally from one generation to the next; there are no written scriptures.

Highlife is the most popular style of music in Ghana. The term *highlife* refers to the English style of dancing to music played by native bands. Highlife was initially performed during military functions but

evolved, incorporating native songs and rhythms. It is now the most popular form of music in Ghana and is played in Ghanaian pubs and discotheques, as well as in other parts of Africa.

CUISINE

Corn, rice, and the root crops of cassava (manioc) and yams provide the staple diet of Ghanaians. *Fufu*, made of mashed cassava or yams, is served with every meal. They also consume plenty of meat and vegetables. *Shito* (a hot spicy sauce) is of Ghanaian origin. *Jollof* (a rice dish made with spices and tomatoes) is also popular.

Some kind of soup usually accompanies every meal. Groundnut soup (*pepe*), uniquely Ghanaian, is a widely consumed preparation made with meat and peanut butter. *Waatse* is rice served with beans, and *kenkey*, fermented cornmeal wrapped and boiled in plantain leaves, is eaten with seafood in a hot pepper sauce. *Efun forowee* is a spinach soup made with fish, beef, tomatoes, onions, eggs, and spices. *Kelewele* is a

Chicken & Peanut Butter Soup

Ingredients:

8 to 12 pieces of chicken
 9 oz. of smooth peanut butter
 1 medium onion, chopped
 2 qt. slightly warm water
 1 tsp. salt
 2 medium ripe tomatoes, peeled, or 2 Tbs. tomato paste
 1 tsp. black pepper
 Diced pimentos or 1 tsp. curry powder, optional

Preparation:

Combine chicken pieces with the chopped onion and seasonings in a large saucepan. Moisten with a little water and cook over medium heat for 15 minutes. Stir once or twice. While chicken is cooking, mix peanut butter with water in a bowl until smooth, then add to chicken. Bring mixture to a boil and allow to boil for 30 minutes. Blend tomatoes until smooth, and add tomatoes to soup. Simmer until the chicken is tender and oil begins to form in soup, about 2½ hours. Continue to stir occasionally. If desired, sprinkle with pimentos or curry powder before serving. Accompany with *fufu* or boiled potatoes.

Fun Fact

If an Ashanti man has eaten a meal served without *fufu*, he will say he has not yet eaten.

ripe plantain preparation seasoned with chili, cloves, and ginger and fried in hot oil. A variety of fresh fruits, including bananas, oranges, and mangoes, are often eaten for dessert. The popular drink in Ghana is palm wine.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Gregorian (Western) calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day. In Ghana Revolution Day is celebrated on December 31, and the festivities continue with New Year's Eve. New Year's Day celebrations involve drinking, eating, singing, and dancing in the company of family and friends.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 6

On March 6, 1957, Ghana was granted total independence from Britain. It is a national holiday and thousands of people assemble in the country's capital Accra for the Independence Day celebrations. Flag-raising ceremonies, military parades, and official speeches are followed by dance and music performances.

Traditionally people from different communities circle around the baobab tree, a native tree of Africa that can grow 80 feet high and 25 feet in diameter. There is singing, dancing, drumming, and storytelling. Sometimes the celebrations last up to a week and typically include musical and theatrical performances.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

Labor Day, also known as May Day and Workers' Day, commemorates the important role played by workers in their societies. The May 1 observance was set by the Socialist Second International in 1889 to coincide with an 1890 general strike in the United States called by the American Federation of Labor (AFL) to win the eight-hour workday. Labor Day is a national holiday in Ghana and all public and private institutions are closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ 1979 COUP ANNIVERSARY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 4

On June 4, 1979, the armed forces of Ghana, under Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings, staged a coup to overthrow the government of President Lieutenant General Frederick William Kwasi Akuffo. Corruption was rampant and the administrative structure was crippling the nation's progress. Ironically General Akuffo had himself assumed office after leading a coup against the then-president Lieutenant Colonel Ignatius Kutu Acheampong. Rawlings assumed power as the head of state but soon relinquished leadership to Hilla Limann, who had been elected to head a civilian government.

❁ REPUBLIC DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 1

Ghana Republic Day commemorates the establishment of the Republic of Ghana on July 1, 1960. This holiday is marked by official speeches, military parades, and cultural activities. As a national holiday all public and private institutions are closed.

❁ FARMERS' DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 2

Farmers' Day is celebrated to recognize and honor the farmers who face hardships like drought and pestilence and produce the crops to feed the country. On this day farmers pray for abundant rain and good harvests. One major challenge that Ghana faces is the movement of farmers to urban areas, as they abandon farming looking for better jobs or employment. This day features meetings with agricultural department officials, who educate farmers about modern agricultural techniques.

❁ REVOLUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31

Revolution Day commemorates the second revolution led by Jerry Rawlings against the administration of President Hilla Limann. After the successful coup of 1979, Rawlings relinquished power to Hilla Limann, who had been elected to head a civilian administration. The economic situation worsened under Limann, provoking nationwide strikes against the government. On December 31, 1981, Jerry Rawlings and a group of military officers led a successful coup against the Limann government and once again assumed control of the nation. A holiday from work and various official functions commemorate this second coup by Jerry Rawlings.

Religious Holidays

✿ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

The two main celebrations of Muslims are *eid* days. *Eid* means “celebration.” Eid al-Adha commemorates the willingness of Ibrahim (Abraham) to sacrifice his son in order to obey God. The observance is also called Festival of Sacrifice and Tabaski. On this day Ghanaian Muslims sacrifice a goat or a sheep and give part of the meat to the poor. During this period Muslims are urged to make a pilgrimage called hajj to Mecca. For every Muslim a visit to Mecca is required once in his or her lifetime. At the end of the pilgrimage it is mandatory for Muslims to shave their heads or cut off a lock of hair. Prayers, social gatherings, and gifts for children mark this day, which is a public holiday.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

✿ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

The Christian holiday of Good Friday commemorates Jesus’ Crucifixion. It falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent, the austere season of fasting and penitence. It commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. It has been in the Christian liturgical calendar even longer than Easter has, although no one is sure why it is called “Good” Friday. Some have suggested that the use of *good* in the name goes back to Old English and means “God’s” Friday, while others interpret *good* to mean something like “observed as holy.” This observance is also known as Black Friday and Sorrowful Friday, and in Eastern Orthodox Churches it is called Great Friday. On Good Friday in Ghana, devout Christians wear mourning clothes (black) and attend church. Many Ghanaian Christians also abstain from eating meat on this day. Special Gospel theatrical performances depict Jesus’ life and teachings.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

For Christians Easter is considered the most important Christian festival, and its numerous celebrations and observances form the core of the liturgical year. This occasion celebrates the resurrection of Jesus three days after his Crucifixion.

Christians believe Jesus was the Son of God, and died on the Cross to redeem humanity from sin. In Ghana on Easter Sunday, people are in a joyous mood and wear white clothes as they attend churches. Afterward they gather for special meals. Easter celebrations generally last four days in Ghana.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

The breaking of the fast, or Eid al-Fitr, marks the end of Ramadan, during which Muslims fast from dawn until sunset each day. Every year the date of the celebration shifts 11 days behind the Gregorian or Western calendar, as the Islamic calendar is based on the cycles of the Moon. In Ghana this festival is celebrated as a reminder of the good things one has received in life, and prayers of thanks are offered to God. Though it is not compulsory Muslims are requested to give either money or food, which is distributed to the poor to allow them to celebrate this *eid*.

Celebrants wear new clothes and offer special prayers on this occasion. Prayer services are usually held in big mosques or stadiums. After prayers children receive gifts and money from family members, and most homes have lavish feasts. The Koran forbids fasting on this day.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM

✿ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas commemorates the birth of Jesus (the founder of Christianity) whom Christians believe to be the Son of God. Europeans introduced Christmas to western Africa, and the customs and traditions of the Ghanaian celebrations are a mixture of African and European. During Christmas children go from one house to another, dancing and singing songs based on African folklore. When children receive gifts or money from their neighbors, they sing in thanks. In Ghana people hang stockings for Santa Claus, organize plays based on the life of Jesus, and dance and perform the plays, typically wearing colorful, traditional masks.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Fun Fact

The Commonwealth of Nations is an association of independent nations, most of which are former colonies of the British Empire. They share some common cultural links as a result of British colonization, and Boxing Day is one of them.

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 26

The day after Christmas December 26 is celebrated as Boxing Day; it is also called St. Stephen's Day, in honor of the first Christian martyr. Boxing Day originated with a British custom, which Ghanaians still observe as a remnant of their colonial past. On this day gifts are given to those who render service to the community throughout the year.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ BUGUM FESTIVAL

Observed in: Dagbon, Gonai, Mamprusi, and Nanuba
Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: January or February

This Muslim-African festival is celebrated to commemorate Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina in 658 C.E. Dagbon, Gonai, Mamprusi, and Nanuba groups celebrate this festival in January or February. The people begin their processions from various villages and come together in a large open area. Usually they surround the chief's palace with lit torches, and the chief presides over the festivities. There is drumming and dancing. The streets are also illuminated. The festivities continue until early morning.

See also Volume III: ISLAM

❁ THE DEER-HUNTING FESTIVAL OF GHANA

Observed in: Southern Ghana
Observed by: Simpa tribe
Observed on: May

The Aboakyer Deer-Hunting Festival falls on the first Saturday in May and is celebrated by the Simpa people, who live on the southern coast of Ghana. The festival originated in the ancient sacrificial offering made to Otu, the Harvest God. People would pray to Otu and try to appease him so that he would bless them with a good harvest. In ancient times, if there had been a series of crop failures in the region, a priest asked families to sacrifice the youngest member of their family to please Otu. Taken aback by this practice, people prayed to Otu and requested that he accept the sacrificial offering in the form of a wild cat. However in their attempts to capture a wild cat, many people lost their lives. They once again prayed to their god, and according to traditional accounts, he asked them to sacrifice

antelopes. On this day therefore competitions are held that involve catching an antelope without the use of weapons and delivering it to the village chief. The team that presents the first antelope is declared victorious. The antelope is sacrificed. Though a ban prohibits killing these animals, the rules have been relaxed for this festival.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

❁ ELIMINA BAKATUE FESTIVAL

Observed in: Elimina
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: First week of July

This festival marks the beginning of the fishing season. The word *bakatue* literally means "opening up of Bengya lagoon in to the sea." For the people of Elimina fishing is the major source of their livelihood. This festival has been observed for centuries, long before the arrival of Europeans. During this week the Bengya lagoon is a riot of color with numerous canoes. There are processions, and people celebrate by drinking and partying. A net-casting ceremony is conducted to welcome the fishing season. The people of this region offer prayers and give the first catch to their local deities, asking them to protect their livelihood and bless them with a good year of fishing.

❁ THE RICE FESTIVAL

Observed in: Vane
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Late November–early December

The Rice harvest festival, also known as the Amu festival, is celebrated by the people of Vane in the district of Ho, attracting people from all parts of Ghana. Usually celebrated at Vane's traditional capital, Avatime, the festivities start at the end of November and last until the first week of December. The people of Avatime migrated from the Ashanti region in Ghana and took up agriculture, which they continue to rely on. The week includes dance performances, a lot of singing and drumming, and eating and drinking.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

Rites of Passage

❁ CHILD-NAMING CEREMONY

In Ghanaian communities child-naming ceremonies are major occasions for celebration. On this day the child is given a name and is taken outside the home for the first time. All ethnic groups practice a similar ceremony, though they have different names for it. The Akan call it *abandinto*; Ewes call it *vibebedego*, and among the Dagaries it is called *summa*. Akans celebrate

naming on the eighth day after birth, whereas in the northern regions the naming ceremony takes place on the third day for boys and the fourth day for girls.

The Ga tribe's naming ceremony is called *kpodziemo*. In their tradition, the paternal and maternal sides of the child's family assemble in the courtyard of the child's father. The purpose is to introduce the child to both sides of the family at the same time. The child is named after his father's lineage, and a blessing ceremony follows. Presiding over the blessing ceremony is an elderly member of the family with an exemplary character. Many believe that children take on the characteristics of the person who performs the blessing ceremony. It involves pouring two libations, consisting of corn oil and gin, which are provided by the father. After the libations water is sprinkled on the face of the child and the ceremony is considered complete. A lavish feast follows.

❁ COMING OF AGE

The Krobo people of Ghana celebrate the Dipo-Krobo Festival every year. It marks the coming of age ceremony for girls of the Dipo tribe, and the girls are dressed in new attire for the ceremony. They wear strands of colored beads, some of which are usually given to them by their mothers. The girl stays in seclusion throughout the Dipo-Krobo ceremony. Coming of age is considered an important step toward marriage, and girls are taught the moral and ethical values of the tribe during their isolation. In earlier times a girl was thought to be ready for marriage soon after the ceremony and might even have been married the same day. The customs are now a little different, although the practice of female cutting (genital mutilation) continues. The practice persists in spite of legislation passed in 1994 that explicitly prohibits it.

❁ MARRIAGE

Various ethnic groups follow different customs in marriage, which consists of a religious ceremony followed by civil registration. Certain matters must be attended to before choosing the spouse. Every family member goes through a check for incurable diseases, criminal background, employment status, and religious background. An individual who is hard-working and respectable is preferred. Inter-marriage is not generally practiced between Christians and Muslims. However converting from Islam to Christianity and vice-versa is encouraged before marriage.

Among the Ashanti marriage is very important to community life. Men can have more than one wife, and many take several wives to advertise their willingness to be generous and their ability to support a large family. Women in the Ashanti culture do not marry unless their parents consent to it, and many women do not meet their husbands until they are married. Even so divorce is very rare in the Ashanti culture, and it is the parents' duty to keep a marriage going.

Fun Fact

In the suburbs of Accra (Teshie/Nungua) coffin-makers are in great demand because they are famous for their coffins shaped like cars, airplanes, and various animals. For a fisherman's body, for example, relatives may ask for a fish coffin. However this can be expensive, affordable only for the wealthiest Ghanaians.

❁ DEATH

The Ga tribe believes that people should be buried in a coffin that identifies the occupation or lifestyle of the person. Also they believe in an afterlife and that failure to bury the deceased with the proper rituals means that his or her spirit will haunt the living members of the family and bring death and disease. Therefore proper funerals are conducted with the rites properly executed under the supervision of an experienced and elderly person who is well versed in all the burial rituals.

Muslim burial rituals involve cleansing the body and draping it in a white shroud. Then the body is carried in a procession to the local graveyard and buried with the proper Islamic rites.

After the burial the neighbors and other villagers extend their support to the family members of the deceased. A 40-day mourning period, during which she is not allowed to come out of her hut, is mandatory for a widow.

Further Reading

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Greece

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Southern Europe, between Albania and Turkey, bordering the Aegean Sea, Ionian Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea
Size	50,942 sq. mi.
Capital City	Athens
Flag Description	The Greek flag has nine equal horizontal stripes of blue alternating with white; superimposed on the first five lines is a blue square in the upper hoist-side corner bearing a white cross.
Independence	1829 (from the Ottoman Empire)
Population	10,668,354 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary republic
Nationality	Greek
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Greek (98%)
Major Language(s)	Greek (99%)
Major Religion(s)	Greek Orthodox (98%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Independence Day, March 25; Labor Day, May 1; Oxi Day, October 28

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

During the Bronze Age (4000–3000 B.C.E.), there were three powerful and developed civilizations in Greece: the Cycladic, Minoan, and Mycenaean civilizations. The people during this time were constantly at war with each other over trade rivalries. Around 2200 B.C.E. the Achaeans, and Indo-European group, invaded Greece, bringing with them the Greek language, and founded Mycenae. In 1450 the Mycenaeans destroyed the Minoan civilization, only to be overrun in 1100 by the Iron Age Dorians from the north, also speakers of Greek. Greece entered a period of stagnancy made worse by a civil war, and the period from 1100 to 800 is called the Greek Dark Ages.

Then between 900 and 700, which archaeologists call the Geometric period, startling innovations and changes in Greek society occurred. The population began to increase at an alarming rate and proto-urban life reemerged, causing over-

crowding and political tensions. Some of these tensions had begun lessening around 1000 when some Greeks moved into other territories to the east and west and started commercial trading posts and colonies. Around the same time written language, which had disappeared when the Mycenaean civilization collapsed, was revived by the adoption of the Semitic alphabet, acquired from the Phoenicians. And the Greek city-states of Athens, Thebes, Megara, Corinth, and Sparta took shape. It is thought that Homer's epic poems the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, which had been orally preserved, were recorded during this period. It was also during this period that the Greeks began to codify their religious practices and to build temples where their gods were worshipped, and in 776 the first Olympic games were held.

The Early Archaic period, roughly 700 to 600, laid the foundations for the flowering of Greek civilization. The Greek city-states, the polis, became increasingly powerful although tyrants ruled many of them. In 640 Sparta adopted a militaristic style of government. Athens became an oligarchy in 632, but by 621 Dracon had formulated the first Athenian

The Olympics

According to Greek mythology Hercules challenged his brothers to a race in front of the gods. The race was held in the fields of Olympia. In this tradition the Greeks hosted a festival of sports every four years for about 1,200 years, until the Roman emperor banned the event claiming it to be vulgar and corrupt.

The warring Greek city-states declared a temporary truce during the period the Olympics were held. It is recorded that athletes competed in various events completely nude. Women were not allowed

to participate in or watch these athletic contests.

Olympic games were not held in the Roman Empire or during the Ottoman rule. Centuries of earthquakes and floods buried all evidence of the games until 1870 when German archaeologists found remains of the Temple of Zeus and statues of Olympic athletes in Greece. This finding inspired the idea of resuming this event on an international scale, and the first modern Olympics was held in Athens in 1896. Fourteen nations participated, and the Greeks won the most medals. Athens also hosted the 2004 Olympics.

code of law. Abroad the Greek colonies flourished, and new ones were settled, especially around the Black Sea and Mediterranean, bringing the Greeks into prolonged hostilities with the Persians. Trade with highly developed cultures in Egypt and Anatolia was improved and brought in eastern imports, which the Greeks imitated. They also adopted minted coinage for commercial exchange at this time, and the architectural styles known as Doric and Ionic appeared in the construction of temples. The Persians, under Cyrus (c. 585–c. 29), attempted to extend their control over the Greeks in Asia Minor and successfully defeated individual Greek city-states there. In the end the Greeks triumphed over the Persians, and this victory was celebrated in Greek art and literature as a symbol of the triumph of civilized peoples over the forces of barbarism.

The most powerful among the Greek city-states were Athens and Sparta. After a series of wars known as the Peloponnesian Wars (431–04), the Spartans, who were known for their military prowess, defeated Athens. Soon afterward, however, Sparta was annexed by the kingdom of Macedonia. Macedonian rule continued through three dynasties and ended with the untimely death of Alexander the Great (356–23). Under Alexander the Macedonian Empire had expanded into parts of Asia Minor, Persia, Egypt, Afghanistan, and India. This era (776–323) is known as the Hellenic Period and saw the great flowering of classical Greek civilization whose incredible accomplishments in philosophy, art, music, mathematics, science, medicine, and architecture form the very foundation of Western civilization. Although the renowned philosopher Sophocles was tried, found guilty of heresy, and chose to commit suicide (399), his pupil Plato founded the first university (388), and in 375 wrote *The Republic*. By 367, Aristotle, one of the greatest thinkers of all time, was a student in Plato's academy.

Between 200 and 196, parts of Greece came under Roman rule and were declared Roman provinces. However in spite of limited political and economic freedom, the Greek areas largely retained

their identity. The Roman Empire moved its capital to Constantinople (which was then located within Greek borders) and evolved into the Byzantine Empire, which included Greece. The power of this empire was considerably weakened during the Crusades (a series of military campaigns fought to extend the control of the young Christian Church), and when Turkey captured Constantinople, Greece came completely under Turkish control. This ushered in the era of the Ottoman Turks in Greek history. Under the Turks Greece was reduced to the status of yet another territory that the empire exploited. There were many notable Greek statesmen and merchants during that time, but the majority of Greece was impoverished. Greece remained an integral part of the Ottoman Empire until the 19th century C.E.

The eventual independence of Greece was the result of a cultural revival during the 18th century. In 1821 the Greeks rebelled against Turkish domination, and both Russia and England were major players in the Greeks' efforts to obtain independence. Noted writers such as Lord Byron, Shelley, and Goethe supported the Greeks in their battle against Turkey. The War of Greek Independence ended in 1832, and the European powers of that time helped a monarchy assume control in Greece. The Greek king became a ceremonial head of state, however, and democracy prevailed when the new constitution was enacted in 1864.

Since Greek independence, the relationship with Turkey has remained volatile. In 1912, again with support from European countries, Greece fought the First Balkan War against Turkey. As a result some areas of Macedonia became part of Greece, and Albania became a newly liberated nation. The Greeks supported the Allied forces during World War I. Greek troops, encouraged by the Allies, attacked Turkey and occupied Thrace. In 1922 Greece proceeded to occupy the region of Asia Minor but was defeated by Turkey this time. Under the supervision of the League of Nations, millions of Greeks from Asia Minor were resettled in Greece.



Fun Fact

No place in Greece is more than 62 miles away from a beach.

Greece was neutral when World War II began. Italy nonetheless tried to invade Greece in 1940, but the country successfully resisted. Germany, too, had plans for Greece. In 1941 when German troops entered the Greek mainland, the Greek government sought political asylum in Egypt and operated from there. Political unrest continued to haunt the nation, when in 1943 a civil war broke out between Communists and Royalists. In 1949 the civil war finally ended with the Communists' defeat. The new Greek government was highly unstable, however, and there was continued friction with Turkey. Further conflict resulted in the independence of Cyprus in 1960.

In 1967 a military coup overthrew the constitutional government in Greece. A new constitution drastically restricted the monarchy's powers, and Greece's military government attempted, without success, to regain power over Cyprus. In 1973 after yet another military coup, a new government came into power, but in July 1974 the country was returned to civilian government.

In the 21st century, Greece's relationship with Turkey has improved following devastating earthquakes that struck both nations at separate times in 1999. Both Greece and Turkey sent each other generous aid during this time of crisis. Greece is a member of the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU). The Euro was adopted as the official currency in 2002.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Greece is a peninsula surrounded by about 1,400 islands. Located in the Balkan region in southeastern Europe, the country shares borders with Albania, Macedonia, Turkey, and Bulgaria. Greece has coastlines on the Mediterranean Sea, the Ionian Sea, and the Aegean Sea. The numerous Greek islands are divided into six groups: the Cyclades, Ionians, Sporades, Saronic Gulf islands, Dodecanese, and the Northeastern Aegean Islands. The largest Greek islands, however, are not part of any of the six groups. These are Crete and Evia.

The most prominent relief feature of Greece, apart from the extensive island chains that surround it, is the country's mountainous terrain. Mt. Olympus (1,813 feet) is the highest mountain in Greece. The Aliakmon is its longest river.

Greek summers are extremely hot and dry, and the temperature can soar as high as 104°F. Strong winds from the north blow across the country during July and August and provide some relief during the hot summers. The winters are normally cold, and the northern parts of the country experience snowfall. Winters are mild in the southern parts and on the islands.

❁ ECONOMY

Greece has a primarily agricultural economy, and agriculture is the main contributor to the nation's gross domestic product (GDP). Crops, such as corn, barley, wheat, olives, citrus fruits, wine grapes, potatoes, and cotton are grown. Fishing and tourism are also thriving industries in Greece. Apart from hosting world-famous events like the Olympics, Greek festivals and holidays contribute significantly to the tourism industry. Greece manufactures tobacco, textiles, chemicals, processed food items, metal and construction materials, and petroleum-based products. The country is also rich in raw mineral resources, including iron ore, bauxite, zinc, and lignite. As a member of the EU, Greece receives considerable economic aid from that organization.

Greece continues to be a destination country for women, men, and children trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor, with most victims brought in from eastern Europe and the Balkans (although some are moved on to other EU countries). The number of identified Roma (gypsy) and Albanian child victims has decreased, but various sources report a possible new trend of African women trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Greek culture can be traced back thousands of years, long before the Roman civilization came into being. However over the course of time, the Romans had a major impact on Greece. Influences from the Ottoman and Byzantine eras as well continue to affect everyday Greek life. Greece itself is world famous for the artistic and architectural influences it had on the rest of the world, and the remains of ancient and medieval Greek architecture draw tourists to the country.

Much of the evidence of Greek art and architecture was destroyed during the many wars fought there over the centuries. However some Greek art has been preserved in the form of coins and pottery, in sculpture, and in buildings, such as the Parthenon. Greek developments in the fields of philosophy, mathematics, science, and medicine are the basis for many modern achievements. In 310 B.C.E. the Greek mathematician Euclid wrote the *Elements of Geometry*: Astronomy, literature, and music are other fields of Greek achievement. The Greek scientist Aristarchus was the first to propose that the Earth circles the Sun in 300 B.C.E. Greek works have had a profound influence on Western and Eastern civilizations alike. The poems of Sappho and Homer are still read all over the world. And Greece does not rest on the laurels of its past glory. The works of recent Greek Nobel laureates, such as Giorgos Seferis (1900–71) and Odysseas Elytis (1911–96), are translated and widely read.

The majority of Greeks today are followers of

the Greek Orthodox Church. But the ancient Greeks had a unique polytheistic religion, which is known to us today through Greek mythology. The Greeks worshipped a large pantheon of deities. Gods from the Roman culture were also absorbed into Greek culture. Though the ancient Greek paganism is no longer practiced, a small number of Greeks have attempted to revive the religion of ancient Greece.

❁ CUISINE

Greek cuisine is typically Mediterranean with an identifiable Turkish influence. The food mainly consists of salads, citrus fruits, meat, and seafood. The use of olive oil, as in most Mediterranean countries, is generous. Appetizers made of yogurt, pickled octopus, and squid are very popular. Favorite dishes include moussaka (eggplant baked with lamb and sauce), grilled seafood, and stuffed tomatoes. The Greeks also enjoy sweet desserts, such as baklava and *loukoumade*, both pastries filled with nuts and covered with honey.

Greece makes many good wines, including the unique retsina, made from sap extracted from pine needles. The local brandy is known to be very fiery, while Greek beer is light. Known as Greece's national drink, the fiery alcoholic drink ouzo is made from a combination of pressed grapes and herbs.



A Communist Party demonstrator holding a Lenin poster takes part in a Labor Day rally and march through Athens. Thousands take part in rallies around Greece to mark the holiday. (AP Photo/Aris Messinis)

Some Ancient Greek Gods

Zeus	King of the gods and ruler of the world
Aphrodite	Goddess of romantic love and beauty
Apollo	God of male beauty and patron of the arts
Artemis	Goddess of chastity and the hunt
Athena	Goddess of art and crafts, wisdom and victory
Ares	God of war
Poseidon	God of the sea, storms, and earthquakes
Hermes	God of communication, commerce, and medicine
Demeter	Goddess of fertility
Hera	Goddess of love and marriage
Dionysus	God of wine and celebrations

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western (Gregorian) calendar January 1 is celebrated as New Year's Day throughout the world. For the Greeks January 1 is also known as St. Basil's Day. This saint is an important figure in the Greek Orthodox Church. He was known for being generous and helpful to the needy. It is on St. Basil's Day that gifts are traditionally given rather than Christmas.

On this day, Greeks bake a special cake (called a *vasilopitta*) with a gold or silver coin inside. The oldest member of the family cuts the cake and distributes it to the other members. It is believed that the person who finds the coin will be the luckiest in the year ahead. On this day people also visit friends to exchange gifts and enjoy elaborate feasts. Because January 1 is a national holiday, schools and offices are closed in Greece.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 25

On March 25, 1821, Germanos, the bishop of Patra, began an uprising against the Ottoman Empire. This sparked the War for Independence that

Fun Fact

Greeks revere bread and consider it a gift from God. This belief is based on the story of how Jesus fed 5,000 people with just five loaves of bread and two fish. As a mark of respect the Greeks do not waste bread, and housewives make the sign of the cross before slicing it.

ended after nine years, when a small part of modern Greece was liberated. The Greeks celebrate this day with parades in every town and city in the country. The armed forces also conduct parades in Athens. Independence Day coincides with the Christian Feast of the Annunciation. All schools, government offices, and commercial establishments remain closed.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. The holiday is also called Workers' Day and May Day.

In addition to celebrating the contributions of workers, in Greece May 1 is a day for celebration of fertility and spring, an observance that goes back to the pre-Christian pagan spring festivals. Greek families take time out for picnics, and children collect wildflowers, the first blooms of spring. These flowers are then used to make wreaths to decorate homes. The wreaths remain on front doors until August 29, the Feast of St. John, when they are burned in bonfires.

Greek schools and workplaces remain closed on this day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

OXI DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 28

Oxi Day (meaning “no” day, and pronounced “ochee”) commemorates Greek resistance to Italian efforts at domination, backed by Hitler, during World War II. It is the anniversary of General Ioannis Metaxas’s (1871–1941) refusal to give Mussolini permission to invade Greece. It is said that the war would have been prolonged had it not been for this resistance. The Greeks celebrate this day with great pride, hanging the national flag out their windows. Military parades, naval parades, special church services, and other celebrations are held. Government offices, schools, and most businesses remain closed on this holiday.

Religious Holidays

EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: January 6

The Christian Feast of Epiphany, known as Theofania in Greece, celebrates the Three Wise Men from the East who came to Jerusalem looking for the newborn Jesus. Greeks attend church services and prepare an elaborate feast for the occasion. Priests visit the households in their parish holding a cross and the branch of a basil plant, which they use to bless the home. On the same day, priests lead processions of followers to the seaside. A ceremonial baptism is performed there, and the priests throw crosses into the water. Youngsters, ignoring the cold, dive into the sea to retrieve them. Greeks believe that those who return the crosses will be lucky for the rest of the year.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EPIPHANY

SHROVE MONDAY

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: Last Monday before Lent

Shrove Monday, or Green Monday, is the Monday before Ash Wednesday, the first day of the Lenten season. It precedes the 40-day period of fasting and abstinence from milk, meat, and dairy products. The Greek Orthodox community adheres strictly to this fast.

Before the fast begins, however, they prepare for the Lenten season with a feast. Special dishes served for the occasion are typically made with octopus, squid, olives, lettuce, and radishes. Greek families often enjoy their pre-Lenten feast by having picnics in the countryside. In some areas, they also hold kite-flying contests.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; LENT

THE ANNUNCIATION

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: March 25

This Christian feast day commemorates the appearance of the Archangel Gabriel to Mary, the mother of Jesus, announcing the news that she would bear a child whom she should name Jesus. Gabriel informed Mary that the child was divine and would be a king.

This is an important holiday for members of the Greek Orthodox Church. Special prayer services are held in all churches. Believers celebrate this day with dances and feasts. The Feast of the Annunciation also coincides with the Greek Independence Day holiday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

✿ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Last Sunday before Easter

The Christian holiday of Palm Sunday begins Holy Week and falls on the Sunday before Easter. It commemorates Jesus' return to Jerusalem a few days prior to his execution. In those days it was customary to cover the paths of people who were considered highly honorable as a mark of respect. It is believed that on his arrival in Jerusalem, Jesus was greeted with palm fronds laid in his path as he entered Jerusalem. Thus the day came to be known as Palm Sunday.

In Greece Palm Sunday is celebrated with a solemn procession in which church priests lead devout Orthodox Christians with palms in their hands. The procession is followed by a special Palm Sunday service.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

✿ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

The Christian holiday of Maundy Thursday, also known as Holy Thursday, commemorates the day when Jesus washed the feet of all his disciples before sharing a meal now called the Last Supper. It falls on the Thursday before Easter. It is called Maundy Thursday because *maundatum* (a Latin word that means "commandment") is the first word that Jesus spoke before he began washing the feet of his disciples. It was reported that Jesus said, "*Mandatum novum do vobis,*" which translates as "A new commandment I give to you."

In Greece all Orthodox churches conduct special solemn prayer services. The priest, while celebrating the Divine Liturgy, recalls scenes from the Last Supper and washes the feet of 12 chosen parishioners just as Jesus did. The mood is somber, and the faithful pray on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; MAUNDY THURSDAY; LENT

✿ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

The Christian holiday of Good Friday commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. Observed as a solemn, sad occasion, it falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent (an austere season of fasting and penitence). In Greece Orthodox Christians observe a fast on Good Friday and perform a ritual called "Stations of the Cross," visiting scenes that represent Jesus' final journey as he carried the Cross to Golgotha.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a Christian feast celebrating Jesus' Resurrection from the dead three days after his Crucifixion. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent. The name of Easter is actually the name of the fertility goddess Eostre worshipped by the Germanic tribes, and the symbols and activities associated with the Christian holiday were originally pagan in spirit.

On Easter in Greece, families attend special church services to celebrate Jesus' Resurrection. Children receive decorated chocolate Easter eggs from their parents and grandparents. Feasts and the exchange of greetings and Easter eggs continue on the next day, which is referred to as Easter Monday and is the first Monday after Lent.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fifty Days after Easter

Both the Sunday and Monday of this Christian holiday celebrate the Holy Spirit's descending upon Jesus' disciples. Alternate names Whitsunday and Whitmonday refer to the white garments worn by those who were baptized during the disciples' vigil. Whitsunday and Monday have been celebrated since the third century. Many of the traditions and celebrations now associated with Pentecost were taken from pagan celebrations of the arrival of spring.

On this day, also called Day of the Holy Spirit in Greece, Orthodox Greeks attend special prayer services in churches.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; PENTECOST; SPRING FESTIVALS

✿ TRANSFIGURATION OF CHRIST

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: August 6

The Christian Feast of the Transfiguration of Christ celebrates the moment when Jesus revealed his divinity to the world. It originated with a biblical account in which Jesus revealed his true identity as the son of God and was transfigured in front of his disciples. In Greece, this day is celebrated mainly on the islands of Ikaria and Leros, where the people enjoy messy food fights using eggs, flour, and squid ink.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: August 15

The Christian Feast of the Assumption commemorates the elevation of Mary, Jesus' mother, into heaven. The Assumption is an important feast for the Greek Orthodox because it reaffirms their belief in Jesus as the Christ, who said that all devout Christians would find a place in the glory of heaven. On this day the faithful attend special church services.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

FINDING OF THE TRUE CROSS

Observed by: Orthodox Christians
Observed on: September 14

According to legend St. Helena traveled to Palestine in search of the Cross on which Jesus was crucified. It is said that she found three crosses. To identify the original she touched an ailing woman with each of them. The true Cross is said to have healed the woman on this day in 326.

The Finding of the True Cross, also called Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, is one of the last summer festivals in Greece. It is celebrated most enthusiastically in the town of Halki, where believers attend church services and sing hymns.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 24–25

The Christian holiday of Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus. In Greece Christmas celebrations begin on December 24 (Christmas Eve) and last until December 26. On December 24 children go from house to house singing Christmas carols and receive sweets and coins as gifts. Families attend church and offer prayers in a special midnight service. At home families sit down to a special feast, a highlight of which is a traditional Greek sweet bread, known as *christopsomo* (Christ bread), which is baked specially for the occasion.

On Christmas Day the festivities continue with church services. Churches are decorated for the holiday with a manger scene containing figures of Joseph, Mary, and the baby Jesus, along with shepherds and the Three Wise Men. Friends and relatives visit each other and exchange gifts on this day. Afterward they gather at lunch or dinner to celebrate with a special meal that traditionally features spit-roasted lamb or pork. Traditionally children receive gifts on St. Basil's Day (January 1) rather than on Christmas.

Although they are becoming more common Christmas trees are not a part of the traditional Greek Christmas. Instead the most recognizable

symbol of the season in Greek homes is a wooden bowl with a piece of wire suspended across the rim from which hangs a sprig of basil wrapped around a wooden cross. A small amount of water is kept in the bowl to keep the basil from wilting. Each day for the 12 days of Christmas, the cross and basil are dipped into some holy water, which is then sprinkled in each room of the house to keep the Killantzaroi (evil spirits) away from the house.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

CARNIVAL

Observed in: Patra, Athens, and other areas
Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Three week before Ash Wednesday

Carnival starts three weeks before the onset of the Lenten season, which is a period of fasting and abstinence. Many parts of Greece celebrate this event and enjoy a last chance for frivolity and merriment before Lent. The revelers parade through the streets wearing colorful costumes.

The drinking and dancing that are an integral part of these festivities have roots that can be traced back to pre-Christian times in Greece. This festival is said to have been associated with Dionysus, also Bacchus, the Greek god of wine.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; LENT

FEAST OF AGIOS GEORGIOS

Observed in: Arahova and Crete
Observed by: Orthodox Christians
Observed on: April 23

This day is the Feast of St. George, the patron saint of shepherds. St. George, a knight, is often depicted in paintings killing a fearsome dragon. Three-day feasts are held in Arahova to honor this saint. The Greeks also have sheep-shearing contests on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

Rites of Passage

MARRIAGE

Greek weddings are usually week-long affairs, in which the prenuptial ceremonies take place throughout the week. On the wedding day a procession of the priest, the groom, and his family approach the bride's house bearing a flag. The bride's mother offers the groom wine, which he accepts. Then the bride's male relatives escort the bride to the church.

In Greek weddings the best man, called the *koumbaros*, plays an important role. He places gold crowns or wreaths of orange blossoms on the heads of the couple. The crowns symbolize the beginning of a new family together and are exchanged by the bride and groom three times. The best man then invites the couple to the altar. The wedding service is performed in Old Greek, the language of the Greek Orthodox Church. The priest blesses the couple and asks the couple to exchange wedding bands. These rings are exchanged three times between the bride and the groom.

An all-night party follows the wedding ceremony. Guests form two circles around the bride and perform the famous Greek circle dance. During this dance dishes are smashed, and money is thrown at the musicians for good luck. The guests are given candy-coated almonds called *bom bom yara* as party favors.

Further Reading

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Fun Fact

The bride normally wears a yellow or red veil for her wedding. This color signifies fire and is supposed to protect the bride from evil spirits.

Greenland

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	An island in North America between the Arctic Ocean and the North Atlantic Ocean, northeast of Canada
Size	836,331 sq. mi.
Capital City	Nuuk (Godthab)
Flag Description	Greenland's flag has two equal horizontal bands of white (top) and red with a large disk slightly to the hoist side of center; the top half of the disk is red, the bottom half is white.
Independence	N. A. Part of the Kingdom of Denmark
Population	56,375 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary democracy within a constitutional monarchy
Nationality	Greenlander
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Inuit and Greenland-born whites (88%)
Major Language(s)	Greenlandic (East Inuit); Danish; English
Major Religion(s)	Evangelical Lutheran
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; National Day, June 21

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The Inuit were the first people to come to Greenland from what is now northern Canada. By 900 C.E. the Thule (wandering whale hunters from Alaska) had arrived in Greenland. During the 10th century, Icelandic Vikings, the first Europeans to arrive in Greenland, settled on the southwest coast. Eric the Red, a Viking who was exiled from Iceland after committing a murder, established a colony in Greenland in 985.

This colony soon grew to include 3,000 to 5,000 people. It relied on trade with Europe, exchanging ivory from walrus tusks as well as rope, sheep, and seal and cattle hides for iron and timber. In 1126 a diocese was founded at Garl; it was subject to the Norwegian archdiocese in Trondheim. The population accepted the authority of the Norwegian king as well although it continued to have its own laws. In 1380 Greenland entered into a union with Denmark.

In 1536 Denmark and Norway were officially merged,

and Greenland came to be seen as a Danish dependency rather than a Norwegian one. This was acknowledged by the inclusion of a polar bear in the Danish Coat of Arms in the 1660s. Although the whaling trade of the 17th century brought English, Dutch, and German ships to Greenland, where whales were sometimes processed ashore, no permanent settlement was made. Gradually Greenland was opened to Danish trading companies and closed to those from other countries. This new colony was centered at Godthab ("Good Hope") on the southwest coast.

When Norway separated from Denmark in 1814 Greenland remained under Danish rule. The 19th century saw increased interest in the region on the part of polar explorers and scientists. At the turn of the 19th century northern Greenland was sparsely populated. During that period Inuit families emigrated from Canada to settle there. The last group from Canada arrived in 1864. In 1953 Greenland officially became a part of Denmark. An autonomous government was formed in 1979 with Denmark, currently ruled by Queen Margrethe II (b. 1940), retaining control of defense and foreign affairs.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The country dominates the North Atlantic Ocean between North America and Europe. Greenland has the world's second largest ice cap and its gradual slope covers all but a narrow, mountainous, barren, rocky coast. Most of Greenland's terrain is flat. The sparse population is confined to small settlements along the coast, and nearly one-quarter of the population lives in the capital, Nuuk. The climate varies from arctic to subarctic with cool summers and extremely cold winters.

❁ ECONOMY

The economy remains critically dependent on exports of fish and substantial support from the Danish government. The public sector, including publicly owned enterprises and government offices, plays a dominant role in the economy. Several hydrocarbon and mineral exploration activities have produced coal, cryolite lead, molybdenum, uranium, and zinc, some of which is exported. Tourism has potential, but it is limited due to a short season and high costs.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Although modern life has caught up with the Inuit in the form of warm climate foods, computers, luxury cars, and outboard motors, as little as 40 years ago Greenlanders were still practicing a traditional way of life that revolved around the hunt. Harmony with the land and respect for the dead were the hallmarks of a good hunter.

Tupilak, originally carved out of bone, skin, and chunks of peat, are small grotesque figurines characteristic of Greenland. They were originally intended as talismans to ward off misfortune and death. These days *tupilak* are sold as souvenirs and are carved from caribou antler, soapstone, driftwood, narwhal tusk, and walrus ivory and bone.

The language of the Inuit belongs to the Eskimo-Aleut family of languages that construct sentences consisting of long strings of polysyllabic words. Inuit has 17 phonemes (units of the phonetic system of a language) and 3 vowels. Conversation is complicated by the habit of spontaneously abbreviating the very large words to a more manageable length.

Christianity is the religion followed by present-day Greenlanders. On Christmas and New Year's, carolers go from house to house singing carols and hymns, and are usually invited in for refreshments after their performances. In North Greenland the end of the polar night and the commencement of the sunny phase is a big occasion for celebration.

❁ CUISINE

Traditional Greenlandic food featured meat from freshly killed animals: walrus, seal, and whale.

The Thule

Originally from Alaska the Thule people developed hunting technology well suited to hunting large marine mammals. Using open boats in the Alaskan coastal waters, they perfected the use of a float harpoon and could kill enough whales in the summer to provide food throughout the winter. These people followed the whales eastward as they migrated through the open waters of the Canadian Arctic. Over the course of only a few generations, the Thule had migrated to the coast of Greenland.

According to convention the meat is distributed according to social status, with the tastiest parts (the eyes, kidney, and heart) reserved for the lead hunter. Every part of the animal is consumed. One traditional delicacy, described by Jean Malaurie (b. 1922) in *The Last Kings of Thule* (1982), consisted of narwhal fat and water, mixed with walrus brain and digested grass from the first stomach of a reindeer. Despite the trend toward global cuisine, it would be a challenge for visitors to adjust to traditional Greenland fare. These days supermarkets have replaced the game hunt and even tropical fruits are available, but prepackaged whale steaks and seal meats are still stocked generously.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

New Year's Eve celebrations in Greenland are a welcome break in the long dark winter. There are non-stop dancing, musical concerts, and dazzling fireworks throughout the night. People tend to welcome the new year in the company of family and friends. Traditionally rural people enjoy playing pranks on this night. Another ancient belief is that piles of broken dishes at the doors of houses bring good luck, so people save their old dishes all during the year to throw them at the front doors of close friends.

On New Year's Day speeches by the queen and diplomats of Denmark are broadcast on television and radio. Celebrations include parties and the ringing of cathedral bells and fireworks.

Fun Fact

The term *Inuit*, which means "the people," is the preferred name for the indigenous peoples of Canada and the Arctic region. They are also referred to as Eskimos, which is the preferred term in Alaska.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

Labor Day, also called May Day or Workers' Day is celebrated all over the world to recognize the contributions of workers and laborers to the socioeconomic development of nations. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

In Greenland government offices, business establishments, and schools remain closed. People from all over the country assemble in cities to recognize this day with union meetings, seminars, and rallies.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 21

National Day is also known as the official Flag Day of Greenland, and Ullortuneq, the Longest Day. The flag features white and red horizontal bands with a disk, the red semicircle of which symbolizes the midnight sun and the white semicircle symbolizes ice. Flags are flown from every public building across the country. The longest day of the year is celebrated with seminars, cultural activities, musical shows, and community dinners.

Religious Holidays

EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: January 6

This Christian festival, also called Three Kings' Day, commemorates the arrival of the Three Wise Men (or the Magi) in Bethlehem to behold the infant Jesus. Children and men dressed as the kings throng the streets, honoring the biblical story, and churches lead colorful religious processions. It is customary for Greenlandic children to leave hay by their bedsides the night before Epiphany as a treat for the camels of the Three Kings, and in return they expect to find presents the following morning.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EPIPHANY

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Thursday before Easter

This day, also called Holy Thursday, commemorates the Last Supper of Jesus, a few hours before his trial and Crucifixion. As a gesture of humility and love Jesus washed the feet of his 12 apostles, thus setting an example of his preaching: universal love and brotherhood. In Greenland on this day churches change the color of the draperies on the walls and windows from dark shades to brighter ones. Special prayers and Gospel services are held in churches across the country.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

This Christian holiday, also called Holy Friday, Black Friday, and Sorrowful Friday, commemorates the agony and death of Jesus on the Cross. It is a solemn occasion rather than a joyous one. But it is also a symbol of hope and eternal life, because the Crucifixion precedes the Resurrection, which is celebrated a few days later on Easter. Churches in Greenland hold special prayer services on Good Friday with readings from the Gospel concerning the life and Jesus' Crucifixion.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY

EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

For Christians Easter is considered the most important Christian festival, and its numerous celebrations and observances form the core of the liturgical year, which begins around the time of the vernal equinox in the Northern Hemisphere (the autumnal equinox in the Southern Hemisphere) and stretches out into summer in the Northern Hemisphere (winter in the Southern Hemisphere). It celebrates the emergence of Jesus from his tomb after his Crucifixion. This event symbolizes hope and eternal life. Easter church services in Greenland begin before daybreak. The celebrations continue on Easter Monday and include egg-rolling competitions and dousing other people with holy water. Holy water is also sprinkled in homes and over foods to sanctify them.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT

✿ PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fifty days after Easter

The Feast of Pentecost takes place over a two-day period, also called Whitsunday and Whitmonday. It marks the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles and about 120 early Christians, 50 days after Jesus is said to have risen from the dead. The Christian holiday is believed to be related to the Jewish festival of Pesach (Passover). Observant Christians typically attend special Pentecost church services on one or both days.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; PESACH; PENTECOST

✿ GREAT PRAYER DAY

Observed by: Evangelical Lutherans

Observed on: Fourth Friday after Easter

Great Prayer Day, or Storbededag, is a traditional Danish festival observed on the fourth Friday after Easter Sunday. It is customary to eat small square wheat bread tea sandwiches, dress in new clothes, and stroll along the streets on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

✿ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christian missionaries brought Christianity to Greenland at the beginning of the 18th century. Christianity spread across the country rapidly, and a large segment of the population embraced the celebration of Christmas. Homes and Christmas trees are decorated with *kamiks* (boots sewn from seal-skin), traditional Danish Christmas hearts, tinsel, and Greenlandic crafts.

On Christmas Eve it is traditional for children in church choirs to perform selections from the Gospels. The next day Christian Greenlanders gather with family and friends in private get-togethers, where they dance around their Christmas trees, exchange gifts, and enjoy lavish meals.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

✿ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26

Boxing Day, historically celebrated as a day when churches distributed the contents of the poor box to the poor and service people went from door to door for Christmas “bonuses,” is also celebrated as St. Stephen’s Day. St. Stephen was the first Christian martyr. He was made a deacon of the early Christian Church by the apostles when dissatisfaction arose over the distribution of alms, but he was ultimately stoned to death for his allegiance to Christianity.

The charitable aspects of this holiday date back to the Middle Ages when wealthy landowners presented gifts of food to the peasants on the day after Christmas. In Greenland today people customarily offer tips to deliverymen and other tradespeople who perform services for them throughout the year. As a public holiday it also extends the Christmas holiday an extra day.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

✿ NUUK SNOW FESTIVAL

Observed in: Nuuk

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 19–22

The brainchild of architect and ice sculptor Peter Barfoed, the first Nuuk Snow Festival in Greenland was held in 1994. The highlight of the festival is a competition for the best statues and figures sculpted out of large blocks of compressed snow. Teams from Greenland and other countries compete for the best figurative and nonfigurative sculptures. Every year during the month of March, when the dark Greenland winter seems interminable, the residents of the capital city of Nuuk turn out for this event.

✿ GREENLANDIC VIKING/INUIT FESTIVAL

Observed in: Narsarsuaq

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July

Descendants of Vikings from Europe and Iceland and native peoples from Greenland come together during the Greenlandic Viking/Inuit Festival held in July to reenact the everyday life of 1,000 years ago. There are demonstrations of Viking and Inuit cooking, domestic crafts, archery, combat, music, and dancing. The name *Viking* is derived from the native Scandinavian term for the Norse sea-faring warriors who raided the coasts of Scandinavia, Europe, and the British Isles from the late 8th to the 11th century. The term *Inuit*, which means “the people,” is the preferred name for the indigenous peoples of Canada and the Arctic region, previously referred to as Eskimos.

Rites of Passage

✿ BIRTH

In Greenland the birth of a child is often looked upon as the revival of a dead soul. Following Norse tradition the father is expected to be present at the

Symbel

A traditional Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian drinking ritual practiced by the Norse tribe, *symbel* is associated with accessing divinity by drinking alcohol to excess. After a birth friends and family sit together and drink alcohol in cups made of horns, raising toasts in honor of the newborn.



time of birth to provide moral support to the mother, who is experiencing labor pains. There is an old, long preserved tradition wherein the midwife lays the newborn on the floor or ground after birth and the father picks it up, affirming its legitimacy. In many Norse regions this has been incorporated into the naming rite held on the ninth day. Following the feast the parents host a short *symbel* in the baby's honor.

DEATH

The Inuit and other Greenlandic tribes believe that the soul stays in the body for three days after death. Silence is observed after a death has taken place, so that the ghost is not tempted to return to the house. Self-mutilation and silent weeping are traditional forms of mourning and lamentation.

Further Reading

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~ Grenada ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	An island between the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean, north of Trinidad and Tobago
Size	133 sq. mi.
Capital City	St. George's
Flag Description	The Grenadian flag is a rectangle divided diagonally into yellow triangles (top and bottom) and green triangles (hoist side and outer side), with a red border around the flag; there are seven yellow five-pointed stars with three centered in the top red border, three centered in the bottom red border, and one on a red disk superimposed at the center of the flag; there is also a symbolic nutmeg pod on the hoist-side triangle. (Grenada is the world's second largest producer of nutmeg, after Indonesia.) The seven stars represent the seven administrative divisions of the country.
Independence	February 7, 1974 (from United Kingdom)
Population	89,502 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional monarchy with Westminster type of parliament
Nationality	Grenadian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Black (82%)
Major Language(s)	English (official); French patois
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholics (53%); Protestants (47%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Independence Day, February 7; Labor Day, May 1; CARICOM Day, July 5; Emancipation Day, August 1; Thanksgiving Day, October 25

Introduction

🌸 HISTORY

Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) was the first European to land on the Island of Concepción, later known as Grenada, in 1498. The oldest inhabitants of Grenada are the Carib Indians, who successfully resisted early European colonization attempts. Finally an expedition from Martinique (a colony of France) invaded Grenada in 1650–51 and established imperial French rule.

For almost 90 years France managed to keep the British away from the territories of Grenada. Fort George and Fort Frederick, near the St. George's harbor, date from the period of those battles between the French and the British. In 1783

France entered into the Treaty of Versailles, whereupon the Island of Grenada was legally and permanently acquired by the British. Soon the British set up sugar plantations in the country and started importing slaves to work on the plantations. In 1795 a black planter named Julian Fedon was inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution to challenge British authority in Grenada. Violent rebellions ensued, with the local Grenadians and the planters working together to shake off the supremacy of the British. Though these rebellions were ultimately unsuccessful, they acted as a springboard for the abolition of slavery, which finally came about in 1834 in Grenada and throughout the British West Indies.

Between 1885 and 1958 Grenada was part of the British Windward Islands. In 1967 it became a self-governing state and in 1974 gained its independence and adopted a modified

parliamentary system based on the British model. A governor general was appointed by, and represented, the British monarch (head of state). A prime minister, who is both leader of the majority party and the head of government, is elected. Sir Eric Gairy (1922–97) was Grenada's first prime minister. While Gairy headed the nation through the latter half of the 1970s, he was opposed by many in Grenada who accused him of being corrupt.

In 1979 Gairy was ousted in a bloodless coup, and the Marxist-Leninist People's Revolutionary Government (PRG) (sometimes called the "New Jewel Movement") came to power, headed by Prime Minister Maurice Bishop (? 1944–83). Soon thereafter, Grenada aligned itself with Cuba and other Soviet-bloc countries. This situation alarmed the United States as well as many Caribbean nations. In 1983 the PRG split, and the faction opposed to Bishop had him arrested. A showdown ensued in the capital city of St. George's, and many of Bishop's supporters were killed. Bishop himself was executed by a firing squad.

U.S. President Reagan dispatched a joint U.S.–Caribbean force to Grenada. They took control of the island, bringing an end to Grenada's revolutionary government. The incident is known on the island as "the intervention." After the U.S. troops withdrew, elections in 1984 installed the first post-revolutionary government. Aid and technical assistance programs sponsored by the United States have strengthened the country's economy. The country has attempted to increase tourism in recent years, a task made easier by the completion of the international airport in 1984.



The Quadrille

As immigrants and travelers arrived in the Western Hemisphere, they brought with them goods as well as the popular European dances of the day. The French quadrille, which began in the French court ballet, became hugely popular in France, then jumped the channel, catching on in the British Isles, before finding its way across the Atlantic in the mid-19th century. As the name *quadrille* implies, it is a drill done in a quadrangle formation. This has not changed, and it is remarkable how many of the original movements have also remained unchanged.

Quadrilles were originally divided into five sections with four brief breaks to catch one's breath and flirt a bit. That was then reduced to three sections. The least experienced couples would take the "side" positions and have an opportunity to watch the first as the prompter called a series of "changes" for the head couples. The "sides" then did exactly the same thing.

The New National Party, headed by Dr. Keith Mitchell (b. 1946) came forward to assume power in 1995 and moved to a better position in the 1999 elections.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Grenada is a three-island state, made up of Grenada, the largest island, Carriacou, and Petit Martinique.

Grenada is 12 miles wide and 21 miles long and boasts Mt. Saint Catherine, with a height of 2,713 feet. The island of Carriacou is much less mountainous than Grenada and possesses many wonderful sandy beaches. Average temperatures range from 75°F to 86°F, tempered by the steady and cooling trade winds. The lowest temperatures occur between November and February. Because of Grenada's remarkable topography, the island also experiences climate changes related to altitude. The driest season is between January and May. During the rainy season from June to December, it rarely rains every day, and even when it does, the rains do not last for more than an hour at a time.

ECONOMY

Agriculture is the primary driver of Grenada's economy. Unfortunately, much of the economy was brought to a near-standstill by Hurricane Ivan in September 2004. Thirty-seven people were killed, and approximately 9,000 people were left homeless. Ninety percent of the buildings on the island were damaged or destroyed, including some tourist facilities, which are also important sources of foreign exchange. Reconstruction is under way but will require time and substantial resources; the United States has committed itself to ongoing participation in the reconstruction effort.

Grenada is a member of the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM). Most goods can be imported into Grenada under open general license. Goods that are produced in the Eastern Caribbean receive additional protection.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

While many countries boast about their "cultural fusion," Grenada is a living symbol of it. Groups from the West Indies and other Latin and Caribbean countries coexist with British, Creole, and French influences. The African Creole influences are widespread among the Grenadian communities and are especially evident during Carnival, which highlights these diverse dance forms, music, and rituals. Traditional European dances like the quadrille are also performed during festivals and holidays. Carriacou has an especially popular folk festival featuring the African Big Drum Dance.

❁ CUISINE

Some of the great dishes from these islands feature Creole cuisine and seafood. Most Grenadian cuisine is enhanced by the wide variety of spices grown on the island, including nutmeg, cinnamon, vanilla, and ginger. For example, nutmeg, which is the island's principal spice, is infused into everything from candy to ice cream. Grenada's more exotic dishes include oildown (the national dish), which is a stew made with salted meat, breadfruit, onion, carrot, celery, dasheen (a root vegetable grown locally), and dumplings, all slowly steamed in coconut milk until the liquid is absorbed. Seafood of all kinds is very popular; Grenadian caviar (roe of white sea urchin), conch, and a fish dish called "stuffed jacks" are among the favorite attractions.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

Grenadians bid farewell to the old year and welcome the new one with renewed hopes and new resolutions. Special church services mark the day. New Year's celebrations are generally family affairs, but a number of people celebrate with lavish parties as well as grand balls.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 7

Independence Day celebrations are marked by a national rally and a military parade in the capital city of St. George's. Outstanding contributors in their respective fields are honored at public ceremonies. Grenadians wear their national colors of yellow, green, and red on this day and celebrate with music, fireworks, and beach parties.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Labor Day, also known as May Day and Workers' Day, celebrates the working class and emphasizes the principles of equality and social rights. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world, and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL),

demanding an eight-hour workday. Workers in Grenada take a day off and hold massive rallies and discussions at Queen's Park, St. George's. Trade union gatherings are held across the island.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ CARICOM DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 5

This day commemorates the founding of the Caribbean Community in 1973. CARICOM Day is of great significance for most of the islands located in the Caribbean, that belong to this organization. Grenada became a member of CARICOM on May 1, 1974. This is an occasion to celebrate the dynamic efforts of countries that share a common history, culture, origins, and language and come together for the common good of their peoples. In Grenada CARICOM Day is marked by official gatherings and public speeches delivered by important public figures from Grenada and other countries in the Caribbean Community.

❁ EMANCIPATION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 1

Commemorating the abolition of slavery in 1834, Emancipation Day (or Abolition of Slavery Day) in Grenada brings together people from all walks of life. International and local authorities debate historical, cultural, and political aspects of race relations and civil rights. Musical concerts feature a mix of gospel, calypso, jazz, and classical music, promoting the themes of peace and harmony. Caribbean and Creole culture dominate offerings at the book and craft exhibits. Many charitable efforts and volunteer projects are organized on this day as well.

❁ THANKSGIVING DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 25

This day commemorates the intervention of the American troops on the islands. Relations with the United States were strained when Maurice Bishop (1944–83) took power in a bloodless coup and suspended the 1974 Constitution. Following another coup in which Bishop, among others, was executed, the United States invaded Grenada on October 25, 1983. They were accompanied by troops from Jamaica, Barbados, and other countries. The following year the constitution was reinstated, and elections were held. On this day a military parade is held at the Queen's Park in St. George's (the capital city). This park is also the venue for various cultural events and religious services.

Religious Holidays

CARNIVAL

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: The week before Lent

Carnival is a time of unrestrained revelry before the onset of the austere Lenten season. Carnival is known for its profusion of color, creativity, and culture. The festival begins with the National Calypso Monarch Competition in which the calypso poets, old and young alike, recite their poems amid colorful celebrations. People participate in the masquerades dressed in Arabian-style headgear, quarter-length baggy trousers, batwing sleeves, large sleeves that resemble the wings of a bat, and jumbo collars that represent the carefree customs of the Creole people. All through the night people can be seen moving around, clad in flamboyant attire, waving fluorescent torches, and enjoying the music, food, drink, and dancing in the streets.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; LENT

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, also called Holy Friday, Great Friday, or Mourning Friday, recalls the suffering and death of Jesus on the Cross. Special prayers, readings from the Gospels and Psalms, and hymns to Jesus in public gatherings are features of Good Friday in Grenada.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated on the Sunday after Good Friday. It immortalizes the day Christians believe that Jesus rose from the dead following his death by Crucifixion. For Christians Jesus' Resurrection symbolizes the renewal of life and new hope for humanity. Easter in Grenada is marked by prayer services held early in the morning. During the Easter weekend the old and young alike take part in flying kites, which come in many shapes, sizes, and colors.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

EASTER MONDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Monday after Easter

Easter Monday in Grenada is celebrated with reli-

gious services and traditional activities such as soaking one another with holy water and egg-rolling competitions. In the religious context, the rolling of eggs is seen to symbolize the rolling away of the stone placed at the mouth of Jesus' tomb.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK

PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Fifty days after Easter

Pentecost is a religious observance that recalls the visitation of the Holy Spirit to about 120 early Christians, including the Apostles and followers, after the Resurrection of Jesus. This festival is often celebrated over two days. They are also referred to in many countries as Whitsunday and Whitmonday, the seventh Sunday and Monday after Easter.

Modern scholars believe that many of the traditions and celebrations now associated with Pentecost were borrowed from pagan celebrations of spring. Whitsunday is usually spent in leisure activities. Christians dress in formal clothes and take part in processions led by young girls clad all in white. The day concludes with a public feast. During this weekend most establishments and government offices remain closed on the islands.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; PENTECOST; SPRING FESTIVALS

CORPUS CHRISTI

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: Sixty days after Easter

Corpus Christi commemorates the institution of the Eucharist. The Feast of Corpus Christi was established for the entire Catholic Church in 1261 by order of Pope Urban IV (r. 1261–64). It also marks the beginning of the planting season. In Grenada a special procession moves through the streets of St. George's (the capital city) with participants singing and dancing along the route.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 25

In Grenada Christmas celebrations are marked with church services, carol singing, and the decoration of homes and Christmas trees. The trees remain decorated until after the first weekend of January. Special Grenadian Christmas foods and drinks include black fruitcake, port wine, white and red rums, rice, ham, green pigeon peas, baked stuffed turkey, macaroni pie, sorrel, and ginger beer.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 26

The day after Christmas is known as Boxing Day. The name *Boxing Day* refers to the old British custom of opening donation boxes placed in churches for the poor on this day. In Grenada the day continues to be one devoted to charity and donations. It is also the Feast of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr. As a public holiday, it is a day for spending time with family and friends.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ EASTER MONDAY KITE-FLYING COMPETITIONS

Observed in: Carriacou Island
Observed on: Monday after Easter

This event is known for its weeklong kite-flying competitions held on the various islands of Grenada. It is a time for kites of all shapes, colors, sizes, and materials. This festival and its participants are a major tourist attraction.

❁ CARRIACOU MAROON MUSIC FESTIVAL

Observed in: Heritage Village, Belair Park, Carriacou Island
Observed on: April 29

The Carriacou Maroon Music Festival is a three-day event that boasts the Big Drum Nation Dance. Music, dances, and bands exist alongside prayers for continued abundance. This festival is an expression of happiness and gratitude for good harvests in the past and the expectancy of good harvests in the future. It is also an attempt to preserve the Grenadian heritage.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

❁ FISHERMAN'S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

Observed in: Coastal villages
Observed on: June 29

St. Peter, the patron saint of fishermen, is revered by the fishing community of Grenada, so Fisherman's Birthday Celebrations is considered a holy day in many fishing villages and coastal areas in Grenada. There are morning services and prayers in churches, and in the evening fishermen seek blessings for the tools of their trade (their boats and nets). This is fol-

The Big Drum Dance

The Big Drum Dance is West African in origin. The bulk of people who inhabit Grenada and its sister islands originally came from Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Dahomey, Congo, and Guinea. On the islands the intermarriage among members of the various tribal backgrounds led to a great deal of cultural cross-pollination. Communal gatherings of the various tribal peoples were known as *Big Drum* ceremonies. The name *Big Drum* has nothing to do with the size of any musical instrument; it refers, instead, to the size of the gathering. When members of all the different tribes living on these islands come together to celebrate a social event, such as a wedding or the memory of an ancestor, this dance is performed.

lowed by community sports events such as boat races, various fishing displays, and late evening parties. This holiday is also called Feast Day of Sts. Peter and Paul.

Rites of Passage

❁ MARRIAGE

The traditional Grenadian wedding ceremony includes several ceremonies and feasts held throughout the wedding festivities. In order to get married the groom first needs permission from the bride's family. About two months before the wedding, flags are flown on the rooftops of the homes of both the bride and the groom, announcing the proposed wedding to the entire community.

Friends and close relatives attend the Parents' Plate, a feast hosted by the two families two or three weeks prior to the wedding. A separate *saraca* table is set for the ancestors of the families. A variety of foods, cakes, and fruits are laid out and candles are lit in the evening. The next morning the children from the village are invited to eat the food, which is known as "scramble" or "grap-pay." Flag dances are performed before the wedding day; the flags are removed the day of the wedding. A procession from the groom's home leads up to the bride's with the dancer from the bride's side accepting the hand of the dancer from the groom's side. After the church wedding there is a reception at the bride's parents' home, complete with the Big Drum Dance. Two weeks later the families host a thanksgiving celebration, called the "return thanks," to express gratitude to the guests and to seek their blessings.

Fun Fact

Saraca is a peculiarly Grenadian rite in which food is offered to the deceased as well as to the guests.

☼ DEATH

A person is buried one day after death. Initially a wooden marker is erected over the grave, usually because of lack of money. The family collects and saves money over the next few years and then erects a marble tombstone. Prayer nights or meetings are held on the third, ninth, and 40th nights after the death in remembrance of the deceased. The tombstone feast is the last of the death rites and is held on the second or third death anniversary.

Further Reading

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Guadeloupe

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Guadeloupe consists of nine islands located between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean, southeast of Puerto Rico
Size	687 sq. mi.
Capital City	Basse-Terre
Flag Description	The flag of France is used. It is called the <i>tricolor</i> and contains three horizontal stripes of blue, white, and red, in that order.
Independence	Guadeloupe is administered as a department of France.
Population	448,713 (2005 est.)
Government	Guadeloupe is administered as a department of France
Nationality	Guadeloupian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Black or Mulatto (90%)
Major Language(s)	French (99%)
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (95%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Victory Day, May 8; Abolition of Slavery Day, May 27; Bastille Day, July 14; Victor Schoelcher Day, July 21; Armistice Day, November 11

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) reached the islands of Guadeloupe on November 4, 1493. Though they were originally called Karukéra (Island of Beautiful Waters) by the native Carib Indians, he renamed them after the famous sanctuary of Santa María de Guadalupe de Estremadura in Spain.

Since this region lacked gold and silver, Europeans did not take much interest in it until the 17th century. For a brief period, the Spanish tried to establish themselves in Guadeloupe, but they were discouraged by the armed resistance of the Carib Amerindians. Three decades later, French colonists, sponsored by an association of French entrepreneurs, established the first European settlement on the islands. The party landed on the southeastern shore of Basse-Terre in 1635 and claimed Guadeloupe for France. The French forced the Caribs from Guadeloupe, imported slaves, planted crops, and, within a decade, had built the first sugar mill. By the time

France officially annexed the islands in 1674, a slave-based plantation system was already functioning in the area.

Between 1759 and 1763, the British launched several invasions. They succeeded in developing Pointe-à-Pitre into a major harbor and opened profitable English and North American markets for Guadeloupe in sugar, in exchange for which the local planters were allowed to import cheap American lumber and food. Since the economy expanded rapidly, many French colonists also grew wealthier under the British occupation.

The situation changed with the Treaty of Paris (1763) when France abandoned its territorial claims in Canada in return for British recognition of French control of Guadeloupe. However, in a bid to take advantage of the chaos ensuing from the French Revolution, Britain invaded Guadeloupe in 1794. The French recaptured the island under the command of Victor Hughes, however, a black nationalist, and they succeeded in freeing the slaves from their owners, who controlled the sugar plantations. Then followed a period of unrest and turmoil. As a consequence of Hughes's attacks on U.S.

Original Inhabitants

The first inhabitants of Guadeloupe (around 300 B.C.E.) were the Arawaks, a peaceful Amerindian tribe that relied on fishing for their livelihood. Around the ninth century C.E. the Arawaks were supplanted by the Caraïbes (Karibs or Caribs), who were the island's inhabitants when Christopher Columbus's fleet landed on the island on November 3, 1493.

ships, the United States declared war on France. Alarmed, Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821), the French emperor, sent a general to Guadeloupe to quell the uprising and restore slavery.

Throughout the 19th century, Guadeloupe was the most prosperous territory in the French West Indies. Although the British continued invading and occupying the islands for most of the period between 1810 and 1816, the Treaty of Vienna (1816) restored the islands to France, and it has maintained sovereignty over them ever since.

Following a campaign led by French politician Victor Schoelcher (1804–93), slavery was finally abolished on these islands in 1848. Schoelcher is honored with a holiday by Guadeloupians for his great vision and persistence. In the years that followed, planters brought laborers from Pondicherry, a French colony in India, to work in the cane fields in Guadeloupe.

Since 1871, Guadeloupe has had representation in the French parliament. It became an overseas department of France on March 19, 1946. This department also comprises the northern portion of the island of Saint Martin, which France shares with the Netherlands.

🌸 GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Guadeloupe is an archipelago of nine inhabited islands, including Basse-Terre, Grande-Terre, Marie-Galante, La Desirade, Îles des Saintes (two islands), Saint-Barthelemy, Île de la Petite Terre, and Saint-Martin (the French part of the island of Saint Martin). Its subtropical climate is tempered by trade winds, but the humidity is moderately high. Their topographies distinguish the islands from each other. The terrain of Basse-Terre is volcanic in origin with interior mountains, while Grande-Terre is a low limestone formation. Most of the seven other islands are volcanic in origin. A narrow channel, the Rivière Salée, divides the entire territory into two sections: the larger, western Basse-Terre and the smaller, eastern Grande-Terre.

Guadeloupe's weather is warm throughout the year with daily highs near 81°F. There is only a 5°F difference between summer and winter temperatures. From December to March, the early mornings and late evenings are somewhat cooler. Guadeloupe, like all other Caribbean islands, is sub-

ject to occasional hurricanes between July and October, and moderate rainfall is commonplace during this period.

🌸 ECONOMY

Guadeloupe's economy depends on agriculture, tourism, light industry, and services as well as France for large subsidies and imports. Tourism is a key industry, with most tourists arriving from the United States on the large number of cruise ships that visit the islands. The traditional sugarcane crop is slowly being replaced by other crops such as bananas (which now supply about 50 percent of export earnings), eggplant, and flowers. Other vegetables and root crops are cultivated for local consumption although Guadeloupe is still dependent on imported food, mainly from France. Light industry features sugar and rum production. Most manufactured goods and fuel are imported. Hurricanes periodically devastate the economy. Unemployment is high, especially among the youth.

🌸 CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The region of Guadeloupe is a melting pot of diverse cultural currents and cross-currents—French, African, East Indian, and West Indian. In spite of these diverse origins, however, the people are united by language (99 percent speak French) and religion (95 percent are Catholic). The blend is visible in the architecture, which ranges from French colonial to Hindu. In terms of intellectual attainments, its most renowned representative is Alexis Léger (whose pseudonym is Saint-John Perse). He was born in Guadeloupe in 1887 and won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1960 for the evocative imagery of his poems. One of his noted works is *Anabase* (1925), which was translated into English by T. S. Eliot.

Guadeloupe has a rich repertoire of music including *zouk* (a blend of African, reggae, calypso, and electronic rhythms), calypso, reggae, and the beguine, which derives its name from the French word *beguin*, which means “flirtation.” This highly popular dance of the islands of the French West Indies (including Saint Lucia, Martinique, and Guadeloupe) somewhat resembles the rumba. The people of Guadeloupe claim that the beguine originated in their country and not in Martinique as is generally believed.

🌸 CUISINE

Guadeloupe is considered one of the true culinary capitals of the Caribbean. Its cuisine has been influenced by the circumstances of its history, and the cuisine reflects its many cultures. Fresh seafood is consumed in large quantities. The specialties include shellfish, smoked fish, and stuffed land crabs. To the typically Creole dishes have been added the subtle nuances of French cuisine, the spice of African cook-

Red Snapper Seviche

Ingredients:

1 lb. snapper filet
 3/4 c. lime juice
 3/4 c. lemon juice
 1/2 medium Scotch bonnet chili, seeded and diced
 1/2 c. fresh cilantro, chopped
 1 c. avocado, chopped
 1 c. fresh tomatoes, chopped
 1/2 c. shallots, chopped
 1 Tbs. salt
 1 tsp. fresh ground black pepper

Preparation:

Cut the filets into even diced pieces about 1 inch long and 1/2 inch wide to ensure that they “cook” evenly—so the acid in the citrus juices penetrates the each piece evenly.

In a large stainless steel bowl, marinate the snapper in the lime and lemon juices. Cover and let sit for one hour. Add the scotch bonnet chili, cilantro, avocado, tomato, shallots, salt, and pepper. Mix well, cover, and refrigerate for one hour before serving.

ery, and the purity and simplicity of Hindu and Southeast Asian recipes. However, two main cuisine styles are evident: French cuisine (which consists of traditional continental dishes) and Creole cuisine (using African methods and Caribbean ingredients).

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The New Year's celebration is probably the oldest of all holidays in Guadeloupe. To its residents, this festival symbolizes rebirth and a fresh lease on life with renewed hope. In Guadeloupe, people commonly celebrate New Year's Day with music, dances, and parties. It is also a time when flowers bloom and for planting new crops. Many people resolve to get rid of their bad habits and cultivate good ones for the coming year.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Labor Day, also called May Day and Workers' Day, honors workers throughout the world and highlights the successes and challenges of the labor movement. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, set aside May 1 as a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

In Guadeloupe it is a day of rest for most people, while workers participate in parades and attend labor union meetings.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ VICTORY DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 8

Victory Day celebrates the victory of the Allied Powers in World War II (1939–1945). In Guadeloupe the people pay homage to the Guadeloupean soldiers who died in the war. After the Nazis occupied France Guadeloupe at first supported the French Vichy collaborators, but in 1942 it signed an accord with the United States and fought with the Allies (France, Great Britain, the United States, and Soviet Russia).

❁ ABOLITION OF SLAVERY DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 27

Slavery was abolished in Guadeloupe in 1848, following a campaign under the leadership of French politician Victor Schoelcher (1804–93). Every year, cultural events, picnics, and parties are organized to celebrate this event. The celebration often begins with church services, followed by a parade through the streets of the capital, and then by picnics in the park. Speakers deliver stirring speeches throughout the day. Abolition of Slavery Day is also called Emancipation Day.

❁ BASTILLE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 14

Bastille Day, which is the primary French national holiday, is celebrated annually on July 14. It is called La Fête Nationale in France, where it has great significance because it commemorates the end of the French monarchy and the beginning of the First Republic after the French Revolution. As a part of the celebrations in Guadeloupe French flags are





Wearing traditional French West Indies outfits, women take a break during a parade through Marigot, St. Martin, on July 14 as part of Bastille Day celebrations. The celebrations included a march through the capital in which armed forces and private citizens took part. Wreaths were laid at the monument of war victims and several citizens were honored for their contributions to the community. (AP Photo/Marvin Hokstam)

hoisted over government buildings and public houses. Schools and public offices remain closed, while the evenings are packed with cultural events, music, dances, races, and gastronomical exhibits across the country. These activities begin early in the evening and continue until the early morning hours.

❁ VICTOR SCHOELCHER DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 21

The inhabitants of Guadeloupe observe the birthday of the former French Minister of the Colonies Victor Schoelcher and pay tribute to his successful opposition to slavery. Born in Paris on July 21, 1804, Schoelcher was a businessman by profession. He traveled to the Americas in quest of clientele, but instead of clients he discovered the shocking working and living condition of the slaves. Thereafter he was actively involved in the movement for the abolition of slavery, which finally came about in 1848. In his honor several events and public meetings are held in the streets of Guadeloupe (many of which are named after him).

❁ ARMISTICE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 11

The people of Guadeloupe remember the historic agreement that marked the end of World War I on

this day. The armistice that ended World War 1 was signed at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month.

Like the residents of mainland France and other French outposts, in Guadeloupe veterans' organizations hold parades, and the president of Guadeloupe places a ceremonial wreath on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Religious Holidays

❁ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: January 6

Epiphany, also called Three King's Day or, in French, Fête des Rois, commemorates the visit paid by the Three Wise Men (three kings from the East named Balthazar, Gaspar, and Melchior), to the infant Jesus at Bethlehem. The event was believed to have occurred on January 6, though there is no mention of specific dates in the scriptures. As in France the traditional dishes served at dinner on this day in Guadeloupe include a cake known as *galette des rois* ("the cake of the kings"). A lucky charm (*une fève*), traditionally a bean, is baked into the cake. Whoever finds the charm in his or her slice of cake becomes the king or queen and gets to wear a paper crown. The king or queen then has to choose his queen or her king, by dropping the lucky charm into another's glass. Children dressed as the Magi go from door to door, singing for a slice of the *galette des rois*.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EPIPHANY

❁ CARNIVAL

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Last Tuesday before Lent

In Guadeloupe Carnival, also known as Mardi Gras (Fat Tuesday) in French-speaking countries, or Shrove Tuesday in English-speaking countries, unofficially begins on the first weekend in January after Epiphany. Groups that will participate in Carnival parades begin their rehearsals then, especially on the weekends. The Sunday before Carnival there are dancing, masquerades, and a good deal of excitement in the streets. On Shrove Tuesday, masqueraders parade, dressed in pajamas, and dance all day long. The theme of the parades changes every year.

What makes the festivities in Guadeloupe unique are the events of the following day, Ash Wednesday. The streets are filled with revelers dressed in black-and-white as he- and she-wolves. Carnival comes to a close on Ash Wednesday evening with the cremation of King Carnival, an effigy known as Vaval, accompanied by loud wails from the assembled crowd. Dining and dancing follow.

On Guadeloupe, Carnival is also revived for one day—on Mid-Lent Thursday—which is midway

between Carnival and Easter. On this day revelers dress up as devils in red and black costumes.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Because it celebrates the Christian belief in the Resurrection of Jesus after his Crucifixion, Easter is the central holiday in all Christian calendars. Prayer services begin before daybreak all over Guadeloupe. Parades and banquets are held to mark this special day across the country. Girls and women make it a point to wear festive Easter bonnets on the occasion.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER, LENT

✿ EASTER MONDAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Day after Easter

Easter Monday, or Holy Monday, comes immediately after Good Friday and Easter. The holiday is celebrated on Guadeloupe with egg-rolling competitions for children. In addition Guadeloupians drench each other with perfumed water (which originally symbolized the holy water blessed during the Easter sacrament) on Easter Monday. Parades and banquets are also organized across the country.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY

✿ PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fifty days after Easter

Pentecost, also known as Whitsunday and Whitmonday, is observed to mark the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the twelve apostles and about 120 other early Christians. In Guadeloupe people attend church on Sunday. On Monday they again dress in their best clothes to take part in parades, which are led by young girls dressed entirely in white. There is also a country fair that features special types of food and drink.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; PENTECOST

✿ THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: December 8

The Immaculate Conception of the blessed Virgin Mary, is a time to recognize Mary and her important role (as Jesus' mother) in the celebration of Christmas

and Jesus' birth. It also celebrates the Christian belief that Mary was chosen by God to be born free from sin so that she would be a suitable mother for his Son. This day is one of a handful of days the Catholic Church calls "holy days of obligation." As the label implies all the adherents of the church are obligated to attend Mass on this day. In Guadeloupe this celebration is marked by services at local churches, fireworks displays, and a grand parade, in addition to food and dance festivals.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS; IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

✿ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

In Guadeloupe Christians traditionally attend a midnight services on the evening of December 24 to mark the beginning of the Christmas season. Afterward they prepare traditional dishes, which usually consist of rice and beans, blood sausage, and pork.

Decorating Christmas trees, giving gifts to friends, relatives, and acquaintances, exchanging greeting cards, and eating and drinking a great deal are all part of the Christmas celebrations. It is a joyous occasion celebrated with family and friends.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Fun Fact

Blood sausages are eggplant-colored sausages made of pig's blood mixed with fat, a filler such as bread crumbs, and other flavorings that vary from region to region. They are usually sold pre-cooked, but most people heat them before serving.

Origin of Gwo Ka

During the era of slavery, blacks from various regions of the African continent were found in the Caribbean. However no matter what their languages were, they had something in common—their music. In Guadeloupe in particular, African slaves lived under very difficult conditions. Gwo Ka became popular during that dark period of the Guadeloupien history.

Gwo Ka is not just music but everything that revolves around it—dance, plays, jokes, a certain manner of being—in a word, a whole way of living. Although its roots are African, the basic elements of Gwo Ka underwent several changes when they were adopted by Guadeloupians. Due to the influence of the slave masters, Creole replaced the African languages that were originally used in the music, and barrels replaced "excavated wood" for the drums because the slaves were forbidden to fell trees.

Regional Holidays

✿ SAINT PATRON'S DAY

Observed in: Vieux
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 5

On this day the residents of Vieux build altars for their patron saints (especially St. Joseph, who is considered the patron of many trades), as an act of gratitude for answering their prayers and for providing good crops. Over time, this tradition has evolved into a very large public event. Special food items, linen, flowers, and statuettes adorn the altars of St. Joseph. The bread made for this day is often shaped like a scepter or a beard. The guests of honor include villagers dressed as the young Jesus or Mary and Joseph, as well as orphans, widows, and beggars.

✿ GWO KA FESTIVAL

Observed in: St. Anne
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Early June

Gwo Ka refers to the drums originally fashioned in slave quarters of the islands and the music that evolved from them. For an entire week concerts are held in the town square of St. Anne. Each night a distinctly different style of music is performed. The music ranges from reggae to zydeco to Afropop, among others. Flame trees, which thrive in Guadeloupe and are ablaze with bright red blossoms from May to August, are a major attraction of this event.

✿ FESTIVAL OF THE WOMEN COOKS

Observed in: Pointe-à-Pitre
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August

Festival of the Women Cooks, or Fête des Cuisinières, is a spectacular culinary event held in early August each year. The festival features a five-hour banquet to which everyone is invited. There is a colorful ceremony that precedes the banquet: Clad in Creole dresses and carrying baskets of traditional food items, women parade through the streets of Pointe-à-Pitre to the cathedral, where they are blessed by the bishop. Afterward the much-awaited banquet and dancing take place.

Rites of Passage

✿ BIRTH

Catholic children are often given two names, one of which is that of a saint. It is commonplace to send flowers, cards, or a small gift for the baby. Among Guadeloupians baptism usually takes place during the first few months of the child's life. The ceremony of baptism is held in a church either on a Sunday afternoon or at a regular Sunday liturgy.

✿ MARRIAGE

Marriage customs in Guadeloupe are rooted in Roman Catholic tradition. The bride wears an elegant white gown, while the groom dresses in formal attire. The rituals include the exchange of wedding vows and rings. It is traditional to hold the wedding ceremony at high noon. The bride may place a bouquet at the shrine (or statue) of Mary, and the newlywed couple may light a large unity candle from two smaller ones to signify their new life together.

✿ DEATH

When a Guadeloupien dies, the body is washed thoroughly to cleanse him or her of all worldly sins; on the second day after a loved one has passed away, friends and family hold a visitation, or wake, usually at the home of the deceased or a funeral home.

The funeral service may stand alone or be part of a Mass. A funeral reception can also be held after the services, where food and drinks are often served, depending on the deceased's family's wishes. In later years a Mass may be held on the anniversary of the death of Catholics.

Further Reading

Brenda F. Berrian, *Awakening Spaces: French Caribbean Popular Songs, Music, and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Ellen M. Schnepel, *In Search of a National Identity: Creole and Politics in Guadeloupe* (Hamburg: Helmut Buske, 2004); André Schwarz-Bart, *A Woman Named Solitude*, Arnold Rampersad, Trans. (Berkeley, Calif.: Distributed by Creative Arts Book Co., 1985).

Guatemala

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Central America, bordering the North Pacific Ocean, between El Salvador and Mexico, and the Gulf of Honduras (Caribbean Sea) between Honduras and Belize
Size	42,042 sq. mi.
Capital City	Guatemala City
Flag Description	Guatemala's flag has three equal vertical bands of light blue (hoist side), white, and light blue with the coat of arms centered in the white band; the coat of arms includes a green and red quetzal (the national bird) and a scroll bearing the inscription, <i>Libertad 15 de Septiembre de 1821</i> (the original date of independence from Spain), all superimposed on a pair of crossed rifles and a pair of crossed swords framed by a wreath.
Independence	September 15, 1821 (from Spain)
Population	14,655,189 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional democratic republic
Nationality	Guatemalan
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Mestizo (55%); Mayan (40%)
Major Language(s)	Spanish (60%); indigenous languages (40%)
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (55%); Protestant (30%); indigenous Mayan beliefs (15%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Army Day, June 30; Independence Day, September 15; Revolution Day, October 20

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The Mayan civilization, which dominated Central America from before 2000 B.C.E. until about 1000 C.E., had a profound and lasting impact on the society and culture of Guatemala. During the Mayan era fishing and farming communities thrived along the Pacific coast of Guatemala. Between 600 and 900 C.E. the center of power moved toward the El Petén lowlands. Thereafter the Mayan civilization declined swiftly as the result of natural disasters such as drought and famine, as well as inept leadership.

The weakened and divided Mayans were defeated in 1523–24 by the Spanish conquistador Pedro de Alvarado

(1485–1541), who became captain general of Guatemala. The first colonial capital was Ciudad Vieja, or Santiago. The conquerors found very little gold in the area but, with the use of forced labor, cultivated cacao and indigo. The Central American Union, a political confederation (1825–38) of the republics of Central America united under a captaincy general in Spanish colonial times—Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Salvador—gained independence in 1821. For a brief time Guatemala, along with the other Central American republics, was annexed to the Mexican Empire. Guatemala became an independent and separate nation in 1839.

Jorge Ubico Castañeda (1878–1946), who became president in 1931, greatly improved the nation's economic position but also ran a politically repressive regime. After Guatemala declared war on the Axis powers (Germany, Italy, and Japan) in 1941, the large German-owned coffee holdings were seized

by the government. Popular discontent with his repressive regime led to Ubico's overthrow in 1944. His successor Juan José Arévalo (1904–90), launched a series of labor and agrarian reforms, and Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán (1913–71), who succeeded him in 1951, continued the reforms.

In 1954 U. S.-backed rebels, calling themselves anticommunists, overthrew the Arbenz government and placed Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas (1914–57) in power. When Castillo Armas was assassinated in 1957, Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes (1895–1982) became president. Guatemalan bases were used to train anti-Castro guerrillas in the early 1960s; around that time dissident leftist military officers and students commenced a guerrilla movement.

Violence continued during the 1970s and 1980s; in 1977 the United States cut off military aid to Guatemala. After three supposedly fraudulent elections General Ríos Montt (b. 1926) assumed power in a 1982 coup, only to be deposed in 1983 by General Óscar Mejías Victores (b. 1930). During the early 1980s leftist guerrillas formed the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union (URNG) and began an insurgency against the government.

In 1996 Álvaro Arzú Irigoyen (b. 1946), a former mayor of Guatemala City and foreign minister, won the presidency. He conducted a purge of top military officers, and in December 1996 his government signed a UN-sponsored peace accord with the URNG guerrillas, who subsequently regrouped as a political party.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

More than 66 percent of the country is mountainous, while 62 percent is under forest cover. Guatemala can broadly be divided into four topographical regions: the Pacific coast with a tropical savannah plain and lagoons; the high plateau and mountain systems, which include the Sierra Madre, Sierra de Chaucús, and Sierra de las Minas, among others (this region also contains around 30 volcanoes); the Continental Divide and Caribbean Lowlands, which include three deep river valleys—the Motagua, Polochic, and Sarstun; and the El Petén, a rolling limestone plateau covered with dense tropical forests. Eighteen short rivers flow

Marimba

The marimba is a musical instrument that originated in Africa but was modified in Central America, where it became immensely popular. It consists of a set of graduated wooden bars, often with resonators beneath to reinforce the sound. It is played by striking the wooden bars with mallets.

from the highlands to the Pacific Ocean. The region abounds in lakes, the most famous of which are Lake Atitlán, Lake Amatitlán, Lake Izabel, and Lake Peten Itza.

ECONOMY

Coffee, sugar, and bananas are the leading commercial and export crops in Guatemala's principally agricultural economy. The United States, Mexico, El Salvador, Venezuela, Germany, and Japan are Guatemala's major trading partners.

Guatemala is a source, transit, and destination country for women and children from Guatemala and other Central American countries trafficked internally and to the United States for the purposes of sexual and labor exploitation.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Guatemala has a rich and varied cultural heritage. The indigenous Mayan groups were never completely subjugated by the colonizing Spaniards, and the descendants of the Maya have preserved some of their indigenous culture. Guatemala's culture today reflects two distinct heritages: Western and Mayan. While the former is found primarily in Guatemala City, a modern, cosmopolitan hub, the latter thrives in the highland villages. In these villages the colorful dress, handicrafts, and celebration of religious, cultural, and social festivals preserve many Mayan traditions.

Each community in Guatemala has its own characteristic motifs, patterns, and designs that are particular to that area. Music and dance are integral aspects of most Mayan religious festivals. The marimba is the favorite national instrument, and it is played on all-important occasions. Semana Santa (Holy Week, or the week preceding Easter) is Guatemala's biggest festival, and the Antigua region is home to the largest Easter celebration in the world. The colorful processions, dating from 1543 and originally modeled on Spanish processions, attract large numbers of tourists who throng the streets along with the faithful.

CUISINE

Corn is the staple food of the Guatemalans. It is the basic ingredient for dishes such as tortillas, tamales, and enchiladas, among others. The indigenous contributions to Guatemalan cuisine include beans, squash, chocolate, and plantains, and chili-based sauces are an important part of the local diet. The Spanish influence is evident in soups, stews, and special dishes such as *fiambre* (a mixture of meat, fish, sausage, and vegetables). Melons, mangoes, and papayas, along with honey, nuts, and cinnamon, are the main ingredients of desserts. The most popular drink of the Guatemalans is coffee, which is also the country's principal export item.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

Most Guatemalans celebrate New Year's Eve at home with their families. It is increasingly common in the cities for people to go out to restaurants and nightclubs. They celebrate New Year's Day with vibrant music, colorful costumes, and fireworks displays; on this occasion *boj* (cane alcohol) flows freely. People wear new clothes, which are believed to usher in good fortune throughout the year.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world, and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

In Guatemala, Labor Day, also known as May Day (Primer de Mayo) and Workers' Day, celebrates the contributions of all Guatemalan workers and laborers to the economic and social development of the country. It is observed with processions, meetings, and parades.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ ARMY DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 30

On June 30, 1871, a revolt for agrarian reforms took place in Guatemala in which Justo Rufino Barrios (1835–85), an army general in charge of the western command, overthrew the incumbent Conservative president Vicente Cerna (1810–85). Barrios later became the president of Guatemala for some time and his sweeping innovations earned him the nickname "the Reformer." On this day the president of Guatemala addresses the armed forces, and a military parade is held in the capital city.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 15

On this day in 1821 Guatemala secured its independence from Spanish colonial rule. To celebrate the occasion, banners of blue and white (the colors of the national flag) are draped over all government

buildings in the capital city. There is a parade with military bands, and an air force precision display. People turn out in large numbers to wave flags and watch the parade.

❁ REVOLUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 20

This day is observed in remembrance of the October Revolution in Guatemala. On October 20, 1944, a coalition of democratic forces that included armed workers and students overthrew the government of General Jorge Ubico Castañeda (1878–1946). He was the last of a series of liberal dictators who had ruled Guatemala since the 1870s. The October Revolution and the Counterrevolution a decade later established the political terrain for the ensuing decades of armed conflict. Every year on this day an air of patriotic fervor prevails. Political demonstrations, marches, music, and fireworks displays are held throughout the country.

Religious Holidays

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

In Guatemala people traditionally celebrate Maundy Thursday (also called Holy Thursday or Sheer Thursday) with religious feasts and processions. Some people stay up all night decorating the *alfombras* (carpets), which are laid on church floors and along the cobblestone streets where the effigies of saints are carried in slow, swaying processions accompanied by bands of musicians.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; MAUNDY THURSDAY

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Alfombra

The word *alfombra* is Arabic in origin and means "carpet." The mixing of plants with sawdust, sand, and other materials into design patterns is actually a Moorish custom that was passed on to Spain and thence to the Americas. As used in Guatemala it reflects a mixture of Spanish and indigenous customs. In the Mayan culture when important dignitaries passed by, flowers were laid down to announce their presence.



Good Friday, also known as Holy Friday or Mourning Friday, and Great Friday in Orthodox Churches, memorializes the Crucifixion of Jesus. Christians in Guatemala observe this day as a day of fasting. The reenactment of the last journey of Jesus to the place of his Crucifixion is an important annual ritual in Guatemala. The largest procession is in the Antigua region of Guatemala, where people choose to spend the entire day in devotional settings, attending church, public readings of the Gospels and the Psalms, and singing hymns.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY

✿ HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Saturday before Easter

Holy Saturday, also called Grand Saturday, the Angelic Night, or the Vigil of Easter, is the seventh and last day of week before Easter and the third and final day of the Easter triduum (the last three days before Easter). On this day many of the churches in Guatemala perform baptism ceremonies. Devout Catholics are required to fast and abstain from meat on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter commemorates the Resurrection of Jesus after his Crucifixion. For the devout Jesus' Resurrection symbolizes eternal life and the resurgence of hope.

In Guatemala worship services begin quite early in the morning. Guatemalans celebrate the day by participating in parades and later enjoying the many parties that are held. Villagers clad in traditional Mayan attire carry statues of Jesus in processions.

In certain regions of Guatemala, such as Antigua, the Easter celebrations are widely renowned for their colorful ceremony. Along cobblestone streets, intricately designed carpets painstakingly made of colored sawdust and other natural materials are laid down. Later a solemn procession of Roman centurions marches over the carpets, carrying an image of Jesus hanging on the cross. The delicate carpets, which are created to be sacrificed on this day, are destroyed as they are trod on. These processions attract large numbers of participants and tourists.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

✿ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: August 15



Young Catholic faithfuls burn incense as others carry the Virgin of Assumption (Virgen de la Asuncion) during a procession in Guatemala City, Guatemala. (AP Photo/Moises Castillo)

Assumption Day marks the day when Mary, the mother of Jesus, was received into heaven. Devout Christians consider this a vindication of Jesus' promise to faithful Christians that they too will be received into paradise. The people of Guatemala celebrate the festival with prayers and visits to their churches. In the town of Jocotenango, a special fair is organized on this day for the sale and purchase of horses, mules, and other goods.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

✿ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day, also known as the Day of the Dead in Guatemala, is celebrated as All Souls' Day in other countries. It's an important holiday in Guatemala. On this day people visit cemeteries, where they pay homage to their relatives and friends who have died by decorating their tombstones and graves with flowers and candles. In the village of Santiago Sacatepéquez, near Guatemala City, it is traditional for people to fly huge colorful kites in the cemetery. The kites, which represent souls rising to Heaven, often have notes addressed to the dead and

to God attached to the strings. People traditionally eat *fiambre*—a mixture of vegetables and many kinds of meat—on this day.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

On Christmas Eve a figure of the infant Jesus is added to the *nacimiento* (Nativity or Christmas manger scene) as part of an elaborate ceremony. When the clock strikes midnight, an *abrazo de navidad* (Christmas hug) is exchanged among relatives, friends, and neighbors, symbolizing unity and love.

The custom of *las posadas* is another important element of Guatemalan Christmas celebrations. (The Spanish word *posada* means “inn.”) This is the reenactment of Mary and Joseph’s search for lodging on the evening of Jesus’ birth. During the *posada* actors portraying Mary and Joseph make stops at three inns (usually people’s homes or business establishments) to ask if there is room for them to spend the night. They are symbolically turned away from the first two places and finally given lodging at the third. Midnight Mass and a lavish supper follow *las posadas*.

For Christmas Day Guatemalans decorate their homes with small colored lights and other ornaments. In almost every home a *nacimiento* (Nativity scene) is set up, and Christmas trees are decorated.

Tamales (made with pork or chicken) are the most popular dish during Christmas in Guatemala. People also enjoy a variety of different punches (which make abundant use of dried fruit, including raisins, prunes, and dates, cinnamon, milk, and/or rum) on this occasion.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ FESTIVAL OF THE BLACK CHRIST OF ESQUIPULAS

Observed in: Esquipulas

Observed by: Roman Catholics, Mayans

Observed on: January 8–15

The border town of Esquipulas (138 miles east of Guatemala City) hosts one of the largest religious festivals in Central America. A fine blend of Christian and Mayan rituals the week-long festival culminates on January 15 every year. More than 100,000 pilgrims come to pray before the statue of the Black Christ, which is enshrined in the Basilica de Esquipulas and appears black because it was carved from a variety of dark woods. Pilgrims and visitors to the shrine often have to wait in a long line; the wait affords a chance to savor traditional foods, offered by

vendors, and to observe the colorful native costumes.

❁ VIRGEN DE CANDELARIA

Observed in: Huehuetanango

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: February 2

The origin of the Virgen de Candelaria festival, also called Virgen of the Candlemas and Purification of the Virgin, lies in the ancient Jewish purification rites followed after childbirth. These required the mother of a male child to observe a period of segregation that lasted for about 40 days after his birth. When this period was over it was mandatory for the mother to take her newborn to offer prayers at the synagogue. According to the Bible Mary adhered to this custom and took the infant Jesus to the synagogue for prayers. Because the Catholic Church fixed Jesus’ birth date on December 25 (although it is not known when he was actually born), the 40-day period of segregation (for Mary) would have ended on or around February 2 of the following year.

The city of Huehuetanango, where this festival is celebrated, has a famous silver image of the Virgen de la Candelaria. The image is so heavy that it cannot be moved out of the church for religious processions. Worshippers sing folk songs, light candles, and make floral offerings before the Virgin. Traditional Guatemalan cuisine is served at the large street parties organized for the occasion.

❁ DAY OF THE DEAD

Observed in: Santiago Sacatepéquez

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: November 1

During the Day of the Dead (Día de los Muertos) observances in the Santiago Sacatepéquez region of Guatemala, people use kites of all shapes and sizes to communicate with the spirits of the deceased. According to local beliefs the dead communicate with the mortals through the whistling winds and fluctuations in the movements of the kites. Hordes of people gather in the cemeteries nearest to them to fly gigantic, colorful paper kites in an attempt to send messages to their deceased loved ones. Guatemala’s Day of the Dead falls on what is generally observed as All Saints’ Day in other countries.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS’ DAY, ALL SOULS’ DAY

❁ GARÍFUNA DAY

Observed in: Livingston

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 26

Garífunas are the largest black ethnic group in Central America. During the European exploration of the Americas, West African explorers and runaway

slaves commingled with the native islanders of Yurumein (St. Vincent) in the Eastern Caribbean. The offspring of these unions were the original Garifunas. They were a unique community, with the distinction of never having been enslaved; at least this is what Garifuna parents tell their children about their shipwrecked African ancestors, whose intermarriage with indigenous Caribbean people created a fiercely independent American ethnicity. The European colonialists called the Garifunas “black Caribs.” Because the Garifuna refused to accept enslavement as an alternative to death, they were exiled to the uninhabited Island of Roatan, off the coast of Honduras. From the Bay Island of Honduras, they migrated to the Atlantic coasts of Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua.

Garifuna Day, or Settlers’ Day, has a special significance for the people of Livingston because on this day in 1802 the first boatload of Garifuna settlers landed in the Río Dulce region of Guatemala. On this occasion there is a soccer tournament in which Garifuna teams from Guatemala, Honduras, and the United States compete against one another. Some of Central America’s most popular Garifuna dancers and musicians also perform on this holiday.

Rites of Passage

✿ BIRTH

Mayan traditions and beliefs dominate Guatemalan birth rituals. The most important ritual is the burying of the detached placenta. This act of burial is very important because it signifies that the individual is now firmly planted in his or her native soil, which he or she must respect and honor throughout his or her life. It is expected that the person will not become individualistic or self-centered; rather, he or she will remain a part of the community and a true son or daughter of the soil.

✿ COMING OF AGE

The coming-of-age ceremony, known as the *quinceaños*, is an important family event in Guatemala. It refers to a party hosted to celebrate a girl or boy’s 15th birthday, which is considered the year when children become adults. Both boys and girls wear special jewelry for the occasion, which is later symbolically removed. The boy wears white beads in his hair, and the girl a red shell in her belt, representing her virginity. After this ceremony, the parents may begin contemplating and making plans for the marriage and future life of the child.

✿ MARRIAGE

When a potential match between a young man and woman is found, the prospective bridegroom’s family hires the services of a professional *atanzabab* (matchmaker) to study and match the couple’s horoscopes and names to ensure their celestial and earthly compatibility. The matchmaker also negotiates between the couple’s families to fix the dowry (the price the groom will have to pay to the bride’s family) and the period of time for which the groom would have to work for his parents-in-law. This period may vary from five to six years and depends largely on the *atanzabab*’s negotiating skills.

Once the date of the wedding is finalized, the mother of the bridegroom weaves and embroiders a loincloth decorated with parrot feathers for her son and a skirt and brocaded blouse for her future daughter-in-law. For the guests a meal of turkey, tamales (steamed cornmeal dumplings), beans, potatoes, and tortillas is prepared. During the wedding ceremony the couple prays and receives a blessing from the priest. Traditionally the couple does not exchange a single word until the ceremony is over.

✿ DEATH

As their Mayan ancestors did the Guatemalans treat death as their final journey to heaven. The death of a Mayan woman, however, is treated differently from that of a man. Women approaching middle age start preparations for this final journey long before their actual death. They weave their own burial dresses, which are then carefully stored away until the time of the funeral.

The family and friends of a dying man stay with him throughout his last hours. As soon as he passes away, his children inform all the relatives. Thereafter only the male members of the house join together to make preparations for the funeral, while the women raise the funds for it. The dead person is attired in his finest jewelry and clothes for his final journey to heaven, away from this world. Coffee and *aguardiente* (alcohol) are served to the guests who come to offer their condolences.

Further Reading

David Carey, Jr., *Engendering Mayan History: Kaqchikel Women as Agents and Conduits of the Past, 1875–1970* (Oxford: Routledge, 2005); Jim Handy, *Gift of the Devil: A History of Guatemala* (Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 1990); Jim Handy, *Revolution in the Countryside: Rural Conflict and Agrarian Reform in Guatemala, 1944–1954* (Chapel Hill, N. C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Michael T. Millar, *Spaces of Representation: The Struggle for Social Justice in Postwar Guatemala* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

Guinea

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Western Africa; between Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau
Size	94,926 sq. mi.
Capital City	Conakry
Flag Description	The Guinea flag has three vertical bands of equal size in the following colors: red (on the hoist side), yellow, and green.
Independence	October 2, 1958 (from France)
Population	9,467,866 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Guinean
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Fulani (40%); Malinke (30%); Soussou (20%)
Major Language(s)	French (official); indigenous languages
Major Religion(s)	Muslim (85%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Second Republic Anniversary, April 13; Labor Day, May 1; Anniversary of Women's Revolt Day, August 27; Referendum Day, September 28; Republic Day, October 2; Invasion Day, November 22

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

The Republic of Guinea is a former French colony that was granted independence in 1958. In Africa the name *guinea* is generally used to refer to the west coast of the continent, which lies north of the Gulf of Guinea and south of the Sahara desert. In Berber *guinea* means “land of the blacks.” Berber is the language of the Berber ethnic group, which is a predominantly Muslim tribe.

Guinea has a long history of foreign rule. Between the 10th and 15th centuries, the region was a source of conflict among many rulers and became a part of the empires of Ghana, Songhai, and Mali, successively. The domination of the Mali Empire lasted for almost 200 years, from the 13th to the 15th centuries. Toward the end of the 15th century, Fulani herders began settling in the region, and they brought with them the teachings of Islam. In 1725 after an Islamic holy war, the region came under Fulani rule.

The Portuguese also made their presence felt in the

region about this time and opened the doors for other European powers, principally France and Britain, who turned the region into a major slave-trade center. The Europeans profited immensely by selling black Guineans as slaves.

In 1849 the French declared the region a French protectorate, thus becoming another foreign ruler and adding yet another chapter to Guinea's colonial history. The Guineans, however, made it difficult for the French to maintain control over their country. Samory Touré (c. 1830–1900), a Malinke warlord and great freedom fighter, led his army against the French and fought for Guinea's independence. When he was defeated and captured in 1898 French domination was finally assured. However voices of dissent continued to echo in the Fouta Djallon region.

In the 19th and 20th centuries France entered into negotiations with the British for Sierra Leone and with the Portuguese for their Guinea colony (which is present-day Guinea-Bissau), in order to clarify the boundaries of Guinea. After negotiations the territory of Guinea came into existence, and a governor-general was appointed for administrative purposes.

After World War II the independence movements in

Islamic Holy Wars

The growing European presence and intensification of the slave trade in the region sowed the seeds for an Islamic holy war or jihad as Muslim militancy grew in the western desert and Senegambia. Muslims were opposed to foreign domination of the slave trade and the support that some African rulers gave the Europeans. One of the clerics, Nasir-al-Din (d. 1674), wanted to impose an Islamic theocracy on the region and launched a jihad against foreign rulers. Inspired by al-Din's teachings, a Wolof wise man and warrior by the name of Maalik Sy next launched a jihad in 1690 against Europeans in Senegambia and founded the kingdom of Bundu. In 1725 Sy's victory inspired the Muslim revolution in Fouta Djallon against the atrocities of the Jallonke aristocracy. Under the leadership of a devout Muslim named Karamaxo Alfa (d. 1751) the powerful theocratic Islamic state of Fouta Djallon was established.

other African countries inspired the people of Guinea and gave impetus to their own struggle for freedom. Ahmed Sekou Touré (1922–84), a descendant of the famed freedom fighter Samory Touré, became the head of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and won overwhelmingly in the territorial elections held in 1957. A plebiscite took place in September 1958, and the people of Guinea voted against the proposed membership in the French Community. France withdrew its forces from the region and on October 2, 1958, the independent and sovereign Republic of Guinea came into existence.

Under Ahmed Sekou Touré the country became a one-party dictatorship; all opposition parties were banned. There was widespread corruption, and the economy was soon in a shambles. Human rights violations were rampant, and there was no freedom of expression. Ethnic violence also increased since preference was given to the Malinke people (Touré was of Malinke origin) in hiring, while candidates of other ethnic groups were rejected.

Opposition leaders were imprisoned and dissent was brutally crushed. In 1970 after the Portuguese-led invasion of the Republic of Guinea failed, Sekou Touré became obsessed with the idea that people, both within Guinea as well as in foreign countries, were trying to displace him. As a result relations with both European and other African countries suffered a setback, and Guinea was completely isolated. Sekou Touré's oppressive policies continued, and he displayed an utter disregard for human life. Millions of Guineans were forced into exile, and those within Guinea suffered at the hands of the repressive regime.

On March 26, 1984, Sekou Touré died, and on April 3, 1984, a military junta, led by Lieutenant Colonel Lansana Conté (b. 1934), assumed control of the Republic of Guinea.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in the western part of Africa, the Republic of Guinea is flanked by Senegal, Mali, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte-d'Ivoire, and the North Atlantic Ocean. Conakry is the capital of the Republic of Guinea.

The Republic of Guinea has a temperate climate, lofty mountains, and high plateaus. Topographically, Guinea is divided into four main regions: Lower Guinea, the narrow coastal belt region; Middle Guinea, which is mostly pastoral highlands; Upper Guinea, characterized by the northern savannah (grasslands dotted with trees); and Forest Guinea, the southeastern rain forest region.

As one of the wettest countries on the African continent, the region's climate is mostly tropical. The coastal regions have substantial rainfall. April and May are the hottest months with temperatures averaging 90°F.

ECONOMY

The Republic of Guinea is richly endowed with minerals, and it is estimated that the country has one-third of the world's bauxite reserves (including substantial deposits of iron, as well as gold, diamonds, and undetermined uranium deposits). Mining is the main source of Guinea's foreign trade, and bauxite alone accounts for 80 percent of the country's foreign revenue. The only hindrance to the country's economic growth is its poor infrastructure, which has proven a major obstacle to attracting foreign investment.

Although the economy suffered immensely under Ahmed Sekou Touré's regime, the economic reforms of the late 1980s provided the much-needed impetus for the economy to get back on track. There is immense potential for agricultural and fishing activity, and if developed properly the revenue from these industries could provide a major stimulus for Guinea's economy.

Guinea is a source, transit, and destination country for women and children trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor. Guinean girls are trafficked internally as domestic servants and boys for shoe shining and street vending. Women and girls are trafficked to Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Senegal, Nigeria, South Africa, Spain, and Greece for sexual exploitation.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

In Guinea there are three prominent ethnic groups: the Fulani (also known as Peuhl or Fula), who inhabit Fouta Djallon; the Malinke (also known as Madingo), who inhabit the savannah and forest regions; and the Soussous, the people of the coastal areas. Other ethnic groups of the forest include the Toma and Gerze.

French is the official language of Guinea, but people prefer to speak their native languages.

Malinke is widely spoken in the north while Fula is spoken in the Fouta Djallon region. Sou is spoken in the region south of Conakry.

Almost 85 percent of the Guinean population is Muslim, and 8 percent is Christian. However in the rural areas, ethnic groups still adhere to indigenous beliefs and continue to observe their ancient traditions and spiritual beliefs.

Music is an integral part of Guinean culture. The traditional music is enormously popular, and Guinea has adapted Western musical instruments to play traditional tunes. Western music is also popular. Drumming is the most popular form of music among the tribesmen. Drums are played in all important ceremonies, including those involving rites of passage.

❁ CUISINE

As in most West African countries, rice and maize (corn) are the staples of the traditional Guinean diet. It is often combined with grilled fish or chicken and served with a spicy sauce. Guinea hens are usually seasoned with paprika and cayenne pepper, stewed with plantains, tomatoes, or yams, and served with rice. Pastries, cakes, pizzas, and hamburgers are a part of the urban diet, and French-style patisseries are found all over Conakry.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western (Gregorian) calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day. A festive spirit reigns as people host parties and celebrations beginning on New Year's Eve. People in Guinea usher in the new year with great joy and enthusiasm. Dining, singing, and dancing are the main activities during Guinea's New Year's Day celebrations. It is a public holiday and all public and private institutions remain closed.

❁ SECOND REPUBLIC ANNIVERSARY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 13

After the death of Sekou Touré on March 26, 1984, Lt. Col. Lansana Conte led a military coup and seized control of the Republic of Guinea. The Second Republic Anniversary commemorates this change of leadership that ended the oppressive policies of Ahmed Sekou Touré.

After assuming power in 1958 Sekou Touré became a dictator and banned all political parties. Due to poor economic policies and widespread corruption, Guinea's economy deteriorated. Worse, the practice

Drumming and the Sounds of Nature

Traditional African drumming is inspired by nature, and the rhythms generally reflect the sounds of falling raindrops, wind, and animal voices as well as work rhythms such as sounds produced during the grinding of grains with a pestle and the digging of earth to plant crops.

of ethnic discrimination led to ethnic violence all over Guinea. The entire country essentially became a war zone, where human rights violations were the norm, and opponents of the dictatorial regime often met with a cruel end. International relations suffered as a result, and the country was in chaos.

The Second Republic Anniversary pays tribute to all those proponents of democracy who risked or gave their lives to help restore political and economic stability in Guinea.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, Workers' Day, or May Day in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in their societies. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. In the Republic of Guinea, government offices, business establishments, and schools remain closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ ANNIVERSARY OF WOMEN'S REVOLT DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 27

Cayenne Pepper

Cayenne is a hot red spice derived from the dried fruits of the chili *Capsicum frutescens*. Cayenne pepper adds zing to recipes, because it contains the substance capsaicin, which is also said to have numerous health benefits including pain reduction, improved blood flow, and the prevention of ulcers. Capsaicin also effectively opens and drains congested nasal passages, and provides a high level of vitamin A to a diet.

The Anniversary of Women's Revolt commemorates a historic revolt led by the women of Guinea in 1977. This event is also known as the "market women's revolt." The year it occurred, President Sekou Touré had passed a law mandating that all agricultural produce be delivered to state-run cooperatives. These corrupt cooperatives were a threat to the livelihoods of many. The new law was a severe blow to small farmers as well as to small vendors of fruits and vegetables. The market women in Conakry were the first to protest this presidential decree, which led to a riot. The revolt quickly spread around the country, culminating in the deaths of the governors of the provinces of Boke, Kindia, and Faranah. It also forced Sekou Touré to legalize small-scale trade.

On August 27, special demonstrations and marches are held by women's organizations in the Republic of Guinea to commemorate the important role played by women in the country.

REFERENDUM DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: September 28

This holiday commemorates the historic vote by the people of Guinea to expel its French colonizers. Official speeches and military parades mark this historic day.

In order to pacify the freedom fighters in the region the French government held elections in Guinea in 1957. The People's Democratic Party (PDP) won the elections, and Ahmed Sekou Touré became the president of the territory. The French then sent a proposal to the newly elected government, asking them to join the French Community. However the people of Guinea were not willing to settle for anything less than absolute freedom from French rule. When a plebiscite was held on September 28, 1958, the people of Guinea unanimously squashed all French hopes of retaining Guinea by voting in favor of independence. A turning point in Guinea's history, this referendum spelled out the Guinean intentions clearly to the French government. On October 2, 1958, the Republic of Guinea came into existence.

REPUBLIC DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 2

The Republic of Guinea came into existence on October 2, 1958. Thus, this day is celebrated as Republic Day or Independence Day in Guinea. Guinea had been under French rule since the middle of the 18th century. The legendary fighter Samory Touré was a warlord of Malinke descent who led the first war for Guinea's independence. He made a brave attempt to oust the French rulers but was captured by them in 1889. His legend inspired millions of Guineans, and the voice of freedom

echoed in different parts of the country. At the end of World War II, the French could no longer ignore the voices of dissent and tried to pacify the Guineans by holding elections in 1957. However, in 1958, the French proposal to join the French Community was unanimously rejected by the people of Guinea. Finally, after years of struggle, Guinea was granted its independence on October 2, 1958.

INVASION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 22

Invasion day commemorates the Portuguese-led invasion of the Republic of Guinea on November 22, 1970. The African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde Islands of Guinea (PAIGC) supported the war for independence in Portuguese-controlled Guinea (now Guinea-Bissau). The Portuguese were very displeased with the support given by the Republic of Guinea to these movements.

In 1969 and 1970 attempts were made to assassinate President Sekou Touré, and he accused the Portuguese extremists in neighboring Portuguese Guinea of plotting to kill him. He believed that Portuguese Guinea wanted to bring the Republic of Guinea under its control. This led to the arrest of many Portuguese living in Guinea as well as Guinean political leaders suspected of involvement in the conspiracy.

In retaliation Portuguese Guinea sent its forces to invade independent Guinea and overthrow its president. The Invasion Day holiday commemorates the day these forces entered Conakry and began burning buildings, killing people, and freeing political prisoners. Sekou Touré appealed for UN support; the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and other members of the international community responded by sending in troops and denouncing the invasion. Later evidence revealed that the attack was led by a group of Guinean dissidents and white Portuguese forces.

On this day people pay homage to those who lost their lives in the invasion and to the armed forces of the independent Republic of Guinea, who fought against the invaders.

Religious Holidays

EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th or pilgrimage month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, also called Tabaski and the Festival of Sacrifice, is celebrated in honor of (Ibrahim's) Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his own son at God's command and honors his selfless devotion to Allah. On Tabaski Guinean Muslims wake up early and

dress in new clothes. Then they accompany their friends and family to the local mosque, where prayers to Allah are offered. Sheep are also sacrificed in commemoration of Abraham's great sacrifice. Elaborate feasts follow.

The holy pilgrimage for Muslims, the hajj, also takes place this month. The Koran, the holy book of the Muslims, has made it mandatory for every Muslim to undertake this journey at least once in his or her lifetime if it is physically and financially feasible.

Tabaski is a national holiday in the Republic of Guinea, and all government, private, and public institutions are closed.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; HAJJ; ISLAM

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

In remembrance of Jesus' Crucifixion Christians celebrate Good Friday all over the world. It falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent. It is a day of sorrow and silent prayers. For this reason it is also called Mourning Friday and Black Friday.

Christians in Guinea attend Good Friday services and recall the legacy of Jesus. Plays based on his life and processions reenacting his final journey to Golgotha are also performed on Good Friday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection three days after his Crucifixion. It falls on the first Sunday following the 40-day period of fasting called Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over as a time of hope and rebirth.

Easter is the most important holiday in the Christian calendar. On Easter special prayer services are held. In Guinea this is an occasion of joy and hope. People bring home-cooked food to Easter Sunday services and have it blessed by the priest.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER MONDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Monday after Easter

The first Monday after Easter is Easter Monday, reinforcing the joyous spirit of the season. Formerly, it was celebrated as a part of Easter Week, but was reduced to a one-day celebration during the 19th century. The events that take place on this day are essentially fun-filled and include egg-

rolling competitions and drenching other people with water. Originally holy water, which was used to bless homes and food, was also used for these pranks.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

❁ MOULOU

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

The birthday of Muhammad is celebrated all over the Muslim world as Mouloud, or Mawlid al-Nabi. It falls in the third month of the Islamic year and is an important day for the followers of Islam.

On this day Muslims in Guinea, with their friends and family, offer prayers in honor of the great prophet. His life and teachings are also part of the special inspirational speeches delivered by the imam (a Muslim cleric). The day is festive; cities and towns are beautifully decorated and people greet each other. A traditional meal of meat dishes and sweets is prepared for this occasion, and the evening skies are lit with fireworks.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOU

❁ ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Forty days after Easter

Ascension Day is a day of special celebration for Christians all over the world, because it commemorates Jesus' Ascension to heaven 40 days after he rose from the dead on Easter. Devout Christians in Guinea attend Ascension services to pray and greet the day with joy and enthusiasm.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

❁ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: August 15

Assumption Day commemorates the Virgin Mary's Assumption into heaven. According to legend, when she was dying at the age of 73, long after Jesus had ascended to heaven, all the apostles visited with her before her death, all, that is, except St. Thomas, who arrived too late to speak with her. When he did arrive her body could not be found, because she had been raised into heaven. Christians believe that her soul and body were united at Jehoshaphat (Mary's Tomb), and St. Gabriel took Mary's soul to heaven.

On August 15 Guinean Christians attend church and offer prayers to Mary. They thank God for her and celebrate the day with feasting and dancing. This is a legal holiday in Guinea; schools and government offices remain closed.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day is a Christian feast honoring all the saints of Roman Catholicism, both known and unknown. It is an annual religious celebration that takes place on November 1. It is believed that All Saints' Day celebrations began after Pope Boniface IV (r. 608–15) rededicated the Pantheon in Rome to the Blessed Virgin.

The Feast of All Saints' Day has been celebrated on November 1 since the time of Charlemagne (742–814). Later it was declared a “day of obligation” (a required observance for all Catholics) by Louis the Pious (788–840) at the instance of Pope Gregory IV (r. 827–44). In Guinea the devout attend church services and light candles for their favorite saints.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

During the holy month of Ramadan, which precedes Shawwal, a month-long fast is observed each day from dawn until dusk by all Muslims. During the fast the consumption of water and food is strictly prohibited.

Eid al-Fitr means “celebration,” and it is one of two *eid* festivals in the Islamic religious calendar. (The other is Eid al-Adha.) It marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, and fasting on this day is strictly forbidden by the Koran.

For Muslims in Guinea, Eid al-Fitr is one of their most important holidays. On this day they rise early, dress in new clothes, and pray at their local mosques. The mood in Guinea is festive as Muslims visit friends and family to greet them and join in celebratory feasting.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas is a day of celebration for Christians throughout the world because it marks the birth of Jesus, whom Christians believe was the Son of God and the savior of humanity. In Guinea Roman Catholic families attend a special Mass on Christmas Eve and celebrate by singing and dancing all night. Christian homes are decorated with balloons and ribbons. On Christmas Day worshippers attend a special prayer service at which the life and teachings of Jesus are remembered. Guineans also visit their friends and

relatives and exchange gifts and greetings.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

FESTIVAL DE GUINÉE

Observed in: Conakry

Observed by: Guineans

Observed on: April

Festival de Guinée is an annual cultural festival held in the capital city of Conakry. Of recent origin (it began in 2004), this heritage and cultural festival takes place the last week of April. The purpose of the festivities is to highlight the rich cultural heritage of Guinea and to educate and create awareness among Guinean youth about their ancient customs and traditions.

The week-long festivities include traditional dance and music performances, some by Les Ballets Africains, Africa's foremost touring dance company. Having performed all over the world for the past 50 years, the troupe is considered Guinea's goodwill ambassador. There are also exhibits and workshops on traditional Guinean artwork, sculpture, and crafts, as well as tours to some of the most beautiful places in Guinea. Some of these tours visit a tropical paradise called the Loos Islands, an archipelago located near the capital city of Conakry. It consists of three main islands—Kassa, Room, and Fotoba—famous for their white sand beaches.

Rites of Passage

BIRTH

The birth of a baby is celebrated with great joy and happiness, since a child is considered a gift from God in Guinean society. Although there are no special rituals a lavish feast is prepared, and all the members of the extended family, as well as friends and villagers, are invited to celebrate. Guinean women trust midwives to ensure safe and less painful births.

COMING OF AGE

Female genital mutilation (FGM), or female “circumcision,” continues to be widely practiced in the Republic of Guinea even though it is illegal. Between 70 and 90 percent of Guinean women undergo this ritual either willingly or forcibly, without distinction as to ethnicity, religion, or region. A highly controversial practice, FGM is banned in many countries.

Boys are circumcised either at birth or as a part of an initiation ceremony, with less physical risk and

long-term side effects than female genital cutting. Among the Soussou and the Malinke tribes the coming of age ceremonies for male initiates take place during harvest time. A special dance ceremony is arranged, and the initiates, along with the village men, dance joyfully. Their dance movements are inspired by nature and include movements of birds and animals. The dance must reflect grace, strength, beauty, and intelligence since these are the most preferred qualities in African cultures.

❁ MARRIAGE

Bride-price is an integral part of marriage in most West African nations, including Guinea. In most parts of Guinea, it is customary to offer kola nuts, as well as money, as part of the bride price. No negative connotation is attached to this practice. In fact it is believed that the groom's family pays a bride price to the bride's family as a token of appreciation for having brought up and nurtured the bride with affection and care.

A marriage is initiated when the suitor's family sends kola nuts to the bride's family. This serves as a proposal. If the bride's family accepts the nuts, and the bride and her female relatives agree to the proposal, the groom and his family (mostly men from the extended family) are invited to the bride's home. After snacks and beverages are served to welcome the guests, negotiating the bride-price begins. If the suitor's family agrees to pay the price, the couple is officially engaged. If not then the proposal is rejected. After the marriage ceremony the husband can take his wife home, but only if the bride-price has been paid. The bride price, however, is returned to the groom's family after marriage in many parts of the region.

Among the Baga tribe, the bride sits in a hammock after the wedding. It is carried by four men above their heads during the journey from her parent's house to her husband's. People dance in front

of the hammock, leading the bride to her new life.

For the 85 percent of the population that is Muslim, the laws of Islam govern their marriages. Free consent of the couple is required under Islamic law, and the marriage ceremony is presided over by an imam. Then in the presence of the fathers of the bride and groom, the priest asks the bride and groom separately if they are willing to accept each other as husband and wife. If the bride and groom agree, then the marriage is deemed legitimate.

Polygamy is practiced in the region and divorce laws favor men.

❁ DEATH

Since most Guineans are Muslims, they bury their dead according to Islamic law and traditional practice. The dead body is washed and draped in a white shroud and taken to the mosque. Prayers are offered for the departed soul and his family. Then villagers bury the dead in the local cemetery. Belief in Allah and reincarnation help Guinean society accept death more easily.

Further Reading

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Fun Fact

Kola nuts are edible seeds belonging to the Cola genus and are found in different parts of Africa. Kola nuts have a bitter taste and are rich in caffeine. These chestnut-sized nuts are chewed because of their high caffeine content and used to make cola drinks.

Guinea-Bissau

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Western Africa, between Guinea and Senegal and bordering the North Atlantic Ocean
Size	13,946 sq. mi., including Bijagos Archipelago
Capital City	Bissau
Flag Description	The flag of Guinea-Bissau has two horizontal equal bands of yellow (top) and green (bottom). They touch the vertical red band on the hoist side of the flag. This red band has a five-pointed black star in the middle.
Independence	September 24, 1973 (announced); September 10, 1974 (recognized by Portugal)
Population	1,416,027 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic, multiparty since 1991
Nationality	Guinean(s)
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Balanta 30%; Fulani 20%; Manjaca 14%; Mandinka 13%; Papel 7%
Major Language(s)	Portuguese (official); Crioulu; French; Balanta-Kentohe; other indigenous languages
Major Religion(s)	Indigenous beliefs (50%); Muslim (45%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; International Women's Day, March 8; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day, September 24

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

The early history of Guinea-Bissau (prior to its colonial era) is lost in the mists of antiquity, but there is evidence that some of the major ethnic groups of the region, namely the Balanta and Papel, had a conspicuous presence in the area by the 12th century C.E.

A Portuguese traveler named Nuño Tristão (d. 1446) landed in Guinea-Bissau in 1446 from the neighboring colony of Cape Verde. After his arrival Gabu, the largest town in eastern Guinea-Bissau, became a center for facilitating slave trade that was copied from its neighbor Cape Verde. A Portuguese post was established at Bissau in 1687, but the Portuguese claim was disputed by the French and the British; in 1792 the British briefly had a settlement at Bolama. In 1879 the region was constituted as a Portuguese colony. Border disputes with the French were settled by treaty in 1886,

but the Portuguese were unable to exercise effective control over the country until 1915.

In 1956 both the neighboring Portuguese colonies got back together to form the African Party for the Independence of Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau, while guerilla warfare for attaining independence was on the rise. In 1974 these rebels formed their own government, which some countries recognized, though not Portugal. By April of the same year, a military coup in Portugal increased the chances of freedom for both the colonies. In August the Portuguese government made Guinea-Bissau an independent republic, with Luís Cabral (b. 1931) as president. Premier João Bernardo Vieira (b. 1939) ousted him in a military coup in November 1980. Vieira is known to have accepted the help of the Republic of Guinea and Senegal to suppress a rebellion before his ouster. However he too was eventually overthrown in 1999 for unsatisfactory leadership and his failure to end poverty in the country. After about a year of military rule a former teacher and the opposition leader Kumba Ialá (b. 1953) of the Social Renova-

tion Party (PRS) was elected president. Ideally this democracy should have lasted, but it did not. Ialá is said to have become very authoritative.

In 2003 the chief of defense General Verríssimo Correia Seabra (1947–2004) led the army in a coup to depose Ialá, who “volunteered” his resignation simultaneously. While Ialá was kept under house arrest a 25-member Committee for Restoration of Democracy and Constitutional Order was created. A popular businessman Henrique Rosa (b. 1946) was elected president in September 2003, and Artur Sanha (b. 1965; president of PRS) was made the prime minister. Following legislative elections held in March 2004 under international observation, Carlos Gomes Júnior (b. 1949) became the prime minister. After six months ex-president Kumba Ialá was freed from house arrest in March 2004. He vowed to return to active politics, much to the dismay of the ruling party.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Bordering the Atlantic Ocean, Guinea-Bissau shares borders with Guinea to the south and Senegal to the north. The mainland part of the country is a low-lying region of rain forests, swamps, and mangrove-covered marshlands with the savannah (tropical grasslands) toward the east. The Bijagos Islands (a group of 25 islands), which stretch 30 miles into the Atlantic Ocean, are considered an extension of the main landmass. One-third of Guinea-Bissau has been washed away by floods, while the lowest areas have been covered by high tides.

Guinea-Bissau has a hot and humid tropical climate. Rains last from June to November along with southwesterly winds, while the dry season lasts from December to May, accompanied by the northeasterly Harmattan winds.

❁ ECONOMY

As one of the 10 poorest countries of the world, Guinea-Bissau has paid a heavy price for its civil wars and internal political disturbances. For instance during the 1998 civil war, the gross domestic product (GDP) dropped by a drastic 28 percent, though it was partially recovered in the following years.

Perhaps the biggest problem of the country's economy lies in its extremely unequal income distribution. The country is making use of the African Development Bank debt relief and the World Bank to solve its economic problems. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other international agencies have also been trying to reshape the economy by energizing the private sector.

Most of the land is state-owned, limiting growth prospects for entrepreneurs. Utilizing offshore oil reserves would help the country's economy in the long run. However, petroleum, mineral, and phosphate deposits remain unexplored due to high costs involved in exploiting them.

Farming and fishing are the two major com-

Bijagos Islands

The Bijagos archipelago can be safely assumed to be Guinea-Bissau's most precious ecological zone. It is actually a biosphere reserve of international recognition and protection efforts. Draped in mangroves and tropical beaches, these 25 islands are some of Guinea-Bissau's most visited spots. The island of Bolama will also be extended into the biosphere under UNESCO's World Heritage List. The Orango island group forms a national park that harbors saltwater crocodiles, hippos, birds in palm trees, and woodlands. The islanders do not venture out much, so the wilderness has retained its pristine form, although Caravela has an airstrip for travelers' benefit.

mercial activities of the country, with cashew nut exports providing the bulk of foreign exchange earnings. In fact Guinea-Bissau is the sixth largest cashew exporter in the world. During the 1998 political disturbances, the country's cashew export had declined by 30 percent, damaging the economy drastically. Fish, seafood, peanuts, timber, and palm kernels constitute the other important exports. Rice, beans, corn, cassava (manioc), and cotton are the domestically consumed crops.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The country has been divided into nine administrative zones. Bissau is the largest city and also the capital. Cacheu, Oio, Gabu, and Bolama are the major towns. Most people are farmers with traditional religious beliefs (animism) with about 45 percent Muslims and a few Christians.

The basic ethnic groups of Guinea-Bissau include the Fulani, the Mandinka (Muslims inhabiting the north and northeast), the Balanta, and the Papel (residing in the southern coastal regions), the

Harmattan Winds

The Harmattan winds blow over the Sahara desert, picking up fine dust particles during the months of December, January, and February. Blowing over the Sahel region (that semi-arid section of Africa between the Sahara to the north and the savannahs to the south that encompasses Niger, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Chad and other grassland-rich areas in their vicinity), these winds greatly reduce visibility. These winds are common in many other African countries. They are hot, dry, and dusty and often reduce visibility to less than 50 feet. In fact air traffic comes to a halt until these winds have ceased.

Manjaca, and the Mancanha, who occupy the central and the northern coastal regions. The official language is Portuguese, while Crioulo (or Kriolu, a mix of Portuguese and local words) is widely spoken along with other African languages.

❁ CUISINE

The staple foods here are cassava, yams, and maize, all an integral part of every meal. Additionally, almost any kind of meat, fish, vegetable, or spice can be added. Guinea Bisseau's specialties include Jollof Rice (a festive one-pot dish served with a variety of ingredients throughout West Africa), chicken, and fish dishes. There are many regional variations of Jollof Rice, depending on where it is cooked. However, the common basic ingredients are rice, tomatoes and tomato paste, onion, salt, and red pepper.

Imported brews and drinks are easily available, though the local flavors like *caña* (120-proof rum) made from palm tree sap and *caña de cajeu* (cashew rum from cashew nut fruit pulp) are widely consumed.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

Families and friends get together to celebrate New Year's Eve. This is the time for making New Year's resolutions. New Year's Day brings joy and cheer to people and is one of the most popular public holidays in the world. Most people take a day off and spend time with family and friends. Guineans celebrate it with lots of good food and dance, whether indoors or on the beaches.

❁ INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 8

Women have to play an effective role in each sphere of life. This day celebrates the strength and the increasing need for active women in many countries of the world. There are seminars and meetings held on this day in Guinea-Bissau to underscore the importance of women in society. Discourses and discussions take place on the role of women and their rights in all areas of society.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to rec-

ognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. On this day all commercial establishments and offices in Guinea-Bissau are closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 24

The Guineans declared their independence from Portugal on this day in 1973. But it was not until September 10, 1974, that Guinea-Bissau received formal recognition from Portugal. Even so, this is celebrated as a day of honor and pride by the citizens who cherish their hard-earned freedom. Flag raising, processions, and public speeches by prominent figures are highlights of the day.

Religious Holidays

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th or pilgrimage month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, also called Feast of Sacrifice and Tabaski, commemorates the end of the holy pilgrimage called hajj (mandatory for every Muslim, if possible, once in his or her lifetime) along with Ibrahim's (Abraham's) sacrifice. Abraham unquestioningly agreed to sacrifice his son because God commanded him to. And God rewarded Abraham's faith by substituting a ram for the boy. Celebrations of this day in Guinea-Bissau are quite similar to those practiced by Muslims elsewhere and include sacrificing lambs and other cattle, praying at the mosques, and exchanging sweets and feasting.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr, also known as Korite, is one of the most auspicious days in the Muslim calendar. After Ramadan, the holy month of fasting, is over, this day marks the beginning of celebrations and feasting. Guinean Muslims (men only) go to the mosques, offer prayers, and distribute alms to the needy. This also the time for new clothes for all and unlimited feasting. The Koran forbids fasting on Eid al-Fitr.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Commemorating the birth of Jesus, the founder of Christianity, this day calls for much feasting and celebration. Even though Christians are a minority in Guinea-Bissau, Christmas Day is an official holiday and an occasion of unlimited excitement, gaiety, and fun for old and young. The feast day provides an opportunity for the exchange of goodwill and gifts. In preparation people clean and decorate their houses; there is a lot of emphasis on good food and having a good time.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ GUINEA-BISSAU CARNIVAL

Observed in: Bissau

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Monday and Tuesday before Lent

During this two-day, high-spirited festival, the Guineans wear fantastic multicolored masks and costumes and dance to the accompaniment of some modern popular tunes. Sharks, hippos, bulls (made with real horns), and sawfish are the most common shapes for the masks. The celebrations are of the pre-Lenten type, most commonly seen in Latin cultures and exhibit an interesting mix of African and Catholic rituals and beliefs. Although the biggest show is at the capital, Bissau, Carnivals are also held at other towns on a much smaller scale.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY

Rites of Passage

❁ COMING OF AGE

In Guinea-Bissau about 50 percent of the women undergo the coming-of-age operation of genital cutting (or female genital mutilation, FGM), and both clitoridectomy and excision are widely practiced, although the practice has decreased to between 20 and 30 percent in urban areas. FGM is widespread among the Fulani and Mandinka. There is no legislation specifically prohibiting the practice, and in 1995 a proposal to outlaw FGM was defeated. The Guinea-Bissau Assembly, however, approved a proposal to hold practitioners criminally responsible if a woman dies as a result of FGM.

❁ MARRIAGES

The Balanta are one of the major ethnic groups of Guinea-Bissau. The people of this tribe are basically hunters who raise cattle for beef. When it comes to their rites of passage, these groups organize big dance parties. They wear fantastic costumes and colored masks. There are a number of activities associated with such occasions: For instance there is a Sunungal ballet that describes the wedding of the prince of Mini-Ndame (a kingdom). All the villagers bring their daughters to the wedding. They dance and vie for the prince's attention. The prince then chooses his bride and the celebration continues.

The masks are of utmost importance when it comes to such occasions in terms of spiritual and family connections. Here for instance the dance masks are large and laden with cowry shells. There is an old woman's mask, a young girl's mask, and a young man's mask. In the Balanta tradition, after the marriage the bride remains in her house for an entire month. Seven days after the marriage the newlywed woman has to be washed. It is a ritual that takes place at dawn, and it begins with a woman's ululations (a high-pitched sound made while simultaneously moving the tongue rapidly from side to side) waking up the entire village, followed by the beating of drums. This is a sign that all the men and male teenagers must leave the village until sundown, because the women are gathering for sacred rites.

Further Reading

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Fun Fact

The Carnival hippo mask is so large that it needs to be held up by carved legs!

The traditional music and dance performed during the festival show heavy Gambian and Senegalese influences. Women can be seen jiving very energetically to the music-played on the *kora* (similar to a harp) and *balafon* (like a xylophone).

~ Guyana ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Northern part of South America bordered by Suriname, Brazil, Venezuela, and the north Atlantic Ocean
Size	83,000 sq. mi.
Capital City	Georgetown
Flag Description	Guyana's flag is green, with a red isosceles triangle on the hoist side superimposed on a long, yellow arrowhead; there is a narrow black border between the red and yellow, and a narrow white border between the yellow and the green.
Independence	May 26, 1966 (from United Kingdom)
Population	765,283 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic within the British Commonwealth
Nationality	Guyanese
Major Ethnic Group(s)	East Indian (50%); black (36%)
Major Language(s)	English; Amerindian languages; Creole; Hindi; Urdu
Major Religion(s)	Christian (50%); Hindu (35%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Republic Day, February 23; Labor Day, May 1; Indian Heritage Day, May 5; Independence Day, May 26; CARICOM Day, July 4; Liberty Day, August 1

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

The original inhabitants of Guyana were Carib Indians. The Dutch East India Company arrived in Guyana in 1615, followed by the English and the French. Although all of them made their own colonies in the region, the Dutch settlements were originally more dominant. Eventually, however, Britain managed to seize control of the Dutch colonies, and Guyana was renamed British Guiana in 1831. The British established sugar and tobacco plantations west of the Suriname River, but when slavery was abolished in 1834, many plantations were abandoned. So the British, looking for another cheap source of labor, shipped workers in from India, and almost 250,000 laborers from India were sent to Guyana from 1846 to 1917.

British Guiana became a crown colony in 1928 and was granted home rule in 1953. In 1950 under the leadership of Dr. Cheddi Jagan (1918–97), an Indo-Guyanese, the colony's

first political party, called the Progressive People's Party (PPP), was formed; its aim was to liberate Guyana. In 1961 the British granted partial autonomy to Guyana, and Dr. Jagan became the prime minister of the country. In 1966 Guyana achieved independence. Four years later in February 1970, it became a cooperative republic within the Commonwealth and thereby cut all ties with the British. Once independent, British Guiana was renamed Guyana.

After independence the first few decades saw racial unrest and disturbance between the Indians and the Africans of Guyana. Although the Guyanese are largely a peace-loving population, racial conflicts between the Indo-Guyanese and the Afro-Guyanese erupted in 1962–64 and then again after the elections in 1997 and 2001. Racial tensions are still a sensitive issue in Guyana.

Guyana was engaged in territorial and border disputes with Venezuela and Suriname in 2000. The dispute between Suriname and Guyana over the ownership of an oil-rich coastal area remains unresolved.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Guyana is flanked by Suriname, Venezuela, Brazil, and the Atlantic Ocean. In terms of area Guyana is the third smallest country in South America. The terrain of Guyana consists of rolling highlands, marshy coast, low-lying plains, thick rain forests, and savannah (areas dotted with trees). The highest point of Guyana is Mount Roraima, which stands 9,220 feet high. The longest rivers that flow through Guyana are the Berbice, the Demerara, the Essequibo, and the Corentyne.

Guyana enjoys a tropical climate and remains hot and humid throughout the year. There are two rainy seasons in Guyana: from May to mid-August and from mid-November to mid-January. Average temperatures range between 75°F and 88°F. In terms of flora Guyana is home to thick forests of trees like bamboo and mangroves, and flowering plants like yellow hibiscus and ginger lily flowers. Fauna are represented by a wide variety of birds, reptiles, and mammals such as ocelots, tapirs, and monkeys.

❁ ECONOMY

Guyana has a moderate economy that is struggling with chronic problems such as lack of skilled labor and inadequate infrastructure. Agriculture is the backbone of its economy; the main crops include wheat, rice, sugar, vegetables, and fruits. The fishing industry is another significant contributor to the nation's gross domestic product (GDP). In addition Guyana has rich deposits of mineral resources like gold, diamonds, and bauxite, and many deposits remain untapped. Some of the major export items of the country are gold, diamonds, and bauxite, as well as rum, timber, shrimp, rice, sugar, and molasses.

Another problem that the country must confront is the trafficking of human beings for sexual exploitation and forced labor. Guyana is a country of origin, transit, and destination for young women and children trafficked primarily for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

Guyana has begun to make good progress recently through the enactment of antitrafficking legislation, improvements in government coordination, and aggressive public awareness campaigns. With the help of international organizations, the government of Guyana has also introduced a number of progrowth economic policies that are focused on the development of agriculture and mining activities.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Guyana has a diverse cultural heritage that is influenced by various ethnic groups and is home to East Indians, Amerindians, Chinese, blacks, whites, and people of mixed race.

It is a multilingual society; some of the languages that are widely spoken in Guyana include English, dialects of Amerindian languages, Creole, Hindi, and Urdu. Over 50 percent of the Guyanese population

follows Christianity, but the country is also home to Hindus and Muslims as well as people of other faiths.

The Guyanese love sports, and beach cricket (an informal version of the game) and football (soccer) are favorite outdoor games. Dominoes and boxing are equally popular indoor games.

Queh Queh songs are traditional Guyanese folk songs that are sung during weddings—usually the night before the wedding—by older people. Other folk songs sung by the ethnic Guyanese include boat songs, love songs, Amerindian songs (emphasizing the hunting skills of ethnic tribes), and “ring play songs” that are sung by children, usually in the rural areas on nights when the Moon is full. They are referred to as “ring play songs,” because the singers sit in a circle, and the lead singer sits in the middle of the circle. Sometimes even adults sing these songs during wakes or weddings.

Many Guyanese enjoy Caribbean music and dance, while the East Indian community enjoys their traditional folk songs and dances like the *kathak* (a classical dance that narrates the stories from religious literature), the *bhangra* (a folk dance of the Indian state of Punjab performed at the time of harvest), and the *giddha* (a folk dance performed by the women of Punjab’ they also sing about the woes, happiness, and loves of their life while dancing).

Some noted Guyanese literary figures include the poet A. J. Seymour, novelist Wilson Harris, and historian Walter Rodney.

❁ CUISINE

The Guyanese diet is greatly influenced by Indian and Chinese cuisine. It features a wide variety of Indian curries, a soft flat bread known as roti, seafood, garlic pork (a traditional Portuguese dish), meat, vegetable stew, and cooked vegetables, mashed potatoes, and pepper pot, a spicy stew that is cooked in the juice extracted from cassava (manioc). Popular beverages include wine, beer, rum, whisky, brandy, and fruit punches.

Fun Fact

Guyana is the only South American country in which English is the official language.

Fun Fact

In Guyana, there is little friction between Muslims and Hindus because neither attempts to convert the other's members, and Christians and Muslims take part in the other's festivals in some rural areas.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 designates the beginning of the Western (or Gregorian) calendar and is widely celebrated as New Year's Day. Celebrations take place all over the

world with revelry that often begins the evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve). In Guyana on New Year's Eve, parties are organized throughout the country to usher in the new year with great joy and enthusiasm. Singing, dancing, feasting, and champagne are integral to these celebrations. As the countdown begins for the arrival of the new year, people pour champagne in their glasses and as the clock strikes 12, they raise a toast for the coming year and wish each other happiness and prosperity. After partying until the wee hours on New Year's Eve, people spend New Year's Day at home with the family.

REPUBLIC DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 23

Guyana declared itself a republic on February 23, 1970, after gaining independence from the United Kingdom. This date also begins Mashramani, the Arawak name for "celebrations after successful cooperative effort." Previously Mashramani was celebrated on May 26, in conjunction with Guyana's Independence Day. However heavy rains in May interfered with the celebrations, so the government decided to combine Mashramani with Republic Day.

On February 23, the president presides over Republic Day celebrations that include flag-raising ceremonies and speeches in the capital city. Then an elaborate parade of people dressed in colorful costumes and accompanied by steel bands, string bands, and costumed bands sing joyful songs as they march through the streets of Georgetown. Finally a spectacular display of fireworks, greeted with loud cheers and applause, concludes the Republic Day celebrations.

Mashramani is observed throughout the country with week-long festivities. The major highlight of Mashramani is the Miss Mash Contest. This takes place at the regional level during the week and culminates on February 23, when the regional winners of the beauty contest assemble in the capital of Georgetown for the final judging.

Musical events are an integral part of this carnival-like celebration, and a number of competitions like calypso competitions (for adults and children), sports events, street-band competitions, and musical talent searches are also held. Masquerade bands play nonstop music during the festivities, displaying their dancing and musical skills in competitions held at the National Park in Georgetown. Finally a spectacular display of fireworks, greeted with loud cheers and applause, concludes the Republic Day celebrations.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day and Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by

workers in their nations and societies. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world, and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

On Labor Day trade unions organize workers' rallies throughout Guyana to express their concerns about issues affecting the workforce in the country. In the capital of Georgetown workers and leaders of trade unions gather at Kaieteur National Park; often the president of Guyana, along with the union leaders, addresses the nation's workers. After the rally the workers are treated to special music and refreshments, either at their places of employment or at the labor union headquarters.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

INDIAN HERITAGE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 5

After slavery was abolished here in 1834 Britain began encouraging the emigration of Indians and other people from Asia in order to have access to cheap labor. This day celebrates the first arrival of East Indians in Guyana on May 5, 1838, and is also known as Indian Arrival Day. It honors the immense contribution the Indian community has made to the development of Guyana.

On this day Guyanese Indians hold a variety of cultural events and celebrations presided over by the prime minister. These begin with a ceremonial lamplighting and singing devotional songs. Some of the highlights of the celebrations are performances of Indian classical and folk dances including the *kathak*, *bhangra*, and the *ghidda*. The celebrants also sing folk songs from other parts of India. Cultural troupes from India and Guyana entertain the audience with their performances and renditions of classical and popular Indian music.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 26

On May 26, 1966, Guyana obtained its independence from British rule. Since 1831 the region, formerly known as British Guiana, had been under British domination, and ethnic tribes such as the Arawak and the Carib were enslaved and forced to work on British plantations. Britain abolished slavery here in 1834, so it was not until the early 1950s that Guyanese political parties started nationwide protests and demonstrations protesting British rule and demanding independence. The British forces tried to crush the voices of protest, but they could not dampen the Guyanese's desire to obtain total independence.

On this historic day the president of Guyana raises the national flag in the capital of Georgetown and gives a ceremonial speech. People share stories about the period of enslavement during British rule and about the struggle for freedom. They emphasize the importance of freedom and honor all the patriots who lost their lives during the independence struggle.

❁ CARICOM DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 4

CARICOM Day commemorates the signing of the Treaty of Chaguaramas on July 4, 1973, which established the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM). The goals of CARICOM are to protect the cultural heritage of the Caribbean region and provide an economic link among English-speaking countries in the Caribbean.

Guyana was one of the four signatories of the original treaty (the other three were Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica), so CARICOM Day has been celebrated here ever since. Holiday observances include official gatherings, speeches, and cultural events that represent the Caribbean way of life. On this day, the prime minister of Guyana participates in celebrations organized by the government in honor of CARICOM Day. Other events include performances of Caribbean music and dance.

❁ LIBERTY DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 1

Liberty Day, also known as Freedom Day or Emancipation Day, commemorates the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire (including Guyana, which was known as British Guiana) on August 1, 1834.

Religious Holidays

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, also called the Feast of Sacrifice and the Greater Bairam, is a very important festival for Muslims all over the world. It was on this auspicious day that Ibrahim (Abraham) submitted to God's will and agreed to sacrifice his young son. At the last minute God spared Ibrahim's son and substituted a ram for the sacrifice. Muslims honor Ibrahim for his willingness to do God's will.

On this day Muslims in Guyana go to their local mosques to greet each other and pray. Also goats that are defect-free are sacrificed, and some of the meat is distributed among family members, neighbors, and

poor people. The bones of the animal are buried, and the skin is disposed of in the manner dictated by the Koran. Also a *sewain* (a sweet noodle casserole) is prepared on this day and shared with friends and relatives.

The month in which this holiday is celebrated is also the time when many Muslims undertake their annual pilgrimage (or hajj) to Mecca. It is the aspiration of every Muslim to go to the sacred city once in his or her lifetime if it is physically and financially possible to do so.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; HAJJ; ISLAM

❁ HOLI

Observed by: Hindus

Observed on: March–April

Holi, or Phagwah, the Hindu Festival of Colors, is celebrated over a two-day period either in March or April, depending on the Hindu lunar calendar. The origin of the festival is traced to a Hindu myth that tells the story of a demon king named Hiranyakashipu and his young son Prahalad. Hiranyakashipu was granted a boon by Lord Brahma (the Hindu god regarded as the creator of the universe) who made him almost invincible. Assuming that he would never be killed and would live for eternity, he proclaimed himself God and banned worship of any other deities. He also forced his subjects to worship him as God, and any defiance met with a gruesome fate. However his young son Prahalad was an ardent worshipper of Lord Vishnu (the caretaker of the universe), and although Prahalad respected his father, he refused to worship him as God. This angered Hiranyakashipu, and so he sentenced his own son to death. However his attempts to kill his son failed, as Lord Vishnu came to Prahalad's rescue each time.

Eventually Hiranyakashipu sought the assistance of his sister Holika, who was granted a favor by Lord Brahma that made her immune to fire. But Lord Brahma also told her that if she used this favor for any evil purpose, the fire would destroy her. Holika did not pay attention to Lord Brahma's instructions and decided to use her special powers to help her brother get rid of Prahalad. On full Moon night in spring Holika sat on a pyre with Prahalad in her lap and asked Hiranyakashipu's soldiers to set the pyre on fire. But Lord Vishnu's blessings protected Prahalad, and he escaped unhurt, while Holika perished. Since then Holi has been celebrated among the Hindus as the victory of good over evil.

There is great enthusiasm for this festival among Hindus in Guyana. On the night of the full Moon before Holi, they gather around a huge bonfire that symbolizes the burning of Holika (or evil), and they sing traditional songs. They also invite non-Hindu Guyanese to join in the festivities by throwing colored powder on them. Music is an integral part of the celebrations. Guyana's Hindus dance

Fun Fact

Hindu and Muslim holidays were not officially recognized in Guyana until the 1970s.

Fun Fact

In Guyana some Muslim and Hindu religious observances are public holidays—Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, Mouloud, Diwali, and Holi, respectively—although both are minority religions.

to traditional Indian music played on a wide variety of musical instruments, such as the *dbolak* (drum) and *jhaals* (little finger cymbals).

See also Volume III: HINDUISM; HOLI

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, also called Mourning Friday, Sorrowful Friday, or Black Friday, falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent, a 40-day period of fasting

and abstinence. It is observed in most parts of the world to commemorate the trial and Crucifixion of Jesus. This is a day of mourning and sorrow throughout the Christian world. On Good Friday in Guyana Christians attend a prayer service and take part in readings from the Bible that narrate the events related to Jesus' Crucifixion. Many devout Guyanese Christians observe the fast that starts on Ash Wednesday (the first day of Lent) and lasts until Good Friday); others observe a partial fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a Christian feast that celebrates Jesus' Resurrection from the dead three days following his death on the Cross, so it is sometimes called Resurrection Day. This day is central to the Christian liturgical calendar because the fundamental teaching of Christianity maintains that Jesus, through his death, freed all his followers from the penalty of sin.

The holiday falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. They often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to offer prayers. Both the name of the observance and many of its symbols were taken from ancient European pagan festivals, which celebrated the return of spring and the rebirth of nature. The holiday's name is based on the Germanic fertility goddess Eostre, and both eggs and rabbits were symbols of fertility linked to her observances.

In Guyana devout Christians attend a special Easter service and celebrate Jesus' rebirth with great joy and enthusiasm. Thousands flock to Bartica, Guyana, where various events take place including speedboat racing, music, and a rodeo. During the rodeo, vaqueros (aspiring matadors) test their skills on wild bulls and horses amid cheers from the crowd.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

EASTER MONDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Monday following Easter Sunday

The first Monday after Easter is Easter Monday. In Guyana skies are filled with colorful kites of all shapes and sizes, and people compete to fly their kites higher than others and for a longer period of time. As the day nears an end people tie wishes or prayers to their kites; as the kites fly higher, they cut the strings, hoping that the kites will carry their messages to God.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

MOULOUD

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, third month of the Islamic calendar

The birthday of Muhammad, the holy prophet of the Muslims, falls in the third month of the Islamic year and is known as Mouloud, or Mawlid al-Nabi, and in Guyana, as Yaum an Nabi. For Muslims all over the world, this is a day of great joy and celebrations as Muhammad is the most revered prophet. On this day Guyanese Muslims offer special prayers in honor of Muhammad and thank Allah for his benevolence in sending them his messenger. Also people read about the life of Muhammad and seek inspiration from his unwavering faith in Allah.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOUD

DIWALI

Observed by: Hindus

Observed on: Five days from the 13th of the waning half (Krishna Paksha) of the lunar month Asvina to the second of the waxing half (Shukla Paksha) of Karttika

Diwali, also called Deepawali and Divali, is the Hindu Festival of Lights. It commemorates the coronation of Lord Rama (a Hindu god and one of the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu), the king of Ayodhya, on his return to his kingdom after 14 years in exile. It also celebrates his victory over the evil forces represented by Ravana, the king of Lanka. According to the Hindu epic, Ramayana, the people of Ayodhya were so happy about Rama's return that the entire kingdom was lit with beautiful lamps to greet Lord Rama, his wife Sita, and his brother Lakshmana on their return and also to show them the way to the palace in the darkness of the night.

Diwali falls in the Hindu month of Karttika, which corresponds to either October or November in the Western calendar. Among northern Indians it also marks the beginning of the Hindu new year.

In Guyana, Hindus and non-Hindus alike celebrate Diwali enthusiastically. Hindus make special sweets and distribute them among friends. They also exchange gifts and greetings, wear new clothes, and decorate their homes with traditional clay lamps and

electric lighting to dispel darkness. After offering prayers to the goddess Lakshmi (the goddess of wealth and prosperity), Hindus celebrate Diwali by lighting firecrackers.

However the most anticipated events are the annual Diwali motorcade and the illumination of thousands of clay lamps known as *diyas* along the streets of Georgetown. Diwali literally means “row of lamps,” and the light produced symbolizes the elimination of spiritual darkness.

See also Volume III: DIWALI; HINDUISM

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr, also called the Lesser Bairam, designates the end of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. During Ramadan Muslims all over the world observe a month-long fast. The fast lasts from dawn until dusk every day. The consumption of food and water is strictly forbidden during this period.

Both Muslims and non-Muslims celebrate Eid al-Fitr with joy and enthusiasm in Guyana. Devout Muslims wake up early in the morning and enjoy a light meal. Muslim homes are decorated with beautiful lights, and little children also receive money. Then they put on new clothes and go to their local mosques to pray. They greet each other at the mosque and make donations of money. They also distribute food and clothing to the needy.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world. It celebrates the birth of Jesus, whom they regard as the Son of God. In Guyana, official celebrations begin on Christmas Eve (December 24) and last until Boxing Day (December 26). However businesses start decorating their offices in mid-November, while homeowners begin cleaning and decorating their homes in early December.

On Christmas Eve Guyanese decorate their Christmas trees and get the presents and cards ready for Christmas. Roman Catholics in Guyana attend a Midnight Mass and celebrate Jesus’ birth with devotional hymns and carols. On Christmas Day people visit friends and family members and exchange gifts and greetings. It is commonly believed in Guyana that Santa Claus visits Guyanese children and gives them gifts, sweets, and candies. A lavish meal is prepared for Christmas that includes pepper pot, cakes, candies, and puddings, along with wine and other beverages. Children love a sweet beverage prepared from the fruits of the sorrel plant.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26

Boxing Day is celebrated the day after Christmas. Most of the countries that were formerly under British rule continue to observe this holiday. The name Boxing Day is probably derived from the age-old tradition of distributing the money from church collection boxes to the poor on the day after Christmas. Another possibility is that the name refers to the British practice of presenting servants with their gifts the day after Christmas.

In Guyana, people either visit friends or family members or spend the day at home.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ BARTICA REGATTA

Observed in: Bartica

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Easter Week

During Easter Week, the city of Bartica plays host to a wide variety of events to celebrate Jesus’ Resurrection from the dead. Every year thousands flock here to take part in the festivities.

The regatta transforms Bartica into a huge amusement park, complete with games, food stalls, and exciting activities. For adventure lovers Bartica offers speedboat racing, while for sports enthusiasts there are cricket and boxing matches. The Miss Bartica Beauty Pageant attracts thousands of young and beautiful women from all over Guyana. The most awaited event is the rodeo, where vaqueros (would-be matadors) test their skills on wild bulls and horses to the cheers of the crowds.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

Ethnic Guyanese are extremely superstitious. They believe that when a bird called a *belly-mema* whistles, it means that there is a pregnant woman in the village. They also believe that two pregnant women should not walk together unless one of them is carrying a piece of stick in her hand or their babies will die. Nor should a pregnant woman walk past a fire because her baby will be born cockeyed.

In order to ward off evil spirits after the birth of a child, the mother must keep a Bible and a pair of scissors under the child’s pillow. To protect the child from the evil eyes of people, a blue cloth with asafetida (a gum made from the resin of Asian plants) wrapped inside it should be tied around the child’s

hand. Care must be taken while breast-feeding since any breast milk that falls on a boy's penis will make him impotent.

MARRIAGE

Queb Queb songs are traditional Guyanese folk songs that older people sing the night before a wedding. These songs discuss the bride and groom's suitability for marriage, advise them on matrimonial affairs, and make jokes about their sexual skills.

Christians in Guyana solemnize their marriage in a church. On the day of the wedding, an elderly relative of the woman bathes her and dresses her in an ordinary dress. The bride is then escorted to a friend's house to elude evil spirits that might try to possess her. At her friend's place the bride changes into her wedding gown and gets ready for her wedding. Tradition dictates that the bride avoid looking back while leaving the house lest she catch the attention of any wandering evil spirit. Before the bride drives away, rice and old shoes are thrown over her car to protect her from any harm and to wish her prosperity in her married life. The bride is driven straight to the church without stopping anywhere.

At the church the groom and his wedding party greet the bride, who is escorted to the altar by her father or guardian. When the couple is invited by the priest to exchange their wedding vows, the bride rises before her husband. The Guyanese believe that the person who rises first will die first, and every Guyanese bride hopes to protect her husband's life at any cost. Once the couple has exchanged wedding vows and rings, they are united in matrimony and are congratulated by the assembled family members, friends, and guests.

A big reception follows the wedding. Singing, dining, drinking, and dancing are all part of the celebrations. After the reception the bridesmaid who receives the bride's handkerchief is believed to be the one who will marry next. The couple is expected to leave the reception hall before their guests. The

bride is supposed to dance her way to the exit of the reception hall either with the groom or one of her male relatives. Elderly relatives of the bride do the household chores for her for the first three days after marriage.

DEATH

When someone dies in Guyana, all the paintings and pictures in the house are covered with cloth or are turned toward the wall. The house is not cleaned until the coffin of the deceased is taken to the cemetery. Most Guyanese bury their dead in a solemn ceremony. However to prevent the soul of the deceased (known as the *jumbie*) from wandering and haunting people, mourners either put mustard or corn seeds inside the coffin or place an object that the deceased liked the most when living in its hand. The needle that was used to stitch the white shroud of the deceased is also placed in the coffin.

After burial people stop at unfamiliar places to mislead the *jumbie* and prevent it from following them home. To confuse the *jumbie* if it follows them, people leave their shoes at the entrance of their homes and enter the house barefoot. To keep the *jumbie* of their husbands away, widows wear blue napkins for 40 days and nights.

Hindu Guyanese cremate their dead.

Further Reading

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∞ Haïti ∞

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Western one-third of the island of Hispaniola, lying between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean, west of the Dominican Republic (on the same island)
Size	10,714 sq mi.
Capital City	Port-au-Prince
Flag Description	The Haitian flag has two equal horizontal bands of blue (top) and red with a centered white rectangle bearing the coat of arms; on the coat of arms is a palm tree flanked by flags and two cannons above a scroll bearing the motto: “ <i>L’Union Fait La Force</i> ” (“Union Makes Strength”).
Independence	January 1, 1804 (from France)
Population	8,121,622 (2005 est.)
Government	Democratic
Nationality	Haitian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Black (95%)
Major Language(s)	French and Creole (both official)
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholics (80%); Vodun
National Holiday(s)	Independence Day, January 1; Heroes Day, January 2; Flag Day, May 18; Battle of Vertières Day, November 18; Discovery of Haiti Day, December 5

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

On December 6, 1492, Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) discovered Hispaniola, the island referred to as Quisqueya (name in use even now) and Aytí or Hayti (“land of mountains”) by its Taino and Carib inhabitants, related to the Arawak Indians. Columbus renamed it La Isla Ispanola (“the Spanish Island”), which was subsequently abbreviated to Hispaniola.

Columbus’s expedition had established a settlement, but when the Spaniards returned they found it destroyed by the Caribs, the native people. Hispaniola was finally colonized in the late 15th century, and the spread of new diseases introduced by the Spaniards, in conjunction with the harsh treatment the Spanish meted out, led to the near-annihilation of the Carib population within 25 years. The menace of French and British pirates in the 1630s, however, led the Spanish to cede the western third of the island to France in 1697. Spain had named the entire island Santo Domingo, and the French

adapted it to Saint-Domingue (present-day Haiti).

Under French rule the country was known as the “pearl of the Antilles,” and it flourished with sugar and coffee plantations as well as logging. The labor for these ventures was made possible by the large number of African slaves brought to the island. Between the white colonists and the African slaves, there was another social stratum—the mulattos, the offspring of the two. People of mixed African and European ancestry have remained a minority, and Africans continue to dominate the population mix.

News of the French Revolution of 1789 inspired revolts by the slaves when they realized that the new rules of equality being promoted in France would not apply to them. Free Africans on the island, however, were able to claim French citizenship under the Revolution’s Declaration of the Rights of Man. Dutty Boukman, a Vodun priest and a slave, was the hero of the major slave revolt of 1791, even though the French decapitated him hoping, thereby, to discourage the rebels. In 1793 slavery was abolished, largely to enlist the slaves’ help in fighting off British invaders.

Once the British had been turned back, there were indications that slavery was about to be reenforced. The ensuing rebellion culminated in the declaration of independence in 1801 by Pierre-Dominique Toussaint l'Ouverture (1745–1803), a Haitian revolutionary, and the defeat of French forces by troops led by Jean-Jacques Dessalines (? 1758–1806) on November 18, 1803. Dessalines declared Saint-Domingue independent and renamed it Haiti on January 1, 1804. This was the world's first black republic and the first to be led by a person of African ancestry. Jacques Dessalines's assassination in 1806 triggered major political unrest in Haiti, and the country has never enjoyed a stable political climate.

Throughout the 19th century Haiti was politically isolated and left to its own resources except for the economic interest shown by Western capitalists. Since its independence early in the 19th century, a succession of opportunistic dictators has left the populace destitute and without direction. This isolation provided a pretext for the U.S. invasion of Haiti in 1915, and the country became a colony again, if not in name certainly in practice. Jean Vilbrun Guillaume-Sam (d. 1915), for example, the fifth president in as many years, lasted only six months as president of Haiti. Guillaume-Sam had led the revolts that brought assassinated President Cincinnatus Leconte (1854–1912) to power and the one that brought down President Oreste Zamor (1861–1915). He became president when his predecessor Joseph Davilmar Théodore (1847–1917), was forced to resign when he could not pay the cacao workers of his militia in the overthrow of Zamor.

In his turn, Guillaume-Sam faced a revolt led by Rosalvo Bobo (1873–1929), but reacted so violently that he enraged the wealthier mulatto population, who revolted. Guillaume-Sam fled to the French embassy, but the rebels seized the embassy and found him hiding in a toilet. They threw his limp body over the embassy's iron fence, where it was impaled. His body was then ripped apart, and the pieces were paraded through the capital. When news of the murder reached Washington, President Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924), with the United States embroiled in World War I, ordered the Marines to seize the capital, claiming that the turmoil could provide Germany with an opportunity to gain a foothold in the hemisphere. The U.S. occupation of Haiti lasted 19 years, and the country was governed by U.S. Marines. Representatives from the United States wielded veto power over all governmental decisions in Haiti, and Marine Corps commanders served as administrators in the provinces. Local institutions, however, continued to be run by Haitians, as was required under policies put in place during the presidency of Woodrow Wilson.

In the 1950s François "Papa Doc" Duvalier (1907–71), a medical doctor, teamed up with a powerful union leader Daniel Fignolé (1914–86) to form the *Mouvement Ouvriers Paysans* (MOP) party. Both men wanted to be president, but Fignolé was

elected in 1957. He occupied his office, however, just 18 days, before Duvalier overthrew him and began his nearly 30-year reign. By 1964 Papa Doc was Haiti's dictator. When he suddenly died in 1971, his 19-year-old son Jean-Claude Duvalier ("Baby Doc") took over. Although there was some easing of government control, there were no radical changes, and Haiti muddled along as an isolated nation.

In 1986 with increasing public dissatisfaction and unrest, Baby Doc fled to France in 1986, leaving the country still impoverished and without commercial development. The United States installed a military regime after Duvalier's departure, with General Henri Namphy (b. 1932) at its head. Once again, however, the promised constitution failed to materialize and the process of democratization was never begun. When Namphy stepped down in 1990, Jean-Bertrand Aristide (b. 1953) became president, the first to be elected in a free democratic election. After proposing an increase in the minimum wage, starting a vigorous literacy campaign and reducing human rights violations, a military coup funded by Haiti's wealthy elite succeeded in overturning the Aristide government.

Again the United States intervened, and Aristide was returned to the presidency in 1994. But there was not much of a country remaining. There was no infrastructure, the economy was in chaos, and more than 4,000 people had been killed. Unable to run immediately for reelection, Aristide stepped aside and started a new political party, *Fanmi Lavalas* (the Family Lavalas Party; FLP). Although the FLP won more than 50 percent of the vote in 2000, the opposition parties protested the results and refused to take part in runoff elections. Aristide won easily again, but the opposition refused to grant legitimacy to his administration.

Aristide took office again in 2001, but he was overthrown in 2004 in a coup supported by the United States, France, and Canada and driven into exile again. An interim coalition government then took over, but the political climate remains volatile. A UN peacekeeping force has failed to mediate the situation, and human rights activists point to what seems, by now, permanent features of the Haitian landscape—violence, rape, and extortion—that continue to mar Haiti's international image.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The beauty and the contrasts of the land seem perfectly matched to the country's checkered history. It shares the West Indies island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic. Haiti is a country of many contradictions—river valleys where the rivers are not navigable; the black sands and gingerbread houses of Jacmel, the white sands of Port Salut, and the ruined English fort on the tiny river island at Aquin; a fertile sunny tropical climate and a cloud forest at Macaya National Park; mountains that block the trade winds, resulting in the arid eastern part.

Haiti's share of Hispaniola consists of two

peninsulas separated by the Gonâve Gulf, and five mountain ranges cross the country: the Chaîne du Haut Piton; the Massif de la Selle, where Pic la Selle, the highest point in Haiti, reaches a height of 8,793 feet; the Massif de la Hotte at the western end of the southern peninsula; the Massif des Montagnes Noires; and Chaîne des Cahos. In spite of these mountainous regions, several large inland plains—the Plaine du Nord, the Artibonite River valley, and the Cul-de-Sac Plain—provide Haiti with its most productive agricultural terrain.

Haiti's climate is tropical but variable due to its geographical contrasts. The average temperature at Port-au-Prince, located at sea level, is 81°F, one of the highest average annual temperatures in the West Indies, but Kenscoff, just south of Port-au-Prince, at 4,700 feet, averages 60°F. The country lies in the hurricane belt, making it vulnerable to severe storms between June and October as well as occasional flooding. In September 2004 Jeanne, a category 4 hurricane, struck the cities of Gonaïves, Port-de-Paix, and the area of Chansolme, leaving the affected areas devastated and more than 3,000 people dead. There are also occasional droughts, and the area is also prone to earthquakes.

❁ ECONOMY

Haiti is the least-developed country in the Western Hemisphere and the second poorest country in the world. Eighty percent of the population lives in abject poverty, and almost 70 percent depends on subsistence farming. There has been virtually no commercial development since the mid-1990s, and the country's inability to agree with international sponsors has resulted in a lack of much-needed economic assistance.

Extreme poverty has created a situation of desperation, and Haiti is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor. But the majority of trafficking in Haiti

involves the internal movement of children for forced domestic labor, called *restaveks*. The *restavek* tradition is widespread in Haiti, and involves situations in which poor mothers give custody of their children to more affluent families, hoping that this will give them access to an education and economic opportunities. The reality though is more a situation of severe mistreatment, abuse, and long hours of uncompensated hard labor. The interim government estimates that 90,000 to 120,000 children live and work in coercive conditions as *restaveks*, but UNICEF's estimate is much higher: between 250,000 and 300,000.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Spanish and French influence resulted in Roman Catholicism becoming the major religion although half the population continues to believe in Vodun, which was declared an official religion of Haiti in 2003. Before its official recognition Vodun was practiced clandestinely and the imposed Catholicism simply meant that Christian symbols were grafted onto traditional beliefs. Holidays like Christmas and All Saints' Day coexist with Vodun festivals like Casse Canarie, Papa Ogou, and Simbi Blanc.

Spirituality permeates everyday Haitian life. It is an integral part of the culture, and satisfying the *iwa* (nature spirits and the souls of ancestors) is central. While offerings often include toys and sacrificial animals, there are also the wonderful *veve*—patterns that represent a particular *iwa* and function as a symbol of him or her. Each spirit (*iwa*, or *loa*) has its own symbol or symbols and colors. These patterns can be painted on the walls of the prayer room or created on the altar with flour, cornmeal, charcoal, ash, gunpowder, chalk, or powdered red brick before a ceremony. These patterns get wiped away by the ritual dancing. The spectacular prayer flags, known as Drapo Art, are spiritual flags worked with sequins and beads in *veve* patterns. They are stored in the altar rooms of temples when not in use and taken out



Vodoun (Voodoo)

An ancient spiritual religion based on the Yoruba religion of West Africa, Vodoun combines Christian and Arawak traditions and beliefs. The word *vodoun* is from the Fon (of Benin) word *voudon*, which means “the power” or “the creator.” The predominant note remains African and the basic belief is in an unknowable, remote Creator, whose various aspects are personified by some 400 orisha, and the *iwa*, who can be alternatively understood as spirits, souls of the dead, guardian spirits of some aspects of nature, or personifications of human concepts. The *iwa* are believed to mediate between humans and the orisha. Vodoun is a complex culture, and

there are many interpretations of the identity and roles of the *iwa*.

The Voodoo often shown in Hollywood movies starting in the 1950s bears little resemblance to the African Traditional Religions (ATRs) as practiced in Africa and in other parts of the world by African descendants.

One thing is certain: slaves had to practice their African traditions in secret and the identification with Catholic saints was as much an attempt to appease their Catholic masters as it was a natural outcome of two highly ritualistic religions. The rites can be positive (*Rada*), or aggressive and quite negative (*Petro*), or only negative (*Secta Rouge*), and extremely negative (*Zobop*).

for Vodun ceremonies and processions. They rank as the country's finest form of art.

The music, drumming, and dancing associated with Vodun rituals have become an important part of Haitian culture. Percussion instruments, such as the *rada* and *petro* drums, are integral to Vodun rites: *Rada* is the gentle, healing, positive aspect of Vodun while *petro* represents the negative, aggressive aspect. Vodun songs continue to be sung in Kreyol and Langai, the languages of the ancestral religions. Even the curiously named Vodun Jazz employs these ancient melodies. Traditional Rara music, which is played during Carnival, shares the drumming techniques and possession trances of Santería, and those possessed by *guédés* (members of a particular family of nature spirits) can reprimand spectators as they see fit.

CUISINE

Haiti's cuisine is varied, ranging from seafood, as in *accrats* (breaded and fried codfish) and conch (a gastropod mollusk), to fresh seasonal vegetables, including pumpkins, the main ingredient in *soupe au joumou*. Haitian cooking uses many herbs, particularly basil. The more common dishes include *riz djon-djon* (rice and black mushrooms) and the *legume* (vegetable and meat stew) that can feed a family at very low cost.

Public/Legal Holidays

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 1

Haiti gained its independence on November 18, 1803, when Jacques Dessalines defeated the French General Rochambeau (1725–1807). Dessalines proclaimed independence on January 1, 1804, and restored the original name of the country Haiti, thus making it the first independent black country in the world.

The presidential address and military parade in Port-au-Prince reflect the solemnity of the occasion while cultural events, food fairs, photography exhibitions, and music lend a celebratory mood to the day. Independence Day is also known as Soup Joumou Day, Haiti day, and Jour de l'Indépendance. Before 1804 Haitian slaves were not allowed to touch *joumou*, a delicious, aromatic pumpkin that was a favorite of their white French masters. After Haitian independence *joumou* soup was prepared as a mark of celebration and freedom. This soup is intrinsic to the celebrations of Independence Day and New Year's Day.

The sounds of *bonjour la maisonnée* (“hello the household”) resonate in every home, because this is New Year's Day as well. Haitians welcome the new year by cleaning the house, wearing new clothes, and

exchanging gifts. People sit down to a traditional dinner with family and friends, complete with the special *soupe au joumou* (“pumpkin soup”).

HEROES DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 2

Ancestors are highly revered in Haiti, and Heroes Day is set aside expressly to honor one's ancestors—heroic or not. On this day, which is also called Ancestors Day, Ancestry Day, or Jour des Aieux (Day of the Forefathers), Haitians offer flowers and food at the graves of their ancestors. Across the nation there are various cultural and folk events and special parades for children.

FLAG DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 18

Flag Day, Jour du Drapeau, commemorates the historic event of 1803 when a group of slaves fighting for the freedom of Haiti tore the white strip out of the French flag to signify their separation. They created a new flag from the remaining blue and red strips, and declared independence on New Year's Day.

Flag Day is a major national holiday that is celebrated with great fanfare. The origin of Haiti's flag is closely linked to the history of its freedom struggle. As a mark of respect, teenagers carry the flag through the streets for an entire week. A Haitian community parade is organized on this day in Port-au-Prince, and participants, dressed in traditional Haitian costumes, march from Southwest Fourth Street to Merritt Park.

BATTLE OF VERTIÈRES DAY

Observed by: Defense Forces

Observed on: November 18

Armed Forces Day, Jour des Forces Armées, commemorates the Battle of Vertières (November 18, 1803) that saw the historic victory of forces led by Jacques Dessalines over the French troops of Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821), led by Rochambeau. Official ceremonies include military parades, performances by military bands, and speeches by the chiefs of military contingents. Soldiers are honored at awards ceremonies.

DISCOVERY OF HAITI DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 5

Christopher Columbus was the first European to discover the island of Hispaniola in 1492. The first Spanish settlement in the New World La Navidad was on present-day Haiti. The original inhabitants

of the island the Taino and Carib Indians called the land Quesqueya and Ayti (land of mountains). Columbus called it “La Isla Hispaniola,” which was eventually abbreviated to Hispaniola.

To celebrate Discovery of Haiti Day, also called Columbus Day, Haitians across the country hold parades and feasts with singing, dancing, and revelry. Traditional cuisine is served at public gatherings.

Religious Holidays

❁ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians and Vodun Followers
Observed on: January 6

Epiphany, also known as *Tirer Gâteau*, *Les Trois Rois*, or Three King’s Cake Festival, is a Catholic holiday that commemorates the arrival of the Three Kings or Magi at Bethlehem to pay homage to the infant Jesus. Guided there by the stationary star over Bethlehem, they brought gifts—frankincense, myrrh, and gold—said to symbolize Jesus’ divinity and his Crucifixion.

This is a day to bake the *tirer gâteau* (“three kings’ cake”) and place the decorative crown on it to signify remembrance of these gifts. In Haiti the celebration is a blend of Catholic and Vodun traditions. People wear white dresses (a symbol of purification

and spirituality) and pray to the powerful Vodun deities. In churches, devotional songs and hymns are sung in honor of the Three Kings, and family elders pray for their children.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ NORRITURE RITUELLE DES SOURCES TÊT D’ L’EAU

Observed by: Vodun Followers
Observed on: February 25

Vodun is a spiritual system in which natural forces are personified as spirits, and Vodun rituals center around human interaction with these powerful spirits. *Norriture Rituelle des Sources Têt d’ l’Eau* (Feeding the Springs) is dedicated to the spirit *Simbi*, a guardian of water sources and the *lwa* (spirit) of rivers, springs, and marshes, as well as the sources of these. He is also believed to be the healer of diseases of supernatural origin. According to Vodun beliefs, the spirits have to be fed if they are to be strong enough to protect the community. They imbibe the life force of the offering, making animal sacrifices necessary.

Speckled roosters are the favorite food of this *lwa* (or *loa*, “spirit”) and thus the appropriate sacrifice for this day. This is the “feeding” that the festival name refers to. Vodun practitioners express their devotion to *Simbi* by wearing green clothes.



Haitian women dressed as Voodoo queens march through the streets of the capital on the last day of Haiti’s three-day Carnival celebration in Port-au-Prince. (AP Photo/Daniel Morel)

Rara Celebrations

After the end of Carnival and throughout the 40-day fasting period of Lent *rara* celebrations are held every weekend. These travel from the countryside into the towns. *Rara* bands with brightly costumed dancers and musicians move slowly through the streets, picking up people along the way. The musical instruments—drums, trumpets, horns, and shakers—are all homemade. The chaos is only apparent as strict codes govern the dancing. The gaiety and colors can be explained by one word—*iwa* (Vodun spirits). The *iwa* of one group protects it from the *iwa* of another group, and the vitality and wealth of each group is seen as an expression of its *iwa*.

CARNIVAL

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Tuesday before Lent

The word “carnival” is derived from the Latin *carne lev* (“the removal of meat”). The celebration traditionally takes place on the days leading up to the austere 40-day fasting period of Lent. Carnival ends on Mardi Gras (translated “Fat Tuesday,” in English, also called Shrove Tuesday), the Tuesday before Lent begins.

Carnival, the most anticipated festival in Haiti, takes place in Port-au-Prince, the capital city. Three days of masquerades (costume parades), zouk music (music inspired by *kompas*, a Haitian adaptation of European ballroom dancing), and a lot of dancing, Carnival is of Catholic origin, but the Haitian version is definitely African. *Rara* music (Vodun music) is prominent at the Carnival parades and features strong percussion and spirit-possession. Participants who are possessed by spirits will frequently chastise onlookers.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CARNIVAL; LENT

ST. JOSEPH EXPRESSION DE LA JURIDICTION LEGBA

Observed by: Vodun Followers
Observed on: March

Legba is the most powerful of the Vodun *iwa* (spirits) and guards the gate between the material world and the spiritual plane. In other words the communication, or the interaction between the spirits themselves and with Vodun practitioners, is not possible without the permission of Legba. For this reason he is the first spirit called upon and, because of his seniority, the first receiver of offerings. He is associated with Jesus and St. Peter and symbolized by both the Sun and the cross. The cross is a traditional symbol of the crossroads, the meeting point of the spiritual and material worlds. On this day Vodun followers sacrifice animal bones and marrow, particularly of roosters and goats, to please Legba.

LEGBA ZAOU

Observed by: Vodun Followers
Observed on: Mid-March

On Legba’s feast day, Feast of Legba Zaou, altars with his representative *veve* pattern are erected indoors, near the entrance to the home. Legba is invoked by chanting and sprinkling rum on the ground, and a black goat is sacrificed to him. Other appropriate offerings include candy, smoked foods, palm oil, green bananas, toys, rice, cassava (manioc), molasses, candles, rum, roosters, chickens, and cigars. In addition to offerings on his feast day, offerings are made on Mondays and on the third of every month, seeking Legba’s blessings of protection and healing.

LOCO DAVI

Observed by: Vodun Followers
Observed on: March 16

Vodun is a spiritual system based on natural forces, presided over or represented by spirits (*iwa* or *loa*), who mediate between the Creator and humans. Rituals are for invocation purposes, to acquire the blessing and protection of these supernatural forces. The French word *manger* means “to eat,” and the festival is about feeding (offering sacrifices to) the forest spirits. Hence this holiday’s alternate name Manger du Bois Rituel (“To Eat Ritual Wood”).

Loco is an aspect of Legba, the most powerful of the *iwa* spirits. Loco is the spirit of vegetation and the guardian of sanctuaries, the patron of healers and of herbs and other plants. He protects worshippers against negative magic and is symbolized by a butterfly. Vodun practitioners always invoke Loco before embarking on a healing treatment. Offerings are placed in straw bags, which are then hung on the branches of a ceiba tree (the Antillean silk-cotton tree).

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, also called Holy Friday, Great Friday (in the Orthodox Churches), or Mourning Friday, is the Christian holiday in remembrance of the crucifixion of Jesus. It is a day of mourning but also holds the promise of the miracle of Easter, when Jesus rose from the dead. In Haiti the day is one of special prayers, readings from the Gospels and the Psalms, and singing hymns detailing Jesus’ life and deeds. Every year thousands of pilgrims from all parts of Haiti and the world arrive at Calvaire Miracle (Miracle Calvary) hill above the town of Ganthier, where they pray at the crucifix on top of the hill.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter commemorates the Resurrection of Jesus after his Crucifixion and is considered the most important Christian holiday. After rising from the dead, Jesus traveled in various parts of the Holy Land for 40 days before ascending to heaven. The devout attend early church services. Kite flying is a Haitian Easter tradition.

One of the most important pilgrimages in the Vodun religion coincides with Easter. Vodun adherents dressed in white flock to the town of Souvenance, where they dance, chant, and sacrifice goats, reaffirming their faith in the principles of Vodun.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ DANBALA WEDO

Observed by: Vodun Followers

Observed on: April 27

This festival honors the iwa Danbala Wedo (identified with St. Louis Cleimeille). He is the oldest of the iwa, a father figure, and symbolizes the knowledge that forms the basis of Vodun. He is the force that sustains the world. The feeling of comfort and peace experienced by all present at the ceremony (or nearby) signifies his presence. He is so sacred that he does not speak but expresses himself only through the hissing sounds made by someone possessed by him. Danbala's symbol is the snake, and a possessed person will slither, dart his or her tongue, hiss, and climb trees.

Danbala brings the rain and, thus, a good harvest. His blessings are sought through a special dance and the offering of white or near-white foods such as eggs, bananas, rice, and melons.

✿ CASSE CANARIE

Observed by: Vodun Followers

Observed on: April 29

Ancestors occupy a special place in the Vodun religion. They protect and act as intermediaries between humans and the Creator. To this end the souls of the dead must leave this world and abide in the city of Ife in Ginen, the realm appropriate to them. *Govis* are sacred clay pots that temporarily hold the souls of the recently dead. In order to ensure that they depart for Ginen, the pots in which their souls are temporarily kept must be broken to release them, hence the alternate name, Breaking of the Jugs. They become part of the iwa (supernatural forces or spirits) and are revered as such. *Govis* on the altars of white magic practitioners of Vodun are believed to be the resting places of iwa until they are invoked.

Govis and Black Magic

Govis are the lidded pots in which *loa* are kept when their help is not sought, and they are kept on altars. But they are also used by *bokors*, the practitioners of Vodun negative magic, to hold the *ti-bon-ange*—one-half of the soul of a person who has been dead for more than a month but less than a year. In this way they can create a zombie (the walking dead). The *gros-bon-ange* is trapped in the body. To release the soul, certain rituals have to be performed, and these include breaking the pot and performing the Casse Canarie ritual. Simply breaking the *govi* will not release the soul. The *ti-bon-ange* (the other half of the soul) needs to be reunited with the *gros-bon-ange* and then sent to the appropriate abode for souls.



ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Forty days after Easter

Ascension is a Christian holiday celebrating Jesus' Ascension to heaven, 40 days following his rising from the dead. In Haiti there are special Masses, prayers, and processions. There are reenactments of scenes from the Gospels and of Jesus being welcomed at the gate of heaven.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY

✿ GRANDE ALOUMANDIA

Observed by: Vodun Followers

Observed on: May 18

Grande Aloumandia is a time to get rid of bad luck, unwanted spirits, and to dismiss vampirelike entities. The festival has gradually evolved into a day of honoring ancestors. Thousands participate in ceremonies and events that include religious dances, cockfights, horse races, and lavish parties.

✿ CORPUS CHRISTI

Observed by: Roman Catholics and Vodun Followers

Observed on: Thursday after Trinity Sunday (May–June)

Corpus Christi, or Fête Dieu (Feast of God), commemorates the institution of the Eucharist on the Thursday (Maundy Thursday) before Jesus' Crucifixion. During his last supper Jesus offered bread and a cup of wine to his disciples, presented as his body and his blood, proclaiming their consumption to be

a sacred covenant. This day became a separate holiday due to the efforts of St. Juliana of Liege, who felt that this momentous event was being lost in the other incidents of that Thursday.

This is a national holiday in Haiti, made beautiful by the altars set up at roadsides by churches. Believers stop to pray at these altars, holding crosses and family photographs, and looking heavenward while praying. Many churches also organize processions.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CORPUS CHRISTI; EASTER; MAUNDY THURSDAY

AGOU

Observed by: Vodun Followers

Observed on: August 30

Agou is the Vodun spirit of the sea and the patron of fishermen and sailors. He is represented as a fair-complexioned mulatto with green eyes, and his symbol is a boat. This observance is called Feeding the Sea. At his feast day ceremonies, Agou is invoked by sounding conch shells. Offerings of champagne and other items are loaded on specially crafted small rafts and set out to sea. If the raft sinks it is believed that the sacrifice has been accepted, and Agou will protect the interests of the person.

ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians and Vodun Followers

Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day, also known as La Toussaint or All Hallows' Eve, is a Christian holiday dedicated to all saints, both known and unknown. In the eighth century Pope Gregory III (r. 731–41) consecrated a chapel to all the Christian saints because there were too many for there to be individual days for each. This chapel is at the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome. November 1 was the anniversary of this consecration. Pope Gregory IV (r. 827–44) assigned this day for observance.

This is a public holiday in Haiti with schools, government offices, and businesses closed. Haitian families gather in cemeteries to honor their ancestors. They offer food, clothes, and other items to the departed souls. It is also traditional to trim the grass in the graveyard, whitewash the graves, and paint the cemetery fences. At twilight, people light candles and place flowers around the graves.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

ALL SOULS' DAY

Observed by: Christians and Vodun Followers

Observed on: November 2

All Souls Day, also called Defunct's Day, Day of the Dead, Fête Guédé, or Jour des Morts, is a Christian day of prayers for the dead. It is believed that souls

are not totally free of sin when they leave the body, and need the help of our prayers to be purified. The day was first observed by the Benedictine monks in the sixth century when they prayed for the deceased monks of their order.

The Haitian spirit Baron Samedi is also invoked on this day by followers of Vodun. He guards the passage between the worlds of the living and the dead and is the most powerful of the Guédé family (spirits or guardians of matters relating to life and death, and of cemeteries) of iwa. His symbol is a cross (signifying the crossroads at which the spiritual and material worlds meet) and the coffin. People visit cemeteries and lay offerings at the tombstones. Many people wear lacy white robes and go around the cemetery burning handmade candles and dripping coffee and liquor on the graves. People remove their clothes, rub hot pepper juice on their bodies, and dance. It is also celebrated as Confession Day, and people visit the church to confess their sins.

See also Volume III: ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus, the founder of Christianity. Interestingly this is not one of the early Christian festivals but was originally the pagan season of renewal, rebirth, and the return of the light, celebrated at winter solstice. Christmas was celebrated in Alexandria, Egypt, in the second century, but on May 20. Even as late as the fourth century, the birth of Jesus was celebrated, along with Epiphany, on January 6. The December 25 celebration was observed in a few places, such as Antioch at the end of the fourth century, but the practice spread from the fifth century on.

In Haiti Christmas celebrations begin a week in advance. The first sign of Christmas is carolers singing in the streets. On Christmas day homes, streets, and whole towns are lit up with tiny lights, and Christmas trees are decorated with bright ornaments and lights. There is a great deal of singing and feasting, and people attend church services and Christmas plays in the evening.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

ST. JEAN'S DAY

Observed in: Port-au-Prince

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: June 24

June 24 celebrates the Feast of St. John the Baptist and is known as St Jean's Day in French-speaking countries. Christians regard John the Baptist as the

precursor of Jesus, representing the light of the world, which explains the link to the summer solstice, bonfires, and the longest day of the solar year. This day is celebrated with bonfires, dancing, and leaping over fires. At midnight wreaths with burning candles are cast into the river. Boat parades, dances, and fireworks are also organized.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ PAPA OGOU

Observed in: Plaine du Nord

Observed by: Vodun Followers

Observed on: July 25

The Vodun pantheon holds a number of *iwa* (spirits) who represent the dynamic forces of the universe as well as human ideals. Ogou was initially the *iwa* of blacksmithing but later, when this profession ceased to be important, he was made the warrior *iwa*. He is the interpreter of Dumbala's messages and the *iwa* of lightning and storms and of politics and victory as well. In his aspect as Ogoun Faraille he symbolizes strength. Ogou is also believed to have inspired the slave revolts of the Haitian independence struggle. He shares his feast day with Jacques Le Majeur (St. James), who is the patron saint of Haiti and depicted as a soldier on a white horse, bearing a flag marked with the cross.

Vodun priests (*houngans*) and priestesses (*mambo*) conduct ceremonies to ensure strength and freedom for all. The ritual includes shaking the religious rattle and beating Vodun drums that have been cleansed and purified.

❁ GRAN DÉLAI ET GRAN ALOUMANDIA

Observed in: Aloumandi

Observed on: July 26

Gran délai et Gran Aloumandia celebrates Erzulie (or Ezili), the Vodun spirit of beauty and love. Erzulie is symbolized by the Moon and is portrayed as a beautiful dark-skinned woman. She is seen as loving and kind but temperamental. In this aspect she is called Erzulie Ge-Rouge and portrayed with her knees drawn up to her chin and her fists clenched, weeping fiercely as she mourns the life's brevity and love's imperfection. In spite of these tantrums Erzulie is lavish with her love and with her gifts, and her altars reflect this luxury: Champagne, perfumes, jewelry, makeup, roses, and beautiful clothes are appropriate offerings. On her fingers she wears three wedding rings, one for each of her husbands: Damballa, the serpent god (Erzulie is represented as a water snake); Agwe, god of the sea; and Ogoun, the warrior hero.

July 26 is also the Feast of St. Anne (although Erzulie is identified with the Virgin Mary), the mother of the Virgin Mary and the wife of St. Joachim. They were an elderly couple and childless.

Joachim and Anne both appealed to God, separately, for a child. An angel appeared to each and told them that their child would be considered blessed the world over. St. Anne was canonized in 1584, but her feast day was first celebrated in the fourth century.

In Haiti the day usually starts with a Catholic Mass, after which an effigy of St. Anne is taken from each village church and placed in a shrine. This is followed by rituals and dancing, and at the end of the day the effigy is returned to the church, marking the end of the festival.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ MANGÉ YAM

Observed in: Various regions

Observed on: November 25

Mangé Yam (literally, "eating the yams") is Haiti's harvest festival (also called Fête de la Moisson; *moisson* means "harvest"). On this day farmers decorate their carts and paint the horns of their bulls. Yams are offered to ancestors and the household gods to ensure a bountiful harvest from the next crop.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

When a child is born in a Haitian family, the parents try to please Hestia, the Greek goddess of the hearth. The house is her symbol, and it is traditional for the newborn to be carried around the house before being received into the family. Food, animal sacrifices, and gifts are offered to the goddess following the birth of a child. In return she is expected to provide health, protection from evil spirits, and good fortune to the newborn.

❁ MARRIAGE

Haitians have to register with the ministry of Religious Affairs before solemnizing a Vodun marriage. After a ceremony before a civil judge the wedding ceremony is conducted by a Vodun practitioner. Music and dance are key elements of any Vodun marriage, and people wear white clothing. The ceremonial dance is an expression of spirituality and of connection with the divine and the spirit world. Guests present gifts to the couple, but gifts of money are not appropriate. The wedding cake is cut at the couple's home. Food at the reception includes conch, fried pork, and black rice prepared in the Creole style.

❁ DEATH

Haitian beliefs do not consider death to be the end of life but the beginning of a new phase. Death rituals

accomplish a number of functions in the Vodun religion. The most important is to send the *gros-bon-ange* (one part of the soul, understood as the life force) to Ginen (the cosmic community of ancestral spirits), after which family members can worship it as an *iwa*. If the journey is not completed the *gros-bon-ange* can be trapped on Earth and bring misfortune to the family members. To avoid the hovering of the *ti-bon-ange* (the second part of the soul) on the dead body, a ritual called the nine nights is performed to ensure that the *ti-bon-ange* stays in its grave.

Further Reading

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~ Honduras ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Central America, bordering the Caribbean Sea, between Guatemala and Nicaragua and bordering the Gulf of Fonseca (North Pacific Ocean) between El Salvador and Nicaragua
Size	43,278 sq. mi.
Capital City	Tegucigalpa
Flag Description	The flag of Honduras has three equal horizontal bands of blue (top), white, and blue with five blue five-pointed stars arranged in an X pattern centered in the white band; the stars represent the members of the former Federal Republic of Central America (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua).
Independence	September 15, 1821 (from Spain)
Population	6,975,204 (2005 est.)
Government	Democratic constitutional republic
Nationality	Honduran
Major Ethnic Group (s)	Mestizo (90%)
Major Language(s)	Spanish; Amerindian dialects
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (97%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Americas Day, April 14; Labor Day, May 1; José Trinidad Cabañas Day, June 9; Independence Day, September 15; Soldiers' Day, October 3; Columbus Day, October 12; Armed Forces Day, October 21

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Present-day Honduras was once part of the Mesoamerican civilization. Western Honduras was part of the Mayan Empire that flourished from the fifth century to the early ninth century C.E., but earlier sites date back to at least the second century. Copán was the site of a major Mayan kingdom of the Classic Era named Xukpi (“Corner-Bundle”). The magnificent ruins of Copán remain, and the last dated hieroglyph goes back to 800 C.E. Other pre-Columbian sites, at La Travecia and the Ulua Valley for example, have provided evidence of other pre-Columbian civilizations.

After the Maya other indigenous people arrived in Honduras—tribes related to the Toltec people of Mexico, and the Lencas, Chibcha, Sumu, and Jicaque from Colombia—and

the descendants of these indigenous peoples remain. The most prominent groups claim Lencas and Garifuna ancestry, but the majority of the population is Mestizo, of mixed European-Amerindian ancestry.

Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) landed on mainland Honduras (near modern Trujillo) in 1502 and called it Honduras (which means “depths”) referring to the deep coastal waters. Spanish colonization of the highland areas of the country began in 1524. Some local tribes resisted the Spanish colonizers well into the late 1530s. One of the native leaders who stood proud and was successful in resisting the Spaniards was Lempira (? 1499–1537). He was a member of the Lenca nation and is still celebrated as a national hero.

Spanish settlements proliferated along the coast, and Honduras came under the control of the Captaincy General of Guatemala. Under Spanish rule Honduras was a major mining center for gold and silver. In the 16th century slaves

Lempira

A national hero of Honduras, Lempira was chief of the Lenca tribe and one of the few to resist Spanish control successfully. His name means “gentleman of the mountain.” In the 1530s he organized the native tribes against the Spanish and turned back the Spanish forces led by Captain Alonso de Cáceres, who was en route to govern the Congolón area. This area is known as the Department of Lempira. The Honduran currency, named after Lempira, honors his heroic efforts.

were brought in. In the 17th century, because gold and silver deposits were dwindling, the Spanish largely abandoned Honduras.

In 1821 Honduras, along with other Central American territories, gained independence from Spain. After being briefly annexed by Mexico, it joined the newly formed United Provinces of Central America in 1823. Honduran-born General Francisco Morazán (1792–1842) was the last president of the Central American federation and its most ardent defender. Despite his efforts to maintain Central American unity, however, Honduras broke away to declare itself a sovereign nation in 1838. Morazán is considered a national hero in Honduras, and a day for honoring him is celebrated throughout the country.

Since then upheavals, foreign interventions, and short-lived governments have caused chronic instability. There have been 300 internal rebellions, civil wars, and changes of government in Honduras, more than half of which occurred during the 20th century.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

A Caribbean nation bordered by Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador, Honduras is a mountainous country with narrow coastal plains. The climate ranges from temperate in the mountains to

subtropical in the lowlands. Honduras is home to the largest tropical rain forest in the Western Hemisphere, with three different zones: Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve, Tawahka Anthropological Reserve, and Patuca National Park, the largest structurally intact forest in Mesoamerica.

ECONOMY

From the late 19th until the mid-20th century, foreign capital, plantation life, and conservative politics dominated Honduras. The power of the banana plantation owners gave rise to the term “banana republic.” During the 1980s Honduras, surrounded by political turbulence in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, depended on strong U.S. influence, aid, and military assistance to maintain stability relative to its neighbors.

Honduras has been designated one of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries eligible for debt relief by both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Honduras is one of the poorest countries in the Americas. Although the economy somewhat improved under President Ricardo Maduro (b. 1946), the distribution of wealth continues to be extremely polarized, and the average wages of the population are still very low. Many people live below the poverty line.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Roman Catholicism is the predominant religion of the country. The indigenous tribes practice their own religions, often combining Christian elements with African and Amerindian traditions. Catholic saints are important in the life of Hondurans, and Catholic homes always have pictures or statues of saints. Not only do individuals and families pray to saints for help with problems, but whole towns and villages celebrate the feast days of their patron saints. The blend of traditional customs with Roman Catholicism is best exemplified by the Guancaco ceremony, a peace ceremony that includes folk dances and is celebrated between neighboring towns or villages on the days of the patron saints.

Latin Americans love soccer, and Hondurans are no exception. The Honduran soccer team is exceptional, and outstanding players are national heroes. However soccer remains a male-dominated sport in Honduras.

The conch is very much a part of life here: The conch shell has been a popular musical instrument since pre-Columbian days, and modern musicians often play the conch accompanied by a guitar or accordian.

CUISINE

Conchs figure prominently in the cooking of Honduras, and conch soup (made of the gastropod that lives in the shell) is a favorite dish. Other popular

Fun Fact

In 1980 UNESCO declared Copán a World Heritage Site.

The Soccer War

In 1969 Honduras and El Salvador entered into a brief war known as the Soccer War. This took place during a World Cup qualifying soccer match between the two countries. Games were played in both countries, and the hostilities were sparked by the mistreatment of supporters of the visiting countries. The real cause, however, was the immigration of 300,000 El Salvadorans into Honduras during the previous 20 years. This war lasted for 100 hours.

foods include fried plantains, tacos, tortillas, and tamales—all featured dishes throughout Central America. A typical Honduran meal consists of at least two of the above, served with rice and beans.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

On New Year's Eve Hondurans wear their best clothes. At midnight everyone who has been able to stay awake goes out to wish his or her neighbors a happy, prosperous new year. As with many other Honduran holidays, music and dancing are important features of the celebrations.

❁ AMERICAS DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 14

Honduras celebrates Americas Day, or Pan-American Day, in a manner similar to that of several other Central and South American countries (Belize, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic). There are parades and cultural events to celebrate Pan-American culture. Pageants, competitions, and cultural programs are held in schools to make school children aware of the different cultures and customs that exist in the various American countries.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

On Labor Day, also called May Day and Workers' Day, workers from all over the country gather in Tegucigalpa, the capital city, to take part in the Labor Day parade. Rural workers travel long distances by bus or on foot to take part in peaceful demonstrations of solidarity in the city.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ JOSÉ TRINIDAD CABAÑAS DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 9

The Pineapple in Honduras

Hondurans eat their pineapple and have it too. The flesh is used for pies, juice, and jam; the skin for tea and vinegar; and the top is soaked in water until it grows roots and can be replanted.

June 9 is the day set aside for Hondurans to honor José Trinidad Cabañas. They remember Cabañas (1805–71) for his efforts to keep the Central American federation together. He served as president of Honduras during the 1850s and tried to make his dream of a railway in Central America a reality.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 15

Independence Day commemorates the declaration of independence from Spain of the Central American provinces of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica in 1821. These nations formed the United Provinces of Central America in 1823, but this federation disintegrated, and Honduras proclaimed itself independent in 1838.

Firecrackers typically mark many Honduran celebrations, and this day is no exception. There are parades, music, fireworks, food, and parties.



Students dressed in traditional attire participate in Independence Day activities, in Tegucigalpa. The country celebrates its independence from Spain on September 15. (AP Photo /Antonio Romero)

SOLDIERS' DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 3

Soldiers' Day, also known as Francisco Morazán Day in Honduras, marks the birthday of General Francisco Morazán, a national hero who led the struggle to free Honduras from Spain. In 1829 he led the revolt that ousted Manuel José Arce (1786–1847). He was made president of the Central American Federation in 1830, but his efforts to maintain unity were unsuccessful, and the federation was dissolved in 1838. In 1842 Morazán became president of Costa Rica, but his continued attempts to restore Central American unity led to his betrayal and his death at the hands of his own party on September 15, 1842. His name was suggested for use on Honduran currency, but supporters of Lempira, the other national hero, won by six votes. Nevertheless once a year Hondurans pay homage to this great leader with parades and fireworks.

COLUMBUS DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 12

Christopher Columbus was the first known European navigator to reach the Americas and the Caribbean islands. He arrived in Honduras on his fourth and last voyage in 1502 and named the country Honduras, referring to the deep coastal waters. October 12 is celebrated as Columbus Day in English-speaking countries, where the celebrations include civic parades, parties, and fireworks. In many Caribbean and Central and South American countries, including Honduras, however, this day has more recently been renamed Día de la Raza, Day of the Race, by indigenous peoples. They have designated it a day to also celebrate the cultures that were jeopardized by the actions and influences of the Europeans who followed Columbus.

ARMED FORCES DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 21

Armed Forces Day commemorates the revolt of 1956, which ousted the dictator Lozano Diaz. This annual celebration recognizes and honors the Honduran military, and military installations are usually open to the public on Armed Forces Day.

Religious Holidays

SUYAPA DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: February 3

Suyapa Day, also called The Feast of Virgin Suyapa, honors the Virgin of Suyapa, the patron saint of Honduras. She protects the capital city of Tegucigalpa and provides food and shelter for the people of her country. Her feast day has been celebrated here for more than 250 years.

The holiday begins with a nine-hour pilgrimage from El Piliguin to the cathedral in the capital city. Here believers assemble to venerate a small statue of the virgin. This three-inch high wooden statuette was discovered at El Piliguin in the 18th century by a poor farmer. Miracles have been attributed to this figurine, which is now in the Santuario de Suyapa in Tegucigalpa.

This is one of the most important holidays in the country, and there are processions, ceremonies, Masses, and concerts to celebrate the day. The discovery of the tiny statue is reenacted. In the capital the festivities continue from February 3 to 10. In Suyapa, a nearby village surrounded by lush mountains and plantations, the holiday is observed from February 1 to 3.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: Thursday before Easter

Maundy Thursday, or Holy Thursday, is a Catholic commemoration of the day on which Jesus washed the feet of his apostles before the Last Supper. It falls on the Thursday before Easter. If falls during Holy Week, which was the last week of the mortal life of Jesus. Christians believe that Jesus is the son of God, the embodiment of the second person in a Holy Trinity comprising the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In recognition of Jesus' simple action, Hondurans celebrate this day as a day of humility and thankfulness.

The name Maundy Thursday may be linked to the Latin word *maundatum*, which means "command," because, during the Last Supper Jesus commanded his apostles to observe the ritual now called Communion. The Easter Triduum officially begins after the Communion at the Maundy Thursday evening service and concludes with the evening service on Easter Sunday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday observes the day on which Jesus, believed by Christians to have been the Messiah, was crucified by the Romans. Christians also believe he was the Son of God, embodying the second being of the Holy Trinity. The day is a part of Holy Week, or Passion Week, the last week of Jesus' mortal life. He died after three hours on the Cross. His Crucifixion occurred at the same time that the paschal lambs (for

the Jewish feast of Passover) were being slaughtered (between noon and 3 P.M.). Out of this synchrony came the symbolism of Jesus as the sacrificed lamb, the “true paschal lamb.” His death is believed to have redeemed the world, and the name “Good Friday” expresses the Christian belief that even death cannot overshadow God’s love for humanity. This is a day of sorrow, and so it is also called Black Friday and Mourning Friday. It is an aliturgical day in the Catholic Church, so there is no Communion. At 3:00 in the afternoon, the lights in churches are dimmed, and no bells ring.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

In Honduras prayer services are held on Easter, and there are parades, feasts, dances, and parties. Traditionally colorful Easter eggs are purchased or decorated at home. The eggs are given as gifts, while the children of the family engage in Easter Egg Hunts. The winners are those who find the most eggs that the adults have hidden, and they receive a prize. The day is associated with new life, and draws much of its symbolism from pagan spring rituals in celebration of Eostre, the Germanic fertility goddess. Eggs and hares, both of which are powerful symbols of rebirth, were sacred to Eostre.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

A few days before Christmas, Nativity scenes are set up in homes, and the infant Jesus is covered with a blanket. On Christmas Eve the blanket is removed to reveal the baby. Christmas Eve Mass is a widely attended event by Catholics, and afterward there are parties and gifts exchanged. Hondurans usually spend the rest of Christmas Eve with relatives, feasting far into the night.

Homes have Christmas trees decorated with strings of small lights and ornaments. Christmas Day is a time for family celebrations, followed by get-togethers with neighbors and friends. Traditional foods include pork, eggnog, beer, and tamales—baked cornmeal with meat and a sauce, wrapped in plantain leaves. Children are given their Christmas presents, and the family may then attend a fireworks display.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ GUANACO FESTIVAL

Observed in: Intibucá, Francisco Morazán, Lempira

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December–January

Guanaco is a peace ceremony practiced between Lencan towns and villages, or in regions the Lencas used to inhabit. Elaborate and colorful, the ceremony includes folk dances and the *paisanazo*, a dance inspired by both the Moorish (Spanish Arabic) and Christian cultures. The traditional ceremony involves intense drumming, chanting, marimba music, and dancing, including the *paisanazo*. It is performed on the day dedicated to the patron saints of the participating towns and villages.

While most villages share their Guanaco with just one or two other villages, some villages, like Chinacla and La Paz, take part in many. The most important celebrations are in Intibucá, Francisco Morazán, and Lempira. The Guanaco between Mejicapa and Gracias in Lempira is held December 12–16; in Mejicapa it takes place on the feast day of St. Lucia; and in Gracias from January 19 to 25, on the feast of San Sebastián.

Fun Fact

The original name of this holiday may well have been God’s Friday because, in Early Modern English, *good* meant “holy.” Also the two words were often interchangeable as in, “God be with you,” now elided and spelled “good-bye.”

❁ FIESTA DE SAN ISIDRO

Observed in: La Ceiba

Observed on: Third week of May

The Fiesta de San Isidro is one of the greatest of Honduran carnivals. It honors La Ceiba’s patron saint Isidro. The original European settlers called the town La Suiza de San Isidro, because it reminded them of Switzerland. Born at the end of the 11th century, Isidro was a poor, hardworking farm laborer devoted to God and to prayers who never missed the Santa Missa in the mornings, even if it meant being late for work. When his coworkers complained to their boss Juan de Varga, he went to investigate and saw in the fields the oxen working by themselves, as if guided by unseen hands. This miracle was reported far and wide, as were other miracles that followed. Isidro was canonized in 1622. His feast is celebrated with a week of costume parades, dawn-to-dusk music, and dancing.

Rites of Passage

✿ MARRIAGE

In small villages parents select a local girl for their son after he turns 20. Next they seek the blessing of a priest and ask for an auspicious day for the marriage ceremony. The groom's family offers the bride's parents gifts in order to secure their consent. The marriage ceremony includes a gala feast. The new husband then moves to his father-in-law's house to work for him for seven years, after which time the young couple is allowed to move to their own home.

✿ DEATH

Funerals are held 24 hours after someone dies. Relatives and friends of the deceased get together to offer condolences to the family. The traditional wake is usually held before the Catholic Mass and burial.

It is customary to have a large drum party a year and a day after the death of a family member. The family of the deceased saves money throughout the

year for this party and may seek financial help from relatives living in other parts of the country and abroad. The house is cleaned and decorated, and vast quantities of food are prepared days in advance of the party. Drummers are hired, and family members arrive from far and wide. The drumming continues as long as the food, drink, and money last.

Further Reading

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Hong Kong

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Eastern Asia, bordering the South China Sea and China
Size	422 sq. mi.
Capital City	Hong Kong
Flag Description	The flag of Hong Kong is red with a stylized, five-petal white Bauhinia flower in the center.
Independence	October 1, 1949 (Founding of the People's Republic of China); July 1, 1997 (Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region of China)
Population	6,898,686 (2005 est.)
Government	Limited democracy (Special Administrative Region of China)
Nationality	Chinese, Hong Konger
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Chinese (95%)
Major Language(s)	Chinese (Cantonese dialect); English (both official)
Major Religion(s)	Eclectic mixture of local religions (90%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Chinese Dragon Boat Festival, June; Establishment Day, July 1; Mid-Autumn Festival, September; Zhong Yeung, September 9; National Day, October 1

Introduction

HISTORY

There is strong historical evidence that the region known as Hong Kong has been inhabited by humans since the Stone Age. Until it was occupied by the British, the area was a neglected portion of the Qing Empire (1644–1911 C.E.); its population was made up of farmers, fishermen, and pirates. In 1841 the British took control of Hong Kong after the Opium Wars.

A series of conflicts between Hong Kong and Britain followed Britain's assumption of control over Hong Kong, during which the British had backing from French, Russian, and American interests. The British and the French forces combined to invade China in 1859, and the Chinese were forced to agree to the Convention of Beijing, under which the Kowloon Peninsula and nearby Stonecutters Island were ceded to the British. In 1898 the British signed a 99-year lease on a part of Hong Kong called the New Territories.

A civil war in China during the 1920s and the Japanese invasion in the 1930s led Chinese capitalists to flee from the mainland to the safer haven of the colony. During this period Hong Kong started moving away from trade to manufacturing. However in the 1950s, in the wake of a U.S. embargo on Chinese goods during the Korean War, Hong Kong was compelled to increase its manufacturing capacity and develop service industries, such as banking and insurance. When the Communists came to power in China in 1949 and during the Cultural Revolution there in the 1960s, Hong Kong's existence was threatened once more by mainland China's desire to bring Hong Kong under its control.

In 1984 the British decided to withdraw from the entire colony at the end of the lease period in 1997 rather than maintain a fragmented colony comprising Kowloon and Hong Kong Island. In 1997 the Chinese government designated Hong Kong a Specially Administered Area. During the ensuing period Hong Kong underwent many hardships as a result of economic crises in Asia in the late 1990s. In the early years of the 21st century, it experienced near-zero growth as well as rising unemployment and falling property values.

Opium Wars

The Opium War, also known as the Anglo-Chinese War, was the most humiliating defeat that China has ever suffered and, perhaps, among the most sordid events in European history. By the 1830s, the English had become the largest drug-trafficking criminal organization in the world. Growing opium in India, the East India Company shipped tons of opium into Canton, which it traded for Chinese manufactured goods and tea. This trade produced a society filled with drug addicts, as opium parlors proliferated throughout China during the early 19th century. British traders generously bribed Canton officials in order to keep the opium traffic flowing freely.

The effects on Chinese society were devastating. A key player in the shady business was a young idealistic official named Lin Ze-hsu. Deeply concerned about the opium menace, he maneuvered himself into the position of imperial commissioner at Canton. He was imbued with the idea of disrupting the opium market by hunting corrupt officials and cracking down on the British trade. Within two months of taking charge, he had taken action against Chinese merchants and Western traders and

shut down all the traffic in opium. He destroyed all the existing stores of opium and wrote to Queen Victoria of England requesting that the British call a halt to this nefarious trade.

The English, despite Lin's powerful letter, refused to stop the opium trade. In response, Lin threatened to cut off all trade with England and expel all English from China. This led to the first Opium War. It began when Chinese junks attempted to turn back English merchant vessels in November of 1839. Although this was a low-level conflict, it inspired the English to send a fleet of warships in June 1840. The Chinese, with old-style weapons and artillery, were no match for the British gunships, which moved up and down the Chinese coast shooting at forts, besides fighting on land. The Chinese were stunned by the technological superiority of the British land armies and suffered repeated defeats. Finally in 1842, the Chinese were forced to accept an ignominious peace under the Treaty of Nanking. The second Opium War in 1856 pitted the Chinese against the British and French. The second defeat of the Chinese ended in the Treaty of Diantsin in 1858.



China's official policy toward Hong Kong is that of "one country, two systems." In other words, Hong Kong is part of China, but Communist-ruled China has agreed to allow Hong Kong to continue as a capitalist center. As a result the European Commission has described Hong Kong as one of the freest societies in Asia, regardless of the lack of full democracy.

Most experts believe that as long as Hong Kong continues to make money (and avoids any kind of dissent) this special status is relatively secure. However recent interference in Hong Kong's affairs by Chinese authorities shows that there is no autonomy in the real sense of the term.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Hong Kong is made up of a peninsula jutting out from the southeastern part of China and hundreds of islands scattered off the coast. On the peninsula are Kowloon and the New Territories. The New Territories is the area of land in Hong Kong, north of the Kowloon peninsula, south of Shenzhen and the Shum Chun River and Hong Kong's outlying islands (including Lantau Island, Lamma Island, Zheng Chau, and Beng Chau). They were leased from Qing China to Britain in 1898 for 99 years under the provisions of the Second Convention of Peking.

The other portion of the country includes Hong Kong Island and other remote islands. Hong Kong Island is located slightly south of the Tropic of

Cancer. There are approximately 234 outlying islands. Lantau Island is the biggest of Hong Kong's islands, but the island of Hong Kong is the most famous and most populated.

The ocean around Hong Kong is quite deep. With its wide harbors protected by mountains located to the north as well as to the south, the area is ideally suited to function as a transit corridor for ships. Its geographical location between the Taiwan Straits, the South China Sea, and the Pacific Ocean make it a strategic channel for maritime traffic between the Asian continent and the rest of the world.

Hong Kong stands on a volcanic terrain, with its landscape dominated by hills and mountains. Hong Kong's backbone is a crest running from the northeast to the southwest. Both the Kowloon Peninsula and the northwestern New Territories are mainly flat. Three percent of Hong Kong's total land area is under cultivation, and this lies mostly in the New Territories' large alluvial plains.

Although Hong Kong rests on volcanic plains, there is only minor seismic activity, occasionally causing tremors. No major earthquakes occurred during the 20th century; the last one, which had a magnitude of 5.75 on the Richter scale, was back in 1874, but it caused only minor damage.

Hong Kong has a subtropical climate. Hong Kong's location falls within the tropics, but its seasonal changes are far greater than most places at similar latitudes. Monsoons and seasonal alternation

of winds regulate and modify the climatic system of the country.

❁ ECONOMY

Hong Kong's position as one of the world's most valuable economic centers is due to several factors. It is located midway between Japan and Singapore and lies on the main shipping and air routes of the western Pacific. It also has long served as a major port of entry and trade for China, which uses Hong Kong as a primary link to the world economy.

Hong Kong has a congenial atmosphere for the pursuit of trade and commercial activities. Hong Kong's economy has always hinged on commerce, trade, and shipping, Hong Kong vies with Singapore as the world's largest container port. Industry and tourism also enjoy considerable importance. Agriculture provides a large portion of Hong Kong's food and flower supplies, but Hong Kong must still import the majority of its foodstuff.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Hong Kong enjoys a stimulating, highly dynamic, cosmopolitan lifestyle. It also has a tranquil side to it with lush green countryside and remote beaches accessible only from the sea. Approximately 40 percent of Hong Kong has been set aside as Country Park and is shielded from development. Botanists and zoologists are still uncovering hitherto undiscovered species of flora and fauna here.

Hong Kong's embrace of both oriental and occidental culture is evident in its art centers, museums, and libraries. The annual arts festival and cultural events held throughout the year feature top performers from all over the world. Hong Kong's image as a metropolis belies a unique heritage, a fine blend of ancient Chinese traditions and British colonial influence.

❁ CUISINE

Hong Kong's cuisine is a fusion of Eastern and Western flavors. Its cultural blend, proximity to mainland China, and its emphasis on quality have made Hong Kong a gourmet's paradise. A diversity of Asian culinary arts can easily be found in Hong Kong. These include spices from Thailand, rich aromatic flavors from India, and the delicacies of Japan and Korea, among others.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

Although this former British colony embraces the Western New Year's celebration, the Chinese New

Year is the bigger of the two celebrations. In Hong Kong people begin celebrating the Western (Gregorian) New Year's on December 31 with parties for friends and family. They exchange gifts and greeting cards to celebrate the day.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

The May 1 observance of Labor Day, also called May Day and Workers' Day, honors the workers of every nation. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, designated May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

In Hong Kong all the government offices, businesses, and schools are closed. The day is commemorated by a large number of labor union rallies, meetings, and speeches.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ THE CHINESE DRAGON BOAT FESTIVAL

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Fifth of the fifth lunar month in the Chinese calendar

The Chinese Dragon Boat Festival is one of the most significant holidays celebrated in Hong Kong. Competing teams row boats shaped like dragons to the rhythm of drumbeats, in a frenzy to reach the finish line first.

The boat races on this day are connected with a tragic incident that took place in ancient times. A renowned patriotic poet Chu Yuan had drowned himself on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month in 277 B.C.E. In anguish the Chinese citizens who witnessed the incident threw bamboo leaves filled with cooked rice into the water so that the fish would eat the rice and not harm the poet's body. This later turned into the custom of eating *zingzi* (rice dumplings filled with ham or bean paste), which is in vogue even today.

This racing festival is a time to ensure protection from evil and disease for the rest of the year, and people hang healthy herbs on their front door, drink nutritious concoctions, and display portraits of evil's nemesis, Zhong Guei, a protective spirit. If one manages to stand an egg on its end at exactly 12:00 noon, the following year will be lucky. This holiday also marks the beginning of hot weather, and people are heard to say, "Don't put your warm clothes away until you have eaten dragon boat rice dumplings."

Origin of Mid-Autumn Festival

The origin of the Mid-Autumn Festival is not very clear. It is said that the festival originated in ancient times, when people held ceremonies to honor the Moon Goddess, or to celebrate the mid-autumn harvest. However another version says that the Mid-Autumn Festival commemorates the uprisings in China against Mongol rulers in the early 14th century. Unlike the Chinese Mongols did not eat Moon cakes, so the rebels hid a small piece of a note detailing their plans inside each Moon cake, which were then smuggled to compatriots.

ESTABLISHMENT DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 1

This day marks a milestone in the political history of Hong Kong. On this day in 1997 the British relinquished control of Hong Kong to China, and Hong Kong attained the status of a Specially Administered Region (SAR) of China. This day is celebrated by civic ceremonies and a brilliant display of fireworks in the evening.

MID-AUTUMN FESTIVAL

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Fifteenth of the eighth month of the Chinese calendar

For this traditional Chinese festival the full Moon is supposed to be at its roundest and brightest. To the Chinese the full Moon symbolizes family unity and togetherness. On this occasion family and friends come together to visit scenic spots, marvel at the beauty of the Moon, eat Moon cakes (a salty and sweet pastry), and *bomeluo*s (“grapefruit”) together. Children carry brightly lit lanterns for the occasion. Farmers celebrate the end of the agricultural season and the harvest on this date.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

ZHONG YEUNG

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Ninth of the ninth month of the Chinese calendar

Zhong Yeung, or Autumn Remembrance, is a much-beloved holiday in Hong Kong; people usually enjoy the day hiking and visiting high places such as the hills and plateaus around the city. It is believed that long ago a family living in this region had gone out on an excursion to a nearby hill. When they came home,



A brother and sister talk while sharing some of the food offerings to the deceased at their ancestors' grave at the Diamond Hill cemetery in Hong Kong. Hong Kong people clean and sweep their ancestors' graves, a tradition of the Zhong Yeung Festival that shows respect for the dead. The festival is a public holiday in Hong Kong. (AP Photo/Anat Givon)

they found all their animals had mysteriously died. Out of this legend developed the belief that going to a high place would save one from similar disasters.

❁ NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 1

This day commemorates the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. This most important of official PRC holidays was first celebrated in Hong Kong in 1997 following the transfer of control from Great Britain to the PRC.

In Hong Kong this day is observed through a series of official and community activities such as a flag-raising ceremony, which is attended by a large number of guests, including the chief executive of Hong Kong, senior government officials, members of the consular corps, dignitaries, and community leaders. Activities include a sea parade and an air force fly-over, a variety show, and a display of fireworks in the evening.

Religious Holidays

❁ CHINESE NEW YEAR

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Starts with the second new moon after the winter solstice and ends two weeks later with the full Moon

The most exciting festival in Hong Kong is the Chinese New Year, which usually occurs between January and February of the Gregorian (Western) calendar and lasts two weeks. New Year's Day festivities focus on lavish feasting and family gatherings. This period is highly anticipated by the Chinese since this festival brings bright new hope for the coming year. This holiday is also known as the Spring Festival, the Lunar New Year, and Tet in Vietnam.

In preparation for the holiday, it is traditional to clean one's house from top to bottom. Children, youth, and unmarried people receive red packets (*ang baws*) containing money as a token of blessings and good wishes from their elders and other married relatives. (The color red predominates because it symbolizes good fortune for the Chinese.)

During a typical Chinese New Year dinner, a variety of dishes are served, most notably, the *nin gou*. This resembles pasta, drenched in soy sauce and mixed with bamboo shoots, cabbage, pork, and Chinese straw mushrooms. Another important seasonal dish is abalone (a gastropod mollusk) with cabbage drenched in oyster sauce. Other dishes enjoyed during Chinese New Year include *ru youk* (stewed pork), goose giblets, jellyfish, and soup with egg dumplings and vermicelli.

While the festivities may go on for the full two weeks, only the first three days are actual holidays for schools, businesses, and government offices. The last day of the celebration period is considered to be "everyone's birthday" (and the Chinese do not celebrate their actual birth dates) although this day is not an official holiday.

See also Volume III: CHINESE NEW YEAR; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ JING MING FESTIVAL

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: One hundred and sixth day following winter solstice according to the Chinese calendar

This festival is also known as Remembrance of Ancestors Day or Grave Sweeping Day (also transliterated as Qing Ming). It celebrates the beginning of spring and is observed on the 106th day following winter solstice and is celebrated in April of the Western (Gregorian) calendar. Literally, the name means "Pure Brightness" (*jing*, which means "pure or clean," and *ming*, which means "brightness").

The worship of one's ancestors is the only religion indigenous to China. On Ching Ming families visit the graves of their ancestors and relatives. They carry incense sticks and paper offerings (paper money, paper clothes, or any other paper items), which are placed on the graves. All paper offerings are burned because the people believe that the deceased can receive the gifts, including money, in this manner. Special food items like roasted suckling pig and steamed chicken, along with fruit and wine, are offered during the ceremony. Some people carry willow branches with them or hang them on the sides of their front doors. It is believed that willows help them to get rid of evil spirits, since Ching Ming is one of the days that ghosts and spirits roam the earth freely.

See also Volume III: SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ VESAK

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: Full Moon day of fifth or sixth month of Buddhist calendar

Vesak, or Wesak, the Buddha's Birthday, commemorates three major events in the life of Gautama Buddha (the founder of Buddhism): his birth, enlightenment (nirvana), and his *mahaparinirvana* (quitting of the worldly body, or salvation). In Hong Kong, which has a sizable Buddhist population, followers show their devotion throughout the day by bathing Buddha's statues. Celebrations center on the major temples and monasteries of Hong Kong. Po Lin Monastery on Lantau Island, which houses the world's largest, seated, outdoor bronze Buddha, is the hub of activity on this day. The people carry gifts of food items and flowers to the temples and monasteries, where they pray for good fortune and pros-

perity throughout the coming year. Everyone enjoys the sumptuous Chinese vegetarian dishes cooked by the monks at Po Lin Monastery.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM; VESAK

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26

Boxing Day, also known as Christmas Bank Holiday and St. Stephen's Day, commemorates a medieval English custom of giving servants and the poor Christmas gifts the day after Christmas, which is on December 26. On this day church boxes used for collecting money for the poor are also opened, hence the name, Boxing Day. Gifts are given to those who render useful services throughout the year. Boxing Day is also the feast day of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr.

Because of Hong Kong's long association with Britain, this day is an important holiday in the region. Hong Kongers traditionally celebrate Boxing Day with picnics, excursions, and other outdoor activities. It is also an official holiday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS; BOXING DAY

Rites of Passage

❁ MARRIAGE

In Hong Kong society, affluent families have traditionally sought brides who are able to manage household finances efficiently and above all produce sons who will inherit the family wealth. In contrast poor families have traditionally sought simple homely brides who could work hard in the fields and produce sons who would grow up to become helping hands.

In earlier days marriages were arranged, and it is still common for the parents to dominate the bride-seeking process. Traditionally all communication regarding marriage is carried out through formal letters. Therefore letters play an important role at various stages of traditional marriages even today. Three letters are involved in the process.

1. *Request Letter*: Confirms the formal arrangements of an impending marriage. It is sent by the groom's family to that of the bride. It is customarily presented with the initial gifts for the bride's family.

2. *Gift Letter*: Accompanies the formal gifts for the bride's family. In reality this is a checklist that records the description and quantity of the gifts.

3. *Wedding Letter*: This letter is presented to the bride's family on the day of the wedding. It confirms the act of absorbing the bride into the groom's family.

The Chinese definition of the word *etiquette* includes both customs and gifts. The following steps comprise the *Six Etiquettes*:

1. *Request for Marrying the Bride*—After the

groom's family has selected a girl whom the groom wants to marry, the family hires a spokeswoman to communicate its wishes to the prospective bride's family. (In the old days, elderly women were hired as spokeswomen for the grooms.) This spokeswoman persuades the potential bride's family to accept the offer from the groom's family. Both sides will negotiate the terms. If they can come to an agreement, they proceed to the next phase.

2. *Request for Bride and Groom's Birth Dates*—In the second phase the groom's family will request the bride's "letters" through the spokeswoman. After obtaining the letters of the groom and bride, an astrologer will be hired to determine whether the two are compatible. If all is fine with the bride's birth date, the groom's family will proceed to the next step. Otherwise communication between the two families will cease, and the groom's family may look elsewhere.

3. *Initial Gifts for the Bride's Family*—If the potential bride's birth date is acceptable the groom's family will request the spokeswoman to send some initial gifts, accompanied by the gift letter.

4. *Formal Gifts for the Bride's Family*—The groom's family will select a good day and send the bride's family the bridal gifts: cash, cakes, food, and items of sacrifice for worshiping the ancestors. This act confirms the marriage pact between the two families.

5. *Selecting the Wedding Date*—The astrologer will select a good day according to the birth dates of the bride, the groom, and their family members. After the groom's family has agreed to the good day as the wedding day, a man who is known to have experienced good fortune all through his life will be employed to set up and decorate the conjugal bed and move it to the appropriately designated place. Next, a lucky woman (one who has a healthy husband and many sons) will decorate the bed more and place a few tokens of good fortune (such as food and fruits) on it. After the nuptial bed is decorated, it is to be left untouched until the time the marriage is consummated.

The bride's gifts for the groom will reach the groom's house a couple of days before the wedding day or, if she lives very far off, she will bring gifts (carried by her maids) to give to the groom when she arrives at his home on the wedding day. The bride's gifts usually consist of gems and jewelry, kitchen utensils, bed linens, and clothes.

6. *Combing of the Hair*—The night before the wedding both the bride and the groom have to find a lucky person (a woman for the bride and a man for the groom) to comb their hair in their respective homes. The bride and the groom each bathe, change into fresh new lingerie, and burn incense in their rooms. It is customary for the bride to sit next to a window from which the Moon is visible. Her hair has to be combed ceremonially four times, and each step has a special meaning:

The first round symbolizes from beginning till the end.

The second round symbolizes harmony from the present to old age.

The third round symbolizes many sons and grandsons.

The fourth combing symbolizes wealth and a long-lasting marriage.

The whole ritual also symbolizes the attainment of adulthood by the couple. If either has been married before, then the combing event is skipped.

On the day of the wedding, both the bride and the groom's homes will be decorated predominantly in red. The groom's family sends a procession of servants, musicians, and a litter (palanquin), which is carried by four servants to the bride's family to bring the bride to the wedding ceremony.

When the groom's procession arrives at the woman's home, the groom's spokeswoman enters the bride's house and carries the bride on her back until she reaches the carriage. By no means should the bride's feet touch the ground before she arrives at the groom's house. In some regions it is customary among the bride's relatives to throw handfuls of rice into the air, so that the chickens nearby will eat the rice instead of pecking at the bride. In many cases a red umbrella is used to shield the bride; the opening of the umbrella symbolizes her bringing many children to the groom's family. The parents and relatives bid her farewell as she sits in the carriage to depart to her new home.

After the bride reaches the groom's house, the two of them will take part in the marriage ceremony, which will be witnessed by their relatives and friends.

The bride and groom will worship the heavens and the Earth, as well as the groom's ancestors, and then they will serve tea to all senior members in the family. Thereafter the elders will give them red packages (*lai see*) containing monetary gifts and wish them health, wealth, and happiness. If they can afford it the groom's family will also throw a huge feast for their friends and relatives. The groom's spokeswoman will oversee the whole process and repeatedly toast the couple.

When the ceremonies are over the couple drinks and toasts each other; the spokeswoman offers sweets and fruit to the couple, thereby wishing them a long and happy married life with lots of children. After the meal the newlyweds proceed to the bridal chamber. As soon as the couple is left alone the groom takes off the red veil that covers the bride's face.

Further Reading

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Hungary

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Central Europe, northwest of Romania
Size	35,919 sq. mi.
Capital City	Budapest
Flag Description	Hungary's flag has three equal horizontal bands of red (top), white (middle), and green (bottom).
Independence	1001 (unified by King Stephen I)
Population	10,006,835 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary democracy
Nationality	Hungarian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Hungarians (90%)
Major Language(s)	Hungarian
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (68%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Hungarian Revolution Anniversary, March 15; Labor Day, May 1; St. Stephen's Day, August 20; Republic Day, October 23

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Throughout its history Hungary has been a great survivor. It survived the onslaughts of the Tartars and Turks, the Habsburgs and Russians in the Carpathian Basin, and the enormous devastation of two world wars. The difficulties faced by the Hungarians have even been integrated into their national anthem, which describes Hungarians as “people torn by fate.” At the time of the Roman Empire Hungary was known as the province of Pannonia. After the fall of Rome, it was invaded by a number of tribes around 375 C.E. Prominent among them were the Huns (a Mongolian-Turkish nomadic tribe) who expanded into Eastern Europe. This marked the beginning of the Great Migration Era (migration of Germanic, Turkish, and Slavic tribes from Eurasia and their settlement in Europe). The Huns founded their empire in the region of Hungary in the fifth century. For a time it was led by Attila, who was considered the greatest king of the Huns. It is likely that the name Hungary is derived from the name of the Huns.

Apparently contemporaries mistakenly referred to the peoples living in the Carpathian Basin as Hungari, believing that they were descendants of the Huns.

After the empire of the Huns disintegrated Germanic tribes ruled Hungary for about 100 years; they were followed by the Avars, a nomadic Eurasian tribe. During the 200-year supremacy of the Avars, various tribes, including the Slavonic tribes, Moravians, Bulgars, Croato-Serbian, and Poles, tried to establish control in the region, but none of them could stand up to the might of the Avars. Near the end of the ninth century, a confederation of seven nomadic tribes, calling themselves Magyars (ethnic Hungarians), migrated to Hungary from the Eurasian plains and, finding the basin ideal for their pastoral-agrarian way of living, began establishing settlements. Unlike other tribes migrating into Europe at the time, they did not speak an Indo-European language such as Germanic or Slavonic. The Magyars arrived speaking a language that incorporated traces of Turkish and Iranian influences that linguists have classified as Finno-Ugric.

The Magyars fought many battles with the Avars and ultimately defeated them, gaining power over the region. Árpád (c. 850–907), the elected leader of the Magyars and the six

other tribes, led his army to victory against the ferocious Avars. His successors founded the kingdom of Hungary. Stephen I (997–1038), a descendant of Árpád, became chieftain when his father, Geza (c. 940–97), died, and consolidated his power by ousting rival clan chiefs and taking their lands. Pope Sylvester II (c.950–1003) agreed to recognize Stephen as king, and he was crowned the first king of Hungary on Christmas Day in 1000.

Árpád's descendants continued to rule the country until 1301, after which a series of weak rulers and uprisings among the peasants in the Pannonian lowlands and parts of Transylvania resulted in the disintegration of central rule. The resulting chaos set the stage for the next empire to rule Hungary, the Habsburgs, who reigned as kings of Hungary from 1526 to 1918, and pursued a resettlement of ravaged areas with new immigrants from Austria and Germany, Slovakia, Romania (Wallachia and Moldavia at the time), and Serbia. The Habsburgs also ruled numerous hereditary lands in central Europe, collectively named the Austrian Empire in 1804, and the Hungarians constantly struggled against absorption into the homogenized Habsburg Empire.

The Revolution of 1848 began on March 15 with mass demonstrations against Habsburg rule throughout the kingdom. Taking advantage of the uprisings, Hungarian reformers declared Hungary's autonomy within the Habsburg Empire. Following this Austria came to power in Hungary. Amid rising resistance to Austrian rule within the Hungarian kingdom, the Compromise of 1867 was signed, and a dual monarchy came into existence in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The compromise provided that Austria and Hungary would maintain essentially separate governments under the same monarch. Foreign policy, the military, and the economy remained unified, but the Hungarian government became an equal partner in the administration of the empire.

In June 1914 seven conspirators armed by the Black Hand (a secret society of Serbian officers) assassinated Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, Bosnia, the spark that ignited the Great War, now known as World War I. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand brought into play the tangled alliances of Europe. Although Hungary and the Archduke shared a mutual dislike of each other, the Austro-Hungarian military dragged Hungary into the punitive war against Serbia. Russia, which had long had designs on Hungary, came to the aid of Serbia, Germany allied with Austro-Hungary against Russia, and France and England allied with Germany against Russia. The result was disastrous for Austro-Hungary.

In 1918 as a result of its defeat in World War I, the Austro-Hungarian monarchy collapsed. An interim government foolishly disbanded the weary army. The Romanians, Czechs, and Serbs seized the opportunity and quickly occupied huge areas of Hungary. In March 1919 Leninist Bolsheviks joined the government, and in April Bela Kun (1886–1939), a leading Hungarian Communist,

Attila the Hun

Attila the Hun was a great warrior and the most powerful king of the European Huns. During his reign European Huns led a series of invasions into neighboring countries and annexed them. He was known as Attila the Conqueror, and his empire stretched from the Danube River to the Baltic region and covered all of central Europe, as well as the region around the Black Sea. He died in a battle with Germanic tribes in 455 C.E., marking the end of the European Hun Empire.

proclaimed the Hungarian Soviet Republic and took over the remaining unoccupied areas. This government proved to be short-lived because the Romanian army invaded Hungary. The Communist forces were defeated, and the Soviet Republic was brought down on August 6, 1919. For the first time in its history the Carpathian Mountains no longer protected Hungary, and the winners of World War I awarded more than two-thirds of Hungary, along with millions of Hungarian speakers, to Serbia, Romania, and the new country of Czechoslovakia.

Led by the former Austro-Hungarian Admiral Miklos Horthy (1868–1957), rightist military forces entered Budapest in the wake of the defeat by Romania and filled the power vacuum. Horthy made an alliance with Nazi Germany in the 1930s, in the hope of reversing the territorial losses that had followed World War I. Hungary was rewarded by Germany with the return of historically Hungarian territories that had been absorbed by Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania. Hungary took an active part in World War II. Following the fall of Nazi Germany Hungary fell under the Soviet sphere of influence and was converted into a Communist state following a short period of democracy in 1946–47.

After 1948 Communist leader Matyas Rakosi (1892–1971) established a Stalinist regime in the war-ravaged country. On October 23, 1956, hundreds of thousands of Hungarians rose up against the government in what came to be known as the Hungarian Uprising, and within days millions of Hungarians had come out to support it. The Stalinist regime was deposed and reform-minded Communists took control of the country. When the rebels announced their intention to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact (a treaty in which eight Eastern European Communist states pledged to defend one another if any one was attacked), the Soviet Union intervened with overpowering military force. Reform-minded Communist Prime Minister Imre Nagy (1896–1958) was arrested and executed. In the end 50,000 Hungarian rebels and 7,000 Soviet troops were killed. Thousands more were wounded in the fighting.

In the late 1980s Hungary led the movement to dissolve the Warsaw Pact and shifted toward a mul-

tiparty democracy and a market-oriented economy. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Hungary developed closer ties with Western Europe, joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1999, and the European Union (EU) on May 1, 2004.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

East of the Alps, the Carpathian Mountains form a crescent of snow-capped peaks, enclosing an alluvial plain where, tens of thousands of years ago, a huge inland lake had existed. The mountains, interspersed with rolling hills, protect the open spaces on its north, east, and southeast sides. Shaped like a kidney, Hungary lies in the center of Europe, sharing borders with seven other countries: Austria, Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Croatia, and Slovenia.

Although Hungary is predominantly flat, the landscape ranges from the low-lying regions of a great plain in the east, called the Great Hungarian Plain, to mountain ranges and hilly regions in the west and southwest. The country is divided into three large regions by the Danube (Duna) and Tisza Rivers. The highest peak in Hungary is Mount Kekes at 3,330 feet in the Matra Mountains along the country's northern border.

Hungary has over 1,000 lakes. The largest among them is Lake Balaton, the major attraction of Hungary's resort area, and the largest freshwater lake in western and central Europe. There are also a number of thermal lakes, among which Lake Hévíz (Hévíz Spa) is said to be the largest in the world; it is also reputed to have curative effects.

The climate of Hungary is continental (a climate typical of the interiors of the large continents of the northern hemisphere): The winters are cold, cloudy, and humid, and the summers are warm to hot. The coldest month in the country is January and the hottest, July. The average annual temperature is 50°F, with temperature extremes of approximately 81°F in the summer and 22°F in the winter. The country enjoys an average yearly rainfall of approximately 24 inches.

ECONOMY

From the beginning agriculture has played a significant role in Hungary's economic system, but the history of the nation has often led to drastic changes. The Habsburgs enjoyed a feudal system in which the peasants toiled to increase the wealth of the nobility. Under Soviet domination the forced collectivization of farms impoverished the nation, and the final decades of the 20th century were economically tumultuous. Following World War II the peasants were given land rights, but between 1949 and 1963 the farms were forcefully collectivized. However the system, based on centralized instructions without productive incentives, meant that agricultural production in the 1960s was unable to match the levels

recorded in 1938. Since 1975 the Hungarian agricultural and food industries have managed some recovery, especially in some sectors of production and attained internationally recognized high standards.

A member of the European Union (EU) since 2004, Hungary has steadily made the transition from a centrally planned economy to a demand-driven market economy. It has made tremendous strides and now boasts a per capita income close to one-half that of the Big Four European nations (Germany, Italy, France, and Great Britain). But the citizens of Hungary have paid a price for these economic successes: a high level of inflation (still in the high- to mid-teens), an unemployment rate that continues at well above 10 percent (more in eastern areas of Hungary), and a painful decrease in the real earnings of workers, especially those in the public sector—teachers, medical personnel, and civil servants—as well as those living on fixed incomes, the elderly in particular.

The major industries in Hungary include mining, metallurgy, agriculture, construction materials, processed foods, textiles, chemicals (especially pharmaceuticals), and motor vehicles. Most of the country's trade is conducted with Germany, Austria, Italy, and Russia. The principal import items include fuels, raw materials, and semifinished products, agricultural and forestry products, and light industrial goods. The main exports are agricultural products, pharmaceuticals, bauxite, machine tools, and lighting equipment.

Although the ongoing privatization process has caused a drop in agricultural production, the disrupted balance is being restored to a realistic level of supply and demand since its realignment based on actual market conditions. Since 1997 Hungary has enjoyed steady economic progress, with growth rates around 4 percent a year. Despite the worldwide economic slowdown, Hungary's gross domestic product (GDP) growth—at a little over 5 percent in 2000—was the highest in the world, mainly pushed by increased exports. The nation has made progress dealing with inflation and unemployment, both of which have substantially declined since 2001. In the midst of technological advances and restructuring, Hungary is taking great care to make sure that its natural resources are not depleted or destroyed.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The culture of Hungary is rich and colorful, a reflection of the country's history, which has brought together a variety of traditions: Magyar, Roman, German, Slovak, Croatian, Serbian, and Romanian. Home to great folk art traditions, producing beautiful items of embroidery, pottery, and carving, Hungary is also known for great architecture, music, and literature. Violinists and pianists from Hungary are celebrated worldwide, and the country has given the world great composers such as Franz Liszt, Bela Bartok, Zoltan Kodaly, and Ferenc Erkel, who com-

Hungarian Suicide Song

The music for “Gloomy Sunday” (Szomorú Vasárnap)—the notorious Hungarian Suicide Song—was written in 1933 by Rezső Seress (1899–1968), a Hungarian pianist and composer. (Seress did actually commit suicide in 1968 by jumping out of a window.) The crushing hopelessness and bitter despair that characterized the two stanzas penned by Seress were superseded by the even more mournful, melancholic verses written by Hungarian poet László Javorka. When the song received public attention, it quickly earned the dubious reputation of being a “suicide song.” Hungarian reports tell of people

who took their lives after listening to the haunting melody, or who left the lyrics with their farewell letters. Many radio stations, including the BBC, banned “Gloomy Sunday,” saying it was too depressing for the airwaves. To alleviate the pessimistic tone of the song, a third stanza was added, giving the song a dreamy twist, but the suicide reputation has remained. The English version of the song became very popular and many artists have covered it since Billie Holiday’s interpretation in 1941, including Sarah Vaughan (1961), Genesis (1968), Ray Charles (1969), Sinéad O’Connor (1992), Björk (1999), and Venetian Snares (2005).

posed the Hungarian national anthem and the first Hungarian opera. Literature has been inspired by the monumental events of the nation’s history, giving rise to odes, inspiring poems of independence, and producing gritty tales of realism.

The Roman, Gothic, Baroque, and Art Nouveau periods have all influenced Hungarian art and architecture. Thermal baths and spas are an important part of modern life in Hungary. The tradition is an old one as archaeologists have unearthed Roman baths in Hungary.

Because they have been the primary breadwinners in the home, men have traditionally dominated Hungarian families. But as more and more women have become wage earners, the traditional family roles have changed dramatically, and women have come to play more significant, high-profile roles within the family and the larger community as well.

In traditional Hungarian society, games and sports competitions have played an important role, especially for children, and the nation is well known for water sports such as swimming, canoeing, and water polo.

❁ CUISINE

Hungarian cuisine tends to be heavy and meat-centered because traditional recipes reflect the importance of agriculture, especially the family farm, and provide directions for preparing flavorful and unforgettable peasant dishes. Many popular dishes from Hungary took advantage of the bounty of the land and required slow cooking while the farmers worked in the fields. These are stick-to-the-ribs, clog-your-arteries food, many of them pork and beef dishes, particularly goulash (a beef soup) and a stew called *porkolt*. Basic dishes consist of fatty meat (pork is generally preferred) or overcooked fish, a quantity of starch, and a garnish of pickles. The main dishes often contain potatoes, and are flavored with paprika, black pepper, and onions. Sausages, sauerkraut, and a variety of dumplings are also popular family meals.

In addition to *porkolt* and goulash, popular Hungarian delicacies include *balaszle* (spicy fish soup cooked with paprika), *jokai bablèves* (bean soup), *bideg gyümölcsleves* (cold fruit soup made from sour cherries), and *palacsinta* (stuffed crepes).

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR’S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 1

The first day of the Western or Gregorian calendar January 1 is celebrated as New Year’s Day throughout the world. In a Hungarian ceremony to usher in the New Year (Ujev), the priest uses salt and water to bless the parishioners’ houses and marks the initials of the three biblical kings (Gaspar, Balthazar, and Melchior) who came to visit the infant Jesus on the doorstep.

On New Year’s Eve (Szilveszter), the effigy of Jack Straw, a puppet signifying the bad luck of the outgoing year, is burned after being paraded through the village. This ancient tradition symbolically destroys the misfortunes of the old year, clearing the way for good luck in the new year. On the streets of Budapest masks and noisy paper trumpets are sold in stalls.

Fun Fact

The first public bath in the Pannonia province (modern-day Hungary) was built by the Romans when the province was part of the Roman Empire.

❁ HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION ANNIVERSARY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 15

The Hungarian Revolution Anniversary (1848-as Forradalom és Szabadságharc) commemorates the beginning of the Revolution of 1848 against the rule

Fun Fact

Hungarian scientists invented the match, the ballpoint pen, the electronic railway engine, Rubik's cube, and the first helicopter capable of vertical elevation.

of the reactionary and incompetent Habsburg monarchy in Vienna. This war of independence against Austrian rule aimed at abolishing feudalism, modernizing the economy and infrastructure, and establishing a modern constitutional state with civil liberties. Lajos Kossuth (1802–94), the leader of the Hungarian Revolution, based many of his ideals on the U.S. Declaration of Independence.

Hungary very nearly achieved independence in a series of military victories. When Austria enlisted Russian military assistance, however, the Hungarian Revolution was crushed, and many of its leaders were hanged or shot.

In Budapest people gather at the statue of Sándor Petöfi (1823–56), a Hungarian poet, writer, and leader of the 1848 Revolution, and in front of the National Museum for speeches by politicians and readings of Petöfi's *National Ode*. The Hungarian tricolor of red, white, and green is displayed all over the country. Government offices, businesses, and schools are closed.

✿ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day (*A munka ünnepe*),

also called May Day or Workers' Day to commemorate the important role played by workers in society. The day was first decreed as Labor Day in 1889 by the Socialist Second International. Under Communist rule the day was celebrated as Workers' Day but has since been renamed Labor Day.

In Hungary workers celebrate the holiday with beer and musical programs, sponsored by local trade unions. Workers' unions organize events in Városliget (Budapest's city park) that include speeches, acrobats, clowns, food, and music. It is a national holiday with schools, businesses, and government offices closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

✿ ST. STEPHEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 20

This is the day on which Hungary's first king the Christian St. Stephen was crowned and the Hungarian (Magyar) state was founded in 1000 C.E.

St. Stephen's Day (Szent Istvan napja; also called Foundation Day) is celebrated with sporting events, parades, and an impressive fireworks show over the Danube River at night. A floral festival in Debrecen and a bridge fair in Hortobágy are also held on this day. August 20 is also known as the Day of the New Bread, because traditionally the first bread from the new harvest is baked on this day.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS



Members of the Hungarian National Cavalry dressed in traditional Hussar uniforms march in front of the Parliament building during the flag-raising ceremony held on Kossuth Square, Budapest, on March 15 to commemorate the 1848–49 civil revolution and war of independence against Habsburg rule. (AP Photo/MTI, Tibor Rozsahegyi)

❁ REPUBLIC DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 23

On October 23, 1956, Hungarian students rose up against the Stalinist government in what came to be known as the Hungarian Uprising. Millions of Hungarians came out to support the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 (Az 1956-os népfelkelés emléknappja). The Stalinist regime was deposed, and Communists bent on reform took control of the country. When the rebels threatened to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact, the Soviet Union intervened, and the prime minister Imre Nagy was arrested and executed. Tens of thousands were killed or wounded in the fighting. From the beginning of the uprising on October 23, the revolt lasted just 18 days.

October 23 is also the anniversary of the declaration of a multiparty democracy in Hungary in 1989.

Religious Holidays

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter (Husvet) is a Christian feast celebrating Jesus' Resurrection from the dead three days after his Crucifixion. This holiday falls on the first Sunday after Lent. In Hungary Easter eggs, a traditional symbol of life and rebirth, of all styles and colors are painted the day before. For Hungarian Christians the eggshell symbolizes the Old Testament portion of the Bible, and the inside represents the New Testament. Moreover, these symbols of rebirth allude to Jesus' resurrection.

Early Sunday morning, children awake to find small gifts of candy and toys beside their beds. A traditional breakfast of Easter eggs, ham, braided cake bread, horseradish, and hot chocolate follows. Many families attend church on Easter morning.

Easter Monday, the first Monday after Lent, is a national holiday and extends the Easter celebration. In earlier days young men would pour buckets of water over young women's heads, supposedly to ward off evil and protect them from harm; in return the women would reward the men with kisses and eggs painted red for passion. Today, instead of pouring water, they spray perfume, and painted eggs as well as chocolate ones are exchanged.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Fifty days after Easter

Both the Sunday and Monday of this holiday celebrate Pentecost, the day on which Christians believe

the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus' disciples 50 days after the Resurrection. These holidays are also known as Whitsunday and Monday (Punkosd vasárnap as hatfo). Devout Christians attend church on both days, and the religious celebrations are followed by a public holiday. In Szentendre craftspeople and folk artists host celebrations. Monday is a national holiday with government offices, schools, and businesses closed.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; PENTECOST

❁ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholic
Observed on: August 15

Assumption Day, the Day of the Great Lady, is celebrated by Catholics as the day the Virgin Mary was bodily taken into heaven, a dogma of faith since 1950. St. Stephen, whose feast is also celebrated in August called Mary "the great Lady of the Hungarians," and dedicated the country and its people to her. This holiday is not only Mary's greatest festival, but one of her oldest. Its origins lie in the earliest days of Christianity. It is a very special day for Hungarians, and Marian devotion is said to be a national characteristic.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

❁ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day (Mindenszentek napja) is a Christian feast, honoring all the saints of Christianity. On this day Hungarians pay respect to their deceased loved ones by lighting candles at their graves.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 24–26

The Christian festival of Christmas (Karacsony) celebrates the birth of Jesus. Hungarian families enjoy most of their celebrations on December 24, rather than December 25. The Christmas tree is decorated on the 24th with real candles and *szaloncukor*, a special holiday candy wrapped in red and gold foil with a bow. In some families the adults decorate the

Fun Fact

This day honoring St. Stephen (Szent Istvan), considered the founder of the nation, is observed by carrying a case containing the right hand of the saint in a procession from St. Stephen's Basilica through the streets of Budapest.

Fun Fact

Horseradish is eaten with the Easter breakfast ham, because the pungent odor of horseradish is traditionally thought to possess magical powers to ward off evil. According to legend babies who eat horseradish will not get colic.

Fun Fact

On December 6, St. Nicholas Day, Hungarian children receive small gifts and candy from Santa Claus if they've been good. Children place their boots by the window the night before and Mikulas (St. Nicholas), dressed in bishop's robes and wearing a mitre (the tall, pointed ceremonial headdress worn by bishops), fills the boots with presents.

Christmas tree, surprising the children with a tree decorated by angels. With the candles lit, the family gathers around the tree to sing Christmas carols and opens the gifts arrayed beneath it. After a Christmas feast (often roast turkey, chicken, or fish with cabbage and a special Christmas poppy bread called *beigli*). At midnight Catholic families proceed to the local church to attend a special Christmas Mass. The tree is left up for as long as it lasts.

Christmas day is usually spent relaxing with friends and family. The second day of Christmas is celebrated on December

26 and continues the holiday spirit as Hungarians visit family and friends and exchange greetings and gifts. Christmas was an official two-day holiday under Communist rule as well, following the 1956 Uprising.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Rites of Passage

BIRTH

In Hungary many pregnant women place their trust in midwives for a safe delivery. Some Hungarians believe that cutting the baby's cord less than six or seven inches from the body would mar the baby's physical appearance.

MARRIAGE

Traditional Hungarian weddings are three-day events. All of the guests are personally invited either by the best man or the bride and the groom.

In earlier times the bride wore a tricolor wedding dress along with a headdress embedded with wheat, which symbolized fertility. In the villages the entire village would escort the bride, seated in a decorated cart, to the church or the groom's house, where the wedding would take place. There was also a custom of kidnapping the bride by a group of relatives before the wedding, and the groom had to rescue the bride from her alleged kidnappers.

When she reached the groom's house, the bride

was offered a glass of wine by the groom's parents. After drinking the wine, she was required by tradition to toss the glass over her shoulder. Then she would break an egg, a symbol of fertility, on the floor, indicating her desire to have healthy children. Another ritual involved breaking plates on the floor and tossing coins among the shards. Hungarians believed that the more pieces created when the plate broke, the more successful married life would be. The bride was then required to separate the coins from the pieces of plate as a test of her industriousness.

Prior to a church ceremony Hungarians are married in a civil ceremony to legalize the marriage. In the presence of two witnesses and a legal authority, the bride and the groom are declared husband and wife under Hungarian law after confirming that they have freely chosen to get married and signed their names in the marriage registry. The couple then goes to a local church for a Catholic wedding ceremony where their friends and family join them.

During the church service the couple sit on a platform in front of the altar, while friends and relatives express their good wishes for the couple through poems and songs or share fond memories of the bride and the groom. After exchanging wedding vows, the bride and groom move their rings to their right hands from the left, where they had worn them from the time of their engagement. The priest pronounces them husband and wife, and the wedding guests congratulate the newlyweds. After the wedding ceremony the bride presents her husband with three or seven handkerchiefs (three and seven are considered lucky numbers by Hungarians); the groom gives her a small bag of coins.

A wedding reception with much feasting, singing, and dancing follows the church service. A custom called the "money dance" is observed: The guests have to "pay" money to earn the right to dance with the bride. They either pin the money on her wedding gown or drop it into her wedding shoes. The money is used by the bride to set up her new home, as well as to meet the expenses of the honeymoon trip. Dancers are accompanied by the violin, the traditional musical instrument for weddings.

Further Reading

Steve Fallon and Neal Bedford, *Lonely Planet: Hungary*, 4th ed. (Footscray, Aus.: Lonely Planet Publications, 2003); Paul Lendvai, *The Hungarians: A Thousand Years of Victory in Defeat*, Ann Major, trans. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); Miklos Molnar, *A Concise History of Hungary*, Anna Magyar, trans. (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

~ Iceland ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Island in Northern Europe, northwest of the United Kingdom between the Greenland Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean,
Size	39,769 sq. mi.
Capital City	Reykjavik
Flag Description	The flag of Iceland is blue with a red cross outlined in white extending to the edges of the flag; the vertical bar of the cross is closer to the hoist side
Independence	June 17, 1944 (from Denmark)
Population	296,737 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional republic
Nationality	Icelandic
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Norse and Celts (94%)
Major Language(s)	Icelandic; English; Danish
Major Religion(s)	Evangelical Lutheran (86%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Sprengidagur, February 8; First Day of Summer, April 22; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day, June 17; Labor Day Weekend (August)

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The first inhabitants of Iceland were Irish monks who stayed on the island during the late ninth century C.E. About 30 years after they left, Norwegian Vikings arrived and became the first permanent settlers in Iceland. There are vivid descriptions of these Viking adventurers, who came from Norway in long-boats, in the *Landnámabók* (*Book of Settlements*), an Icelandic genealogical record from the 13th century. The period between 870 and 930 is known as the Age of Settlement, when conflict in Scandinavia forced many people to seek refuge in Iceland. It is thought that the Vikings were escaping from their tyrannical King Harald Haarfagri (Harald Fairhair, Harald I; c. 848–c. 931) who wanted their lands in southern Norway.

The settlers decided to adopt a parliamentary form of government because they had experienced the drawbacks to monarchy in their native country. A district assembly and a state assembly, or Althing, were created in 930, and a code of law was drawn up. The Althing is considered to be the oldest

functioning legislative body in the world. Iceland was declared a Christian country in 999, and this helped to unite the country. Over the course of the next century, Iceland developed an agrarian economy.

Iceland enjoyed 300 years of independence until the first half of the 13th century when a period of great turmoil and political wrangling called the Sturlung Age began. A Norwegian king named Hákon Hákonarson (Hákon IV or Hákon the Old; 1204–63), invaded the country and ruthlessly plundered it. At the same time, Mt. Hekla (4,890 feet), Iceland's most active volcano, erupted in 1300, 1341, and 1389; many lives were lost and property destroyed. On top of the invasion and volcanic eruptions, epidemics, including the Black Death (bubonic plague), raged through the country between 1348 and 1350.

Danish rule was imposed on Iceland at the end of the 14th century. Religious conflict between church and state in Europe culminated in the Protestant Reformation of 1550 when the Lutheran faith became Denmark's official doctrine.

Iceland had endured many centuries of domination by foreign powers. It continued to suffer from exploitation by the Danes on the one hand and natural catastrophes on the other.

Mighty Explorers

Many explorers in the North Atlantic used Iceland as their base. Among them was Eric the Red, the son of a Norwegian who settled in Iceland. Eric colonized Greenland in 982 C.E., and his son Leif Eriksson is considered to be the first European to have explored the North American coast. He christened it “Vinland the Good,” because of its pleasant climate and wealth of natural resources. In one of the Icelandic sagas, Eriksson is said to have heard about Vinland from another Icelander named Bjarni Herjolfsson, who had come across it 14 years earlier. These explorations are the main subject of the literary sagas of this period.

Pirates were another source of trouble. Icelanders began to feel the need to assert their right to self-rule. In the early half of the 19th century, the independence movement gained momentum with a nationalist named Jon Sigurdsson (1811–79) as its leader. He took the demands of the Icelanders to Denmark and pressured the Danish government to give partial independence to Iceland. In 1874, Denmark allowed Iceland to draw up its own constitution. Iceland was permitted to decide its domestic

issues and, in 1918, was given partial freedom, with the status of an independent state within the Danish kingdom. But Denmark still controlled Iceland’s defense and foreign affairs.

During World War II Germany invaded and occupied Denmark in 1940. Even though Iceland had previously maintained a position of neutrality, British forces invaded and took control of the region on May 10, 1940. Iceland quickly responded by agreeing to fight alongside the occupying forces.

In 1941 responsibility for the defense of Iceland passed to the United States, which took control of the region from

British forces. During the U.S. occupation a plebiscite was held in Iceland in which the people voted unanimously in favor of independence from Denmark. Iceland declared its independence on June 17, 1944.

In 1949 Iceland became a charter member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) under the stipulation that it would not participate in any kind of offensive action against another nation.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Geologically a relatively young country, the main island of Iceland is made up of desert plateaus, sandy deltas, volcanoes, lava fields, and glacial landscapes. About half of the country is above 1,312 feet and the highest point, Hvannadalshnúkur, is about 6,952 feet.

Less than 1 percent of Iceland is fit for agriculture, and this area is located in the southwest between the capital of Reykjavik and the town of Vik. Due to frequent volcanic activity and earthquakes, there are practically no trees, but the island has grasslands, bogs, and barren deserts in addition to a number of hot springs and geysers.

In Iceland summers are mild, and winters rather cold. The southern and western coasts receive a lot of rainfall, and July and August are the warmest months. The northern and eastern parts of the country have better weather. The deserts in the interiors are prone to blizzards and sandstorms. The climate is very changeable in Iceland and during the course of a single day one can experience rain, sunshine, drizzle, and snow. The air is clean and relatively free of pollution.

Iceland can be divided into the following regions: Reykjavík and the capital area, west Iceland, Westfjords, north Iceland, east Iceland, the central highlands, and south Iceland, each having its own charm and unique terrain. In west Iceland the glaciers and waterfalls are spectacular. The Westfjords has a sparse human population but plenty of wildlife in the form of seabirds and Arctic foxes. There are small, scattered fishing villages that still make their living from the sea. In north Iceland, which is part of the Arctic Circle, most people live close to the coast in communities that are sheltered from the elements.

East Iceland is made up of mountains, plains, highlands, and glaciers. In south Iceland there are moss-covered lava fields that are a couple of centuries old. There is a lot of geothermal activity that produces several hot springs, which are very popular with visitors. In the central highlands, the landscape is barren, with glaciers and deserts of black sand, springs, and active and spent volcanoes. There is also the occasional outcrop of vegetation that has managed to survive despite its inhospitable sub-Arctic surroundings.

ECONOMY

Iceland’s capitalist economy is supplemented by a well-developed welfare system. Unemployment rates are low, and there is little disparity in income. The main source of revenue is the fishing industry, which employs almost 12 percent of the population. Due to the almost constant darkness, business slows down in winter. Although Iceland has good reserves of hydrothermal and geothermal power, it is dependent on fishing for 70 percent of its export income. Its other chief exports are aluminum and ferrosilicon.

The government plans to boost the economy by

Fun Fact

Icelanders have a storytelling tradition that dates back to the 9th century. Up until the 12th century, these stories took the form of poems composed on heroic themes. In the late 12th and early 13th centuries, known as the Saga Age, poetic expression was replaced by epic tales of the early settlers: romance, conflict, and the growth of the country.

privatizing state-owned industries and diversifying the economy. It is not eager to join the European Union (EU) because it does not want to lose control over its fishing industry. Many new areas of development are being explored, such as software production, biotechnology, and financial services. The tourism sector has also grown, and ecotourism and whale-watching have become popular.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Warriors and farmers are the ancestors of present-day Icelanders. They had to build a new home for themselves in harsh conditions, and the traits that this required have forged a nation of people who are tough and independent. Icelanders have a rich literary heritage with their famous sagas recounting historic struggles, battles, and heroic exploits. Icelandic sagas are considered among the most noteworthy of all medieval writing. Iceland has also produced modern writers such as Halldór Kiljan Laxness (1902–98), who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1955.

Traditional Icelandic music is deeply rooted in religion. Most of the songs are Protestant hymns and are sung during religious celebrations. Besides the traditional lullabies, Iceland is also known for cowboy songs, brought into the country by the American soldiers who have been posted in the region since World War II. However, the most recognizable face of Icelandic music today is that of former Sugarcubes lead singer, Björk (b. 1965).

Icelandic, the official language, has hardly changed since the Vikings settled Iceland in the ninth and 10th centuries. It has rejected foreign words, preferring instead to form its own new words derived from ancient Viking words. Thus, the word for *computer* becomes *bolva*, made up of the ancient words for *number* and *prophetess*. English and Danish are also widely spoken in Iceland.

Icelandic women retain their names after marriage because Icelanders use patronyms or matronyms instead of surnames. The society and culture are “woman friendly,” and women enjoy positions of leadership in both government and business. Homosexuals are also accepted and treated equally. In July 1992 all discriminatory criminal laws were done away with and in 1996 an

antidiscrimination law was passed that prohibits discrimination in the provision of merchandise or services as well as actions intended to humiliate, degrade, or defame lesbians and gay men. Although there is no right to adopt, a Registered Partnership Law was also passed that allows lesbians and gays to confirm partnership in a civil ceremony. Though small, there is a gay scene in Reykjavik, and on the first weekend of August, lesbians and gay men hold a two-day Gay Pride celebration that culminates in a parade through the capital city.

❁ CUISINE

Traditional Icelandic cuisine tends toward the “exotic.” One such preparation is *bákari*, shark meat that has been buried for six months in the ground to allow it to decompose sufficiently. *Rútsprungur* is ram’s testicles that have been pickled in whey and shaped into a cake; *svie* is charred sheep’s head, with the eyes intact, which is cut in half and then boiled and eaten, either fresh or pickled. Another dish is *slatur*, a mixture of sheep leftovers tied up in the stomach and cooked.

Fish is a mainstay of the Icelandic diet; chicken, duck, turkey, and lamb are also common. Other traditional dishes include *bar_fiskur* (haddock), *bleikja* (char), *lundi* (puffin), whale blubber, whale steaks, seal meat, and *skyr*, a yogurtlike preparation made of skimmed milk and a bacteria culture. *Thorramatur* are salted, pickled, or dried meats and fish commonly consumed during the winter months. Coffee is a favorite beverage, while beer, wine, and spirits are available but expensive. A traditional Icelandic brew is *brennivín*, made from potatoes and flavored with caraway.

Fun Fact

Since 874, Mt. Hekla has erupted more than 20 times. During the Middle Ages, Icelanders called the volcano the “Gateway to Hell.”

Fun Fact

Among all the members of NATO, Iceland is the only country that does not have its own military force. It has only a small fleet of ships and a police force. American military forces have been stationed in the country since World War II.

The Cod Wars

The United Kingdom aroused Iceland’s anger when it refused to recognize Iceland’s expanded territorial fishing rights in the 1970s. For a few years there were clashes between Icelandic gunships and British warships in what came to be referred to as the “Cod Wars.” The cod is a common fish that is the basis of the Icelandic fishing industry, and the main issue was the amount of cod caught by fishermen from the two countries. There were three Cod Wars in all.

The first Cod War took place in 1958, when Iceland increased its fishing territory from 4 miles to 12 miles off its coast. The second war occurred between 1972 and 1973, when Iceland wanted to expand its fishing rights to 50 miles off its coast. The third war (1975–76) was sparked when Iceland declared its fishing territory to extend 200 miles off the coast of Iceland. With NATO intervention the two countries were finally able to reach an agreement in June 1976.

Skate Hash

Thorláksmessa, St. Thorlákur's Day, is celebrated on December 23, so it is also the day when Icelanders hope to be finished with their final preparations for the coming Christmas holidays. Closely associated with St. Thorlákur's Day in the western fjords of Iceland is an odiferous skate hash that smells like ammonia. It is said to be so repellent that it makes

other holiday dining a treat, no matter how bad. The custom of eating fish on St. Thorlákur's Day began when it marked the end of the Catholic Christmas fast, a period when people weren't permitted to eat meat. After Iceland's conversion to Lutheranism people still needed a meal that was simple to prepare during the last-minute rush of pre-Christmas activities. Not everyone necessarily eats his or her serving.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

On New Year's Eve Icelanders light huge bonfires and sing and dance around them. As the clock strikes 12:00, the night skies are lit with fireworks displays, which is known as *sprengja út árið* ("blowing out the year"). An ancient Icelandic belief holds that on New Year's Eve miraculous and unexplained things happen. For example many Icelanders believe that cows talk like humans, while seals assume a human form. Also Icelanders believe that elves change their homes on this day, and the dead rise from their graves.

Fun Fact

Geologically, Iceland straddles the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates.

❁ SPRENGIDAGUR

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: February 8

Sprengidagur, or Bursting Day, is the Icelandic version of Carnival. On the day before Lent, *Saltkjöt og baunir*, "salted meat and peas," is traditionally eaten.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; LENT

❁ FIRST DAY OF SUMMER

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 22

In Iceland, April 22 marks the beginning of the summer season. If there is heavy snowfall and the weather is extremely cold the night before the First Day of Summer, then it is believed that the coming year will be filled with sunshine. To celebrate the holiday sporting events and parades are held all over Iceland to usher in sum-

Fun Fact

From the end of May until the beginning of August, there are 17–20 hours of daylight in Reykjavik, while in the northern part of the country the sun never sets in June. At the end of August, the colorful aurora borealis (northern lights) appears.

mer. Government offices, schools, and businesses remain closed on this day.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

The earliest origins of May Day are ascribed to the pagan celebrations of farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages. The May 1 observance of Labor Day, now also called May Day or Workers' Day, was declared in 1889 by the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. On May 1 in Iceland, trade unions and workers participate in outdoor meetings and demonstrations commemorating the valuable contributions made by workers as well as to discuss the needs and demands labor.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 17

On June 17, 1944, Iceland obtained full independence from Denmark. Iceland had been under the rule of the Kingdom of Denmark since the 14th century. In 1918 Denmark established the Act of Union, which recognized Iceland as a sovereign state united with the kingdom under the rule of the king of Denmark. In 1940 during World War II, Nazi forces invaded Denmark. Although Iceland had previously maintained a position of neutrality, British forces took control of the country on May 10, 1940. Iceland quickly responded by agreeing to fight alongside the Allied (British, French, and U.S.) occupying forces. In 1941 responsibility for the defense of Iceland passed to the United States, which took control of the region from British forces. Under the U.S. occupation a plebiscite was held in Iceland in which



A whimsically dressed marching band drummer makes his way down Laugavegur during the Independence Day parade in Reykjavik on June 17. Independence Day is Iceland's celebration of independence from Denmark in 1944. (AP Photo/Suzanne Plunkett)

the people voted unanimously in favor of independence from Denmark. Thus on June 17, 1944, Iceland declared its independence from Denmark. The day was chosen because it marks the birthday of a great freedom fighter, Jón Sigurðsson, who was born on June 17, 1811, and was the leader of Iceland's first independence movement.

On June 17 celebrations are held throughout Iceland, but the biggest celebrations are in the capital of Reykjavik. The president of Iceland presides over the Independence Day celebrations and unfurls the national flag. There are official speeches, sporting events, outdoor concerts, and a spectacular display of fireworks in the evening. A carnival atmosphere pervades Reykjavik as people throng the streets, enjoying a day off from work and school.

✿ LABOR DAY WEEKEND

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: First weekend in August

In addition to May Day (or Workers' Day), Icelanders also celebrate Labor Day Weekend, a holi-

day modeled after the U.S. Labor Day observance, which is more recreational than political. Because the weather in Iceland is already turning cold in September, Labor Day, also called *Verslunnarmannahelgi*, is celebrated a month earlier than it is celebrated in the United States and people traditionally head for the outdoors for two days of relaxation.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

Religious Holidays

✿ DAY OF ST. THORLÁKUR

Observed in: Iceland
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 23

Day of St. Thorlákur, or Thorláksmessa, commemorates the anniversary of the death of St. Thorlákur (1133–93), the bishop of Skalholt, who is also one of the three Catholic saints of Iceland. He died on December 23, 1193 and, although the Iceland parliament canonized him in 1198, the Roman Catholic Church has not. Until 1500 two feasts of St. Thorlákur were celebrated—one on July 20, as well as one on December 23. However after Iceland became a Protestant country, the date of the Feast of St. Thorlákur was fixed on December 23.

This is the last day for Christmas preparations, including decorating the Christmas tree, buying last-minute presents, and cleaning the house. St. Thorlákur's Day is also the day on which the traditional smoked mutton (*hangiket*) for Christmas was cooked. Shops stay open until 11 P.M. In the western fjords, the ancient tradition of consuming cured skate hash on this day has spread across Iceland.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

✿ BOLLUDAGUR

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Monday before Lent

Bolludagur ("Bun Day"), also called Shrove Monday (and Shrove Tuesday), belongs to the pre-Lenten observances called Carnival in countries celebrated by speakers of one of the Romance languages (Spanish, French, Italian, etc.) and called Shrove-tide in England. The English word *shrove-tide* (from *to* "shrive," or "hear confessions") refers to the custom in Catholic England of confessing one's sins and being shriven during the week before Lent. Before a long period of deprivations, the 40-day fast of Lent,

Fun Fact

Iceland has an interesting naming system, which at one time was the norm in the Norse countries. Last names are derived from the father's name, with *-arson* ("son of") or *-dottir* ("daughter of") added as a suffix.

throughout Europe people sought some expression involving pranks, frolic, and good cheer. In Greece it is called Clean Monday.

But there was also a more practical aspect of the Shrovetide festivities, and that was using up all the foods that would otherwise go bad during the fast, such as eggs and butter. In Iceland Bun Day refers to two practices associated with the day. First people are hit on the buttocks with a stick before they have gotten out of bed. Second and more pleasantly, it is also a day for eating sweet buns with whipped cream, and throughout Iceland, homes, restaurants, and some bakeries offer large quantities of delicately made cream puffs, or “buns,” which are eaten with great pleasure. This event is thought to have been introduced to Iceland by Norwegian and Danish bakers who migrated there during the 19th century.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; LENT

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

Maundy Thursday, or Holy Thursday, is a Christian holiday commemorating Jesus’ washing of his disciples’ feet before sharing a meal known as the Last Supper. The holiday falls on the Thursday before Easter and is called Maundy Thursday because *maundatum* (a Latin word meaning “commandment”) is the first word that was spoken by Jesus before he began to wash the feet of his disciples. It was reported that Jesus said, “*Mandatum novum do vobis,*” which translates to “A new commandment I give to you.” On this day, devout Lutherans in Iceland attend church services.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

The Christian holiday of Good Friday commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. A somber occasion, it falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent (an austere season of fasting and penitence). Devout Lutherans attend special Good Friday church services and remember the life and teachings of Jesus.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

The Christian festival of Easter celebrates Jesus’ Resurrection from the dead three days after his Cru-

cifixion. The night before Easter Icelanders attend a special midnight church service. Easter egg hunts do not take place in Iceland because the land is generally covered with snow during Easter, and the weather is extremely cold. Instead, children receive chocolate-filled Easter eggs and fortune cookies on Easter. Easter dinner usually consists of pork, peas, carrots, jelly, and red wine. In Iceland feasting and the exchange of greetings continue even on Easter Monday, which is a national holiday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Forty days after Easter

Ascension Day for Christians celebrates Jesus’ rising up to heaven 40 days after he was resurrected from the dead on Easter. The Feast of the Ascension is celebrated 10 days before Pentecost Sunday, which comes 50 days after Easter. Faithful Lutherans attend Ascension Thursday services in churches all over Iceland. In many European countries, including Iceland, fowl is eaten on this day to commemorate Jesus’ Ascension (flight) to heaven.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; PENTECOST

PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fifty days after Easter

Both Pentecost Sunday and Monday, also known as Whitsunday and Whitmonday, are celebrations of the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus’ disciples 50 days after his Resurrection on Easter. The alternate names of Whitsunday and monday refer to the white robes that used to be worn by those who were baptized on this day. Devout Lutherans in Iceland attend special church services in observance of Pentecost. Whitmonday is a national holiday and most businesses and schools are closed.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; PENTECOST

ALL SAINTS’ DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: November 1

All Saints’ Day is a Christian feast honoring all Christian saints (known and unknown). On All Saints’ Day in Iceland, a special prayer service is held in churches across the country in memory of the saints. A special feast is prepared in their honor, and many Icelanders celebrate the occasion with family and friends.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS’ DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

The Christian festival of Christmas, also called Jól (Yule) and Jóladagur in Iceland, celebrates the birth of Jesus. In Iceland Christmas celebrations begin on Christmas Eve (Yule Eve, or Athfangadagur) and last until December 26. On Christmas Eve celebrations commence at 6 P.M. Children gather around the Christmas tree to open presents. Many Icelanders attend special Christmas Eve services in their local churches and sing devotional hymns and carols.

On Christmas, Icelanders visit their extended families to celebrate. Gifts and greetings are exchanged, and people enjoy a special Christmas meal that includes dishes such as *hangikjot* (leg of roasted lamb), *rjúpa* (rock ptarmigan), and *jólagrautur*, a rice porridge with raisins. It is an old Scandinavian tradition to hide a lucky almond in the *jólagrautur*: *Laufabrauth*, a thin deep-fried wheat bread, is also served. Traditionally, *laufabrauth* was delicately cut with intricate designs but it is now available, already cut, in Iceland's grocery stores. Cut into thin strips, it also replaces nachos or potato chips.

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26

Celebrations here continue on the second day of Christmas, which is known as Annar Jóldagur. Since Iceland was under British rule for a brief period of time during World War II, December 26 is also celebrated as Boxing Day in Iceland. Boxing Day is observed in the United Kingdom as a day for giving gifts to service workers (like postal workers) and those who render useful service throughout the year.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ THIRTEENTH DAY OF CHRISTMAS

Observed in: Heimaey Island

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 6

The last day of Christmas, conventionally celebrated by Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches as Epiphany (the day when the Three Wise Men brought gifts to the newborn Jesus in Bethlehem), is called The Thirteenth in Iceland. On Heimaey Island the day is celebrated with great style and imagination based on Iceland's Nordic heritage. A procession of 13 Icelandic youth (*jólasveinar*) carry flaming torches, along with Gryla and Leppalúthi (their troll parents) and an assortment of other terri-

ble trolls, through the town. The procession makes its way finally to a huge bonfire where elves, fairies, and other magical creatures dance. In this way Christmas is bid goodbye with an impressive fireworks display at midnight.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EPIPHANY

❁ FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Observed in: Reykjavik

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 17–20

The Festival of Lights is dedicated to the theme of light and energy, and an exciting public festival takes place around Laugardalur Park in Reykjavik.

❁ SEAMEN'S DAY

Observed in: Reykjavik and coastal towns

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First Sunday in June

In Iceland fishermen and sailors celebrate Seamen's Day, Sjomannadagur, on the first Sunday in June. This day acknowledges the contributions made by the maritime industry to Iceland's economy as well as paying tribute to seamen who have lost their lives at sea.

After special memorial church services, the festivities begin. Large celebrations take place in the ports, harbors, and coastal towns and in the capital city of Reykjavik. Communal singing, speeches, and competitions that test the sailors' nautical prowess are principal highlights of National Seamen's Day.

❁ REYKJAVIK ARTS FESTIVAL

Observed in: Reykjavik

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June of even-numbered years

The Reykjavik Arts Festival, also called Festsþillene I Reykjavik, has been held every two years since the first one was organized in 1970. The internationally renowned pianist Vladimir Ashkenazy, a citizen of Iceland, and Ivar Eskeland, once the director of the Nordic House in Reykjavik, both dreamed of a festival celebrating the visual and performing arts, and the Reykjavik Arts Festival is the result of their vision. For 16 days attendees are treated to performances by internationally recognized artists, and people come from all over the world for this artistic extravaganza.

Fun Fact

It is an ancient Icelandic tradition that the day does not begin at midnight but at 6 P.M. Thus, all celebrations, such as Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve, begin at 6:00 P.M.

Fun Fact

In Iceland, dancing in public is considered inappropriate on Christmas Eve and Christmas. However on the second day of Christmas, dancing is allowed in public places.

❁ FIRST DAY OF SUMMER

Observed in: Nationwide

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 21

On the First Day of Summer, the summer solstice, Icelanders celebrate the longest day of the year by getting together with friends and relatives and drinking and dancing the shortest night away.

❁ PJODHATID

Observed in: Heimaey Island

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Early August

Fun Fact

Archaeologists have found a well in Iceland from the Norse era. The well had dozens of skeletal remains that belonged to infants who were condemned to death by exposure.

Pjodhatid is an independence day festival held in the Vestmannaeyjar region of Iceland, on Heimaey Island, one month later than independence celebrations in the rest of Iceland. In 1874 when Denmark agreed to grant Iceland partial independence, the island's inhabitants were unable to reach the mainland to celebrate Iceland's new status as a republic because of bad weather, so they held their own celebration.

Today Pjodhatid is a huge annual event with many attractions, and the island is filled with campers from the mainland who have

come to join in the festivities. Many of Iceland's most popular bands perform. There are impressive firework displays, a huge bonfire, and a communal sing-a-long, and people sing, eat, and party until dawn.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

In Iceland in ancient times, a newborn child was accepted in the family only after the performance of certain rituals. The mother would show her acceptance of the child by breast-feeding. The father performed a ritual called *vatni ausinn*, which involved taking the child on his knee and sprinkling water on him or her. Only after the performance of these rituals did the child earn the right of inheritance and

other special rights within the family under Norse law. An infant that did not gain acceptance, usually due to some kind of deformity and the economic hardships of the family, was condemned to death by exposure to the elements.

Norse tradition allowed well-to-do families to entrust the upbringing of their children to families of lower social status. The less well-off families were paid a certain amount in exchange for their services. This tradition helped develop social bonds between the upper- and lower-class families.

❁ MARRIAGE

In modern Iceland couples are encouraged to have long engagements in order to develop trust and to bond before finally getting married. In ancient Iceland, on the other hand, it was traditional for weddings to take place within a few days of the engagement.

In contemporary Iceland weddings are very much patterned on U.S. and European weddings with bridal showers, bachelor parties, tossing rice at the couple for good luck after the ceremony, and a reception following the church ceremony.

❁ DEATH

The ancient Norse believed that, with the exception a few privileged people, most of the dead remained in their graves and did not move into the afterlife. Depending on the status and geographic location of the deceased, they were buried with either the daily necessities they might need should they reach the afterlife or with a model of a ship, suggesting they would continue their journey even in the afterlife. Poor people were generally buried with very few things, while the extremely rich were buried along with horses, servants, and material goods.

Cremation was the preferred funeral rite, and warriors were cremated with their broken shields and bent swords as a mark of respect.

Further Reading

Jesse L. Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (New York: Penguin, 2001); Terry G. Lacy, *Ring of Seasons: Iceland—Its Culture and History* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2000); Michèle Hayeur Smith, *Draupnir's Sweat and Mardöll's Tears: An Archaeology of Jewellery, Gender and Identity in Viking Age Iceland* (Oxford: John and Erica Hedges, 2004).

India

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Southern Asia, bordered by Pakistan, Nepal, Myanmar, Bhutan, China, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean, and Bay of Bengal
Size	1,269,346 sq. mi.
Capital City	New Delhi
Flag Description	India's flag has three equal horizontal bands of saffron (top), white, and green, with a blue chakra (24-spoked wheel) centered in the white band.
Independence	August 15, 1947 (from the United Kingdom)
Population	1,080,264,388 (2005 est.)
Government	Federal republic
Nationality	Indian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Indo-Aryan (72%); Dravidian (25%)
Major Language(s)	Hindi; Bengali; Telugu; Marathi; Tamil; Urdu; Gujarati; Malayalam; Kannada; Oriya; Punjabi; Assamese; Kashmiri; Sindhi; Konkani; Manipuri; Sanskrit; Bodo; Maithili; and Nepali (official) Hindustani; English
Major Religion(s)	Hindu (81%); Muslim (14%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Republic Day, January 26; Independence Day, August 15; Mahatma Gandhi's Birthday, October 2

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Believed to be one of the earliest civilizations of the world, India boasts Stone Age rock shelters at Bhimbetka in Madhya Pradesh that contain paintings that are, so far, the earliest known traces of humans in the area. The first known permanent settlements appeared some 9,000 years ago and became the Indus Valley Civilization, which peaked between 2600–2000 B.C.E. It was followed by the Vedic Civilization. Archaeologists have found evidence of the existence of two great cities of that era called Mohenjodaro and Harappa. They are located in what is now Pakistan.

Starting around 500 B.C.E. a spate of independent kingdoms emerged, and India came to be made up of many small kingdoms that were often overrun by numerous invaders from Central Asia. The rulers of these states encouraged the growth of art, science, literature, astronomy, and philosophy,

which flourished under their patronage. The territory governed by the Maurya Dynasty was the most significant of these kingdoms and under the rule of Ashoka (273–32 B.C.E.; pronounced a-shok), the greatest Mauryan king, was the first ruler of ancient Bharata (India). Under him the region prospered and flourished.

Ashoka ruled a vast territory, much larger than the present Republic of India. It encompassed the territory from Afghanistan to Bengal and south to Mysore. Ashoka was also a supporter of Buddhism, and he had several monuments built that marked important locations in Gautama Buddha's life. In Sanskrit his name means "without sorrow."

A Portuguese explorer named Vasco da Gama (1460–1524) sailed to India in 1498, and the Portuguese took control of some coastal parts of India. Goa became the capital of the Portuguese Empire, and the Portuguese established a strong foothold in the region. The Indian Army eventually drove them out in 1961, and their 450-year rule came to an end. The French and the Dutch also visited India, but their stays were short-lived, and they ruled only small areas.

Fun Fact

The Himalayan Mountains are the highest mountain chain in the world where all 14 of the highest peaks are found.

In 1526 Babar, also Babur (1483–1530), a descendant of the famous Genghis Khan (1162–1227), invaded India and established the Mughal Dynasty. The Mughals were Muslims and spread Islam over a large part of northern India. The Mughal Empire lasted till 1857, when the British deported the Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar to Rangoon. The British set up the East India Company in 1612. They had come to India with the primary intention of establishing trade relations but, seeing the lack of unity within the country, took advantage of the situation and colonized it.

Nationalist sentiment in India increased in the first half of the 19th century, and this led to an uprising in 1857, but it was firmly suppressed by the British. However the Indians were determined to overthrow the British, and in the 20th century, a new phase of the struggle for independence began. Led by Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948), a lawyer from South Africa, who went on to become the father of the nation, the Indians embarked on a prolonged struggle for independence from the British. Eventually in August 1947, India gained independence from the British and was granted the status of a secular democratic republic in 1950.

However at the same time, members of the Muslim minority of India, who were numerous, became apprehensive that Hindus would dominate the country after independence. This increased partisan feelings, causing a split between the two religious groups. Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876–1948) became the leader of the Muslims, while Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964) led the Hindus. When the Muslims pressed for their own territory, political tensions reached a peak, leading to widespread riots. Ultimately the country was divided into India and Pakistan.

After the division the Hindus moved from Pakistan to India, and Jawaharlal Nehru became the prime minister of India. The Muslims moved to Pakistan, and it is estimated that more than 2,500,000 people lost their lives in the wave of par-

tianship that swept the region at that time. Post-independence, border disputes with Pakistan occurred leading to wars in 1948, 1965, and 1971. A dispute over the occupation of Kashmir, a region in north India, remains unresolved.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in the southern part of Asia, India is flanked by Pakistan, Nepal, Myanmar, Bhutan, China, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Bay of Bengal. Some of the most striking geographical features of India include the Himalayan mountain range to the north, the fertile Indo-Gangetic plains that cover the northern and eastern parts of the country, the Thar Desert in the west, and the Deccan plateau in the southern region.

The highest point in India is Mt. Kanchenjunga in the Himalayan range. It stands 28,156 feet high.

India is also a land of mighty rivers. Some of the most prominent are the Ganges (Ganga), Yamuna, Godavari, and the Krishna.

The climate in India varies from temperate in the northern parts of the country to tropical monsoon in the southern parts. The average temperature during summer can reach as high as 120°F, especially in the southeastern state of Andhra Pradesh, while during winter the temperatures can dip as low as -26°F in Ladakh in the northern states of Jammu and Kashmir. Monsoon winds blowing from the southwest provide rain during the monsoon season, which lasts from June to September.

India is home to a wide variety of trees such as sandalwood, *deodhar* (cedar), poplar, banyan, palms, oaks, spruce, bamboo, and extensive mangrove forests. India accounts for almost 6 percent of the world's flora and has more than 45,000 species of plants (33 percent are native species), which includes 15,000 species of flowering plants.

More than 5,000 species of large animals are found in India. Leopards, lions, tigers, monkeys, elephants, snakes, crocodiles, jackals, rhinoceros, kingfishers, peacocks, parrots, and pygmy hogs are all part of the rich Indian fauna.

❁ ECONOMY

In 1991 the Indian economy entered a phase of liberalization after economic reforms were introduced, and it is one of the fastest growing economies in the world. It is the fourth largest in the world in terms of purchasing power parity and the tenth largest in terms of currency conversion. The official currency of India is the Indian rupee.

Although agriculture contributes 25 percent to the nation's economy, industries such as information technology (IT), textiles, mining, petroleum, handicrafts, and film have become the driving forces. In recent years India has become one of the largest IT players in the world due its expertise in software and the booming business-process out-

Royal Bengal Tigers

Bengal tigers, also known as Royal Bengal tigers, are an endangered species found in the Sunderbans, a beautiful forest region of West Bengal. This species belongs to the feline, or cat, family (*Felidae*) and is its largest living member.

Bengal tigers are faced with the threat to their survival due to a loss of natural habitat and poaching. They are hunted for their fur and to serve as ingredients for traditional East Asian medicines.

sourcing (BPO) industry.

Some of the major export items of India are gems and jewelry, handicrafts, leather products, software services and technology, agricultural products, chemical products, and engineering goods. The most imports are machinery, fertilizer, and crude oil.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

India is ethnically diverse, multilingual, and a culturally rich secular society. In terms of ethnicity, India is dominated by Indo-Aryans, who constitute 72 percent of the nation's population and occupy most of the northern regions of the Indian subcontinent. They are closely followed by the Dravidians, who reside mainly in the southern parts of the country. The northeast is dominated by Mongol descendants.

Freedom of religion and communal harmony are the cornerstone of Indian society. India is home to all the prominent religions of the world, including Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, and various other faiths, as well as being the place where several originated. There are so many religions, and so many rituals and observances, that it is possible to travel in India for a year and participate in a different festival every day (if the timing is just right).

Hindi, spoken by 30 percent of the nation's population, is the national language of India, but English is widely used in business, by government departments, as the medium of instruction for post-graduate education, and as the language of communication among Indians of other linguistic backgrounds. In addition to Hindi, official status has been granted to at least 20 Indian languages. Most Indians speak at least three languages: Hindi, English, and their mother tongue.

India has a rich traditional folk culture. Indian music can be broadly categorized into Hindustani (in the north) and Carnatic (in the south). Traditional folk songs are an integral part of Indian society, and every region has songs related to the different stages of life. Folk songs also provide a way of perceiving the daily occupations of people living in different regions.

Traditional Indian dance forms include *bharatnatyam*, *kathak*, *kathakali*, *kuchipudi*, *manipuri*, *mobiniattam*, and *odissi*. Most of these traditional Indian dances depict great Indian epics in narratives that combine the stories with spiritual elements.

Indian astrology is one of the most ancient practices in the world. Similarly, *ayurveda*, which was developed by Charaka over 2,500 years ago, is one of the earliest schools of medicine and is now accepted worldwide.

Epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the scriptures (Puranas, Vedas), which are all thousands of years old, testify to India's rich culture. The Indian film industry is the biggest in the world, and Indian cinema is appreciated worldwide.

India's architectural wealth is reflected in its

hundreds of temples, forts, palaces, and tombs. The Taj Mahal, built of white marble, is considered to be one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

Even though hockey is the national game of India, cricket is the more popular game. Football, which Indians call soccer, is extremely popular. Golf is also gaining popularity among the urban elite.

❁ CUISINE

Indian cuisine is as diverse as its culture. Every region in India has its own specialty, which gives rise to an amazing number of vegetarian and nonvegetarian dishes. Most of these are spicy and delicious. Besides spices, clarified butter (*ghee*) and yogurt are used extensively in cooking.

Rice and wheat (in the form of various kinds of bread) are the staples of the Indian diet. Among the most popular breads are a flat unleavened bread called *roti*, a fried bread called *puri*, and bread baked in a clay oven called *naan*. Tea and coffee are the preferred beverages of India.

A traditional Indian meal consists of rice, curries, a variety of breads, a vegetable, and a meat or fish side dish, yogurt, pickles, chutney, and salad.

Fun Fact

The Baily Bridge, located in the Ladakh Valley between the Dras and Suru Rivers in the Himalayan Mountains, is the highest bridge in the world.

Fun Fact

The densest human population belt in the world is located along the 1,558-mile length of the Ganges River.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

In India the New Year traditionally falls in the month of Chaitra, the first month of the Hindu lunar calendar, but India has readily adopted the festivities of the Western celebration. Although New Year's Eve and New Year's Day celebrations on these dates are new to India, the observances in India resemble those shared around the world. Some people celebrate with huge parties that last late into the night, while others prefer to spend a quiet evening at home with friends and family. As in other parts of the world, fireworks are used to mark the end of the year.

People in India have also adopted the practice of making a New Year's resolution to change and improve their life in some important

Fun Fact

The number system as well as the decimal system was invented by Indians. Aryabhata (b. 476 C.E.) was the scientist who invented the digit zero and described the universe as heliocentric.

Fun Fact

The largest venomous snake in the world, the king cobra, is found in Indian forests.

way. Others pray for health and wealth during the coming year.

❁ REPUBLIC DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 26

Republic Day, or Ganatantra Diwas, commemorates the adoption of the first constitution of the independent republic of India on January 26, 1950. This is the date India truly became a sovereign state. Republic Day is a national holiday in India, and there are a variety of celebrations in the capital city of New Delhi. The president of the country confers awards for bravery on those soldiers who have shown their valor on the battlefield and also presents awards to those civilians who have shown exceptional courage and valor in challenging situations. These ceremonies are followed by a parade in which all the regiments of the Indian armed forces march and give the entire world a glimpse of

India's defense capabilities. A pageant of floats that depict the daily lives of every region, as well as their songs and dances, showcases India's rich cultural heritage. In the evening Rashtrapati Bhawan (the residence of the president) and other government buildings are beautifully illuminated.

The governors of all the states preside over celebrations of a more limited but similar type in their capitals.

Fun Fact

India is the second most populous country in the world, after China.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 15

At the stroke of midnight of August 14, 1947, the first prime minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, declared India's independence from Britain. The country had been under British rule for more than 150 years.

Fun Fact

Chess was invented in India.

Despite misunderstandings between Hindus and Muslims, every Indian fought during the independence struggle using violent and nonviolent means. They were led by freedom fighters like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel (1875–1950), Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose (1897–1945), Bhagat Singh (1907–31), Veer Savarkar (1883–1966), and Chandrashekhar Azad (1906–31). Eventually, after several rounds of talks with British representatives, the leaders obtained freedom for India. A price was paid, however, when the territory was split into Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan.

On Independence Day (Swatantrata Diwas), the major highlight of the day is the current prime minister's announcement of new plans for the improve-

ment of the country. The national flag is raised and cultural events take place in all the state capitals as well as towns of India. Another interesting activity on Independence Day is flying kites. Children all over India fly kites designed with the Indian national colors. The sky seems ablaze with the color of the hundreds of kites that symbolize the happiness and joy this day has brought to millions of Indians.

❁ MAHATMA GANDHI'S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 2

This day, also known as Gandhi Jayanti, commemorates the birth of Mahatma Gandhi, a peace-loving leader of India who inspired Indians in their fight against British rule and helped them achieve independence. He was born on October 2, 1869, and Indians consider him the father of their nation. His teachings of nonviolence and its role in helping obtain India's independence inspired many colonized nations around the world to fight against colonial rule and achieve independence following the path of nonviolence.

On this day, prayer meetings are held at Rajghat in New Delhi. This is the monument where Mahatma Gandhi was cremated and which still serves as a memorial to this great leader. Politicians and average citizens unite in bringing floral tributes to Gandhi's tomb to remember his life, legacy, and teachings.

Religious Holidays

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha (also called Feast of Sacrifice, Eid al-Zuha, Id ul Juha, Tabaski, and Bakrid) is celebrated on the 10th day of Duh al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar. It is an important festival for Muslims all over the world because it was on this day that Ibrahim (Abraham) agreed to sacrifice his young son only because God commanded him to do so. Muslims honor Ibrahim for his unquestioning willingness to do God's will.

In India Eid al-Adha is also known as Bakrid. On this day devout Muslim men get up early in the morning and go to their local mosques, along with friends and family members, to offer prayers. People wear new clothes, and a festive atmosphere rules in every Muslim household. It is believed that any Muslim who has wealth equal to, or more than, 14 ounces of gold or who can afford two meals a day must sacrifice an animal on this day. Hence, each

family or a group of families sacrifices one goat in honor of Ibrahim's sacrifice. In addition they give children gifts and money.

During the month this holiday is celebrated, many Muslims also undertake a pilgrimage, or Hajj, to Mecca. It is the hope of all Muslims to go to the sacred city once in their lifetime, and the Koran requires it as long as it is both physically and financially feasible for the individual to do so.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; HAJJ; ISLAM

❁ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

El am Hejir, also called the Islamic New Year, is celebrated in the first month of the Islamic calendar. Muslims celebrate the first day of Muharram not only to usher in the year, but because they believe that, on this day in 622 C.E., Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina and formed the first Islamic state.

The word *mubarram* means "mourning," and many Muslims observe a mourning period for at least the first 10 days of this month. Shiite Muslims even observe mourning throughout the month in remembrance of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the grandson of Muhammad, who was killed in the Battle of Karbala. This observance is also called Ashura and the Mourning of Karbala.

In India the mourning period is also known as Muharram, and on the 10th day of the month, Shiite Muslims may repent for their sins by inflicting wounds on their bodies with sharp knives in order to experience Hussein's pain. They also parade glittering replicas of Hussein's tomb called *tazias*. Generally a white horse beautifully decorated for the occasion is also included in the procession to mark the empty mount and horse, Dul Dul of Hazrat Imam Hussein, after his martyrdom. Since Muharram is a sad occasion, everyone in the procession laments by chanting "Ya Hussein" with loud wails. The *tazias* of Hyderabad and Lucknow are renowned for their special decorations.

Women forsake all adornments on these days. During these 10 days, people clad in black recite incidents from the Battle of Karbala. Everybody then drinks a sweetened cold drink to remind themselves of the terrible thirst that Imam Hussein and his family had to suffer. During the procession, wrestlers and dancers enact scenes depicting the Battle of Karbala.

See also Volume III: ASHURA; EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

❁ HOLI

Observed by: Hindus

Observed on: The full Moon of the Hindu month of Phalgun

Holi, or Phagwah, the Festival of Colors, is an annual Hindu spring festival that is celebrated for a two-day period starting on the full Moon day in the month of Phalgun, or in February or March of the Gregorian (Western) calendar. This celebration is also known as the Festival of Colors since people put colors on each other to celebrate this festival.

Holi celebrations take place in many parts of India, but the most elaborate take place in the northern parts of the country.

According to Hindu mythology, there was a demon king in India named Hiranyakashipu, who wanted to avenge the death of his younger brother, also a demon, who had been slain by Vishnu (one of the trinity of gods in Hinduism). Having been granted a boon by Brahma, the king felt omnipotent and ordered all the people to worship him.

But the king's young son Prahalad was a devotee of Vishnu. Going against his father's wishes, Prahalad constantly prayed to Vishnu. Unable to make Prahalad change his ways, the demon king decided to kill him. The demon king asked his sister Holika (from whom the name of the festival is derived) to help him because she was supposedly impervious to fire. They planned to burn Prahalad to death, so Holika sat on a burning pyre with Prahalad on her lap. But Prahalad emerged unharmed by the flames and Holika, the demoness, was burned to death. The bonfire on the eve of the festival celebrates that event.

On the night before Holi, Hindus light huge bonfires symbolic of the burning of the evil Holika. On the day of Holi people throw colored powder on each other. Children shoot colored water with water pistols (*pichkaris*) and even throw water-filled balloons on people to celebrate. The Holi celebrations in the city of Mathura include traditional folk dancing, singing, and the distribution of sweets.

See also Volume III: HINDUISM; HOLI

❁ MAHA SHIVRATRI

Observed by: Hindus

Observed on: Thirteenth or 14th of the dark half of Phalgun in the Hindu calendar

Maha Shivratri (Night of Lord Shiva) is an annual religious celebration that honors Lord Shiva, one of the trinity of Hindu gods. Hindus believe that on this day Lord Shiva performed a cosmic dance called *tandav* (also known as the dance of destruction) and destroyed the evil in the world. They also believe that on this day Lord Shiva redeemed the world from all sin and that those who pray to him on this day will be absolved of all their sins.

Fun Fact

Although India is the birthplace of Hinduism, one of the ancient religions of the world, the country is also home to over 100 million Muslims, making it one of the non-Islamic nations with the largest population of Muslims in the world.

Fun Fact

There are more than 330 million deities in the Hindu religion.

The festival is celebrated with great devotion throughout India in the Hindu month of Phalgun (spring). Devout Hindus get up early in the morning and visit their local Shiva temple. Milk, flowers, and leaves of the bel tree (*bel patra*) are offered to Lord Shiva and poured on the Shiva Lingam (a stone that represents Shiva).

Many devotees participate in night-long vigils on this moonless night and sing devotional songs dedicated to Shiva. Many also observe a day-long fast. Young girls who fast and pray to Lord Shiva will marry the man of their dreams.

See also Volume III: HINDUISM

❁ RAM NAUMI

Observed by: Hindus

Observed on: April

Ram Naumi, Sri Rama's Birthday, commemorates the birth of Lord Rama, a Hindu god, believed to be one of the incarnations of Vishnu and king of the ancient Indian state of Ayodhya. The life and legacy of Rama is found in the Indian epic Ramayana, which was written by a revered Indian sage Valmiki.

Hindu legends tell how, during the Tretayuga (the second subperiod in a caturyuga and the second age of Earth, calculated at around 3000 B.C.E.), Ravana, the demon king of Lanka (modern Sri Lanka), had been creating havoc on Earth. Because of a boon that Brahma had given him, no god or goddess could kill Ravana. So Vishnu assumed a human form in order to redeem humanity and was born into this world as the son of King Dasharatha and his first queen, Kaushalya, who ruled over the kingdom of Ayodhya. Lord Rama is regarded as the seventh incarnation of Vishnu. As was preordained, Rama annihilated Ravana.

Ram Naumi is celebrated with great joy and enthusiasm throughout India. Eight days before his birthday, readings of the epic Ramayana take place. Chanting, traditional folk songs, devotional music, and ballads based on the life of Rama are also important to the Ram Naumi festival. Many Hindus fast for nine days before Ram Naumi, getting by only on fruit or on one meal without a grain a day. Some live as vegetarians for these nine days.

See also Volume III: HINDUISM

❁ MOULoud

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

Mouloud, the birth anniversary of Muhammad, the Muslim prophet, is also known as Mawlid an-Nabi; it falls in the third month of the Islamic year, Rabbi al-Awwal. For Muslims all over the world this is a

day of great joy, since Muhammad is the most revered prophet among the Muslims. However Muhammad is known to have urged his followers not to make a show of his birthday, and so celebrations are rather low-key. In fact to abide by this directive, many Muslims, especially those who are very conservative, do not celebrate at all.

In India Muhammad's birthday is called Id ul-Milad. Devout Indian Muslims go to their local mosques to pray and listen to readings from the Koran. After worshipping, they visit friends and family members.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULoud

❁ JANMASHTAMI

Observed by: Hindus

Observed on: Begins on the eighth of the dark fortnight of Sravana, the fourth month of the Hindu calendar

This day commemorates the birth of Lord Krishna, a reincarnation of the Hindu god Lord Vishnu (who



Indian dancers in traditional costumes participate in the Hindu festival of Navratri, or "Nine Nights," in Ahmadabad, India. The annual Navratri festival is held on the nine nights preceding the Hindu holiday of Dussehra. (AP Photo/Siddharth Darshan Kumar)

is regarded as the protector of the universe). The Hindu festival of Janmashtami (sometimes called Krishna Janmashtami) celebrates the birth of Lord Krishna, arguably the most venerated god in Hinduism. Hindus believe Krishna to be an avatar (incarnation) of Lord Vishnu, the creator of the universe and the second deity, as the Preserver, of the Hindu trinity; the first deity is Lord Brahma, the creator, and the third is Lord Shiva, the destroyer. Krishna is a hero, teacher, warrior, and philosopher in Hinduism. He is also regarded as the eternal platonic lover, devoid of carnal lust. Hindus believe that it was Krishna who delivered the deeply philosophical message of the Bhagavad Gita (*The Divine Song*), one of the world's religious classics.

On the day before Janmashtami, Hindus observe a day-long fast and offer prayers in Radha Krishna temples to the Lord Krishna and his consort Radha. They also participate in night vigils. At midnight after the birth of Lord Krishna is announced, everyone rejoices and dances with happiness. In many parts of the country people sing devotional songs dedicated to Krishna and attend plays based on the events of his life.

See also Volume III: HINDUISM; JANMASHTAMI

❁ DUSSEHRA

Observed by: Hindus

Observed on: First through 10th of the month of Asvina, the seventh month of the Hindu calendar

Dussehra, also called Durga Puja, Vijaya Dashami, or Victorious Tenth Day, is a popular Hindu festival, observed with great fervor by Hindus throughout the world and second only to Diwali, the Festival of Lights, which it precedes. It celebrates the victory of Lord Rama, one of the most revered deities in Hinduism and the main character of the epic Ramayana, over the demon king of Lanka Ravana. The period prior to this day is known as Nine Nights (Navratri). Wakes (*jagrans*) are organized on these nine consecutive nights, and devout Hindus spend the night singing devotional hymns. During the days they observe a fast and worship the goddess Durga and her nine forms. Prayers and devotional songs dedicated to this Hindu goddess are also sung.

During the 10-day festival, *Ramleela* (the story of Rama) is performed by professional dance groups and amateur troupes. On the final day of the festival, men, young and old, dressed as Rama, Lakshmana (Rama's brother), Ravana, and other actors in the drama, walk through the main roads and streets of the cities and towns. Ravana and Rama engage in a fight and Ravana palpably is defeated. Spectacular displays of fireworks light the night skies as everyone celebrates the victory of good over evil.

See also Volume III: DUSSEHRA; HINDUISM

❁ DIWALI

Observed by: Hindus

Observed on: Lasting for five days from the 13th of the waning half (Krishna Paksha) of the lunar month Asvina to the second of the waxing half (Shukla Paksha) of Kartika in the Hindu calendar (October–November in the Gregorian calendar)

Diwali, also called Divali, Deepavali, and the Festival of Lights, celebrates the coronation of Lord Rama, the king of Ayodhya, after his return from 14 years of exile. Hindus believe Rama was the seventh reincarnation of Lord Vishnu. Diwali is a festival of lights. Its name literally means “row of lamps,” and refers to the Ramayana, which states that the people of Ayodhya were so happy on the return of Rama that the entire kingdom was decorated with lamps, or *diyas*, to greet Lord Rama, his wife Sita, and brother Lakshmana, on their arrival and to show them the way to the palace in the darkness of night as well.

This festival is celebrated all over India. Religious ceremonies are held in offices as well as homes by Hindus who decorate them with colorful *diyas* and flowers. However the major highlight of the festivities is the spectacular display of fireworks and the deafening noise of firecrackers that echoes throughout Diwali night all over India. The light that is associated with the celebrations symbolizes the elimination of spiritual darkness.

On Diwali Hindus wear new clothes and offer prayers to the goddess Lakshmi (goddess of wealth and prosperity). Special sweets are prepared for the occasion. Diwali is also celebrated as Narak Chaturdashi since Hindus also believe that Lord Krishna killed a demon named Narakasura on this day.

See also Volume III: DIWALI; HINDUISM

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr, Feast of the Breaking of the Fast, occurs on the first day of Shawwal, the 10th month in the Islamic calendar, so it also marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan. During Ramadan Muslims observe a fast from dawn until dusk that prohibits them from consuming either food or water.

Like their Muslim brethren all over the world, Indian Muslims wake up early in the morning on this joyous day. The men go to pray in their local mosques or in *idgabs*, open fields transformed into prayer places for special occasions such as this observance.

The holiday is also celebrated with lavish feasts with delicious nonvegetarian delicacies. A special sweet dish, *sewaiyan*, has given the holiday the alternate name of Eid Sewaiyan. This delicacy is made from semolina vermicelli, which is cooked with milk, dried fruits, and saffron. *Kheer kborma* is another

Taj Mahal: Monument of Love

Taj Mahal, the monument of love, was built by the Mughal Emperor of India Shahjahan in memory of his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal. *Taj mahal* means the “crown of all palaces.” The Taj Mahal is made entirely of white marble, stands on a platform, is surrounded by beautiful ornamental gardens, and overlooks the Yamuna River. On nights when there is a full Moon, the Taj Mahal shines in all its glory, and its ethereal beauty mesmerizes people.

Construction on the Taj began in 1630. It took 23 years of labor and more than 22,000 laborers to complete this glorious monument. Construction material from all over India and Asia was used to build it. It is believed that the emperor had the thumbs of all the workers cut off after its completion so that its beauty could not be duplicated. It is estimated that approximately US\$921,276 was spent to construct the Taj Mahal. Every year thousands of tourists flock to Agra to see this monument to eternal love.

specialty made from *sewaiyan*. Different kinds of *biryani* (meat and rice casserole) are also part of the meal on this day.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

Regional Holidays

❁ PONGAL

Observed in: Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Four days in Magha, the tenth month of the Hindu calendar

Pongal, while historically a secular harvest festival where it is celebrated, is also called Makar Sankranti in northern India, where it is the second major Sankranti (transit) of the solar calendar. Pongal is celebrated by all people in Southern India for four days. On the first day Bhogi, old clothes and objects are thrown out and burned, marking a new start. The second day, the Pongal day, is celebrated by boiling rice with fresh milk and unrefined sugar (called *jaggery*) early in the morning. This mixture is allowed to “boil over,” which is what *pongal* means in Tamil. It symbolizes plenty. People also prepare savories and sweets, visit each other’s homes, and exchange greetings.

The third day, Mattu Pongal, honors cows and bullocks because they plow the land. The cows and bullocks are fed pongal, then decorated and led in a procession to the beat of drums and music. On the fourth and final day, Kanum Pongal—*kanum* means “to view”—young people customarily gathered along river banks to view and select their future life partners, although this is no longer done.

Other celebrations held at this time include the annual kite-flying day in Maharashtra and Gujarat, and the harvest festival celebrated in Punjab and Haryana, where it is called Lohri.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

❁ BIKANER CAMEL FESTIVAL

Observed in: Bikaner

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January

The Bikaner Camel Festival is an annual cultural festival that takes place in the city of Bikaner (at the Bikaner Fort), in the western state of Rajasthan, in January.

During this festival, camel owners from Bikaner and other Indian towns and cities participate in this colorful and eventful festival that attracts thousands of tourists from all over the world. Among the festivities is a beauty pageant for camels. The camels are judged on the basis of physical attributes, health, ability to dance, and respond to their master’s commands. The owner of the winning camel is given a cash prize. In this festival tea and sweets prepared from camel milk are available.

On the second day of the festival, a camel race is held. This is when the best camels vie for honors. Thousands of locals and visitors cheer them on. At night cultural events such as performances of traditional Rajasthani folk songs and dances are an integral part of the celebrations. The festivities are brought to a colorful end when the sky is lit up with a well-orchestrated display of fireworks.

❁ TAJ MAHOTSAV

Observed in: Agra

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February

Taj Mahotsav is an annual cultural festival that takes place in the Indian city of Agra in February. Every year thousands of tourists flock to India to participate in this 10-day carnival. It is organized by the Uttar Pradesh Tourism Office in collaboration with the Indian Cultural and Tourism Ministry, and is held against the backdrop of the elegant structure dedicated to love, the Taj Mahal.

During the celebrations, there is a wide variety of cultural events. These include performances of a

wide array of Indian classical and folk dances and songs, plays, poetry recitations, gifts and handicrafts exhibits, elephant and camel rides, games, and a food festival featuring the traditional delicacies of different Indian states.

❁ FLOAT FESTIVAL

Observed in: Madurai

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January–February

Madurai's Float Festival is celebrated on the night of the full Moon between mid-January and mid-February every year. A splendid procession that starts at the Meenakshi Temple features heavily ornamented icons of the god Sundaresha (the incarnation of Lord Shiva) and the goddess Meenakshi (the incarnation of the goddess Parvati) with pearl crowns on their heads and riding on a golden bull. The occasion celebrates the marriage of Sundaresha to Meenakshi when Lord Alagar (the incarnation of Lord Vishnu) gave away his sister (Meenakshi) amid a lot of rejoicing.

Followers dressed in red and yellow finery dance and throw colored water on each other. The icons are then floated around the temple tank (Mariamman Teppakulam in Vandiyur) on a special raft, which is beautifully decorated with flowers and flickering lamps, with traditional music playing in the background. This festival attracts pilgrims from all over the country.

❁ GOA CARNIVAL

Observed in: Goa

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February–March

Goa bubbles with activity as it dresses up for its annual Carnival. This three-day celebration begins just before the Lenten season on Fat Saturday (Sabado Gordo) and concludes on Shrove Tuesday, the eve of Ash Wednesday. The Goa Carnival is marked by colorful processions, singing, dancing, and merrymakers in masks behaving boisterously and flamboyantly. Amid the revelry and partying, the carnival king, King Momo, and his queen are chosen. Goa was a Portuguese colony before independence and Carnival is a remnant of its colonial past. The colorful floats and revelry are a tourism bonanza for the state government.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY

❁ RATH YATRA

Observed in: Puri

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June–July

The sacred coastal town of Puri in the Indian state of Orissa wears a festive look when Rath Yatra, the chariot festival of Lord Jagannath, takes place. Lord

Jagannath is an incarnation of the Hindu god Krishna. He is accompanied by his brother Balabhadra (Balaram) and sister Subhadra when they go to their birthplace of Gundicha Ghar riding in their chariot, known as Ratna Sinhasan.

On the day of the journey, three chariots—the yellow Nandighosa and the Taladwaja and Deviratha, both blue—are lined up in front of the Jagannath Temple in Puri. Then the deities are brought out to their respective chariots. The former king of Puri, believed to be the living symbol of Lord Jagannath, sweeps the road in front of the chariots with a golden broom and sprinkles scented water while pilgrims pull the chariots to Gundicha Ghar.

After a stay of nine days, they return to Puri. The return procession is called Ulta Rath.

❁ ONAM

Observed in: Kerala

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August–September

Onam, a harvest festival, is the most important observance in Kerala. It is celebrated for anywhere from four to 10 days during the month of Chingam, the first month of the Malayalam solar calendar. According to legend Onam celebrates the memory of King Mahabali, an ancient king of Kerala who cared well for his people. Onam represents the happy time of King Mahabali's rule, and the people of Kerala believe that he comes back to visit during the Onam celebrations.

Onam celebrates a bountiful harvest following a year of hard work, and a variety of activities are associated with the Onam celebrations including worship, music, dances, sports, boat races, and lots of good food. People prepare for the festival by cleaning their houses and decorating them. Women create beautiful, intricate flower mats called *pookalam* in front of their homes to welcome the return of King Mahabali. Everyone wears new clothes bought especially for the public festivities.

During Onam people participate in traditional rituals and everyone attends a grand feast. Delicious sweets, such as *payasam*, a sweet porridge, and favorite dishes are prepared and served on banana leaves for everyone's enjoyment. Two of the featured events of Onam are the fantastic procession in Thrissur, a major city in Kerala, and the Great Boat Race, called Vallamkali, on the Pampa River. Hundreds of men row their boats to the beat of drums and cymbals; hanging from red silk umbrellas over every boat are gold coins. The rowing motion shakes the umbrellas, making their color flash and the coins tinkle as they collide. There are many kinds of boats, but the most beautiful to watch are the *chundan*s, the long boats shaped like snakes, as they skim swiftly over the water.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

In India every religion has its own set of ceremonies pertaining to birth, and even within the same religion the rituals vary from region to region. In the seventh month of pregnancy in many parts of the country, the pregnant woman is showered with gifts, blessings, and wishes for the safe delivery of a healthy child.

After the birth of a Hindu child, both mother and baby have to remain indoors for a period of 40 days to protect them from evil. At the end of this period, in some regions a naming ceremony is held to which friends and family members are invited. The priest performs a religious ceremony in which offerings to God are made, and then the father's sister whispers the name chosen for the child in its ear. The priest announces the name, and assembled guests come forward to give their blessings and good wishes to the infant.

Other ceremonies related to children include: the first solid food ceremony (*annaprasana*), when the child is fed sweet rice; head-shaving (*mundan*), which is generally performed in temples; ear-piercing (*karnavedha*), which is done to both boys and girls and is meant to bring good health and wealth to the child; and the commencement of formal study, or *vidyarambha*, which is celebrated by writing the first letter in a tray of rice.

❁ COMING OF AGE

When a Hindu boy reaches puberty he participates in a ceremony known as *upanayana sanskara*. Most prevalent in Brahmin families, it formalizes the transition from boyhood to adulthood. During this ceremony the boy is made aware of his duties and responsibilities as a human and as a Hindu. Amid Sanskrit chants, the priest invests the boy with a sacred white thread that he must wear on his left shoulder for the rest of his life.

Male circumcision is prevalent among the Muslims of India, though it is not compulsory. Most Muslims believe that by undergoing this ritual a boy becomes a man. Trained elders use knives, razors, and other sharp instruments to perform the circumcision on boys aged 10–12, without administering any anesthetic. Huge celebrations follow this coming-of-age ritual since the entire community takes great pride in it.

Indian Parsis refer to their coming of age ritual as Navjote. It is a new light ceremony similar to the Jewish bar mitzvah and the Hindu thread ceremony. The child is blessed and inducted into the Zoroastrian com-

munity by putting on a sacred chord (*kusti*) and a soft muslim undershirt (*sudreh* or *sudra*). He or she is initiated into the faith through prayers and community blessings.

❁ MARRIAGE

Marriage ceremonies in India vary from religion to religion and from region to region. Arranged marriages are prevalent even today in Indian society. A relative or a mutual friend delivers the marriage proposal, and then the families of the prospective bride and groom meet each other.

If the proposal is accepted the families consult their family priests and, using astrological charts, they decide on a marriage date. Providing a dowry continues to be an integral part of wedding ceremonies in many parts of India.

A Hindu marriage generally involves week-long festivities with a special ceremony on each day. Some of the important ceremonies include: a musical evening (*sangeet sandhya*) during which the guests dance and sing traditional folk songs; the ceremony called *mehendi*, in which professional *mehendi* artists are hired to apply a decorative pattern of henna to the hands and feet of the bride; and the actual marriage ceremony, or *vivaha*, when the groom, riding a white horse or in a car, comes to the venue of the wedding, followed by his wedding party (*baraat*), who dance their way from the groom's house to the scene where the wedding is to take place. Then, the bride's family welcomes the groom and the wedding party, and in front of the holy fire the bride and groom exchange their wedding vows and solemnize their wedding in the presence of God, family members, and friends.

There is also a lavish reception in honor of the bride and the groom. The wedding guests congratulate the newlyweds and extend their good wishes for their married life. After the reception a farewell ceremony (*bidai*) ceremony takes place. It gives the bride the opportunity to bid farewell to her family members, friends, and relatives.

❁ DEATH

After the death of a Hindu, family members cleanse his or her body, anoint it with sandalwood paste, and drape it in new clothes. Then mourners pay their final respects and drape flowers over the body of the deceased. In accordance with tradition a *dija*, a small lamp, is lit and placed near the body. Then male family members and friends carry it to the nearby crematorium for the final rites. Hindus believe that women should not accompany the body because they are too sensitive to see their loved ones cremated. Often during the funeral procession, mourners engage in religious chants dedicated to Yama (the Hindu god of death) and Lord Rama.

At the crematorium the body of the deceased is placed on a funeral pyre with the head positioned at

Fun Fact

In ancient times the bride and groom were married off at an early age, and it was only after the marriage that the bride and the groom saw each other for the first time.

the north, in the direction of the realm of Kubera (the god of wealth) and the feet at the south, in the direction of the realm of Yama. The eldest son or male member of the family performs the last rites and lights the funeral pyre. The ashes of the deceased are immersed in Hindu holy rivers such as the Ganges, since Hindus believe that doing this will absolve the deceased of all his or her sins. Also as an expression of sorrow, male members of the family shave their heads.

Donations to the poor and to other charities are made in honor of the deceased. During special memorial services, rice balls (*pinda*) are prepared and offered to the soul of the deceased. Also on the 11th or 13th day after the death, family members feed the poor in the deceased's honor.

Further Reading

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Indonesia

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Archipelago in Southeastern Asia, between the Indian and Pacific Oceans
Size	741,100 sq. mi.
Capital City	Jakarta
Flag Description	Indonesia's flag has two equal horizontal bands of red (top) and white (similar to the flag of Monaco, but longer; also similar to the flag of Poland, which is white and red).
Independence	August 17, 1945 (independence proclaimed); December 27, 1949 (official recognition from the Netherlands)
Population	241,973,879 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Indonesian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Javanese (45%); other (26%)
Major Language(s)	Bahasa Indonesia (official; a modified form of Malay); English; Dutch; local dialects, including Javanese, which is most widely spoken
Major Religion(s)	Islam (88%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Kartini Day, April 21; Independence Day, August 17

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Historians and geologists believe that what is now Indonesia probably existed as long ago as four million years ago and was part of mainland Asia. The famous Java Man (*Pithecanthropus erectus*), whose fossil remains have been discovered on the island of Java, might have been among the first inhabitants of the region. From the start the islands of Indonesia have experienced various waves of peoples, and their cultures, languages, and spiritual beliefs have merged gradually.

Between 3000 and 500 B.C.E. Indonesia was inhabited by sub-Mongoloid migrants from Asia who married and intermingled with the indigenous people. The earliest settlers from India, who migrated to the islands during the first century C.E., were primarily from the coastal regions. During the Saka period in Indonesia the Sanskrit language and the Pallava script (metrical Sanskrit) were introduced by the Indian Prince Aji Saka (78). The adapted language and script were

called the Kawi language; words and phrases from the Javanese language were incorporated into it.

The Greek astronomer and geographer Ptolemy of Alexandria (fl. second century) referred to Indonesia, which he called Abadiou in his writings. In 144 the Chinese traveler Fa Xian (c. 337–c. 422) visited and stayed in Java. At that time the northern part of the island was ruled by an Indonesian Hindu king named Kudungga, the first king of Indonesia.

Buddhism came to Indonesia between the first and second centuries. Of the two sects, Hinayana and Mahayana, the latter became more prominent in the eighth century. In the seventh century, trade relations flourished between the southern parts of India (including Orissa) and Indonesia. Sumatra was then named Suvarna Dwipa (“island of gold”), while Java was called Java Dwipa (“island of oats” or “millet”). The Indian settlers continued to pour into Indonesia up until the seventh century, and the Hindu religion gradually and peacefully spread throughout the entire region. The local people from all strata of society were influenced by the tenets of Hinduism.

Around the seventh century the kingdom of Srivijaya,

centered in the Palembang region of Sumatra, controlled major parts of Sumatra, western Java, and a large portion of the Malay Peninsula. Dominating the straits of Malacca and Sunda, this kingdom played a key role in the trade and commercial activities of the region. As a bastion of Mahayana Buddhism Srivijaya attracted pilgrims and scholars from all over Asia. A famous Buddhist kingdom in Central Java was ruled by the Sailendra Dynasty. During their regime (between 750 and 850), the world-renowned Borobudur temple was built. The Sailendra kingdom was also famous for its flourishing arts and culture as well as its naval strength.

The kingdom of Singasari emerged in East Java under King Dharmawangsa (911–1007). He codified the laws of the land and got the Mahabharata and the Bhagavad Gita translated into Javanese. The Singasari Kingdom was succeeded by the Majapahit Kingdom, whose first ruler was Prince Wijaya. During the reign of King Hayam Wuluk (1334–89) this empire emerged as the most powerful kingdom in Indonesia. It acquired and maintained dependencies in North Vietnam, Kampuchea (Cambodia), and the Philippines during the years 1331–64. This golden era produced major literary works.

In the 13th century Muslim merchants from India and Persia arrived in Indonesia to engage in trade. They propagated Islam among the Indonesian people, particularly in the coastal areas of Demak on Java. The influx of Muslims eventually caused the decline of the Majapahit kingdom (1293–1520). During the decades that followed Islam spread rapidly throughout the entire archipelago.

The Portuguese arrived in Indonesia in 1511, after conquering Malacca on the Malay Peninsula. They were followed by the Spaniards. The two colonial powers began propagating Christianity and were successful in their endeavors, particularly in Molucca. Later, in 1651 the Dutch invaded Kupang in Western Timor. Despite the presence of the Dutch in Timor a formal and clear-cut demarcation of the territories held by Holland and Portugal did not take place until almost 200 years later. On April 20, 1859, the Dutch signed a treaty with Portugal to divide Timor into two portions. The Dutch occupied the western part of the island, and Portugal the eastern part. Portugal held sway over East Timor until 1975.

The Indonesian movement for independence began in the early part of the 20th century. The Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) was founded in 1920. In 1927 the Indonesian Nationalist Party (PNI) gained prominence under the leadership of Sukarno (1901–70). In August 1945 after the Japanese surrender, Sukarno and Muhammad Hatta (1902–80), another nationalist leader, declared the country an independent republic. The Dutch strongly resisted the upsurge of nationalism, which resulted in four years of intermittent, often heavy, fighting. Finally under UN pressure, an agreement was reached in November 1949 for the creation of an independent republic of Indonesia. A new constitu-

tion was drawn up to provide a parliamentary form of government and Sukarno was elected president. Sukarno's administration was marked by inefficiency, corruption, and chaos. The mass expulsion of Dutch citizens (during the 1950s) and seizure of their property for public use adversely affected the economy. A populist revolt, springing from a desire for greater autonomy, began on the island of Sumatra early in 1958, spreading to Sulawesi and several other islands of the archipelago; in retaliation Sukarno tightened his authoritarian rule. The parliament was dissolved and the constitution of 1945 reinstated.

In early 1962 Sukarno sent paratroopers to Netherlands New Guinea, forcing the Dutch to agree to transfer that area to the United Nations with the understanding that it would come under Indonesian control by May 1963 following a referendum. Meanwhile Sukarno in 1963 declared Indonesia's opposition to the newly created Federation of Malaysia and initiated guerrilla raids into Malaysian territory on Borneo; the ensuing conflict lasted three years.

Sukarno began increasingly to tilt toward the left and made overtures to Communist China. About this time there was an aborted Communist coup sparked by the assassination of six high officials of the Army. The coup was quelled by the armed forces, which gradually assumed power under the leadership of General Suharto (b. 1921), while retaining Sukarno as *de jure* leader. The following weeks and months witnessed the bloody massacre of Communists as well as other innocent people. Chaos and anarchy prevailed. Gradually General Suharto ceased hostilities against Malaysia, banned the PKI, fostered close ties with the United States, and in 1966 rejoined the United Nations. In 1967 Indonesia became a founding member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In March 1967 Sukarno was voted out of power and General Suharto became acting president.

Suharto was elected president in 1968 and reelected in all subsequent elections through 1998. Under his rule the government reinstated an earlier Dutch colonial policy of "transmigration," by which farmers from the overpopulated islands of Java and Bali were moved to the underpopulated areas of Kalimantan, Sumatra, and Papua. During Suharto's regime his family held sway over much of Indonesia's economic life; corruption became rampant. In October 1997 the country was plunged into a crisis when the value of its currency plummeted. Struggling under crushing foreign debt and Suharto's reluctance to implement the reforms prescribed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Indonesia's economy continued to worsen.

Fun Fact

The Sakas were Central Asian nomads, probably Indo-Europeans whom Herodotus called Scythians, who moved into northwestern India during the second and first centuries B.C.E.

In 1998 student protests and riots over skyrocketing prices spread across the country. In May 1998 Suharto stepped down and his vice president B. J. Habibie (b. 1936), assumed the presidency, promising reforms and honest administration, among other things. Around this time there was a major crisis related to Indonesian-controlled East Timor, which sought independence. The rebellion was brutally suppressed, but East Timor eventually won independence after UN peacekeepers established order. In the June 1999 parliamentary elections, the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle, led by Megawati Sukarnoputri (b. 1947; daughter of Sukarno), topped the list with 34 percent of the vote; President Habibie's Golkar party came in second, with 22 percent. In the presidential elections of October 1999 Abdurrahman Wahid (b. 1940), of the National Awakening party, became the country's first democratically elected president. Megawati failed to build the coalition needed to win; nevertheless she was chosen by the parliament as vice president. Indonesia's economy began to revive in 2000, though the currency (rupiah) again experienced a sharp loss in value. Indonesia still faces many problems, including rising Islamic extremism (and religious conflict generally), military insubordination, official corruption, a fragile democratic process, and separatist movements.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Indonesia is the largest archipelago in the world. It comprises five major islands and 30 smaller groups, bringing the total number of islands to approximately 17,508. The archipelago is located between the Pacific and the Indian Oceans; it bridges the continents of Asia and Australia. Its sea area is four times its land area, which is about 1.2 million square miles. The five main islands are: Sumatra (284,285 square miles), Java/Madura (82,087 square miles), Kalimantan (355,204 square miles), Sulawesi (117,572 square miles), and Irian Jaya (262,206 square miles).

The land is covered by lush tropical rain forests, and the fertile soil is regularly replenished by volcanic eruptions such as those on the island of Java. Indonesia is predominantly mountainous with 400 volcanoes, out of which 100 are still active. Some of the highest peaks are Mt. Leuser and Mt. Kerinci (Sumatra), Mt. Gede, Mt. Tangkubanperahu, and Mt. Ciremai (Java). Several rivers flow through the country, and they are used extensively for transportation. Many of the islands also possess beautiful, placid lakes.

Indonesia experiences two tropical seasons, which are influenced by the equatorial and the meridian air circulations. The climate changes every six months. The dry season (June to September) is influenced by the Australian continental air masses, while the rainy season (December to March) is affected by the Asian and Pacific Ocean air masses. The country's tropical areas get rain all year round. The transitional periods are April–May and October–November.

Temperatures vary due to the large number of islands and mountains. The average temperature on the coastal plains is 82°F; and in the inland and mountain areas it is 79°F. In the higher mountainous areas, it hovers around 73°F, depending on the altitude. Because of Indonesia's location in the tropical zone, the relative humidity regularly tops 70 percent.

❁ ECONOMY

The economy of Indonesia is predominantly market based, but the government plays a key role in it. In fact the government owns and controls most of the large-scale enterprises and determines the prices of fuel, rice, and electricity. Indonesia exports large quantities of coal, crude oil, gas, wood, and wooden products, along with pottery and ceramics. Imports include machinery and equipment, chemicals, fuels, and food.

In the aftermath of the economic crisis that shook the country in 1997, the government took over many private sector assets. During the 1980s the incumbent government began to take steps to stimulate employment and growth in the non-oil export sector. Annual real gross domestic product growth was as high as 7 percent between 1987 and 1997. International analysts confirmed that Indonesia was emerging as a newly industrializing economy and also a major international market.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Indonesian society is made up of diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious groups, but mass education, the mass media, and the nationalistic policies of the government have helped foster a distinct Indonesian identity and culture, with Bahasa Indonesia serving as the lingua franca.

The national craft of Indonesia is batik, the art of applying wax to cloth followed by tie-dyeing in colorful and dramatic designs. The center of batik is Yogyakarta on the island of Java. Other artistic crafts include *ikat*, a distinct style of weaving with tie-dyed threads, *songket*, a kind of silk cloth with gold or silver threads woven into it; and *kris*, artwork embellished with jewels.

Javanese *wayang* (puppet) plays and gamelan (complex improvised rhythms created by groups of percussion players) are some of the well-known and popular elements of Indonesian culture. Indonesia is a polyglot nation in which the myriad communities continue to speak their distinct languages and dialects.

Islam is the predominant religion of the archipelago. In Indonesia social and religious norms, etiquette, and duties are largely governed by Islamic law. The code of ethics is familiarly called *adat*. However religious practices are influenced by elements of Hinduism and Buddhism, as well as animism. In spite of a long period of colonialism, Christian missionaries succeeded in converting only small pockets of the Indonesian population to Christianity.

❁ CUISINE

Indonesians usually have their main meal in the middle of the day. The food cooked in the morning is used up, and nothing is saved for the next meal. Family members help themselves, serving each dish with a spoon and using the right hand only.

A system of communal cooking and a strict hierarchy determine an individual's role and behavior at the table. The centerpiece of each meal is a huge mound of long-grain polished rice. The main meal consists of soups, salads, and different types of curries. Each meal is invariably accompanied by at least one or more *sambals*, or spice relishes, that are mixed with the food.

Indonesian gastronomy uses a good deal of coconut milk, which goes into the making of beverages, sauces, soups, and even rice. Traditional spices include coriander, pepper, garlic, turmeric, cassia (similar to cinnamon), bay leaf, star anise, ginger, tamarind, *galangal* (related to ginger), cardamom, lemon grass, shallots, peanuts, and so on. The Indonesians also eat lots of dried anchovies and prawns as part of their meals. Many Indonesian dishes are influenced by Chinese culinary arts, but dishes such as *padang* (a heavily spiced style of cooking, which is native to Sumatra) are totally indigenous.

On the streets of the cities and towns, vendors selling potato-based snacks, sweet nuts, biscuits, and fruit are a common sight. *Nasi goreng* (fried rice) is one of the most common dishes, while *sate* (skewered meats with a spicy peanut sauce), *gado-gado* (made with bean sprouts and vegetables in peanut sauce), and seafood items are also favorites. Indonesia boasts a great variety of tropical fruits—indigenous ones such as durians and rambutans—along with custard apples, guavas, papayas, mangoes, starfruit, and jackfruit, to name a few.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

New Year's celebrations in Indonesia begin on New Year's Eve. The occasion is enjoyed with parties, music, dancing, and the exchange of greetings and gifts. This is a public holiday in Indonesia.

❁ KARTINI DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 21

Kartini Day celebrates the life of Raden Ayu Kartini (1879–1904), the Indonesian heroine of women's emancipation. Her father, Raden Mas Adipati Arlo Soroningrat, was a mayor. He had 12 children from several wives, so Kartini was fortunate to receive a

Durians and Rambutans

Known as the “king of fruit,” the durian is a native of the tropical region and rarely seen beyond Southeast Asia. The name *durian* is derived from an Indonesian word meaning “thorny.” The fruit resembles an unripe coconut with spines covering its thick, green rind. Notorious for its foul smell, the flesh of this fruit is nevertheless sweet and delicious.

The rambutan is closely related to the lychee fruit. Its fibrous outer husk, covered with thick hairlike spines, encases a soft and fleshy fruit. The fruit of the rambutan tastes like a mellow grape with a syrupy flavor.

Dutch education. At age 12, however, she was forced to end her education because of the old Javanese tradition of *pinjit*, which required women to remain at home until they were married.

Although Kartini disliked her forced imprisonment and the ways in which women's lives were constrained, at 24 she obeyed her father and married the mayor of Rembang, Raden Adipati Joyodiningrat, a man of 50 who already had three wives and dozens of children. She had had a scholarship to study in Europe, but her hopes to study abroad were dashed. Instead she established a special school for local girls. She died at only 25, in childbirth. Kartini Day is a school holiday.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 17

On this day in 1945 Indonesia won its freedom from centuries of Dutch colonial rule. This occasion is celebrated with public ceremonies throughout the country, especially in the capital city of Jakarta. There is a ceremonial gun salute, followed by the raising of the national flag and the inspection of an honor guard by the president. Patriotic songs are sung by school-

Sambal

Sambal is used as a daily condiment and plays a part in every Indonesian meal. *Sambals* have numerous variations depending on the ingredients—garlic, shallot, coconut, meat, seafood, and vegetables—added to it. The most common of them all, *sambal ulek*, is made by chopping fresh red chilis and grinding them to a paste (along with the seeds) on a flat stone, using a hard rock to ensure that the seeds are thoroughly pulverized. Brown sugar and salt are added to the paste. Another kind of *sambal* is made of sliced green chilis with *peteh* beans.

children who gather at public places for the occasion. This is a public holiday in Indonesia.

Religious Holidays

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha—also called Eid ul-zuha, Bakr-Eid, and Idul Adha—commemorates the unwavering faith in God that the patriarch Ibrahim (Abraham) showed by his willingness to sacrifice his young son at God's command. In Indonesia on this day each family that can afford it sacrifices sheep (or goats or cattle) in the name of God. This meat is then shared with friends and family and distributed among the poor. Prior to this festival devout Muslims undertake a hajj, or pilgrimage, to Mecca, the center of the Islamic faith.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; HAJJ; ISLAM

❁ CHINESE NEW YEAR

Observed by: Chinese

Observed on: First of the first month of the Chinese calendar

Among Chinese festivals, the New Year's celebration is the most elaborate and colorful. It is the time to ring out the old and to usher in the new year with processions, fireworks, music, dancing, and feasting. The holiday also stresses the importance of family ties; it is a time for family reunions and visiting friends and relatives.

See also Volume III: CHINESE NEW YEAR

❁ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Muharram, first month of the Islamic calendar

The Islamic calendar is based on the revolutions of the Moon and has only 354 days. El am Hejir, the Islamic New Year, is celebrated on the first day of Muharram, the first Islamic month. Compared to Western calendars, the Islamic year goes backward 11 days every year, so the date of the new year varies from one year to the next in the West.

The beginning of the Islamic New Year is usually quiet, unlike New Year's celebrations associated with other calendars. In Indonesia Muslims gather in mosques for special prayers and readings. A major part of the holiday is the recounting of the incident of the Hijrah—Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina. Muslims also reflect on the passage of time and their own mortality.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: Balinese

Observed on: Vernal Equinox

For weeks before New Year's Eve (Ngerupuk) much noise is made. People paint their faces and bodies and run through the streets banging tins and setting off firecrackers to frighten away the evil spirits from Bali. The people believe that when spring begins and, with it, the rainy season, Yama, the God of Hell, sweeps the devils from hell, and they all fall on Bali. This inundation requires the purification of the entire island.

On New Year's Eve a ritual called Tawur is performed in order to give something back to nature. The Balinese believe in balance: If one takes, one should also give back; otherwise balance is lost. In Ubud Tawur is performed at the crossroads, which is considered *tenget*, a place highly charged in a supernatural way. The ceremony also takes place where there are Hindu communities in other parts of Indonesia, such as Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Sumatra, and Jakarta.

In the evening grotesque statues made of wood and bamboo frames covered with papier-mâché and Styrofoam™ and garishly painted, some almost 10 feet high, are paraded through village streets accompanied by loud gamelan (percussion orchestra) music. These statues represent demonic spirits (Ogoh-Ogoh). A ceremony is held before the parade to purify the Ogoh-Ogoh, and they are then usually burned when the parade ends. Many cockfights are also featured on New Year's Eve because it is believed that blood purifies the Earth.

On New Year's Day (Nyepi), the noise is stilled and silence prevails. There are four basic restrictions, the four *brata*: no fire, no work, no travel, and no leisure activities. Bali must appear to be deserted so the demons will be convinced to leave. The ports close. Shops are closed. Cars are forbidden, and no one leaves his or her compound. Turning on electricity, cooking, or lighting fires for any purpose is forbidden. Balinese radio does not broadcast, and people fast for 24 hours. Men from the *banjar*, the village guards, the *pecalang*, patrol the streets to make sure the *brata* are obeyed. Anyone caught engaging in a forbidden activity is fined.

See also Volume III: HINDUISM

❁ MOULoud

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

Mouloud, or Mawlid al-Nabi, celebrates the birthday of Muhammad, who was born in 570 C.E. On this day Muslims reflect on Muhammad's life and teachings. They sing songs, utter special prayers, and recall how the prophet forgave even his worst enemies. On this day Muslims also give alms to the poor. Muhammad urged his followers not to make a show of his birthday, and many Muslims, especially

those belonging to conservative sects, do not celebrate this day at all.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOU

❁ MESH SANKRANTI

Observed by: Hindus

Observed on: Ninth of Shukla Paksh (the bright fortnight) of Chaitra, the first month of the Hindu calendar

Mesh Sankranti, also called the Hindu Bali Day of Silence or Nyepi, is the most important Sankranti (solar transit) because the solar year begins when the Sun moves into Chaitra, the zodiacal sign of Aries, the Ram, at the vernal equinox, one of the two times in a year when the day and night are equal in length. The Hindu community in Indonesia celebrates the Hindu New Year according to the lunisolar calendar. By far the biggest celebrations are held in Bali, although celebrations also take place in other parts of the country. In preparation for the holiday, cooking begins two days in advance, villages are cleaned, and on the eve of the new year, people create a hula-baloo in order to scare away devils and evil spirits. The actual day, however, is characterized by absolute silence and stillness. Hindus in Indonesia do not leave their homes, cook, or engage in any activity. The streets of towns and cities are deserted.

See also Volume III: HINDUISM

❁ VESAK

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: First full Moon day in May (except in a leap year, when the festival is held in June)

Vesak, also called Tri Suci Waisak (Three Holy Events) in Indonesia, commemorates the birth, enlightenment, and salvation of Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism. Each of these events is commemorated on the day of a full Moon (Purnama Sidhi). On this occasion devout Buddhists make offerings of fruit, flowers, and candles at shrines and monasteries. To Buddhists the candles symbolize life and enlightenment. Large-scale celebrations take place in the areas with large concentrations of Buddhists—Jakarta, Riau, North Sumatra, and West Borneo. Traditional celebrations of Vesak take place in the most renowned Buddhist monasteries, which are located in Sunter (North Jakarta) and Pacet (West Java).

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM; VESAK

❁ SHAB-E-MIRAJ

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twenty-seventh of Rajab, the seventh month of the Islamic calendar

Shab-e-Miraj, also known as Isra Meraj, Laylat Al-Isra wa Al-Miraj, Ispak Mikray, and Ascension of the Prophet, is a very special celebration among Mus-



A Buddhist monk sprinkles holy water during Vesak celebrations at Borobudur Temple in Central Java, Indonesia. On Vesak Buddhists in Indonesia and throughout the world observe the birth anniversary of Buddha, and also the day when he attained enlightenment. (AP Photo/Purwowiyoto)

lims. They believe Muhammad traveled from Mecca to Jerusalem, ascended into the seven heavens, and returned, all in the course of a single night. The official name of the holiday is Laylat al-Isra wa al-Miraj, which means “the night journey and ascension.” During his sojourn in the seven heavens Muhammad was commanded to establish the five daily prayers (*namaaz*), and met other spiritual beings such as Abraham, Moses, Aaron, Adam, the Archangel Gabriel, and Jesus.

On this day devout Muslims of Indonesia gather in mosques or at one another’s homes and listen to recountings of the story of Muhammad’s journey. They share food and sweets to celebrate the night.

See also Volume III: ISLAM

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr, also called Lebaran or Feast of the Breaking of the Fast, is the second *eid*, or festival, of the Islamic religious calendar. It marks the start of the festivities and celebrations that end the month-long fast during Ramadan, the holiest month of the Islamic calendar. Indonesian Muslims begin the day with morning prayers, generally in mosques or *idgabs*, open spaces created for such important observances. This is followed by social visits, the exchange of greetings and gifts, and the enjoyment of such delicacies as *sewiyen* (vermicelli), which is specially prepared for this occasion.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

Eka Dasa Rudra

The long and complex Balinese ceremony of Eka Dasa Rudra is performed only once every hundred years. According to tradition there must be a balance in the world between the forces of good and evil; when the balance favors evil, the ceremony must be performed. The preparations for the most recent Eka Dasa Rudra began in 1963 at the request of President Sukarno. Shortly after, however, the volcano Gunung (“Mount”) Agung erupted and almost 2,000 people died. The preparations were halted because of this disaster but were resumed again 16 years later in 1979. The rituals and accompanying sacrifices involved take place at Pura Besakih in Bali, the 1,000-year-old mother temple, which houses around 30 different temples dedicated to Balinese and Hindu gods.

When the ceremony of Eka Dasa Rudra is performed the entire population of Bali participates. Basically, the 11 demons, of which Rudra is the most powerful, must be transformed so that they are less threatening to the world balance. Such an undertaking requires much time and labor, and all of the ceremonies, which number about 30, last for 11 weeks. In 1979 Eka Dasa Rudra went on from late February to early May.

Eka Dasa Rudra begins by carrying the images of the gods down to the sea to be washed. The procession takes three days, and the populations of whole villages line the route. The climax of the rituals is the sacrifice of a buffalo whose horns have been covered in gold to the sea demons. A heavy stone is tied around the neck of the buffalo as it is forced into the swirling ocean. There are various chants and prayers by *pemangku* (spiritual leaders) and *pedanda* (priests), and dance rituals are performed, the most important one being the war dance, *baris* (literally “war formation”), which is danced by men.

Once the initial sacrifice and rituals are over, virtually everyone in Bali leaves for the mother temple at Besakih. Every path and road in Bali is filled with worshippers bringing offerings to Pura Besakih. Then the climax of Eka Dasa Rudra begins, the Taur purification sacrifices. The *pedanda* send their prayers in all 11 directions of Balinese “space,” in accordance with ancient rituals written on lontar palm scripts. (On Bali the lontar palm is the tree of life.) While these prayers are being sent, two dozen or so priests sacrifice many animals and birds in an effort to appease Rudra, the demonic manifestation of Bali’s supreme being.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

The birth of a new child is a time of great rejoicing in the Indonesian Muslim community, since children are considered a token of Allah’s compassion. Children are often referred to in Islam as “wealth.” Immediately after birth the baby is thoroughly washed. According to Islamic tenets the first sound that a baby ought to hear is the sacred name of Allah. This is customarily uttered by its father (or a male relative), who whispers the call to prayer, or *adhan*, first into the child’s right ear and then into its left ear. The idea is to make the child aware of Allah’s omnipresence and his power over the lives of mortals.

When the child is between three and seven days old, its head is shaved to remove the natal impurities. This ceremony is known as the *aqiqah*, and it symbolizes the removal of misfortune and evil so that the child can embark on a good and trouble-free life. The hair is collected and weighed, and the equivalent weight in silver is given to the poor. Then the hair is buried. Some Muslim families also sacrifice an animal on such occasions and distribute the meat to the people in their neighborhoods.

Muslim children are not named at birth. The choice of name is believed to have a direct bearing

on the character and behavior of the child during its lifetime. The local imam is often consulted on the naming. On the day of purification the child is also given a proper name.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Muslim boys generally experience a major change in status through circumcision (*khitān*) after they have recited the entire Koran. In Islamic countries where this procedure is followed, the boy undergoes the operation between the ages of 10 and 12. This is a puberty rite, separating the boy from childhood and introducing him to adult status. In Indonesian Muslim families this occasion is accompanied by a good deal of festivity, including music, special foods, and many guests.

❁ MARRIAGE

The majority of the population in Indonesia is Muslim. Most Muslim marriages are decided by the two sets of parents. According to Islamic tenets, however, the prospective bride and groom are free to refuse the spouse that has been selected by their parents or elders.

Prior to the actual wedding the two families decide on a specific amount of money, or articles in

kind, that the groom's family must give to the bride. This sum of money is in reality a security deposit for the bride in case the marriage fails. Muslim weddings in Indonesia take place in the bride's home. The rites are conducted by an imam.

The bride and the bridegroom sit in separate rooms during the marriage ceremony. Two guests—one from the bride's family and one from the groom's family—witness the bride's consent to the marriage and inform the imam. The ceremony begins with the imam reciting relevant passages from the Koran. The imam then speaks about the duties of marriage and asks the bridegroom whether he agrees to the marriage. Once the bridegroom has assented, the bride, bridegroom, and two witnesses sign a marriage contract.

The Koran says that a man may marry up to four wives but only if he can treat them all equally. If a marriage does not work out, the Koran says that couples may get divorced but only as a last resort. First the couple must try to resolve its problems. If this does not work, each spouse must choose a friend or relative for counseling. If this too fails, they must wait four months before they can end their marriage.

❁ DEATH

All religions accept death as a part of human life. Since death is unpredictable but inevitable, Muslims are exhorted always to be prepared. They bury their dead, unlike Hindus and Buddhists, who are cremated. Islam prohibits cremation. Muslims are taught to treat the dead body with gentleness and respect. In Indonesia (as in all Islamic societies), it is customary for Muslims to wash the dead body, perfume it, and drape it in a fresh new white cloth before burial. The burial is supposed to take place as soon as possible after death. The dead person's face is turned toward Mecca, the arms and legs straightened out, and the mouth and eyes closed. A baby who dies at birth, or even a stillborn child, must have a name.

The friends, relatives, and acquaintances of a deceased person come together for prayers. Then the men carry the corpse to the graveyard. Religious laws forbid Muslim women from attending burials. Some women, however, do break this rule. The men attending a funeral form a double line facing each other and pass the bier on their shoulders toward the grave. In the case of a child, the bier is carried in the arms of a relative. The wrapped body is customarily laid directly at the bottom of the grave, on its right side

with its face turned toward Mecca. Although graves are dug by professional gravediggers, the task of filling it with earth is carried out by the relatives and all those present, who throw handfuls of dirt into the grave as a token of solidarity and remembrance. Attendants at funerals cover their heads as a mark of respect for the deceased.

The grave is sealed and then marked by a small elevation to differentiate it from the level ground nearby. After the funeral a wake is held for both men and the women, usually on the same day.

Further Reading

Colin Brown, *A Short History of Indonesia: The Unlikely Nation?* (Crow's Nest, NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2003); Robert Pringle, *A Short History of Bali: Indonesia's Hindu Realm* (Crow's Nest, NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2004); M. C. Ricklefs, *History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1200* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001); Susan Rodgers, ed., *Telling Lives, Telling History: Autobiography and Historical Imagination in Modern Indonesia* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1995); Michael Wood, *Official History in Modern Indonesia: New Order Perceptions and Counterinterviews* (Boston: Brill, 2005).

Fun Fact

The Balinese believe that the shape of the teeth distinguishes gods and humans from animals and ogres. Gods and humans have flat teeth, whereas animals and ogres have pointed ones. Because people cannot fulfill their karma if all their teeth are not flat, the Balinese have their children's canine teeth and incisors filed down, called *matatah*, usually when they are between 16 and 18.

This procedure removes impurity by reducing the Balinese six deadly sins (Sad Ripu): lust, greed, anger, intoxication (as a result of drink or passion), sadness, arrogance, and jealousy. If children die before their teeth have been filed flat, the procedure is performed on the corpse.

Fun Fact

Balinese religious practice, called Agama Tirtha (the holy water religion), is a blend that includes Hinduism.

Iran

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Middle East or West Asia, bordering the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf, and the Caspian Sea, between Iraq and Pakistan
Size	636,296 sq. mi.
Capital City	Tehran
Flag Description	Iran's flag has three equal horizontal bands of green (top), white, and red; the national emblem (a stylized representation of the word <i>Allah</i> in the shape of a tulip, a symbol of martyrdom) in red is centered in the white band; ALLAH AKBAR ("God is Great") in white Arabic script is repeated 11 times along the bottom edge of the green band and 11 times along the top edge of the red band.
Independence	April 1, 1979 (Islamic Republic of Iran proclaimed)
Population	68,017,860 (2005 est.)
Government	Theocratic republic
Nationality	Iranian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Persian (51%); Azeri (24%)
Major Language(s)	Persian and Persian dialects (58%); Turkic and Turkic dialects (26%)
Major Religion(s)	Shia Muslim (89%)
National Holiday(s)	Day of Oil Industry Nationalization, first of Farvardin; Navruz, first of Farvardin; Sizdah Bedar, 13th of Farvardin; Islamic Republic Day, April 1; Death of Imam Khomeini, June 4; Magnificent Victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, First of Esfand

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

According to historians and scholars, the earliest people to inhabit the Iranian plateau were the Elamites, who founded the city of Shush in the southwestern part of the country. The city was situated on the east side of the Tigris River about 150 miles to the north of the head of the Persian Gulf. The Indo-Europeans came into the region of Iran in the second millennium B.C.E., bringing with them agricultural as well as domestic skills. In the sixth century the Achaemenian king Cyrus the Great (c. 585–c. 29) ruled the region, and it was during this period that the history of Persia began to be documented.

In the fourth century, Alexander the Great (356–23) invaded Persia. Despite the efforts of King Darius III (c.

380–30) to negotiate peace with Alexander, Alexander destroyed most of Persepolis, the capital of the region. After Alexander's death in 323 his empire was torn asunder by feuds and factions, and Persia came to be controlled by the Macedonian Seleucids. Seleucus I (358/54–281) was the Macedonian general who, as one of Alexander's successors, acquired the vast eastern section of the empire centered on the territory of the old Babylonian Empire. It was from him that the Seleucid Dynasty was established which lasted for 225 years. The Seleucids ruled Persia from 312 to 247, but they had a hard time controlling the ethnic minorities.

Among these ethnic minorities were the nomadic Parthians who controlled most of the territory of Persia until the third century C.E. Next came the Sassanians. They hailed from the central regions of Persia which were not under the Parthians' control. They were Zoroastrians by faith and very

The Elamites

The Elamites established one of the first recorded civilizations (2700–539 B.C.E.) in the far west and southwest of what is now Iran, following what is called the Proto-Elamite period (3200). Ancient Elam, called Haltamti, Atamti in later Elamite, by its people, lay to the east of Sumer and Akkad (modern-day Iraq). The Akkadians called the region Elam, which means “highland,” and they were called the offspring of Elam, the eldest son of Shem, in the Hebrew Torah. Much of the Elamite civilization occupied what is now Khuzestan, but it extended into Fars in prehistoric times. (The name *Khuzestan* is derived from Hujij, the Old Persian root for “Elam.”)

Not much is known about Elam aside from what has been gleaned from various Mesopotamian sources. Elam’s capital, Susa, was founded around

4000, before the Proto-Elamites occupied it. During excavations conducted in 1978, the earliest levels contained pottery found nowhere else in Mesopotamia, but the material found in the following level has been identified as Sumerian of the Uruk period. Proto-Elamite influence appears around 3200, and texts in the still undeciphered Proto-Elamite script continue to be present until about 2700. The Proto-Elamite period ends with the establishment of the Awan dynasty. The earliest known historical figure of Elam, mentioned in the Sumerian king list, is King Enmebaragesi of Kish (c. 2650). Elamite history, however, is only attested in records contemporary with the beginning of the Akkadian Empire, around 2300 onward.

hardworking. They went on to promote trade and urban development but were overrun by the Arabs in 637, who ruled until 1050.

The Arabs converted most of the population to Islam and were instrumental in introducing the new Persian script and Islamic culture. They in turn were overpowered by a Turkish dynasty that captured Isfahan, an important city in central Iran, in 1051. Isfahan had served as the capital of both the Seljuk and Safavid Dynasties and was the cultural hub of the eastern Islamic world in terms of language and art.

Under the rule of the Safavid Dynasty (1502–1722) the Persian Empire reached the pinnacle of glory and power. The noted ruler Shah Abbas I and his successors made strenuous efforts to promote Shiism and let it flourish. Moreover they also restored the city of Isfahan, which had been ravaged by invaders and plunderers.

The Safavids were succeeded by Afghans in the early 18th century. Unfortunately the Afghans could not hold onto power for long and hence followed a period of utter chaos, virtual anarchy, and frequent change of rulers. In 1779 Agha Muhammad Khan (1742–97), chief of a Turkish tribe, the Ghajars, established a capital in Tehran, at the time a mere village. The Ghajars introduced an era of peace to Iran until 1921. Though Iran remained neutral during World War I, it was unable to prevent partial occupation by the British forces that were keen to maintain an uninterrupted supply of oil.

One of the later Ghajar kings supported the idea of elections and a legislative assembly (*majlis*), but the idea took a concrete shape when Reza Khan (1877–1944), a military chief, made his political debut in 1923. Reza became prime minister and undertook the challenging task of upgrading and modernizing the country. In 1925 Reza Khan

adopted the title of *pahlavi* and claimed himself to be the shah (emperor) of Iran. The country made a fair amount of progress during his rule.

The name Iran was officially adopted in 1934. During World War II Britain and Russia established spheres of influence in the country to successfully thwart Germany’s advance. In 1941 Reza was forced into exile in South Africa and was succeeded by his son, Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi (1878–1944). After the war, the United States persuaded the Russians to vacate the country; Mohammad Reza regained absolute power.

Over the next 30 years, discontent brewed with regard to Shah Mohammad Reza’s regime of repression and modernization. With gradual deterioration of the economy (due to the shah’s post-boom mismanagement), the growing opposition expressed its resentment through sabotage and massive demonstrations. The shah retaliated by enhanced brutality and suppression. The U.S. support for the shah wavered, and the latter finally fled the country in January 1979. Two weeks later Ayatollah Khomeini (1900–89), the leader of the growing opposition, returned from exile to a hero’s welcome. The ayatollah’s supporters helped to establish a clergy-dominated Islamic Republic. Shortly afterward, the ayatollah was proclaimed imam, or leader. Around this time Iraqi President Saddam Hussein made an attempt to grab land in

Fun Fact

It was once thought that Zoroaster’s name (also Zarathushtra, or Zardost) meant “[bringer of the] golden dawn,” but that pleasant notion has been replaced and it is now believed that the name is an Avestan compound: *zareta-* “feeble, old” and *ustra* “camel,” which means “owner of feeble camels.”

Fun Fact

The Kurds, who number more than 25 million, inhabit the mountainous areas of Iraq, Turkey, Iran, Syria, Armenia, and Lebanon. They are one of the largest ethnic groups without their own country.

Khuzestan province. It was a disastrous move that resulted in a war that killed innumerable people before a ceasefire was negotiated in 1988.

On June 4, 1989, Ayatollah Khomeini died, plunging the country into chaos. Two months later, in August 1979, Hashemi Rafsanjani was elected president, and Khomeini's position as supreme leader was occupied by the former president, Ayatollah Hojjatoleislam Ali Khamenei.

Following the 1997 landslide election of the moderate Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, people expected relations with other countries to improve. However relations with Germany (and most of Europe) reached a nadir in 1997 after a German court gave the verdict that the Iranian government had been involved in the assassination of Iranian Kurds in Germany.

Khatami's re-election encouraged Iranian reformers, but real power still remained with the Islamic clerics. In the early years of the 21st century, Iran has come under international pressure regarding its nuclear ambitions.

In 2003 the country was hit with one of the severest earthquakes in living memory. With its epicenter near the city of Bam in southeastern Iran, it killed 40,000 people and left the city utterly devastated. In the 2004 elections the conservatives won control of parliament in a process marred by controversy. At present the spiritual leader of Iran is Ayatollah Ali Hosseini-Khamenei, while the head of the government is President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

☼ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Iran's interior region is fringed by a chain of huge, heavily eroded mountains. Most of the country lies above the 1,500-foot level. Outside the mountain ring in the north, the 400-mile strip of coastal plain along the Caspian Sea is never more than 70 miles wide (frequently narrowing to 10 miles). It falls sharply from the 1,864-foot altitude to 17 miles below sea level. In the south the land drops away from a plateau to meet the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman.

The Zagros range stretches from the border with the Republic of Armenia in the northwest to the Persian Gulf and onward into Baluchistan. The Alborz mountain range runs along the southern shore of the Caspian Sea to meet the border ranges of Khorassan situated in the eastern part of the country. The snow-covered Mt. Damavand (18,606 feet) is the highest peak in Iran. On the border of Afghanistan the mountains gradually fall away to merge into sand dunes. The vast desert tracts of the country stretch across the plateau from the northwest, close to Tehran and Qom, for a distance of about 400 miles to the southeast and beyond the frontier.

Approximately one-sixth of the total area of Iran is barren desert. The largest desert areas are Kavir-e-Lut and Dasht-e-Kavir or Great Salt Desert. The Caspian Sea, which is the largest landlocked body of water in the world, is 385,000 square miles and lies some 85 feet below sea level. Its salt content is considerably less than that of the oceans; hence it abounds in an unusual variety of fish. The important ports on the Caspian coast are: Bandar Anzali, Noshahr, and Bandar Turkman.

Along the Iran-Afghanistan border are several marshy lakes that expand and contract according to the season of the year. Freshwater lakes are rare in Iran. There are several large rivers—the Sefidrood, Karkheh Mand, Karun, and Qara-Chay Atrak; but the only navigable one among them is Karun.

Iran has a complex climate, ranging from subtropical to subarctic. In winter a high-pressure belt, centered in Siberia, sweeps over the central Iranian Plateau, while low-pressure systems develop over the Caspian Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Mediterranean Sea. These result in wet spells and a phase of very cold weather coupled with frost and snow. The area adjacent to the Persian Gulf has very high temperatures during summer though winters may be quite cool at the northwestern extremities. Dust storms and haze are common features during summer.

In the summer temperatures vary from a high of 122° F in Khuzestan province (known as Arabistan to locals and Iraqi Arabs) near the Persian Gulf to a low of 34° F in the northwest. Rainfall varies from less than 2 inches in the southeast to about 77 inches in the Caspian region. The annual average is about 14 inches. The rainy season occurs in the winter.

☼ ECONOMY

Iran is OPEC's (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) second largest oil producer and holds 10 percent of the world's known oil reserves. It possesses the world's second largest natural gas reserves after Russia. Iran's economy relies heavily on oil export revenues, which comprise approximately 80–90 percent of total export earnings.

In March 2004, the incumbent American President George W. Bush renewed the sanctions originally imposed by his predecessor (President William J. Clinton) in 1995 by another year, arguing that Iran posed "unusual and extraordinary threat" to the U.S. The sanction prohibits U.S. companies and their foreign subsidiaries from conducting business with Iran, while banning any "contract for the financing of the development of petroleum resources located in Iran."

The bulk of the country's crude oil reserves are located onshore in the southwestern Khuzestan region in the vicinity of the Iraqi border as well as the Persian Gulf. Iran has 32 producing oil fields, of which 25 are onshore and seven located offshore. Iran exports around 2.5 million bbl/d (barrels per day), with major customers being Japan, China, South Korea, Taiwan, and Europe.

The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam

The Rubaiyat is a collection of Persian verses usually called *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*.

Omar Khayyam (1048–1123) was born in Nishapur, Persia (Iran). His full name was Abu ol-Fath ebn-Ebrahim Omar ol-Khayyami. (*Khayyam* means “tent maker”.) Although he is known to most people for his beautiful verses, he was also a mathematician, philosopher, scientist, and astronomer. He created the Jalali calendar, which is more accurate than the Gregorian, and astronomical tables, as well as contributing the geometric solution of cubic equations to the field of algebra.

The term *rubaiyat* also refers to the verse form that Edward Fitzgerald (1809–83) used in his famous

translation of Khayyam’s poetry. The musical quality of the verses derives from the *aaba* rhyme scheme. The rhyme scheme is often extended so that the unrhymed third line becomes the rhyme for three of the four lines in the following verse, *aaba, bbcb, ccde*, and so forth. This rhyme scheme is called interlocking *rubaiyat*. The following example comes from Fitzgerald’s translation:

Then to this earthen Bowl did I adjourn
My Lip the secret Well of Life to learn:
And Lip to Lip it murmur’d—“While you live,
Drink!—for once dead you never shall return.”

Robert Frost (1874–1963), the winner of four Pulitzer prizes, used the interlocking *rubaiyat* in his well-known “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening.”

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Traditional religious fervor is the most outstanding feature of Iranian culture, and it deeply permeates all aspects of people’s lives; the most visible expressions are the modest dress code and etiquette observed at the mosques. In Iran (as in all Islamic countries), the nature of art is nonrepresentational and stylized. Persian carpets are Iran’s most famous cultural export, dating back to the fifth century B.C.E. They are very much an integral part of both religious and cultural activities.

Persian poetry first made its debut in the ninth century C.E. and slowly grew into a vast anthology of epic poems and nonrhyming couplet poems, which are still intact. Other notable Persian crafts include metalwork, glassware, and woodwork.

The traditional folk art of Iran has been preserved by the ethnic minorities like the Turkmen, Azaris, Kurds, and Lors. The exquisite Persian painting style dates back to the Seljuk period (1040 to 1220); it disappeared until the 16th century, when it was revived and flourished again, along with calligraphy, across the country, but especially in the region of Shiraz.

In June 2004 Iranian officials prohibited by law the smoking of the water pipe (*bookab*, *narguileh*, or *bubble-bubble*) in all restaurants and other public places. Interestingly water-pipe smoking has been a traditional Middle Eastern practice and an integral part of Iranian culture through the centuries. The official ban is in response to concern about the health of the Iranian youth, among whom there has apparently been rising addiction to the water pipe.

CUISINE

Rice is the staple food of the Iranians, who take pains to cook it superbly. The meat used in cooking is usu-

ally lamb or mutton minced or cut into small chunks. Meat is rarely the dominant ingredient, except in kebabs. Fresh vegetables and herbs also form an integral part of Iranian gastronomy. Well-known dishes include *chelo kboresh* (rice topped with vegetables and meat in a nut sauce), *polo chele* (pilau rice), *polo sabzi* (pilau rice cooked with fresh herbs), *polo chirin* (sweet and sour saffron tinged rice cooked with raisins, almonds and pieces of orange), *chelo kebab* (rice with skewered meats cooked over charcoal), *kofte* (minced meatballs), *kboresh badinjan* (mutton and eggplant stew), and *mast-o-khier* (cold yogurt-based soup flavored with mint, chopped cucumber, and raisins) among others. Iranians eat their meals with a spoon and fork

Fruit and vegetable juices are popular, and tea is widely enjoyed and drunk in the many teahouses (*ghahve khane*). The Iranian *chay* (tea) is always served hot, black, and strong. The consumption of alcohol is strictly forbidden for the Muslims in Iran.

Public/Legal Holidays

DAY OF OIL INDUSTRY NATIONALIZATION

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First of Farvardin, the first month of the Jalali calendar

Day of Oil Industry Nationalization, also called Petroleum Day, is a significant day in the economic history of Iran. On this day in 1951 the country’s entire petroleum resources were nationalized for optimum utilization and exploitation and also to reduce dependency for oil on other countries. This

Fun Fact

Rubaiyat, which means “quatrains” in Persian, is derived from the plural of the Arabic root that means “four.”

Fun Fact

Persian carpets are classified on the basis of their design, the kind of fabric used, and the technique of weaving. The names of the classifications come from the names of cities and areas known to produce each design.

centralization helped to boost Iran's economy through reduction in pilferage and waste, besides stabilizing prices for domestic consumption.

❁ NAVRUZ

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First of Farvardin, the first month of the Jalali calendar

The official calendar of Iran is the Jalali, or Persian, solar calendar, and the first day of the Persian New Year is the first of Farvardin (March 21–24 of the Gregorian calendar). Navruz (or Norouz), which means “new day,” is the celebration of the Persian New Year. Although celebrated in a number of Islamic countries, Navruz, is not regarded as a religious holiday in Iran. It is in fact the celebration of the vernal equinox. According to scholars it originates from the customs of Ancient Mesopotamia. In Babylon the New Year was celebrated on the 21st day of Nissanu (March–April) with festivities lasting 12 more days, each commemorated with individual rites, amusements, and performances. Navruz is believed to have been celebrated even in pre-Islamic times. It is a major festival of the Zoroastrians whose ancestors hail from the region that is present-day Iran.

For Iranians Navruz heralds the advent of the glorious spring season, the commencement of agricultural activities, and the gradual onset of warm weather. This is also the day when conflicts and hostilities are forgotten and forgiven. On this day Iranians greet each other and also partake of lavish feasts. An atmosphere of bonhomie and brotherhood pervades everywhere.

See also Volume III: NAVRUZ; SPRING FESTIVALS; ZOROASTRIANISM

❁ SIZDAH BEDAR

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Thirteenth of Farvardin, the first month of the Persian calendar

This day marks the end of the Navruz vernal equinox celebrations. From ancient times the Iranians have observed the tradition of spending the 13th day of the month of Farvardin out of doors. The word *sizdah* means “13,” and the phrase “*sizdah bedar*” translates as “getting rid of 13.” It is customary for Iranian families on this day to go to parks or the countryside and enjoy picnics. This is done in order to purge the minds and hearts of all evil.

Sizdah Bedar is also a special day to ask for rain. In ancient Iran the 13th of Farvardin was devoted to the angel of rain Tir, who is depicted as a horse. Siz-

dah Bedar is also devoted to competitive games—many involving horses—and tournaments. The victory of a horse represented the victory of the angel. Another ritual observed on this day is the knotting of blades of grass by spinsters in the hope of finding a suitable husband. The knotting of the grass represents the bonds of matrimony.

See also Volume III: NAVRUZ; ZOROASTRIANISM

❁ ISLAMIC REPUBLIC DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 1

With the victory of the Islamic revolution the people of Iran went to the polls for the first time in April 1979 and voted in favor of an Islamic republican system. There was an overwhelming majority of 99 percent. A team of experts subsequently began to formulate the constitutional law of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This constitutional law was then approved by the vote of the Iranian nation. In Iran Republic Day is marked by civic ceremonies and cultural activities.

❁ DEATH OF IMAM KHOMEINI (LITERALLY, HEART-RENDING DEPARTURE OF THE GREAT LEADER OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN)

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 4

The mastermind behind the Islamic Revolution of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, died on this day in 1989, more than a decade after he shot into limelight due to the revolution. Hence this is a solemn and somber occasion for the Iranians. On this day the public pays homage to their departed leader. The occasion is marked by speeches and processions. All public and government institutions are closed.

❁ MAGNIFICENT VICTORY OF THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION OF IRAN

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First of Esfand, the 12th month of the Jalali calendar

The Iranian Revolution in 1979 was an epoch-making event that transformed Iran from an autocratic pro-West monarchy and a liberated society under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to an orthodox Islamic theocracy under the reign of Ayatollah Khomeini. In Iran this day is observed by processions and marches and public speeches by well-known personalities. This is an official holiday and all government and public establishments are closed.

Religious Holidays

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

The day marks the depiction of Abraham the patriarch's unflinching faith in God by his willingness to sacrifice his young son, just because the Almighty commanded him to do so. In Iran on this day it is mandatory for each family to sacrifice a sheep, goat, ram, or cattle in the name of God; this meat is then shared with friends, family, and distributed among the poor. Prior to this festival, devout Muslims may, if they so desire, undertake a hajj or a pilgrimage to Mecca—the bastion of the Islamic faith.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

❁ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

Islam has a calendar based on the revolutions of the Moon. Thus, the year is only 354 days long. The Sunni Islamic New Year is celebrated on the first day of Muharram, the first Islamic month. Compared to Western calendars, the Islamic year goes 11 days backwards every year. Hence the date of the Islamic New Year, according to the Gregorian calendar, varies from year to year.

The beginning of the New Year is usually quiet, unlike New Year's celebrations associated with other calendars. In Iran Sunni Muslims gather in mosques for special prayers and readings. A major part of the holiday is spent recounting the incident of Hegira—Muhammad's flight from Medina to Mecca. Muslims also reflect on the passage of time and their own mortality.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR, ISLAM

❁ ASHURA

Observed by: Mainly Shia Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

Ashura, also called the Mourning of Karbala, actually consists of two days of fasting and prayers for forgiveness, celebrated mainly by the Shia sect of Muslims. On this day Shia Muslims remember the martyrdom of Hussein, a grandson of Muhammad, in 680 C.E. For them this is a somber occasion. The devout reenact the events leading to the martyrdom. As in other Islamic countries, in Iran Ashura is marked as a day of mourning, which honors Hussein and 72 other martyrs who sacrificed their lives in the Battle of Karbala. As a part of the celebrations the devout Shia men practice self-mortification and flagellate themselves in order to relive the agony of the martyrs.

Ashura is also known as a day of fasting for Sunni Muslims since it marks two historical events: the day Nuh (Noah) left the Ark, and the day that Musa (Moses) was saved from the Egyptians by Allah.

See also Volume III: ASHURA; ISLAM

❁ ARBA'EEN AL-HUSSEINI

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Forty days after Ashura

The word *Arba'een* denotes “forty” in Arabic. This is a religious holiday observed by the Shia Muslims and occurs 40 days after Ashura, the celebration of the martyrdom of Hussein bin Ali, a grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. This marks the end of the traditional period of mourning, which for Muslims is 40 days. The occasion reminds devout Muslims about the inherent significance of this martyrdom: Establishment of justice and fighting injustice, no matter what its manifestation. On this day Iranian Muslims congregate at mosques, offer prayers, and pay homage to the martyrs.

See also volume III ASHURA; ISLAM

❁ MARTYRDOM OF HASSAN

Observed by: Iranians

Observed on: Twenty-eighth of Safar, the second month of the Islamic calendar

Imam Hassan was a grandson of the prophet Muhammad. On the issue of the claim to the seat and the powers of the Caliphate, his adversary, the governor of Syria, Muawiyah conspired with the Imam's disloyal wife Jadah (the daughter of Ashath) to eliminate him. She was made to administer some poison to Imam Hassan, which affected his liver. Thus Hassan unwittingly fell victim to Muawiyah's fatal mischief. On this day devout Muslims offer prayers at the mosques in memory of the martyr. An atmosphere of serious reflection pervades all.

See also Volume III: ISLAM

❁ MARTYRDOM OF FATIMA

Observed by: Iranians

Observed on: Third of Jumada al-Awwal, the fifth month of the Islamic calendar

After the demise of her father, Prophet Muhammad, Hazrat Fatima was very sad and melancholy. In spite of her loss Fatima persisted in glorifying Allah and living a virtuous life. Disunity and tensions cropped up among the followers, adding to her distress. Leaders of the community met to choose a Caliph (or Khalifa) (religious and spiritual leader who would also deal with the affairs of the Muslim subjects in general). Instead of unanimously selecting Ali ibn Abu Talib the husband of Fatima, the only surviving child of the Prophet, who had been perceived by the majority of Muslims as the rightful candidate, their eventual choice was Abu Bakr

(father of Muhammad's second wife Aisha), to whom they pledged allegiance.

According to written records many followers objected to Abu Bakr's seizure of power. Fatima was enraged when the rights of the Caliphate were snatched from her husband, and she was denied her right to inherit Muhammad's property, which included lands in Medina, Khaibar, and the village of Fadak.

Fatima opposed these decisions and was brutally attacked during a scuffle that ensued. She put up a valiant resistance but was grievously injured and ultimately succumbed to her injuries. She died barely three months after her father's death. In Iran this day is observed by the people through prayers and processions. The masses pay homage to this brave woman who laid down her life for her husband as well as for the sake of her religion.

See also Volume III: ISLAM

❁ BIRTH OF IMAM ALI

Observed by: Iranians

Observed on: Thirteenth of Rajab, the seventh month of the Islamic calendar

A cousin of Prophet Muhammad, who also later married the Prophet's daughter Fatima. Hazrat Ali was born in the sanctum sanctorum of Islamic faith the Holy Kaaba (Mecca) on Friday, the 13th of Rajab 23 years before the beginning of the Hegira Era. In the entire history of Islam, Imam Ali is the only mortal to have been born inside the sacred shrine. Hence this unique event is celebrated by the devout Muslims in Iran by means of prayers and religious processions.

See also Volume III: ISLAM

❁ LAYLAT AL-ISRA WA AL-MIRAJ

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twenty-seventh of Rajab, the seventh month of the Islamic calendar

This is a very special event for Muslims. The official name of the holiday is Laylat Al-Isra wa Al-Miraj, which means "the night journey and ascension." Prophet Muhammad is believed to have gone from Mecca to Jerusalem, ascended into the seven heavens, and returned, all in course of a single night. Muhammad is believed to have ascended into the seven heavens from a rock, which is now the focal point of the Dome of the Rock, a sacred building in Jerusalem. During his sojourn in the seven heavens, Muhammad was commanded to establish the five daily prayers (Namaz). He is also believed to have met luminaries like Abraham, Moses, Aaron, Adam, Archangel Gabriel, and Jesus. On this day devout Muslims of Iran gather in mosques or at one another's homes and listen to the story of Muhammad's journey. They share food and sweets to celebrate the night.

See also Volume III: ISLAM

❁ BIRTHDAY OF IMAM MAHDI

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Shaban the eighth month of the Islamic calendar

Muslims believe that a messiah-like figure (Imam Mahdi or The Mahdi) is going to appear at a critical period of the world's history (for instance, the present) to restore people's faith in, and ensure the ultimate triumph of, Islam. Varied descriptions of the Mahdi occur in several Muslim literary works. One of them is the *Bihar al-Anwar* (*Ocean of Light*, a metaphor for God) by the 17th-century Iranian scholar, Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi (1628–99). It should be noted that although the Sunni and the Shia agree in principle on the prophecy about the appearance of the Mahdi, only the Shia believe that he will manifest himself as the 12th imam (there has been a succession of 11 imams in the past centuries).

The 12th Holy Imam Al-Mahdi, is believed to have been born to the 11th Imam Hassan Al-Askari and his wife Sayyidah Nargis in the year 225 of the Hegira Era in what is now northern Iraq. He is believed to be still living incognito and waiting for God's divine command to make him known to the world. His mission is to fight against injustice and establish justice, law, and order for the benefit of humanity. With him the line of succession from the Holy Prophet will draw to a close. The devout believe he has remained incognito and invisible but steadily monitors the lives and fortunes of the faithful.

See also Volume III: ISLAM

❁ MARTYRDOM OF IMAM ALI BIN ABI TALIB

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twenty-first of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar

Imam Ali Bin Abi Talib, the cousin of Prophet Muhammad and also his son-in-law (husband of the Prophet's daughter Fatima) became his successor and also one of the 12 imams. However the clerics in those days were involved in quarrels and bickering over the assumption of supreme religious powers. Since Ali was related to the Prophet and also enjoyed the latter's favorite, many people became his foes. While Imam Ali was saying his morning prayers at the mosque of Al Kufah on the 19th of Ramadan the year 40 of the Hegira Era he was attacked by an assailant who pierced his body with a poisonous sword. He died two days later and was buried in al-Najaf al-Ashraf (in modern Iraq). In Iran on this day people take part in prayers and processions and pay homage to the noble soul who sacrificed his life for the sake of the faith.

See also Volume III: ISLAM



The Iranian supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, foreground, leads an Eid al-Fitr prayer, marking the end of Muslims' holy fasting month of Ramadan, in Tehran. (AP Photo/Vahid Salemi)

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

This marks the celebration at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, which is considered the holiest month of the Islamic calendar. It was during this month that the Prophet Muhammad observed austerity and fasted for 40 days, after which the Koran was revealed to him. Iranians commemorate this day by waking up early in the morning and taking part in a morning prayer along with their Muslim brethren. The site of these prayers is generally mosques and *idgahs* (prayer grounds.) This is followed by social visits, an exchange of greetings and gifts, and the enjoyment of delicacies chiefly *sewiyān*, especially prepared on this occasion. The Koran forbids fasting on this day.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ MARTYRDOM OF IMAM JAFAR AL-SADIQ

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twenty-fifth of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

The sixth Holy Imam Jafar Al-Sadiq is famous in the Islamic world as the most intellectual and learned of all the imams both before and after him. He was also

a highly religious man, endowed with unlimited knowledge, profound wisdom and a strong sense of justice. His other qualities included truthfulness and simplicity. Owing to the internal feuds and factions within the Islamic theocracy in that turbulent era, Imam Sadiq was poisoned by his enemies. His body was buried in the Baggea Cemetery in Medina, Saudi Arabia. In Iran this occasion is marked by prayers and religious ceremonies as people remember the noble deeds of this imam.

See also Volume III: ISLAM

❁ BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF IMAM ALI IBN MUSA AR-REZA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Eleventh of Dhui al-Qidah, the 11th month of the Islamic calendar.

Imam Ali ibn Musa ar-Reza the eighth imam was born in Medina in the year 148 of the Hegira Era. In the year 183 of the Hegira Era, he became the imam after the martyrdom of his father, Imam Musa Kazem. In 201 of the Hegira Era he was forced to leave Medina and go to the city of Merv in Khorasan on the orders of the wicked Abbasid caliph, Mamoun. The caliph thought that Reza's departure from Medina would greatly demoralize his followers. But not only did he retain his following in Medina, his presence transformed Khorasan into a center of divine blessings. Piety, modesty, and simplicity were the outstanding attributes of Reza. He is still remembered for his kindness and generosity to

the poor and downtrodden. On this holy occasion the Iranians offer prayers and pay homage to the memory of the Imam.

See also Volume III: ISLAM

Rites of Passage

✿ BIRTH

The birth of a new child is a time of great rejoicing in the Iranian Muslim community, because children are considered a token of Allah's compassion. Children are often referred to in Islam as "wealth." Immediately after the birth the baby is thoroughly washed in order to remove all impurities. According to Islamic tenets the first sound that a baby ought to hear should be the sacred name of Allah, customarily uttered by the baby's father or male relative. The father whispers the *adhan*, or call to prayer, into the child's right ear and then the left. The idea is to make the child aware of Allah's omnipresence and his power over the lives of mortals.

When the child is between three days and seven days old, the head is shaved to remove the natal impurities. This ceremony is known as the *aqiqah*, and it symbolizes the removal of misfortune, evil, and dross, so that the child can embark on a good and trouble-free life. In earlier times the hair used to be collected and weighed and the equivalent weight in silver was given to the poor. Nowadays the hair is generally buried. In some Iranian families an animal is sacrificed on such occasions, and the meat distributed to neighbors and friends.

On the day of purification the child is also given a proper name. Muslim children are not named at birth. The local imam is often consulted, and one particular name is picked from among the numerous names of Allah for a male child. Girls are often called Fatima after Muhammad's daughter.

✿ COMING OF AGE

Muslim boys generally experience a major change in status—circumcision (*khitān* in Arabic or *khatneh* in Persian)—when they have recited the entire Koran once thoroughly. In Iran, as in all other Islamic countries where this procedure is followed, the boy undergoes the operation between 10 and 12 years of age. This is a puberty rite, separating the boy from

childhood and introducing him to his new status as an adult. In Iranian Muslim families there is a good deal of festivity, music, special food, and many guests on such occasions.

✿ MARRIAGES

Most Muslim marriages in Iran are conducted in a traditional manner with the matches being finalized by the parents on both sides. However according to Islamic tenets, both the individuals (the bride and the groom) are free to refuse the spouse that has been selected by their parents or guardians or elders. Prior to the actual wedding the two families involved decide upon a specific amount of money or articles in kind that the groom's family must give to the bride. This sum of money is in reality a security amount for the bride in case the marriage breaks up. As in all Islamic societies weddings in Iran take place in the home of the bride. The rites are conducted by an Imam, who also leads the prayers in the mosque.

✿ DEATH

All religions accept death as a part of human life. Since death is unpredictable and can happen at any time, anywhere, Muslims are exhorted to be always prepared for the inevitable. Muslims are always buried, unlike Hindu and Buddhists who are cremated. Cremation and other modes of disposal are prohibited. Muslims are taught to treat the dead body with gentleness and respect. In Iran (as in all Islamic societies) it is customary for the Muslims to ritually wash the dead body, perfume it, and drape it in a fresh new white cloth before burial. Also the burial ought to take place as soon as possible after death. When an individual is breathing his last, he or she is encouraged to recite and declare his or her faith. The dead person's face is turned toward Mecca, the arms and legs straightened out, and the mouth and eyes closed. Babies who die at birth, including the stillborn child, must be given a name.

Further Reading

Paul Kriwaczek, *In Search of Zarathustra: Across Iran and Central Asia to Find the World's First Prophet* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004); Mehran Kamrava, *The Political History of Modern Iran: From Tribalism to Theocracy* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1992)

Iraq

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Middle East (or West Asia), bordering the Persian Gulf, situated between Iran and Kuwait on the east, Turkey on the north, Syria and Jordan on the west, and Saudi Arabia on the west and south.
Size	168,744 sq. mi.
Capital City	Baghdad
Flag Description	The Iraqi flag has three equal horizontal bands of red (top), white (middle), and black (bottom) with three green five-pointed stars in a horizontal line centered in the white band, and the phrase <i>Allahu Akbar</i> (meaning “God is Great”) in green Arabic script. (<i>Allahu</i> to the right of the middle star and <i>Akbar</i> to the left of the middle star were added in January 1991 during the Persian Gulf crisis. The design of the flag is based on the colors of Arab Liberation.)
Independence	October 3, 1932 (League of Nations mandate under British administration)
Population	26,074,906 (2005 est.)
Government	The Iraqi Interim Government
Nationality	Iraqi
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Arab (75–80%); Kurdish (15–20%)
Major Language(s)	Arabic; Kurdish (official in Kurdish regions); Assyrian; Armenian
Major Religion(s)	Muslim (97%; Shia 60–65%; Sunni 32–37%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year’s Day, January 1; Army Day, January 6; Revolution Day, February 8; Day of Saddam Hussein’s Downfall, April 9; Labor Day, May 1; Republic Day, July 14; Peace Day, August 8

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

What we know as Iraq today in ancient times was Mesopotamia, which witnessed the rise and fall of many civilizations—Sumerian, Akkadian, Aramean, Babylonian, and Assyrian. Subsequently the region of Mesopotamia passed into oblivion and remained under the rule of Persian and Seleucid Dynasties for a few hundred years. The region came back into prominence with the advent of Islam. Muslim Arabs invaded Mesopotamia in 656 C.E. By 762 the Abassid Caliphate had established its center in Baghdad, which would become world-famous as a center of political power, religion, knowledge, and the arts.

Baghdad remained a site of conflict for quite some time. The area was dominated during the late 13th and early 14th centuries by the Black Sheep Turkmen, who were defeated by their adversaries, the White Sheep Turkmen, in 1446. The Turkmen were displaced by the Ottomans, who in 1534 incorporated this area into their empire, centered in Istanbul.

Britain gained control over Iraq after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. In phases spread over nearly two decades, Iraq gained its freedom, ultimately emerging completely independent in the year 1932. On July 14, 1958, the monarchy was overthrown in a military coup, and Iraq became a republic. The next 10 years or so were marked by conspiracies, political intrigues, and a series of coups. In 1967 the effects in the region of the Arab–Israeli conflict led Iraq to seek help from the Soviet Union. Shortly afterward, on July 17, 1968, in a

Black Sheep Turkmen

The Black Sheep Turkmen were a federation of tribal Turkmen who held sway over the regions of present-day Azerbaijan and Iraq between the years 1375 and 1468. They suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of Timur Lenk (Tamer Lane, 1336–1405) around 1400.

highly dramatic and bloodless coup by the Baath Party, a secular socialist party (founded in Syria in 1942) placed General Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr (1914–82) in power.

The 1970s witnessed a period of stability for Iraq. In 1975 Iraq and its neighbor Iran agreed to iron out their differences and a boundary was drawn down the middle of the Shatt al-Arab waterway. During this period there was also a semblance of rapprochement between the Kurds and Iraqi authorities, between whom there had been simmering conflict since the 1960s.

In 1979 Saddam Hussein (b. 1937) replaced Al-Bakr as president. An autocratic ruler, Saddam used intimidation and torture to secure his power. Meanwhile also in 1979, the Islamic Revolution took place in Iran. As a result relations between the two countries reached their nadir, and Iraq reignited the earlier dispute over the Shatt al-Arab waterway. The Iraqi government, which had heavy Sunni leanings, was apprehensive about an Iranian-style revolution (the Shia-majority seizing control) in Iraq.

Full-scale war broke out on September 22, 1980, when Iraqi forces entered Iran. The eight years of war that followed were gory and brutal. Many ships carrying oil and other provisions were destroyed on the waters of the Persian Gulf. Hostilities ceased in August 1988. In the eight years of war, Iraq's economic burden escalated to more than US\$100 billion. As Iraq started to rise from the ashes, relations with neighboring Kuwait began to turn sour. In July

Shatt al-Arab

The Shatt al-Arab (also known as the Shatt al-Arab waterway) is a river flowing through southwest Asia. It is some 124 miles in length and is formed by the confluence of the Euphrates and the Tigris Rivers in the southern part of Iraq. The southern end of the waterway constitutes the border between Iraq and Iran right up to its mouth, where it flows into the Persian Gulf. Conflicting territorial claims and disputes over navigation rights down the Shatt al-Arab were among the factors that sparked the Iraq–Iran War between 1980 and 1988, when the pre-1980 status quo was restored. The city of Basra, Iraq's major port, is located along this river.

1990, Hussein accused the Kuwaitis of waging economic warfare against Iraq by trying to cut the price of oil artificially and of stealing oil from the Iraqi portion of an oil field located on the border between the two countries. Mediation by other Arab countries failed, and on August 2, 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait, assuming that the United States would not intervene. Though the United Nations condemned the move, Iraq annexed Kuwait as its 19th province. Western countries, led by the United States, imposed a trade embargo on Iraq, and about half a million troops from 27 countries poured into Saudi Arabia as the diplomatic stand-off over Kuwait deepened.

Despite frantic attempts by international leaders to strike a deal, the January 15 deadline set by the United Nations for the withdrawal of troops passed without any movement on the part of the Iraqis. A series of Tomahawk cruise missiles (unleashed by the United States) signaled the onset of the Gulf War. Allied (mostly U.S.) aircraft began a five-week bombing campaign over Iraq and Kuwait. The subsequent ground offensive lasted only 100 hours. While there were relatively few casualties on the Allied side, the civilian and military deaths on the Iraqi side were somewhere between 10,000 and 100,000. A ceasefire was announced on February 28, 1991. The UN Security Council demanded the eradication of all weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and WMD-development programs as a condition for lifting the UN sanctions.

Though there were some internal problems, including skirmishes with the Kurds and the Shiite Muslims, Iraq faded out of the focus of the world media until the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001. The United States attacked Afghanistan, whose Taliban rulers shielded the perpetrator of the September 11 attacks, but soon Iraq emerged as a new target. Although UN inspection teams found little to indicate a weapons of mass destruction program, Washington believed otherwise. The United States and its allies invaded Iraq on March 20, 2003. The Iraqi forces capitulated. On April 9, 2003, U.S. forces took control of Baghdad, toppled Saddam's statue, and brought his regime to an end. This incident brought in its trail a power vacuum, anarchy, and chaos.

As the transition to a new Iraqi government proceeded, fighting persisted, causing considerable destruction of property, death, and instability, despite efforts by U.S. forces to quell the insurgency. An interim government took charge in June 2004, and in 2005 elections raised some hopes. Sheikh Ghazi Ajil al-Yawar (? b. 1958) became president, Iyad Allawi (b. 1945) was chosen to be the prime minister, and Iraqi leaders struggled to write a constitution. Meanwhile the U.S. occupation continued.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Iraq is located in the Middle East, bordering the Persian Gulf, between Iran and Kuwait on the east,

Turkey in the north, Syria and Jordan to the west, and Saudi Arabia on the west and south. The terrain consists primarily of broad plains and reedy marshes (along the borders with Iran and Turkey), and vast tracts of Iraq are desert.

Iraq experiences mild-to-cool winters with dry, hot, cloudless summers. However the northern mountainous regions experience cold winters with occasional heavy snowfall. The snow melts in early spring, sometimes causing floods in central and southern Iraq. The average temperatures in Iraq range from higher than 118°F in July and August to below freezing in January. The bulk of the rainfall occurs from December through April. It rains abundantly in the mountainous region, reaching an annual rate of more than three feet in some places. During the summer months, weather is determined by two wind systems: the southern and southeasterly *sharqi*, a dry, dusty wind with occasional strong gusts, which occurs from April to early June and again from late September through November. The *shamal*, a steady wind from the north and northwest, begins to blow in mid-June and lasts until mid-September. *Shamal* is accompanied by very dry air, which causes intense heating of the land surface but also provides some cooling effect. Dust storms often accompany these winds.

❁ ECONOMY

Iraq's economy is dominated by the oil sector, which provides about 95 percent of foreign exchange earnings. The financial problems caused by massive expenditures in the eight-year war with Iran and the physical damage to oil export facilities compelled the government to adopt austerity measures, borrow heavily, and reschedule foreign debt payments. After hostilities with Iran ended in 1988, oil exports gradually increased with the construction of new pipelines and restoration of damaged facilities. But Iraq's seizure of Kuwait in August 1990 brought international economic sanctions and ultimate intervention by an international coalition in 1991 that defeated Iraq and caused economic as well as social and political devastation.

In December 1999, the UN Security Council authorized Iraq to export as much oil as required to meet humanitarian needs. The drop in gross domestic product (GDP) between 2001 and 2002 was due to the global economic slowdown and lower oil prices. Per capita food imports increased significantly, while medical supplies and health care services steadily improved. Invasion of Iraq by the United States and its allies in March–April 2003 resulted in the shutdown of sizable sections of the central economic administrative structure. From the year 2004 on, the rebuilding of oil, electricity, and other production has been progressing slowly, aided by the United States occupation and international grants but hampered by ongoing hostilities in the country.

Kurds

Ethnically related to the modern-day Iranians, the Kurds were originally nomadic herdsmen. They are mostly settled or seminomadic and live not only in northern Iraq but in Iran, Turkey, and Syria as well. Through the ages Kurds have resisted domination by other groups and tribes and have suffered terrible discrimination. Promised their own state in the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920 (a promise that was not fulfilled), many Kurds still long for a separatist Kurdistan. The majority of Kurds are Sunni Muslims. Kurdish dialects belong to the northwestern branch of the Iranian languages.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Iraq is a country with a rich and varied cultural heritage. Many important landmarks of the ancient and medieval world, including ruins, monuments, and museums, are situated around the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers. These include Nineveh, the capital of King Assurbanipal I (r. 669–27 B.C.E.); the famous Sumerian city of Ur (third millennium B.C.E.); the birth place of Abraham, the desert city of Hatra, included on UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites; Assur, the capital of the Assyrian kingdom and site of the legendary Ishtar Temple; and the legendary Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world.

Iraq also has a rich musical heritage. According to archaeological evidence, a large number of instruments were in use in the region as long as 3,000 years ago. Sumerians had evolved a music notation system 2,000 years ago.

Contemporary music in Iraq consists of a melody with rhythmic accompaniment. No harmony or chords accompany the highly ornamented melodies. Many pitches are “bent” or adorned with trills and glissandos (short secondary notes) to heighten a single straightforward pitch. This ornamentation gives the music a distinctly Middle Eastern feel in addition to having an emotional impact on the listener. Complex rhythms and mixed meters are some of the salient features of this music.

❁ CUISINE

Iraq's cuisine is an amalgamation of diverse culinary styles—Arab, Turkish, Kurdish, Ottoman, Persian, and Jewish, to name a few. Iraqi cooking uses some spices typical of Arabic cooking, namely saffron and mint. The

Fun Fact

Sunni commentators suggest that Sheikh Ghazi Ajil al-Yawar is held in low esteem by Iraqis, pointing to the nickname they have given him al-Baqara al-dhahika, which translates roughly as “the laughing cow.”

Baklava

Baklava is a very rich dessert common to Turkish, Greek, and Middle Eastern cuisines. It is made with thin pastry leaves and nuts. The flour-and-water dough is stretched into thin sheets, cut, and layered in a large oven tray. Each sheet is generously brushed with melted butter; then, chopped walnuts and pistachios are spread between the layers and it is baked. After it turns golden brown, the pastry is soaked in a thick syrup of sugar, honey, and lemon juice.

commonly preferred meats in Iraq include lamb, beef, goat, mutton, and poultry. Muslims abstain from eating pork or its products. Some of the specialties include kebabs, *quzi* (stuffed and roasted lamb), *kubba* (minced meat with nuts, raisins, and spices), as well as *masgouf* (grilled fish). Flat bread (*samoons*) is present at every meal. For sweets and desserts, people eat fruit, rice pudding, sesame cookies, and baklava. *Amba* is an essential item of the typical Indian platter, and its popularity is evidence of the close trade and cultural links between Iraq and India; as a natural corollary, many other food items have passed from the subcontinent to Mesopotamia.

Coffee, tea, fruit juices, and soft drinks are the most common beverages. For Muslims alcohol is prohibited. A highly popular Iraqi condiment is *amba* (mango pickle).

During the first half of the 20th century, Jews were the single largest community living in Baghdad. A good number of what are considered typical Baghdadi dishes are actually Jewish. Some classic examples are *tabit* (slow-cooked rice, tomato, and chicken, classically stuffed in sheep's intestine), *karil* (rice, lentils, and yellow squash, often served with yogurt during the festivals of Rosh Hashanah and Shavuot), *salon* (fish cooked with sweet peppers and tomatoes and generally served cold), and *kuba shwandry* (dumplings stuffed with meat and cooked with beets to give them a rich reddish-purple color).

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

As in other parts of the world, the people of Iraq welcome the New Year on January 1. Since this is an official holiday, all educational, commercial, and government organizations remain closed. People devote the day to leisure and recreational activities shared with their loved ones.

ARMY DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 6

On this day Iraq marks the anniversary of the formation of its army in 1921. There are ceremonies held across the country to recall the army's past service and sacrifices. This is also an opportunity to showcase the army's current and future capabilities. The ceremonies in the capital are attended by the minister of defense, the chief of staff of the army, and numerous army generals. Dignitaries also place floral tributes at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Baghdad. This is a public holiday in Iraq with schools, businesses, and government offices closed.

REVOLUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: February 8

On this day in 1963 the Arab Socialist Baath Party (ASBP) ousted Brigadier Abd-al-Karim Qassim (1914–63) from power. He had earlier deposed the reigning monarch King Feisal II (1939–58), in 1958 and had been instrumental in the establishment of the republic in Iraq. It is interesting to note that this coup took place during Ramadan, when it is mandatory for Muslims to observe dawn-to-dusk fasting and abstain from all kinds of vices and evils, including conspiracy, hatred, and political intrigues. In Iraq the day is marked by speeches and processions. Since Revolution Day, also called Ramadan Revolution Day, is a public holiday, all public and government establishments remain closed.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; RAMADAN

DAY OF SADDAM HUSSEIN'S DOWNFALL

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 9

This holiday is of quite recent origin. On this day in 2003 the Iraqi president Saddam Hussein was deposed from power by U.S. forces and went into hiding. Hussein's downfall marked the end of an era of brutal dictatorship and military rule sustained through torture and intimidation. On this day in Iraq the people (those who are anti-Saddam) organize marches, shout slogans, and participate in processions. This is a public holiday in Iraq with schools, stores, and government offices closed.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

The May 1 observance of Labor Day, also called May Day and Workers' Day, originated with the interna-

tional socialist party. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of Socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. In Iraq all government offices, businesses, and schools remain closed. The day is observed with labor union activities, meetings, and speeches.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ REPUBLIC DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 14

During World War I Iraq, which had been a part of the Ottoman Empire, was occupied by Britain; in 1920, it was declared a League of Nations mandate under the governance of the United Kingdom. During the next decade Iraq attained its independence as a kingdom. Then on July 14, 1958, the monarchy was overthrown in a military coup, and Iraq became a republic. This event is commemorated mostly by government ceremonies. It is also an official holiday in Iraq with schools, businesses, and government offices closed.

❁ PEACE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 8

This holiday, only a few decades old, commemorates the end of the conflict between Iraq and neighboring Iran that occurred between 1980 and 1988. This war resulted in the heavy loss of life and property on both sides. A ceasefire was enacted on August 8, 1988. Since then the day has been celebrated as Peace Day. On this day Iraqis recall the sacrifices of those who died during this war; many families lost loved ones in the brutal extended conflict. Parades and public speeches mark the day.

Religious Holidays

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, the Feast of Sacrifice, also known as Eid ul-Zuha and Bakr-Eid, recalls Ibrahim's (Abraham's) unflinching faith in God, evidenced by his willingness to sacrifice his young son because the Almighty commanded him to do so. In Iraq on this day each family that can afford it is expected to sacrifice sheep, goats, rams, or cattle in the name of God; this meat

is then shared with friends and family and distributed among the poor. Prior to this festival devout Muslims also undertake a pilgrimage, or Hajj, to Mecca if they can, the holy city of the Islamic faith.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; HAJJ; ISLAM

❁ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

Islam employs a lunar calendar, made up of 12 months of 29 or 30 days, based on the cycles of the Moon. The Islamic year thus amounts to only 354 days. Muslims do not make adjustments to anchor particular holidays or months in particular seasons, unlike the Jewish lunar calendar. Therefore compared to Western calendars, the Islamic year cycles 11 days backward every year and Muslim holidays, such as El am Hejir, the Islamic New Year, shift in their placement in the Western solar calendar. Hence the date of the New Year observance varies from year to year.

The Islamic New Year is celebrated on the first day of Muharram, the first Islamic month. The beginning of the New Year is usually quiet, unlike New Year's celebrations associated with other calendars. In Iraq, Muslims gather in mosques for special prayers and readings. A major part of the holiday is the recounting of the incident of the Hegira—Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina. Muslims also take this time to reflect on the passage of time and their own mortality.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

❁ ASHURA

Observed by: Shia Muslims, some Sunni Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

In Iraq, the Muslim holiday of Ashura, also called Mourning of Karbala, is marked as a day of mourning, honoring Hussein, a grandson of Muhammad, and other martyrs who sacrificed their lives in the Battle of Karbala. Observed primarily on the 10th day of Muharram, it consists of two days of fasting and prayers for forgiveness.

Shia Muslims in particular observe this holiday in remembrance of the martyrdom of Hussein in 680 C.E. In Shia communities this is a solemn day; plays reenacting the martyrdom are often staged, and many men participate in mourning rituals, walking in processions through the streets and flagellating themselves with sharp objects or scourges.

Interestingly, Ashura has been a day of fasting for Sunni Muslims since the days of early Islam. The Sunni commemorate two historical events on this day: the day Noah (Nuh) left the Ark, and the day Moses (Musa) was saved from the Egyptians by Allah.

See also Volume III: ASHURA; ISLAM



Iraqi Kurdish women dance during the Navruz celebrations in Dukan near the city of Suleymaniya, in the Kurdish dominant northern Iraq. Navruz, the Farsi-language word for “new year,” is an ancient Persian festival, celebrated on the first of spring in countries including Iraq, Turkey, Afghanistan, and Iran. The festival is mainly a Kurdish event in Iraq and Turkey. The festival is a symbolic opportunity to purify the soul for the new year and symbolizes revival and is marked by spring cleaning, buying new clothes, and planting trees. (AP Photo/Murad Sezer)

❁ MOULOU

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

Mouloud, known also as Milad ul-Nabi and Mawlid al-Nabi, marks the birthday of Muhammad in 570 C.E. It is celebrated on the 12th day of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar. On this day Iraqi Muslims focus on the life and teachings of the prophet and his virtue of forgiving even his worst enemies. Prayers and special songs are part of the observance. The poor are given alms on this day.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOU

❁ NAVRUZ

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: March 21

Navruz, or Nowruz, is not a religious festival but a celebration of the vernal equinox. According to scholars, it originated in ancient Mesopotamia and was celebrated widely in pre-Islamic times. In Babylon, for example, it was tied in with the New Year,

which was celebrated on the 21st day of Nissanu (March–April) with festivities lasting 12 more days, each day commemorated with special rites, amusements, and performances.

Navruz heralds the advent of spring, the resumption of agricultural activities, and the gradual onset of warm weather. This is also the day when conflicts and hostilities are supposed to be forgotten and forgiven. On this day the people of Iraq greet each other and partake of lavish feasts. An atmosphere of good-naturedness rules the day.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; NAVRUZ; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr, the Feast of the Breaking of the Fast, marks the start of festivities and celebrations at the end of dawn-to-dusk fasting during the month of Ramadan. Ramadan is considered the holiest month of the Islamic calendar. It was during this month that

Muhammad observed austerity and fasted for 40 days, after which the Koran was revealed to him.

Iraqis celebrate this day by wearing new clothes and taking part in the morning prayer with other Muslims, generally in mosques and *idgabs*, open spaces set aside for prayers on special occasions. This is followed by social visits, the exchange of greetings and gifts, and the consumption of delicacies, such as sweets and desserts, along with other items specially prepared for this occasion.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

The birth of a new child is a time of great rejoicing in the Iraqi Muslim community, since children are considered a sign of Allah's compassion. Children are often referred to in Islam as "wealth." Immediately after the birth, a baby is thoroughly washed in order to remove biological impurities. According to Islamic tenets, the first sound that a baby ought to hear should be the sacred name of Allah. This should be uttered by its father (or a male relative). The male relative whispers the call to prayer, or *adhan*, first into the child's right ear and then into its left. The underlying idea is to make the child aware of Allah's omnipresence and his power over the lives of mortals.

When the child is between three and seven days of age, its head is shaved to remove remaining natal impurities. On the day of purification, the child is also given a proper name. The local imam is often consulted in selecting the name. For a male child it is taken from among the numerous names for Allah and Muhammad; girls are often called Fatima, after Muhammad's daughter.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Male circumcision is a puberty rite, separating the boy from childhood and introducing him to his new status as an adult. In the Islamic countries where this procedure is followed, including Iraq, the boy undergoes the operation between the ages of 10 and 12. In Iraqi Muslim families the occasion is celebrated with a good deal of festivity, music, food, and many guests.

❁ MARRIAGE

In Iraq most marriages are conducted in the traditional Muslim manner. The matches are created by agreement between the two sets of parents. However according to Islamic tenets, both the bride and

the groom are free to refuse the spouse selected by their parents, guardians, or elders. Prior to the actual wedding the two families decide on a specific amount of money or articles in kind that the groom's family must give to the bride. This sum of money is in reality security for the bride in case the marriage breaks up. As in all Islamic societies weddings in Iraq take place in the bride's home.

The wedding rites are conducted by an imam, who also leads the prayers in the mosque. Iraqi tradition requires that, while the *nikah* (wedding contract) is being recited by the priest, the bride has to read the *surat al fath* (verse 48) from the Koran. The imam asks her whether she gives him permission to marry her to the groom upon payment of the specified amount. The Iraqi Muslim bride customarily wears a white dress for the wedding and puts her feet in water (symbolizing tranquility), while her kinsmen place in front of her a *sufra*, which consists of fruits, six candles, different types of sweets, bread and cheese (colloquially known as *khubz al abbas*), rice, honey, and yogurt. These items symbolize plenty and prosperity.

❁ DEATH

All religions accept death as a part of human life. Since death is unpredictable and can happen at any time, anywhere, Muslims are exhorted always to be prepared. When Muslims are faced with death, they are encouraged to recite prayers and declare their faith. Muslims believe that a baby who is born dead or stillborn must nonetheless have a name.

Muslims are taught to treat the dead body with gentleness and respect. In Iraq (as in all Islamic societies), it is customary for Muslims to ritually wash the dead body, perfume it, and drape it in a fresh new white cloth before burial. A dead person's face is turned toward Mecca, the arms and legs are straightened out, and the mouth and eyes closed. The burial is supposed to take place as quickly as possible following death.

Further Reading

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∞ Ireland ∞

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Western Europe, occupying five-sixths of the island of Ireland in the North Atlantic Ocean, west of Great Britain
Size	27,135 sq. mi.
Capital City	Dublin
Flag Description	Ireland's flag has three equal vertical bands of green (hoist side), white, and orange.
Independence	December 6, 1921 (from United Kingdom)
Population	4,015,676 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Irish
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Celtic; English
Major Language(s)	English; Irish—(both official); Gaelic, mainly along western seaboard
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (88%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Saint Patrick's Day, March 17; Bank Holidays (dates vary); Battle of the Boyne Day, July 12; Halloween, October 31

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

During the last Ice Age Ireland was mostly ice-covered and joined by a land bridge to Britain and Europe. The island has been inhabited for about 9,000 years. The earliest inhabitants, probably hunters, reached Ireland via a land bridge (from what is now Scotland) during the Middle Stone-Age period (c. 12,000 years ago). The culture gradually progressed from Mesolithic to high Neolithic culture during the next three or four millennia. Then around 5,000 years ago, a farming people arrived. These Neolithic people left behind numerous megalithic tombs including those at Newgrange and Knowth, both in the Boyne Valley. Newgrange, built in 3200 B.C.E., is what archaeologists call a passage-grave or passage-tomb. This site predates the Giza Pyramids in Egypt by 600 years and is 1,000 years older than its more famous neighbor, Stonehenge. On winter solstice, the light of the rising Sun reaches the roofbox at Newgrange and illuminates the space for just 17 minutes. Knowth, the oldest chambered structure in the world (5600–3800), on the other hand, is a gallery of

megalithic art, with a quarter of all the known European megalithic art. Archaeologists spent 40 years excavating Knowth, and it is now open to the public.

Around 2000, Bronze Age metal workers and prospectors reached Ireland and began to produce axe heads and jewelry of bronze and gold as well as ceramics. The *Milesian Genealogies*, compiled over a four-year period in the 17th century by Franciscan monks, are said to trace Irish genealogies back to one of the three sons of Mil Espáine (or Milesius), a Gaulish warrior. Some historians believe Irish lineages are fairly accurate at least as far back as the sixth century, maybe even the fifth.

Irish mythology begins somewhere between 4,000 and 3,000 years ago. Around 1200 B.C.E. yet another group settled in Ireland, bringing with them very different weapons and other objects from those left by the preceding peoples. Their dwellings, called *crannog*, were built on artificial islands out in the middle of lakes. Six hundred years later, the Celtic-speaking members of the Bronze Age La Tène culture reached Ireland and took over. No records have been found of the peoples displaced by the Celts, so their language, probably non-Indo-European, remains unknown.

The Celts shared a common dialect and culture, but the

area they controlled consisted of about 150 mini-kingdoms, called *tuath*, ruled by minor chieftains. The *tuath* was the most basic political unit. These chieftains, in turn, answered to a king who controlled a group of *tuath*, who was subject to one of five provincial kings. This hierarchy ruled an agrarian society of numerous *fine*, or “extended families” divided into distinct classes. There were no towns, and cows were the medium of exchange. These Celts ruled Ireland for 1,000 years.

Around 100, the Gaels began to populate Ireland, and by 200 C.E. the high kingship at Tara in County Meath had started. The Gaels, speakers of Goidelic Celtic, are still an ethnic group living in Ireland, Scotland, and the Isle of Man. The word *Gael* (or Goidelic) was first used as a collective term to describe the Irish, although it may derive from the Welsh word *gwyddel*, which means “raiders.” At the beginning of the Christian period in Ireland, when the monks were compiling whatever records of Irish history they could find, the Gaels claimed to be descended from Mil Espáine (from the Latin *miles Hispaniae*, meaning “soldier of Spain”); the “sons of Mil” (Milesians), who represent the Goidelic Celts.

Around 300, the Romans recorded about 300 attacks by the Dalriada Scots (in Latin, *Scotti*), from the east of the modern-day province of Ulster, and their Pictish allies from Caledonia (the Roman name for the region). (The Romans called Ireland Scotia, and raiding bands of Irish were called Scotti, although the principal Latin name for the island was Hibernia. However this sense of the word *Scot* lasted well into the Middle Ages.) In 432 Pope St. Celestine I (r. 422–32) sent St. Patrick (387–493, other sources say 460/61) to Ireland to convert the Irish to Christianity.

In 500 under King Fergus I, the Dalriadans of Ireland invaded Argyll and established the Scottish half of the realm known as Dál Riata (Dalriada) in the Pictish lands, called Caledonia by the Romans. As long as the Romans represented a common enemy, the Picts and Scots were allies. Once the Romans had left, the two sides fought each other intermittently between 300 and 840, with the Picts winning more often than not.

Around the ninth century the Vikings began to plunder the monasteries and towns along the Irish coast. They established a number of towns in Ireland, one of which became Dublin.

In 1172 King Henry II of England (1133–89) took control of Ireland, and the pope called him the Lord of Ireland. In the 13th century English law was introduced in Ireland. Although initially English rule was limited to areas around Dublin, by the 17th century England ruled almost all of Ireland.

The 1800 Act of Union created the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Later in the 19th century, the English started replacing the Irish language. The issue of self-government did not come up until 1870, when the debate increased tensions between Irish nationalists and those who favored union with Britain. About five-sixths of the

The Sons of Mil

Mil Espáine never set foot in Ireland. His given name was Golam. While serving in the military in Scythia and Egypt, Mil remembered a prophesy that his descendants would rule Ireland. So he headed west and got as far as Spain, where he died. But his wife Scotia and his uncle Íth sailed to Ireland where the the Tuatha Dé Danann killed Íth. When Mil’s eight sons and Íth’s nine brothers saw Íth’s body, they invaded Ireland and defeated the Tuatha Dé. Like their ancestors at the start of the Christian era, contemporary Gaels of Scotland and Ireland still believe that they are the descendants of Mil’s sons, and many, if not most, clan leaders in both countries claim descent from their predecessor, back to famous historical kings all the way back into prehistory.

island was largely nationalist, while one-sixth was unionist. The Irish republicans led a series of rebellions. The Easter Rising in Dublin in 1916 increased the nationalist feeling, and in the general elections of 1918 Irish republicans won a large majority of seats in the legislature. They declared Irish independence, which led to the Anglo-Irish War (1919–21). Finally the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 granted independence to 26 Irish counties, while Northern Ireland remained part of Great Britain.

In 1937 a new constitution was enacted and Ireland was proclaimed a democratic state. Although thousands of Irish soldiers volunteered to join the British forces during World War II, Ireland remained neutral. Finally in 1949, Ireland was formally declared a republic and left the British Commonwealth.

Although initially a poor country, after its independence, Ireland made efforts to revive its economy and encourage foreign investment. It joined the European Community (EC) in 1973. The EC was the precursor to the European Union (EU). The per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of Ireland is the second highest in the EU, behind that of Luxembourg.

Fun Fact

What is called the Milesian Genealogies is held to trace the generations all the way back to Adam, and some believe that the monks’ original list of the generations between Adam and Mil Espáine will eventually be found.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in Western Europe, Ireland lies in the North Atlantic Ocean. Great Britain lies to the east of the island, across the Irish Sea. Sea cliffs and low mountains characterize Ireland’s terrain. The central part of Ireland, however, has raised bogs (swampy areas or marshlands) and flat farmlands. The highest point in Ireland is Carrauntoo Hill, a peak that stands 3,513.8

Ogham

The Ogham (Old Irish Ogam) alphabet flourished between the fifth and sixth centuries and was used to carve boundary markers and memorials in the Gaelic languages. These inscriptions are found in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England, and the Isle of Man. There are 25 distinct symbols (letters) in Ogham, the *fedá*. The first 20 are the primary letters, while the last 5 are supplementary (*forfedá*). The letters themselves are a specific number of lines etched along the edge of a stone, the stemline, and they are distinguished both by the number of lines and their relation to the stemline. The first five letters, for example, represent *n*, *s*, *f*, *l*, and *b*. All five letters in this first set were carved on the right side of the stemline at a 45-degree angle. They differ only in

the number of parallel lines used to represent each one. Thus five straight lines is *n*, four lines is *s*, three is *f*, and so on. In the second set all the lines were carved to the left of the stemline, and these letters, like the first five, are distinguished by the number of parallel lines used to represent them. Thus, *q*, which has five straight lines, is distinguished from *c*, which has four lines, but is distinguished from *n* because its five lines point left, not right, from the stemline. The fourth set of five letters contains the vowels *i*, *e*, *u*, *o*, *a*, differentiated from each other by the number of lines in the character and from the consonants because the parallel lines cross the stemline to either side. An Ogham text is read from the bottom left-hand side of the stone, then upward, then across the top and down the right-hand side.

feet high. The longest river in Ireland, the Shannon River, divides Ireland into two parts.

Ireland enjoys a maritime temperate climate characterized by cool summers and mild winters. The average daily temperature in summer is 66°F, while the average daily temperature in winter is 39°F. Oak, birch, yew, elm, holly, hazel, ash, whitebeam, and alder trees, as well as shrubs such as bird cherry, blackthorn, gorse, and rowan, are among the Irish flora. As far as fauna, Ireland is home to bats, bumblebees, red squirrels, wasps, humming bird-hawk moths, Irish hares, hedgehogs, salmon, trout, and brent geese.

ECONOMY

Ireland has a trade-dependent economy. It is a member of the European Union (EU) and in January 1999, along with 10 other member nations of the EU, Ireland adopted the Euro (the common currency of many members of European Union) as its national currency. Due to the growth-oriented economic policies of the Irish government, Ireland is ranked second among EU nations in terms of per-capita GDP. The industrial sector is the driving force of the economy, contributing 80 percent to Ireland's export revenues and employing 28 percent of the workforce. Recently the government has introduced economic reforms that encourage foreign investment, reduced government expenditures, and controlled price and wage increases. It has also made it possible for the nation's laborers to improve their skills.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The main ethnic groups of Ireland are Celtic and English. English and Irish are the official languages

of Ireland, although Gaelic (or Gaeilge) is spoken in the western parts of the country. A predominantly Roman Catholic country, Ireland is also home to followers of the Church of Ireland and people of other faiths as well.

Ireland is known for its rich musical heritage. Traditional Irish musical instruments include fiddles, goatskin drums, pipes, and tin whistles. *Looheen* is a popular traditional song in Ireland in which every singer tries to improvise on the verses of the song, and then everyone singing joins in the chorus and sings the verses again.

One of the most popular forms of folk dance is called set dancing, a dance for groups of varying sizes. A fast dancing style, it involves rhythmic foot stomping to the tune of folk music. Another popular folk dance is Irish step dancing, which can be performed solo or by a group. Step dancing is a dance style in which the dancers keep their upper bodies stiff while moving their feet in a quick and precise manner as dictated by the rules of the dance. Competitive step dancing has grown rapidly since the appearance of *Riverdance*, a musical show performed worldwide by a troupe professional step dancers. An organized step dance competition is referred to as a *féis* (pronounced "fesh"), which means "festival" in Gaelic.

The Irish also enjoy playing a wide variety of sports and Gaelic (ancient Celtic games) games such as hurling (a Celtic game played with sticks and a ball), Gaelic football, handball, and Camogie (a team game played by women with sticks and a ball) are extremely popular sports in Ireland. Irish rugby and boxing also have many fans in Ireland.

Ireland has produced some very well-known literary figures, including the playwright George Bernard Shaw, the dramatist and poet W. B. Yeats, and the playwright, novelist, and poet Samuel Beckett.



A large dragon makes its way through the streets of Dublin in the annual St. Patrick's Day parade, March 17 in Belfast. (AP Photo/John Cogill)

❁ CUISINE

The Irish enjoy pork, lamb, and beef, and most of their dishes are meat-based. Some of the traditional Irish dishes include: Irish meat cobbler, roast chicken, roast pork loin, Dublin Coddle (made from bacon and sausage), smoked salmon, lamb, stew, and whisky-baked ham.

The Irish prefer tea to coffee and beer over wine, although fruit juices and whisky are also consumed.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western (Gregorian) calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day throughout the world. Each year a festive spirit reigns as people hold parties and celebrations beginning on New Year's Eve. In Ireland on New Year's Eve, the Irish attend parties thrown at local bars and pubs and usher in the new year with lots of beer and music. At the stroke of midnight, fireworks light up the night sky in the bigger cities and towns of Ireland.

A number of interesting customs are associated with Irish New Year's celebrations. At midnight on New Year's Eve, many Irish walk in through the front doors of their houses and then go out the back doors since they believe that doing this will bring good luck

in the new year. Also many Irish preserve the Christmas bread and bang the walls of their homes to chase out bad luck and pave the way for good spirits and good luck to enter the house. The tradition of a New Year's swim is widely practiced in the southern parts of Ireland. On New Year's Day people swim in the cold water of the sea for a few minutes.

The modern custom of standing under a sprig of mistletoe to be kissed at the stroke of midnight is derived from the reverence of the ancient Celts for this poisonous parasitic plant. When the leaves fell from its host trees, the leaves and white berries of the plant could be seen; it was believed that their visibility at this time promised the return of the Sun. Specifically mistletoe was thought to be the sperm of the solar deity Taranis, a promise of the Sun god's rebirth. At winter solstice branches were cut from the trees on a day sacred to the Moon, and cattle

New Year's Day Superstitions

Many superstitious beliefs are associated with New Year's Eve and New Year's Day in Ireland:

- Wearing shoes with holes in them on New Year's will bring financial losses in the coming year;
- Washing clothes on this day is unlucky because throwing out water on New Year's Day brings bad luck;
- Making money deals on New Year's Day is unlucky since people in earlier days believed this brought traders misfortune.



Fun Fact

James I was the last Catholic king to rule over England, Scotland, and Ireland.

were sacrificed in thanks for the precious gift. Belief in the magical powers of mistletoe has long outlived the ancient Celts. In medieval times, the plant was called allheal because it was credited with great healing power and believed capable of curing almost anything, from epilepsy to cancer. In England, because people believed that as long as some mistletoe was kept in the home love would also be sustained, they made sure that a fresh sprig was brought in every year, and this may be the source for the modern New Year's ritual.

❁ ST. PATRICK'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 17

St. Patrick's Day commemorates the death of the patron saint of Ireland St. Patrick, who died on March 17, 461 C.E. In honor of their patron saint, Ireland celebrates March 17 as its national day. St. Patrick's Day is celebrated with great enthusiasm. Beginning March 15, a special four-day festival is organized in Ireland that lasts until March 18. Big parades, spectacular fireworks (known as skyfest), street theater, and musical bands are integral parts of the festival. In addition, a variety of events such as

fun fairs, visual and art exhibits, and games such as treasure hunts create a carnival atmosphere. People often wear a bunch of shamrocks (an indigenous Irish plant) on their caps on this day. It is believed that St. Patrick used shamrocks to explain the Holy Trinity to those people whom he hoped to convert to Christianity.

In the town of Downpatrick, where it is believed that St. Patrick is buried, residents participate in colorful parades. The girls wear green ribbons in their hair, and most children proudly wear a tri-color badge displaying the colors of the Irish national flag (green, white, and orange).

Fun Fact

The Hill of Tara (Temair, in Gaelic) was the seat of power in pre-Christian Ireland, and it is said that 142 kings reigned there. There are countless monuments and earthen structures on the Hill of Tara, with the earliest settlement built during the Neolithic, and the Mound of the Hostages constructed around 4,500 years ago. According to legend the most famous of Tara's monuments, Ireland's ancient coronation stone, was placed there by the godlike people, the Tuatha Dé Danann. The stone was said to roar when touched by the rightful king of Tara.

❁ BANK HOLIDAYS

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May, June, August, October

Bank Holidays are traditional holidays that trace their origins to earlier times when banks remained closed on specific days, preventing other businesses from functioning. Ireland celebrates five bank holidays, and all are public holidays. This means that all private and public institutions remain closed, and everyone employed in nonessential services gets the day off.

In addition to St. Patrick's Day, the bank holidays are celebrated as follows: The early May bank holiday falls on the first Monday in the month of May; the June bank holiday falls on the first Monday in the month of June; the summer bank holiday falls on the first Monday in the month of August, and the Halloween bank holiday falls on October 31.

❁ BATTLE OF THE BOYNE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 12

Battle of the Boyne Day, also known as Orangemen's Day (or Orange Day), celebrates the historic victory of the Protestant William of Orange (1650–1702; he became King William III of England, Scotland, and Ireland) over his father-in-law and Catholic King James I (1650–1702, at the Battle of Boyne in 1690).

King James I was the king of England and Scotland (where he was known as King James VII) and Ireland. However, his dictatorship and lack of regard for Catholic beliefs angered his subjects, and he was ousted from the throne by his nobles. Instead of his son James Francis Edward (1688–1766) succeeding to the throne, his Protestant daughter Mary (1662–94) and her husband, William of Orange, assumed power. This led to a series of wars between King James I and William of Orange, in which James I was defeated in the Battle of Boyne on July 12, 1690.

Celebrations begin on the evening of July 11, when the men of each community assemble around huge bonfires and in pubs to remember this historic victory and discuss celebrations to be held the next day. On July 12, parades are organized all over Ireland. Families gather together for a nice meal that consists of roasted potatoes and a variety of vegetable dishes; the children feast on pastries.

❁ HALLOWEEN

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 31

Halloween, also known as All Hallow's Eve and Day of the Dead, is celebrated on the night of October 31, now also the eve of the Roman Catholic festival of All Saints' Day (November 1). Halloween celebrations can be traced to the Samhain celebration practiced by the Celts during the pre-Christian era in Ireland. The Celtic new year began with Samhain and, like the Roman Saturnalia, it was a time for rowdiness and misbehavior. The Celts believed that during Samhain the barrier between their world and the

otherworld became so thin that the dead were able to return and warm themselves at the fires of the living. Likewise some of the living, especially poets, could enter the otherworld through the doorways of the *sidhe*, such as that at the Hill of Tara in Ireland. (A *sidhe* was a place where the door between the world of mortals and the otherworld was always open.)

To celebrate the beginning of the winter season, Celtic tribes slaughtered cattle and made huge bonfires out of their bones. It is believed that the word *bonfire* is derived from the term *bonefires* (bones of cattle used as sacrificial offerings by the Celts). In the rural areas of Ireland, huge bonfires are still lit on this day.

Contemporary Halloween observances are more parody than anything else. It is common for this holiday to be celebrated by children who dress up in fancy costumes, visit their neighbors, and shout “trick or treat.” The neighbors give them candies and other sweets. After the children return from collecting candies from their neighbors, the entire family attends a special Halloween party with friends and neighbors where a number of games are played. The most popular game is snap apple in which players try to bite a coin out of a suspended apple. Treasure hunts are also very popular. Parents hide sweets and pastries hooked to strings tied around the high branches of trees, and children are given hints as they look for them.

Barnbrack (a fruitcake) is traditionally eaten on Halloween in Ireland. It is usually baked with a small treat inside it. The Irish believe that a person’s fortune can be predicted by the treat. For example if a person finds a ring inside the fruitcake, it indicates that the person might soon be married.

Religious Holidays

❁ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: January 6

Epiphany, also known as St. Jordan’s Day, Woman Christmas, or Little Christmas, is celebrated to remember the Christian legend of the Three Wise Men from the East (or Magi) who came to Jerusalem looking for the newborn Jesus. This is one of the most important Christian holidays. In Ireland, it is marked by church services with special prayers and the reading of psalms. Because water is considered a symbol of life, it is blessed and sprinkled on the congregation to absolve them of all their sins. The observance is also marked by lighting 12 candles in honor of Jesus’ 12 disciples and by baking pastries and cakes.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS; EPIPHANY

❁ HOLY WEEK

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Palm Sunday through Good Friday

In the seven days preceding Easter Sunday, the Irish celebrate three important holidays: Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday. Holy Week is also called Holy Week, Passion Week, or Great Week (in Orthodox calendars).

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY

❁ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, commemorating the last week of Jesus’ mortal life. Jesus was the prophet of Christianity, and Christians believe he was the Son of God incarnate and the second personage of the Holy Trinity: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Palm Sunday is as much about Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem as it is about the beginning of his journey to the Cross. When they attend Mass on this day, Catholics are given small twisted loops of dried palm frond.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY; PESACH

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Thursday before Easter

Maundy Thursday is a Christian observance and part of the religious calendar that is variously referred to as. Christians believe that Thursday was the day Jesus had his last meal with his disciples, which is known as the Last Supper. It is thought to have been a seder, a ritual meal that is part of the Jewish feast of Pesach (Passover).

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PESACH

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday commemorates the Christian belief in the Crucifixion of Jesus, so it is observed as a somber, solemn occasion. It falls on the Friday

Fun Fact

The name *Maundy Thursday* may be linked to the Latin word *mandatum*, meaning “command,” because that night Jesus commanded his apostles to observe the ritual now called the Eucharist.

before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent (an austere season of fasting and penitence). On this day Good Friday prayer walks are organized in Belfast and other parts of Ireland. Devout Christians actively participate in this solemn observance of Jesus' Crucifixion.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

For Christians Easter is considered the most important festival, and its numerous celebrations and observances form the core of the liturgical year, which begins around the time of the vernal equinox in the Northern Hemisphere (the autumnal equinox in the Southern Hemisphere) and stretches out into summer in the Northern Hemisphere (winter in the Southern Hemisphere). This occasion celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus three days after his Crucifixion. Christians believe Jesus was the son of God, and died on the Cross to redeem humanity from sin. Apart from its religious aspect, the Resurrection symbolizes the resurgence of hope and a fresh lease

on life for all human beings. Easter is a Christian feast that celebrates Jesus' Resurrection from the dead. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over.

On Easter, a special Easter Mass is held in local churches that is attended by all devout Irish Catholics. Also children enjoy decorating hard-boiled Easter eggs. A number of competitions, such as the egg-eating contest, in which people compete to see who can eat the most eggs, are organized throughout Ireland. Before the egg was taken and linked with the Christian festival of Easter, it was closely associated with various spring festivals. The Romans, Gauls, Chinese, Egyptians, and Persians all regarded the egg as a symbol of the universe. In pagan times the egg represented fertility and the rebirth of the Earth. After the long, harsh winter, the Earth burst forth with signs of new life just as life emerges from eggs. Ireland is a nation of Celts, and the Celts, who dominated pre-Christian Europe well into the Roman era, had a full calendar of festivals connected with the Earth, its beings, and seasonal cycles.

See also Volume III: EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

✿ EASTER MONDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: The day after Easter

Easter Monday is a Christian holiday celebrated on the day after Easter Sunday. Formerly, it was celebrated as a part of Easter Week, but was reduced to a one-day celebration during the 19th century. The events that take place on this day are essentially fulfilled and include egg-rolling competitions and drenching other people with water. Originally, holy water, which was used to bless homes and food, was also used for these playful pranks. In Ireland Easter games and festivities continue on Easter Monday.

The practice of drenching everyone with water may be traced to the Irish goddess Boann, a fertility goddess as well as a water-goddess. According to legend, there was a sacred well (Sidhe Nechtan) that contained the source of knowledge. No one was allowed to approach this well, with the exception of the god Nechtan (Boann's husband) and his servants. Boann, ignoring the warnings, walked up to the sacred well and violated the area's sanctity. For this transgression she was punished; the waters of the defiled well were transformed into a raging river that pursued her. In some versions she was drowned; in others she managed to outrun the currents. In either case this water became the river known as the Boyne, and Boann thereafter became the presiding deity.

Easter Monday also commemorates the Easter Monday Rebellion Uprising of 1916. Although it was brutally crushed by British forces, this event began a year of guerilla warfare against the British in Ireland. Eventually, in 1921, Britain signed a peace treaty, and Ireland obtained independence. This day

The Celtic Lunar Calendar

The Coligny calendar, now held in the Palais des Arts at Lyon, is the earliest-known Celtic calendar, dating back to the first century B.C.E. The calendar is in pieces—bronze fragments, once a single huge plate—and is inscribed with Latin characters but in the Celtic language. It is a lunisolar calendar with a 30-year cycle, five individual cycles of 62 lunar months (plus one of 61 months); each year has 13 months, not 12. Each month starts with the full Moon, and each month is divided into fortnights, not weeks.

Lunar Month	Gregorian Month	Translation*
Samonios	October–November	“Seed-Fall”
Dumannios	November–December	“Darkest Depths”
Riuos	December–January	“Cold Time”
Anagantios	January–February	“Stay Home Time”
Ogronios	February–March	“Ice Time”
Cutios	March–April	“Windy Time”
Giamonios	April–May	“Shoots Show”
Simivisionios	May–June	“Bright Time”
Equos	June–July	“Horse Time”
Elembiuos	July–August	“Claim Time”
Edrinios	August–September	“Arbitration Time”
Cantlos	September–October	“Song Time”

(*The translations are based on those of Caitlin Matthews.)

A 13th month, called Mid Samonios, was repeated.

is marked with parades by the armed forces of Ireland, and a special memorial service is organized in memory of the Irish soldiers who died for the liberation of Ireland.

See also Volume III: EASTER

❁ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: August 15

Assumption, also known as the Day of the Virgin Mary in Ireland, commemorates the Christian belief in the Assumption of Mary, Jesus' mother, into heaven. On this day prayer services are held in local churches in honor of the Virgin Mary.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day is a Christian feast that honors all the saints (known and unknown) of the Roman Catholic Church. For Roman Catholics, and, to some degree, Anglicans, the event is a day to remember the saints and to thank God. It is also a day to honor and give thanks to the saints for fulfilling the believers' wishes. It is a common practice among Catholics to honor and pay homage to the better-known saints on days designated as their feast days, but there are many unsung or lesser-known saints who have been forgotten or are given little recognition. On All Saints' Day, Christians remember such nearly forgotten saints and request their intercession in mundane matters. In Ireland on All Saint's Day, huge bonfires are lit on hills in the countryside.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world. It celebrates the birth of Jesus, whom they believe was the Son of God. In Ireland, Christmas celebrations begin on December 24 (Christmas Eve) and last until St. Stephen's Day on December 26. During the Christmas season, the Irish decorate their homes with candles, holly, and ivy and also hang beautiful wreaths on their front doors. They decorate the Christmas trees with candles, ribbons, and other adornments.

On Christmas Eve the youngest child in each family gets the honor of lighting candles kept on the windowsill to welcome the baby Jesus and his parents to the home. Also families attend Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. Then children return home

and open their presents that have been placed under the Christmas tree. On Christmas Day people attend church in the morning; afterward, they visit their friends and families to exchange gifts and greetings.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26

The Feast of St. Stephen, also called Boxing Day, is observed on December 26, the day after Christmas. It honors St. Stephen, the first martyr of Christianity, who was stoned to death by the Romans for speaking in favor of Jesus and his disciples. Boxing Day is thought to be based on the custom of opening the alms boxes the day following Christmas and distributing the money collected to the poor.

On this day the tradition of Wren boys is still prevalent even in modern-day Ireland. Carrying poles with wrens tied at the top in their hands, young boys go from door-to-door singing carols and are paid in exchange for their songs. Also in many parts of Ireland, people dress themselves in colorful, strange costumes (mostly as birds) and take part in the St. Stephen's Day parades.

According to legend the reason that the wren is the focus of St. Stephen's Day is that St. Stephen's hiding place was given away by the call of a wren while he was hiding from the Roman soldiers. As a result he was caught and stoned to death. Thus the wren continues to be punished for its unpardonable crime. Another version states that, while Irish forces were launching an attack during the Viking era, a wren awoke the sleeping Vikings by tapping on a drum. As a result the Vikings were quickly spurred into action, and the Irish soldiers were massacred. In ancient times wrens were killed and tied to the poles, but today they are released in the wild again after St. Stephen's Day is over.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ PAN-CELTIC INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

Observed in: Kilkenny

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April

The Pan-Celtic International Festival is an annual cultural festival. Started in 1971, the main objective of this cultural event is to foster a spirit of oneness among Celts and the Celtic nations of Ireland, Scotland, Brittany, the Isle of Man, Cornwall, and Wales. The main highlights of the six-day festival include: a

fiddle-playing competition, a traditional song competition, a pipe-playing competition, a traditional costume competition, an international Celtic song competition, folk dances, parades (with people in traditional costumes), and dance parties.

However the most awaited spectacle is the girl's hurling match. It is known as *camogie*, and the final match takes place on the last day of festivities. In this game two teams armed with curved sticks try to take control of a small, hard ball. It is a no-holds barred contest, in which even punching and kicking are allowed.

❁ DUBLIN PRIDE

Observed in: Dublin

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June–July

Ireland is one of the few countries where gays and lesbians have attained general social acceptance and are not persecuted. Every year in the months of June and July, Dublin plays host to the annual Dublin Pride festival that celebrates the gay and lesbian way of life. As in other countries, along with the patronage of social organizations, the community, and corporate promoters, many straight men and women show their solidarity with gays and lesbians by participating in the celebrations.

Some of the major highlights of the Dublin Pride festival include the Lesbian and Gay Holistic Day, the night of poetry, the Pride Ceili, a beach party, and a special Mass in honor of the festival. The event ends with a Pride Parade in which Irish gays and lesbians walk through the streets of Dublin and are cheered by the people. A pride party is the grand finale of the festivities and is marked by singing, dancing, and feasting.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

Fun Fact

Birthday bumps are an integral part of birthday celebrations in Ireland. Friends hold the person by the hands and legs and gently bump him or her on the floor. The birthday boy or girl receives birthday bumps equivalent to his or her age plus an extra bump for good luck.

In Ireland after a child is born, he or she is introduced into the community through a Celtic ritual that takes place in the church. On the appointed day the child and its relatives gather at the Holy Well (an integral part of most churches in Ireland). There in the presence of the priest and holding the child in their arms, the parents walk around the Holy Well, which is considered by Celts to be the womb of the goddess Earth. This ritual acknowledges the fact that every person comes from a divine source. Then parents announce the name of

the child and may also explain the choice of the name. Next the child is presented to every assembled guest, who blesses the child. The godparents (*anam-chairde*) are introduced, and the reason for choosing them is explained. Godparents also share their feelings about this opportunity and discuss how they intend to fulfill their responsibilities as godparents. Many guests volunteer to sing songs and devotional hymns and relatives shower the child with love, gifts, and blessings.

Then, prayers are said regarding the four elements of life—fire, earth, water, and air. For example, a bowl filled with earth (mud or soil) is rubbed on the soles of the baby's feet, and a small prayer is said to ensure a safe, long walk (journey of life) on Earth. Afterward the priest puts oil on the crown of the child's head and acknowledges his or her calling by divine forces. Then water is sprinkled around the child, which symbolizes the circle of protection against any misfortune (illness, accidents, and abuse). At the end of the ceremony, people join hands and thank God for the gift of the beautiful child. Singing, dancing, and feasting follow.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Among Irish Catholics, an important religious initiation is the First Holy Communion, which takes place at the age of seven. Dressed in a traditional white Communion dress or suit, children receive Holy Communion from the priest and they are welcomed into the community as Roman Catholics.

“Communion” is a term that means “to be united,” and Catholics believe that, by receiving Holy Communion, they share in the oneness of Jesus. Holy Communion is also known as the Eucharist, a Greek term meaning “to give thanks to.” It refers to the ritual of the Christian sacrament of taking bread and wine and the Mass that takes place as part of the ritual.

The Eucharist involves readings from the Gospels and the four lives of Jesus as described by the apostles Mathew, Luke, John, and Mark. The priest also leads the Eucharist prayer, narrating the events of the Last Supper when Jesus is supposed to have asked his disciples to take the bread as his body and the wine as his blood. Irish Catholics believe that the child should know about Jesus, as well as his life and teachings, since from this day on they will be sharing a unique oneness with him.

Bread (kept in baskets) and wine (in a goblet) are kept at the altar and are blessed by the priest. After the priest distributes the bread and wine, the vessel used in the ceremony is washed in a special basin known as the *sacrarium*, which is connected to the ground. This is done to ensure that if any particle of the Eucharist is left in the cup it will return to earth.

When an Irish Catholic reaches puberty, he or she becomes a member of the local church and is expected to be confirmed. Confirmation is always performed by a bishop, who represents the wider

church and confirms people by laying his hands on their heads and praying for them. Before people are confirmed they usually attend confirmation classes, where they are taught about the important beliefs of Christians. Confirmation usually takes place when a person is old enough to make his or her own decisions. A person being confirmed will say that he or she believes in God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and asks for strength and courage to live as Jesus would want the faithful to and to tell other people about their faith.

The actual ritual of the sacrament of confirmation takes place during the Mass, after the priest completes the sermon. The priest reads aloud the name of all those individuals who will be confirmed. Each individual whose name has been called goes to the bishop and, after the candidate asserts that he or she has total faith in Jesus and promises to reject evil in totality, the bishop lays his hands on him or her. The hand symbolizes the strength and power of the Holy Spirit that will come to the candidate. Then the bishop calls out the confirmation name of each candidate, which can be either his or her real name or the name of a saint. Using the oil of chrism, he makes the sign of a cross on the candidate's forehead, thereby indicating that the candidate is now a child of God.

❁ MARRIAGE

In Ireland St. Patrick's Day is considered to be the most auspicious day to get married. The bride is generally dressed in blue, since the Irish consider it a lucky color. Also the bride braids her hair, which, according to Irish beliefs, helps preserve her power as a woman and ensures good luck. Irish women wear a special ring known as a *claddagab* (a wedding ring, for many) that has a heart (symbol of love) held by two hands (hands of faith) with a crown (honor). If a woman wears the ring with the hands pointing outward, it indicates that she is single; when the hands are turned inward, it signals that she is married.

Ancient Irish tradition requires the bride and groom to walk to the church for their wedding. As the bride and groom pass through the streets on their way to the chapel, they are showered with rice by the onlookers. Rice is considered to be a blessing; in previous eras pots and pans were also banged on the ground to wish them good luck.

The concept of the honeymoon is known as *mi na meala* ("month of honey") in Ireland. In ancient times the newlyweds had to spend an entire month in isolation and had to drink a honeyed wine during their period of seclusion.

❁ DEATH

In the 21st century Irish funerals are conducted in strict conformity to Catholic rites. However in ancient times, the Irish put more emphasis on the power of nature and buried their deceased with ornaments, weapons, and food to assist the soul in its migration to the otherworld, a small island beneath the sea, where they believed people went after death. The Irish believed that there was no sickness, old age, disease, or death in the otherworld, which was also known as the Delightful Land or Land of the Young. They believed that happiness lasted in the otherworld for eternity and each day was equal to a hundred years.

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Israel

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Middle East, between Egypt and Lebanon, bordering the Mediterranean Sea
Size	8,019 sq. mi.
Capital City	Jerusalem
Flag Description	Israel's flag is white with a blue hexagram (six-pointed linear star) known as the Magen David (Shield of David) centrally located between two equal horizontal blue bands near the top and bottom edges of the flag.
Independence	May 14, 1948 (from British administration under League of Nations mandate)
Population	6,276,883 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary Democracy
Nationality	Israeli
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Jewish
Major Religion(s)	Jewish (77%)
Major Language(s)	Hebrew (official); Arabic; English
National Holiday(s)	Holocaust Remembrance Day (March or April); Memorial Day (April or May); Independence Day (April or May)

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Israel as a Jewish state traces its origins back to Abraham, the biblical patriarch who propounded the concept of monotheism (a belief in one god). According to the Bible Abraham, his son Yitzhak (Isaac), and grandson Jacob (later changed to Israel) lived in the region of Canaan, which later became known as “the land of the children of Israel” or simply “the land of Israel.” From Jacob’s 12 sons arose the 12 tribes that combined to form the Israelites, the precursors of the Jewish nation. The name *Jew* is derived from Yehuda (Judah) who was one of Jacob’s progeny.

Archaeology and history tell us that the people who became the Hebrews, the Israelites, and ultimately the Jews were indigenous to the region west of the Jordan River. The Bible tells their story in details that are sometimes difficult to verify but nonetheless powerful to those who believe the Hebrew Bible as a historical account. The rule of the Israelites in the land of Israel, according to biblical accounts, began with

the conquests of Joshua, the successor of Moses, credited with leading the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt.

The period from 1000 to 587 B.C.E. is known as the “Period of the Kings.” The greatest among the legendary kings was David (1010–970), who unified Israel and Judah, two related but independent nations, combining them into the kingdom of Israel. David made Jerusalem the capital of Israel, and his son Solomon (970–31) built the first temple there. In 587 the army of the Babylonian ruler Nebuchadnezzar (c. 630–562) captured Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple, and drove the Jews into captivity. They went to Babylon (present-day Iraq), and the area was subsequently ruled or controlled by a number of powerful empires.

Following the Persian conquest of Babylon the Emperor Cyrus (c. 585–c. 29) allowed the Jewish exiles to return to their homeland, and in 516 they rebuilt their Temple in Jerusalem, which they called the Second Temple. The Jewish people reestablished themselves but eventually found that they were caught between expanding powers, Egypt and Syria. The land came under Syrian rule, causing revolt and civil war and ultimately resulting in subjugation by Rome.

The Roman Empire seized Israel in 63 B.C.E., placing it

under the control of a series of consuls, including Herod the Great (73 B.C.E.–4 C.E.) and Pontius Pilate (d. after 36 C.E.). This was around the time when Jesus is believed to have been born, grown up, and provided the inspiration for the foundation of Christianity. The malpractices and misrule of the Emperor Caligula (who lived between 12 and 41) led to a Jewish revolt. It lasted four years but was finally crushed, and the Temple in Jerusalem was again razed. After a second revolt Jerusalem itself was devastated, and a new city (Aelia Capitolina) built in its place. At this time the province of Palestine was created. This bitter defeat marked the end of the ancient Jewish state and the beginning of the Diaspora, the scattering of the Jewish people across the world.

In 331 the Emperor Constantine (306–37) converted to Christianity and gave the religion official status. But Christianity's hold over the country was short-lived. In 638 Jerusalem fell to the Caliph Omar (c. 581–644) and was declared a holy city of Islam on the grounds that Muhammad had ascended to heaven from the Temple Mount. This enraged Christians around the world, and by the year 1099, in what became known as the Crusades, they had raised an army, occupied Jerusalem, and started nearly 100 years of Christian rule.

By the year 1187, however, the Muslims had regained control of the region. After decades of conflict the Islamic Mamluks gained control of the last crusader stronghold in 1291. *Mamluk* is the Arabic word that is usually translated as “owned.” The Mamluks were slave soldiers deployed by the Muslim caliphs and the Ottoman Empire and who, on more than one occasion, seized power for themselves.

During the next 500 years empires rose and fell. In the 16th century the Ottoman Empire took control, and Suleyman the Magnificent (1491/95–1566) rebuilt Jerusalem's city walls. By the mid-19th century the Ottomans' grip over Israel had loosened considerably, and other countries began to take an interest in the region. The United Kingdom opened a consulate in Jerusalem, and in 1839 Sir Moses Montefiore (1784–1885), a British Jew, proposed the idea of an independent Jewish state. By the 1880s when a devastating series of anti-Semitic pogroms (massacres of Jews) swept through the Russian Empire, and a new ideology of Jewish nationalism (Zionism) emerged, European Jews increasingly turned their attention to the land of Israel, where they hoped to realize their new dream of self-determination in their ancient homeland. Jews poured out of Europe to the United States, South America, and British dominions, but they also immigrated to Palestine in the First Aliyah (or “ascension”) between 1881 and 1903. Continued anti-Semitism, particularly the Dreyfus affair in France, in which a Jewish officer was unjustly convicted and imprisoned for treason in the 1890s, also inspired Zionism. The first Zionist Congress met in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897.

While Jewish settlement increased in Ottoman Palestine, the Arab population of Palestine was developing its own nationalist consciousness. Hostil-

The Crusades

The Crusades were a series of military campaigns initiated by zealous European Christians, which usually had the sanction of the pope in Rome. These took place between the 11th and 13th centuries and were carried out with the intention of recapturing the Holy Land from the Muslims.

ity between Jews and Arabs increased; meanwhile the Ottoman Empire disintegrated.

During World War I Britain issued the Balfour Declaration (1917), which declared its support for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. Britain similarly promised Arabs that it would support Arab independence in the Middle East. When the war ended Britain was given a mandate to rule the country, and it sought to balance various claims with its own colonial self-interests. Jewish immigration increased, national aspirations expanded, and Arab hostility and resistance grew.

Following World War II British control of the situation in Palestine eroded. By 1947 the conflict among Arabs, Jews, and British colonial authorities had reached a crisis point, and Britain withdrew from its mandate. A United Nations partition plan, Resolution 181, which was passed in November 1947, sought to create two new states in Palestine, one Arab and one Jewish. Reaction to the Holocaust (the systematic genocide of millions of European Jews by the Nazis prior to and during World War II) was a major impetus in the creation of a Jewish state, which world powers supported as a place of refuge for the surviving remnants of European Jewry.

On May 14, 1948, the country of Israel came into being and was immediately plunged into war, as Arabs rejected the prospect of sharing Palestine and attacked. Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon invaded Israel but were pushed back. By the time a cease-fire was declared in May 1949, Israel had secured and extended the territory under its control. Citizenship was offered to any Jewish individual who chose to immigrate, and the country welcomed an influx of new arrivals.

The next few years witnessed continued skirmishes between Israel and Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon. On June 5, 1967, Israel reacted sharply to the threats it faced from its Arab neighbors and launched attacks on Arab troops gathered along its borders. During the Six-Day War Israel extended its territory into the Golan Heights, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the Sinai Peninsula. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), founded in 1964 and reconstituted under the late Yasser Arafat (1929–2004), emerged as the principal representative of the Palestinian people and vowed to regain their lost territories and destroy the Israeli state.

In 1979 after failing to regain the Sinai from Israel

in the Yom Kippur War (1973), Egypt signed a mutual recognition pact with Israel, and the Sinai was handed back. Relations with Lebanon and Syria worsened. In 1981 Israel invaded Lebanon, and the Golan Heights were formally annexed. Israeli troops withdrew in 1985, but the area along its border in south Lebanon remained an occupied security zone until 2000, when a peace agreement with Jordan was signed.

In 1987 a Palestinian uprising, known as the Intifada, tried to put an end to the encroachment of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. To this end it employed guerrilla warfare against Israeli forces. In 1993 the Oslo Peace Accord advocated mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO. It also offered limited Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank and Gaza. The chances of success were diminished when, in 1995, Israel's prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin (1922–95) was assassinated by an extremist, ultra-Orthodox Jewish law student, Yigal Amir (b. 1970). Rabin's successor Benjamin Netanyahu (b. 1949) proved unsympathetic to the peace process. During his time Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza spread, and terrorist activity increased.

In 1999 Ehud Barak (b. 1942) came to power in Israel promising to withdraw from the security zone in southern Lebanon, where Israeli troops and Hezbollah guerrillas had been fighting each other. Israeli forces unilaterally withdrew in May 2000, and hope grew that Israel might achieve peace both with its neighbors and with the Palestinians. Yet talks between Prime Minister Barak and Chairman Arafat broke down, and in 2001 hard-liner Ariel Sharon (b. 1928) replaced Barak as prime minister. Previous to his election Sharon made a controversial visit to the al-Aqsa/Temple Mount Complex in Jerusalem, which seemed to ignite a second, more bitter Intifada (uprising), along with a tougher, more resistant Israeli policy toward the Palestinians.

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States further toughened the Israeli mood. Both sides hurled accusations and blamed each other for unleashing violence and anarchy. As Palestinian suicide bombers killed or wounded myriad civilians, the Israelis swooped down on the Palestinians, attacking suspected terrorist cells and tightening their grip on the West Bank. However

Sharon's policies did little to check the waves of suicide bombings by the Palestinians.

During this time the day-to-day living conditions in the Palestinian territories deteriorated. The aging and feeble leader Arafat resisted attempts to loosen his grip on power but was increasingly isolated. Israeli settlers on Palestinian land continued to swell. Construction of a security fence was declared illegal by the United Nation's judicial branch. Yet despite the constant threat of violent acts of terror, life went on. Restaurants and shopping malls were still visited by the local inhabitants, especially the young. Tourist attractions remained open. Industry and factories functioned normally. Whatever the political environment, Israeli society continued to grow and develop.

With the passing of Yasir Arafat in November 2004, the election of Mahmud Abbas (b. 1935) as the new Palestinian leader in January 2005, and an initiative by Prime Minister Sharon to withdraw from the Gaza Strip, new hope emerged that peace might be possible.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The terrain of Israel is divided into four general areas: the coastal plain, which is fertile, humid, and thickly populated, stretches along the Mediterranean Sea; the central highlands, including the hills of Galilee in the north, have the country's highest elevation at Mt. Meron (3,963 feet) and the arid Judean hills in the south; the Jordan Rift Valley with its lowest point (1,309 feet below sea level) at the Dead Sea; and the Negev Desert, which occupies about half Israel's area.

Israel has a Mediterranean climate characterized by long, hot, dry summers and short, cool, rainy winters, as modified locally by altitude and latitude. The climate is determined by Israel's location between the subtropical aridity characteristic of Egypt and the subtropical humidity of the Levant, or eastern Mediterranean. January is the coldest month, with temperatures ranging from 41°F to 50°F, and August is the hottest month, with temperatures from 64°F to 100°F.

Al-Aqsa: The Temple Mount Complex

The Temple Mount (or Noble Sanctuary) Complex is one of the most sacred sites in the world, because it is venerated by the followers of three major religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This complex houses the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque. The Dome of the Rock (or Qubbat as-Sakhrah) is one of the most famous Islamic mosques. It was built by a caliph who wanted to honor Allah and create a mosque that would rival those in Mecca with its splendor.

The al-Aqsa Mosque is the largest mosque in Jerusalem, with a capacity of 5,000 worshippers. Its architectural style is a mixture of old Islamic and Crusader designs. At the center of the dome is a rock that is believed by Muslims to be the place of Muhammad's ascension to heaven. Christians and Jews believe this rock was the altar where Abraham was supposed to sacrifice his son. The Jews also believe that this was the location where Jacob saw a ladder rising into heaven. At the base of the Mount is the Western Wall, sacred to Jews as the only remnant of their ancient Temple left standing.

About 70 percent of the average rainfall in the country falls between November and March; the months of June through August are often rainless. Rainfall is unevenly distributed, decreasing sharply as one moves southward. In the north the average annual rainfall is 44 inches; in the extreme south, rainfall averages less than 4 inches annually. The areas of the country where agriculture is practiced receive about 12 inches of rainfall annually, and about one-third of the country is arable. Rainfall varies from season to season and from year to year, particularly in the Negev Desert. Precipitation is often concentrated in violent storms, causing erosion and flooding. During January and February it may take the form of snow at the higher elevations of the central highlands, including Jerusalem.

❁ ECONOMY

Israel has the most diversified economy in the Middle East, with a high level of modernization and a record of technical innovation. In recent years the Israeli economy has experienced an upswing, much of it due to a decreasing need to divert funds to the military. Much of the strength of Israel's economy, however, comes from a politics that has allowed high deficits on state budgets and foreign trade balances.

Mining is an important activity for the Israeli economy, and a lot of minerals are extracted from the Dead Sea. Oil drilling exists in Israel but on a very small scale. Agriculture in Israel is very effective since it is able to cover about 75 percent of domestic needs, despite the limited land available. However agriculture contributes only 3 percent of Israel's gross national product (GDP). Mainly citrus fruits and eggs are exported. Water, critical to agriculture, is a valuable resource and a source of conflict between Israel, the Occupied Territories, and Israel's neighbors.

Israel has a large income from tourism (especially religious tourism), as well as from donations from individuals and organizations around the world. The United States aids the Israeli economy at the level of \$3 billion annually, of which \$1.8 billion is allocated to military expenses; the balance goes to the civilian economy. Since the Israeli economy still runs with heavy deficits, the country cannot do without this help, even though recent governments have declared economic independence as a major objective.

Israel has the highest average standard of living in the Middle East, but many, particularly immigrants and Israel's Arab citizens, do not benefit from the country's wealth. The cost of living in Israel is high, and for many their wages never manage to cover more than their basic costs. A large portion of the population lives under very modest conditions, often surviving only on aid from the government.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Probably one of the most familiar aspects of Israeli culture to outsiders, although occupied by only about 7 percent of the country's population, is the kibbutz

(singular, kibbutz), Israel's collective communities. Other countries have attempted communal enterprises, but no other country has been as successful in their implementation. For one thing communal groups in other countries, for example, in the former Soviet Union, were not voluntary; they were imposed by the government. In Israel, in contrast, the kibbutzim are voluntary, intentional collective communities, and they have played a vital role in Israel's economic success; indeed the kibbutzim have played an essential role in the creation of Israel, especially as the world beyond its borders perceives it. Though the kibbutz movement never accounted for more than 7 percent of the Israeli population, it did more to shape the image Israelis have of their country, and the image that foreigners have of Israel, than any other Israeli institution. During the six decades of its existence Israel has emerged as a world power, owing to the ambitions, hard work, and creativity of its citizens, and the kibbutzim have provided many of Israel's military leaders, intellectuals, and politicians.

The Jewish community that inhabits Israel has always been diverse, drawing on the traditions of the wide range of Jews who have returned there from the worldwide Diaspora. Some practice an Orthodox Judaism, while many are secular. Israelis display artistic brilliance in music, literature, dance, and architecture wherever they live, but Israel's musicians have created a diversified musical tradition. During the first few years of Israel's existence, an attempt to forge a unique Israeli cultural identity by combining its constituent musical cultures failed because the disparate musical traditions did not blend well. After 1948 explicit government policy encouraged Hebrew language songs instead of Ladino or Yiddish ones, and Hebrew gradually became the language of choice for most Israeli musicians, though many occasionally include a song or album in Yiddish or Ladino. Into the 1950s most of the musical stars were Yemenite Jews because Yemen had long been a center for the preservation of Jewish traditions. For this reason Yemenite Jews remain popular and some performers have achieved international popularity. Sephardic Jews, for example, Haim Louk and Ruth Yaakov, have also had a major role in the development of Israeli popular music.

During the decades of the 1980s and 1990s wave of roots revival and fusion musicians arose, fusing Iranian, Turkish, Greek, and Moroccan traditions with rock and roll, pop music, and jazz. Habrera Hativiet, influenced by musical traditions as varied as American blues, African folk music, and Hassidic song, is perhaps the most influential of these groups. Even more recently hip hop has made some inroads into mainstream Israeli musical audiences. Israel is also one of the leading sources for Goa trance and psychedelic trance music. The most popular artists are Astral Projection, Infected Mushroom, and Skazi.

Israel is also at the forefront of science and technology in disciplines that range from agricultural innovations to medical breakthroughs. Israeli

scientists have contributed in the areas of genetics, medicine, agriculture, computer sciences, electronics, optics, engineering and other high-tech industries. Israeli science is known for its military technology, from simple submachine guns like the Uzi to advanced anti-ballistic defense system. Israel is also one of the few nations capable of launching satellites into orbit. Israel's scientists have also pioneered in important areas such as energy-conserving methods of crop irrigation, cancer research, and theoretical physics.

CUISINE

Israel's cosmopolitan society is reflected by the diverse cuisines available there. The Jewish culinary arts mirror the various places that the Jews have lived through the centuries. Jewish cooking is a fusion of Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, Spanish, German, and Eastern European gastronomies. For instance, stuffed cabbage is common in eastern Europe. Blintzes (cheese wraps) and knishes (buns stuffed with meat or potatoes) are German in origin; couscous originated in North Africa, falafel is Egyptian, and *shishlik* comes from Turkey.

At the same time Jewish food is the food of an agrarian people, who in earlier times barely subsisted. This reality led to the evolution of a style of cooking that valued everything and wasted nothing. The dishes are based on readily available ingredients that were also fairly cheap.

Basically one can divide Israeli cuisine into two genres: Ashkenazi and Sephardic. Ashkenazi refers to Jewish people (immigrants) from eastern and western Europe, while Sephardic Jews come mainly from the Mediterranean and Spain. Ashkenazi cooking tends to be heavier and sweeter; Sephardic food is full of aromatic spices and herbs. The latest trend is to combine both traditions.

Orthodox Jews at home, as well as many Israeli restaurants, observe the laws of *kasbruth*, the Jewish dietary laws that dictate what is kosher—which foods may be eaten and which may not—as well as how meals must be prepared and eaten. *Kosher* means “fit to eat” and encompasses a whole code of rules that originate in the Hebrew Bible's book of Leviticus. When dining kosher, for instance, pork and shellfish are *trayf* and cannot be eaten at all, and meat and dairy products cannot be mixed and must be eaten on separate sets of dishes.

Public/Legal Holidays

HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

Observed by: Jews

Observed on: 27th of Nisan, the first month of the Jewish calendar

Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, is an annual Jewish observance on the 27th day of Nisan, in the Jewish calendar, in remembrance of the approximately six million Jews who died in the Holocaust during World War II. Originally it had been suggested that the holiday be observed on the 15th of Nisan, the anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto uprising (April 19, 1943), but this idea was rejected because it is also the first day of Passover. Instead, the 27th was chosen, being eight days before Yom Ha Atzmaut, Israeli Independence Day. Yom HaShoah was established by Israeli law in 1959 and the decree signed by David Ben-Gurion and Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, then prime minister of Israel and president of Israel, respectively.

At 10 A.M. on Yom HaShoah the air-raid sirens throughout Israel sound for a full two minutes. Public transport (including virtually all highway vehicles) is halted for this period.

People stop where they are and remain silent. All flags on public buildings are flown at half staff. During Yom HaShoah many public entertainment and other business establishments in Israel are closed by law. Israeli television and radio channels transmit mourning songs and documentaries about the Holocaust without commercial interruptions. Also tens of thousands of Israeli high school students hold a memorial service in Auschwitz, in what has become known as “The March of the Living,” in remembrance of the Holocaust death marches. This service is financed by the government and regarded as an important part of Israeli students' education.

MEMORIAL DAY

Observed by: Jews

Observed on: Fourth of Iyyar, the second month of the Jewish calendar

Yom Hazikaron Memorial Day (Israel Fallen Soldiers and Victims of Terrorism Remembrance Day) is observed on the fourth of Iyyar of the Jewish calendar. It always precedes the next day's celebrations of Israel Independence Day, or Yom Ha Atzmaut, celebrated on the fifth of Iyyar, the annual observance of the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. The sequence in which these holidays are observed is appropriate, because Yom Hazikaron honors veterans and fallen soldiers of the state of Israel and the Israel Defense Force who died in the modern Arab Israeli conflict. But it also commemorates civilians murdered by Palestinian acts of terror.

The day includes many national ceremonies for the fallen soldier at which senior public officials and military officers are present. The day opens the preceding evening at 20:00 (8 P.M.), because days in the Jewish calendar always begin at sunset, with a one-minute siren during which most Israelis stand in silence, remembering the dead and showing respect. Many religious Jews say prayers for the souls of the fallen soldiers at this time as well. A two-minute siren is heard the following morning, at 11:00, which marks the opening of the official memorial cere-

monies and private remembrance gatherings held at each cemetery where soldiers are buried. The day officially ends between 19:00–20:00 (7–8 P.M.) with the official ceremony of Israel Independence Day on Mount Herzl, when the flag of Israel is raised to the top of the pole.

Scheduling the Memorial Day immediately before Independence Day reminds people of the price that's paid for independence and of what the soldiers gave with their sacrifice. This juxtaposition demonstrates the importance attached to this day in Israel, where many people have served in the armed forces and where almost everyone has a connection to people who were killed during their army service.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: Jews

Observed on: Fifth of Iyyar, the second month of the Jewish calendar

Israel's Independence Day Yom Ha Atzmaut is celebrated on the fifth day of the month of Iyyar in the Jewish calendar. It was on this day in the year 5708 (May 14, 1948) that the state of Israel was created. Long before the actual day the streets are decorated with Israeli flags and lights. The residents hang Israeli flags from their balconies and spruce up their homes for the occasion.

The day preceding Independence Day is Yom Hazikaron, Remembrance Day, devoted to the memory of those who gave their lives for the achievement of the country's independence and its continued existence. It is a day of personal and collective grief mixed with awe and gratitude for the sacrifice of those who died in the service of their country.

Independence Day Eve ceremonies begin with the traditional torch-lighting at Mt. Herzl. The next day, as the mood shifts from sorrow to joy, the Israeli president receives the distinguished soldiers of the year in his residence, an International Bible Contest is held, and the Israel Prizes are awarded. Special thanksgiving prayers are recited in many synagogues throughout the country and the world, and festive meals and celebrations are held to commemorate the reestablishment of the Jewish state in the land of Israel after 1,900 years.

With the arrival of the evening, firecrackers and fireworks are set off. The fireworks displays continue until late into the night. The atmosphere is festive and joyful, and dance and musical programs are conducted in many cities and towns.

Religious Holidays

❁ PESACH

Observed by: Jews

Observed on: Begins on the 15th of Nisan, the first month of the Jewish calendar, and continues for seven days

Passover, or in Hebrew, Pesach, begins on the night of the 15th day of the month of Nisan, and lasts for seven days (eight days outside of Israel). It celebrates the liberation and departure of the Israeli nation from Egypt, which is chronicled in the Bible as the Exodus. This is, in fact, a celebration of the Jewish people's spiritual freedom as well as freedom from the bonds of slavery. The highlight of Pesach is the observance of the seder (which means "order"), a ritual meal and ceremony performed on the first evenings of Passover (the first two evenings in the Diaspora). At the seder the guests eat special kinds of food, listen to narratives about the exodus from Egypt and freedom from slavery under the pharaoh, sing songs, and offer special prayers giving thanks to God. Passover is also a celebration of spring, marking rebirth and hope.

During Pesach Jews eat only matzah, unleavened bread, symbolic of the haste required in their escape from Egypt, when they did not have time to allow their bread to rise. Jews see Passover not simply as a commemoration, but as an event in which they participate. They are commanded to observe three rituals: to tell the story of the exodus; to eat matzah; to refrain from eating *hametz* (leavened bread).

The central ritual of Passover, the seder, is observed not in synagogues, but in homes. It is a time to ask questions, to discuss one's faith, as well as to enjoy an elaborate meal with family and friends. It is widely observed, even among secular Jews.

See also Volume III: JUDAISM; PESACH

❁ LAG B OMER

Observed by: Jews

Observed on: Begins on the 16th of Nisan, the first month of the Jewish calendar

In the Torah (the book of Leviticus), Jews are commanded to count the days from Passover to Shavuot.

Seder

This special service is unique to Pesach (Passover) and is conducted in every home on the first night of the festival (and often on the second night as well) throughout the Jewish Diaspora. The word *seder* literally means "order," and the seder is called such because it is indeed an ordered ceremony that narrates the Exodus story of Jewish liberation and rehearses the central tenants of Judaism.

There are a number of steps that must be followed, which are detailed in the Haggadah: an ordered collection of sacred passages, related praises, blessings, stories, songs, and psalms centering on the story of the Exodus from slavery in Egypt. A seder is also a great meal, which is sumptuous even though it excludes all *hametz*, food made with leavened grain products, which are prohibited during Passover.



Every night, from the second night of Passover to the night before Shavuot, Jews recite a blessing and enumerate the *omer* in both weeks and days. An *omer* is a unit of measure. During the days of the Temple, an *omer* of barley was cut down on the second day of Passover and brought to the Temple as an offering. This grain offering was called the Omer. This period of calculation is called the Counting of the Omer, or Lag b Omer. This counting of *omers* reminds Jews of the link between Passover, which commemorates the exodus, and Shavuot, which commemorates the giving of the Torah. The end of the Hebrews' slavery was not complete until they had received the Torah.

Lag b Omer is a time of partial mourning. Weddings, parties, and dinners with dancing are not scheduled in remembrance of a plague that occurred during the lifetime of Rabbi Akiba (fl. second century). Haircuts are also forbidden. On the 33rd day of the Omer (the 18th of Iyyar) a break in the plague is celebrated with a minor holiday Lag b Omer, when the mourning aspects of the *omer* period are lifted. *Lag* is the number 33 in Hebrew.

See also Volume III: JUDAISM; PESACH

SHAVUOT

Observed by: Jews

Observed on: Sixth of Sivan, the third month of the Jewish calendar, 50 days after Passover

Shavuot, also known as Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks, celebrates giving the Torah to the Jewish people. It is also a harvest festival or a first fruits holiday, marking a new agricultural season. The name *shavuot* means “weeks,” relating to its dating, which comes 50 days after Passover.

Many of the traditions and customs of Shavuot can be traced back to the diverse experience of the ancient Jewish people at Mount Sinai. According to various legends and parables, the Israelites actually overslept on the morning of God's visit. To compensate for this negligence, Jews hold a vigil on the eve of Shavuot. They stay awake from dusk to dawn, keeping themselves busy with readings from the Torah and the Talmud. (The Talmud is a body of Jewish literature composed of two parts: the “Mishna,” a rabbinic commentary on the Torah, and the “Gemara,” an additional, lengthy commentary.) Another Shavuot custom is eating dairy foods. One plausible explanation for this comes from a passage in the Torah: “And He gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.”

Another explanation is found in a legend that claims that, prior to the visitation from God, Jews did not observe kashruth (dietary) laws. On this first Shavuot they discovered that their utensils were nonkosher and thus unfit for use. Finding themselves without kosher utensils and food items, the Israelites resorted to eating only dairy products. This is still practiced carefully. Another interesting legend tells the story of the Israelites finding Mount Sinai with lush greenery and a profusion of flowers.

From this is derived the custom of decorating homes and synagogues with branches and flowers. In some Jewish temples people decorate the scrolls of the Torah with lots of flowers, especially roses.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS; JUDAISM; PESACH

TISHA BE-AV

Observed by: Jews

Observed on: Ninth of Av, the fifth month of the Jewish calendar

Tisha Be-av is observed on the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av. As the anniversary of the most tragic events in Jewish history, including the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem (586 B.C.E. and 70 C.E., respectively) and the expulsion of 100,000 Jews from Spain in 1492, this is a major fast and day of mourning in the Jewish year. Like Yom Kippur it begins at sundown and continues until the next sundown, a full night and day. Tisha Be-av now commemorates all the tragic events in Jewish history that occurred on this day and represents for Jews the beginning of *galut* (exile), physically in the Diaspora until the creation of the state of Israel, and figuratively as a state of spiritual alienation in an imperfect world.

The devout are forbidden to eat or drink anything, wash leather shoes or wear them, or indulge in physical pleasures for the entire period. Marital relations are forbidden. People must not read the Torah on this day because the study of Torah brings joy. On the night of Tisha Be-av and until noon of the following day, people sit on the ground or on low stools, and during the prayer services in the synagogues the book of Lamentations and *Kinnot* are read. As a gesture of sorrow, the worshippers sit on the floors during the service.

See also Volume III: JUDAISM; YOM KIPPUR

ROSH HASHANAH

Observed by: Jews

Observed on: First and second of Tishri, the seventh month of the Jewish calendar

In Hebrew *rosh hashanah* means “head of the year” or “first of the year.” Since it occurs on the first two days of the seventh month of the Jewish calendar, this observance is commonly known as the Jewish New Year. The Jewish New Year is a time for introspection, looking back at the mistakes of the past year and planning the changes one wants to make in the new year. Rosh Hashanah commences the Jewish High Holidays or *yamim noraim* (“days of awe”), which focus on repentance, judgment, and atonement, culminating after 10 days in Yom Kippur. The Bible refers to the holiday as Yom HaZikaron (the “day of remembrance”) or Yom Teruah (the “day of the sounding of the shofar”). The shofar is a ram's horn that is blown like a trumpet. The Bible gives no explanation for this practice. It is commonly

believed that the shofar's sound is a call to repentance. The shofar is not blown if the holiday falls on a weekend or day of rest (Shabbat).

In modern Israel no work is permitted on Rosh Hashanah. People spend most of the day in synagogues, where prayers are conducted. Another common holiday custom is the eating of apples dipped in honey, symbolizing the wishes for a pleasant new year. Also popular is the practice of casting off (*Tashlikh*). People walk to creeks or rivers on the afternoon of the first day and empty the contents of their pockets, symbolically casting off their sins. This practice is not discussed in the Bible but is a long-standing custom. On this day people meet and wish each other a happy new year. The traditional greeting is, "May you be inscribed for a good year [in the Book of Life]."

See also Volume III: JUDAISM; ROSH HASHANAH; YOM KIPPUR

✿ YOM KIPPUR

Observed by: Jews

Observed on: Tenth of Tishri, the seventh month of the Jewish calendar

Yom Kippur, the most solemn of Jewish festivals, falls on the 10th day of the Hebrew month of Tishri (September or early October of the Gregorian calendar). It closes the 10-day period of repentance begun at Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. The first Yom Kippur took place after Moses returned from his second trip to Mt. Sinai with a replacement set of tablets containing the Ten Commandments. He had broken the original set when he returned the first time to discover the children of Israel worshipping a golden calf rather than the one God who had delivered them from slavery in Egypt. Moses earnestly pleaded with God to have mercy on the Jews; subsequently, on the first of Elul (the sixth month in the Jewish calendar), he ascended the mountain to procure a second set of tablets. In his absence the people fasted from sunrise to sunset. Moses descended the mountain on the 10th of Tishri to find his followers truly repentant; whereupon he announced that God had forgiven them. He decreed that the 10th of Tishri would remain a day of atonement for all generations to come.

Yom Kippur is a time for profound examination of one's life. Jews are urged to consider their shortcomings, seek forgiveness and redemption, and repair themselves and the world. It is customary to eat heartily on the day before Yom Kippur. Toward the evening people eat their final meal before the fast, which begins at sundown. It is a tradition to dip bread in honey (as is done during Rosh Hashanah). People must also eat only food which is easily digested, such as fowl. Fish is not eaten at this meal but is generally eaten earlier in the day. The meal must be completed before sunset.

On Yom Kippur, people not only refrain from eating and drinking, but they also do not bathe,

anoint themselves, wear leather shoes, or have sexual relations. People dress humbly, and men wear a white *kittle*, besides the large prayer shawl, the tallith, during the day and also at night. This is done to create a solemn and prayerful mood.

Candles are lit in homes before sunset. Moreover *yartzeit*, the traditional candle lit in memory of the deceased, continues to burn for 25 hours. Parents bless their children before they go to the synagogue, imploring God to grant the children a good life, health, prosperity, and peace. Some people seek blessings from the rabbis (holy men) for the new year.

See also Volume III: JUDAISM; ROSH HASHANAH; YOM KIPPUR

✿ SUKKOT

Observed by: Jews

Observed on: Fifteenth through 21st days of Tishri, the seventh month of the Jewish calendar

This seven-day festival originated in ancient times when Jews made pilgrimages to the Temple in Jerusalem. It derives its name from the *sukkah*, or booth, a temporary structure in which people found shelter, so it is also called Festival of Tabernacles/Booths or Hag ha Asif, Festival of the In-Gathering. Sukkot commemorates God's protection of the children of Israel during their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. Sukkot is also an agricultural festival. The *sukkah* built during the holiday also recalls the practice of ancient farmers, who constructed temporary huts near their fields during the harvest.

Sukkot is a joyful holiday that celebrates the successful harvest as well as recent completion of the process of repentance during the Days of Awe (Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur). In biblical times, Sukkot was the most important Jewish festival and was the occasion for the consecration of the Temple by Solomon.

During Sukkot, Jews must fulfill three mitzvot ("commandments"): living in the *sukkah*; gathering together the four species; and rejoicing during the holiday. The four species refers to four kinds of growing things (citron, myrtle, palm, and willow) that are carried around the synagogue as a part of the prayer service. The seventh day of Sukkot, called Hoshana Rabbah, is marked by many recitations of "help us, we pray" (hosannas) by worshippers carrying bundles of twigs from willow trees (which grow along river banks) as they circle the synagogue seven times. This practice is related to the belief that on this the Almighty decides the amount of rainfall to be sent down on the Earth to ensure good harvests.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS; JUDAISM; ROSH HASHANAH; YOM KIPPUR

✿ SHEMINI ATZERET

Observed by: Jews

Observed on: Twenty-second and 23rd days of Tishri, seventh month of the Jewish calendar

The term *atzeret* means “concluding gathering.” The word *shemini* means the “eighth day.” Hence Shemini Atzeret is also known as the Eighth Day of Solemn Assembly or the Celebration of Renewal and Thanksgiving. Observed the day after Sukkot, in Israel Shemini Atzeret actually marks the completion of the annual cycle of the ritualistic reading of the Torah. It also signifies the beginning of the rainy season in Israel, which lasts until spring. Therefore on Shemini Atzeret the Jewish people hold a special prayer for an abundance of rain. The recital of memorial prayers for the dead, called *yizkor*, also takes place on this day.

In Israel Shemini Atzeret is also the holiday of Simchat Torah. Outside of Israel, where extra days of holidays are held, only the second day of Shemini Atzeret is Simchat Torah: Shemini Atzeret is Tishri 22 and 23, while Simchat Torah is Tishri 23.

See also Volume III: JUDAISM

❁ SIMCHAT TORAH

Observed by: Jews

Observed on: Twenty-third of Tishri, the seventh month of the Jewish calendar

Each week in the synagogues, the devout chant a particular passage (*parshah*) from the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible). There are 54 *parshahs*, one for each week of a leap year, so that, in the course of a year, worshippers manage to read the entire Torah. During non-leap years, there are 50 weeks, so they double up on some of the shorter portions. Simchat Torah, or Rejoicing the Law, joyously celebrates the completion and the beginning of the annual cycle of Torah reading, which takes place in September or October, a few weeks after Rosh Hashanah (the New Year). On Simchat Torah devout Jews read the last portion of the Torah and then proceed to begin again with the first paragraph of Genesis, thereby symbolizing that the Torah is a circle and can never come to an end. *Simchat* means “joy.” In synagogues celebrants dance and sing as they joyously circle with the Torah.

See also Volume III: JUDAISM; ROSH HASHANAH

❁ HANUKKAH

Observed by: Jews

Observed on: Twenty-fifth of Kislev, the ninth month of the Jewish calendar

In Hebrew the word *Hanukkah* also known as Chanukah and Hanukah, means “dedication.” This festival is celebrated for eight days and nights, starting on the 25th of Kislev in the Jewish calendar. This holiday commemorates the rededication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem after the Jews’ 165 B.C.E. victory over the Hellenic Syrians. Earlier Antiochus IV (215–164), the Greek king of Syria, had prohibited Jewish rituals and ordered the Jews to worship Greek gods. In 168 he seized the Holy Temple of the Jews and dedicated it to the worship of Zeus.

Under the leadership of Judah Maccabee (d. 161) the Jews defeated the Greeks after three years of relentless fighting. When Judah Maccabee and his soldiers entered the Holy Temple, they were aghast to see its pitiful condition. After they had cleaned and renovated the Temple, they decided to hold a grand dedication ceremony. But for the celebration they wanted to light the menorah (a seven- or nine-branched candelabra). They managed to find a small flask of oil, but it contained only enough to light the menorah for just one day. Miraculously, however, the oil lasted eight days. This gave them enough time to obtain a fresh supply of oil to keep the menorah perpetually lit.

On the first night of Hanukkah, a single candle is lit by the worshippers in every home. On each successive night, another candle is added until the final night, when all the lights are lit. The candles are placed in the menorah from right to left, but lit from left to right. The tallest candle, known as the *shamash* (“servant”) is used to light the other candles. Blessings are recited each night before the lights are lit.

Hanukkah has no special ritual meal, but it is traditional to have parties, invite friends to light candles, exchange small gifts, play dreidel (a top), and eat foods fried in oil, such as *sufganiyot* (a kind of doughnut) or potato latkes (“pancakes”).

See also Volume III: HANUKKAH; JUDAISM

❁ TU BSHEVAT

Observed by: Jews

Observed on: Fifteenth of Shevat, the 11th month of the Jewish calendar

Tu Bshevat, the 15th day of the Jewish month of Shevat (in Hebrew, *tu* means “fifteen”), is also called the New Year for Trees. From ancient times Tu Bshevat has been used to calculate the age of trees for tithing. One of the laws given in Leviticus states that fruit from trees cannot be eaten during the first three years; the fourth year’s fruit is for God. From the fifth year on it is permissible to eat the fruit. On Tu Bshevat each tree is considered to have aged a year, so trees planted on Shevat 14 are already a year old by this reckoning, and the trees begin their second year the next day. A tree planted two days later on Shevat 16, however, is not two years old until the next Tu Bshevat.

This holiday does not have many customs associated with it, but one custom is to eat a new fruit on this day. According to Jewish tradition, there are four different kinds of fruit: (1) fruits and nuts with tough inedible exteriors and soft edible flesh, such as oranges, bananas, walnuts, and pistachios; (2) fruits and nuts with soft exteriors but hard pits inside, such as dates, apricots, olives, and persimmons; (3) fruit that can be eaten completely, such as figs and berries. A fourth type of fruit, according to kabbalistic tradition, does not belong to this world.

See also Volume III: JUDAISM

❁ PURIM

Observed by: Jews

Dates: Fourteenth of Adar, the 12th month of the Jewish calendar

Purim, the Feast of Lots, commemorates the salvation of the Jews during their Babylonian exile. King Ahasuerus (probably the Persian king Xerxes I, r. 485–65) had an advisor named Haman, who plotted to kill the Jews. His plans were foiled by the efforts of the righteous Mordechai (the principal ally of the queen) and the beautiful Jewish Queen Esther.

Purim is celebrated on the 14th of Adar, the anniversary of the day the Jews were saved from being massacred by a hapless king manipulated by his cruel vizier. Like all Jewish holidays, it begins after sunset and ends the next night. The day before Purim is a *taanit*, “day of fasting,” and Taanit Esther recalls the three-day fast by Persian Jews at Esther’s request. Taanit Esther is considered a minor fast and is not widely observed outside of traditional circles.

On Purim Jewish people customarily read aloud from the Megillah (a scroll containing the story of Esther). The reading takes place once at night and once by day on this holiday. Before the Megillah is read, the reader gives three blessings; from that point on it is forbidden for listeners to speak until the reader finishes the whole Megillah and gives the final blessing. It is customary to create a commotion when the name of Haman is mentioned during the reading. It is very important for the reader to stop reading while the noise is being made and not continue until the noise ends. This gesture merely symbolizes the devout’s hatred for the vile, mean, despicable character.

It is also customary to give three half-shekels in charity before Mincha (afternoon prayers) on the day before Purim in memory of the Machatzit Hashekel (half-shekel) that was given by every Jew in the month of Adar during the times of the Beit HaMikdash (Holy Temple). Every Jew is required to give a minimum of two gifts to two poor people on Purim. Ideally the gifts should be food or money that the poor can use for Purim.

Seudab means “feast.” It is customary to observe the Purim *seudab* after Mincha (the afternoon prayers). The bulk of the Purim *seudab* must be eaten before nightfall. It is appropriate to recite from the Torah before beginning the meal. Part of the mitzvah (“holy act”) of the Purim *seudab* is to drink until the devout are unable to distinguish between Arur Haman (“Cursed is Haman”) and Baruch Mordechai (“Blessed is Mordechai”). This is in memory of the miracles of Purim, which were all associated with the drinking of wine. This is an extraordinary mitzvah because drunkenness is usually strongly discouraged by Jewish law. The prayer called “Al HaNissim” (“For the Miracles”), which commemorates the salvation of the Jews, is combined with the “Shmoneh Esrei” (“Amidah”) and the “Birchas Hamazon” (“Grace after Meals”).

Finally Purim is a time of frivolity and farce. It



Ultra-Orthodox Jews dressed in celebration of the festival of Purim, walk down a street in the ultra-Orthodox neighborhood of Mea Shearim in Jerusalem. The festival of Purim commemorates the rescue of Jews from genocide in ancient Persia. (AP Photo/ZOOM 77)

has a Mardi Gras or Halloween character, as celebrants dress up in costumes, indulge in masquerades, and stage plays and parodies.

See also Volume III: JUDAISM; PURIM

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

The ceremonies of naming infants can either take place in the synagogue or at home, and relatives and friends are welcome to attend the naming. During the ceremony one chair is traditionally left empty (for Elijah, the prophet, to witness the occasion). The Jewish equivalents of a child’s godmother (*kvaterin*) and godfather (*kvater*) are involved in the ceremony.

Among the Ashkenazim (Jews from Western European backgrounds) names are usually chosen to honor deceased members of the family (it is forbidden to name a child after a living person). On the other hand among Sephardic Jews (of Eastern heritage), children are named after esteemed individuals still living, to honor them during their lifetimes. It is customary for each child to be given a Hebrew name (by which they will be addressed when in the synagogue) as well as a secular name. The Hebrew name may be simply a translation of the secular name or a completely different one.

Jewish boys are circumcised in a ceremony performed on the eighth day after birth called the *bris-mile* or *bris* (*bris*, in Yiddish, means “covenant”). The

bris represents, or reenacts, the original covenant between God and Abraham. Blessings and prayers accompany a naming ceremony, which is followed by the circumcision itself. Girls are named in the synagogue on the Sabbath closest to their birth. The ceremony is called the *brit babat* and involves only blessings, prayers, and the naming. Both naming ceremonies are followed by a traditional meal and often a party.

❁ COMING OF AGE

The Hebrew expression for “responsible male” is *bar mitzvah*, which literally means “son of the commandments.” According to Jewish law, a boy becomes a bar mitzvah at age 13. This means he is eligible to be counted in a prayer quorum (*minyan*), to wear the *tefillin*, to lead prayer services, and to testify before a religious court. Many families organize a festive meal to celebrate the occasion.

The equivalent for girls, meaning “responsible female” or “daughter of the commandments,” is a *bat mitzvah*. According to Jewish law, a girl becomes a bat mitzvah at age 12, based on the belief that girls mature earlier than boys. The *bat mitzvah* may be celebrated by the girl blessing and/or reading the Torah in addition to leading part of the prayer service. Festive meals and lavish parties in honor of a girl becoming a *bat mitzvah* are common in non-Orthodox communities. In Orthodox communities, the *bat mitzvah* is more of a family celebration than a religious ritual. If a girl wants to celebrate her *bat mitzvah* by reading Torah or leading a prayer service, then this is generally done in the presence of women only.

❁ MARRIAGE

The Hebrew word for engagement *kiddushin* means “to make holy or sanctify,” and the term for the actual wedding *nissuin* means “to elevate or lift up.” Thus the public ritual that has developed around Jewish marriage reflects the creation of a holy and

uplifting bond between the bride and groom. Jewish law requires very little official ceremony, and the presence of a rabbi or other cleric is not mandatory. Jewish law (*halachah*) requires only that two witnesses who meet certain criteria be present. The wedding ceremony often takes place out of doors under a bridal canopy (*chuppah*), usually a cloth covering held aloft on four poles; it symbolizes the home the couple will build together. The tradition of being married under the open sky says that “our home is subject to nature,” and reaffirms the couple’s faith in God’s protection.

The bride is the last to join the wedding party under the *chuppah*. Upon arrival she walks in a circle around the groom seven times. This symbolizes the seven revolutions the Earth made during the seven days of creation. The rabbi then recites the blessing over the wine and the prenuptial blessing (*birkat erusin*), after which the bride and groom drink from the wine goblet. The groom recites, “*Haray at mekudesbet li betaba’at zu kedat Moshe v’Yisrael*” (“Behold, you are consecrated to me with this ring according to the laws of Moses and Israel”) and places the ring on the bride’s finger. The marriage contract (*ketubah*) is then read.

Exchanging vows is not a Jewish tradition. The Sheva Brachot, or seven blessings, are recited either by the rabbi or a guest. Following the reading, the couple drinks a second cup of wine. The groom then smashes a wine glass. The smashing of the glass recalls the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, the Temple in Jerusalem. In Jewish society no celebration or social occasion (*simcha*) is deemed complete without thinking of the ancient shrine, its sanctity, and its key role in the lives of the people. As the devout Jewish individuals are about to build a new home, it is mandatory to recall the tragic destruction of the Temple. Usually greeted by a chorus of mazel tovs and joyous singing, the couple is escorted to a private room for the *yibud*, a short period of time for them to be alone together. The *yibud* does not call for the consummation of the marriage. Instead it is a chance for the couple to enjoy some privacy as they begin a new life together. Later they join the cele-

Tefillin

Tefillin consist of two leather boxes: one is worn on the arm and is called *shel yad*; a second is worn on the head and is called *shel rosh*. They are made out of the skins of kosher animals. (A kosher animal must be killed in one stroke.) According to tradition the boxes should be square. Their height should be about the same as the length or the width, and they should be black in color. The measurements of the boxes are not given, but it is recommended that they should not be smaller than the width of two fingers. The width of the straps should be equal to the length of a grain of oats. The strap that is passed

through the *shel rosh* should be long enough to encircle the head and to allow for the knot. The two ends, falling in front over either shoulder, should reach the navel or just above it. The strap that is passed through the *shel yad* should be long enough to encircle the whole length of the arm and then to be wound three times around the middle finger and knotted. Each box contains several biblical passages—Exodus 13:1–10, Exodus 11:16, Deuteronomy 6:4–9, and Deuteronomy 11:13–21—that are inscribed with black ink in Hebrew square characters on parchment specially prepared for the purpose from the hides of kosher animals.

bratory dinner—the first in a chain of six. Traditionally the newlywed couple is feted for seven days. Each night a lavish dinner is held in the couple's honor, often hosted by a relative or close friend.

❁ DEATH

At the time of a person's death, whoever is present at the place he or she dies is not supposed to leave the room. This is done in order to pay last respects to the departed soul. The eyes and mouth of the deceased are shut, and a sheet is drawn over the deceased's face. His or her feet are arranged so that they point toward the doorway. Until the time of burial the deceased is never left alone. However immediate members of the family should not be present while the body is prepared for burial.

As part of the preparation the deceased is draped in a shroud. For rich and poor alike this is a simple white garment that is without pockets. He or she is then wrapped in a prayer shawl with one of the fringes cut off to symbolize the loss and mourning period. Devout Israelis do not use caskets at all; the body is put into the ground in the prayer shawl.

Since the deceased's soul has already returned to God, it is considered proper to "return" the body as well. The deceased must therefore be buried in the earth; cremation and embalming are forbidden. There should be a natural decomposition of the body. The burial should be done as soon as possible.

The pallbearers are usually family members and close friends, and they are the first ones to shovel the dust into the grave. A prayer called the "Kaddish" is recited for the deceased at this time. All those present at the funeral must wash their hands afterward as a cleansing process.

There are three situations in which mourners may rend their garments: upon hearing of the death, at the funeral chapel, or at the cemetery. The mourner's act of rending his or her garment is a mark of separation. It also provides psychological relief. The garment is torn for a mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister, or spouse.

There are five stages of mourning in Judaism:

1. between death and burial
2. the first three days following burial
3. a seven-day mourning period following burial called *shivah*
4. thirty days after burial, or *shloshim*
5. the twelve-month period

The mourning period for all relatives ends with *shloshim* (30 days after burial). Mourning from day 31 to the end of the 12 month is to be observed only by children for their parents. Leaving the house of mourning is allowed only for a limited period of time. All mirrors in the house are covered. One reason for this is that a mourner should not improve his or her appearance during this time.

Mourners sit on low stools. Leather shoes are prohibited (because leather shoes were a symbol of wealth and comfort in ancient times). Greetings in any form by mourners and visitors are prohibited. Wearing new clothes and enjoying carnal pleasures are also forbidden. The Sabbath bathing and washing of clothes is prohibited. Dirt may be removed locally with soap and water. Haircuts, shaving, and clipping of nails are prohibited.

Further Reading

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Italy

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Peninsula in Southern Europe, extending into the central Mediterranean Sea northeast of Tunisia
Size	116,306 sq. mi.
Capital City	Rome
Flag Description	The Italian flag has three equal vertical bands of green (hoist side), white, and red.
Independence	March 17, 1861
Population	58,103,033 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Italian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Italian
Major Language(s)	Italian (official); German; French; Slovene
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Liberation Day, April 25; Labor Day, May 1; Republic Day, June 2

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

The Etruscans were the first people to move into the region now known as Italy, and they ruled Rome from about the twelfth to the eighth centuries B.C.E. Although archaeologists are uncertain about their origin, these people are said to have come from the eastern Mediterranean region, possibly Asia Minor (southwest Asia). Eventually they contributed to forming the Roman Empire, but little evidence of their existence remains today.

The first Republic of Rome was founded in 509 B.C.E. Victories over Carthage (at the time a North African country near the present-day state of Tunis) and Hellenic Macedonia between 264 and 164 paved the way for further expansion of the Roman Empire into Britain, Spain, northern Africa, and present-day Iraq. The spreading empire became so large that it had to be divided into eastern and western sectors.

Christianity was officially embraced by Constantine (d. 337) in 313, and the capital city of the eastern empire moved from Rome to Constantinople (Istanbul). The western part of

the Roman Empire disintegrated due to plague, famine, and tribal incursions (from the north), while the eastern empire continued to prosper in fits and starts until the Turks took over in 1453.

Ending the Middle Ages and marking the transition to the Modern Age was the Renaissance, spreading through the 14th to the 16th centuries. The Renaissance, or *Rinascimento* (in Italian), marked a change in the intellectual and cultural ideas of Italians. It was a cultural movement, which was attributed to the growing aristocratic urban city-states within northern Italy. The Renaissance eventually spread from Italy to the rest of Europe.

In the centuries post-Renaissance first Spain and then Austria took over Italy, followed by Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821) for a brief while. Napoleon utilized the French armies for fulfilling his imperialist designs in Europe. Later there was a drive for the unification of Italy led by King Victor Emmanuel II (1759–1824, of the Savoy Dynasty). The Kingdom of Italy was declared in 1861. The peninsular region of Italy, along with the neighboring states of Sardinia and Sicily, also formed a part of the Italian nation. The 1920s brought Benito Mussolini's (1883–1945) dictatorship in Italy, ending an era of parliamentary rule. His alliance with Nazi

The Etruscans

Frustratingly little is known of the Etruscan civilization (Etruria) that preceded the Gauls' arrival and flourished in the Po valley of what is now northern Italy. Although Herodotus (400 B.C.E.) speculated that they came from Lydia (now western Turkey), Etruscan culture apparently is indigenous to the Italian peninsula and developed in northern and central Italy after 800 B.C.E. with no discontinuity between it and the Villanovan culture that preceded it. Around the seventh century the Iron Age Villanovan culture

was increasingly influenced by the Hellenic culture of Greek traders and Greek neighbors in southern Italy. The Etruscans probably spoke a non-Indo-European language, a possibility supported by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (c. 100 B.C.E.) who said they were indigenous to Italy, called themselves Rasenna, and described them as unrelated to any other people in their language, way of life, or customs. Until the discovery of the bilingual Phoenician–Etruscan Pyrgi Tablets in 1964, nothing was known about the Etruscan language, but it remains largely a mystery.

Germany during World War II led to Italy's defeat and major economic setbacks for the country. After the end of World War II, Italy became a democracy in 1946.

In the 1950s Italy became a member of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the EEC (European Economic Community), now the European Union (EU). The Euro was introduced in 1999.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Shaped like a boot afloat in the Mediterranean Sea, the Italian peninsula is surrounded by smaller water bodies like the Adriatic Sea (northeast), Ionian Sea (southeast), Tyrrhenian Sea (southwest), and the Ligurian Sea on its northwestern side. Switzerland, France, Slovenia, and Austria touch Italy on its northern border. The larger islands of Sicily and Sardinia also form a part of the country politically. Both are about 9,650 square miles in size. Italy is mountainous, with the Alps (one of the biggest mountain chains in Europe) in the north and the Apennine Mountains forming the backbone of the remaining peninsula. The Alps stretch for 600 miles from east to west with the famous peaks of Monte Rosa, and Cervino.

Alpine vegetation (trees and shrubs growing in cold climates) covers the foothills of the mountains, which are marked by occasional large lakes like Maggiore, Como, Garda, and Iseo. The triangular Po River basin has the Alps to its north and the Apennine Mountains to its south, forming the lowest and most densely populated land area in Italy. The Po River is the longest river, about 390 miles in length, and it flows into the Adriatic Sea in the east through a magnificent delta formation (the point at which a river breaks up into distributaries before emptying into the sea). The Corno Grande (Gran Sasso d'Italia) is the highest mountain peak of the Apennine Mountains at almost 10,000 feet. The country has three dangerous active volcanoes—Vesuvius near Naples, Stromboli in the Aeolian Islands, and Etna in Sicily. The climate depends on the altitude of a region and its proximity to the sea. Winters are severe in the Alps, with snowfall begin-

ning every September. It gets warmer on the lower altitudes. Summers are hot and dry in the interiors. Summers next to the sea are cooler, and pleasant in the Alps and Apennine mountains.

Italy has a number of natural parks. The largest is Parco Naturale dei Monti Sibillini, located in Marche. It is spread over 25 miles of mountain peaks and is noted for its exotic birds. There are a variety of salamanders found in Italian seas.

The Italian town of San Remo (also called the Town of Flowers) is famous all over the world for its many varieties of tropical flowers (roses, carnations, begonias, camellias). The town of Tuscany (located in central Italy) is one of the most beautiful places in Italy. It has 120 protected nature reserves as well as a rich traditional heritage, accessible to the public in dozens of museums. Tuscany houses more than 100 species of plants that have medicinal value, especially for veterinary ailments.

❁ ECONOMY

Italy has a diversified industrial base with a profit-based capitalist economy in the north, rendering the north more prosperous than its southern counterpart. The southern part has an economy based on welfare and agriculture with unemployment levels up to 20

Leonardo da Vinci

Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) was a famous Italian Renaissance artist. He is universally accepted as a genius, having excelled as an artist, painter, anatomist, philosopher, sculptor, engineer, and inventor. His most famous paintings are *The Last Supper* and *Mona Lisa*. His inventions have contributed to studies in anatomy, astrology, and civil engineering. From creating designs of the human body's anatomy (after dissecting dead bodies in a hospital) to designing helicopters and hang gliders, Leonardo da Vinci's cultural contribution has been exemplary. He was a visionary, far ahead of his time.

Lampedusa: The Southernmost Point of Italy

Lampedusa (*Isola di Lampedusa* in Italian) is an island lying 127 miles away from Sicily (Italy) and 70 miles from Tunisia (Africa). Geologically it is a part of Africa (the sea being 394 feet deep between both landmasses), but politically and administratively it is under Italian control. The total land area is 8

square miles with a population of 5,300. The people here thrive on fishing, agriculture, natural rainfall (for drinking water), and tourism.

The island is of historic importance, especially since World War II; with other islands, Lampedusa was an important island in the Allied invasion of Sicily. Operation Corkscrew was the name given to the Allied invasion of this island, which cleared the way for their conquest of Sicily during World War II.

percent. Sectional tensions arise from this economic disparity. The per capita income, however, is similar to other developed European nations. Italy hardly has any natural resources of its own. About 75 percent of its energy requirements are imported.

Italy is a destination and a transit country for women and children trafficked for the purposes of sexual and labor exploitation. Estimates provided by PARSEC, a social research institute in Italy, indicate that 2,000 to 3,000 new trafficking victims—largely from Nigeria, Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, and Albania—entered Italy in 2004. The country has a strong tourism sector, along with rapidly evolving small to medium enterprises (SMEs). Trade is mostly done with the developed members of the European Union (EU) and the United States.

Fun Fact

Romulus (771–17) and Remus (771–53), the legendary founders of Rome, were said to be the twin sons of the priestess Rhea Silvia, fathered by Mars, the god of war. Supposedly abandoned to die of exposure, the twins were raised by a she-wolf and fed by a woodpecker. Romulus was believed to have founded Rome on the Palatine Hill.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Italy is rightly referred to as the world's living art gallery. Whatever the medium, Italians have significantly contributed to its development. The European Renaissance (cultural and scientific revolution) began in Italy in the 14th century. Italian authors of poetic classics that continue to be read include Dante, Tasso, Petrarch, and Ariosto while Machiavelli, Boccaccio, and Castiglione exerted a lasting influence on European culture through their prose. Giants like Leonardo da Vinci, Filippo Brunelleschi, Michelangelo, Raffaello, Botticelli, and Fra Angelico made significant contributions in architecture, painting, anatomy, and sculpting. Tommaso Geraci is a modern-day Italian sculptor of repute.

Composers Vivaldi, Palestrina, Monteverdi, and Corelli influenced the musical sensibilities of people all over the world well into the 19th century, while the compositions of Giacomo Puccini, Gioacchino

Rossini, and Giuseppe Verdi made Italian romantic opera famous. The world owes the piano and the musical notation system to Italy. Contemporary Italian artists, writers, composers, architects, filmmakers, and designers continue to contribute to the growth of Western culture.

Football (or soccer) is the national game. Italy has won the Football World Cup three times: 1934, 1938, and 1982.

CUISINE

The Italian system of meals is quite different from the American or English. *Colazione*, or breakfast, is light. There is usually a cappuccino (coffee and milk) or an espresso (strong black coffee) coupled with a brioche (a sweet pastry). *Pranzo*, or lunch, is the bigger meal. It begins with an *antipasto* (starter) that might include bread, cheese, and fresh vegetables. Then comes the first course of rice, peas, pasta, and soup, called *primo piatto*. The *secondo piatto* has meat or fish with salad and vegetables (*contorno*) and *frutta* (fresh fruit). The lunch might end with an espresso or *amaro* (a strong digestive liquor). *Dena* (dinner) is similar to lunch.

These days, people prefer a lighter lunch and make dinner the bigger meal of the day. People enjoy *gelato* (“ice cream”), which is available in a plethora of flavors any time of the day, and also enjoy having *granita*, crushed ice soaked with flavored syrup. The food is rich and creamy in the north while southern Italians prefer spicier food. The famous Italian red wine called Chianti is made in Tuscany. It can be easily identified, because it is kept in squat bottles covered with straw baskets, or *fiaschis*.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western (Gregorian) calendar and is celebrated as New Year's Day all over the world. Celebrations usually begin the

evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve). In Italy boys and girls get money and gifts on this day. People go to church the first thing in the morning and spend the day visiting relatives and close friends. Lunch is often a special event on New Year's Day. A special snake-shaped cake is eaten. This is symbolic of a new life in the new year, just as a snake sheds its old skin after growing a new one.

❁ LIBERATION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 25

Italian Liberation Day is celebrated on April 25 to commemorate the country's liberation from German occupation following World War II and the remnants of former dictator Benito Mussolini's Fascist government. It is an occasion to honor the Italian soldiers who fought the battle and those who were victims of Fascist atrocities.

The president of the country leads the activities on this day by placing a wreath in honor of Italy's war dead at the towering white stone memorial in central Rome. The prime minister leads a march through the streets of Milan usually attended by thousands, including aging former partisans and politicians. This march in the streets of Milan commemorates an uprising in the northern city that began on April 25, 1945, and soon spread to the whole of German-occupied northern Italy. Various parties and groups also organize various rallies and demonstrations on this day.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies.

While the earliest celebrations of May Day are ascribed to the pagan rites that were practiced by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages, conflicting opinions exist about its connection to the labor movement. Some claim it was established in 1889 by the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, when they designated May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. Although the strike was postponed, the day for the observance remained May 1.

In Italy political parties hold processions on the streets and protest their various causes. The atmos-

Parmesan and Parmigiano-Reggiano

Do not confuse parmesan cheese with the more prestigious Parmigiano-Reggiano! The two Italian cheeses differ in a number of important ways, including taste and texture.

Parmesan

Aged only for 10 months

Has larger curds and more moisture

No product regulation

Wheels average 24 pounds, which makes it saltier

Parmigiano-Reggiano

Aged an average of 24 months, which provides deeper flavor

Smaller curds, which drain better

Increasingly regulated; in 1955 it became a certified name

Wheels average 80 pounds; 9' H x 18' D; two-thirds less sodium than Parmesan

phere is quite festive but sometimes people tend to get carried away and become a little too rowdy.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ REPUBLIC DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 2



An estimated 30,000 people fill Milan's Duomo square for an April 25 rally celebrating Liberation Day, marking the beginning of the uprising against the Nazi occupation and Italy's Fascist dictator, Benito Mussolini. Milan holds a special place in the history of the 1945 uprising. Three days after it began, partisans killed Mussolini and his mistress. Their bodies were hanged in a Milan square. (AP Photo/Antonio Calanni)

Fun Fact

The Seven Hills of Rome lie east of the Tiber and form the heart of Rome. The Seven Hills of early Rome were the Cermalus, Cispius, Fagatal, Oppius, Palatium, Sucusa, and Velia. The Seven Hills of later Rome are the Aventine Hill (Collis Aventinus), the Capitoline Hill (Collis Capitolinus), the Quirinal Hill (Collis Quirinalis), the Viminal Hill (Collis Viminalis), the Esquiline Hill (Collis Esquilinus), Palatine Hill (Collis Palatinus), and the Caelian Hill (Collis Caelius).

Republic Day, Festa della Repubblica, celebrates the day Italy chose to become a republic, after being a monarchy, through a popular referendum on June 2, 1946. The House of Savoy (kings who ruled Sardinia before) ruled Italy when the referendum for change was passed. The public had become hostile toward the royal family and had therefore exiled them from Italy as retribution for supporting the Fascists and Mussolini.

A grand military parade through central Rome is one of the highlights of this day. The president, prime minister, and leaders of political parties watch this parade and flag-waving crowds cheer the soldiers. The president

opens the ceremony by laying a wreath at the tomb of the unknown soldiers in Rome's Piazza Venezia. The jets of the Italian Air Force also fly overhead, leaving plumes of red, white and green smoke—the colors of Italy's flag.

Religious Holidays

❁ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: January 6

The Feast of Epiphany is a Christian feast that celebrates the birth of Jesus, the arrival of the Magi (the Three Wise Men of ancient Persia, Caspar, Balthasar, and Melchior) in Bethlehem to see the infant Jesus, and his life up until John the Baptist baptized him in the river Jordan.

In Rome Epiphany has evolved into a celebration of the end of the Christmas season, around the 12th day after Christmas. On this day according to popular notions, Befana, the Italian equivalent of Santa Claus, flies on a broomstick to give gifts to children. Befana is said to drop toys and candy through chimneys into the stockings hung up by the children. There are street fairs where families end up buying more gifts, usually earthenware. There is a belief that animals can

talk on the day of Epiphany, so they are fed well on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS; EPIPHANY

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection three days after he died on the Cross. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over.

Many of the symbols and beliefs, indeed, even the English name for this holiday Easter goes back to prehistoric pagan spring religious festivals. The holiday was named after Eostre (or Eastre), the Mother Goddess of the Saxon tribes of northern Europe; she was also the goddess of fertility. The Germans knew her as Ostara. After the harsh dreary winters of northern Europe, she brought the warmth of spring, fertility, and abundance. The ancient deities in all civilizations had patron animals, and the rabbit, an obvious symbol of fertility, is the companion animal of Eostre. The deity was believed to preside over conception and birth in both animals and humans and pollination, flowering, and the ripening of fruit in the plant kingdom.

The date of the Christian celebration of Easter is linked to the ancient Jewish celebration of the Passover. The Jewish people followed the Persian/Babylonian calendar and their new year commenced with the spring equinox. Most of the pagan societies settled in the Mediterranean region also had a major religious celebration at or following shortly after the spring equinox. A common element in these spring observances was a god whose own death and rebirth symbolized the death and regeneration of life during this time of the year. Toward the end of the first century C.E., the early Catholic Church, eager for converts, systematically made its own use of the rituals and symbols attached to the pagan observances, often building its churches on top of their sacred ground.

On Easter Italian families gather together to celebrate Jesus' Resurrection. Italian Catholics attend Mass wearing their best clothes, visit the cemetery, and have the traditional day-long banquets. Children receive specially decorated Easter eggs.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ EASTER MONDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Monday after Easter

In Italy feasting and exchanging greetings and Easter eggs continue into the next day, Easter Mon-

Fun Fact

The Ohm Salamander can go without food for six years. They say it lives more than 100 years and grows eyes only when it is exposed to light. This implies that if this salamander stays in the dark caves of the seas it will not develop vision.

day, which is the first Monday after Lent. This celebration is more like a *pasquetta*, or picnicking with friends. Consuming a glass or two of wine is a must, and it is an occasion for people to visit with their family and friends and enjoy themselves. A carnival of parades, masks, and pageants precedes Lent and the Easter celebrations in Italy.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT

❁ ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Forty days after Easter

On Ascension Day Christians celebrate their belief that Jesus rose to heaven 40 days after his Resurrection from the dead on Easter Sunday. According to the Bible, during the time between Jesus' Resurrection and his Ascension into heaven he appeared to his disciples numerous times, eating, drinking, and conversing with them about the kingdom of God. Christians also believe that Ascension Day was the last time Jesus was seen on Earth and that his second coming will coincide with the end of days or Armageddon. Doctrinally the Ascension of Jesus is important to Christians. Along with his Resurrection, it is proof for Christians of Jesus' legitimacy as a prophet and the Son of God. According to Christian belief the Ascension was his ultimate triumph over Satan's powers.

In Florence, Italy, residents do not go out to the country but spend the holiday outdoors in their own unique ways. There is a picniclike atmosphere as parents pack lavish lunch boxes, gather up their children, and assemble in Cascine Park to celebrate the Festa del Grillo, or Festival of the Cricket. It is a colorful day filled with children carrying cages; stands with balloons of different hues, and food stalls replete with sweets, ice cream, and drinks. Every child must have his or her own cricket, since tradition holds that if it still sings when carried home the cricket will bring good luck. In the past children caught their own crickets, but in contemporary Florence vibrant woven or wire cages, holding prisoner hundreds of crickets caught in the park, hang in vendors' stalls.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

❁ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day is a Christian feast that honors all the saints (known and unknown) of Christianity. It is an annual religious celebration that takes place on November 1. It is believed that All Saints' Day celebrations began after the consecration of the Pantheon at Rome to the Blessed Virgin by Pope Boniface IV (r. 608–15). The Feast of All Saints' Day has been celebrated on November 1 since the time of

Charlemagne (742–814). Later it was declared a day of obligation by Louis the Pious (778–840) at the insistence of Pope Gregory IV (r. 827–44). In Italy this day is celebrated as a memorial day to reflect on those who have passed away.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: December 8

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception commemorates a Roman Catholic belief that states that at the time of her birth, God had protected Mary from all sin and filled her with his grace. It is believed that, since God wanted Mary to be the mother of Jesus, she had to be totally free of any kind of sin. Mary led a sinless life and became a source of inspiration for her son, Jesus. This day is also called the Day of Holy Obligation. Italian Catholics attend Mass to celebrate Mary's Immaculate Conception.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas is a day of celebration for Christians all over the world and falls on December 25 every year. It marks the birth of Jesus. In Italy Christmas celebrations last through the whole of December. On Christmas Eve, the pope gives Midnight Mass in St. Peter's Square. The Christmas Eve speech is broadcast to dozens of countries. Many communities in Italy enact the nativity scene depicting the holy family.

Christmas begins with a 24-hour fast, from sunset of December 23 to sunset of December 24. In most homes the *presepio*, a miniature Bethlehem stable scene, is made from cardboard,

Fun Fact

Archaeological sites at Etruria, Latium, and Campania contain high percentages of pig bones, indicating that pork was a favorite meat in western central Italy. In the north, sites in the Arno and Po valleys have been found to have more cattle bones, while sites in the south, which were influenced by the western Greek diet, have higher percentages of sheep and goat bones.

Fun Fact

Italy's first pasta, for which it has become famous, was brought back from China by Marco Polo (1254–1324). In October 2005 a bowl of noodles 4,000 years old was unearthed in a Chinese archaeological site. "Spaghetti" is actually the plural of Italian *spaghetto*, a diminutive of *spago*, which means "string."

moss, and bits of twig. Sometimes these are very elaborate. The family gathers before the *presepio* to light the candles and offer prayers. Christmas Eve is strictly a family gathering. Family parties continue until almost midnight when everyone attends church services.

The Yule log, rather than the Christmas tree, is important to Italian boys and girls. Sometimes they tap it with little sticks, asking for the gifts they want.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ CARNEVALE

Observed in: Venice

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Ten days before Lent

Every year before the fasting begins for Lent many people gather in Venice to participate in Carnevale. People dress up in masks and costumes and take part in impromptu skits and games. It is an occasion to indulge in food, wine, music, and celebration.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY

❁ EXPLOSION OF THE CART

Observed in: Florence

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Easter Sunday

Explosion of the Cart, or Scoppio del Carro, is celebrated by exploding a cart full of firecrackers declaring another successful harvest. During the Mass a dove-shaped rocket, called the *colombina*, flies out of the famous Duomo (dome) and ignites a huge wooden cartlike structure in Florence's Piazza del Duomo. Though some people say that the idea of this festival was conceived during the war for purposes of entertainment, the history of this event combines religious artifacts with pyrotechnic machinery in a really strange way. The ultimate purpose of this (as a pagan ritual) is to celebrate a good harvest.

On this day a *carro* ("cart") pulled by two white oxen leaves for the Piazza del Duomo accompanied by revelers in traditional costumes and clerics. The fire is traditionally started with the historical shards of the Holy Sepulcher in the Church of SS Apostoli and transported to the Duomo where the archbishop lights the sacred *colombina* rocket with it during the Easter Mass. This rocket travels along a wire, sets fire to the firecrackers on the *carro*, and returns to the church the way it came. It is believed that if this complex ritual is completed without problems a good harvest and good luck is ensured for the people.

See also Volume III: SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ ROME'S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

Observed in: Rome

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 21

Celebrating the birth date of Rome is a big event in Italy. Legend has it that twin brothers, Romulus and Remus, who were brought up by a she-wolf, founded the city of Rome on April 21, 753 B.C.E. The city-run museums and archaeological sites offer free entry for the entire day. Public speeches are made, and the roads are full of people in parades. As dusk approaches candles are lit on the Aventine Hill, one of the seven hills of Rome, before fireworks light up the Tiber River, providing a spectacular scene.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

Having more children is considered an economic asset in Italian households. When a child is born, a feeling of friendliness fills the entire family. Godparents are chosen from friends and family to rear the children in case the real parents are unable to do so. The godfather can be the best man present at the child's parent's wedding or a good friend of the family (called *compare* or *padrino*). The godmother is chosen in a similar fashion. The birth of a new family member is marked by a christening ceremony, which relatives from far and wide attend to bless the newborn. The baby is given a single name, usually derived from a saint's name such as Maria, Giovanna, and so on. A boy is named after his grandfather.

❁ MARRIAGE

Traditionally the family arranges weddings in Italy. The groom's (or bride's) family contacts the father or uncle for marriage. After both families agree, the couple gets officially engaged. Sometimes a *masciata*, a matchmaker, is sent to the prospective bride's house to arrange a marriage. Before the wedding, the bride prepares a trousseau that includes new clothes, household items, and sometimes clothes for the future husband. Friends and family give money and gifts to the newlywed couple. The groom's family also contributes resources for the wedding.

The *sposalizio*, the actual wedding, is officiated by a civil authority or a priest. Weddings on Sunday are considered luckiest. Weddings during Lent (a 40-day fast), May (veneration of Virgin Mary), and August (believed to bring ill health and bad luck) are considered improper.

According to folklore men are supposed to carry pieces of iron in their pockets to ward off the evil eye. Sometimes a vase or a glass is broken at the end of the ceremony, and the number of pieces it breaks

The Roman Domestic Goddesses

The Romans, like the Greeks, had festivals to honor numerous gods and goddesses, many of them responsible for the welfare of women at various stages of their lives. Some of their names live on in English words.

Alemonia	Goddess who fed unborn children	Fornax	Goddess of bread baking and ovens
Bona Dea	Goddess of fertility, healing, virginity, and women (Festival, May 1)	Libera	Goddess of fertility
Candelifera	Goddess of childbirth	Lucina	Goddess of childbirth and midwifery
Carmenta	Goddess of childbirth and prophecy (Festiva Carmentalia, January 11 and 15)	Mena	Goddess of menstruation
Cinxia	Goddess of Marriage	Mutinus Mutunus	God of fertility
Cloacina	Goddess of the Cloaca Maxima, the Rome sewer system and protector of sexual intercourse in marriage	Nona	Goddess of pregnancy
Cunina	Goddess of infants	Nundina	Goddess of the ninth day, when newborns were given their names
Decima	Goddess of childbirth; with Nona and Morta she forms the Parcae, the Three Fates	Orbona	Goddess of parents who lost their children
Deverra	Goddess of women in labor and the patron of midwives	Potina	Goddess of children's drinks
Fauna (Bona Dea)	Goddess of the Earth; Mother Goddess	Prorsa Postverta	Goddess of women in labor
		Pudicitia	Goddess of modesty and chastity
		Quiritis	Goddess of motherhood
		Rumina	Goddess of nursing mothers
		Stimula	Goddess who incites passion in women
		Suadela	Goddess of persuasion, especially in matters of love
		Trivia	Goddess of the crossroads
		Viriplacaa	Goddess of marital strife
		Vitumnus	God who gave life to children in the womb
		Volumna	Goddess who protects the nursery

into is considered the number of years the couple will live happily together.

❁ DEATH

Despite being relatively poorer in the south, the people there can be said to be death oriented because they save a lot of money in order to ensure their loved ones proper funerals. In a bid to calm the soul, the favorite things of the deceased are buried with him or her in a strongbox. If some things are forgotten, then they are sent in the casket of another deceased villager on the assumption that both souls will meet after death. To keep the soul of the deceased from finding its way back into the house, his or her body is taken with the feet coming out first so that the door used to exit cannot be seen. Lamenting and wailing are forbidden to enable the soul to reach its destination without confusion. To prevent the soul from coming back, frequent turns

are made on the way to the cemetery and different routes are taken returning home after the funeral.

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❧ Jamaica ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Island in the Caribbean Sea, south of Cuba
Size	4,244 sq. mi.
Capital City	Kingston
Flag Description	A diagonal yellow cross divides the flag into four triangles—green (top and bottom) and black (hoist side and outer side).
Independence	August 6, 1962 (from the United Kingdom)
Population	2,731,832 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional parliamentary democracy
Nationality	Jamaican
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Black (91%)
Major Language(s)	English; Creole
Major Religion(s)	Protestant (60%); others, including some spiritual cults (35%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 23; Emancipation Day, August 1; Independence Day, August 6; National Heroes Day, October (date varies)

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

The Arawak Indians were the first to settle on the island of Jamaica around 700 C.E. Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) was the first European to see Jamaica, in 1494. The Spanish colonized the island in 1510. After their arrival, the indigenous population of the island drastically declined due to epidemics and ill treatment by the Spaniards. The Spanish settlers set up sugar plantations on the island and imported slaves from Africa to work on them.

There were some among those Africans who preferred to take a chance on freedom in the mountains rather than bear the burden of slavery, and they fled into the wilderness of the island. These runaway slaves were branded as Maroons. As the number of African slaves brought to Jamaica increased so, too, did the number of Maroons. They were further joined by the slaves of the retreating Spanish. The Maroons had frequent skirmishes with the British.

England defeated the Spanish and took control of the island in the mid-17th century. In 1739 England granted

autonomy to the Jamaicans—but only to the small minority of white colonial rulers—who continued their lucrative plantation economy based on slavery.

The American War of Independence (1775–83) and the French Revolution (1789) stepped up the frequency and pitch of the local slave rebellions that had been going on since the early 1700s. These rebellions, however, were mercilessly suppressed. The Christmas Rebellion of 1831 is the best known and was led by a Creole slave named Daddy Sam Sharpe (1801–32). He was born in 1801 in Montego Bay, Jamaica, and unlike other slaves he had learned to read and write. He learned from various newspapers that a number of people in England were opposed to slavery.

Sam Sharpe joined the Baptist Church, which preached that slavery was immoral. He learned that the Bible says that all men are equal and that “no man can serve two masters.” All this encouraged him to work toward freedom for slaves. Sharpe convinced other slaves to participate in a peaceful plan for people to refuse to work unless they were paid. Some slaves, who were followers of Sharpe but in favor of more radical action, rejected Sharpe’s peaceful protest and instead, just after Christmas in 1831, they burned down Kensington Estate in St. James. Sharpe’s Christmas Rebellion, which ultimately

failed, got out of control and turned violent. Sharpe surrendered, was sentenced to death, and was executed in Market Square in Montego Bay in 1832.

The British government took the slave rebellion seriously. Public opinion in England favored abolishing slavery. Finally on August 1, 1834, slavery was abolished in Jamaica. Subsequently the Jamaican parliament introduced the concept of wage labor. This caused economic turmoil in Jamaica, since the former slaves considered the wages too low and opted to work independently.

The American Civil War (1861–65) cut off vital supplies to the island, causing a rapid deterioration in economic conditions. This resulted in the Morant Bay Rebellion led by the Black Baptist deacon, Paul Bogle (? 1820–65). On October 11, 1865, Paul Bogle led about 300 black men and women into the town of Morant Bay in the eastern part of Jamaica. They came armed and hoped that by challenging the power of the European plantation owners they would ultimately precipitate a general rebellion throughout the island. The rebels met with little resistance and soon took control of the town. In the days that followed, some 2,000 rebels roamed the countryside, killing plantation owners and forcing others to flee for their lives. The Morant Bay Rebellion turned out to be one of the defining points in Jamaica's struggle for both political and economic freedom as power shifted decisively toward the black majority.

The economy of Jamaica developed and strengthened during World War II, as it supplied food and raw materials to Britain. In 1944 all Jamaicans were granted voting rights. Virtual autonomy was achieved in 1947. In 1962 Jamaica gained full independence after a referendum dissolved the West Indies Federation. Alexander Bustamante (1884–1977), founder of the Jamaican Labor Party (JLP), and his cousin Norman Manley (1893–1969), founder of the People's National Party (PNP), dominated post-independence politics in Jamaica.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Jamaica and the other islands of the Antilles evolved from a chain of ancient volcanoes that rose from the sea billions of years ago. The country is divided into three landform regions: the eastern mountains, the central valleys and plateaus, and the coastal plains. The coastline of Jamaica presents many contrasts. The northeast shore is severely eroded by the ocean. There are many small inlets in the rugged coastline, but no coastal plain of any extent. A narrow strip of plains along the northern coast offers calm seas and white sand beaches. Behind the beaches is a flat raised plain of uplifted coral reef.

There are two types of climate in Jamaica. An upland tropical climate prevails on the windward side of the mountains, whereas a semi-arid climate predominates on the leeward side. Warm trade winds from the east and northeast bring rainfall throughout the year but primarily between May and October. Temperatures are constant throughout the year, aver-

The Original Maroons

Before finally departing from Jamaica, the Spanish freed their slaves, leaving them behind in the mountains to harass the English until they could amass a force to reconquer Jamaica. These freed slaves later became famous as the Maroons. Christoval Arnaldo de Ysasi organized them into a fighting force before he escaped to Cuba. The name *maroon* is probably derived from the Spanish (*esclavo*) *cimarrón*, which means “fugitive.”

aging 82°F. The island receives, in addition to the northeast trade winds, refreshing onshore breezes during the day and cooling offshore breezes at night.

❁ ECONOMY

The Jamaican economy is heavily dependent on its service sector. The global economic slowdown, particularly after the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, stunted economic growth. The economy rebounded moderately in 2003, with one of the best tourist seasons on record. However the economy faces serious long-term problems that include spiraling interest rates, foreign competition; an exchange rate under tremendous pressure, unemployment; and a growing internal debt. Depressed economic conditions have led to increased civil unrest, including gang violence fueled by the drug mafia.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Jamaican society is predominantly Christian with various denominations, such as Methodist, Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, Anglican, and Mormon. The Rastafarian religion is also widely practiced. Its followers believe that the former head of Ethiopia Haile Selassie (1892–1975) is their leader. The spiritual consumption of marijuana is prevalent among this group. The followers of this unique folk religion (Rastas) wear their hair in dreadlocks, eat saltless food, and wear vivid colors (red, gold, and green). Jamaican Creole, a patois, is the language of the people in Jamaica. Reggae music, an important part of Jamaica's cultural heritage, is derived from a form of Jamaican music called dancehall. Jamaicans love to celebrate whenever possible, and festivals take place throughout the year. Many of these celebrations commemorate the important historical events of Jamaica. Others have been adopted from neighboring regions.

Carnival is new to Jamaica and is an import from the eastern Caribbean. The celebrations last an entire week. There are street dances and parades leading up to a grand finale at the Jamaican National Stadium in Kingston. The processions feature colorful floats, and people in colorful costumes participate in street dances and parades.

Jerk

The most widely known and beloved of Jamaican foods is jerk, which is prepared by a particular method of grilling meats that originated with the Arawaks. It involves cooking marinated meat over a fire of pimento wood. The pimento tree is the source of allspice, a popular Jamaican flavoring. Allspice finds its way into most jerk recipes.

🌸 CUISINE

Jamaican cuisine incorporates a multitude of influences from around the world. The Arawak Amerindians, who made use of native products and meats, did the initial cooking on the island. Cassava root, *ackee* (a fruit used as a vegetable), and callaloo (a green similar to spinach) were mainstays of the Arawaks' diet. With European colonization and the introduction of slavery, English pudding, along with African yams and *okram*, entered Jamaican cuisine. When the British brought over indentured servants from India, various curries became popular. Chinese immigration and influence introduced an array of sweet-and-sour dishes. Other popular ingredients of Jamaican cuisine include bananas, breadfruit, *chocho* (or *chayote*, a type of squash), bok choy, butterbeans, papaya, lime, and avocados. Pork, chicken, fish, and shellfish are the meat bases of many dishes, and the extra hot Scotch bonnet pepper adds a punch to almost everything. The vegetarian cooking of the Rastafarians is also an important part of Jamaican food. Blue Mountain coffee, grown in the interiors of Jamaica, is a world-famous export.

Public/Legal Holidays

🌸 NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

Jamaicans usher in the New Year by making resolutions for the coming year. They also celebrate the year that has gone by, combining it with *junkanoo* celebrations—wearing wild flamboyant costumes and dancing in the streets. Parties, family gatherings,

Ital

Ital food is derived from the expression “vital food” (the “v” is dropped). In Rastafarian terms it means a natural, pure, clean, salt-free, and totally vegetarian diet. During Nyabingi ceremonies and other Rastafarian rituals, eating *ital* is mandatory for all the participants.

reggae music, mass parades, and colorful costumes are all part of the celebrations.

🌸 LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 23

Originally Labor Day was a celebration of trade union activities. In Jamaica it is celebrated on May 23 with community projects such as repairing roads, painting school buildings, and planting trees. People make it a point to participate in these community efforts.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

🌸 EMANCIPATION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 1

On August 1, 1834, Britain passed the Emancipation Act, which freed 750,000 slaves. Caribbean countries celebrate the day with a great deal of enthusiasm and revelry. At Emancipation Park in Kingston Jamaicans play drums and dance, especially the *bruckins*—a traditional, graceful dance of Jamaica.



Dancers perform a traditional folk dance called the Dinki Mini during the National Independence Day Parade at King's House on August 6 in Kingston, to celebrate the anniversary of the country's independence from Britain. (AP Photo/Collin Reid)

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 6

Jamaica celebrates its independence from Britain on August 6. People parade along specified routes in colorful costumes. The parade normally has a large number of floats, a few disco units, dozens of effigies, groups of costumed performers, and classic cars. Modern, as well as *junkanoo*, dancers, showcase a cross-section of Jamaican culture. Prominent national leaders and cultural icons are featured in effigy, and popular Jamaican music fills the air. Beauty queens, models, and sports personalities parade in the streets. Festival performers keep the atmosphere lively as they dance aboard the music trucks.

❁ NATIONAL HEROES' DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Third Monday of October

National Heroes' Day is celebrated on the third Monday of October in honor of seven Jamaican National Heroes: Granny Nanny of the Maroons, Sam Sharpe, Paul Bogle, George William Gordon (1820–65), Marcus Garvey (1887–1940), Alexander Bustamante, and Norman Manley. On this occasion the governor-general of Jamaica confers national honors on individuals who have worked selflessly for the development of the country. Exhibits feature Jamaica's prominent historic events and a military parade is held. Cultural activities, including songs and dances, are performed in schools to celebrate this occasion.

Religious Holidays

❁ CARNIVAL

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February

Jamaica is famous for its Carnival, which is held during the month of February. Among the prominent features are fashion shows, calypso competitions, and all-night dances. Beach parties, calypso, reggae, and soca music add to the fun. People dance in the streets in bright, colorful costumes. Various musicians perform during the weeklong music festival, and visitors from all over the world flock to the island to attend it. Carnival marks the end of frivolities and fun and the onset of the somber Lenten period.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CARNIVAL; LENT

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

On Maundy Thursday, also called Holy Thursday, Jamaican Catholics attend special Masses. This was the last week of the mortal life of Jesus. Christians believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the embodiment of the second person in a holy trinity comprising the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christians also believe that Thursday was the day Jesus had his last meal with his disciples, the Last Supper, which is thought to have been a ritual meal called a seder, a part of the Jewish feast of Passover (Pesach). The name Maundy Thursday may be linked to the Latin word *maundatum*, "command," via French *mandé*, because Jesus commanded his apostles to observe the ritual now called the Eucharist.

Jamaicans eat no meat during Holy Week, which begins on the preceding Sunday, Palm Sunday, and ends on the following day, Good Friday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday and Monday after Lent

Easter celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus on the third day after his Crucifixion. In Jamaica this festival is celebrated on two consecutive days, Sunday and Monday. Jamaicans celebrate the Easter holiday with traditional Easter buns and cheese. Other delicacies served at Easter include the *bullia*, a round cake eaten with avocado (or "pear" as the Jamaicans call it), plantain tarts, banana bread, bread pudding, and sweet potato pudding.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus, who Christians believe was the Messiah, the founder of Christianity. On Christmas Jamaicans attend church, visit friends and relatives, and exchange gifts. Singing of

Fun Fact

Granny Nanny of the Maroons is the only female national hero in Jamaica. Originally born in Ghana and a member of the Ashanti people, she was brought to Jamaica as a slave. She is remembered for the inspiration she gave to her people when they were fighting the English in the early 18th century. Both the Maroons and the British settlers recognized her as an outstanding military leader. She played a particularly important role in the fierce fight with the British during the First Maroon War, which lasted from 1720 to 1739.

Junkanoo

The origin of the word *junkanoo* is obscure and highly controversial. It may come from the French *l'inconnu* (meaning “the unknown”), in reference to the masks worn by the paraders; or it may have originated with *junk enoo*, or “junk enough,” as the Scottish settlers referred to the parades. The most likely explanation is that the word was derived from John (or Johnny) Canoe (Jonkonnu), the name of an African tribal chief who demanded the right to celebrate with his people even after being brought to the West Indies as a slave.

It is believed that this festival began during the 16th and 17th centuries. *Junkanoo*, an early traditional dance form of African origin, links music and dance and mime and symbol. Masks have a central and unique function in African religions, and it may be that John Canoe, a masquerade form, and *myal*,

a possession-healing form of religion, were closely allied in their early forms in Jamaica, as they are allied in the two powerful male secret societies of West Africa, Poro and Egungun.

The slaves were given a special holiday during Christmastime, when they could leave the plantations to be with their families and celebrate the holidays with African dances, music, and costumes. Even after emancipation, they continued these traditions. Today, *junkanoo* has evolved from its simple origins to a formal, organized parade with sophisticated, intricate costumes, theme music, and prizes.

Junkanoo went through three stages in Jamaica: the early years of introduction and adaptation; the addition of a European feature, the set girls, in the 1770s; and, after emancipation, the addition of masquerade, which may be the consequence of British influence.



Christmas carols, mostly in their reggae versions, is very popular. Christmas dinner is enjoyed in the company of friends and relatives, and it includes *gungo* (peas), chicken, oxtail, curried goat, roast beef, and pork as well. The favorite drink of this season is sorrel. Sorrel is a dark red drink made from soaking sorrel leaves in hot water and adding sugar, ginger or lime, and rum. The sorrel plant blooms only at Christmastime. The arrival of Santa Claus and the performances of the *junkanoo* bands are the highlights of the Grand Market, a community fair held on Christmas that includes food, street dancing, crafts, and music.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26

In Jamaica, food, fun and a spirit of love and friendship pervade the atmosphere on Boxing Day (also called Family Day and St. Stephen's Day), especially in gatherings of friends and families. *Junkanoo* parades are held in most places with competitions for the scariest and weirdest costumes.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY

Regional Holidays

ACCOMPONG MAROON FESTIVAL

Observed in: Accompong in St. Elizabeth

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 6

This day is celebrated with traditional crafts, dances, feasts, choral performances, and ceremonies commemorating the birthday of the great Maroon warrior Captain Cudjoe. Cudjoe, one of Granny Nanny's brothers, defeated the British army during the war of 1729–39 and provided the Maroon people with their land and freedom by signing a peace treaty with the British. The *abeng* (Maroon war horn) is sounded at 10 A.M. to mark the beginning of the celebrations. Participation in this festival is very competitive and only the best are selected in the fields of visual and performing arts, culinary skills, and crafts. Many foreigners, too, take part in these celebrations. There are many parties and events that include narration of folk tales and history and performances of war dances and treaty songs of the Accompong Maroons.

REBEL SALUTE

Observed in: Kingston

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 17

The annual Rebel Salute stage show, held in the capital of Kingston, is Jamaica's largest music festival. Created to satisfy both dancehall lovers and fans of roots reggae, it was named after its promoter, entertainer Tony Rebel. It features local popular artists and draws many music lovers.

BOB MARLEY DAY

Observed in: Kingston

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 6

The world-renowned musician Robert Nesta Marley's (1945–81) birthday February 6 is celebrated as

Bob Marley Day. His life was dedicated to music. He spread the message of peace, love, and hope through his music. He also spoke out against apartheid, oppression, poverty, and slavery. He was honored by the United Nations with the Peace Medal of the Third World and with the Order of Merit by Jamaica. The celebrations last for a week and include reggae music, cultural activities, and much beer drinking.

❁ BREADFRUIT FESTIVAL

Observed in: Bath
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August

In the town of Bath the Breadfruit Festival provides an excuse for the people to party and eat, especially breadfruit. Breadfruit is considered very important because it was the fruit (which has the texture of bread) from breadfruit trees that sustained starving slaves in earlier times. The fruit, a native of Polynesian /Pacific islands (Tahiti and Samoa, among others) was brought to the West Indies (including Jamaica) by European voyagers and mariners. During this festival, the crowds enjoy stage shows, music, and poetry, as well as a variety of dishes prepared with breadfruit as the basic ingredient.

❁ TAINO DAY

Observed in: Seville Heritage Park–St. Ann
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 18

The Tainos—one of the indigenous peoples of Jamaica—once had a rich and vibrant culture before Columbus's arrival. Columbus sold large numbers of the Tainos in the slave markets of Seville, Spain. On this day, the descendants of the ancient tribe display their culture and traditions. Taino foods, arts and crafts, fashion, and music are highlights of this festival.

Rites of Passage

❁ MARRIAGE

Jamaican weddings take place in a church. The bride's father leads her down the aisle, and a flower girl carries her train. All the villagers line up to see the bride. Only her husband can lift the bride's veil. After the ceremony the couple go to the church office or the rectory to sign the wedding register.

The bride may change from her wedding gown into a formal dress before the reception that follows the church ceremonies. Curried goat, rice, and rum punch are served at the wedding banquet, along with champagne and wine. The newly married couple cut the wedding cake.

❁ DEATH

Funerals in Jamaica are important events for which people turn out in their best clothes to comfort the bereaved family and pay their last respects to the deceased. Burial takes place the day after the death. Some towns and churches have their own cemeteries, but most of the rural people maintain their family graves in their yards. Normally the body is brought to the church about an hour before the service so that it can be viewed. After the graveside service the coffin is lowered into the ground. Wreaths are then placed on the coffin, and the workers fill the grave with earth and seal it with concrete slabs.

Many funeral customs are based on African traditions or beliefs. For instance it is considered important to say goodbye to the corpse to ensure that the dead person does not return. People do not normally leave before the last shovel of sand is tossed onto the grave or the last hymn is sung.

Family and friends assemble for wakes for several nights after the burial. Funeral rituals end nine nights following the death. On the ninth night after the burial the spirit of the dead is given a final farewell. Refreshments are served, and hymns, accompanied by beats of a drum, are sung. This ritual continues until the following morning and also involves dancing. Additional singing takes place 40 nights later. This is the time when the soul is supposed to have ceased roaming.

Further Reading

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Japan

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Island chain in Eastern Asia, east of the Korean Peninsula, between the north Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Japan
Size	234,775 sq. mi.
Capital City	Tokyo
Flag Description	White with a large red disk (representing the sun without rays) in the center
Independence	660 C.E.
Population	127,417,244
Government	Constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary government
Nationality	Japanese
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Japanese (99%), others (1%)
Major Language(s)	Japanese
Major Religion(s)	Shinto is Buddhist (84%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Coming of Age Day, January; National Foundation Day, February 11; Hina Matsuri, March 3; Spring Equinox, March 20–22; Nature Day, April 29; Labor Day, May 1; Constitution Memorial Day, May 3; People's Day, May 4; Children's Day, May 5; of the Sea, July; Respect for the Elders Day, September; Autumnal Equinox, September 23; Health and Sports Day, October; Culture Day, November 3; Labor Thanksgiving Day, November 23; Emperor's Birthday, December 23

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

It is believed that early humans inhabited Japan almost 600,000 years ago. During the Ice Age Japan was connected to Asia by land bridges facilitating the migration of humans from Korea and China to Japan.

Around 11,000 B.C.E. hunters and gatherers occupied the area, and excavations have revealed that pottery existed during that time. By around 300 C.E. the area was largely inhabited by the Yamato Kingdom. Irrigation, rice farming, iron, and bronze-making were introduced during that period. The period from 300 C.E. to 600 C.E. is called the Yamato Era, or the Kofun period.

In the mid-sixth century, the Chinese introduced Buddhism to Japan, and along with it Chinese culture also crept in.

Shinto was the traditional religion of Japan at that time. However the clash between Buddhism and Shinto was prevented by presenting the Shinto deities as manifestations of Buddha.

According to Japanese mythology the first Emperor Jimmu was a descendant of the Sun goddess Amaterasu. He founded Japan in the seventh century C.E. A succession of emperors followed. But the real power has always been in the hands of the military and the prime ministers.

During the medieval era a ruling class of warriors called samurais emerged. In 1185 the Minamoto family came to power. Their leader Yoritomo established himself as the shogun (general) and set up his headquarters in Kamakura. After his death a warrior clan the Hojos took control. In 1274 and then again in 1281 Japan resisted an invasion by the Mongols.

The next few centuries saw the samurai fighting with each other for control over the region. The period was marked by chaos and civil wars. Eventually the Tokugawa

family unified the country and moved the capital from Kyoto to Edo (now called Tokyo).

The period from 1600 to 1867 is called the Tokugawa Period. During this time fear of the influence of Catholic missionaries prompted the government to prohibit Japanese from traveling overseas or even indulging in trade.

By the beginning of the 19th century, corruption was rampant in the Tokugawa government. Famine and poverty were playing havoc, and the country was in decline. In 1867 the leader of the Tokugawa clan Yoshinobu resigned, and Emperor Meiji came to power. Under his rule, Japan prospered and began to reap the benefits of industrialization and modernization. Japan became a world power. It defeated China in the Sino-Japanese War in 1894–95 and Russia in the Russo-Japanese War in 1904–05. By 1910 Japan controlled Taiwan, Korea, and half of Sakhalin Island.

During World War I Japan sided with the Allies but did not involve itself completely in the fighting. In 1926 Emperor Hirohito came to power. Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931, and it entered into hostilities with China as well in 1937.

In 1940 Japan allied itself with Germany and Italy and launched a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. In the beginning of World War II Japan took the initiative and was victorious. However when the United States counterattacked, the Japanese navy suffered, and by 1945 Japan was rapidly losing its initial gains. Hiroshima and Nagasaki were struck with nuclear bombs, and Japan eventually surrendered. From 1945 until 1952 the Allied forces (the United States, Great Britain, and France) occupied Japan.

Japan recovered from its defeat in the war at an amazing rate, and over the next few decades it became one of the strongest economies in the world, with unprecedented advancements in electronics, computing, car production, and robotics. In the 1990s Japan's growth slowed a little. However despite the downturn, Japan remained a global economic power.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Japan is surrounded by the sea on all sides and is strategically located in northeast Asia. Japan is made up of a series of islands, which stretch for about 1,864 miles from north to south. There are four main islands: Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu.

The Japanese landscape is largely rugged and mountainous. The tallest mountain is Mt. Fuji (12,388.5 feet). Japan is the most seismically active region of the world. Most of the mountains are volcanic in nature, and the threat of earthquakes and tsunamis is ever present. The country gets almost 1,000 earthquakes a year. To counter this, all the buildings in Japan are quake resistant, and the latest equipment is used to track the activity of storms and typhoons precisely.

Japan has a temperate climate with four seasons. The climate varies from region to region. The climate of the northern island of Hokkaido is the coldest, and snowstorms occur frequently during winter, while the southern areas are subtropical. There is a rainy season from late June until early July, and in the late summer and early autumn, typhoons often bring heavy rain to the region.

Japanese pine and cedar, respectively called *matsu* and *sugi* in Japanese, are the most common plants found. The favorite plant of the Japanese is the *sakura*, or the cherry tree, which blossoms in spring.

Japan has very diverse fauna as well. Corals, turtles, and sea snakes are abundant off the coast of the islands, especially near the Ryukyu Islands. In the sea near Honshu sea lions, fur seals, and whales are common. On the mainland the Japanese dormouse, the Japanese macaque (a variety of monkey), the giant salamander, and the dragonfly are the most common species.

❁ ECONOMY

Japan's economy is one of the strongest in the world. Japan main exports are electronics, cars, and computers. While the United States is its largest trading partner, the country also trades extensively with Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, China, and Singapore. The main imports are raw materials and fuels. The industrial sector of Japan is the most advanced. The primary industries are manufacturing, construction, and distribution.

Only 15 percent of the land area of Japan is arable, and agriculture accounts for only 2 percent of the Gross National Product (GNP). Rice is the most important agricultural product. However, Japan has to import 50 percent of its requirements for grain and crops. Minerals like iron ore, copper, and bauxite are also imported.

Although the 1990s was a period of recession, led by sliding stock and real estate prices, the economy seems to be making a quick turnaround, and in 2004 it experienced the highest rate of growth since 1990.

❁ CUISINE

The traditional Japanese diet is very high in protein and low in calories. Japanese cuisine is mainly composed of fish, seafood, rice, and soybeans. In addition to rice the Japanese also eat bread, noodles, and pasta with their meals.

Main dishes are usually accompanied with miso soup, which is made from fermented soybeans and fish broth. A traditional breakfast is rice served with miso soup and a side dish. Nowadays many people have a Western breakfast, such as toast and coffee, instead.

One of the most popular rice dishes is sushi (raw or cooked fish served with rice). Shabu-Shabu is another favorite dish, prepared from boiled meat

Japanese Tea Ceremony

Drinking tea is more of a ritual ceremony than a daily activity in Japan. The Japanese tea ceremony (*cha-no-yu*, *chado*, or *sado*) is a traditional ritual that has been influenced by Zen Buddhism. The mood is serene during the ceremony, which lasts between one and five hours. Incense fragrance fills the air, and conversation is minimal.

This ceremony takes years of study to perfect. This ritual requires a skilled person to prepare powdered green tea or *matcha*. Even a guest has to be

well versed in the correct customs of gestures and responses. As part of the ritual the guest has to wash his or her hands and rinse the mouth using a small stone basin. Another part involves cleaning the crockery used for tea, which is done in front of the guests.

The tea ceremony is regarded as an art form in its own right. It has also influenced other forms of arts and crafts and promoted the development of Japanese porcelain manufacturing.

and vegetables. Another all-time favorite dish is tempura, which is batter-fried seafood and vegetables, served with a dip.

The most popular Japanese beverage is tea (*niboncha*), which is generally served cold and without milk. Tea-drinking is a ritual in Japan. Other favorite beverages are sake (rice wine) and Japanese malt beer.

The Japanese eat with chopsticks. Pointing the chopsticks at another person, chewing on them, or waving them around when talking is considered rude. However slurping soup is acceptable and is considered as a sign of appreciation.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Japanese culture has been influenced by both the traditional Asian culture and Western culture.

Classical music came to Japan from the West and it is very intense. Many distinct kinds of folk music are also common. Rock, electronic music, hip-hop, and country music are particularly popular among younger fans.

The oldest form of theater in Japan is called No. The plot of the drama is narrated through singing and is accompanied with music and dance. The actors wear masks to depict the characters they are playing. Puppet theater, called *bunraku*, is very popular among the children and is one of the world's most renowned forms of puppetry.

The kimono is the traditional dress of Japanese women. It is a robe made of almost nine meters of cloth and tied with a sash around the waist. Wearing a kimono is an art in itself, and special classes are held to train people. In the olden days, kimonos were worn every day, but due to Western influences, this trend has been declining. Today, kimonos are worn mainly for weddings and special occasions.

Other Japanese traditions, however, are still observed conscientiously. For instance people always take off their shoes before entering the house. They also consider point-

ing an index finger at someone very impolite. Tipping is not a common custom, and it is rare that a bartender, waiter, hairdresser, or cab driver is given a tip.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 1

January 1 is the first day of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar and is widely observed as New Year's Day. Celebrations take place all over the world that often start the evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve).

In Japan, all shops and businesses remain closed from January 1 until January 3. Special greeting cards are sent out to friends and family members for New Year's.

The Japanese clean their houses and wash their clothes especially for New Year's Eve. They also decorate their homes with branches of plum, pine, and bamboo trees. Special parties known as *bonenkai* (year forgetting) parties are held where people gather to celebrate the New Year. Also, a traditional meal is served that consists of *toshikoshi soba* (buckwheat noodles) symbolizing longevity.

New Year's Day is also known as Oshogatsu or Shogatsu. On New Year's Day people wake up early in the morning to catch a glimpse of *batsubinode* (rising Sun), because it brings good luck and prosperity in the coming year. Many Japanese visit temples and offer prayers on Shogatsu. They also, take part in fun activities such as *takoage* (kite flying), *hanetsuki* (Japanese badminton), and *karuta* (a card game) on New Year's Day.

COMING OF AGE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Second Monday in January

Coming of Age Day, or Seijin No Hi, is the day that coming of age ceremonies take place in Japan. All

Fun Fact

The Japanese believe that a knife should never be used while eating since it is used for killing. Hence all food items are diced into small pieces to avoid the use of knives on the dining table.



Worshippers strike a giant bell to celebrate the New Year at Zojoji Buddhist temple early on January 1 in Tokyo. It is a popular custom among Japanese to make their first visit of the year to Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines on New Year's Day to pray for health and prosperity. (AP Photo/Itsuo Inouye)

Japanese men and women who have reached 20 years of age participate in these ceremonies, which mark their transformation from childhood to adulthood. The Japanese consider the age of 20 the beginning of adulthood, and young people get the right to vote, drink, and smoke when they reach this age.

The ceremonies are organized throughout Japan by state authorities. The males wear suits, while many women prefer to wear a *furisode*, which is a traditional type of kimono that is meant for unmarried women and has extra long sleeves with elaborate designs on them.

❁ NATIONAL FOUNDATION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: February 11

It was on this date in 660 B.C.E. that the first emperor of Japan was crowned. He was Jimmu Tenu, a semi-legendary figure who was supposed to have descended from the Sun goddess.

Throughout Japan there are grand celebrations and a wide variety of cultural events. These include traditional dancing, songs, plays, and demonstrations of ancient martial arts. Prayers are offered at local temples.

❁ HINA MATSURI

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 3

Hina Matsuri is a day for families with young daughters to wish them a happy and prosperous life and offer prayers in temples for their future. They decorate their homes with a display of dolls and peach blossoms. It is an ancient belief that dolls act as charms, that they help in warding off evil forces, and that, if any evil has entered the house, then the dolls will embrace it and thus protect the members of the family from its effect.

Many families take beautiful collections of dolls out of their closets and quickly return them at the end of Hina Matsuri. This is because there is a Japanese tradition that families that are slow to place their dolls back will have trouble marrying off their daughters. At the end of the festivities, others release their dolls in the rivers, because they believe that all evil, signs of sickness, and misfortune that might befall the family are carried away along with the dolls by the flowing water.

❁ SPRING EQUINOX

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 20–22

The vernal equinox is the day the Sun crosses the equator, thus making day and night the same length. In Japan, this day is known as Shunbun Hi.

The Japanese believe that they should show affection toward other living beings and express their oneness with nature on this day. Many people also visit graves of their loved ones, clean them up, place flowers on them, light incense sticks, and pray for the deceased.

See also Volume III: SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ NATURE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 29 (May 4, starting in 2007)

Nature Day is a day dedicated to nature appreciation. Until 1988, April 29 was celebrated as the birthday of Emperor Showa. However after his death in 1989 it was decided to celebrate the date as Nature Day to honor the late emperor's love of plants and nature. It was inspired by the U.S. celebration of Arbor Day.

On Nature Day the Japanese plant trees and contribute toward nature conservation and preservation. Other integral parts of the celebrations are walkathons, educational and awareness programs,

exhibits, visiting parks, and participating in environment-related discussions.

✿ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

Fun Fact

Japan has the longest life expectancy in the world—82.8 years for women and 76.46 years for men. Also it is estimated that the population over 100 years of age is growing by about a 1,000 a year in Japan.

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. Although this is an official holiday in Japan, the November 23 holiday known as Labor Thanksgiving Day is the more important day with regard to recognizing the contributions of workers.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

✿ CONSTITUTION MEMORIAL DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 3

On May 3, 1947, the constitution of Japan came into effect after the end of World War II. To commemorate this event special programs are held throughout the country. Among the activities featured are lectures on the vital role played by the constitution in Japan and tours of the National Diet Building in Tokyo, where both houses of the Diet—the House of Representatives and House of Councilors—are situated.

✿ PEOPLE'S DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 4

Japanese law stipulates that a day that falls between two national holidays is also a holiday unless the day is a Sunday. Since May 3 is Constitution Memorial Day and May 5 is Children's Day, May 4 has also been declared a national holiday and is celebrated as People's Day.

Starting in 2007, however, the Japanese government has moved Nature Day (now celebrated on April 29) to May 4.

✿ CHILDREN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 5

On Children's Day, also known as Kodomo Hi, the Japanese pray for the health and happiness of their children. In order to be blessed with good health and

to ward off evil, Japanese families bathe in water mixed with iris leaves and roots on this day.

They also celebrate the ancient festival known as Tango-no-Sekku (Boy's Festival) on this day. Families who have sons put up a display of dolls and puppet warriors inside their homes and also fly *koinobori* (carp-shaped streamers) outside their homes. The carp is considered a symbol of strength and success.

✿ DAY OF THE SEA

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Third Monday in July

In June 1941 this day was designated Marine Commemoration Day to celebrate the return of the late Emperor Meiji to Port Yokohama from Hokkaido in 1876. This day is also called Umi No Hi to honor of the ocean.

It is Japan's newest holiday. It was only declared as a national holiday in 1995 after a number of marine-related organizations rallied together and demanded a holiday for the sea, an idea which garnered a lot of public support.

Cultural programs and special lectures are conducted at the Tokyo University of Mercantile Marine to celebrate this day. The *Meiji-Maru*, the lighthouse service steamship used by Emperor Meiji for his voyage, is also opened for public viewing. This is Japan's oldest surviving iron ship and was conferred the status of "Important Cultural Property of Japan" in 1978.

Japanese fishermen celebrate this day by making offerings to the sea and seeking its blessings. In addition they pray for a good fishing season and prosperity.

✿ RESPECT FOR THE ELDERLY DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Third Monday in September

On the third Monday in month of September the Japanese pray for the good health and longevity of the elderly members of their families. Also awareness programs are held to educate and inform people about the issues and problems faced by their elderly. In schools children make handicrafts or draw pictures to give to their grandparents. Cultural and athletic programs for the elderly are also organized on this day.

✿ AUTUMNAL EQUINOX

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: September 23

On the day of the autumnal equinox, the Sun rises exactly in the east and sets exactly in the west, so that the day and night are of equal length. It also marks

the movement of the Sun across the equator from the Northern to the Southern Hemisphere.

More than the changing seasons, however, the Japanese honor the dead on this day. They celebrate by visiting the graves of their relatives. They also offer *obagi* (sweet rice balls covered with soybean paste), flowers, burn incense sticks, and pray for the souls of the deceased.

❁ HEALTH AND SPORTS DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Second Monday in October

This celebration was started in honor of the Tokyo Olympic Games in 1964. Since then Health and Sports Day has been observed to encourage the Japanese to indulge in physical activities that will help them attain healthy minds and bodies.

The day is celebrated with a number of sports events in which Japanese of all ages and from all walks of life actively participate. Schools and colleges schedule their field events on this day. Workshops and awareness programs are also held to inform and educate people about various health-related problems and about the advantages of physical fitness. They also get health tips and free medical check-ups.

❁ CULTURE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 3

This day was originally celebrated as Emperor Meiji's birthday, but it was renamed Culture Day when his reign ended. It also commemorates the official announcement of the constitution of Japan on November 3, 1946. In 1948 the government decided to spread the message of love and peace as communicated in the constitution through a wide variety of cultural activities.

On this day cultural fiestas are organized throughout the nation to promote Japanese culture and to instill a sense of pride among the younger generation of Japanese about their cultural heritage. Schools and colleges organize cultural activities that include the performance of folk dances, folk songs, and folk theater. At the Imperial Palace in Tokyo the emperor presents the Order of Culture Awards including the Bunka Kusho (the highest culture award) to those individuals who have made significant contributions in the fields of art, science, and culture. Several other awards instituted by public and private organizations are also conferred on Japanese individuals on this joyous day.

❁ LABOR THANKSGIVING DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 23

In Japan a special holiday dedicated to its workers is known as Kinro Karshan-no-Hi or Labor Thanksgiving Day. The Japanese people express their heartfelt gratitude to the workers of the nation and honor them on this special day. They also thank each other for the work done and honor the fruits of the labor of the past year.

In the city of Nagano the annual Labor Thanksgiving festival is arranged and supported by local labor organizations, since it focuses on issues related to the environment, peace, and human rights. Also people express gratitude to police officers, postal employees, firefighters, and others for their services provided throughout the year.

Many schoolchildren present paintings to these people to honor them on this special day.

Traditionally the emperor also makes the first offering of the fresh rice harvest to God on this day and then eats some of the rice himself. This is because this day coincides with the ancient harvest festival in Japan.

❁ EMPEROR'S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 23

The Emperor's Birthday is a national holiday in Japan. Its date changes depending on the person who sits at the Japanese throne.

This day commemorates the birth of the present Emperor Akihito, who was born on December 23, 1933. The streets of Tokyo are decorated with lights, flowers, and colorful ribbons, and people assemble in front of the Imperial Palace to wish the emperor well on his birthday. The emperor delivers an annual birthday message to the people of Japan that is televised live throughout Japan.

There are celebrations at the palace, and a festive atmosphere envelops the entire nation. A wide variety of cultural events such as dance performances and folk concerts, as well as special songs written in honor of the emperor, are part of the celebrations. People also offer prayers in local temples in honor of their emperor and pray for his long and healthy life.

Fun Fact

According to Japanese meteorological records, November 3 has the highest probability of having the best weather in the country. This has been the trend for the past 100 years. It is also the time when chrysanthemums are in full bloom.

Religious Holidays

❁ OBON

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: Mid-August

Obon is the annual Buddhist festival of the dead. Buddhists believe that ancestral spirits return to the world to visit their living relatives during Obon.

According to tradition people light beautiful lanterns outside their homes in order to guide the ancestral spirits. They also visit cemeteries, clean the graves of their loved ones, and put flowers on them. Food offerings are made to the souls of the deceased in temples and at home altars.

Fun Fact

December 25 is not a national holiday in Japan. Unless it falls on Sunday, offices, commercial establishments, and schools are open on this day.

At the end of the festival, floating lanterns are put in rivers or in the ocean to guide the ancestral spirits back to the world of the dead.

See also Volume III: BUDHISM

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world. It celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ, whom Christians regard as the Son of God.

In Japan Christmas is not a major celebration since Christians constitute only 0.7 percent of the nation's population. However in Tokyo and other urban areas, shopping malls and stores are decorated with Christmas trees, and Santa Claus is seen distributing sweets to little children. Thus it is more of a commercial event than a religious one.

Christians in Japan attend midnight services in local churches on Christmas Eve (December 24) and sing Christmas carols and hymns. On Christmas Day gifts and greetings are exchanged within the close-knit Christian community.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Fun Fact

The Japanese believe that if a pregnant woman cleans her toilet every day during her pregnancy, she will have a healthy and good-looking boy.

Regional Holidays

SETSUBUN FESTIVAL

Observed in: Nationwide
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: February 3 or 4

The main objective of the Setsubun Festival is to drive away evil before the onset of spring as established by the lunar calendar. In ancient times people drove away evil by beating drums, burning wood, and drying sardine heads. But today people throw roasted beans all over their homes, in temples, and shrines across the country to keep the evil forces away. While throwing the beans, people shout "*Oni wa soto! Fuku wa uchi!*" or "Demons out, fortune in!" Then they pick up and eat the number of beans that corresponds to their age. Also many people tie fish heads or holy tree leaves at the entrance of their homes to keep the evil spirits at bay.

Rites of Passage

BIRTH

In the fifth month of pregnancy the pregnant woman and her family visit a holy shrine and pray for the safe birth of the child. Then, in a ceremony known as *annZan*, the priest presents a white sash to the pregnant woman. The sash, which has the picture of a dog on it, is tied around the pregnant woman's belly. The Japanese believe that a dog symbolizes safe and easy birth.

COMING OF AGE

In Japan coming of age ceremonies takes place on Seijin No Hi, which falls on the second Monday in the month of January. All Japanese men and women who have reached 20 years of age participate in this ceremony, which marks the transformation from childhood to adulthood. This is because in Japan, people consider the age of 20 as the beginning of adulthood and the youth get the right to vote, drink, and smoke when they reach this legal age.

Throughout Japan state authorities organize special ceremonies. Males wear suits while many women prefer to wear *furisode*, which is a traditional type of kimono that is meant for unmarried women and has extra long sleeves with elaborate designs on them.

After a prayer ceremony in a Shinto temple, the day is filled with celebration.

MARRIAGE

Traditional Japanese weddings take place in Shinto shrines. On the day of her wedding the bride paints herself white and wears a white kimono and an elaborate headpiece that is adorned with beautiful ornaments. The Japanese believe these ornaments will bring her good luck in her married life. Also the kimono is attached to a white hood that serves as a veil and which the Japanese believe helps in hiding her "horns of jealousy" from her mother-in-law, who now officially assumes the position of the head of the family. Grooms wear black kimonos for their wedding.

During the wedding, while the couple is exchanging wedding vows, their families sit facing each other. To complete their wedding the bride and groom drink nine cups of sake (the rice wine that is Japan's national beverage). In honor of the couple and to wish them eternal bonding, friends and family members also drink sake. Then a formal introduction of the two families takes place. The groom's father introduces his family members, and then the bride's father does the same. Before or after the wedding ceremony, guests give *gosbugi* (an envelope filled with money) to the newlyweds.

A lavish reception is thrown in honor of the newlyweds. The bride changes into a red kimono and later into a Western-style gown. Wedding

guests dance, play games, and perform skits and karaoke during the celebrations.

❁ DEATH

Japanese funeral services follow the principles of Buddhism. Buddhist monks preside over the funeral ceremony. Mourners pay some amount of money to the family of the deceased and receive a small gift from them.

The body of the deceased is cremated on the funeral day, and all the participating mourners take their first meal at the crematorium in honor of the deceased. Then the bones are picked from the ashes, passed on from one mourner to the other with the help of chopsticks, and placed in an urn.

Tradition requires placing the urn on the family altar for 35 days, where incense sticks (*osenko*) burn around the clock. People who visit the mourning

family pay their respects by bowing in front of the altar and lighting an incense stick in honor of the deceased. The urn is buried in a Buddhist cemetery at the end of the 35-day period.

The Japanese pay their respects to the dead and regularly visit cemeteries on special days throughout the year.

Further Reading

Chris Rowthorne, et al., *Lonely Planet Japan*, 8th ed. (Footscray, Aus.: Lonely Planet Publications; 2003); Norika Takada, and Rita L. Lampkin, *The Japanese Way: Aspects of Behavior, Attitudes, and Customs of the Japanese*, 1st ed (New York: McGraw-Hill; 1996).

Fun Fact

The Japanese follow the Shinto rituals during happy occasions like birth, coming of age, and marriage and Buddhist traditions for sad occasions like death.

~ Jordan ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Middle East, east of Israel and west of Saudi Arabia
Size	35,637 sq. mi.
Capital City	Amman
Flag Description	Jordan's flag has three equal horizontal bands of black (top), representing the Abbassid Caliphate, white, representing the Umayyad Caliphate, and green, representing the Fatimid Caliphate. On the hoist side a red isosceles triangle, representing the Great Arab Revolt of 1916, bears a small, white, seven-pointed star that symbolizes the seven verses of the opening Sura (Al-Fatiha) of the Koran; the seven points on the star represent faith in one God, humanity, national spirit, humility, social justice, virtue, and aspirations. The design is based on the Arab Revolt flag of World War I.
Independence	May 25, 1946 (from League of Nations mandate under British administration)
Population	5,759,732 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional monarchy
Nationality	Jordanian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Arab (98%)
Major Language(s)	Arabic (official); English widely understood among upper and middle classes
Major Religion(s)	Muslim (92%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; King Abdullah's Birthday, January 30; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day, May 25; Army Day/Arab Revolt Day, June 10; King Hussein's Birthday, November 14

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Until the early part of the 20th century, Jordan had been a part of Palestine, most of which is now the state of Israel. The area is the site of one of the oldest civilizations in the world. Archaeological findings from the west bank of the Jordan River indicate traces of human habitation from around 9000 B.C.E. From 3000 B.C.E. the area was under the control of the Canaanites and Amorites, as well as Sargon (722–05), king of Sumer and Akkad.

Around 1800 Abraham led the Israelites to the mountains of Canaan (roughly corresponding to present-day Israel). By 1023 the Israelites had formed a kingdom, ruled successively

by Saul and David (r. c. 1005–965), who made Jerusalem the capital. The Roman Empire annexed Israel in 63 and placed it under the control of a series of consuls. Christians later dominated the area, but in 638 C.E. Jerusalem fell to Caliph Omar (c. 581–644), who declared it a holy city of Islam on the grounds that Muhammad had ascended to heaven from atop the Temple Mount.

The Crusades followed, which asserted Christian control, but the area remained contested terrain and then fell under the domination of the Ottoman Empire. In the wake of that empire's decline after World War I, Britain took control of Palestine and created the state of Transjordan, under the rule of King Abdullah (1921–46). Contemporary Jordan is still a stronghold for Bedouins (primarily nomad Arab peoples of the Middle East).

DEAD SEA SCROLLS

Since their original discovery the Dead Sea Scrolls have fascinated scholars and the general public, but the more scholars find out about the tantalizing fragments and scrolls, the more questions arise. For example the story of their discovery seemed at first straightforward. In 1947 a Bedouin shepherd reported the first find in a cave near Qumran. The shepherd, named Mohammed Ahmed el-Hamed (nicknamed edh-Dhib, “the wolf”), was seeking a lost sheep. When he tossed a rock into a cave hoping to flush the sheep, he heard the sound of pottery shattering and decided to investigate. What he found was not his sheep, but old jars stuffed with scrolls wrapped in linen. It was an important find, and the area has since yielded more clay jars containing still more scrolls and fragments in numerous caves throughout the area around the Dead Sea.

More than 50 years later, nothing is certain. Did “the Wolf” make his find in 1947 as reported? Maybe, maybe not. Alternative dates for the original find go back as early as the 1930s or 1940s. Was the shepherd searching for a sheep or was it a goat? Was there only one shepherd who made the find, or were there two, or more? Did he immediately collect the scrolls and remove them or did he (or they) come back the next day, or even later? The conflict-

ing information is the result of numerous interviews with Bedouin shepherds, all saying his name is Mohammed edh-Dhib, and each with a different version of the events.

Here is what is known early in the 21st century: There are about 850 documents discovered between 1947 and 1956 in 11 different caves in and around the Wadi Qumran (near the ruins of the ancient settlement of Khirbet Qumran, on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea). Some of the scrolls were written on papyrus, but many were written on a brownish animal hide that appears to be *gevil*. (*Gevil*, or *gewil*, is unsplit hide prepared according to Talmudic prescription with flour, salt, and specific resins.) According to the Talmud the scroll placed in the Holy Ark was written on *gevil*, and scrolls written on *gevil* are held to be authentic and in accordance with Jewish law. Furthermore the documents have been carbon-dated, and most were apparently written between the second century B.C.E. and the first century C.E. At least one was written between 21 B.C.E. and 61 C.E. These dates make the Dead Sea Scrolls of vital importance in both their religious and political contexts. The only Hebrew document as old as the scrolls is the Nash Papyrus from Egypt, on which the Ten Commandments were written.

In 1948 Arabs and Jews were preoccupied in a war over territories. Taking advantage of the turmoil, Transjordan occupied the West Bank and part of Jerusalem and renamed it Jordan. In 1952 King Hussein (1935–99) assumed power, and Jordan enjoyed a period of economic prosperity with a rise in tourism and substantial aid flowing in from the United States. The Six-Day War of 1967 devastated the country’s tourist industry when Israel captured the West Bank and Jerusalem. Thousands of Palestinians poured into Jordan from the Occupied Territories. By the 1970s, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) began to pose a threat to King Hussein’s regime; an internal war began, ending with the exodus of the radicals to Lebanon.

In 1994 Jordan and Israel signed a peace accord, promising to drop economic barriers and cooperate with each other on issues of security and water. This made Palestinians apprehensive that they would be evicted with the two nations sharing the spoils. Jordan, however, had been forging close links with Yasser Arafat’s (1929–2004) Palestine National Authority (PNA) and working toward agreements with Palestinians.

Jordan also restored its relations with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. King Hussein had launched his country on the road to democracy, prosperity, and

modernization. After a protracted illness King Hussein died in February 1999, naming his eldest son King Abdullah II (b. 1962), as the successor to the throne. Under Abdullah’s reign Jordan has moved closer to Israel with recent agreements to pipe water from the Red Sea to the shrinking Dead Sea and to develop a desert science center on their common border. Ties with Egypt and Syria have also been strengthened. However there were some setbacks too. In October 2002 a senior U.S. diplomat was assassinated in Amman, and the Jordanian embassy in Baghdad was bombed in August 2003, killing 11 people. In the first independent elections, conducted in 2003, the majority of the seats were won by independent royalist candidates.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Jordan is bordered by Israel on the west, Syria to the north, Iraq to the northwest, and Saudi Arabia to the east and south. The central spine of the Jordanian territory, comprising the highland plateau and hilly regions running from north to south,

Fun Fact

The Copper Scroll, found by archaeologists in 1952 where it had been hidden for 2,000 years, actually provides directions to what it describes as vast amounts of buried treasure.

includes the main cities and towns, such as Amman, Irbid, Jerash, Madaba, and Kerak. To the west the Great Rift Valley runs down the entire length of the country, and includes the Jordan Valley, the Dead Sea, the Wadi Araba, the Aqaba area around the Gulf of Aqaba, and the Red Sea.

The eastern desert area is a semi-arid steppe (vast, usually level and treeless tracts like those in southeastern Europe or Asia) with scanty rainfall. Jordan is part of the eastern Mediterranean weather system, so it has one of the world's most pleasant climates. Summers are dry and warm-to-hot and winters are wet and cool-to-cold, with occasional snowstorms. In the highlands there are often strong, cool breezes on summer nights and the low-lying areas enjoy pleasant, moderately cool winters. In winter the windswept plateau of Maan, lying between 3,000 and 5,000 feet, is bitterly cold. January is the coldest month and, although below-freezing temperatures are not unknown, the average winter temperature is above 45°F. The hottest month is August, when temperatures may reach 118°F in the Jordan Valley. In Amman the average summer temperature is a pleasant 79°F. Rain falls mostly during the winter months and ranges from 26 inches in the northwest to below 5 inches in the east.

Amman and its nearby areas enjoy sunny, cloudless weather from May to early November, with warm days and cool evenings. Winters can be cold and wet, with rain falling regularly between late November and early April, and temperatures ranging between 46°–59°F. In Jordan there is a diverse range of fauna in different zones, including foxes, hares, badgers, porcupines, hyenas, jackals, gazelles, and camels. There are innumerable species of birds, especially during springtime, since the territories of Jordan and Israel are on the main migration routes from Africa to Europe and Asia.

❁ ECONOMY

Jordan has a strong and stable currency, and even though the gross national product (GNP) per capita is low, the country has experienced strong economic growth in the last few years. Jordanian dinars have long been the strongest currency in the Middle East. Unfortunately after the Gulf War in 1991 Jordan encountered economic problems, and the exchange rates for the dinar plummeted.

Major export products of Jordan are phosphates and fruits. Increasing tourism is helping the Jordanian economy, with the influx of about 2.5 million visitors a year. Jordan has always had to import foodstuffs, but now the internal demand is higher than what can be produced or supplemented by imports.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Despite the Arab region's rich repertoire of music, literature, and arts, the fairly modern nation of Jordan does not have much to boast of in terms of tradi-

tional literature, fine arts, or music. Jordan's emergence as a center of contemporary arts, however, was recognized during the 1980s by UNESCO, which chose Amman as its Arab Cultural Capital for 2002. Islamic law forbids consumption of pork products and alcohol; this law is generally adhered to throughout Jordan. As in other Islamic countries, Jordan practices segregation of the sexes, and men control the nation politically, socially, and economically.

The population of Jordan also consists of a sizable population of Circassians (also known as Cherkess), who originally were from the Caucasus. The Circassian diaspora is found in diverse metropolitan areas of the old Ottoman Empire. There also exists a community of Cherkess in the Holy Land, on the road from Kfar Tavor to the Sea of Galilee.

In Jordan there is an interesting hybrid music with Arab-style singers backed up by orchestras using both Western and traditional instruments. The Bedouins cling to their musical traditions: groups of men singing to accompany solitary belly dancers. Hospitality is a cornerstone of the Arab lifestyle and etiquette. Jordanian families (especially desert dwellers) are wont to welcome strangers into their homes for meals or light refreshments.

❁ CUISINE

A typical Jordanian meal consists of *mezzeh*, or starters, followed by the main meal. Unleavened bread (*khobz*) is eaten with every dish. The other staple items are falafel, deep-fried chickpea balls, *shwarma*, skewered sliced lamb, and *fuul*, a paste of fava beans, garlic, and lemon. *Mensaf* is a Bedouin specialty, which consists of a whole roasted lamb (head included), placed on a bed of rice and pine nuts.

The Arab nomads of Jordan have traditionally eaten lightly and without much variety—wheat-flour bread, beans and rice, lentils, spinach, and cakes sweetened with honey for important occasions. The meat is usually mutton or camel. Gazelle meat, hare, and ostrich eggs have also been popular among the nomadic and Bedouin tribes.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

As in other parts of the world the people of Jordan welcome the new year with joyous celebrations. Although Jordan is a predominantly Muslim country, and Islam follows a lunar calendar, its embrace of the solar New Year (January 1) may be ascribed to Jordan's long-standing interactions with European powers. It being an official holiday, all educational, commercial, and government organizations are

closed. People devote the day to leisure and recreational activities.

❁ KING ABDULLAH'S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 30

This day celebrates the birthday of the present ruler of Jordan King Abdullah II. When the former monarch Hussein died in 1999, after a prolonged battle with cancer, the young prince, who was 37, and supreme commander of the armed forces, was crowned king in accordance with the last wishes of his father. Like his father Abdullah is also a popular and progressive ruler. This day is marked by civic ceremonies and is also a public holiday.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, designated May 1 as a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. In Jordan, the day is marked by processions and trade union activities. Labor Day is also called May Day and Workers' Day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 25

This day celebrates Jordan's independence from British control, achieved in 1948. This is a public holiday in Jordan; all government and public institutions are closed. The day is observed with flag-raising ceremonies, parades, and speeches.

❁ ARMY DAY/ARAB REVOLT DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 10

This day has dual significance in the history of Jordan. It marks the formation of the full-fledged Jordanian army. It also memorializes the clarion call given in June 1916, by Sharif Hussein bin Ali—the Emir of Mecca and King of the Arabs—to protest British control as well as to foster unity among all Arab nations. This is a public holiday in Jordan. The day's activities include processions and inspirational speeches extolling Arab unity.

Arab Revolt Day

In March 1915, Britain attacked Gallipoli, located south of Istanbul, in an attempt to foil the Ottoman Turks' support for Germany. The campaign was a disaster for the British Army, which incurred tremendous losses. But the debacle generated the idea of bringing the vast Arab-speaking areas of the Ottoman Empire under British control after the war. The British government called on its agents who had contacts in the Arab-speaking regions to try to detach the Arabs from the Turks. This led to a preliminary agreement between Hussein and McMahon (a British representative). In a dramatic move on June 5, 1916, Sharif Hussein launched the "Arab Revolt" and in October declared himself "King of the Arabs." Sharif Hussein bin Ali (1853–1931), Emir of Mecca and King of the Arabs, was the last of the Hashemite Sharifian Dynasty, which ruled over Mecca and Medina continuously from 1201 to 1925. His objective in undertaking the Great Arab Revolt was to establish a single independent and unified Arab state stretching from Aleppo (Syria) to Aden (Yemen)

❁ KING HUSSEIN'S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 14

This holiday commemorates the birthday of the former ruler King Hussein, who was born on this day in 1935. King Hussein is hailed as the architect of modern Jordan. He was instrumental in its progress and development. In Jordan, especially in the capital city Amman, public speeches by eminent personalities and processions with portraits of the late king are organized. This is also a public holiday.

Religious Holidays

❁ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina (about 200 miles north of Mecca) on the first day of the Muslim month of Muharram in 622 C.E. This is the day on which the Muslim lunar calendar starts. It commemorates Muhammad's Hegira (migration) from persecution in Mecca and his acceptance in Medina. In Jordan this holiday is a time for good food and is also considered a good time to make important decisions.

See also Volume III: ISLAM

❁ MOULLOUD

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

Mouloud, or Mawlid al-Nabi, marks the birthday of Muhammad, who entered the world in 570 C.E. It is celebrated on the 12th day of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar. On this day Jordanian Muslims focus on the life and teachings of Muhammad. They sing songs and say special prayers. They also recollect how the prophet forgave even his worst enemies. On this day devout Muslims give alms to the poor. Muhammad urged his followers not to celebrate his birthday in an ostentatious manner, so this festival is a low-key affair.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULLOUD

❁ SHAB-E-MIRAJ

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twenty-seventh of Rajab, the seventh month of the Islamic calendar (August–September of the Gregorian calendar)

Shab-e-Miraj, or Isra Meiraj, is a very special night for Muslims. The official name of the holiday is Laylat Al-Isra wa Al-Miraj, which means “the night journey and ascension.” On this night Muhammad is believed to have gone from Mecca to Jerusalem, ascended into the seven heavens, and returned, all in the course of a single night. During his sojourn in the seven heavens, Muhammad was commanded to establish the five daily prayers (Namaaz). He is also believed to have met luminaries such as Abraham, Moses, Aaron, Adam, the Archangel Gabriel, and Jesus. On this day the devout Muslims of Jordan



Two Jordanians make a traditional Jordanian sweet called *qtayef* in Amman as the Muslim holy month of Ramadan begins. (AP Photo/Korea Pool)

gather in mosques or at one another's homes and listen to the story of Muhammad's journey. They share food and sweets in honor of the night.

See also Volume III: ISLAM

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar (November–December of the Gregorian calendar)

This Muslim holiday marks the celebration at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, the holiest month of the Islamic calendar. During Ramadan Muslims must fast from dawn to dusk every day. It was during this month that Muhammad observed austerity and fasted for 40 days, after which the Koran was revealed to him.

Jordanians mark this day by first taking part in a morning prayer, generally in mosques or *idgabs*, open spaces reserved for prayers on special occasions. This is followed by social visits, exchanges of greetings and gifts, and enjoying delicacies especially prepared for this occasion. According to the Koran, no Muslim may fast on Eid al-Fitr.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Duhl Hijja, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, the Feast of Sacrifice, is also called Eid ul-zuha and Bakr-Eid. This is the second *eid* festival (*eid* means “celebration”). It marks Ibrahim's (Abraham's) unflinching faith in God, demonstrated by his willingness to sacrifice his young son because the Almighty commanded him to do so. When the time came for the sacrifice, God is said to have substituted a ram for the child. On this day in Jordan it is mandatory for each family that can afford it to sacrifice a sheep, goat, ram, or cattle in the name of God; this meat is then shared with friends, family, and distributed among the poor.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

Regional Holidays

❁ JORDANIAN SONG FESTIVAL

Observed in: Amman

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December

This popular cultural festival in Jordan enjoys royal patronage. The three-week festival is organized at

the Cultural Palace at Al Hussein Sport City in Amman. The Jordanian Song Festival gives exposure to talented young singers who may go on to become singing stars at the various pan-Arabic festivals.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

In Muslim communities newborn babies are viewed as tokens of Allah's mercy. Immediately after birth the baby is thoroughly washed in order to remove all biological impurities. According to Islamic tenets the first sound that a baby ought to hear should be the sacred name of Allah. This is customarily uttered by its father (or a male relative), who whispers the call to prayer or *adhan*, first into the child's right ear and then into the left. The underlying idea is to make the child aware of Allah's omnipresence and his power over the lives of mortals.

When the child is between three days and seven days old, its head is shaved to remove remaining natal impurities. On the day of purification the child is also given a proper name, since Muslim children are not named at birth. The followers of Islam firmly believe that the choice of name has a direct bearing on the character and behavior of the child during his or her life.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Muslim boys generally undergo circumcision between 10 and 12 years of age. This is a puberty rite, separating the boy from childhood and introducing him to his new status as an adult. In Jordanian Muslim families, there is a good deal of festivity, music, special food, and many guests on such occasions.

❁ MARRIAGE

Islamic marriage customs in the countries of the Middle East and West Asia follow more or less the same pattern. Traditionally the matches are fixed and finalized by the parents of the individuals. However according to Islamic tenets, both the bride and the groom are free to refuse the spouse selected by their parents, guardians, or elders. Prior to the actual wedding the families of the bride and groom decide upon a specific amount of money or articles in kind that the groom's family must give to the bride. This sum of money is a security amount for the bride in case the marriage breaks up. As in all Islamic societies weddings in Jordan take place in the home of the bride. The rites are conducted by an imam, who also leads the prayers in the mosque.

The bride and the bridegroom sit in separate rooms during the marriage ceremony. Two guests—one from the bride's family and one from the

groom's family—witness the bride's consent for marriage and inform the imam. The imam begins the ceremony by reciting relevant passages from the Koran, then talks about the duties of marriage and asks the bridegroom if he agrees to the marriage. Once the bridegroom has agreed to the marriage, the bride, the bridegroom, and the two witnesses sign a marriage contract that confirms their agreement. The Koran says that a man may marry up to four wives but only if he can treat them all equally. If a marriage does not work out, the Koran says that couples may get divorced, but only as a last resort. First the couple must try to resolve their problems. If this does not work each spouse must choose a friend or relative for counseling. If this still fails, they must wait for four months before they can end their marriage.

❁ DEATH

All major religions of the world accept death as a part of human life. Keeping in mind the ephemeral quality of life, Muslims are exhorted always to be prepared for the inevitable. When death is imminent, an individual is encouraged to recite and declare his or her faith. They are taught to treat the dead body with gentleness and respect. In Jordan it is customary for Muslims to ritually wash the dead body, perfume it, and drape it in a fresh new white cloth before burial. Also the burial ought to take place as quickly as possible following death. The dead person's face is turned toward Mecca, the arms and legs are straightened out, and the mouth and eyes closed; a baby who dies at birth or is stillborn has to have a name.

The loved ones of a deceased person come together for prayers. Then the corpse is solemnly carried to the graveyard. After the burial a "wake" is held for both men and women, usually on the same day as the burial.

Further Reading

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~ Kazakhstan ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	A small area of Asia, northwest of China; and bordered also by Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan
Size	1,049,155 sq. mi.
Capital City	Astana
Flag Description	The flag of Kazakhstan has a sky-blue background representing the endless sky and a gold Sun with 32 rays soaring above a Golden Steppe Eagle in the center; on the hoist side is a “national ornamentation” in gold.
Independence	December 16, 1991 (from the USSR)
Population	15,185,844 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic; authoritarian presidential rule, with little power outside the executive branch
Nationality	Kazakhstani
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Kazakh (Qazaq; 53%); Russian (30%)
Major Language(s)	Kazakh (Qazaq, state language; 64%); Russian (official; 95%)
Major Religion(s)	Muslim (47%); Russian Orthodox (44%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year’s Day, January 1; International Women’s Day, March 8; Navruz, March 21; Labor Day, May 1; Victory Day, May 9; Constitution Day, September 1; Republic Day, October 25; Independence Day, December 16

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

The region of what is now Kazakhstan has been an important cultural crossroad for several hundred thousands of years. Archaeologists have excavated ancient settlements dating back to the Lower Paleolithic Age in Southern Kazakhstan. Central and Eastern Kazakhstan were settled during the Middle and Upper Paleolithic Ages. During the Bronze Age roughly 4,000 years ago, the region was inhabited by the agrarian Andron and Begazy-Dandybai tribes, who were outstanding warriors known for their battle chariots. The Sun god, to whom their hymns were devoted, was believed to be the warriors’ protector.

Around 2000 Aryans, perhaps the ancestors of the Medes and Persians, entered the region. (The Assyrians mention them in the ninth century.) Between the ninth and seventh centuries the region was dominated by groups of nomads

known for their skill with horses and breeding cattle. Between the seventh and third centuries the Persians mention groups they called Saks, probably the same tribes known to the Greeks as Scythians, renowned for their deadly accuracy with the bow and arrow while riding a horse at full speed. The Scythians dominated the Eurasian steppes from Siberia to the Black Sea. The Scythians fought several wars with the Achaemenids, and Cyrus the Great (c. 585–c. 29) was killed in one of them in 530. Tomiris, the Scythian queen, ordered his head put into a wineskin filled with human blood.

In the sixth century the region was finally subdued by the Achaemenid Empire of Persia. Then, in 330, Alexander the Great (356–23) conquered the entire area, reaching Kabul and the Hindu Kush mountain range by 328. The aftermath of Alexander’s short-lived central Asian empire led to an increase in cultural exchange between Europe and Asia. This region came into the limelight once again as a part of the legendary Silk Road, through which the highly coveted Chinese silk trav-

eled from China to Europe and down into Africa during the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E. to 220 C.E.).

For the next thousand years Central Asia (including Kazakhstan) witnessed countless shifts of power. The Huns, the Western Turks, Arabs, and the Chinese all ventured into and held sway over the region during these centuries. Starting in the year 1219 C.E., armies of Mongols, under the leadership of Genghis Khan (1162–1227), swept through most of Eurasia (Central Asia bordering Europe). The ravages inflicted on the region took centuries to heal. The feuds, factions, and bickering that cropped up after Genghis Khan's death led to the fragmentation of the Mongol Empire and the rise of the ruthless Timur the Lame (Timur Lenk or Tamerlane, 1336–1405), toward the end of the 14th century.

The 15th century saw the emergence of Kazakhs as a distinct people for the first time in history, and by the middle of the 16th century they had developed a common culture, language, and commercial system. Originating from the descendants of Mongols, Turkic, and other ethnic groups, the Kazakhs evolved as the world's last great nomadic empire, with their domains stretching across the steppes and desert north, east and west of the Syr-Darya (a river in Tajikistan and southern Kazakhstan). The Kazakhs were eventually vanquished by the Oyrads, a fierce group of Mongolian people who captured the eastern part of Kazakhstan, the Tian Shan, and parts of Xinjiang to form the Zhungarian Empire during the 1630s. The Kazakhs were brutally and repeatedly defeated by the Oyrads between 1690 and 1720. In the 19th century the Russian Empire began to expand its reach into Central Asia and gained control of the region formerly ruled by the Kazakh Khanate. Then in the early 20th century, the Russian Bolsheviks made their debut, swiftly bringing the Central Asian nomads (including the Kazakhs) under their control, and in 1920 the region of Kazakhstan became an autonomous republic within Russia.

Though there were rumblings of discontent, these were quickly put down by the Soviet Communists. Meanwhile a dynamic young Turkish leader named Enver Pasha (1881–1922) convinced the Soviet leader Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870–1924) that he could win for Russia all of Central Asia as well as British India. His ulterior motive was to gain control of the region with Soviet aid. But the former Soviet Union (USSR) managed to outmaneuver him and thwart his plans. This eventually resulted in the waning of Pasha's prowess and the revival of Moscow-centered power over the Kazakhs. Kazakhstan became a Soviet Republic in 1936.

Kazakhstan's medley of tribal divisions located in various regions across the territory were largely ignored and neglected by the Soviets. The republics of Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Turkmen, and Uzbek were created in the 1920s, each designed to contain pockets of diverse nationalities with long-standing claims to the land. Central Asia (including Kazakhstan) was a testing ground for Soviet Russia, which tried convert-

ing the steppe (the temperate grassland of Eurasia, consisting of level, generally treeless plains) into a giant cotton plantation and using Kazakhstan as a secret nuclear testing zone, among many other experiments. As a consequence of decades of suffering political, social, economic, and ecological disasters, these republics declared their sovereignty in 1991 when the USSR was on the verge of disintegration.

Later they teamed up with other former Soviet states to form the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in 1991.

At the start of the 21st century Kazakhstan was struggling with problems related to the introduction of a free-market economy and a brand of deregulation that unfortunately has tended to lead to anarchy. The incumbent president Nursultan A. Nazarbayev (b. 1940), a former Communist, continues to experiment with democracy as a part of his plans to turn his country into a major economic and political power in Central Asia. Nazarbayev's victory in the 1999 elections was partially achieved by banning major opponents on questionable grounds. The nascent country's capital city was shifted from Almaty in the south to Akmola in the north and then renamed Astana.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Kazakhstan is bordered by Russia in the north, China in the east, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in the

Fun Fact

Herodotus wrote of a tribe of women warriors he called "Amazons" in 450, but few believed his story. After five years of excavating kurgans (burial mounds) left by the nomadic Sauromatian and Sarmatian cultures of 600 to 200 B.C.E. near Pokrovka, Kazakhstan, archaeologists report that 7 of 40 female graves contained bronze arrowheads and armor, and the women's legs were bowed from a lifetime spent on horseback. Although the site is 1,000 miles east of where Herodotus located the Amazons, the archaeologists think these women were the Amazons' contemporaries.

Enver Pasha

Ismail Enver, known to the European powers (during his political career) as Enver Pasha, was born in Istanbul, Turkey, on November 22, 1881. He was a military officer and a leader of the Young Turk revolution in the final days of the Ottoman Empire. He was a vociferous supporter of the campaign to eliminate the non-Turkish population of the decadent Ottoman Empire. Enver was killed in action against the Bolshevik Red Army on August 4, 1922, near Baldzhuan, situated in Turkistan (modern Tajikistan).

Fun Fact

The Silk Road was an interconnected series of routes through Southern Asia traversed by caravan and ocean vessel. It connected the trade center of China with Antioch, Syria, and other regions. A northern branch passed through the Bulgar–Kypchak zone into eastern Europe and the Crimean Peninsula, and from there across the Black Sea, the Marmara Sea, and the Balkans to Venice. A southern route passed through Turkistan–Khorasan into Mesopotamia and Anatolia, and then through Antioch on the Mediterranean Sea, or through the Levant into Egypt and North Africa.

82° to 86°F in the south.

There are 8,500 large and small rivers in Kazakhstan. The largest ones are the Ural and the Emba, which flow into the Caspian Sea, while the Syr Darya empties into the Aral Sea. Pik Pobedy (Victory Peak), at 24,406 feet, is the highest peak of the Tian Shan range and is also the highest peak in Kyrgyzstan. (Pik Pobedy is on the border shared by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and China.)

Fun Fact

The suffix *-stan* that ends the names of several new countries in Central Asia goes back to the Proto-Indo-European root **sta*, which means “to stand,” also the source of the English word *stand*. In Sanskrit it means “place,” in Persian (Farsi) “home of,” and in Bulgarian “camp,” referring to the temporary camp of a nomadic group.

south, and the Caspian Sea and part of Turkmenistan in the west. It has a 1,177-mile coastline on the Caspian Sea. Kazakhstan is twice the size of Texas. The terrain is mostly steppes with hilly plains and plateaus. Since it is far removed from the ocean, the climate is continental (characterized by winter temperatures cold enough to support a fixed period of stable snow cover each year and low precipitation, which occurs mostly in summer). The precipitation in the eastern mountains is approximately 24 inches per year (mainly snow), but the rest of the country receives only 4 to 8 inches per year. The average winter temperatures are 26°F in the north and 64°F in the south, while the summer temperatures average 66°F in the north and

ECONOMY

Kazakhstan possesses abundant mineral resources, vast farming areas, as well as a competent, trained labor force. In the early years of the 21st century more than 2,700 enterprises were involved in industrial production, employing nearly 812,000 people. Kazakhstan possesses reserves of high-quality copper, lead, zinc, and cadmium, which are in high demand in world markets.

In terms of oil reserves, Kazakhstan has forged ahead of several oil-producing countries. As of 2005 the

Republic boasted more than 170 oil, 40 condensate, and 90 gas fields with explored and recoverable resources of oil. Of late an international project for construction of pipelines for exporting oil has been launched that would export Kazakhstani oil to the world markets. Oil production is expected to grow exponentially in the future.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The country is split in terms of religion between Islam and Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Although religious expression was suppressed during the Soviet era, religious observances are returning, though many holidays are still not widely celebrated in the early years of the 21st century. Kazakhstanis still managed to retain some of their religious customs, albeit with specific sorts of change. St. Nicholas, for example, the ancestor of Santa Claus, came into being in Myra, in the province of Lydia, when the area was primarily Greek. Under the Soviets St. Nicholas became Grandfather Frost (Ded Moroz), the Russian spirit of winter, who became responsible for delivering presents on New Year's. Grandfather Frost's helper was Snyegurochka, the Snowmaiden.

Peter the Great (1672–1725) brought the custom of decorating Christmas trees (*yolka*) back to Russia after a visit to Europe in the 1700s. The Soviets banned this tradition and, to keep the custom alive, people decorated New Year's trees instead. Because ornaments were either very costly or unavailable during those years, family trees were trimmed with homemade decorations and fruit.

Kazakhstan is home to a great variety of handicrafts. The art of embroidery is well known and has been practiced in Kazakhstan since ancient times. Other well-known crafts are made out of stone, bone, ceramic, metal, clay, wood and leather. Carpet weaving has long been a skill of the Kazakhs. For centuries, right up until the present, *symaks*, traditional handmade carpets, have adorned the interiors of Kazakh buildings and homes.

Another hallmark of Kazakh arts and crafts is the yurt, a portable dwelling. It consists of a wooden framework covered with felt. The framework (*kerege*) forms the walls of the dwelling. *Uyuk* (long wooden poles) serve as a cover for the upper spherical portion of the yurt; *shanrak* comprises the topmost open part of the yurt, which functions as a ventilator and a source of lighting for the interior. Depending on the season and the weather, the yurt can be covered with two or more layers of felt for insulation.

CUISINE

Kazakh *dastarkhan* (which refers to hospitality and cuisine, as well as a table full of food) has a rich heritage. Interestingly any Kazakh meal (especially a banquet) starts with an elaborate ceremony of tea

drinking. The host welcomes his guests and invites them to the table, where girls and young women pour the tea. The women must be alert to ensure that the guests' drinking bowls are always full and that there are no remains of tea leaves on the edges of the bowls. Tea is normally accompanied by cream, dried and fresh fruit, or nuts.

For the main meal Kazakhs serve mostly meat-based appetizers using horseflesh or mutton. There is also an array of smoked, semismoked, and boiled meats. Other prominent items include flat cakes and milk tonics such as *koumyss*, *shubat*, and *katyk*. *Kuyrdak* is a roast meat prepared with liver, kidneys, heart, lungs, and the tail fat of sheep or goats; *samsa* (meat filled patties), *puktermet* (patties stuffed with by-products), *belyasbes*, and *kausyrma* all prepared in much the same way.

The highpoint of any banquet is *besbarmak*, a large round or oval dish with small, round flat boiled pieces of pastry scalded with hot broth and accompanied by small strips of boiled horse meat or mutton. The platter is typically garnished with onion rings and a green mixture of fennel, parsley, and dill. The guest of honor is usually treated to *koy-bas* (a boiled sheep's head). The guest is expected to dress it and distribute it among the other guests sitting around him.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

Though Islam is the religious faith followed by a majority of Kazakhs, by and large they are liberal, unorthodox, and secular in their attitudes and outlook on life. New Year's Day in Kazakhstan (calculated according to the Western, Gregorian, solar calendar, not the lunar Islamic calendar) is accompanied by big celebrations. People join friends and family for parties, feasts, and more casual get-togethers. This is a public holiday in Kazakhstan with government offices, schools, and businesses closed for the day.

❁ INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 8

On this day women are honored for the important roles they play in all cultures. On International Women's Day in Kazakhstan, the streets are decorated with colorful tulips, and the men offer bouquets of flowers to the women in their lives. Men usually take charge of running the household for this day.

❁ NAVRUZ

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 21

Navruz, or "new days" in Persian, also known as the Persian New Year, is Kazakhstan's most popular public holiday. For two days in late March, people take a break from work to celebrate the first day of spring, the vernal equinox. Festive dishes prepared on this occasion include a sugared wheat porridge called *sumalakb* (eaten only by women) and cinnamon-spiced veal called *khalem* (eaten only by men). During this festival people participate in a variety of games and sports matches, attend parties, and enjoy dance, drama, and music festivals.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; NAVRUZ; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

In Kazakhstan Labor Day is called Kazakhstan Peoples' Unity Day and marks the historic event of the Inter-Ethnic Accordance of the population of Kazakhstan. People of over 100 nationalities live in



A senior Kazakh woman attends a grand ceremony on the Independence Square in Almaty to celebrate Navruz, or Navruz, the spring festival, which is Kazakhstan's most popular holiday. (AP Photo/Xinhua, Sadat)

Amu Darya

This 1,603-mile-long river is formed by the joining of the Vakhsh and Pandj Rivers, which rise in the Pamir Mountains of Central Asia. The Amu Darya flows generally northwest, forming much of the northern border of Afghanistan with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan before flowing through the Kara Kum Desert of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, thereafter entering the south Aral Sea through a delta. In ancient times the Amu Darya was called the Oxus and figured prominently in the history of Persia as well the campaigns of Alexander the Great.

Kazakhstan. This day is also International Labor Day (alternatively called May Day or Workers' Day), which is of tremendous importance for former USSR Communist regions. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, designated May 1 as a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

This observance was particularly honored by the Soviet Union and its satellite republics. It is a public holiday in Kazakhstan, and the workers organize parades and public speeches to celebrate the occasion.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

VICTORY DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 9

This day celebrates the end of World War II, which had raged for six years in the European theater. This day was celebrated in the former Soviet Union, which had fought on the side of the Allies during the war. Since Kazakhstan was formerly a part of the Soviet Union, the practice has continued.

CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 1

This day celebrates the adoption of the new constitution in 1995. This day is marked by civic ceremonies, including speeches by politicians and flag-raising ceremonies. Since it is a public holiday, all government and public establishments are closed.

REPUBLIC DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 25

This holiday commemorates Kazakhstan's decision to declare its independence from the USSR in October 1991. Businesses and schools are closed on this day. People throng the main squares in villages and cities to enjoy music, dancing, athletic contests, and feasting. On this occasion the Kazakh women generally wear traditional clothing: a long robe with a high collar, a bright velvet vest, heavy jewelry, topped with a headdress adorned with fur and plumes. The men often wear robes and skullcaps or tall, tasseled felt hats.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 16

This day celebrates Kazakhstan's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. The celebrations on this day are very much along the lines of Republic Day celebrations with people gathering in the main squares of villages and cities to enjoy music, dancing, athletic contests, and feasting. This is also an official holiday in Kazakhstan with schools, businesses, and government offices closed.

Religious Holidays

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

The Russian Orthodox Easter, called Holy Paschal, celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus. It is observed on the second Sunday in April of the Julian calendar, which is currently 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar. In Kazakhstan on the eve of Easter people cook special dishes, bake rich Easter cakes, such as *kulich*, and paint Easter eggs. The egg is the main Paschal symbol of resurrection. When people give each other the Paschal greeting, they also exchange red eggs. When Mary Magdalene came to the Emperor Tiberius, she brought him a red egg and greeted him by saying, "Christ has arisen!" The eggs are red because that color symbolizes the blood that Jesus shed to atone for the sins of the world. On Easter the eggs are brought to the church to be consecrated.

All Paschal Week (also known as Holy Week) people feast on meat, eggs, and other rich foods that were not allowed during the 40-day Lenten fast days, and their celebratory tables burst with many different dishes. There are a lot of different Easter cakes.

On Easter Russian Orthodox Christians in Kazakhstan attend special church services and bake an Easter bread called *kulich*.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

RAMADAN

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar

The first day of the month of Ramadan in the Islamic calendar begins a month of daytime fasting, called *Uraza* in Kazakhstan. The fast is observed as a way of thanking God for one's blessings as well as gaining social empathy, feeling the pain of those less fortunate. Ramadan (also *Ramzaan*) begins with the actual sighting of the new Moon. (Authorities in Saudi Arabia determine the exact moment of the official sighting.) For the entire month of Ramadan, devout Muslims fast from dawn to dusk every day; this fast is the fourth of the Five Pillars of Islam. Billions of Muslims around the world dedicate their time and energy to self-expression and self-control through prayer, sacrifice, and fasting during Ramadan. The Fast of Ramadan ends when the new Moon is again sighted and a new lunar month begins. This fast is observed more by southerners than it is by northerners in Kazakhstan.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; RAMADAN

EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr (also *Id al-Fitr*), the Festival of Fast-Breaking, or the Lesser Feast, marks the end of the fasting and austerity that characterize the month of Ramadan and the beginning of a three-day feast on the first day of Shawwal. It is called *Kurban* in Kazakhstan, and is a day of thanksgiving for devout Muslims when they must give to a special charity and ask everyone to pardon them for wrongs they may have committed during the past year. They attend a special community prayer at the *masjid* (mosque) in the morning, then organize big feasts and celebrate with family and friends. New clothes are worn, and gifts are exchanged.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR, ISLAM, RAMADAN

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: January 6–7

Thirteen days after Western Christmas, on January 7, the Russian Orthodox Church celebrates its

Movable Feasts Associated with Easter

The Russian Orthodox ecclesiastical calendar for each year is based on the date of Easter, which is arrived at using an algorithm. Once the date for Easter has been established, most of the remaining religious observances can then be set.

Days before Easter		Days after Easter	
Triodon	70	Ascension Day	39
Saturday of Souls	57	Saturday of Souls	48
Meat Fare	56	Pentecost	49
2nd Saturday of Souls	50	All Saints' Day	56
Lent Begins	48		
Festival of St. Theodore	43		
Sunday of Orthodoxy	42		
Saturday of Lazarus	8		
Palm Sunday	7		
Good Friday	2		

Christmas, in accordance with the old Julian calendar. It is a day of solemn ritual as well as joyous celebration. After the 1917 Revolution Christmas was banned throughout Russia, along with other religious celebrations. It wasn't until 75 years later in 1992 that the holiday was openly observed. In the 21st century it is once again celebrated in grand fashion, with the faithful participating in an all-night services in incense-filled cathedrals surrounded by the painted icons of saints.

On Christmas Eve it is traditional for all family members to gather to share a special meal. The various foods and customs surrounding this meal differed from village to village and from family to family, but certain aspects remained the same. An old tradition with its roots in the Orthodox faith, is the Christmas Eve fast and meal. The fast typically lasts until after the evening worship service or until the first star appears in the evening sky. The dinner that follows is very much a celebration, although meat is not permitted. *Kutya* (or *kutia*), a type of porridge, is the primary dish. The recipe includes various grains that are symbolic of hope and honey and poppy seeds for happiness and peace.

Once the first star has appeared in the sky, the festivities begin. Although all of the food served is strictly Lenten, it is served in an unusually festive and anticipatory manner and style. The meal is called "The Holy Supper." The family gathers around the table to honor the impending arrival of Jesus. A white tablecloth, symbolic of Jesus' swaddling clothes, covers the table. Hay is brought forth as a reminder of the poverty of the cave where Jesus was born. A tall white candle is placed in the center of the table, symbolic of Jesus, called by Christians "the light of the world." A large round loaf of

Lenten bread, called *pagach*, symbolic of Jesus as the “bread of life,” is placed next to the candle. The meal begins with the Lord’s Prayer, led by the father of the family. A prayer of thanksgiving for all the blessings of the past year is said, and then prayers for the good things in the coming year are offered. The head of the family greets those present with the traditional Christmas greeting: “Christ is Born!” The family members respond: “Glorify him!” The mother of the family blesses each person present with honey in the form of a cross on each forehead, saying: “In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, may you have sweetness and many good things in life and in the new year.” Following this everyone eats the bread, dipping it first in honey and then in chopped garlic. Honey is symbolic of the sweetness of life, and garlic of the bitterness. The holy supper is then eaten. After dinner no dishes are washed, and everyone opens their Christmas presents. Then the family goes to church and returns home between 2 and 3 A.M. On the Feast of the Nativity, neighbors and family members visit each other, going from house to house, eating, drinking, and singing Christmas carols all day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ KHAN TENGRI MOUNTAIN FESTIVAL

Observed in: Dian Shan mountain region

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July–August

During the months of July and August, seasoned mountaineers from all over the country come together near the mountains in the eastern part of Kazakhstan. The mountaineers attempt to climb the formidable peak commonly known as Khan Tengri or King Mountain. Being able to climb this steep mountain peak is a heroic feat in itself. The mountaineers who scale the peak successfully are honored.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

The birth of a Kazakh child is steeped in folk beliefs. As soon as a pregnant woman begins to experience labor pains she calls for her soothsayers, or *baks*, whose presence and predictions are meant to provide relief from the pain. When the time of delivery comes, a female relative or a companion hugs the expectant mother, pressing her hard on the abdomen to accelerate the birth of the baby. If the force exerted by one woman is not enough, a few others are invited to press harder. Relatives entering the

tent customarily strike the pregnant woman’s skirt and say: *Chik* (“Go out child”).

❁ MARRIAGE

The first precondition for a traditional Muslim Kazakh marriage is deciding the amount of the bride-price and the terms and conditions regarding its payment. When the terms are settled, a mullah sanctifies it after asking the fathers or relatives of the groom and bride whether they agree to let their children enter into this lifelong bond. This arrangement is celebrated with a feast.

Until the bride-price has been paid, the wedding cannot take place; however, the groom is allowed to visit the bride. Before the departure of the groom to the bride’s house, his father invites the mullah to pray for the health and well-being of his son. The groom is dressed in a splendid robe, given a new saddle and harness, a strong horse, and is sent on his way.

For the ceremony the groom and bride are shown into a special tent prepared for the occasion. The mullah asks them to sit in the middle of the tent, places a cup of water before them, and covers it with a cloth. He then reads a prayer and asks both of them whether they willingly enter into matrimony or not. They are given water to drink three times. Some mullahs dip an arrow containing hair from the mane of the groom’s horse (bound to the arrow by a ribbon belonging to the bride) into the water.

After this ritual the groom leaves, and the bride changes into a new headdress symbolizing her married status. She is then seated in the middle of the tent where the women gather around her to sing songs. The new husband comes up to the door and asks the bride’s permission to enter but is allowed in only after being made to wait. Finally he rushes in, grabs the bride, and puts her on his horse; then together they ride to their new home to enjoy some privacy.

Afterward they return to the bride’s home, and prior to the formal departure of the newly married couple the entire village gathers. The bride’s father solemnly presents to the son-in-law the dowry, which has been loaded on the backs of camels and horses. He exhorts his daughter to be devoted, virtuous, and loyal to her spouse. As a gesture of farewell he settles her on a horse and hands over its harness to her husband. The couple departs accompanied by the crying and wailing of the assembled women.

Further Reading

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Kenya

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Eastern Africa, bordered by Uganda in the west, Ethiopia in the north, Sudan in the northwest, Somalia in the east, the Indian Ocean in the southeast, and Tanzania in the southwest
Size	224,961 sq. mi.
Capital City	Nairobi
Flag Description	The flag has three horizontal bands of equal size: Black (top), red, and green. The red has white edges and a large shield covering crossed spears is superimposed at the center.
Independence	December 12, 1963 (from United Kingdom)
Population	32,000,000
Government	Republic
Nationality	Kenyan
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Kikuyu (22%); next six tribal groups, including Luhya, Luo, Kalenjin, and Kamba (62%)
Major Language(s)	English and Swahili (official); other indigenous languages
Major Religion(s)	Protestant (45%); Roman Catholic (33%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Madaraka Day, June 1; Moi Day, October 10; Kenyatta Day, October 20; Independence Day, December 12

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Kenya, a former British colony, was granted independence on December 12, 1963.

The name *Kenya* derives from Mount Kenya. The indigenous Kiyuku people called the mountain Kerenyaga or Kirinyaga, which means “mountain of whiteness,” because of the mountain’s snow-clad peaks. Since the British were unable to pronounce the name correctly, Kerenyaga eventually became Kenya.

Although not much is known about Kenya’s ancient history, evidence shows that people have inhabited this region since the prehistoric era. Kenya has also served as a migratory path for millions of people from all over Africa and the Middle East, who passed through the region while seeking new farmland, hunting grounds, trade, or simply a new life. But each one has left an indelible impression on the Kenyan cul-

ture. This is evident from the fact that by the 10th century C.E., the Kenyans had developed their own hybrid language Swahili, which is a Bantu language and incorporates many Arabic words.

The European influence in the region began with the arrival of the Portuguese in the 15th century. In 1729 Arab rulers forced the Portuguese out of the region and established their supremacy. By the end of the 18th century the Arab reign in the region ended when Kenya became a British colony.

Kenya’s struggle for independence began after World War II, and vehement protests led by leaders such as Jomo Kenyatta were a cause of concern for the British. Nationwide demonstrations were held, and the British imprisoned many of the protestors. Despite British attempts to quell the demands for independence, on December 12, 1963, after centuries of colonization, Kenya achieved independent nationhood.

Jomo Kenyatta, the great freedom fighter, became the first president of Kenya and continued to preside over the country until his death in 1978. After that another influential

Kenyan Daniel Toroitich arap Moi was appointed president of the nation and dominated Kenyan politics for 24 years. For much of the 1980s the Kenyan African National Union (KANU) was Kenya's main and only political party, because in 1982 President Moi banned all other political parties in the country.

But handling the mounting international pressure and violence in the country proved to be an increasingly difficult task for President Moi. In violent demonstrations protesters demanded restoration of democracy in Kenya. In the 1990s the multi-party political system was restored, and Kenya was finally heading toward political stability. The KANU continued to dominate for another decade until 2002, when its winning spree was brought to a sudden halt by opposition leader Mwai Kibaki, who became president after a landslide victory in that year's elections.

In the early years of the 21st century Kenya is considered one of the most politically stable countries in Africa. Kenya regularly contributes its troops for peacekeeping missions in troubled areas of Africa.

In spite of political stability the country has its huge public health problems. The increase in the number of AIDS/HIV victims and the spread of cholera and other water-borne diseases is a cause of great concern. The government has taken steps to help contain the diseases and is working to educate people regarding the deadly nature of AIDS/HIV.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in eastern Africa Kenya is flanked by Uganda in the west, Ethiopia in the north, Sudan in the northwest, Somalia in the east, the Indian Ocean in the southeast, and Tanzania in the southwest. The equator passes through Kenya, dividing the country into two equal halves.

Although the country has a warm climate year-round, climatic conditions vary from region to region. While western Kenya and the eastern coastal regions have very hot and humid weather throughout the year, the semi-desert region has hotter days and cooler nights. The Great Rift Valley has pleasant weather throughout the year. In the arid and semiarid regions, although the day temperature can reach as high as 104°F, the night temperature is as low as 68°F.

❁ ECONOMY

Agriculture makes up about 25 percent of the country's gross domestic product, with tourism making up the next largest sector. The government announced liberalization policies in 1993, which included the removal of import licensing and price controls, and removal of foreign exchange controls. Due to poor economic policy, the once booming economy passed through a period of stagnation in the early 21st century. International organizations

Kenya—Cradle of Humanity

In 1931 Dr. Louis Leakey, a Kenyan of British origin discovered 400 skull fragments of a pre-hominid, *Zinjanthropus boisei* (who were capable of carving stone tools) in Olduvai. In 1961 the age of these pre-hominids was determined at 1.75 million years. In 1960 the remains of *Homo habilis* (who were capable of carving stone axes), whose age was estimated to be 1.4 million years, was also discovered by Leakey. This established the presence of pre-hominids in East Africa.

such as the World Bank and the IMF have provided economic assistance to the government to help revive the Kenyan economy.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Kenya does not have one distinct or dominant culture that can be identified as typically Kenyan. The country is home to many ethnic tribes; prominent among these are the Kikuyu, Luhya, Luo, Kalenjin, and Kamba. Each tribe has its own distinct culture and set of customs and traditions. The British and the European missionaries were successful in undermining the indigenous culture of the region and initiated mass conversion in the region. More than 75 percent of the population is Christian, while 10 percent adhere to the Islamic faith and another 10 percent to indigenous beliefs.

Today, most of the 70 tribal groups of Kenya reside in urban areas, fighting an uphill battle to retain their cultural identities. Although English and Swahili are the official languages of Kenya, many tribes still use their native languages.

The people of Kenya love to party and enjoy themselves. *Benga*, which is the contemporary dance and music style, is extremely popular in Kenya. It is believed to have originated among the Luo tribe living in the western region of Kenya. *Masai* and *Som-buru* are both popular traditional dances.

❁ CUISINE

One of Kenya's most popular dishes is *nyama choma*, which is barbecued meat (usually mutton). Other common dishes include *ugali* (cornmeal), *kuku na nazi* (chicken with coconut milk), and roast chicken with peanut sauce. Kenya is a haven for beer lovers as the local brewing industry and Kenya's love for drinking and partying provide the perfect atmosphere to drink and be merry.

Fun Fact

The word *safari* is a Swahili word, which means travel.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S DAY

Observed by: General public
Observed on: January 1

Fun Fact

Recently, a new language known as Sheng has become popular in the urban areas. It is a mixture of Swahili and English.

The first day of the Gregorian calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day. In Kenya people look forward to the New Year with great hopes and aspirations and believe in bidding farewell to the departing year in a grand manner.

Special parties are held where liquor flows freely, and a lavish feast awaits the partygoers. People dance and sing all night long and usher in the New Year in a joyous manner. At the stroke of midnight, fireworks light up the sky, and people greet one another enthusiastically. In Kenya government offices, businesses, and schools remain closed on New Year's Day.

MADARAKA DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 1

After four decades of violent armed struggle Kenya finally attained internal self-rule from Great Britain on June 1, 1963 (independence was finalized six months later on December 12). This day is com-

memorated as Madaraka (Swahili for self-governance) Day in Kenya and is a major holiday.

On this day Kenyans all over the world recall the violent struggle and the lives lost to help Kenya attain its freedom. Official speeches and parades mark this special day. Children are reminded of the freedom movement and the courageous deeds of the freedom fighters who courted arrest and even laid down their lives.

Official speeches pay special tribute to all those who participated in Kenya's freedom struggle, and because it is a national holiday all public and private institutions remain closed.

MOI DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 10

Moi Day commemorates the historic day in Kenya's history, when President Daniel arap Moi assumed power. He was sworn in as the president of Kenya on October 10, 1978, after the death of the then-president of Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta. Moi remained president of Kenya till 2002, when he voluntarily stepped down as president.

Moi Day is celebrated with great pomp and enthusiasm in Kenya. This special day is marked by military parades and cultural activities such as speeches and essay-writing contests. Throughout the country, special celebrations are planned to honor the tenure of this great Kenyan leader.

KENYATTA DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 20

Kenyatta Day commemorates the arrest of the great freedom fighter and first president of independent Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta, on October 20, 1952, after a state of emergency was declared in Kenya by the newly appointed British governor, Sir Evelyn Baring. His arrest triggered nationwide protests and demonstrations throughout the country, as well as an intensified demand for complete independence.

Kenya had been under British rule from the 18th century and had a long history of being colonized by foreign rulers before that. After World War II colonies all over the world were fighting their own wars for freedom, and Kenya was among them. The British tried every means possible to crush the protest, but Jomo Kenyatta and other freedom fighters continued their struggle for independence. Thousands of Kenyans were killed in the process, but ultimately, their sacrifice was not in vain.

Kenyatta Day pays tribute through lectures and symposia on Kenyatta's life and beliefs to all freedom fighters who fought for Kenya's independence.



Kenyan president Toroitich Daniel arap Moi inspects an honor guard mounted by Kenya Armed Forces at Nyayo Stadium in Nairobi on October 20 as he arrives for the Kenyatta Day Celebrations. Kenyatta Day is celebrated in honor of the first president of Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta. (AP Photo/Sayyid Azim)

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 12

A former British colony Kenya was granted independence on December 12, 1963. Independence Day or Jamhuri (Republic) Day is celebrated with great enthusiasm throughout the country. Kenyans come together to pay tribute to those who lost their lives while fighting for the country's independence.

The president of Kenya presides over the Independence Day celebrations in the capital of Nairobi. Official speeches, air shows, and military parades are highlights. All over the country patriotic Kenyans assemble in their cities and towns and sing patriotic songs while participating in the Independence Day celebrations. All government offices, schools, and colleges remain closed on December 12.

Religious Holidays

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

In remembrance of Jesus Christ's Crucifixion Christians observe Good Friday all over the world. It falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent, the 40-day Christian period of austerity and fasting. In Kenya Protestants and Catholics attend special prayer services in church and remember the life and teachings of Christ. Church choirs sing devotional songs, and theatrical productions based on the life of Christ serve as a reminder of the great sacrifice made by whom Christians see as the Son of God.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus Christ's Resurrection. Celebrating victory over death and the resurrection of life, it falls on the first Sunday after the 40-day period of austerity and fasting known as Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over.

Easter is celebrated with great joy by Christians in Kenya. On this day Kenyans attend church and offer prayers. Easter celebrations include religious and cultural activities sponsored by churches all over Kenya. Dancing, singing, and feasting are the hallmark of Easter celebrations in Kenya. Because Kenyans believe that Easter marks new beginnings, wayward people in Kenyan villages receive special counseling from elders on this day and are encouraged to take the right path.

The first Monday after Lent is celebrated as Easter Monday and is a popular Christian holiday in

Kenya. Egg rolling competitions (a game played with decorated Easter eggs) are a part of Easter Monday celebrations.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar; the first day after the month of Ramadan

Eid al-Fitr marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan. The date is based on the Islamic calendar, which has 354 days and so moves backward 11 days per year in relation to the solar or Gregorian calendar. During Ramadan Muslims worldwide observe a month-long fast beginning from dawn until dusk in order to build a stronger spirit. Consumption of water and food is strictly prohibited during the daytime fast. After sunset the entire family breaks the fast with a special family meal called *fa-tur*.

Most Kenyan Muslims reside on the east coast. Eid al-Fitr is the most important holiday for them. On this day they get up early, and wearing new clothes, offer prayers in the local mosque and exchange greetings with family and friends. The afternoon is filled with music, food, and dancing. Because the day is a public holiday, all schools, colleges, and public and private institutions remain closed.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of celebration for Christians all over the world. It marks the birth of Jesus Christ, who is revered by Christians as the son of God and the savior of humanity.

Families attend special evening services on Christmas Eve and celebrate by singing and dancing all night. Churches are beautifully decorated with balloons, ribbons, and Christmas trees. On Christmas Day, Christians attend the special prayer service, remembering the life and teachings of Christ.

Kenyans living in urban areas travel to the countryside to be with friends, family, and relatives. A traditional barbecued dinner is the major highlight of Kenyan Christmas. Lavish Christmas feasts may include chicken, mutton, and beef. *Pilau* is a traditional Christmas dish, prepared by families residing in the coastal regions of Kenya. This dish has meat (mainly beef) and rice as its main ingredients and is seasoned with different spices.

All Government and commercial establishments, public and private institutions remain closed for Christmas.

Fun Fact

The Commonwealth of Nations is an association of independent nations, most of which are former colonies of the British Empire. They share some common cultural links, which were influenced by the British.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 26

This is a special day celebrated all over Kenya. Boxing Day is celebrated in most British Commonwealth countries and stems from a medieval British custom to give servants gifts the day after Christmas. Traditionally on this day church boxes used for collecting money for the poor are

opened; this is thought to be the origin of the box in Boxing Day.

Because Kenya had been a British colony for a considerable length of time some British customs have been incorporated into Kenyan culture. On this day gifts are given to those who render useful services to the community throughout the year. The day is also known as the Feast of St. Stephen in honor of the first Christian martyr.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ MARALAL INTERNATIONAL CAMEL DERBY AND FESTIVAL

Observed in: Maralal (Samburu district)
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Second Week of August

The Maralal International Camel Derby is held in the second week of August every year at Maralal in Kenya's Samburu district. It began as a sporting event in 1990 to create awareness among the pastoral communities about the usefulness of camels and to combat the problem of environmental degradation in Kenya.

Today, this event has gained international exposure and attracts participants from all over the world.

Dugong and Greek Mythology

Dugong or sea cow (a manatee-like animal) finds mention in Greek mythology and is related to the legend of the sirens. Sirens of myth are essentially mermaids whose upper body was that of a woman and the lower that of a fish. It is believed that they seduced sailors with their singing, luring them to their death in the sea. The dugong belongs to the

family of *Sirenia*, which was named after the sirens of Greek legend.

In Homer's *Odyssey* Greek warrior Ulysses is warned by Circe the Sorceress about the dangers posed by the sirens and their enchanting song. She even instructs him to fill the sailors' ears with wax to prevent them from hearing their songs.

The most important events in the Maralal International Camel Derby are an amateur camel race, a semi-professional race, and the professional camel race.

❁ FERODO CONCOURS D'ELEGANCE

Observed in: Nairobi
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: September 27

Ferodo Concours d'Elegance is an annual vehicle beauty contest held in the capital city of Nairobi. It started in 1970 and is organized by the Alfa Romeo Owners club. It has earned the status of being one of the most eagerly awaited events in Kenya. Although it started as a national contest the event has also seen participants from neighboring countries such as Tanzania, South Africa, and Uganda. Held at the Nairobi Race Course, the Concours showcases a wide variety of cars and motorcycles, which are judged on the basis of their maintenance and cleanliness.

❁ MUSIC AND FOOD FESTIVAL

Observed in: All Provinces of Kenya
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May, June, and July

The Music and Food Festival is an annual event organized by the Ministry of Education in Kenya. The event is organized at different levels to include all strata of Kenyan society.

The events organized for primary and secondary school children generally take place in May and July, when the second term of the academic year begins. The festival also invites participation from the general public as well. The main purpose of this event is to create awareness about the rich cultural heritage of Kenya, as well as to preserve the ancient forms of dance and music.

Open to all Kenyans the festival features performances of traditional folk dances and music. All schools, colleges, and universities are encouraged to participate in these events.

There are also food festivals where Kenyan delicacies are offered for all to taste. Ethnic groups par-

ticipate in this food festival and serve traditional delicacies. Restaurants that specialize in a traditional cuisine are invited to showcase their culinary skills.

❁ THE LAMU DUGONG FESTIVAL

Observed in: Lamu

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May

Every year the residents of Lamu, a historical island town with distinctive Arab architecture, located off the east coast of Kenya, organize a festival called the Lamu Dugong Festival. It is held in May, and the donkey race is the major highlight. Donkeys are the sole means of transportation in Lamu and are found in great numbers in this region. Thousands of people from all over Kenya, as well as tourists, visit Lamu during these festivities and enjoy the race.

The festival came to be known as the Lamu Dugong Festival to create awareness among the local people about conservation of dugong (sea cow, a manatee-like creature), an endangered marine mammal, which is found along the coasts of Kenya. Dugongs are being killed for their meat in various parts of the world, including Kenya.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

The birth of a child in Kenya is usually cause for a big celebration. As the news of the birth spreads, relatives from all over the country travel to the birthplace for a big feast. The child is given a name that reflects the family lineage.

Among the Akamba tribe, there is a special naming ceremony. The child is given a Christian name as well as an African name. This is followed by narration of old folktales that reflect ancient African glory.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Female circumcision or female genital cutting is an ancient custom still followed in Kenya. It is performed when girls reach puberty. The procedure is a

painful and non-anesthetic surgery. Maendeleo Ya Wanawake (MYWO), a non-profit, non-government organization, has initiated a drive to put an end to this practice. It has proposed an alternative rite, which is followed among many African tribes. It involves taking the girl to a secluded place by the women of the community and teaching her about family life, which includes lessons on womanhood and sexual education.

Male circumcision, which is much less painful and harmful than female genital cutting, is an integral part of Kenya's culture and takes place when the boy is on the threshold of manhood.

❁ MARRIAGE

Marriage is a grand occasion in Kenyan society. Each tribe has its own specific marriage rituals. Generally a marriage in Africa is not considered complete until a child has been conceived.

An interesting, ancient Kenyan wedding ritual involved symbolic fighting between the bride's family and groom's family. Among the Masai tribe the wedding ritual also involved the female relatives of the groom verbally abusing the bride. It was done in good faith and was considered essential to ward off evil. A lavish feast followed the ritual and people would, eat, drink, and dance. The couple was blessed and wished a happy married life. In some tribes offerings were also made to the ancestors, seeking their blessings.

❁ DEATH

When a person dies the family and clan members gather to celebrate the life the person led. Ancestors are revered and stories of their lives are told to children and grandchildren in order to develop a bond between the youngsters and their ancestors.

Among the indigenous tribes in the countryside, the cause of death is usually attributed to supernatural forces. Special rituals are held to pacify the dead to prevent them from rising as ghosts.

Further Reading

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~ Kiribati ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Coral atolls in Micronesia, Oceania straddling the equator
Size	504 sq. mi.
Capital City	Tarawa
Flag Description	A red upper half with a yellow frigate bird flying over a yellow rising Sun and a blue lower half with three horizontal wavy white stripes representing the ocean
Independence	July 12, 1979 (from the United Kingdom)
Population	103,092 (July 2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	I-Kiribati
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Predominantly Micronesian with some Polynesian
Major Language(s)	I-Kiribati; English (official)
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic 52%; Protestant (Congregational) 40%
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; National Health Day, April 8; Independence Day, July 12; National Youth Day, August 7; Human Rights Day, December 10

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Austronesian-speaking people inhabited the lands of Kiribati in the first century C.E. Islanders from Fiji and Tonga found the archipelago almost 700 years ago and therein introduced the final ingredients that were to result in the I-Kiribati society.

The 19th century saw the introduction of British rule. The islands were the site of intense battles as part of the Pacific Theater in World War II.

Independent since 1979, Kiribati faces ongoing challenges, including a high rate of HIV infection. The prospect of rising sea levels due to global warming is no distant issue to the I-Kiribati, who have implemented the Kyoto Protocols and take umbrage at those who have not. The highest point in Kiribati is 257 feet above sea level.

✿ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Kiribati, formerly known as the Gilbert Islands, is made up of

three widely separated main groups of southwest Pacific islands: the Gilbert Islands on the equator, the Phoenix Islands to the east, and the Line Islands farther east. Ocean Island, with its rich deposits of phosphates (until the reserves were exhausted in 1981), is also included in the two million square miles of ocean. Most of the islands of Kiribati are low-lying coral atolls built on a submerged volcanic chain that is encircled by reefs. Banaba Island has an unnamed location that is considered the highest point in Kiribati at 265.7 feet.

Kiribati enjoys an equatorial maritime climate (with uniform temperatures, high humidity, and variable rainfall). The temperatures during the day and night and for a major part of the year show little variation, with an average of approximately 82.4°F. There is a constant balmy breeze from the eastern side.

The country does not experience tropical cyclones but does experience strong gales and rain during the rainy season, which occurs between December and March. Rainfall is sometimes irregular leading to long periods of drought. The islands to the north and south are more tropical. The trade winds blow between March and October, thus making it the most pleasant part of the whole year; while the highest rainfall (December to May) is concentrated on the northern islands.

November to February is wetter and more humid than the rest of the year. None of the islands supports much vegetation, because soil is scarce. Though there are no rivers, most of the islands possess freshwater lagoons.

The local fauna is limited to the Polynesian rat, a variety of seabird, and a few species of lizard. Marine life encompasses coral and many species of fish. Seaside scrub, mangroves, and pandanus grow on some islands, in addition to epiphytes and ferns. Coconut trees have been planted widely across the islands in protected, or closed, areas.

❁ ECONOMY

The economy of Kiribati has witnessed wide fluctuations in recent times. Overall economic development is hindered by a shortage of skilled workers, weak infrastructure, and remoteness from international markets.

Kiribati has few natural resources. The commercially viable deposits of phosphates were depleted by the time of independence in 1979. Currently copra and fish compose the bulk of production and exports.

Tourism provides more than 20 percent of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP). Foreign financial aid from the United Kingdom, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and China equals 25 to 50 percent of GDP. I-Kiribati working abroad send home each year \$50 per islander. The major trading partners are Australia, Japan, Fiji, New Zealand and the United States.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Kinship is central in the life of the I-Kiribati. Living in extended families, the I-Kiribati commonly adopt the children of relatives. This can occur through *bubuti*, a verbal agreement or request that must be granted. Couples without children or who want more can make a *bubuti* to adopt from within the larger circle.

Large families are highly valued because most people are dependent on subsistence agriculture. Families also need help with fishing, gathering coconuts, and working in the *babai* (a taro-like starchy root crop) pits. Women are responsible for housework, cooking, and child care. Additionally they often help men with their chores. The oldest male is the head of the household; the elderly are treated with great respect. The women and girls of Kiribati wear their traditional kilt made out of grass that reaches from hip up to the kneecap and greatly accentuates the suppleness of their figures. The old men still tend to wrap beautifully textured mats around their waists, which are fastened with the girdles that are nothing but plaited pieces of their wives' hair. Nowadays young men wear printed loincloths in the same fashion as kilts.

Most I-Kiribati live modestly, never making an ostentatious display of their wealth and resources.

Kyoto Protocol

The Kyoto Protocol is an amendment to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), an international treaty on global warming. It also reaffirms sections of the UNFCCC. Countries that ratify this protocol commit either to reducing their emissions of carbon dioxide and five other greenhouse gases or to engaging in emissions trading if they maintain or increase emissions of these gases. A total of 141 countries have ratified the agreement. (Two important exceptions are the United States and Australia.)

The formal name of the agreement, which reaffirms sections of the UNFCCC, is the Kyoto Protocol to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. It was negotiated in Kyoto, Japan, in December 1997, opened for signature on March 16, 1998, and closed on March 15, 1999. The agreement came into force on February 16, 2005, following ratification by Russia on November 18, 2004.

The pragmatic aspect of their nature becomes rather obvious in the way that they carefully use every inch of the coconut tree. The fronds are used for making mats, the midribs for building houses, the sap to make alcohol or for sweetening, the nut to make copra or for culinary purposes, while the oil is used to make soap or refined for use as body oil.

A typical I-Kiribati home has a thatched roof, stick walls, and floor made out of coral rocks. Mats fabricated out of coconut fronds are used to cover the floor, while mats made with pandanus leaves are used for sleeping. There is usually a separate house for cooking.

❁ CUISINE

Coconut and all its products form an integral part of I-Kiribatis' diet. The I-Kiribatis use a lot of grated coconut, even mixing it into their tea. They use coconut milk to sweeten breadfruit soup or combine it with curry powder to marinate raw fish. Coconut sap, or toddy, is rich in vitamin C, and the coconut trees are cut twice daily to release the sap, which is collected by young boys. Boiled over a low flame, toddy forms a thick, sweet molasses called *kamaimai*. This is used instead of sugar to sweeten drinks; it can also be made into a hard candy. Fermented, toddy becomes an alcoholic drink known as *kakioki*.

The I-Kiribati eat locally caught fish, breadfruit, pandanus, papaya, and *babai*. Imported rice and flour are also staple foods. Pork and chicken are usually eaten only on festive occasions. In the urban areas more and more people are eating canned foodstuffs. Traditionally, meals are cooked over an open fire and are either fried or baked. Since few of the

people own refrigerators, salt is used as a preservative, and fish are dried in the Sun. Salt and sugar are two common flavorings, in addition to curry powder, which is used almost exclusively with raw fish.

The breakfast of an I-Kiribati is light and may be made up only of bread with a cup of tea or fresh toddy. Lunches and dinners are more sumptuous and include fish, rice, and coconut. Fish is served in a variety of ways—fried, baked, in soup, or may even be consumed raw. The local fruits and vegetables on the menu include coconut, taro, and sweet potato.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 1

January 1 is the first day of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar and is widely observed as New Year's Day. Celebrations take place all over the world that often start New Year's Eve (December 31).

I-Kiribati Christians gather in *maneabas* (meetinghouses), where they celebrate New Year's Eve with community meals, speeches, singing, and indoor games. At the stroke of midnight they conduct prayers, say farewell to the old year, and welcome the new year. All educational and government establishments are closed on New Year's Day.

❁ NATIONAL HEALTH DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 8

On this holiday the government of Kiribati tries to improve awareness of the importance of health among its citizens. It usually introduces new programs for improving the country's health conditions, which in turn will contribute to the country's progress. The holiday is also celebrated with such fun-filled activities as theatrical and dramatic performances, and sports competitions and contests, including weight lifting, races, basketball, volleyball, and table tennis.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 12

Kiribati won its independence from British colonial rule on this day in 1979. It celebrates the event with a colorful parade and a review of troops, followed by various field events such as soccer, basketball, tennis, and volleyball matches, as well as marathons and canoe races. All educational and government establishments remain closed.

❁ NATIONAL YOUTH DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 7

This day highlights the very important role the youth of Kiribati play in the current and future plans for the country. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) registered in Kiribati have contributed substantially to the welfare and development of Kiribati's youth. From time to time these NGOs organize workshops and other activities, targeting the youth of various churches in order to provide experiences and skills that will contribute to the prosperity of Kiribati.

❁ HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 10

The day honors the United Nations (UN) General Assembly's adoption and proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, on December 10, 1948. This was the first-ever global proclamation of human rights. The commemoration was implemented in 1950, when the UN General Assembly invited all states and interested organizations to celebrate the day in any manner they saw fit. This day is designed to celebrate the dignity of human beings all over the world and to work for their betterment. In Kiribati several churches organize singing and indoor games as well as special dinners. All educational and government organizations remain closed.

Religious Holidays

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday commemorates the agonies of Christ and his death on the Cross. As in other Christian communities around the world on this day in Kiribati religious services are conducted. This is a solemn occasion and after the morning church services the devout spend the entire day attending public readings of gospels, psalms, and singing hymns from scripture.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

The origin of Easter celebrations can be traced to the end of first century C.E. It is a Christian feast that celebrates the belief in Jesus Christ's Resurrec-

tion from the dead. It is sometimes known as Resurrection Day. This day is of utmost importance because the fundamental teaching of Christianity is that Christ through his death freed humankind from the penalty of sin.

The word *Easter* is derived from the name of a Greek Goddess Eostre or Eastre. She was the revered mother goddess of the Saxon people who lived in northern Europe.

Easter eggs have become associated with the festival. They are considered the symbol of new life. Easter thus signifies resurgence of hope and a fresh start for all.

The holiday falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. They often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to offer prayers. Since Kiribati is a Christian country this holiday assumes great importance. On Easter Sunday (as also on Christmas Day) The I-Kiribati attend a religious service and then a feast in the *maneaba* (community hall), where a number of families also perform local dances. No gifts are exchanged on this holiday, but the spirit of joyfulness and festivity spills over to the following day, which is known as Easter Monday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world. It celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ, whom Christians see as the Son of God.

In Kiribati native Christians celebrate this momentous day by attending a religious service followed by a dinner in the *maneaba* (community hall), where various individuals and their families present local dances. However no gifts are exchanged on holidays.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26

This holiday originated in England where it was a practice in earlier times to give cash or durable goods to servants the day after Christmas. Since Kiribati was under British rule for a fairly long time, this practice was adopted locally.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Rites of Passage

Though the natives of Kiribati have converted to Christianity, there are some groups of natives in cer-

tain pockets of the islands who have tended to adhere to their age-old rites and rituals.

❁ MARRIAGE

Among the I-Kiribati, marriage is arranged. In the ceremonial betrothal negotiation, called *te-amata-mata*, a representative of the groom's family approaches the prospective bride's family, bearing customary gifts such as food. If the match is agreeable, the bride's family invites the family of the groom to visit the dowry land, where the couple will make their home if the site is agreeable. The groom's family expresses its acceptance of terms by again sending a male of the family to pay another call on the household of the bride, this time summoning her to live among her in-laws until the wedding.

Nuptials vary by island. Potions of local plants are used to anoint the couple. The traditional house has an upper floor, where, on their wedding day, the newlyweds consummate their union, with family gathered below.

❁ DEATH

During the three nights following a death the ceremony of *bo-maki* is performed. All the people known to the deceased gather together in the darkness at the southern end of the village with sticks of *pan-danus* wood and the butt ends of coconut leaves in their hands. They line up abreast of each other from east to west, slowly advancing northward, beating the ground and trees before them with their staves. Not a word is uttered. When the line has swept through the settlement from south to north, it stops, and the participants disperse in silence. This gesture is meant to encourage the soul of the dead to leave the neighborhood and also to drive away any evil spirit that might wish to possess the corpse.

The immediate family of the deceased begins to mourn by wailing loudly and howling continuously for three days without interruption (by relays), except when the ceremony of *bo-maki* is being performed. The women have the privilege of attending to the corpse. Their first duty is to anoint the body from head to toe with coconut oil, scented with flowers of the *uri* tree (*Guettarda speciosa*), or with a handful of desiccated pith of the almond trees. Wild almond is considered the favorite tree of the ancestral goddess Tituaa-bine, who supposedly resides in *Matang*, a realm of departed souls.

The body, after being dressed, is placed on its back with the head to the east and feet to the west, arms beside it and open palms upward. Two *waea*, or small shriveled coconuts, are placed in the open palms. These are supposed to prevent the soul from returning to harangue the family. The body is kept for three or nine days, to be buried on the fourth or 10th day, as the case might be. On the third night after the final performance of the *bo-maki* ceremony, one of the female relatives of the deceased comes to

utter the final spells, which will straighten the path of the soul to the land of ghosts. She is called *te tia-tabe-atu* (the lifter of the head), because she holds the deceased person's head in her lap while muttering the spell. If she does her work well it is believed that the body begins to shine like fire (possibly with the phosphorescence of decay). The night before burial, assistants dress the body in a new waist mat and lay it on a fresh sleeping mat with wreaths of scented flowers around its neck. Everything that had hitherto come into contact with the dead is then turned, except the shriveled coconuts, which remained on the upturned palms.

The grave is generally dug in the floor of the house, though it is sometimes dug outside; its depth

is between 18 inches and 2 feet. The body, wrapped in its sleeping mat, is laid in the hole; over it is drawn a coarse screen of coconut leaves, which is again covered with a finer mat. The grave is then filled in with sand, and its limits demarcated with a rectangle of small white stones; for three days after the burial, some of the family members indulge in dining and dancing, while a few others fling themselves on the grave and wail loudly. Many mourners compose songs or dirges for the occasion, the most memorable of which remain in the family for generations.

Further Reading

Brij V. Lal and Kate Fortune: *Pacific Islands: An Encyclopedia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000).

❧ Korea, North ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Northern half of the Korean Peninsula. Eastern Asia, between China and South Korea, bordering the Korea Bay and the Sea of Japan
Size	46,451 sq. mi.
Capital City	Pyongyang
Flag Description	Three horizontal bands of blue (top), red (triple width), and blue; edged in white; the red band has a white disk with a red five-pointed star on the hoist side
Independence	August 15, 1945 (from Japan)
Population	22,912,177 (2005 est.)
Government	Communist dictatorship
Nationality	Korean
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Korean
Major Language(s)	Korean
Major Religion(s)	No public religious observances. Historically, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Shamanism were practiced.
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Kim Jong-il's Birthday, February 16–17; Kim Il-sung's Birthday, April 15; Labor Day, May 1; Fatherland Liberation War Day, June 25; Victory Day, July 27; Liberation Day, August 15; DPR Korea Foundation Day, September 9; Chucok, September 17–18; Party Foundation Day, October 10; Constitution Day, December 27

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

The ancient history of the entire Korean peninsula can be said to have started with the Neolithic Age, when groups of Turkic-Manchurian-Mongol people migrated into the region from China. The first agriculturally based settlements appeared in the region around 6000 B.C.E. During this era other communities made their appearance along the Han-gang River near modern-day Seoul (the capital of South Korea), and others in the vicinity of Pyongyang (the capital of North Korea) and Pusan. According to ancient legend Korea's earliest civilization, known as Choson, was founded in 2333 B.C.E. by the mythical figure Tan-gun.

In the 17th century, Korea was transformed into a vassal state of China and in the process was cut off from the rest of the world until the beginning of the Sino-Japanese War of

1894–95. As a result of Japan's victory Korea was granted independence. But it was short-lived and by 1910 Korea had been annexed by Japan, which developed the country but failed to win over the Korean nationalists, who continued to agitate for full independence.

After Japan's capitulation at the end of World War II the Korean peninsula was partitioned into two occupation zones, divided at the 38th parallel. The Soviet Union controlled the north, while the United States took charge of the south. In 1948 the division was made permanent with the establishment of the separate regimes of North and South Korea.

Kim Il-sung (1912–94), officially known in North Korea as the Great Leader and named "eternal president" in the country's constitution, ruled North Korea from 1948 until his death in 1994. An absolute and ruthless Communist dictator, he fostered a cult of personality that portrayed him as a virtual god.

In a bid to unify the two Koreas under a single Communist government, the North launched a surprise attack on

The Legend of Tan Gun

According to legend Hwan-ung, the son of Hwan-in (God and the ruler of Heaven), yearned to live on Earth among the valleys and the mountains. His father sent him and 3,000 helpers to rule Earth and provide humans with great happiness. Hwan-ung descended to Mount Taebaeksan on the border of Manchuria with North Korea and renamed the place Shinshi (City of God). Along with his ministers of clouds, rain, and wind, he instituted laws and moral codes and taught humans art, medicine, and agriculture.

A tiger and a bear living in a cave together prayed to Hwan-ung, yearning to become human. Deeply moved, Hwan-ung called them to him and gave them 20 cloves of garlic and a bunch of mugwort. He commanded them to eat only this sacred

food and stay out of sunlight for 100 days. The tiger shortly gave up and went away. The bear, however, remained steadfast, and after 21 days it was transformed into a woman. The bear-woman was very grateful and made offerings to Hwan-ung. However lacking a companion, she soon became sad and prayed beneath a sandalwood tree to be blessed with a child. Hwan-ung, impressed by her prayers, married her, and soon after she gave birth to a handsome son. They named him Tan-gun, meaning "Altar Prince" or sandalwood.

Tan-gun grew up to be a strong and dynamic leader and in 2333 B.C.E. moved to Pyongyang and established the Choson (Land of the Morning Calm) Kingdom. Finally, at the age of 1,908, he returned to Taebaeksan, where he became a mountain god.

South Korea on June 25, 1950. The attack was strongly condemned by the UN Security Council, which demanded an immediate withdrawal. U.S. President Harry S. Truman ordered his country's air and naval units into action to enforce the UN order. The British government followed suit, and soon a UN multinational command was dispatched to help the South Koreans.

North Korean forces captured Seoul and surrounded the allied forces in the peninsula's southeast corner near Pusan. In a desperate move the UN Commander General Douglas MacArthur (1880–1964) ordered a landing at Inchon on September 15 and routed the North Korean Army. MacArthur's forces pushed north across the 38th parallel, approaching the Yalu River. At this point Communist China entered the war, forcing the UN troops into a headlong retreat. Seoul was lost and then regained. Ultimately the war stabilized near the 38th parallel but dragged on for two years while negotiations took place. An armistice was finally agreed to and signed on July 27, 1953.

Kim Il-sung's death on July 8, 1994, plunged the country into a period of uncertainty, as his son, Kim Jong-Il, assumed his father's mantle. Of great concern internationally was North Korea's suspected nuclear weapons program, in addition to its massive army and long-range missile development. Negotiations over the country's suspected atomic weapons seemed to achieve some success with an agreement reached in June 1995, which included a provision for providing the North with a South Korean nuclear reactor that would be used only for peaceful purposes.

In September 1998 North Korea launched a test missile over Japan, claiming it was simply a sci-

entific satellite. This move alarmed Japan and the rest of the world about North Korea's intentions regarding reentry into the nuclear arms race. In 1999 North Korea agreed to allow the United States to conduct ongoing inspections of a suspected nuclear development site, Kumchangri, which North Korea admitted had been devised for "a sensitive military purpose." It was agreed that in return the United States would enhance the supply of food, in addition to starting a program of potato production in the country.

Antagonism between North and South Korea escalated between 1998 and 1999. But tension with South Korea surprisingly decreased in June 2000, when South Korea's President Kim Dae Jung met with North Korea's President Kim Jong-il in Pyongyang. However efforts toward reconciliation failed and were followed by minor military skirmishes.

In July 2002 North Korea began a series of radical economic initiatives aimed at reforming the devastated economy and introducing free-market policies. The country devalued its currency, raised food prices by as much as 50 percent, and increased wages. In October confronted with U.S. intelligence, North Korea admitted that it had violated a 1994 agreement regarding the freezing of its nuclear weapons; instead it had been developing nuclear bombs.

North Korea officially withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in January 2003. Nuclear proliferation is a source of perpetual tension between Korea and other powerful nations such as the United States, Japan, and China. A modest breakthrough occurred when officials from the United States, North Korea, China, Russia, South Korea, and Japan met in August 2003 in Beijing, although the talks bore no fruit. Yet in February 2005 North Korea candidly admitted that it was in possession of nuclear weapons and declared that it would not engage in further disarmament talks.

Fun Fact

Although the government of North Korea is characterized as a totalitarian dictatorship, exactly how the country is governed remains unclear to outsiders.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The Korean Peninsula extends approximately 621 miles south from the northeast Asian continental landmass. The main Japanese islands of Honshu and Kyushu are located some 124 miles to the southeast across the Tsushima Strait, the southeast part of the Korea Strait. The Korean Peninsula's west coast is bordered by the Yellow Sea. The 5,257-mile-long coastline of Korea is highly irregular, with North Korea's half of the peninsula having 1,550 miles of coastline.

The northern land border of Korea is formed by the Yalu (or Amnok) and Tumen Rivers, which originate in the region around Paektu-san (Mount Paektu or White Head Mountain), an extinct volcano and Korea's highest mountain peak (9,003 feet). The Yalu River flows into the Yellow Sea, and the Tumen River flows east into the Sea of Japan. The total land area of the Korean Peninsula, including islands, is 84,943 square miles, of which 55 percent, or 46,451 square miles, constitutes the territory of North Korea.

Located between latitudes 38° and 43° north, North Korea has a continental climate with four distinct seasons. Long winters have bitterly cold and clear weather interspersed with snowstorms as a result of northern and northwestern winds blowing in from Siberia. The daily average high and low temperatures for Pyongyang (the capital) in January are 27°F and 9°F. Average snowfall is 37 days during the winter. The weather is even harsher in the northern mountainous regions. Summer tends to be short, hot, humid, and rainy because of the southern and southeastern monsoon winds that blow from the Pacific Ocean. The daily average high and low temperatures for Pyongyang in August are 84°F and 68°F. Nearly 60 percent of all precipitation occurs from June to September. Typhoons affect Korea at least once every summer. Spring and autumn are pleasant seasons, with mild temperatures and variable winds.

❁ ECONOMY

A few decades ago Korea had vast timber resources; the major species of trees were larch, oak, alder, pine, spruce, and fir. However, the forests were depleted due to excessive harvesting of trees during the Japanese occupation (1910–45), illegal logging around 1945, and the devastating Korean War (1950–53). Recently reforestation programs have helped to remedy the loss.

North Korea has great mineral wealth, comprising five major minerals—gold, iron ore, coal, tungsten, and graphite. Before the country was divided in the aftermath of World War II, the colder and less fertile northern region relied heavily on the south for food. When the country split, agricultural self-sufficiency became a major national goal of North Korea. Mechanized methods were introduced; the government expanded irrigation facilities,

constructed numerous dams, and initiated land-reclamation projects.

Due to the mountainous and rocky terrain, less than 20 percent of Korean land is fit for agriculture. Rice is the major crop, with wet paddies constituting about half of the total farmland. The paddies lie along the coasts, in reclaimed tidal areas, and in river valleys. Barley, wheat, corn, soybeans, and grain sorghums are also cultivated on a large scale; other crops include cotton, tobacco, fruits, potatoes, beans, and sweet potatoes. The long coastline and numerous islands, inlets, and reefs provide excellent fishing grounds, and the presence of warm and cold currents attracts many varieties of fish.

The Korean economy was shattered by the war of 1950–53. Post-war reconstruction was boosted by huge amounts of foreign aid (from Communist countries such as China and the USSR), in addition to intensive government economic development programs. Large-scale industrial advances were made during the 1960s. At the start of the 21st century the major products of North Korea included iron, steel, and other metals; machinery; military products; textiles (synthetics, wool, cotton, silk); and chemicals.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Traditional Korean clothing dates back to the Three Kingdoms Period (57 B.C.E.–668 C.E.), as depicted in the wall paintings that adorn the tombs of that period. The Korean dress is known as the *hanbok*. The top part, or *jeogori*, is blouselike with long sleeves, with the men's version being longer, stretching down to the waist. Women wear skirts (*chima*) and men wear baggy pants (*paji*). In earlier times commoners wore white, except during festivals and special occasions such as weddings. Clothes for the upper classes used a lot of bright colors to indicate the wearer's social status. Accessories include foot gear, jewelry, and head-dresses and hairpins to hold the tresses in place.

The traditional Korean family was large, and three or four generations usually lived together. Since infant mortality was high, a big family was thought to be a blessing and having many children was highly desirable. Such practices came to an end due to the rapid industrialization and urbanization of the country, which were accompanied by effective birth-control drives. Due to a long-standing Confucian tradition, which directed that the eldest son takes over as head of the family, a preference for sons was prevalent in Korea. To tackle the problem, the

Fun Fact

Hangul, the Korean writing system, was invented in the 15th century by King Sejong the Great (1397–1450) to replace the system of Chinese characters, called Hanja in Korea.

Fun Fact

South Korean Christians report having met with members of underground Christian churches in North Korea.

Song to General Kim Il-sung

A North Korean marching song composed during the Korean War, the “Song to General Kim Il-sung” was sung by both the North Koreans and their Chinese allies.

Changbai Hills roll, stained with blood
 Yalu River meanders, soaked in blood
 These holy stains throw light over
 the bouquet of free Korea today.
 Vast snowy fields of Manchuria, please tell me
 Endless night deep in the Taiga, please tell me
 Immortal guerrilla warrior, who is he?
 Outstanding patriot, who is it?
 He is the benefactor who released the laborers.
 He is the great Sun for new democratic Korea.
 All people gather to the 20-clause political program.
 New spring comes everywhere in North Korea.
 Refrain
 Oh, what a sweet name, General Kim Il-sung!
 Oh, what a glorious name, General Kim Il-sung!

government has revised family-related laws and ensured equality for daughters in terms of inheritance. In 21st-century Korea, young married couples choose to live separately; therefore nuclear families with few children are on the rise.

A Korean name consists of a family name plus a given name. The family name comes first. A Korean woman does not adopt her husband’s family name, but the children do take on their father’s family name. The most common family names in North Korea are: Kim (about 21 percent of all Koreans), Yi (14 percent), Park (8 percent), Choi, Jeong, Jang, Han, and Lim.

A traditional North Korean dwelling is known as a *hanok*. The underlying principle of a *hanok* is to create a living space based on the coexistence of nature and human beings. A unique feature of traditional houses is their special design for cooling the interior in the summer and heating the interior in the winter. Since North Korea has very hot summers and bitterly cold winters, the *ondol gudeul*, a floor-based heat-

Fun Fact

Kimchi, a popular Korean dish in the United States, may have meant “steeped/submerged vegetable” originally. At a traditional North Korean table, all the dishes are served at the same time. In earlier times the number of side dishes varied from three for the lower classes to 12 for royal family members. Table arrangements can vary depending on whether a noodle dish or meat is served. Koreans eat with chopsticks. Compared with China and Japan, however, a spoon is used more often, particularly when soups are served.

ing system and *daecheong*, a cool wooden-floor style hall, were developed over centuries to help the common people survive the extremities of temperature. These primitive heating and air-conditioning systems are so effective that they are still used in many homes even today.

Prior to the Communist regime many North Koreans had been Confucians or Buddhists. The North Korean government, however, has effectively suppressed religion in favor of Marxist principles. Korean is widely spoken, with a smattering of English.

❁ CUISINE

Korean cuisine includes a wide variety of meat and fish dishes along with wild greens and vegetables. Fish remains the chief source of protein in the North Korean diet. Various fermented and preserved items such as *kimchi* (fermented spicy cabbage), *jeotgal* (fermented seafood with salt), and *doenjang jeotgal* (fermented soybean paste) are common items at meals.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR’S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

As with most of the world, North Korea celebrates New Year’s Day on January 1 in accordance with the Gregorian calendar. It is a public holiday, and all government and commercial organizations are closed. People enjoy this day in the company of their loved ones.

❁ KIM JONG-IL’S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 16–17

Born February 16, 1942, Chairman Kim Jong-il has been the uninterrupted ruler of North Korea for more than a decade. He succeeded his father, Kim Il-sung, who had ruled the country ever since its founding in 1948. Familiarly hailed as the “Dear Leader,” Kim occupies the positions of chairman of the National Defense Committee, as well as the general secretary of the Korean Workers’ Party. His birthday is a two-day public holiday in North Korea.

❁ KIM II-SUNG’S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 15

This holiday commemorates the birthday of Kim Il-sung, the father of the current dictator, who ruled North Korea from 1948 until his death in 1994.

During his years as dictator he fostered a cult of personality that raised him to the status of near god. He is known as the Great Leader and was enshrined in the constitution as “eternal president.” He was born in the village of Mangyongdae on the outskirts of Pyongyang, the capital city. On this day the people of North Korea customarily place wreaths and floral offerings at one or more statues of the great leader or pay homage by visiting his native village. Since it is a public holiday all educational and business institutions are closed.

✿ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

North Korea celebrates Labor Day, also called May Day and Workers’ Day, on May 1 to honor the contributions of workers. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, designated May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

This is a public holiday in North Korea with government offices, schools, and businesses closed for the day. The holiday is observed with speeches and parades.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

✿ FATHERLAND LIBERATION WAR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 25

Fatherland Liberation War Day, or Start of Korean War, marks the day in 1950 that North Korea went to war against its southern counterpart South Korea. Although the underlying reason for the outbreak of the Korean War was the ongoing cold war between the two superpowers the United States and the USSR, there were also growing tensions between the governments of North and South Korea. The superpowers used these tensions to fight each other without actually engaging in a direct war, which would have proved disastrous for both. This war should be understood within that larger geopolitical struggle.

Every year on this day the leaders of North Korea, as well as the general public, visit war memorials to place floral wreaths, paying homage to the people who lost their lives during this war. This is a public holiday in North Korea with government offices, schools, and businesses closed for the day.

✿ VICTORY DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 27

This holiday commemorates the armistice ending the Korean War. It was on this day that an agreement was signed between North and South Korea in



North Koreans attend a joint rally marking Korean Liberation Day on August 15 in Pyongyang to celebrate the Korean liberation from Japanese colonial rule in 1945. (AP Photo/Korea Pool)

1953. Since North Korea has always insisted that the war was started by South Korea, aided by the United States, the Pyongyang regime describes the outcome as a victory, implying that the alleged “invaders” were repelled. On this occasion leaders of the ruling Communist Party and the military, along with workers and people from all classes of society, offer their respects at the Tomb of Revolutionary Martyrs, the Victory Tower, and the statue of the late leader Kim Il-sung. This is a public holiday in North Korea with government offices, businesses, and schools closed for the day.

❁ LIBERATION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 15

This holiday celebrates a turning point in the political history of North Korea. On this day in 1945, the country won its freedom from decades of Japanese rule. Japanese rule was often harsh and was fought by Korean guerrilla groups, particularly in the North. Korean antipathy toward the Japanese continues to this day. Civic ceremonies mark the holiday, and government offices, schools, and business are closed.

❁ DPR KOREA FOUNDATION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 9

It was on this day in 1948 that the Supreme People’s Assembly in Pyongyang proclaimed the foundation of a Communist state in the northern part of the Korean Peninsula. In North Korea this day is marked by parades, processions, and speeches by public figures. This day is also observed as a public holiday with schools, businesses, and government offices closed.

❁ CHUSOK

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 17–18

Chusok, the Harvest Moon Festival, is a two-day festival celebrated in North Korea. During this observance, the people give thanks for a good harvest, attend family reunions, and hope for another prosperous year. Families make offerings of food to their ancestors, called a *tsbare*, or memorial offering, and visit their ancestors at the cemetery. The *songp yen*, a rice cake shaped like a half Moon, is a traditional Korean pastry eaten during this holiday. It is usually stuffed with beans, chestnuts, or sesame seeds with honey. Literally, *Chusok* means “Festival of Autumn Night.”

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

❁ PARTY FOUNDATION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 10

According to the official history of North Korea, it was on this day that the ruling Korean Workers Party was founded by Kim Il-sung in 1945, in the aftermath of World War II. This event is commemorated with processions, speeches, and shouting of slogans. Since this is a public holiday all government and commercial institutions remain closed.

❁ CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 27

This day celebrates the adoption of a new constitution in 1972—the first revised constitution since the original one in 1948. The 1972 constitution created the positions of president and vice president as well as the Central People’s Committee. This day is celebrated with civic ceremonies. It is also a public holiday.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

Since ancient times, Korean women have been encouraged to produce male children. In the past an individual’s prosperity was judged by the number of male offspring. The absence of a male child on many occasions led to divorces; men often took concubines in the hopes of fathering a son. The preference for a son is rooted deeply in the Confucian patriarchal system, according to which it was the woman’s duty to produce a male heir, ensuring the continuation of her husband’s bloodline and enabling him to perform important ancestral rites.

The birth of a male child is considered the result of blessings by various spirits. Hence many prayers and rituals are undertaken by women during pregnancy with the hope of receiving these blessings. The deities and spirits to whom such prayers are traditionally offered include *samshin halmoni* (grandmother spirit), the Big Dipper, mountain spirits, and the Buddha, in addition to certain sacred rocks and trees. These shrines are usually visited in the dead of night or at dawn.

Of these spirits *samshin halmoni* is the most important because the Koreans believe that this spirit plays a key role in childbirth and cares for the child’s growth and well-being. In every house a makeshift shrine is made for the deity so that women may conveniently pray and make offerings. It is believed that only with the grace of *samshin halmoni* can an easy childbirth and the woman’s speedy recovery take place.

Even in today’s Korean society, there are many restrictions and taboos that must be observed to

ensure a healthy child and a safe delivery. The woman must not approach or do anything unclean, must not kill anything, must be careful where she urinates, must not step over a straw rope, and must refrain from theft or other kinds of mischief. There are many food items such as rabbit, squid, crab, eggs, and peaches that are considered harmful if eaten during pregnancy.

As the time of the delivery approaches, there should not be any repairs to fireplaces or holes in paper doors, and the family should not see a burning house as these are considered ill omens and harbingers of bad luck. To ensure an easy delivery, all doors are kept open. The husband's clothes are used as quilts, and the clothes of a woman who has experienced easy childbirths are borrowed to cover the woman when labor starts.

Various methods are employed to guess the gender of the unborn child. These may involve the physical appearance of the pregnant woman or dream interpretation. If the mother dreams of horses, oxen, dragons, tigers, and bears, she will deliver a male child. If, however, she dreams of flowers or toys, she will deliver a female child.

Upon the birth of a child, a straw rope (*kumchul*) is hung across the gate of the house to ward off evil spirits and notify people not to enter the premises because a child has recently been born. The rope, twisted in a leftward spiral, is intertwined with pine branches and red peppers to signify a male or with pine branches and charcoal, indicating a female. The *kumchul* is usually posted for 21 days. If more children are desired, the placenta and afterbirth are burned under the eaves of the house. If no more children are desired, these are burned some distance from the house, usually in a clean, sunny place on the side of a mountain. The ashes are often scattered to the winds or in a river.

For seven days after childbirth, rice and seaweed soup are offered to the *samsbin halmoni* twice a day. These items are then eaten by the mother to help her recover. Special offerings are made on the 14th and 21st days after birth. Family members avoid expressing their happiness over the birth of a child and do not make any personal remarks about the newborn, lest any harm befall the child. To fend off evil spirits, children are often given grotesque nicknames like Dog's Dung, Strawbag, and Stonehead.

❁ MARRIAGE

Koreans consider marriage the most important event in an individual's life. Thus divorce is regarded as a disgrace not only for the couple, but also for their families. Wedding ceremonies of the 21st century differ greatly from those in the past. A Western-style ceremony is held at a wedding hall or a church, with the bride wearing a white dress and the groom wearing a tuxedo. Later in the day the bride and groom have a traditional ceremony at a different room in the venue in colorful traditional costumes.

In earlier times Korean boys and girls, from the

age of seven onward, were not even allowed to sit in the same room, minimizing the chances for the development of mutual attraction, friendship, and love. In a Confucian society the ability to repress one's emotions was regarded as a sign of good upbringing and education. The young couple had little or nothing to say in the matter since marriages were arranged by the parents with the help of a matchmaker. The couple generally did not meet until the day of the wedding.

Times have changed, and nowadays there are two paths leading to marriage. The first, *yona*, involves the meeting, falling in love, and marriage of two people without the involvement of a third party. The second, *chungmae*, involves the arranged meeting of two people by a go-between and leads to marriage, provided both parties consent to it.

Since the year, month, day, and hour of birth are thought to influence one's destiny, these aspects of the bride and groom require careful investigation. These factors are referred to as the four pillars (*saju*). A thorough examination of the four pillars is required to determine whether or not the couple can live harmoniously together. And even if the four pillars of the couple are good, a prediction (*kunghap*) by a fortune teller indicating difficulty or misfortune may lead to the two parties canceling the marriage plans.

If the four pillars and the *kunghap* are found to be acceptable, the couple becomes engaged. At the engagement ceremony, the two families get together at the girl's house or any convenient place, but never at the boy's house. The two young people exchange gifts, and a piece of handmade white paper on which the man's four pillars have been written is ceremoniously presented to the girl's family. A discussion follows, and the marriage date is selected.

A few days before the marriage, the groom's family sends a box (*ham*) containing gifts (*yemul*) for the bride. These comprise yards of red and blue fabric for a traditional dress, and jewelry, carried by servants or friends of the groom. The box is usually delivered at night, and upon approaching the house the carrier, jokingly shouts, "Buy a *ham*! *Ham* for sale." The *ham* is not handed over to the bride's mother until the family has offered wine, food, and a sum of money to the carrier.

The traditional wedding ceremony normally takes place either in the front room or in the courtyard of the bride's house. It begins with the bride and groom exchanging bows and drinks as they face each other across the wedding table. On the table are placed red and blue threads, lighted candles, red beans, rice, jujubes, chestnuts, dried persimmons, rice cakes, and the figures of a pair of ducks (symbolizing lasting bondage). During the rituals the bride is assisted by an elderly female servant or a couple of women well-versed in wedding procedures.

At night the couple retires to a room that has been decorated, set apart, and lit with a candle. There the bridegroom takes off the bride's headpiece, unties her coat string, and removes only one of her socks. Then it is customary for him to put out

the candle, without blowing at it, since doing so would bring bad luck. He extinguishes it with a stick prepared for this purpose. The couple is not supposed to leave the room until sunrise. Later in the day the newly married couple, accompanied by the bride's father or uncle and a small procession carrying various articles and gifts, travels to the bridegroom's home. In earlier times the bride rode in a palanquin, while the bridegroom led the procession (*shinhaeng*) on horseback.

At the groom's house the bride's first interaction with her in-laws takes place. This is called the *pyebaek*. During this ceremony, the bride has to bow to her husband's parents, who are seated before a table on which is placed cooked chicken, jujubes, chestnuts, and fruits. Additionally, the bride has to present the groom's parents with silken items and exchange greetings with them. After staying a few days at the groom's house, the couple returns to the bride's home. On this occasion, a party is organized to familiarize the groom with the bride's family, friends, and relatives.

❁ DEATH

Koreans believe that a person's spirit will roam aimlessly to eventually become a ghost, or *kaekkwī*, if he or she succumbs to illness or any other natural death outside the confines of the home. To ensure that this does not happen, families take precautions. For example they try to be present during the last moments of a dying person, or even try to transport the weak back to their homes when death becomes imminent.

After death it is customary for the family members present during the last moments to wail (*kok*). Mourners don simple garb appropriate for the somber occasion. The men wear a sleeveless coat; women shed all their jewelry and accessories and refrain from combing their hair. The corpse is laid with its hands and feet bound tightly together. One of the relatives takes a coat of the deceased to the roof of the house and calls out his or her name three times. Then the coat is taken back into the house and used as a cover for the corpse. This ritual is called *chobon*, or *kobok*.

On the day following the death, preparations for burying the corpse are made. The first of these preparations is *cup*, or bathing the corpse with perfumed water and dressing the corpse. This is followed by combing his or her hair and clipping the fingernails and toenails. Bathed and combed, the corpse, clad in *suui*, the traditional death dress (made from either hemp or silk) is laid in the coffin. Fallen hair and nail clippings are placed in five small pouches called *choballang*. Later the *choballang* are placed in the coffin along with the corpse. With a wooden spoon made from a willow tree, three spoonfuls of rice are fed to the corpse. As the first spoonful is fed, a person close to the deceased calls,

"*rilchlonsogiyo*" (meaning "one thousand bushels of rice"). At the second spoonful "*oicheonsogiyo*" is called out (meaning "two thousand bushels"); lastly, "*psamchconsogiyo*" is called out (meaning "three thousand bushels of rice"). Then metal coins are placed in the coffin. The rice and money are thought to facilitate the soul's journey to the next world.

The corpse is then wrapped in a quilted cloth (*yampo*) made of hemp and bound with ropes seven times before the coffin's lid is tightly sealed. The coffin is placed carefully in a dry and secure place within the house. A makeshift shrine is set up where photographs and written documents about the deceased are placed. It is here that the mourners receive guests. The family members of the deceased dress in the appropriate mourning attire, called *sangbok*, which vary in length according to the individual's relationship with the deceased. The mourning period can last three days or even a month. Those who carry the bier out of the house stop before the gate and lower the coffin three times as a ritual bow to signal the deceased's final departure from the household.

The transportation of the bier to the grave site is traditionally done with much fanfare. At the grave site, a shaman performs a ritual to exorcise the evil spirits from the grave. The eldest male member of the family (usually the deceased's son) sprinkles handfuls of earth over the grave; he is followed by the others present. Often a tombstone is erected at the grave site.

Upon returning home from the funeral, the family places a picture and an ancestral tablet on a wall at the front of their house for three consecutive days. After the third day mourners visit the grave with food and drink for the deceased, placing them in front of the grave, where they again make a deep bow. Another memorial service, called the *cholgokche*, is performed shortly after the second visit to the grave. On this day family members put away all the funeral paraphernalia, and mourning symbolically comes to an end.

Further Reading

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~ Korea, South ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Southern half of the Korean Peninsula in Eastern Asia, bordered by the Sea of Japan and the Yellow Sea
Size	38,023 sq. mi.
Capital City	Seoul
Flag Description	South Korea's flag is white with a red (top) and blue yin-yang symbol in the center; there is a different black trigram from the ancient I Ching (Book of Changes) in each corner of the white field.
Independence	August 15, 1945 (from Japan)
Population	48,422,644 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Korean
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Korean
Major Language(s)	Korean; English
Major Religion(s)	No affiliation (46%); Christian (26%); Buddhist (26%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Independence Movement Day, March 1; Arbor Day, April 5; Children's Day, May 5; Constitution Day, July 17; Liberation Day, August 15; National Foundation Day, October 3

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

It is believed that many Asian tribes inhabited Korea as early as 30,000 B.C.E. These tribes joined together to form a kingdom called Goguryeo in the first century C.E. Over the next few centuries three kingdoms dominated the landscape of Korea: Goguryeo in the north, Baekje in the southwest, and Silla in the southeast. Culture, art, and architecture flourished and prospered during this period. By 700, the Silla Kingdom was at the peak of its culture, and many palaces and pagodas were built there.

In the 13th century, the Mongols arrived from China. In an effort to conquer Korea, they waged a 30-year war and destroyed the ruling Goryeo Dynasty. However in the 1340s the Mongol Empire declined rapidly due to internal struggles, and the Goryeo Dynasty regained control. Then the Choson Dynasty, the last imperial dynasty of Korea, took over the

region in 1392 after a coup d'état that overthrew the last ruler of the Goryeo Dynasty King Kongmin (r. 1351–74). In 1592 Japan made an attempt to invade Korea but was ousted by the Koreans with the help of the Chinese. Subsequently the Manchu Dynasty of China stepped in and ruled the region for the next few centuries.

In 1904 the Japanese attacked Korea. They declared it a virtual protectorate in 1905 and finally annexed the country formally in 1910. Japan ruled Korea until World War II. After World War II in 1948, two separate states were formed: the Republic of Korea in the south, which was occupied by the United States, and the Democratic People's Republic in the north, which was taken over by the Soviet Union. In 1950 North Korea initiated a war against South Korea that came to be known as the Korean War. It lasted until 1953. By the end of the war more than two million people had been killed, and the countries were formally divided. Major political upheavals followed. Finally in 1961, Maj. Gen. Park Chung Hee (1917–79) emerged as South Korea's leader after several military coups.

Fun Fact

In the 10th century the new kingdom of Goryeo succeeded Silla.

Goryeo (a shortened form of *Goguryeo*) was translated into Italian as *Cauli*, the name Marco Polo used to refer to the country in his *Travels*. *Cauli* may have come from the Mandarin Chinese name *Gaoli*; from *Cauli* the English name *Corea* and the now more commonly used spelling, *Korea*, were derived.

Fun Fact

The largest single church in the world, Yoido Full Gospel Church (a Protestant sect), is found in Seoul.

South Korea achieved rapid economic growth over the next few decades under Park Chung Hee's authoritarian rule. After his assassination in 1979 there were widespread protests and strife, culminating in a declaration of martial law in 1980. This sparked a series of protests, and the next 15 years were a period of internal strife and political tensions. Eventually when the country was on the brink of civil war, elections were held in 1988, and a military figure Roh Tae Woo (b. 1932), was elected president. South Korea reestablished its relations with China and the

Soviet Union. In 1992

Kim Young Sam (b. 1927) was elected to the presidency, and this triggered an era of corruption during which the economy suffered. In 1998 Kim Dae Jung (b. 1925) became the president of South Korea.

The economic crisis in the Asian markets in 1998 affected the South Korean economy too, but the economy started reviving in 1999. Meanwhile the tensions between North and South Korea had been increasing and in June 2000 President Kim Dae Jung initiated a move to meet with the president of North Korea seeking some way of achieving peace and reconciliation between the two countries. President Kim Dae Jung was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

South Korea is bordered by North Korea to the north, the Yellow Sea to the west, and the Sea of Japan to the east. The Korea Strait and the South Sea lie to the south of the region. South Korea is a largely mountainous area, with mountains and uplands constituting almost 70 percent of the total land area. The tallest mountain is Mount Halla (3,445 feet), an extinct volcano. The principal rivers are the Nakdong and the Han.

The winters in South Korea are long, cold, and dry, while summers are short, hot, and humid, with late monsoon rains brought in by typhoons. In Seoul the average temperature in January ranges from 19° to 34°F, while the average temperature in July ranges from 72° to 84°F. The wettest season is between June and September, and the southern coast of the country is prone to typhoons consisting of strong winds and heavy rain.

The series of wars that have plagued South Korea over the centuries have wreaked havoc on its environment. The Japanese deforested South Korea completely in order to support their military costs. South Korea has now recovered a lot of its green due to a serious reforestation campaign. The northern part of the country has an alpine environment with beech, fir, and pine trees being very common. This region is also home to South Korea's native wildlife like the black bear and deer. Along the southern coast of the country the vegetation is tropical, and this is where South Korea grows its ginseng, an herb used extensively for medicinal purposes.

South Korea boasts 20 national parks, the most popular ones being Soraksan, Hallasan, and Chirisan parks.

❁ ECONOMY

Since South Korea is a very mountainous region, only 20 percent of the land is arable, and the agricultural sector employs approximately 12 percent of the total population. A large majority of the workforce is employed in the services sector. The main industries are electronics, automobile production, chemicals, shipbuilding, steel, textiles, clothing, and footwear.

South Korea trades mainly with the United States and Japan. It primarily exports textiles, clothing, electronic and electrical equipment, footwear, machinery, steel, ships, automobiles and automotive parts, rubber tires and tubes, plywood, and fishery products, while the main imports are machinery, petroleum and petroleum products, grains, transport equipment, raw materials, chemicals, raw cotton, and cereals.

A seaweed product called agar is one of the country's chief export items. It is a polymer obtained from the cell walls of some species of red algae or seaweeds. It is mainly used for microbiological purposes and also in jellies, ice creams, soups, and as a clarifying agent in brewing.

❁ LIFESTYLE AND CULTURE

Korea has always been influenced by Chinese culture, and the Koreans have adopted many forms of Chinese art. Painting and sculpture are two well-developed forms of art in South Korea. The traditional music of South Korea resembles that of China and Japan, and the two main forms of music are *chongak* (entirely musical) and *minsogak* (the traditional folk music of South Korea). Drum dances are also very popular. *Mugo* is a lively court dance in which the participants wear drums around their necks while they dance.

In South Korea, the family is the most important part of life. The father is the head of the family, and he makes all the decisions. His prime responsibility is to provide food, clothing, and shelter. The home is regarded as a sacred space. When entering

someone's house guests are expected to remove their shoes, and a place for the shoes is usually found near the entrance of the house.

The number four is considered unlucky in South Korea. Also writing someone's name in red ink is akin to saying that the person will die soon or has died. Exchanging gifts is very popular in South Korea, but people usually do not open the gifts in public.

❁ CUISINE

South Koreans have a simple cuisine and tastes. Their meals are usually well balanced and low in calories. Rice is the staple food and is cooked in a variety of ways. It is teamed with vegetables, which are either boiled or stir fried. No meal in South Korea is complete without *kimchi*. It is prepared by preserving an assortment of vegetables like cabbage, radish, or cucumber in a mixture of salt, chili peppers, and other ingredients.

Grilled fish or meats are also very popular. *Pulgogi*, or Korean barbecues, are thin slices of beef marinated in soy sauce, sesame oil, and other spices. South Korea's passion for canine cuisine has earned it a lot of flak from animal-lovers. However South Korean dog meat eaters feel that canine cuisine is a national custom, and the more painful the death of the dog, the tastier its meat is. Many Koreans feel eating dog meat also leads to virility and stamina. The practice actually originated due to a scarcity of food during its days as a colony under first China and then Japan.

Most dishes are served at room temperature, while some are boiling hot. The diners sit and eat at a low table, and all the dishes, except hot soups, are served together. Chopsticks and spoons are used for eating. South Korean chopsticks are made of metal instead of wood.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 is the first day of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar and is widely celebrated as New Year's Day. Celebrations take place all over the world, with revelries that often begin the evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve). On New Year's Eve in South Korea, elaborate celebrations are held in the capital of Seoul, and everyone sings and dances all night. At the stroke of midnight, Seoul's night skies come alive with a spectacular display of fireworks as people wish each other well on this joyous occasion.

New Year's Day is also known as Sinjeong, and January 1 and January 2 are public holidays in South Korea.

❁ INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 1

On March 1, 1919, the Korean people initiated action to achieve independence from Japan. Japan had invaded Korea in 1910 and established its dominance in the region. Koreans were deprived of their basic rights and were brutally oppressed by the occupying forces. There was growing resentment against the Japanese forces and people began taking to the streets, demanding their freedom. On March 1, 1919, more than two million Koreans participated in a peaceful demonstration against Japan in Seoul. During this rally the Declaration of Independence was read at Pagoda Park in Seoul. In retaliation, the Japanese forces killed 23,000 Korean protestors and arrested thousands more for participating in the rally.

This historic day is observed mournfully in South Korea as *Samiljeol* (which means "three-one," the first day of the third month).

❁ ARBOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 5

This is a day dedicated to conserving and preserving the environment. During the Japanese occupation of South Korea, trees were cut indiscriminately and forests were devastated. Thus, after independence, the South Korean government launched a massive reforestation program according to which every South Korean must plant a tree on April 5.

The observance of Arbor Day, also called the Day of Trees, originated in the United States. On this day, people from all walks of life—teachers, students, workers, businessmen, and even political leaders—plant a tree and contribute toward achieving the dream of a greener South Korea.

❁ CHILDREN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 5

South Korea celebrates Children's Day on May 5 every year. This holiday was instituted by children's book author Pang Chong-hwan in 1923 to instill a sense of national pride and independence among Korean children. The objective of the celebration is to emphasize a child's need for love, care, and understanding as well as to honor those adults who have

Fun Fact

Although *kimchi* is probably one of South Korea's best-known dishes, chili peppers were not introduced in Korea until the 17th century, and it may have been as long as 200 years before they were used to make *kimchi*.

Tae Kwon Do

The national sport of South Korea, and the best-known of its martial arts, is tae kwon do, recently added as a competitive sport in the Olympic Games. Tae kwon do combines combat techniques, athleticism, exercise, entertainment, and philosophy. In general, grappling and close contact do not figure in tae kwon do, in which the emphasis is on kicks including jump kicks, spinning kicks, shuffle/skip kicks, drop kicks, and various combinations of these. *Tae* means “to kick or destroy with the foot,” *kwon* means “to punch with the fist,” and *do* means “way” or “art,” so the name can be loosely translated as “the art of kicking and punching” or “the way of the foot and the fist.” A variety of tae kwon do styles exists, but all have in common an emphasis on disabling one’s opponent using high, far-reaching kicks executed from a mobile position.

helped make lives better for children in South Korea.

Children’s Day is celebrated with great joy and enthusiasm throughout South Korea. Some of the major highlights of the celebrations include a demonstration of ancient Korean martial arts (Tae-Kwon-do), parades, and free admission for children to movie theaters, visits to zoos, museums, and exhibits. Children receive gifts from their parents on this day, as well as from the stores they visit.

CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 17

On July 17, 1948, the independent Republic of Korea adopted its first constitution.

LIBERATION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 15

This day commemorates the liberation of Korea from the occupying Japanese forces on August 15, 1945, as well as the inauguration of the Republic of South Korea on August 15, 1948. Japanese forces annexed Korea in 1910; since that time, Korea had been under Japanese domination. Koreans were treated brutally by the Japanese armed forces; dissent was ruthlessly silenced. Koreans remained unafraid and continued to oppose Japan’s occupation. In 1945, after the unconditional surrender of the Japanese forces in World War II, Korea was declared independent. However, the ideological differences between the communist north and the democratic south resulted in the division of Korea into North and South Korea in 1948.

On this day, South Koreans pay homage to those freedom fighters who were killed by the Japanese. It is a patriotic day filled with celebrations in the capital of Seoul. Carrying South Korean flags, people attend Liberation Day celebrations that are presided over by the president of the country. The main highlights of the festivities include a flag-raising ceremony, tributes to the fallen war heroes, and cultural events.

Since 2000, civic groups in North and South Korea have also been celebrating the holiday jointly. Pro-unification activists cross the border to take part in celebrations that include tours to historic sites, cultural events, and seminars addressing the issue of unification.

NATIONAL FOUNDATION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 3

This day commemorates the founding of Korea in 2333 B.C.E. South Koreans believe that they are of heavenly origin and that they are descended from a legendary man-god named Tan-gun. On this day, a wide variety of cultural activities are planned throughout the country. At Mount Mani on the Kanghwa islands in South Korea, religious ceremonies are held at the Altar of Tan-gun, and people bring floral tributes to this mythical first Korean.

Religious Holidays

SEOLLAL/SEOTDAL GEUMEUM

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First of the first month of the Korean lunar calendar (February of the Gregorian calendar) and 31st of the 12th month of the lunar calendar

Seollal, Lunar New Year’s Day, is the first day of the first month of the lunar calendar, the day of the second new Moon after the Winter Solstice, usually in early February of the Gregorian (Western) calendar. Seotdal Geumeum, New Year’s Eve, is celebrated on the 31st day of the 12th lunar month. South Koreans stay up all night and leave all their doors open so their ancestral spirits can come in. On New Year’s Eve, they eat mixed rice with vegetables (*bibimbap*), bean powder rice cakes (*injeolmi*), and traditional biscuits (*hangwa*).

South Koreans celebrate with family members since this day is dedicated to honoring ancestral spirits and strengthening family ties. To ward off evil spirits, straw shovels or rakes are placed at the doors of houses on the eve of Seollal. The next day, Koreans adorn themselves in their traditional dress—*hanbok*—and perform *charye*, the practice of waking

early and setting a table to honor the past four generations of ancestors.

Ceremonial food is prepared and placed on the *charye sang*, or ceremonial table, in a particular order. Then, incense sticks are lit and family members take turns bowing before their ancestors. The eldest member of the family bows twice in front of the ancestors and then, after making a shallow bow, offers drink and food to the ancestral spirits. The rest of the family follows suit in order of seniority. Then the living members turn away from the offerings to allow the ancestral spirits to enjoy their food. After some time, the table is cleared.

The living members of the family show their respect toward their elders by performing *sebae* (a formal bow of respect) before all the elders of the family and wishing them *bok*, or good fortune, in the coming year. In return, the elders give money, gifts, and advice to the younger generation.

A traditional meal of *ttok-guk* (rice cake soup with thick beef broth) is served to the family members. South Koreans believe that in order to grow a year older one must consume *ttok-guk* on New Year's Day. Other popular foods eaten on the lunar new year are *chapchae* (noodles with meat and vegetables), *yakshik* (sticky sweet rice), *pindaettok* (bean pancakes), *shike* (rice punch), and *sujonggwa* (cinnamon-flavored persimmon punch). The new year period ends with the Lantern Festival, the 15th day of the first month.

❁ VESAK

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: First full Moon day in May, except in a leap year when the festival is held in June

This day is the holiest day for all Buddhists. It marks Buddha's birthday, his day of enlightenment (nirvana), and also the day of his death. In South Korea, Buddhism is the dominant religion and this day is celebrated with great joy and devotion. People visit Buddhist temples to offer prayers.

The occasion is made memorable by music and chanting by devotees, which is inspired by Buddha's teachings and goes on throughout the day. In the evening, a lantern parade takes place all across South Korea. In this parade, people hold lanterns and walk through the streets in a peaceful manner. Also, the streets in Seoul are decorated with beautifully designed lotus-shaped lanterns.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM; VESAK

❁ CHUSOK

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: Fifteenth day of the eighth month of the Korean lunar calendar (September of the Gregorian calendar)

Chusok, or the Harvest Full Moon Festival, is the second largest festival in South Korea. Chusok is also known as Han gah wee, which means "the great

day that falls in the middle of the eighth month of the lunar year." On Chusok, a ceremony dedicated to ancestors called Charye is performed. This ritual involves preparing food from the new harvest and offering it to the ancestral spirits. After it is completed, Koreans visit the graves of their ancestors.

A traditional meal is also prepared on this day. One of the main dishes is *shongpyun*, crescent-shaped rice cakes stuffed with beans, chestnut paste, and sesame seeds. Other specialties are freshly picked fruit, *toran-tang* (taro soup), and *song-i* (mushrooms).

A number of cultural activities take place on Chusok. One of these is *Kanggangsouwollae* (an ancient circle dance performed by 10 or 20 women singing traditional folk songs). Another is *talchum* (dancers wearing masks perform to traditional folk songs).

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM; HARVEST FESTIVALS

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world because it celebrates the birth of Jesus. On Christmas Eve, Christmas trees are neatly decorated with stars, lights, and other beautiful adornments



South Korean children in traditional holiday dress jump rope, which is a traditional game played during Korea's Chusok Full Moon Harvest Festival at the Kyongbok Palace in Seoul. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon)

Shamanism in Korea

Because so little land in Korea is arable, Korean shamanism, with its close connections to the seasonal cycle and farming activities, is no longer as widely practiced as it once was. Nevertheless, a number of shamanistic practices continue. The purpose of shamanism is to resolve human problems by mediating between humans and spirits. In Korea a shaman is known as a *mudang*, and women typically take on the intermediary role of shaman, performing a *gut* to seek the spirits' help.

A *gut* is a ritual in which a shaman asks the spirits to intervene in the situation for which someone has come seeking help. Wearing a colorful costume, the shaman sings and dances and offers a sacrifice to the spirits. During her performance of a *gut* the shaman will change her costume several times. There are large *guts* in which several shamans participate, usually on behalf of an entire village, and smaller regional *guts*, performed to ask for an abundant harvest (for farmers) or catch (for fishermen), initiation rites for shamans, and rituals performed to ease the soul's journey to the land of the dead.

and gifts are placed beneath the trees. South Korean Roman Catholics attend Midnight Mass in local churches and celebrate Jesus' birth by singing carols and devotional hymns.

On Christmas day, South Koreans throw special dinner parties and invite friends and family members to celebrate the spirit of Christmas and exchange gifts and greetings. They also stage plays based on the life and teachings of Jesus in various parts of the country.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Fun Fact

Korean Shamanism has about a million adherents in China.

Regional Holidays

❁ MUJU FIREFLY FESTIVAL

Observed in: Muju
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June

The Muju Firefly Festival is an annual event that takes place in the town of Muju in the month of June. Muju is a breeding ground of fireflies (insects that glow at night) and the local people have great respect for these insects. During this festival, bright lights are banned in the town of Muju in order to create an opportunity for fireflies to light up the region.

In order to catch the fireflies in action, platforms are created near the habitats of these incandescent insects to allow people to get a better view. Other important events of the festival include parades organized by the people of Muju and a special prayer session conducted in honor of the fireflies. Educational programs and awareness campaigns are also held to inform and educate people about the importance of fireflies and the role they can play in scientific research.

Fun Fact

A large number of fireflies are kept captive in huge tents so that children can complete their homework. Then the fireflies are released back into the wild.

❁ PUSAN CHAGALCHI FESTIVAL

Observed in: Pusan
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October

The Pusan Chagalchi Festival is an annual event that takes place during the month of October at the Chagalchi Fish Market in Pusan, South Korea. The Chagalchi market is the largest market in South Korea. After the Korean War, it came to be used exclusively for selling fish. Every year special celebrations are organized in the market in honor of the fishing community of the region. Some of the major highlights of the celebrations include: a Chagalchi cooking contest in which the wives of the fishermen participate, preparing special fish delicacies; annual parades in which people of the fishing community actively participate; and offerings to the sea goddess, Yeongdeungsin, who protects fishermen and provides abundant catches. Ceremonial rituals are performed to ensure the well-being of the fishermen as well as to pray for a good fishing season in the forthcoming year.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

Special celebrations, known as *paegil*, take place on the 100th day after the birth of a child. Friends and family members are invited for a lavish meal. Traditionally, the first offering of soup and rice is made to the grandmother of the child. Also, to share the joy in the birth of the child, plates of rice cakes are sent to neighbors and friends who return the plates with money, rice (wishing the child a prosperous life), or a long thread (wishing the child a long and healthy life).

❁ MARRIAGE

Although young couples are allowed to date in South Korea, parental consent is required. Often,

young men date women who have been chosen by their parents. The services of matchmakers are also crucial; they bring proposals to prospective brides for a negotiated fee.

In an earlier era, the groom would ride on his horse to the bride's house and present her with a pair of geese. Geese symbolize fidelity since they are known to mate for life. After the wedding, he would bring the bride to his parental house in a palanquin (a kind of covered litter).

In a traditional South Korean wedding, the bridal dress consists of *chogori* (a short jacket with long sleeves) with two long ribbons that are neatly tied, a *chima* (a high-waisted, full-length, wrap-around skirt), boat-shaped silk shoes, and white socks. The groom wears a *chigori* (jacket), *paji* (trousers tied with straps at the ankles), and a *turumagi* (overcoat). As in courtship, it is traditional to include a pair of geese or ducks in the wedding ceremony as a symbol of fidelity.

After exchanging wedding vows, the bride is formally introduced to her in-laws by the groom. His father might throw red dates on the bride to wish her good luck and fertility. A lavish reception is thrown in honor of the bride and groom, and the marriage is celebrated with singing, dancing, and dining.

❁ DEATH

It is traditional for Koreans to die at home rather than in a hospital. Those who die in a hospital cannot be returned home since it is considered bad luck to bring a dead body into the house. However, the

bodies of those who die in their homes are kept inside the house so that others can pay their final respects. Moaning and wailing loudly is considered an accepted way of expressing grief and sorrow. It is imperative for the eldest son to sit beside the body of the deceased and express his grief outwardly for everyone to see. He must hold a cane tightly in his hand to demonstrate his need for emotional support after the loss of a loved one.

Further Reading

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Fun Fact

Medical researchers are using the molecule that lights up fireflies, luciferase, to illumine the reactions of cells to treatments for such ills as cancer, HIV, and other diseases of cell deaths.

~ Kuwait ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Middle East, bordering the Persian Gulf, situated between Iraq and Saudi Arabia
Size	17,820 sq. mi.
Capital City	Kuwait City
Flag Description	Black trapezoid based on the hoist side; design, which dates to 1961, based on the Arab revolt flag of World War I
Independence	June 19, 1961 (from United Kingdom)
Population	2,257,549 (includes 1,291,354 non-nationals <i>vide</i> July 2004 est.)
Government	Nominal constitutional monarchy
Nationality	Kuwaiti
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Kuwaiti (45%); other Arab (35%)
Major Language(s)	Arabic (official); English is commonly spoken
Major Religion(s)	Muslim 85% (Sunni 70%, Shia 30%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; National Day, February 25; Liberation Day, February 26

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Prior to the 18th century the region of present-day Kuwait was scantily inhabited by nomadic Bedouin tribes. At that time the Arabs founded a town called "Kuwait." The current ruling dynasty was founded by Sabah abu Abdullah (1756–72), who established a sheikhdom. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the sheikhdom, nominally a province of the erstwhile Ottoman Empire, was frequently threatened by the Wahhabis. In 1897 Kuwait became a British protectorate. Finally in June, 1961, the British ended their protectorate, and Kuwait became an independent sheikhdom. Nevertheless in July 1961, the British stepped in to help with military power at the request of the sheikh, when Iraq claimed sovereignty over Kuwait. Later the British forces were replaced by detachments from the Arab League, of which Kuwait is a member. In October 1963, Iraq officially recognized the nation of Kuwait.

In 1961 Kuwait also became a founding member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The country's oil revenues have been used to aid other Arab

countries. Kuwait became a supporter of Palestinian causes. In 1981 Kuwait became a founding member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

Kuwait backed Iraq during the eight year-long Iran-Iraq War, and because of this the country's oil industry suffered. In 1982 a Kuwaiti oil refinery and tankers in the Persian Gulf were attacked by Iran. There was an assassination attempt on Sheikh al Sabah in May 1985. In panic Kuwait sought U.S. protection for its oil tankers, since U.S. forces were patrolling the waters of the gulf between 1987 and 1988.

In 1989 Iraqi President Saddam Hussein accused Kuwait of flooding the international oil market and causing a cut in prices. On this pretext Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990, and Saddam declared Kuwait annexed to Iraq. Native Kuwaitis, including the royal family, fled. The U. S.-led Western and Arab coalition forces expelled Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Unfortunately Iraqi forces devastated the country and set fire to Kuwaiti oil wells before retreating. Over 80 percent of the wells were destroyed or damaged, resulting in enormous environmental hazards. The sheikh returned to Kuwait from Saudi Arabia in March 1991.

In the aftermath of the war Kuwait concentrated on revamping and reconstructing its oil industry and the economy. Parliamentary elections in 1992 resulted in the victory of

opposition candidates; despite promises of democratic reform, the al Sabah family continued to dominate the government. In October 1994, Iraq gathered elite troops along its border with Kuwait but removed them when Kuwait and the United States moved forces into the area. Fresh elections held in July 1999 witnessed the victory of Islamist and liberal candidates. In the July 2003, parliamentary elections Islamists won 42 percent of the seats, while liberals retained only a handful; government supporters won 28 percent of the seats. Kuwait took an important step toward greater democracy in 2005, when it extended the right to vote to women.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Roughly triangular in shape, Kuwait borders the Persian Gulf to the east. Its territory includes nine islands located in the gulf. To the south and west Kuwait shares a border with Saudi Arabia that is about 155 miles long. The third side of the triangle is 149 miles of controversial border to the north and west that Kuwait shares with Iraq.

Kuwait's most conspicuous geographic feature is Kuwait Bay, which indents the shoreline for about 25 miles, providing natural protection for the port of Kuwait.

Kuwait has a hot, dry desert climate. Rainfall varies from three to six inches or more in a year across the country. In summer, average daily high temperatures range from 107.6°F to 114.8°F. The summers are long and cruel, with frequent dust storms.

In the months of June and July northwesterly winds spray the cities with sand. In late summer, which is more humid, there are occasional thunderstorms. By November the cold winter weather sets in, with temperatures dropping to as low as 37°F at night, while the daytime temperature remains in the upper 80° range.

❁ ECONOMY

Kuwait is a virtual desert with a few fertile patches on the coast bordering the Persian Gulf. Agriculture is almost nonexistent. Prior to 1946 Kuwait's traditional exports were pearls and hides. However modern-day Kuwait can boast of possessing the third largest oil reserves in the world (after Saudi Arabia and Iraq). The petroleum industry accounts for more than 90 percent of Kuwait's export revenues. The country's major trading partners are the United States, Japan, the European Union (EU), and Singapore. Food, construction materials, vehicles, and clothing are its major imports.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

In the Arabic language the word *islam* denotes submission. The word *muslim* signifies one who bows to God's will. Though the Islamic code of conduct that governs Kuwaiti lifestyle is not as stringent as Saudi

Arabia's, it is not liberal either. The bulk of Kuwaitis are Sunni Muslims, but there is also a strong Shiite minority. The official language of Kuwait is Arabic, but English is widely spoken and understood.

The original inhabitants of Kuwait were the Bedouins—the archetypal Arabs who herd camels and travel across the desert in search of food. While their numbers have greatly dwindled, they have left a deep impact on the life and culture of the Kuwaitis. This is reflected in the cuisine as well as handicrafts and various types of garments made from sheep's wool, hand dyed, and then skillfully woven on Bedouin looms called *al-sadu*.

❁ CUISINE

In Kuwait one may find many dishes common throughout the Middle East. Best known among them is humus, cooked chickpeas ground into a paste and mixed with garlic and lemon. *Fuul*, a paste made from fava beans, garlic, and lemon, is usually served swimming in oil. Felafel, deep-fried balls of chickpea paste with spices, served on a piece of *kbobz* (Arabic flat bread) with pickled vegetables or tomato, is also popular. Since bread is the pivotal point of all Arabic meals and is eaten with almost everything, it is familiarly called *aish*, which means “life” in Arabic. Other commonplace dishes are chicken, kebabs, and meat or vegetable stews.

In the *tabeehb* (Bedouin) style of cooking, the whole meal is cooked in a single large pot over charcoal. Meat or fish, vegetables, and spices are first deep fried in oils in open pots. Rice or wheat and water are then added, and the pot is covered and left to simmer for some time. This method is still used in many Kuwaiti homes to make meat porridges, as well as prawn and vegetable dishes.

The second method known as *marag* is more complicated. Here too, the meal is cooked in a large pot, but the ingredients are first fried or boiled separately, before being combined and steamed together. Various kinds of fish and meat *marags* are very popular both in homes and public eateries. An outstanding feature of Kuwait is the use of *babarat*, a permutation and combination of cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, coriander, cumin, ginger, nutmeg, black pepper, and paprika.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 1

Although Kuwait is an Islamic country, New Year's day is celebrated here based on the secular Gregorian calendar. This may be attributed to the fact that Kuwait was a part of the British Empire, and some vestiges of British customs and practices have been



Kuwaitis wave swords while performing the Alarda War Dance on Kuwaiti National Day on February 25. The day marks Kuwait's independence from Britain. February 26 is Liberation Day, which marks the anniversary of the day that Iraq was driven out of Kuwait in the Gulf War. (AP Photo/John Moore)

integrated into the local culture. Kuwaitis spend the day enjoying dance and music performances, as well as gathering with friends and family to feast and party. New Year's is a public holiday in Kuwait with schools, government offices, and many businesses closed.

❁ NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: February 25

This day commemorates the emergence of Kuwait as an independent nation in 1961. In the decades since, the day has come to be associated with national and civic celebrations, including public meetings, get-togethers, displays of fireworks, and a pervasive spirit of fellowship. Public buildings are brilliantly illuminated for the occasion. Kuwaiti's young and old wear their national costumes to participate in the festivities. This is a public holiday in Kuwait.

❁ LIBERATION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: February 26

This day marks the liberation of Kuwait on February 26, 1991, by a United States-led multi-national force, ending seven months of Iraqi occupation. Since then this occasion is observed every year with public gatherings and get-togethers. This day has a poignant touch to it as the Kuwaitis remember and honor the loyal citizens who lost their lives fighting Iraqi occupation. This is a public holiday in Kuwait.

Religious Holidays

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

On this day Muslims remember Ibrahim's (Abraham's) unflinching faith in God evidenced by his willingness to sacrifice his young son because the Almighty commanded him to do so. Sacred texts explain that Abraham was spared the sacrifice of his son and a ram was offered in his place. In Kuwait on this day, also known as Eid-al-Zuha, Bakr-Eid, it is mandatory for each family that can afford it to sacrifice a sheep, goat, ram, or cattle in the name of God; this meat is then shared with friends, family, and distributed among the poor. Prior to this festival, the devout Muslims may, if they so desire, undertake a hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca—the bastion of Islamic faith.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; HAJJ; ISLAM

❁ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

The Islamic calendar is based on the revolutions of the Moon. Thus the year is only 354 days long. Relative to the Western calendar, it loses 11 days every year. The Islamic New Year is celebrated on the first day of Muharram, the first Islamic month.

Unlike New Year celebrations associated with other calendars, the beginning of the Islamic New Year is somber. In Kuwait Muslims gather in mosques for special prayers and readings. A major part of the holiday is devoted to the recounting of the story of the Hegira—Muhammad’s flight from Medina to Mecca. Muslims also reflect on the passage of time and their own mortality on New Year’s Day.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

❁ MOULOU

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic Calendar

This day celebrates the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad in 570 C.E. It is often called Mawlid an-Nabi and is celebrated on the 12th day of Rabbi al-awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar. On this day Muslims focus on the life and teachings of Muhammad. They sing songs and utter special prayers. They also recollect their prophet’s qualities of mercy and forgiveness and often give alms to the poor.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOU

❁ ASCENSION OF THE PROPHET

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twenty-seventh of Rajab, the seventh month of the Islamic calendar

This is a very special night for the followers of Islam. The official name of the holiday is Laylat Al-Isra wa Al-Miraj, which means “the night journey and ascension.” The holiday reflects the Muslim belief that the Prophet Muhammad went from Mecca to Jerusalem, ascended into the seven heavens, and returned, all in the course of a single night. During his sojourn in the seven heavens, Muhammad was commanded to establish the five daily prayers (*namaaz*). He is also believed to have met luminaries such as Abraham, Moses, Aaron, Adam, Archangel Gabriel, and Jesus. On this day devout Muslims in Kuwait gather in mosques or at one another’s homes and listen to the story of Muhammad’s journey. They share food and sweets to celebrate the event.

See also Volume III: ISLAM

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

This Muslim holiday marks the celebration at the end of the month-long, dawn-to-dusk fasting during the month of Ramadan. Ramadan is considered the holiest month of the Islamic calendar because it was during this month that the Prophet Muhammad observed austerity and fasted for 40 days, after which

the Koran was revealed to him. Kuwaitis start the day by putting on new clothes and participating in morning prayer at mosques. This is followed by social visits, the exchange of greetings and gifts, and the enjoyment of delicacies and sweets, specially prepared on this occasion.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

Regional Holidays

❁ HALA FEBRUARY

Observed in: Kuwait

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February

This event takes place in Kuwait during the spring season. It is the time of year when the scorching desert sands are transformed into a verdant carpet of brilliantly colored flora. The arrival of migratory birds and seasonal animals during this time adds further color to the scene. The springtime is the tourist season in Kuwait, when visitors flock here to take part in a cultural and musical extravaganza. The highlights of this event include shopping, carnivals, nature walks, raffles, and contests.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

Since earliest times, Muslims have regarded children as tokens of Allah’s infinite compassion and benevolence. Kuwaitis share in this tradition. As soon as is possible after the birth, a Kuwaiti baby is thoroughly washed in order to remove all biological impurities. According to Islamic tenets the first sound that a baby ought to hear is the sacred name of Allah. The name has to be customarily uttered by its father (or a male relative). Consequently the male relative whispers the call to prayer or *adban* first into the child’s right ear and then into its left. The underlying idea is to make the child aware of Allah’s omnipresence and his infinite power over the lives of mortals.

When the child is between the ages of three days and seven days, its head is shaved to remove the peri-natal impurities. This ceremony is known as the *aqiqab*, and it symbolizes purging of misfortunes, evil, and dross, so that the child can embark on a good and trouble-free life.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Circumcision is not mentioned in the Koran, but Muslims everywhere regard it as a *sine qua non*. Hadith records it as a practice enjoined by all the prophets.

Muslim boys generally undergo circumcision between the ages of 10 and 12, although it has been known to take place as early as the seventh day after birth. When done later, it assumes the role of a puberty rite, separating the boy from childhood and introducing him to a new status. In many Muslim families in Kuwait, there is a good deal of festivity, music, special foods, and many guests present on this occasion.

❁ MARRIAGES

It is universally accepted that Islamic juristic schools allow a Muslim man to marry a Jewish or Christian woman; but they prohibit a Muslim woman from marrying a non-Muslim man. Moreover, Shia men are forbidden from marrying their ascendants, descendants, the ascendants or descendants of their wives, or the wives of their ascendants or descendants.

In Kuwait as in other Islamic nations, Muslim marriages are arranged by both sets of parents. However according to Islamic tenets, both the individuals (the bride and the groom) are free to refuse the spouse that has been selected for them. Prior to the actual wedding the two families involved decide on a specific amount of money or articles in kind that the groom's family must give the bride. This sum of money is in reality a security deposit for the bride in case the marriage breaks up.

After the couple has unofficially agreed to marry, they get engaged in an Islamic court under Islamic law. Both names are registered, usually by two males or by two females and a male. (The accepted formula is that two females equal one male.) Thereafter the bride and groom are allowed to interact with each other on a limited basis. However in certain extremely old-fashioned Bedouin families, the bridegroom may not see the face of his wife-to-be until after they are married.

The actual marriage is testified to and legalized in a similar manner. As in other Islamic societies weddings take place in the home of the bride. The rites are conducted by an imam or qazi or mullah, who also leads the prayers in the mosque.

The bride and the bridegroom sit in separate rooms during the wedding ceremony. Two guests—one from the bride's family and one from the groom's family—witness the bride's consent for marriage and inform the imam. The ceremony begins with the imam reciting relevant passages from the Holy Koran. The imam then speaks about the duties of marriage and asks the bridegroom if he agrees to the marriage. Once the bridegroom has agreed to the marriage, the bride, the bridegroom, and the two witnesses sign a marriage contract that confirms their agreement. This is traditionally followed by a sumptuous wedding banquet. In accordance with tradition the male and female family members often conduct

their celebrations completely separately, and rarely do the two fraternize.

The Koran says that a man may marry as many as four women but only if he can treat them all equally. If a marriage does not work out, the Koran says that couples may get divorced but only as a last resort. First the couple must try to resolve its problems. If this does not work, each spouse must choose a friend or relative for counseling. If this fails, they must wait for four months before they can end their marriage.

❁ DEATH

All the major religions of the world focus on the transitory quality of human life. Since death is unpredictable and can happen at any time, Islam exhorts devout Muslims to always be prepared for the inevitable. When an individual is dying, he or she is encouraged to recite and declare his or her faith.

Muslims are taught to treat the dead body with gentleness and respect. In Kuwait (as in all Islamic societies), it is customary for Muslims to ritually wash the dead body, perfume it, and drape it in a fresh new white cloth before burial. The dead person's face is turned toward Mecca, the arms and legs straightened out, and the mouth and eyes closed.

The friends, relatives, and acquaintances of a deceased person come together for prayers.

Then the corpse is solemnly carried to the graveyard. Religious laws forbid Muslim women from attending the burials of their loved ones. The underlying belief is that women are frail and therefore might easily break down. However, some women do flout this rule. Those attending the funeral form a double line facing each other, and the bier is passed on the shoulders along this line toward the grave. In the case of a child the bier is carried in the arms of a relative. The wrapped body is customarily laid directly at the bottom of the grave, on its right side with its face turned toward Mecca. Although graves are dug by professional gravediggers, the task of filling it with earth is carried out by the relatives (and all those present) who throw handfuls of dust into the grave as a token of solidarity and remembrance.

Guests at funerals cover their heads as a mark of respect to the deceased. The grave is sealed and then marked by a small elevation to differentiate it from the level ground nearby.

Further Reading

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~ Kyrgyzstan ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Central Asia, west of China
Size	76,641 sq. mi.
Capital City	Bishkek
Flag Description	Kyrgyzstan's flag has a red field with a yellow Sun in the center with 40 rays representing the 40 Kyrgyz tribes; on the obverse side the rays run counterclockwise, on the reverse, clockwise; in the center of the Sun is a red ring crossed by two sets of three lines, a stylized representation of the roof of the traditional Kyrgyz yurt.
Independence	August 31, 1991 (from former USSR)
Population	5,146,281 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Kyrgyzstani
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Kyrgyz (65%); Uzbek and Russian (26%)
Major Language(s)	Kyrgyz; Russian—both official
Major Religion(s)	Muslim (75%); Russian Orthodox (20%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; International Women's Day, March 8; Navruz, March 21; Labor Day, May 1; Constitution Day, May 5; Independence Day, August 31

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Human habitation in present-day Kyrgyzstan goes back hundreds of thousands of years, and archaeologists have unearthed tools and excavated caves. The Kyrgyz are thought originally to have inhabited the valley of the Yenisei River (a river originating in Siberia).

Petroglyphs (designs etched on rocks) and other traces of material culture make it possible to reconstruct the lives of the early inhabitants of Kyrgyzstan, a land which has sometimes been referred to as the "Pearl of Central Asia." The first traces of humans have been dated to the Paleolithic Ashel epoch (400,000–100,000 years ago). Artifacts and relics belonging to the Middle Paleolithic Mousterian epoch (100,000–40,000 years ago), the Upper Paleolithic (40,000–12,000 years ago), and Mesolithic (10,000–6,000 years ago) indicate fairly continuous human occupation of this Central Asian region, and Neolithic (6000–4000 B.C.E.) tools and weapons have been found

throughout the area. Some of the most significant sites include Issyk-Kul, Tien Shan, as well as the Chu, Talas, Alai, and Ketmentyobin valleys.

During the Bronze Age (between 4,000 and 3,000 years ago) herders and farming tribes populated the Kyrgyz lands, while other farming tribes lived in the valleys of southern Kyrgyzstan. The relics of this period include sepulchers, items relating to daily life, and the decorations found in them. More than 2,200 years ago the first recorded reference to the Kyrgyz groups was made by a Chinese emperor. Around 1,000 written references concerning the inhabitants of Kyrgyzstan occur in the Avesta, the sacred writings of Zoroastrianism (written in the oldest attested Old Persian, which at that time had not diverged significantly from Sanskrit, to which it is related), where the inhabitants are called Suks. Herodotus (c. 484–d. between 430–20), writing around 450 B.C.E., called them "Scythians," making it likely that these people can be identified with the nomadic Sauromatian and Sarmatian cultures of 600–200, in which women excelled at the art of war. The archaeological sites of the Suk epoch are represented by

Fun Fact

The name *Kyrgyz* means “the motherland between two valleys.”

burial mounds (kurgans) and stone inscriptions (petroglyphs). The most impressive petroglyphs, which depict animals and daily life among the Suk, have been found in the Issyk-Kul Basin, the Ketmentyobin Valley, and Saimaly-Tash Virgin Land. The kurgans contain things for everyday life, arms, harnesses, and decorations. The Suks bred cattle, worshipped fire, and revered heavenly bodies. They formed a tribal union, but it had disintegrated by the third century.

Between the third century B.C.E. and the sixth century C.E., the Usun (or Kushan), also nomadic cattle breeders, moved in from what is now Afghanistan and settled in the region; their capital was located on the southern coast of the Issyk-Kul lake. During this period trade relations between tribes developed, and a caravan trail developed across Kyrgyzstan, making commerce between the West and East possible. (In Europe this way was named the “Great Silk Road.”) Trade attracted other nomadic tribes to the region, and the resulting wars had destroyed the Usun confederation by the middle of the first century C.E.

In the fifth and sixth centuries Nestorian Christian missionaries first introduced Christianity to the peoples of Central Asia. For the next five centuries or so the Nestorian Church remained conspicuous in the region. Subsequently the role of the church declined, due to the Mongol invasion led by Genghis Khan (c. 1162–1227), though the great Mongol conqueror Hulegu (c. 1217–c. 65), a grandson of Genghis Khan, later acted favorably toward the Nestorians. Formerly known as the *Kara* (“black”) Kyrgyz to distinguish them from the Kazakhs (who

at one time also called themselves Kirghiz or Kyrgyz), the Kyrgyz migrated to Kyrgyzstan around the 17th century. The area came under the rule of the Kokand Khanate in the 19th century and was gradually annexed by Russia between 1855 and 1876.

The nomadic Kyrgyz resisted being conscripted into the czarist (imperial Russian) army in 1916 and also fought the establishment of Bolshevik (pre-Communist) control from 1917 to 1921. As a result of these wars a famine broke out in the country during 1921–22 in which more than 500,000 Kyrgyz died. The area was knitted into the Kara-Kirghiz Autonomous Region within the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic in 1924. Kyrgyzstan became an autonomous republic in 1926 and a constituent republic in 1936.

In 1990 Askar Akayev (b. 1944), president of the Republic’s Academy of Sciences and a non-Communist, was elected president by the legislature. After warding off an attempted coup in 1991 the government declared Kyrgyzstan independent of the former USSR. Later Kyrgyzstan was incorporated into the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), an association of former Soviet republics, and a new constitution was approved.

Akayev, who retained his presidential position, fostered friendly ties with China and other neighboring countries and launched an ambitious program of free-market reforms. He retained his post in the 1995 elections, which were denounced by opposition leaders. In the same year Kyrgyzstan, along with Belarus and Kazakhstan, signed a pact with Russia to ensure mutual close economic cooperation. In 1996 a referendum on amending the constitution to increase the presidency’s powers went Akayev’s way, but he still had to contend with many

The Nestorian Church

Nestorius (c. 386–c. 451) was a pupil of Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350–428; a lifelong friend of St. John Chrysostom, c. 347–407) in Antioch, Syria, and later became patriarch of Constantinople. Nestorians questioned the divinity of Christ, which made them heretics according to Roman and other Orthodox Christian sects. Nestorius argued that God could never have been a helpless child or have suffered on the Cross during Crucifixion. He preached against the use of the title “Mother of God” (Theotokos) for the Virgin Mary, calling her instead Mother of Christ (Christotokos). Nestorius’s opponents accused him of dividing Christ into two persons: God the Word and Jesus the man. Nestorius was opposed by Cyril of Alexandria (827–69) and finally condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431 C.E., which proclaimed the oneness of Christ and

affirmed that the Virgin Mary was, indeed, the Mother of God. In response to this condemnation, the Assyrian Church of the East formed, splitting from the Byzantine Church. The Assyrian Church had many zealous missionaries who traveled and preached throughout Persia and Central, and East Asia in the seventh and eighth centuries. “Nestorian” Christianity had reached China by 635. Its relics are present in Chinese cities such as Xian. About the same time Nestorian Christianity penetrated into Mongolia, eventually reaching Korea. The great 13th-century Mongol conqueror Hulegu (c. 1217–c. 65), the grandson of Genghis Khan (c. 1162–1227), had a Nestorian mother, was educated by a Nestorian Christian priest, and had a Nestorian as his principal wife. Though never a convert himself, Hulegu became a champion to Nestorian Christians while being a scourge to Middle Eastern and Central Asian Muslims.

problems. For instance in 1999 Islamic militants seized several towns near the border with Tajikistan (where a civil war had begun in 1992). In 2000 Kyrgyzstan forces fought Uzbek guerrillas based in Tajikistan that had infiltrated into the Fergana Valley. Akayev was reelected president in October 2000 in a contest marred by alleged corruption. In February 2003 a referendum approved constitutional changes and affirmed Akayev's term in office.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The climate of Kyrgyzstan is influenced chiefly by the mountains and its position almost in the middle of the Eurasian landmass. Although the mountains collect clouds and tend to block the sunlight, especially in the narrow valleys, the country is by and large sunny, receiving nearly 2,900 hours of sunlight per year in some areas. The temperatures vary greatly from place to place. In January the warmest average temperature, 25°F, occurs in the city of Osh and around Lake Ysyk Köl ("hot lake" in Kyrgyz), located in eastern Kyrgyzstan in the Alatau Mountains. At an altitude of 5,300 feet and with an area of about 2,400 square miles, it is one of the largest mountain lakes in the world. It reaches a depth of 2,303 feet, is slightly saline, and does not freeze in winter.

The coldest temperatures are in the mountain valleys, where they fall to -22°F and sometimes lower. The average temperature in July varies from 81°F in the subtropical Fergana Valley, where the record high is 111°F, to a low of 14°F on the highest mountain peaks. Annual precipitation varies from 79 inches in the mountains above the Fergana Valley to less than 4 inches per year on the west bank of Ysyk-Köl.

Kyrgyzstan is located at the junction of two major mountain systems of Central Asia (the Tien Shan and the Pamirs). The Trans-Alai Range, which is the northernmost part of the Pamirs, forms part of Kyrgyzstan's southern border with Tajikistan. The highest peak in Kyrgyzstan is Pik Pobeda (24,406 feet) which is part of the Tien Shan range. The Naryn River, Kyrgyzstan's largest, originates in the mountains of the northeast and flows westward through the middle of the country. Flowing through the Fergana Valley, it crosses into Uzbekistan, where it joins with another river to form the Syr Darya, one of Central Asia's principal rivers. The Chu River in northern Kyrgyzstan flows northward into southern Kazakhstan.

❁ ECONOMY

Kyrgyzstan is a poor, largely agricultural country. It has vast rich pastures ideally suited for rearing goats, sheep, cattle, and horses. Cotton, potatoes, sugar beets, tobacco, vegetables, fruit, and grapes are the main crops; sericulture (the rearing of silkworms for the production of raw silk) is also practiced. The Kyrgyz have traditionally been masters of wood carving, carpet weaving, and jewelry making. Kyrgyzstan's terrain has vast deposits of antimony, gold, molybdenum, tin, coal, tungsten, mercury, uranium, petroleum, and natural gas. The country's industries include food processing, sugar refining, nonferrous metallurgy, as well as the manufacture of agricultural machinery, textiles, building materials, appliances, furniture, and electric motors. Kyrgyzstan's leading exports are cotton, wool, meat, tobacco, metals (particularly gold, mercury, uranium, and steel), hydropower, and machinery; its chief imports

Manas

The central plot of the epic *Manas*, thought to be about 1,000 years old, unfolds around historic events in the history of the Kyrgyz people from ancient times into the 18th century. The epic describes the different features, ideas, customs, and traditions of the Kyrgyz during different eras, but it is also a record of every aspect of the people's daily life, their social, economic, and political situation, as well as their relations with other countries and their struggle for independence. The *Manas* has been compared to Homer's great works, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, because of its historical sweep and the grandeur of its language.

Manas, the longest epic poem in the world, was passed down orally from one generation to the next by *manaschy*, the storytellers of the Kyrgyz people. It was not written down until the 19th century, but about 60 different versions are known to exist. The

poem has three parts. At the center of the story stands *batyr-khan* Manas, the legendary leader of the Kyrgyz people who led them in their struggle against various invaders. The first part of the trilogy describes his courage and the feats he performed on behalf of the Kyrgyz. The second part, *Semetey*, narrates the life and deeds of Manas's son Semetey, while the third part revolves around the deeds of Seitek, the son of Semetey, who realizes the visions shared by his father and grandfather.

In the Talas Valley there are many relics associated with the *Manas* including what is said to be his mausoleum, which was built in the 14th century. Other relics found in the Talas Valley are linked to other events and protagonists of the epic. For example a camp once occupied by Manas's army where his son Semetey is believed to have been born, the plane tree of Kanikey, Manas's wife, and Chachikey's gorge. Chachikey was the wife of Semetey.



include grain, lumber, industrial products, ferrous metals, and fuel. The main trading partners are other former Soviet republics and China. In 1998 Kyrgyzstan became the first former Soviet republic to join the World Trade Organization (WTO).

✿ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The Kyrgyz are predominantly a Sunni Muslim, Turkic-speaking pastoral people, though the country includes a variety of minorities, including Russians,

Uzbeks, Ukrainians, and Germans. About two-thirds of the population lives in rural areas. The Kyrgyz people place great importance on education. The Kyrgyz State National University was established in 1951, and the Kyrgyzstan Academy of Sciences in 1954; more than 20 universities had been opened in the country by the 1990s. Central Asia's composite culture (including that of Kyrgyzstan) has a rich repertoire of songs, poems, and stories told by wandering minstrels, known as *akyn*. The Kyrgyz are also famous for an entire cycle of oral legends, at

500,000 lines longer than any other comparable epic poem, about a heroic figure named Manas.

Traditionally the Kyrgyz are a very hospitable people. If a Kyrgyz family invites someone for a meal, then the guest is supposed to bring a small gift such as fruit or flowers. Shoes are to be taken off before entering a house. The hosts and the guests sit around the holiday table, or *dastarkhan*, with their feet either to the side or away from the *dastarkhan*. Even if someone drops by unexpectedly, the Kyrgyz women are expected to “whip up” a tasty meal to feed everyone.

Food is eaten only with the right hand, as is the custom in countries that lack bathrooms. At the end of a meal it is customary for people to bring both hands up to their face and drag them down as if washing the face, while uttering “*omin*” (the Muslim equivalent of “amen”). In many households people freely partake of alcoholic drinks (except in certain extremely orthodox Muslim families).

✿ CUISINE

Meat (mainly mutton or horse meat) is central to Kyrgyz cooking because the nomadic way of life provided no opportunity for cultivating fruits and vegetables. The meals are served on a *dastarkhan*, a large cloth laid out on the ground around which the people sit. One of the outstanding features of Kyrgyz cuisine is that dishes should preserve their taste and appearance. For example there are hardly any dishes made with puréed, minced, or chopped meat.

Also Kyrgyz dishes tend to have a plain taste; sauces and spices are used only in small quantities. In fact sauces are intended only to bring out the taste of the dish, not to change it.

Some of the principal dishes are shashliks, or kebabs—meat cubes on skewers cooked over burning embers. The meat is usually mutton, beef, chicken, or liver. The meat is either freshly sliced or marinated overnight. Shashlik is usually served with a sprinkling of raw onion, vinegar, and *lepeshki* (round pizzalike breads made with eggs, flour, sour cream, milk, salt, almonds, and so on). *Oromo* (“roulade”) may be prepared either with meat or with vegetables. Potatoes, onions, and carrots are shredded and spread onto a mat of rolled-out pastry, which is then rolled into a roulade and steamed in a special pan called a *kazgun*. *Plov* is rice mixed with boiled or fried meat, onions, carrots, and sometimes raisins, all cooked in a semihemispherical metal vessel called a *kazan* (like a wok) over a fire. *Ashlan-foo* is a spicy dish made with cold noodles, jelly, vinegar, and eggs. *Pirojki* (pierogi, or dumpling) is flat dough filled with meat, potatoes, and cabbage, which is sold by street sellers. Tea is drunk usually without milk. Despite their Muslim heritage, most Kyrgyz drink alcohol, at least with guests. Another popular drink is *koumiss*, a mildly intoxicating drink made of fermented mares' milk. (It is available only in spring and summer, when mares are foaling.) *Bozo*, a thick, yeasty concoction made from fermented millet, is available year-round.

Public/Legal Holidays

✿ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

Though the bulk of the population in Kyrgyzstan adheres to Islam, there is no official or state religion. The Kyrgyz populace is quite secular in its outlook, and the Gregorian celebrations associated with New Year's Day on January 1 are popular in Kyrgyzstan. Orthodox Christians decorate Christmas trees in their homes, since Orthodox Christmas is just around the corner. Fireworks displays at midnight on New Year's Eve usher in the new year. People enjoy parties, feasts, and get-togethers. This is a public holiday in Kazakhstan.

✿ INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 8

This holiday honors women, celebrates their social contributions, and advocates justice and equality for women worldwide. On International Women's Day in Kyrgyzstan, the streets are decorated with flow-

Fun Fact

Dastarkhan literally means “tablecloth,” but the term can be applied more broadly to denote a cloth spread on the ground for a meal, a conventional table, or referring to the food placed on the table, a “table full of food,” or a feast.

ers. The men offer flowers and gifts to the women in their lives and take charge of running the household for this day.

❁ NAVRUZ

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 21

Navruz, also called Nowruz, Norouz, or the Persian New Year, is the most revered holiday in the greater Persian world because it begins the Persian year. It occurs on the spring equinox and celebrates the renewal of nature after the cold days of winter. Navruz was an ancient festival of Sun worship practiced by the inhabitants of Mesopotamia, who were well aware that nothing could grow on Earth without sunlight. Therefore at the beginning of spring the people paid homage to the Sun, lighting fires to banish winter and welcome the fragrant spring season.

This festival, whose name Navruz literally means “new day,” is a popular religious holiday in Kyrgyzstan. On March 21, Kyrgyz households fumigate their homes with smoke made by burning *archa* (mountain juniper) twigs, whose smoke is believed to drive away evil spirits. The main dishes prepared on this occasion are pilaf, *shurpa* (boiled mutton), and *kok-samsa* (pies filled with spring greens and the young sprouts of steppe grasses). Traditionally people attempt to load their tables (*dastarkban*) with as many dishes and sweetmeats as possible, in the hope of attracting prosperity and plenty in the coming year. The holiday is marked by national singing and storytelling contests, as well as horseback combats and competitions.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; NAVRUZ; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers’ Day, to celebrate the important role played by workers. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

This day is very important in Kyrgyzstan, once part of the former USSR, a Communist nation ruled by workers, in theory if not in practice. Labor Day is a public holiday in Kyrgyzstan, and the public takes this opportunity to honor and show their gratitude to workers. The day is marked by parades, official speeches, and labor meetings.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 5

This day commemorates the adoption of the constitution of Kyrgyzstan in 1993, an important occasion for the Kyrgyz people. It is a public holiday in Kyrgyzstan, marked by street festivals and celebrations.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 31

This day celebrates Kyrgyzstan’s achievement of independence from the former Soviet Union. This is an official holiday in Kyrgyzstan, celebrated with flag-raising ceremonies, public speeches, and parades.

Religious Holidays

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar (January of the Gregorian calendar)

The festival of Eid al-Adha, also called the Feast of Sacrifice or Kurban Ait, commemorates Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) unflinching faith in God as shown by his willingness to sacrifice his young son just because the Almighty commanded him to do so. Ibrahim’s son was spared, and a ram was provided to be sacrificed in his stead. On this day, therefore, each Muslim family in Kyrgyzstan that can afford to is expected to sacrifice a sheep, goat, ram, or cattle in



Kyrgyz National Guards march in front of the monument marking Kyrgyzstan’s post-Soviet independence at Ala Too, Bishkek’s main square. (AP Photo/Alexander Zemlianichenko)

the name of God. This meat is then shared with friends, family, and distributed among the poor. During this entire month devout Muslims may, if they are physically and financially capable of doing so, undertake the hajj or required pilgrimage to Mecca, the holy city of Muslims.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar (November–December of the Gregorian calendar)

Eid al-Fitr, also called the Feast of Fast-Breaking or Orozo-Ait, celebrates the end of the fasting month of Ramadan. Ramadan is considered the holiest month of the Islamic calendar. It was during this month that Muhammad observed austerity and fasted for 40 days, after which the Koran was revealed to him. The Muslims in Kyrgyzstan acknowledge this day by first taking part in morning prayers, generally at the local mosque. This is followed by social visits, exchanges of greetings and gifts, and enjoying delicacies prepared especially for this occasion. The Koran forbids fasting on this day.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: January 6–7

Christmas commemorates the birth of Jesus, whom Christians believe to be the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. The Russian Orthodox Church (which has a sizable following in Kyrgyzstan) celebrates Christmas on January 7. The Orthodox Church calculates Christmas using the Julian calendar and so celebrates it on January 7. On this day the Russian Orthodox Christians in Kyrgyzstan attend prayer services in local churches and exchange greetings and gifts with their family and friends. They also prepare and partake of a festive midday meal. The counterpart of Santa Claus, known as Grandfather Frost since the former USSR banned all religious observances, is believed to bring gifts for the children on Christmas.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

There are several unique traditions associated with the birth of a child in Kyrgyzstan. To introduce the child to the community, the parents provide a huge feast called Djengek Toi, held to celebrate the child's

birth, and invite neighbors, friends, and relatives to see the newborn for the first time. This tradition is known as *koroonduk*. The parents slaughter a sheep and set out great quantities of food for everyone. Immediately after children are born, they are bathed and fed; a bit of melted butter is placed in the baby's mouth. This custom is known as *oozantuu* ("feeding"). Following this the remaining melted butter is mixed with sugar and oatmeal and added to the food prepared for the feast. It is customary for the invited guests to give money to the parents for the child.

Another interesting custom is known as Tyshu Kussu, or Cutting the Binds. After a baby has taken its first steps, its feet are tied with a black-and-white string. Then a race is held among the young children who have been invited for the occasion. The child who wins the race is allowed to cut the baby's strings. Once the baby's feet have been freed, the Kyrgyzstani believe the child will live a healthy life.

Perhaps the most significant Kyrgyzstani tradition connected with birth is how the child is named. According to *sharia* (Muslim code of law), a newborn's name must be announced loudly to everyone gathered for the *toi* (feast), a ritual called *asan chakyruu*. Once a child has been named Kyrgyzstani Muslims believe that, if a child's name is changed, Allah's blessings will go to other children with the same name. Although naming a newborn by *asan chakyruu* is still thought to be the right way of doing this, more recently babies are being named in gatherings of close relatives.

❁ MARRIAGE

Men in Kyrgyzstan have been kidnapping women for a long time, with the willing assistance of their family and friends, including the women, and forcing them into marriage. The custom is called *ala kachuu*, which means "grab and run," and that is exactly what is done. The tradition has been illegal for years, first under the former Soviet Union and more recently under the 1994 Kyrgyz criminal code, but the law is rarely enforced. Such abductions are common, and more than half the married women in Kyrgyzstan were forced into marriage. While Kyrgyz men defend their actions by claiming to abduct women they love, if they cannot find a woman who returns their affection they roam the streets until they find a woman they can grab. In Kyrgyzstan the phrase that some might translate as meaning "marriage," *kelin aluu*, actually means "the marriage of the son." The woman does not figure importantly in the process.

Technically a kidnapping groom is still obligated to pay the *kalym* (bride-price) to the girl's family, usually livestock (sheep, horses, cattle), as well as other useful articles. Sometimes the bride-price can be as expensive as five horses, depending on her family's financial and social status. But the abductions are often rationalized as a way of avoiding this payment. Kyrgyz men say they snatch women because it

is easier than courtship and cheaper than paying the standard bride-price, which can be as much as \$800 cash, plus a cow. However one Kyrgyzstani man admitted to what may be closer to the truth of the matter and the most important reason for the longevity of this custom: “Men steal women to show that they are men.”

When an abducted woman arrives in her new husband's home, she is met by her future in-laws, specifically, the women, who try to calm her and start immediately trying to place a white shawl on her head. The abducted woman is taken to a room set aside in the house in which one corner has been curtained off (*koshego*), and this is where most of the struggling occurs as the man's female relatives wrestle and argue with her, still trying to get the shawl on her head. This activity may go for three or four days, but eventually 80 percent of the women finally give in, often at the urging of their own parents. Once that shawl (*jooluk*) has been successfully placed on her head, the woman's options have run out, no matter how long or how fiercely she resisted. The shawl symbolizes her submission. If all has gone well (about 20 percent of time it does not), the marriage rites are followed by the Otko Kirgizish, initiation into the family hearth. Family members invite the young couple to the hearth, and the young wife becomes a part of the family after she puts some grease into the pot.

The 20 percent who manage to escape without being forced into submission leave the house as tainted women, because they have refused the family's “generosity.”

❁ DEATH

Before a corpse can be buried, it must be ritually purified in accordance with the Islamic law of *sharia*, *sookko kiruu* (“washing the body”). The body must be washed twice. First the three closest relatives of the deceased wash the corpse. This ritual is called *mayram suuga aluu*, “the last purifying washing.” Next another seven family members wash the body again in a ritual called *suuga aluu*, “washing the body.” To protect themselves against contamination, they wear a kerchief over their mouths and wear gloves made from white cloth. While this procedure is performed, an imam makes a shroud from white cloth (*kepin*), which he stitches using white needles.

The deceased is then placed on the left side of the yurt if it is a man, and on the right side if it is a

woman. Then the relatives and friends of the deceased stay up all night discussing the individual's values and what he or she did during his or her lifetime. The next day the women sing a song of mourning (*koshok*) in which the person's virtues are celebrated. On the third day only men carry the body to the grave and bury it because women are considered too delicate to attend the actual burial. Those who performed the ritual cleansing, and other relatives are given the dead person's clothes, but they must read the Koran before they can wear them.

While the men are burying the body, the women cook a special meal, called *kara ash* (“black dinner”), for the men and other people who came to mourn with them. A horse is slaughtered for this occasion, and its meat is served. The meal is followed by readings from the Koran. Forty days after the person's death another feast is prepared, but this time a sheep is killed. The spouse of the dead person is expected to mourn during this period.

A year after death a monument can be set up for the person, and the relatives of the deceased provide a dinner every day for a week. This feeding is done to satisfy the dead person's soul. Before the guests sit down to eat, the Koran is read and the female relatives sing *koshok* again. This final mourning ritual is called *ash*.

Further Reading

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Fun Fact

A Kyrgyz saying goes, “Every good marriage begins in tears.”

 *Country Entries L–Z* 

Laos

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Southeastern Asia, northeast of Thailand, west of Vietnam
Size	91,429 sq. mi.
Capital City	Vientiane
Flag Description	The Laotian flag has three horizontal bands of red (top), blue (double width), and red with a large white disk in the center.
Independence	July 19, 1949 (from France)
Population	6,217,141 (2005 est.)
Government	One-party Communist state
Nationality	Lao, Laotian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Lao Loum (lowland; 68%); Lao Theung (upland; 22%)
Major Language(s)	Lao (official); French; English; and various ethnic languages
Major Religion(s)	Buddhist (60%); Animist and other (40%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Pathet Lao Day, January 6; International Women's Day, March 8; Boun Pimai, April 13–16; Labor Day, May 1; International Children's Day, June 1; Lao National Day, December 2

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

According to historians, the ancestors of the present-day Lao people moved into the region of modern Laos from the southern parts of China starting in the eighth century. In the 14th century the first Laotian state came into being. It became famous as the Lan Xang kingdom, which ruled the territory of Laos until it eventually split into three separate kingdoms in the early 18th century.

The three kingdoms subsequently came under the rule of Siam (modern Thailand). In 1893 they were incorporated into a French protectorate and became a part of the union of French Indochina. A strong nationalist movement developed in the region during World War II, but France reestablished control, giving the king of Luang partial autonomy in 1949, and then, under the influence of the Viet Minh rebellion in Vietnam, granted Laos full-fledged independence within the French Union in 1950.

In 1951 Prince Souphanouvong (1909–95), a son of the

vice-king of Luang Prabang, founded the Pathet Lao, the Laotian branch of a Communist independence movement that originated in North Vietnam.

Together with the Viet Minh forces, the Pathet Lao attacked central Laos, provoking a civil war. In accordance with the Geneva Agreement of 1954 and an armistice of 1955, authority over two of the northern provinces of Laos was transferred to the Pathet Lao, while the monarchy remained in control in the rest of the country. The Paris agreement of December 29, 1954, gave the kingdom full sovereignty. In 1957 Souphanouvong and his half-brother Prince Souvanna Phouma (1901–84), the royal premier, agreed to the idea of establishing a unified government. Pathet Lao officials joined the government, and its forces were integrated into the royal army. In 1959 this agreement broke down, and armed conflict began once more.

In 1960 a third party entered the struggle, when General Phoumi Nosavan (1920–85), a rightist leader who controlled the majority of the royal army, set up a pro-Western revolutionary government headed by Prince Boun Oum (1912–80) in southern Laos. General Phoumi captured Vientiane in December, driving Souvanna Phouma into exile in Cambodia.

Lan Xang

Lan Xang (or Sisattanakhanahut in the Pali language, the language of Theravada Buddhism) was a famous Lao kingdom established in 1354 by Prince Fa Ngum (1316–93). Exiled as an infant to Cambodia, the Lao prince eventually married one of the Khmer king's daughters and in 1349 set out from Angkor (modern Cambodia) at the head of a 10,000-man army. Fa Ngum organized the conquered principalities into provinces (*muang*) and reclaimed Muang Sua from his father and elder

brother. He was crowned king in 1353. Vientiane became the new capital of Lan Xang in June 1354. The name Lan Xang, which translates into “million elephants,” alluded to Fa Ngum's formidable prowess. The Lan Xang territory extended from the border of China to Sambor below the Mekong rapids at Khong Island and from the Vietnamese border to the western end of the Khorat Plateau. It was one of the largest kingdoms in Southeast Asia in its time.

However Souvanna Phouma received support from the Soviets. In 1961 a cease-fire was arranged and all the royal personalities agreed to a coalition government under the stewardship of Souvanna Phouma.

The countries of North Vietnam, the United States (in the form of CIA personnel), and China remained active in Laos even after the settlement. In fact North Vietnam maintained a supply line (known as the “Ho Chi Minh Trail”) running down the mountain valleys of eastern Laos into Cambodia and South Vietnam until a U.S.–South Vietnamese incursion into Cambodia in 1970 stopped the arrival of supplies via Cambodian seaports.

An agreement was reached in 1973 to revive the coalition government. The Communist group seized absolute power in 1975, installing Souphanouvong as president and Kayson Phomvihane (1920–92) as premier. After that the non-Communist parties and political groups started to decay; most of their leaders took asylum in other countries. The Pathet Lao succeeded in abolishing the monarchy on December 2, 1975, when the coalition government was toppled, and King Sisavang Vatthana (1907–78) abdicated.

The 1980s saw close ties with Communist governments including those of Vietnam and the Soviet Union. The economy suffered tremendously, however, and by 1989 when the USSR disintegrated, Laos began moving toward a private free-market economy. In August 1991 the Supreme People's Assembly adopted a new constitution that eliminated even the slightest reference to the concept of socialism but retained the one-party state. In addition to implementing market-oriented policies, the country passed laws governing property, inheritance, and contracts. During the 1990s Laos also began making more diplomatic overtures toward neighboring countries. In 1995 the United States announced the elimination of its ban on aid to the nation.

Since March 2000 Vientiane has been rocked by a series of mysterious blasts. These activities have been mainly attributed to a group of Hmong tribesmen based in the north. This anti-Communist rebel group has been protesting the government's failure to introduce democratic reforms. In June 2003 two foreign journalists and an American pastor of Lao descent were sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment for obstructing police officers and possessing illegal weapons and explosives. However the defendants and human rights groups active in Laos firmly believe they were punished for covering the Hmong rebellion, which the government has refused to acknowledge. Encountering international criticism, the Lao government was forced to release the prisoners later in the same year.

The Viet Minh

In 1941 Ho Ngoc Lam and Nguyen Hai Than founded the League for the Independence of Vietnam, more familiarly known as the Viet Minh, for two reasons: to achieve Vietnam's independence from France and to get rid of the Japanese who occupied French territories in Southeast Asia during World War II. The league was later led by Nguyen Tat Thanh, famous as Ho Chi Minh. Ho Chi Minh, Le Duan, Vo Nguyen Giap, and Pham Van Dong gradually assumed key positions in the league, which, because of its opposition to Japan, had the support of both the United States and China. At the end of World War II, Ho Chi Minh, now in control of the Viet Minh, declared Vietnam's independence from France, and there ensued a decade-long war between France and the Viet Minh.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The People's Democratic Republic of Laos is situated in southeastern Asia. The mighty Mekong River in the west and the Annamite Mountain range in the east form natural borders with Thailand and Vietnam, respectively, while Laos also shares borders with China in the north, with Burma (Myanmar) in the northwest, and Cambodia in the south. This landlocked country has a territory of 91,429 square miles. Seventy percent of the terrain is mountainous, and about half of the land is densely forested. The country's highest peak, Phu Bia (9,252 feet high), is located in the mountainous ranges of

northeastern Laos in the Xiang Khouang province. The Khammouanne and Bolaven plateaus dominate the areas in the vicinity of the Annamite range.

The rivers and streams in Laos eventually merge into the Mekong River, creating a total of 1,491 miles of waterways that are used by Laos for transportation. Laos has a tropical climate with two distinct seasons—the rainy season, which runs from early May to the end of September, and the dry season, from October to April. The yearly average temperature is about 82°F, rising to a maximum of 100°F in April and May. In Vientiane minimum temperatures are often around 66°F in January. In mountainous areas, however, temperatures drop to 57–59°F during the winter season, and on cold nights often reach the freezing point. The average precipitation is highest in southern Laos, where the Annamite Mountains receive over 118 inches of rain annually. In Vientiane rainfall is about 59 to 78 inches, while in the northern provinces it is only 39 to 59 inches per year. The country is home to a profusion of over 1,200 species of rare flora and fauna.

❁ ECONOMY

Laos is one of the 10 poorest countries in the world. It has an agricultural economy, with 50 percent of total gross domestic product (GDP) and approximately 80 percent of the workforce focused in the agriculture sector. Subsistence farmers comprise 80 percent of the population; they have been plagued with alternating floods and droughts since 1993. Agricultural output growth has tended to be quite erratic as a result, but has averaged 6.5 percent per annum over the last decade. Rice is the largest agricultural commodity produced. The industrial sector (including construction and mining) accounts for 25 percent of total GDP and is largely made up of light industry and handicrafts. The industrial sector has been growing by an annual average of 10 percent over the last decade. The main export items are electricity (all sold to neighboring Thailand), garments, wood products, and coffee.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Traditional culture in Laos has been deeply influenced by the Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Thai cultures. The lowland Lao share a common ancestry and cultural affinity with many Thai tribes. This is evident in Lao sculpture, classical music, dance-dramas, and cuisine. Lao folk music is based around the *khaen* (a double row of bamboo reeds fitted into a hardwood sound box). The music is often accompanied by dancing or bawdy theater. The Lao people are skillful carvers and weavers; however, traditional silversmithing and goldsmithing have nearly passed into oblivion. The main motifs of Lao traditional art include *wats* (temples), stupas, and distinctively Lao representations of the Buddha. There exists a secular literary tradition based on themes of the Hindu epic, which have been transmogrified

into popular language. However, Laotian literature is linked mainly to Buddhist traditions.

First introduced by Mon Buddhist monks, Buddhism became widely popular in Laos during the 14th century. The Theravada form was promoted by Fa Ngoum (a famous Lao prince; 1316–93) who introduced the palladium (a sacred symbol of safety and well-being) and the golden Phrabang Buddha image.

The majority of the population practices Theravada Buddhism. Animism is practiced by the Lao-Theung ethnic groups, and a small percentage of the population is Christian. Mahayana Buddhism and Confucianism are observed by the Chinese and Vietnamese minorities.

Lao is the official language of Laos; English, Vietnamese, and French are also spoken by the urban elite. A member of the Tai-Kadai language group, Lao is tonal, strongly resembling its Thai cousin. In fact, there are more speakers of the Lao language in Thailand's northeastern border areas than there are in Laos. The two languages resemble each other so much that Thai television and radio have become very popular among the Lao people.

The Lao people greet each other with folded hands, a gesture called a *noap*. Younger persons or persons of lower status are supposed to greet their elders or superiors. Backslapping, public displays of affection, shouting, and wild gesticulation are all considered impolite. The head is considered the highest part of the body, while the feet are considered the lowest; touching someone's head or pointing at people or things with the feet are, therefore, considered extremely rude. Footwear is removed before entering temples or people's homes.

❁ CUISINE

The typical Laotian meal has a strong forest orientation; a good deal of the food is hunted or collected from the forest tracts of the country. A deer shot in the mountains is carried back to the village, where it is divided into many portions for preparing *laap* (a basic curry) and consumed by the family as well as by neighbors and friends. The entire deer is consumed at once because there are no refrigerators in the villages to keep the meat fresh.

Sticky rice, or *kao niao*, is the main ingredient in Lao cuisine. It is served mainly with fermented fish and a fish sauce called *nam pa*. Chicken and pork dishes are also popular, but beef is quite expensive in Laos. *Laap* is the most characteristic dish of the Lao. It is made with fish, chicken, duck, pork, beef, buffalo, or freshly hunted game; both meat and innards are finely chopped and spiced with onion, chilies, and mint. *Pa daek* is a highly pungent fermented fish sauce. *Klao Poun* is rice vermicelli served cold with a variety of raw chopped vegetables, over which one pours coconut milk sauce flavored with meat and

Fun Fact

Prince Souphanouvong was nicknamed the “Red Prince” because of his leftist politics.

chilies. It is particularly served at weddings or other major social occasions. *Or lam* is similar to a stew. Lemon grass, dried buffalo meat (as well as its skin), chilies, eggplant, crisp-fried pork skin, sweet basil, and, of course, *pa daek* are its basic ingredients. The Lao people prepare a variety of soups and serve them with noodles, bamboo shoots, and fresh vegetables that can be found everywhere. A highly popular ordinary meal eaten by the Lao is *feu* (a dish of Vietnamese origin). This is an economical combination of vermicelli in hot soup filled with meatballs. It is served with a dish of vegetable leaves that must be torn up and stirred into the dish according to individual taste. Plenty of aromatic herbs and spices such as lemon grass, chilies, ginger, and tamarind are used to flavor the dishes.

When Lao peasants go to work in the fields, they carry a supply of sticky rice and a small quantity of fish or meat in little woven baskets. This is their midday meal. At a Lao meal each person takes a small handful of rice, which he or she rolls into a ball and then dips into one of the dishes. These rice balls are also eaten plain. Beer, coconut water, and strong Laotian coffee (either hot or iced) are the usual beverages.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

Although Laotians have their own ethnic New Year's celebration (see Boun Pimai, below), they also observe the New Year's Day of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar. This is one of the lingering influences of the decades of French colonialism. January 1 is a public holiday with government offices, schools, and businesses closed. Laotians spend the day with friends and family.

❁ PATHET LAO DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 6

The Pathet Lao was a powerful left-wing nationalist group that was ultimately victorious in the Laotian civil war of the mid-1950s. The name was first used in 1950 by Lao forces after they joined the Viet Minh's revolt against the French. It eventually became the generic term for the Laotian Communists. In 1956 an official party, the Neo Lao Hak Sat (Lao Patriotic Front) was formed. In the 1960s and early 1970s, the Pathet Lao fought the United States-supported government.

On this date in 1975 the Pathet Lao took control of Laos. The day is celebrated with parades and public speeches. It is a national holiday with government offices, schools, and businesses closed.

❁ INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 8

International Women's Day is an event observed around the world. The women of Laos assemble on this day to make their demands known and to express their aspirations. At rallies and seminars, women's rights activists address the struggle for equality, justice, peace, and development.

❁ BOUN PIMAI

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 13–16

The Lao New Year, Boun Pimai or Pee Mai Lao, is celebrated in the fifth month of the Buddhist calendar, beginning on the sixth day, even though the first month of the Lao New Year actually occurs in December. Since 1975 the date has been fixed to April 13 to 16. Festivities are delayed until April when days are warmer and longer than nights. This is common practice in most Asian countries, where the lunar New Year is celebrated in mid-April. The Lao New Year is known as the Water Festival, or Koudsongkhane, and is the biggest traditional festival throughout the country.

In Laos the entire country nearly comes to a standstill, and the occasion is celebrated with great enthusiasm. Houses are cleaned, Buddha images are washed, and people wear new clothes. In the *wats* (temples) offerings of fruit, flowers, and votives are made. Later the citizens take to the streets and douse one another with water. The festival is a unique combination of revelry and meditation. It is particularly picturesque in Luang Prabang, where it includes elephant processions.

The festival is also an occasion to invite the rains. In Luang Prabang statues of the Buddha (in the calling-for-rain posture) are ceremonially doused in water, which is then poured into an intricately decorated trench (*bang song nam pha*). The small temporary stupas of sand, decorated with streamers (which are made by the people in the *wat* compounds) symbolize people's earnest pleadings for health, happiness, and prosperity during the coming year. This festival is celebrated with traditional Lao folk singing (*mor lam*) and the circular dance known as *ram wong*. This is usually a three-day public holiday.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, Workers' Day, or May Day in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist

organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

The Communist government in Laos emphasizes this holiday. The day is marked with speeches and processions organized by trade unions.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 1

This holiday commemorates the passage of the Geneva Declaration Protecting Children in 1925, which focused on eradication of poverty, prevention of child labor, promotion of education, and other issues related to the welfare of children around the globe. Although the date may vary from one country to another, June 1 remains the most popular day for its celebration in 21 countries.

In Laos children's seminars and workshops are held by children's welfare organizations and social workers who are working toward the betterment of the country's children.

LAO NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 2

Lao National Day, or Republic Day, commemorates the 1975 victory of the Communist Pathet Lao Party and the end of the monarchy. The general public marks this day with parades and speeches. The Lao national as well as Communist red flags (embossed with the hammer-and-sickle) are flown all over the country. Since the celebration of this day is mandatory, the poor people of Laos defer the traditional celebration of Bouk Khao Phansa (which falls on the full Moon day in October) until this day, thus saving themselves considerable expense.

Religious Holidays

VESAK

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: Fifteenth of the sixth lunar month of the Buddhist calendar

Vesak, or Visakha Puja, is the most important Buddhist festival. It celebrates all the major events of the Buddha's life—his birth, enlightenment, and death. Vesak falls on the 15th day of the sixth lunar month. On this day the activities and celebrations are cen-

tered on the shrines and temples (*wats*), with non-stop chanting, sermons, and gorgeous candlelit processions at night. The Boun Bang Fai (rocket festival) coincides with Visakha Puja celebrations in Laos. Parades, songs, dances, and parties culminate in the launching of massive, elaborate homemade bamboo rockets, which are blessed and fired into the skies to invite the rains.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM; VESAK

BOUK KHAO PHANSA (BEGINNING)

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: Full Moon of the eighth lunar month of the Buddhist calendar until the full Moon in the 11th lunar month of the Buddhist calendar

The "rain retreat" implied in this Buddhist festival starts with the full Moon in June or July and continues until the full Moon in October. It is the time when young men are ordained as monks, a status they hold for a short time before they marry. It all ends with the Kathin ceremony in October, when the monks receive gifts from the general public.



Buddhist monks chant prayers at Wat Si Muang in Vientiane during the July "rain retreat" also known as Buddhist Lent. Observed by Buddhists throughout Southeast Asia, it lasts through the rainy season. (AP Photo/David Longstreath)

Throughout this three-month long retreat from the rains, Buddhist monks are expected to reside in a single monastery. The custom originated in a bygone era. During the year, monks were allowed to travel from one place to another freely. After farmers complained to him that the monks were trampling their crops, the Buddha forbade them to wander around during the rainy season lest they cause damage to the rice paddies or other crops.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM

❁ BOUK KHAO PHANSA (CULMINATION)

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: Full Moon in the 11th lunar month of the Buddhist calendar

This festival marks the end of the Buddhist three-month long rain retreat. The faithful take offerings to the temples, and the monks are presented with robes, alms bowls, and the other requisites of daily life. Then they are allowed to leave the monasteries and travel freely again.

On the eve of Bouk Khao Phansa, many people carve out small banana-leaf boats carrying candles, incense, and other offerings, which are set afloat on the rivers. This ritual is known as Lai Hua Fai. The next day, boat races take place on the Mekong River with crews of 50 or more men and women.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM

Regional Holidays

❁ VIETNAMESE TET AND CHINESE NEW YEAR

Observed in: Vientiane, Pakse, and Savannakhet

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Second new Moon after the winter solstice

Laos is inhabited by sizable populations of Chinese and Vietnamese who have lived there for centuries. These festivals are celebrated by the respective communities in the capital city of Vientiane, as well as Pakse and Savannakhet, with parties and deafening, nonstop fireworks. The devout pay visits to Vietnamese and Chinese temples. All business establishments owned and run by Vietnamese and Chinese citizens remain closed for three days.

See also Volume III: CHINESE NEW YEAR

❁ THAT LUANG FESTIVAL

Observed in: Vientiane

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Full Moon of the 12th month of the Buddhist calendar

This week-long festival takes place at That Luang, a temple located in Vientiane. Early in the morning on the first day, marked by the full Moon, hundreds of monks assemble to receive alms and floral votives. They form a colorful procession, marching from one important temple, Wat Si Muang, to another, the Pha That Luang. The celebration lasts six more days and includes fireworks and music. It culminates in a candlelit circumambulation (*wien thien*) of That Luang.

❁ BUN PHA WET

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: December–January

This is a temple-centered festival in which the *jataka*, or anthology of Prince Vessantara (the Buddha's penultimate life), is recited. It is also a time for Lao males to be ordained as monks. The scheduling of Bun Pha Wet is varied and is held on different days in different villages. This is so that relatives and friends living in different villages can invite one another to their respective celebrations.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM

Rites of Passage

❁ COMING OF AGE

It is common for young Buddhist men between the ages of eight and 20 to be ordained as novice monks (Samanera) and live in a monastery for several months. This brief monastic experience is a coming of age ritual for many Laotian Buddhists after which they return to civilian life. The ordination ritual involves the shaving of the head and eyebrows and uttering of vows. Before a monk shaves the whole head, each member of the novice's family cuts a lock of hair. The ordination is a great honor for the entire family and the event is accompanied by great joyous feasting.

❁ MARRIAGE

The marriage ceremony is called the *sou kbouan*. On the wedding day, the festivities begin with a procession led by the groom accompanied by his family and friends. It proceeds from the groom's home to the bride's. After the groom has entered the bride's house, a happily married member of her family seats the groom beside the bride and next to two *pha kbouan*, ceremonial floral arrangements. *Pha kbouan* are made out of fresh banana leaves, which are cut and folded into cone shapes and filled with fresh flowers. Next ensues the *sou kbouan*, which is conducted by a venerated Buddhist elder of the community. He offers chants and food stuffs to the couple and binds their wrists together with white cotton, while blessing the couple. When all have had a chance to bless the newlyweds, everyone sits for a festive meal, followed by dancing.

❁ DEATH

Buddhists believe that a funeral provides an opportunity for both the deceased and the mourners to work toward being reborn into this world at a higher social status. The most virtuous individuals among the ordinary people can hope to attain nirvana. According to the Theravadin school of Buddhism (the form practiced in Laos), physical suffering, like giving birth, disease, aging, and death, is fundamental to human life. Since the present life is only a link in the chain of deaths and rebirths, weeping and wailing or mourning loudly is frowned upon at a Buddhist funeral. Family members are clad in white during the mourning period. The eldest son has to shave his head and wear colorful garments for the funeral ceremony. Other individuals who attend the funeral are supposed to wear black. The family of the deceased invites Buddhist monks to recite prayers for the dead throughout the days leading up to the funeral. The monks' prayers in honor of the dead are the crux of the funeral services. Family members offer food to the monks so that the dead person's soul may achieve tranquility.

The climax of a Buddhist funeral is the cremation, when family and friends carry candles and

flaming torches to light the pyre that gradually engulfs the corpse. Buddhists cremate the dead in memory of the Buddha himself, whose body was cremated in a similar fashion after he renounced the world around 477 B.C.E. Buddhists believe pregnant women should not attend cremation services as the spirit freed from the body might enter the unborn child. The ashes of a Laotian Buddhist are customarily preserved in an urn. About 100 days after the funeral (three months or so), family members burn the favorite material possessions of the deceased so that he or she might enjoy them in the next life.

Further Reading

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Latvia

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Eastern Europe, bordering the Baltic Sea, between Estonia and Lithuania
Size	24,938 sq. mi.
Capital City	Riga
Flag Description	Latvia's flag is red with a white stripe in the center.
Independence	August 21, 1991
Population	2,290,237 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary democracy
Nationality	Latvian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Latvian (58%); Russian (30%)
Major Language(s)	Latvian (official; 58%); Russian (38%)
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (21%); Lutheran (17%); Russian Orthodox (13%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Constitution Day, May 1; Labor Day, May 1; Proclamation of Independence, May 4; Līgo and Jāņi, June 23–24; Commemoration Day of Genocide against the Jews, July 4; Lāčplēsis Day, November 11; Proclamation of the Republic of Latvia, November 18

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The earliest settlers of the area now known as Latvia were Finno-Ugric Livonians or Libiesi, who inhabited Latvia in approximately 6000 B.C.E. The Letts, who were Indo-European Balts and the ancestors of the modern-day Latvians, arrived around 2500 B.C.E. In the fourth century C.E. Latvia was carrying on trade with Germanic tribes and the Roman Empire. Subsequently they traded with the Vikings and the Russians when they were not at war with them. By the 12th century the Finno-Ugrics and the Balts had split into various tribal groups, with pagan beliefs and practices. Taking advantage of their disunity, a German order of crusaders called the Knights of the Sword forcibly began converting these tribes to Christianity. Under these German conquerors the Letts were relegated to a life of servitude and oppression. Thereafter for the next 600 years, Latvia was subjected to a series of invasions and foreign regimes.

Sweden occupied Latvia for 84 of the 92 years between 1629 and 1721. Under Swedish rule the Latvians were liberated from servitude. Universal education was made available, and the Latvians slowly progressed into professions, trades, and crafts. However, Russia had begun making inroads into Latvia and, in 1721, Latvia fell into Russian hands. This again unleashed a reign of terror and oppression against the Latvian populace.

Despite being subjected to massive suppression during this period of Russian rule, Latvia saw rapid industrial growth and large-scale development in the latter half of the 19th century. Riga, the capital of Latvia (situated on the Gulf of Riga, an inlet of the Baltic Sea) emerged as the third largest port in the Russian Empire. World War I saw the collapse of Russia and Germany, and Latvians seized this opportunity to end Russian dominance and declared their independence from the Russian Empire in 1918. The Latvian Republic was proclaimed on November 18, 1918. However, it was not until 1920 that all hostilities ceased, and foreign armies were withdrawn from Latvian territory. Latvia signed a peace treaty with Russia on August 11, 1920, and became a member of the League of Nations in 1921.

Despite a flourishing economy the Latvian republic was adversely affected by political instability in the region. The republic gave way to the authoritarian and autocratic government of President Kārlis Ulmanis (1877–1942), who took the reins of power in his own hands in 1934.

In accordance with the clandestine Ribbentrop–Molotov pact signed between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in 1939, which effectively divided Eastern Europe into Nazi and Soviet spheres, Latvia was handed over to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), along with Estonia and Lithuania, and the Russians reoccupied Latvia in 1939. Elections ensued, and Latvia was declared a constituent republic of the USSR in 1940, much against the wishes of the Latvians. Latvia was forced to accept occupation by 30,000 Russian troops. What followed was ethnic cleansing and mass genocide; 35,000 Latvians were killed or deported. In 1941 Germany invaded the USSR and occupied Latvia. During this time 95 percent of Latvia's Jews were exterminated. When the Soviets invaded Latvia in 1944, another large number of Latvians fled to the West to avoid annihilation. Nevertheless, more than 100,000 Latvians were killed or deported under Soviet rule.

Soviet rule in Latvia extended for another 50 years thereafter. In the late 1980s Mikhail Gorbachev (the last president of the USSR, b. 1931) started to promote *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring), which led to the resurgence of a desire by Latvians to reclaim their lost independence and to reinstate the Latvian constitution of 1922. Following major demonstrations and public rallies, the USSR finally gave in. Latvia declared its full independence from the USSR in May 1990, and was recognized as an independent republic on August 21, 1991. It joined the United Nations (UN) two weeks later. Russian troops finally vacated Latvia in 1994.

Latvia has a parliamentary democracy. Parliament is called the Saeima. Guntars Krasts (b. 1957) became prime minister in 1997, and in June 1999 Vaira Vīke-Freiberga (b. 1937) was elected president, becoming the first woman to hold such a post in Eastern Europe. In 2004 the country became a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU).

The rights of the Russian-speaking population are a sore political issue in Latvia. Although a third of the Latvian population speaks Russian, strict citizenship rules have made it mandatory to know Latvian to become a citizen.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Latvia lies on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea between Estonia to the north and Lithuania to the south. Russia and Belarus lie to its east. It is a land dotted with forests and lakes, river valleys and sandy beaches. The country is mainly a landscape of fertile

Kārlis Ulmanis

Until 1934 Latvia had a democratic system of governance. With the threat of a coup Kārlis Ulmanis took over the existing government in May 1934 and turned Latvia into a virtual dictatorship. Ulmanis had been one of the founders of an independent Latvia and had been elected prime minister several times. After the Soviet occupation in 1940, he was deported to the Soviet Union, where he died in captivity in 1942. In spite of his bloodless coup in 1934 and his authoritarian regime, Ulmanis remains a popular, if also controversial, figure in Latvia today.

and low-lying plains, with the highest point being the Gaizinkalns at 1,024 feet. The main river is the Daugava, a major trade route. The chief cities, apart from the capital city of Riga, are Liepāja, Daugavpils, Cēsis, and Jelgava.

The Latvian climate is maritime and temperate, with cool summers and wet, moderate winters. Its primary natural resources are peat, limestone, dolomite, amber, hydroelectric power, wood, and arable land. Strategically located in the center of the three Baltic states, it serves as a major transportation route for trade and commerce for the Baltic region.

❁ ECONOMY

Latvia's predominantly coastal location has contributed a great deal to its economic activity. Since regaining independence it has rapidly restored its dwindling economy and established flourishing trade with its erstwhile partners like Russia, Germany, and Sweden. The inflation rate has seen a steady decline over the years.

Latvia's major exports are oil products, wood and timber, metals, buses, and processed food. Its major imports are fuel and electric power, machinery, natural gas, and automobiles. Although Latvia has three hydroelectric power plants on the Daugava River and two thermal power plants near Riga, it still relies on energy imports for its industries.

Its trading partners include its neighbors Lithuania, Estonia, and Belarus as well as Russia, Germany, Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Great Britain. Since Latvia has very liberal trade laws, foreign investment is easy. This has encouraged trade with a majority of the countries in the EU. Latvia became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1999.

Fun Fact

Well into the Middle Ages amber, translucent fossilized resin used to make gems, was valued more than gold in many places, and Latvia's coast was famous as a place where amber could be found.

Daina

The *daina* is a traditional form of poetry in the Baltic regions; the form features pre-Christian legends, using a monophonic music style to the accompaniment of zithers, a stringed instrument. *Dainas* are short, unrhymed verses of one or two stanzas about pre-Christian deities like the Sun goddess and the Moon god, as well as the important events of life—namely, birth, marriage, and death.

✿ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

After years of suppression under foreign dominion, post-independence Latvia saw a revival of its cultural heritage. Latvian culture is a strong mix of folklore, ancient customs, and art influenced by pagan symbols.

Folksongs called *dainas* form the essence of Latvian music. In addition, one of the largest and most famous organs in the world can be found in Riga's Dome Cathedral.

Present-day Latvian music has seen a cultural upheaval, and rock music has now become an integral part of the Latvian music scene. Latvia also has a rich heritage of literature and art, with many fine art galleries in Riga.

A traditional Latvian costume as it is worn today comes from the 19th century. The Latvian woman's costume is a long-sleeved, tunic-shaped linen shirt worn with a linen skirt. A sash, or *josta*, is used to secure the skirt. A shawl, or *villaine*, usually made of wool, is draped over the shoulders, and a head covering or headscarf is tied to signify a woman's marital status. Jewelry is added for good measure. Brooches are used to fasten the shirts and shawls. *Pastalas*, simple footwear made from a single piece of leather and tied with laces, are worn by both men and women. The men wear a tunic-style shirt, with trousers and a jacket. The Latvians make generous use of color and geometric patterns in their costumes. Red is a predominant color in the Latvian national dress.

✿ CUISINE

Due to the agrarian nature of early Latvian society, Latvian cuisine primarily consists of farm produce; local homegrown farm products form a major part of

Pierogi

The practice of baking pierogi, *pirāgi* in Latvia, is a tradition more than a thousand years old. After a rich harvest, farmers would use the wheat to make the dough, stuff it with bacon and ham, and make the combination into rolls. This custom showed off the farmer's prosperity.

the Latvian diet. Essentially food on a Latvian table would include potatoes (boiled, fried, or mashed) and boiled black peas, combined with pieces of bacon, vegetables, meat, and eggs. The coastal dwellers have fish as an integral part of their diet. Bread is also an essential part of a Latvian's diet.

Latvian food is largely bland, devoid of strong spices, and is very high in fat and calories. Since there is no source of salt in Latvia, it has been obtained through trade or barter historically and used very sparingly. Spices have been imported and have been at a premium for the Latvian peasant. Due to the multiple regimes that have ruled Latvia, its cuisine has been influenced by Russian, Swedish, and German food styles.

Latvian celebrations are incomplete without the inclusion of their traditional bread called *pirags* (pierogis). *Pirags*, stuffed with bacon, ham, and spices to form a snack-sized roll are called *pirāgis*.

Another traditional dish of the Latvians is J[am]acron]ncedilla]i cheese, an important part of the Jāņi celebration. Jāņi celebrates the summer solstice and includes serving Jāņi cheese, accompanied by fresh caraway cheese, beet soup, *rasols* (potato salad), sauerkraut, and beer.

Latvians consume many dairy products: milk, *r[um]acron]gu[scaron]piens* (plain curdled milk), kefir (cultured milk), cheese, cream, and butter are traditionally eaten in every household. Kvass (a nonalcoholic drink made from yeast), fresh or fermented birch juice, and beer are popular traditional Latvian drinks.

Public/Legal Holidays

✿ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western (Gregorian) calendar and is celebrated all over the world. Revelries begin on the evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve). It is one of the most spectacular annual events and people look forward to celebrating it. They stay up all night to ring in the new year, toasting each other with champagne and wishing everyone a happy New Year.

✿ CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Latvians observe May 1 as Constitution Day, also called Convocation of the Constituent Assembly of the Republic of Latvia; it was on this day in 1920 that the first democratically elected parliament of the Republic of Latvia convened and undertook the task of drafting and passing the constitution of the republic. The day coincides with Labor Day celebrations.

✿ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day and Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. While the earliest origins of May Day are ascribed to the pagan celebrations that were practiced by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages, conflicting opinions exist about the origins of the modern occasion.

The most plausible source is the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, which declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world in 1889 and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. In Latvia, May 1 is a national holiday and all government and private institutions are closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

✿ PROCLAMATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 4

On May 4, 1990, the Supreme Council of the Latvian Socialist Soviet Republic, composed of democratically elected Latvians, adopted a declaration for restoring Latvia's independence. After World War II Latvia was under the domination of the USSR. Latvian languages were banned and the Russian language was imposed throughout Latvia. There was growing discontent regarding Soviet rule, fueled by the large number of Russians who immigrated to the industrially developed Latvia in the 1980s. By the end of that decade, the number of ethnic Latvians remaining in Latvia had been reduced to 50 percent of the population.

Also, the liberalization policy of the Russian president, Mikhail Gorbachev, made it possible for several ethnic Latvian political parties to press for independence from the USSR. As a result, after the first democratic elections for the Supreme Council in Latvia, the Latvians seized the opportunity to adopt a declaration for restoring Latvia's independence. This day is also called Declaration of the Republic of Latvia.

✿ LĪGO AND JĀŅI

Observed by: Latvians

Observed on: June 23–24

Līgo and Jāņi are traditional festivals of the Latvian people, and are celebrated by Latvians all over the world. The Līgo festival, midsummer's eve, is held on

June 23, just after the Summer Solstice, and Jāņi, midsummer's day, is celebrated the following day, June 24. For this reason the celebrations are also called Midsummer's Eve and Midsummer's (Solstice) Day. These festivities are traditionally celebrated with the gathering of wildflowers and making wreaths of oak leaves and flowers.

Jāņi celebrates the day of the Summer Solstice, the longest day of the year. It marks the day in Latvia when the short Latvian summer has reached its height. For the farmer, plowing, sowing, and weeding work has to be done before midsummer; with the beginning of midsummer, crop harvesting starts with the mowing of hay. All the herbs and flowers gathered at midsummer are known as Jāņi herbs. Women and girls make wreaths for all the celebrants to wear. Women traditionally wear flower wreaths while those worn by men are made of oak leaves or twigs. Rooms, wells, mills, and other places important in the farmer's life are decorated with Jāņi herbs. The livestock and fences are adorned with wreaths. Birch, oak, and rowan boughs are used to decorate both gates and rooms.

Legend has it that, on Midsummer's Eve, the mythical blossoming fern opens its golden petals. It is considered very lucky to spot this blossom. For the midsummer celebration, the women make Jāņi cheese, and the men brew beer. With the cheese wheel and the beer mug come the blessings of nature and God. The songs, dances, and rituals of Jāņi bring blessings to every aspect of life.

The highlight of Jāņi is the singing of the *ligotne* songs, midsummer folk songs sung around a ceremonial bonfire with the refrain *līgo, līgo*. The fire is lit atop a hill, before sunset on the eve of Jāņi, and is kept going until sunrise the next day. The Jāņi fire is believed to purify the land and drive away evil.

✿ COMMEMORATION DAY OF GENOCIDE AGAINST THE JEWS

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 4

This day is observed in remembrance of the mass genocide carried out by the Nazis against the Jews in Latvia. On July 4, 1941, soon after the Nazis occupied Latvia, Riga's main Jewish synagogue was razed to the ground, burning alive all those who were trapped inside. It is estimated that almost 90 percent of Latvia's Jews were killed in Nazi concentration camps. On this day, Latvians pay homage to the victims of Nazi atrocities.

✿ LĀ ČPLĒ SIS DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 11

Lāčplēsis Day, or Latvian Freedom Fighters' Remembrance Day, commemorates the victory of Latvian forces against the invading German–Russian

armies after the end of World War I. On this day in 1919, they won a decisive battle in their fight for independence. Foreign troops were permanently evicted in January 1920. On Lāčplēsis Day people remember the sacrifice made by those who laid down their lives for the integrity and sovereignty of Latvia. Also, families of those brave soldiers place flowers on their graves and take pride in the life and legacy of their deceased relatives.

❁ PROCLAMATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 18

This date is by far the most important date in the history of Latvia, for it was on this date in 1918 that the Republic of Latvia was proclaimed an independent state. Seizing an opportunity during the collapse of Russia and Germany during World War I, political parties in Latvia declared its independence from Russia.

Religious Holidays

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, also called Mourning Friday, Holy Friday, or Great Friday in Orthodox Christian churches, falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent. It is observed in most parts of the world to commemorate the crucifixion of Jesus. Christians observe a fast from Ash Wednesday (first day of Lent, 40 days before Good Friday) and Orthodox Christians continue to observe a partial fast until Easter Sunday. Christians fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection. It falls on the first Sunday after the end of Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. The origin of Easter celebrations can be traced back to pre-Christian pagan festivals welcoming the return of spring. When the early Christian Church decided to celebrate Jesus' Resurrection, it adopted the name of the Germanic fertility goddess Eostre, as well as rituals and symbols associated with her festival, in order to win pagan converts.

In ancient times, eggs were symbols of life associated with fertility observances and in Latvian vernal equinox celebrations they were given a special place. Prior to Easter, eggs were colored with onion-skins, rye shoots, chamomile, or hay cuttings. On Easter day, hanging up swings and swinging on them is an important ritual, but it is considered bad luck to stop its motion without allowing it to stop on its own. Girls give boys eggs in return for pushing their swings for them. Eggs are also knocked together and the one whose eggshell survives cracking is believed will live the longest.

In Latvia, *paska* (a sweet, molded cheesecake) is the traditional Easter dish, which is eaten with sweet saffron bread called *kulich*. Feastings and celebrations, including playing Easter games, continue on Easter Monday, which is the first Monday after Lent.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ ST. JOHN'S DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: June 24

This day marks the birth of St. John the Baptist and is celebrated as St. John's Day. This is the Christian midsummer festival and is one of the "quarter days," signaling the beginning of each quarter of the year and welcoming each of the four seasons. The other quarter days are Christmas (December 25), Lady Day (Annunciation Day, March 25), and Michaelmas (September 29). St. John the Baptist is believed to be Jesus' cousin. The date chosen by the early church to celebrate the birth of Jesus (December 25) falls close to the winter solstice. Even though the day of Jesus' birth has never been determined, the Bible indicates that John was born six months before Jesus, so his birth celebrates the summer solstice. John had prophesied the coming of Jesus, and had prepared the way by baptizing people in the River Jordan.

This day is also known as the Midsummer's Day and is celebrated to welcome summer and offer prayers for a rich harvest. Commonly celebrated as Jāņi in Latvia, it is one of the country's most elaborate festivals.

❁ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day is a Christian feast that honors all the saints (known and unknown) of Christianity. It is believed that All Saints' Day celebrations began after the consecration of the Pantheon at Rome to the Blessed Virgin by Pope Boniface IV (r. 608–15). The Feast of All Saints' Day has been celebrated on November 1 since the time of Charlemagne (742–814).

In Latvia, people visit the graves of their deceased relatives on All Saints' Day, as well as on All Souls' Day (November 2), and place flowers and candles near their graves. Families of soldiers who laid down their lives for Latvia's freedom visit their gravesites at the Riga Military Cemetery and light candles.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of celebration when Christians all over the world celebrate Jesus' birth. Although Jesus' date of birth remains a mystery, the early church established December 25 for the observance. As a result, virtually all of the symbols and activities associated with Christmas—decorating trees, Santa Claus, holly, mistletoe, the yule log, and so forth—can be traced back to pagan winter solstice festivals.

During Christmas Latvians decorate their homes with three-dimensional straw or reed ornaments. Natural materials like wood-shavings, evergreen branches, or colored rags are also used in the decorations. Christmas is accented with the traditional custom of mumming, for which grownup men dressed in costumes and masks enact scenes from the Bible and travel from village to village, conveying blessings and driving away evil spirits. Christmas in Latvia has a tradition of dragging the Yule log. This is symbolic of gathering and burning of the past year's misfortunes.

An integral part of Christmas used to be a generous banquet where the food included a pig's head that had been boiled with barley mashed with a pestle. This food was called *kukšis, koča, or kiķas*. Christmas Eve is still sometimes called *kukši* evening. Other traditional foods were peas, beans, and barley sausage, which, because of their round, curved appearance were seen as symbols of the Sun or the year. (Winter solstice celebrations welcome the return of the light because the days, which start to grow shorter at the summer solstice, begin to grow longer again.)

Present-day Latvians bake gingerbread cookies and celebrate Christmas in a more contemporary manner by decorating a fir tree with lighted candles.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS; BOXING DAY

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 26

The Feast of St. Stephen, known elsewhere as Boxing Day, is observed on December 26, a day after Christmas. St. Stephen is considered to be the first martyr of Christianity; he was stoned to death by Roman rulers for speaking in favor of Jesus and his

disciples. In Latvia this day is reserved for visiting friends and family.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS;

Regional Holidays

❁ RIGA OPERA FESTIVAL

Observed in: Riga
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May–June

The Riga Opera Festival is a confluence of music and opera lovers from all over the globe. It is a one-of-its-kind opera festival held at the White House, an ornate but inviting venue with great acoustics, and attracts not only music lovers, but also critics and analysts. This festival has become a traditional conclusion to the end of the season at the Latvian National Opera. (From 1837 to 1839 the theater's musical director was Richard Wagner.)

❁ INTERNATIONAL BALTIC BALLET FESTIVAL

Observed in: Riga
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 21–25

The International Baltic Ballet Festival is an annual event that takes place in the month of April in the capital city of Riga. The festival aims at popularizing ballet by staging classical and contemporary forms of ballet and by bringing together dancers and choreographers from its Baltic neighbors. This festival was originally scheduled to coincide with the International Day of Dance, but it has now become a regular event on the Latvian national calendar.

A popular event, it not only attracts performers from the Baltic region but also first-rate ballet performers from around the world. Special awards and certificates are awarded to the best ballet performance and lovers of ballet make it a point to be in Riga to witness this spectacular event.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

In Latvia expectant mothers as well as young married women pray to Mara (Mother Earth) or Mary for a healthy baby. They believe that Mara rules over the human body and through her blessings helps ease labor pains. Many young women who are not even pregnant offer gifts and flowers to Mara and seek her blessings. After the birth of a child women hope that Lamia, the goddess of fate, will smile on

the child and bestow him or her with health, wealth, and happiness.

In ancient times women would deliver children in a small building called a *pirt*, which was designed to be used for sauna baths. Midwives were entrusted with the safe delivery of a healthy baby. Three days after the birth of the child, the midwife, mother, and child would return to the *pirt* for the ceremonial bath called *Pirtizas*. After the ceremony the mother would keep aside a special gift for Mara as a token of thanks for her blessings. Also a lavish feast was held, and families, friends, and neighbors were invited.

Nine days after a child is born a traditional naming ceremony takes place. For the ceremony the parents choose three adults (mostly their relatives) who will be the godparents of the child and, thus, care for it along (with the biological parents) and encourage it to follow the path of Christianity. These godparents are chosen after careful consideration since Latvians believe that children tend to inherit the qualities of their godparents. Traditionally for a male child there are two male and one female godparents, while for a girl child, it is the reverse.

At the time of the ceremony the godmother dips the child in the water, while the priest asks the godparents if they accept the child. After receiving a positive reply, the godmother lifts the child from the water and holds it in front of the cross. The godparents reiterate their commitment to take care of the child. Then the name of the child, as selected by the godparents, is announced by the priest and the child is welcomed as a full-fledged member of the family, and gifts and blessings are bestowed on him or her. A ceremonial feast takes place, and the godparents perform a ceremonial dance to welcome their godchild.

On the following day the godparents lead a group of people to the forest to collect wood for making a cradle for their godchild. A special basket is prepared to hold the infant. After the cradle is ready, the godmother gently places the baby in it. The godparents and the invited guests place gifts around the cradle. Then members of the family thank Mara for blessing them with a healthy baby, and the naming ceremony concludes.

MARRIAGE

On the day of her wedding a Latvian bride wears a traditional white wedding dress, along with a white veil. She is expected to wear the attire until midnight. After the reception the bride removes her veil and hands it to one of her younger sisters or to a female relative who is expected to marry soon. She is given a white kerchief or a wedding cap to cover her head, marking her transformation from a girl to a wife.

In many parts of Latvia the tradition of kidnapping the bride during the reception takes place. In

order to rescue his bride from her alleged kidnapers (his relatives), the groom is expected to pay a ransom in the form either of a song or by footing the bill for a round of drinks that the kidnapers will consume.

DEATH

Latvian death rituals are defined in great detail in the *dainas* (traditional Latvian poetry). According to the *dainas* death is the last celebration of life. The body is cleansed and draped in new clothes and placed in a coffin. The relatives and friends arrive with special food for a feast organized in honor of the dead. It is believed that the astral body of the deceased, the *velis*, participates in the feast and is the guest of honor. The deceased is offered beer and morsels of food and questions relating to his or her departure are asked. Songs expressing sadness over the death of the person are also sung.

The burial ceremony takes place the next day, and the coffin is placed on a carriage drawn by three horses, standing one behind the other. Only the young male members of the family escort the coffin while the wife and parents (if alive) of the deceased remain at home. The funeral party leaves the house at noon as it is believed that Veiu Mate (Mother of Shades) closes the gates of her realm in the afternoon. The body is laid to rest after proper feasting by the funeral party. Weapons, tools, and other items of daily need are buried along with the body of the deceased.

Gravediggers and pallbearers are given gifts as tokens of appreciation for their help during the hour of crisis and sorrow. The wishes of the deceased regarding disposal of his or her property are honored when it is distributed among the surviving relatives.

Further Reading

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Lebanon

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Middle East, bordering the Mediterranean Sea, located between Israel and Syria
Size	4,016 sq. mi.
Capital City	Beirut
Flag Description	Lebanon's flag has three horizontal bands of red (top), white (double width), and red with a green cedar tree centered in the white band.
Independence	November 22, 1943 (from League of Nations mandate under French administration)
Population	3,826,018 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Lebanese
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Arab (95%)
Major Language(s)	Arabic (official); French; English; Armenian
Major Religion(s)	Muslim (60%), Shia, Sunni, Druze, Ismailite, Alawite or Nusayri); Christian (39%), Maronite Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Melkite Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Syrian Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Syrian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Chaldean, Assyrian, Copt, Protestant
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Martyrs' Day, May 6; Independence Day, November 22

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

According to historians and research scholars Lebanon is believed to be the homeland of the ancient Phoenicians, whose culture and civilization flourished there for more than 2,000 years. The fragments of this civilization are to be found in Tyre, Sidon, and Beirut, among other places. The Phoenicians were a civilized nation, with urban centers and sophisticated arts and crafts. Its inhabitants traveled throughout the Mediterranean and had flourishing trade relations with other countries. The area was added to the empire of Alexander the Great (356–23 B.C.E.) when he conquered Tyre, and it became a part of the Seleucid Empire after his death. Subsequently the area was conquered by the Roman Empire in the first century B.C.E. and remained so until the advent of the Caliphate (632–1258). A series of rulers, called caliphs, ruled Muslim lands following the death of Muhammad.

Christianity was introduced into Phoenicia from neighboring Galilee soon after the death of Jesus of Nazareth. Centuries later, after the death of Muhammad, the Islamic prophet, the Arabs brought Islam with them during their invasions. The Muslim influence increased greatly in the seventh century when the Umayyad capital was established at nearby Damascus (capital of modern-day Syria). The Umayyad clan established a powerful caliphate that lasted from 661 to 750.

During the Middle Ages Lebanon became quite involved in the Crusades. The southern half of modern-day Lebanon formed the northern boundary of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. The Islamic control of Lebanon was reestablished in the late 13th century under the Mamluk Dynasty of Egypt. Various Muslim rulers vied for control of Lebanon until the Ottoman Empire fortified its authority over the eastern Mediterranean. Ottoman rule was rarely challenged during the early modern period, but the Lebanese coast remained strategically important due to its contacts with the Christian territories, through

Baalbeck Temple Complex

At Baalbeck, a city in eastern Lebanon, a cluster of well-preserved Roman temple ruins remains. The temple complex of Baalbeck is made up of the Jupiter Temple and the Bacchus Temple adjacent to it. Nearby is a circular structure, called the Temple of Venus, and part of a staircase belonging to a fourth temple that was dedicated to Mercury.

A Phoenician city until the Greeks took it over in 331 B.C.E., in 16 C.E. the Roman Emperor Augustus seized it. During the next 300 years the Romans incorporated some of the largest stones ever used to construct a huge group of three temples, three courtyards, and an enclosing wall on a hill thought to be nearly 5,000 years old. The quarry where the stones were cut can be found at the southern entrance of Baalbeck. One huge block, probably the largest hewn stone in the world and estimated to weigh 1,000 tons, remains where it was cut almost 2,000 years ago. The Greeks identified the god of

Baalbeck with the Sun god and called the city Heliopolis (“City of the Sun”). Apparently intending to build a temple there of their own, the Greeks enlarged the ancient courtyard, and this is where the Romans later began construction of the Great Court of the Temple of Jupiter in the first century C.E. In the final years of Nero’s reign, 37–68, the Great Court Complex of the Temple of Jupiter was built in the second century and what is known as the Temple of Bacchus was begun around the same time.

When Christianity became an official religion of the Roman Empire in 313, the Byzantine Emperor Constantine closed the Baalbeck temples. Then near the end of the fourth century, the Emperor Theodosius tore down the altars of Jupiter’s Great Court and used the stones and architectural elements to build a basilica. In the years that followed, Baalbeck came under the control of the Umayyad, Abbasid, Toulounid, Fatimid, and Ayyoubid Dynasties.

which trade and commerce flowed to Italian city-states such as Venice.

During the 19th century the capital city of Beirut became the most important port in the country because the region known as Mount Lebanon became a center of silk production for export to Europe. This silk industry made the region wealthy and prosperous. Since the bulk of the silk produced went to Marseille, the French and their ways began to influence the region culturally.

In 1788 Prince Bashir II became emir. Elected emir when his predecessor abdicated, he ruled under Ottoman authority and was appointed *wali*, or governor, of the Mount Lebanon district, the Biqa Valley, and Jabal Amil. He reformed taxes and attempted to destroy the feudal system. In 1822 the Ottoman *wali* of Damascus became involved in a war with Acre, which was allied with Muhammad Ali, the pasha of Egypt. During this war one of the worst massacres in history occurred: the massacre of Maronite Christians by the Druze forces allied with Damascus. Bashir Jumblatt (an adversary of Emir Bashir II) represented the disgruntled Druze (an Islamic sect) who resented the Maronites’ cordial ties with Bashir II, who was a Maronite Christian.

In 1825 Bashir II defeated his rival and killed him after the battle of al Simqaniya. Bashir II subsequently repressed and disarmed the Druze, and allied with France. He governed on behalf of the Egyptian Pasha Muhammad Ali, who entered Lebanon and formally took power in 1832. For the next eight years the Druze-Maronite conflict was intensified by the economic isolation of the Druze, vis-à-vis the increasing wealth of the Maronites.

When the simmering hostility flared into open rebellion, Bashir II fled Lebanon.

The decades of feuds and factions ended in 1858, with the overthrow of the feudal system and its burdensome system of taxation. The situation was unstable, however, because the Maronites lived in the large towns, but they were often surrounded by the Druze, who lived in villages and were extremely poor. Fortunately the last few years of the 19th century witnessed a period of comparative stability and calm as Islamic, Druze, and Maronite groups focused on economic and cultural development of Lebanon, which led to the founding of the American University of Beirut and a spurt of literary and political activity—the result the attempts to liberalize the Ottoman Empire.

Prior to World War I Beirut became the center of various reforming movements and sent delegates to the Arab Syrian conference and the Franco-Syrian conference held in Paris. During these years an array of solutions to the hostilities, such as Pan-Arab nationalism, separatism for Beirut, and many status-quo movements, sought to bring stability to the Ottoman government. After World War I France was given a League of Nations mandate over Lebanon and its neighbor Syria. France divided them in 1920 into separate colonial administrations, drawing a border that separated predominantly Muslim Syria from the diverse religious communities in Lebanon. After 20 years under the French, Lebanon’s independence was proclaimed on November 26, 1941, but full independence came in stages. Under an agreement between representatives of Lebanon and the French National Committee of

Liberation, most of the powers exercised by France were transferred to the Lebanese government on January 1, 1944. The evacuation of French troops was completed in 1946.

Civil war broke out in Lebanon in 1958, when Muslims, led by Kamal Jumblat (1917–77) and Saeb Salam (d. 2000), revolted against the Lebanese government headed by President Camille Chamoun (1900–87), a Maronite Christian in favor of close ties to the West. At Chamoun's request President Eisenhower (1890–1969) sent U.S. troops to Lebanon to reestablish the government's authority.

During the civil war that broke out in 1975, approximately 40,000 Lebanese were estimated to have been killed and 100,000 wounded in only 18 months. At the behest of a Syrian-dominated Arab Deterrent Force (which intervened at the request of the Lebanese) the fighting came to a halt. Then in March 1978 the Israelis entered the country and withdrew three months later, after the UN Security Council created a 6,000-man peacekeeping force for the area, called the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). As they departed the Israelis turned their strongholds over to a Christian militia that they had organized, instead of to the UN force. The second Israeli invasion came on June 6, 1982, after an assassination attempt by Palestinian terrorists on the Israeli ambassador in London. As a base of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Lebanon became the Israelis' primary target.

This extreme state of affairs prompted the return of a multinational peacekeeping force whose aim was to support the central Lebanese government; sadly enough it soon found itself drawn into the struggle for power between different Lebanese factions. The country was highly unstable and chaos was predominant. During their stay in Lebanon 241 U.S. Marines and about 60 French soldiers were killed, most of them due to suicide bombings. The multinational force withdrew in early 1984. In 1985 the majority of Israeli troops also withdrew from the country, but Israel left some troops along a buffer zone on the southern Lebanese border, where they became involved in ongoing skirmishes with Palestinian groups.

The Palestinian terrorist group Hezbollah, or "Party of God," was formed in the 1980s during Israel's second invasion of Lebanon. With financial backing from Iran, it has continuously launched attacks against Israel for more than 20 years. In July 1986 Syrian observers took a position in Beirut to monitor a peacekeeping agreement. The agreement broke down and fighting between Shiite and Druze militia in West Beirut became so intense that Syrian troops were mobilized in February 1987 to suppress the conflict. Again in 1991 Lebanon signed a treaty of friendship with Syria, which gave Syria control over Lebanon's foreign relations. In 1991 the Lebanese government, backed by Syria, regained control over the south and disbanded various mili-

tias, thereby ending the 16-year civil war but not before it had badly damaged the economic infrastructure of the country. In June 1999 Israel bombed southern Lebanon. In May 2000 Israel's new Prime Minister, Ehud Barak (b. 1942), withdrew Israeli troops after 18 consecutive years of occupation.

In the summer of 2001 Syria withdrew nearly all of its 25,000 troops from Beirut and nearby areas. About 14,000 troops, however, remained in the countryside. With the continuation of Israeli-Palestinian violence in 2002, Hezbollah again began building up forces along the Lebanese-Israeli border. In August 2004 Syria insisted that the pro-Syrian president of Lebanon, Émile Lahoud (b. 1936), remain in office beyond the constitutional limit of his six-year term, which was drawing to a close. Despite outrage around the country the Lebanese parliament allowed Lahoud to serve for three more years.

A UN Security Council resolution in September 2004 ordered Syria to remove its troops, which had been stationed in Lebanon for the past 28 years. Syria responded by moving about 3,000 troops from the vicinity of Beirut to eastern Lebanon, a gesture most people believed was superficial. As a result of the crisis, Prime Minister Rafik Hariri (1944–2005), who was largely responsible for Lebanon's economic rebirth in the past decade, resigned. On February 14, 2005, he was killed by a car bomb and many suspected Syria's involvement. Vehement protests demanding Syria's withdrawal from the country followed. After two weeks of protests by Sunni Muslim, Christian, and Druze parties, pro-Syrian Prime Minister Omar Karami (b. 1934) resigned on February 28. Several days later, Syria made a vague pledge to withdraw its troops but failed to announce a stipulated time period.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Lebanon is a small country with an area of 4,016 square miles; from north to south it extends 135 miles and from east to west it spans 50 miles at its widest point. The country is bound by Syria on both the north and the east and by Israel on the south. Lebanon's landforms lie in parallel belts running from northeast to southwest with a narrow coastal plain along the Mediterranean shore. The country's name is derived from the old Semitic word *laban*, which means "white" and refers to the country's snow-capped mountains. The towering Lebanese Mountains (often referred to locally as Mount Lebanon) rise steeply from the plain to dominate the entire country before dropping to the east. There is also a fertile intermountain basin called the Bekaa Valley (Al Biqa) and the ridges of the Anti-Lebanon Mountains, which are shared with Syria. Lebanon's highest mountain peaks are Qurnat as Sawda (10,131 feet) in the country's north, and the volcanic Mount Hermon (9,232 feet) at the southern end of the Anti-Lebanons.

Lebanon has a Mediterranean climate marked by a long, hot, dry summer and a cool, rainy win-

ter. Fall is a transitional season with a gradual decrease in temperature and some rain; spring appears when the late winter rains revive the vegetation. Topographical variations create local changes in the climatic pattern. Along the coast, summers are hot and humid, with little or no rain. Heavy dew formation takes place, which is conducive to agriculture. The average temperatures may reach above 100°F in the daytime and below 60°F at night. Winter is the rainy season, with major precipitation coming in December. Rainfall is generous but is concentrated during only a few days and falls during heavy cloudbursts. The amount of rainfall varies greatly from one year to another. Occasionally there are frosts during the winter, and about once every 15 years a light powdering of snow falls as far south as Beirut. A hot wind blowing from the Egyptian desert, called the *khamsin* (Arabic for “fifty,” since the winds blow for about 50 days, from late March to early May), provides a warming trend during the fall but more often occurs in the spring. Bitterly cold winds may blow in from Europe in winter. Along the coast the sea provides a moderating influence on the climate, making the range of temperatures narrower than it is inland, but the temperatures are cooler in the northern parts of the coast where there is also more rain.

Although Lebanon has no navigable rivers or major natural lakes, springs in the Bekaa basin feed two small noteworthy rivers: the Liṭāni, which flows south, where it is used for irrigation and hydroelectric-power generation before it moves on westward, finally flowing through a gorge into the Mediterranean; the Orontes, which flows north and across Syria into Turkey. Many major springs can be found along the western slopes of the Lebanese Mountains. Throughout the country, many streams flow only during the winter rainy season. Combined with runoff from the melting snow, they supply the country with plenty of water.

The Lebanese mountains were once thickly covered with cedar trees. However, only a few clusters now remain in the mountains, where they are under protection. The slopes are now home to Mediterranean brush vegetation, as well as scattered patches of stone pine, Aleppo pine, and ornamental cypress. Colorful spring wildflowers are found in abundance. During migration season, thousands of birds pass through the Bekaa basin.

☼ ECONOMY

Lebanon was for a long time the distribution center for the Middle East, and a flourishing commercial center; Beirut, a free port, was the region's financial and commercial hub until the economy was almost completely destroyed by the civil wars between 1975 and 1990. By the 1990s the economy was partially revived. Banking, insurance, food processing, and

the manufacture of textiles, cement, chemicals, and metal products have emerged as major sectors of the economy. Oil refining is also an important industry. Other significant sources of income are a revived tourism industry, remittances from Lebanese working abroad, and international aid. The illicit narcotics trade (opium, hashish, and heroin) also has a considerable impact on the economy.

Farm products contribute only a small portion of the gross domestic product (GDP). The main crops are citrus fruits, vegetables, olives, tobacco, and grapes. The annual cost of Lebanon's imports is much greater than its earnings from exports. Lebanon exports paper and paper products, foodstuffs, textiles, jewelry, metals, electrical equipment, and chemicals, mainly to the Arab countries. The imports include machinery and transport equipment, grain, and other foodstuffs, consumer goods, machinery, and fuels, chiefly from Italy, the United States, Germany, and France.

☼ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Lebanon may well boast of one of the best educational systems in the Middle East. The literacy rate is more than 75 percent, one of the highest in the Arab world. Beirut has important universities that attract students from major Arab countries seeking postgraduate study. The most notable is the American University of Beirut (AUB); other institutions of repute are the American Lebanese University (ALU), Beirut-Arab University, and the Lebanese Maronite University.

There are 18 officially recognized religious groups in Lebanon, with the Muslim majority subsidized by the government. Their ecclesiastical and demographic patterns are extremely complex. Divisions and rivalries between groups date back many centuries and remain a significant factor in the country's stability. Christian numbers continue to dwindle compared to Muslims, who are not, by any means, homogeneous. The main branches of Islam are Shia and Sunni, but there has been a sizable Druze presence since the 11th century, although it is concentrated in the rural, mountainous areas east and south of Beirut. The smallest Muslim minorities are the Alawites and the Ismaili (“Sevener”) Shia sect. The “Twelver” Shia, Sunni, and Druze each have state-appointed clerical bodies that administer family and personal status law through their own religious courts, which the government subsidizes.

The Maronites are the largest Christian group. Although they have had an ongoing association with the Roman Catholic Church, they have their own patriarch, liturgy, and customs. The second largest Christian group is the Greek Orthodox Church (composed of ethnic Arabs who continue to adhere to a Greek-language liturgy). Other Christians are divided among Greek Catholics, Armenian Orthodox

(Gregorians), Armenian Catholics, Syrian Orthodox (Jacobites), Syrian Catholics, Assyrians (Nestorians), Chaldeans, Copts, Latins (Roman Catholic), and evangelicals (including Protestant groups such as the Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and Friends).

The traditional lifestyle of the Lebanese revolves around the family, socializing, and hospitality. Western influences, mainly French and American, have given the country a cosmopolitan outlook that predominates in urban areas. Beyond the cities, especially in the mountains, the people cling to old customs and traditions. The Lebanese people, despite being ethnically and religiously diverse because of the country's long history of conquest and assimilation, are friendly and hospitable. The country has a fairly high level of cultural achievement in the arts, with a popular form of poetry being *zajal*, in which poets enter into a witty dialogue of improvised verse. The national dance of Lebanon is the *dabke*, which is performed throughout the country by dancers wearing traditional Lebanese costume. The theme of the dance relates to village life. Local crafts include glass making, weaving, pottery, embroidery, and brass and copper work.

❁ CUISINE

The cuisine of Lebanon is the epitome of the Mediterranean culinary arts. It includes an abundance of starches, fruits, vegetables, fresh fish, and other varieties of seafood; animal fats are consumed sparingly. Poultry is eaten more often than red meat (the red meat is usually lamb). It also includes lots of garlic and olive oil. Generally food is grilled, baked, or sautéed in olive oil; butter or cream is rarely used, except in desserts. Vegetables are eaten raw, pickled, or cooked. Lebanese cuisine focuses on herbs, spices, and the freshness of ingredients; the assortment of dishes and combinations are unending. The meals are full of robust, earthy flavors to a great extent dictated by the seasons.

In Lebanon drinks are seldom served without being accompanied by food. An interesting aspect of Lebanese cuisine is the manner or custom in which food is often served. Called *mezze*, it is an array of small dishes placed before the guests that create a delightful mix of colors, flavors, textures, and aromas. Though simple fresh fruits are often served toward the end of a Lebanese meal, there is also dessert and coffee. Baklava, usually associated with Greece, is a popular Lebanese dessert. The main difference between the Lebanese variety and its Greek counterpart is that Lebanese baklava often contains pistachio nuts and is drizzled with rosewater syrup; the Greek variety usually contains walnuts and honey. In Lebanon coffee is served throughout the day, at home and in public cafes. Lebanese coffee is strong, thick, heavily sweetened and often flavored with cardamom.



A Lebanese family buys party novelties and souvenirs from a vendor in Beirut, Lebanon, on December 31 in preparation for New Year's Eve festivities. (AP Photo/Mahmoud Tawil)

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

Though most of the Lebanese population are Muslims and observe the Islamic New Year, they also celebrate the New Year's Day that begins the Gregorian calendar year. This custom may be ascribed to Lebanon's remaining under French influence for a considerable length of time. This is a public holiday. As in the rest of the world, Lebanese spend the day in parties and get-togethers along with friends and family members.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Although the earliest origins of May 1 celebrations are ascribed to the pagan celebrations practiced by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages, contemporary observances of Labor Day, also known as May Day and Workers' Day, began in 1889 when the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, designated May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour

workday. In Lebanon the day is celebrated by processions, public speeches, and trade union activities.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ MARTYRS' DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 6

Martyrs' Day, or Press Day, recaptures the gory episode of May 6, 1916 (during World War I), when Lebanese journalists were executed by the Ottoman authorities in Martyrs' Square in downtown Beirut. In Lebanon May 6 is still commemorated annually as Press Day. The activities on this day include processions and public speeches.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 22

This day holds tremendous significance for the people of Lebanon. On this day Lebanon finally won its freedom from French rule in 1943. It is a public holiday, and all public and government institutions are closed. The day is commemorated with flag raising ceremonies, parades, and public speeches.

Religious Holidays

❁ ARMENIAN CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: January 6

In Lebanon Christmas is popularly known as "Armenian Christmas." It is a culmination of celebrations of events related to Jesus' incarnation. Theophany, or Epiphany (*Astvadz-a-baytnootyoon* in Armenian) means "revelation of God," the central

theme of the Christmas season in the Armenian Church. During the Armenian Christmas season, the major events celebrated include the Nativity of Jesus in Bethlehem, followed by his Baptism in the river Jordan. Christmas, a major feast in the Armenian Church, is celebrated on January 6.

In Lebanon, which has a sizable population of Armenian Christians, the day is observed with prayers and colorful processions outside the churches, where the clergy and the common people mingle together, chanting and listening to band music.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ ORTHODOX CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: January 7

Orthodox Christmas is celebrated by Ethiopians, Russians, Lebanese, and Ukrainians on January 7 according to the Julian calendar. By following this calendar Orthodox Christians remain true to the traditions of their ancestors.

Orthodox Christmas, also known as the Feast of Epiphany and the Feast of Nativity, celebrates the visit of the three wise men from the East to the newborn Jesus. There is a great deal of preparation, including a 40-day fasting period, although some Orthodox Christians observe this just a week before the event.

In Lebanon on Christmas Eve, observant Orthodox Christians fast until late evening, when the first star appears. When the star is seen, people lay the table for their Christmas supper. On Christmas Day the devout take part in a divine liturgy, after which many walk in procession to seas, rivers, and lakes. Everyone comes together for outdoor ceremonies to bless the water. Some take water home to bless their houses. Then a great feast is held indoors where people eat, drink, and enjoy themselves.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS; EPIPHANY

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, also known as Eid ul-Zuha, Bakr-Eid, and the Feast of Sacrifice, marks Ibrahim's (Abraham's) unflinching faith in God, demonstrated by his willingness to sacrifice his young son because the Almighty commanded him to do so. In Lebanon (as in other Islamic countries) on this day it is mandatory for each family to sacrifice sheep, goats, rams, or cattle in the name of God; this meat is then shared with friends, family, and distributed among the poor. Prior to this festival, the devout Muslims may, if it is physically and financially feasible, undertake a hajj,

The Julian Calendar

The Julian calendar is 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar, which is used by most of the world. It dates back to January 146 B.C.E. when the Greek astronomer Sorsigenies established the length of the solar calendar for Julius Caesar. He found it to be 365 and a quarter days. Every fourth year an extra day was added to keep the quarter days accurate. This resulted in a 10-day gap in the solar calendar by 1528. In March 1582 Pope Gregory XIII (r. 1572–85) rectified this by removing 10 days between March 11 and 21. As a result in Roman Catholic countries March 12–20, 1582 never existed.

St. Maroun

Saint Maroun (d. 1003) was raised in the city of Kouroch, located northeast of Antioch, in Turkey. It is believed that Maroun chose a very high location at the Semaan Mountain (formerly called Nabo Mountain after the pagan god Nabo). Geographically Semaan Mountain is located between Antioch and Aleppo. People had abandoned the mountain for years, and the area was completely deserted.

The ruins of an historic pagan temple that existed on the mountain attracted Maroun. He moved to this mountain and took up the life of a hermit. He made the ruined temple his residence after purging it of devils, but used it only for masses and offerings of the Eucharist. He used to spend all

his time in the open air, praying, fasting, and depriving his body of all means of comfort. He became famous in the whole area for his faith, holiness, and power of healing. Thousands of believers came to him seeking help and advice.

He was a mystic who started a new ascetic-spiritual method that attracted many people. He was a zealous missionary with a passion to spread the message of Christianity. He sought not only to cure the physical ailments that people suffered, but also wanted to nurture and heal the “lost souls” of both pagans and Christians of his time. Maroun’s holiness and countless miracles made him famous throughout the Antiochian Empire.

the obligatory pilgrimage to Mecca required by the Islamic faith.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

ST. MAROUN’S DAY

Observed by: Maronite Christians

Observed on: February 9

St. Maroun’s Day is a Maronite Christian observance that honors the founder of the Maronite Church, St. Maroun. Maroun was a Jacobite recluse who retired to the top of Mt. Nabo to meditate and pray. He was also renowned for his power to heal the sick. On the ninth of February, Maronite Christians remember what they have been exposed to, since the fourth century, both tranquil and turbulent times. They recollect their past, examine the present, and contemplate the future. They also pray for peace, democracy, and freedom on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

Islam’s calendar is based on the revolutions of the Moon, so it has only 354 days. The Islamic New Year, El am Hejir, is celebrated on the first day of Muharram, the first Islamic month. Compared to Western calendars, the Islamic year is 11 days shorter every year. Hence the Western date for this holiday shifts from one year to next. The beginning of the new year is usually quiet, unlike New Year’s celebrations associated with other calendars. In Lebanon Muslims gather in mosques for special prayers and readings. They recount the story of the

Hegira, Muhammad’s flight from Mecca to Medina. Muhammad’s flight marked the beginning of the Islamic era.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

ASHURA

Observed by: Shia Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

Along with other Islamic countries with a sizable Shia (or Shiite) population, Lebanese Muslims observe Ashura, also called the Mourning of Karbala, as a day of mourning in honor of Hussein, Muhammad’s grandson, and other martyrs who sacrificed their lives in the Battle of Karbala. Observed primarily on the 10th day of Muharram, it consists of two days of fasting and prayers for forgiveness. Shia Muslims in particular use the day to commemorate the martyrdom of Hussein.

In Shiite communities this is a solemn day: Plays reenacting the martyrdom are often staged and many take part in mourning rituals. Shia, however, end their 10-day observance with a large procession that reenacts Hussein’s funeral. Some of the Shia men flagellate or ritually cut themselves. They believe that inflicting bloody wounds on themselves will connect them with Hussein’s suffering and guarantee their salvation on the day of judgment.

For Sunni Muslims, Ashura has been a voluntary day of fasting because it also commemorates two historic events: the day Nuh (Noah) left the Ark, and the day that Musa (Moses) was saved from the Egyptians by Allah.

See also Volume III: ASHURA; ISLAM

Fun Fact
Nabo, or Nebo, was the Assyrio-Babylonian god of letters.

❁ HOLY WEEK

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Last week of Lent

In Lebanon on every Friday evening during Lent, a special church service is performed that reenacts the stages of Jesus' progress to Mt. Calvary. These services end on Good Friday, when the statue of Jesus is taken down from the altar, placed in a coffin, and carried around the church or even into the surrounding neighborhood. The statue is left in the coffin during Easter Saturday and the church is in mourning until the Easter service held at midnight on Saturday or on Sunday morning. In addition, Lebanese fast during Lent, and on Good Friday no one eats meat or other animal products.

On Easter Saturday people visit seven churches to be blessed at each. Some people place dough outside in a tree on Saturday night, believing it will be blessed by Jesus. On Sunday evening they also place small pieces of this dough in other food containers so that these too become blessed.

On Easter Sunday and Monday, people feast and take sweets such as chocolates to friends and family. Easter, or Pascha, is a solemn occasion, celebrating the Resurrection of Jesus three days after his Crucifixion. On Easter Sunday all families hold a special lunch at which turkey or chicken (stuffed with nuts) is served with rice. An important practice during Easter is the preparation of the *maamoul*. *Maamoul* are little cakes, made with semolina, covered with icing, sugar, and filled with walnuts or dates. Each household has the *maamoul* laid out on a big plate with other delicacies such as chickpeas covered with sugar and sugared almonds.

During Lent the children of the villages collect eggs that they color and then use for egg-cracking games at Easter. Traditionally the eggs were dyed in colors of brown, green, yellow, and red. The afternoon is spent visiting family and friends. Easter visits often extend to weeklong holidays for visiting friends and relatives in distant places.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ MOULOU

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the fifth month of the Islamic calendar

Mouloud, or Mawlid al-Nabi, is celebrated on the 12th day of Rabbi al-Awwal, the fifth month of the Islamic calendar, to mark the birthday of Muhammad, who entered the world in 570. On this day Muslims focus on his life and teachings, sing songs, and say special prayers. This is a low-key affair

because it is believed that Muhammad urged his followers not to make a spectacle of his birthday.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOU

❁ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: August 15

The festival symbolizes the final journey of the Blessed Virgin (the mother of Jesus) to heaven. The Christian population of Lebanon celebrates this day with traditional prayers and visits to local churches. Mary's passage into heaven is called the Assumption of Mary by Catholics and the Dormition of the Theotokos by the Eastern Orthodox Church. It is also known as the Feast of the Dormition, which means "falling asleep," emphasizing the belief that Mary did die a mortal death before her Assumption.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr, or Festival of Fast-Breaking, this festival marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, the holiest month of the Islamic calendar when the Koran requires Muslims to observe a month-long fast from dawn to dusk of every day. It was during this month that Muhammad fasted for 40 days, after which the Koran was revealed to him.

Lebanese Muslims mark this day by wearing new clothes and taking part in community prayers with their Muslim brethren in mosques. This is followed by social visits, exchanges of greetings and gifts, and partaking of delicacies, in particular *maamoul*, which the women have prepared for this occasion.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day is a Christian festival that honors and remembers all Christian saints, both known and obscure. This day is meant to remember, thank God for, and also to venerate the saints in heaven for their various acts of kindness and charity. In Lebanon on this day people pay homage to the respective patron saints of each village by decorating the local church and holding processions that include statues of the saints.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

Regional Holidays

❁ BAALBECK MUSICAL FESTIVAL

Observed in: Baalbeck region

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July

First conceived in 1922, this internationally famous cultural event showcases the best of drama, poetry, and opera performed not only by the local, regional, and national artists of Lebanon but also by legendary past performers like Rostropovich, Richter, the Paris and Milan Operas, Rudolf Nureyev with the Royal Ballet, Maurice Béjart's Ballet du XXème siècle, the Paul Taylor Dance Company, the Bolshoi Ballet, the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra (with Herbert Von Karajan conducting), the Musici di Roma, and the Academia Filarmonia Romana, to name only a few. Held against the breathtaking backdrop of the majestic ancient ruins of the Sun Temple, it proves to be a memorable event for those who can attend.

Rites of Passage

❁ MARRIAGE

A Muslim *nikah* ("wedding") can be scheduled for any time convenient to both parties. Once the date has been set, the boy's father sends a cash present to the girl's father. This custom is called Legan-Chir. Before the wedding some ceremonies are usually held in both the girl's and the boy's homes. The day before the wedding, the groom's father sends *mebendi*, body artists, to the bride's house to color her hands and feet. On the day of the wedding the bridegroom, wearing a turban with a floral veil (*sebra*) tied on his forehead, leads a procession to the bride's house.

The structure of the ceremony is left to the judgment of the *qazi* (the person who solemnizes the wedding). The most common matrimonial service is one in which the *qazi*, the bridegroom, and the bride's attorney, accompanied by the witnesses,

assemble in a convenient place. This is the point at which arrangements are made regarding the amount of the dowry (*mehr*). The bridegroom then repeats various lines after the *qazi* and finishes by repeating *kabul* three times. The ceremony concludes with the marriage contract, the *nikah-nama*, being signed by the newlyweds and two witnesses.

The wedding is followed by a huge reception hosted by the bride's parents. The groom's family also throws a reception to welcome and honor the new bride. This feast is called the Dawat-e-walima.

Lebanese Christian weddings take place in a church. When the groom-to-be sets out for the church, accompanied by his a best man (usually a brother or friend), the women standing around shower them with rice, while chanting blessings and making a shrill whistling noise. Usually people go all the way to their family's original village to get married. The couple enters the church together. After the vows have been made, musicians play and dancers perform a traditional dance (*dabke*). The troupe engages the couple in dancing along with them in front of the guests. Sabers are brought for the newlyweds, who dance while holding them above their heads, a reminder of the saber dance that was traditionally performed in the villages by professional dancers. Thereafter the couple and their families line up for kisses and blessings. The assembled guests shout congratulatory messages to the newlyweds; they also wish good luck to the couple's young unmarried siblings and cousins who may hope to be married in the near future. The bride then throws her bouquet, champagne bottles are opened, and the wedding cake is cut.

Further Reading

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Lesotho

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Southern Africa, an enclave of South Africa
Size	11,720 sq. mi.
Capital City	Maseru
Flag Description	The Lesotho flag is divided diagonally from the lower hoist side corner; the upper half is white, bearing the brown silhouette of a large shield with a crossed spear and club; the lower half is a diagonal blue band with a green triangle in the corner.
Independence	October 4, 1966 (from United Kingdom)
Population	1,865,040 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary constitutional monarchy
Nationality	Mosotho (singular), Basotho (plural)
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Sotho (100%)
Major Language(s)	Sesotho (southern Sotho); English (official); Zulu; Xhosa
Major Religion(s)	Catholic (45%); Protestant (35%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Moshoeshoe Day, March 11; National Tree Planting Day, March 21; Labor Day, May 1; Family Day, July 4; King's Birthday, July 17; Independence Day, October 4

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Present-day Lesotho was formerly called Basutoland and has been inhabited by Sotho-speaking people since the 16th century. The Qhauique people inhabited Lesotho before the Sothos supplanted them. The Dutch East India Company came to Cape Town in the 17th century in a bid to supply passing ships. The company settled down to practice agriculture and began expanding with the help of African slaves. By the late 18th century about 435 miles from Cape Town, colonialists had to wage long wars with Bantu-speaking chiefdoms for control and power. At the same time in areas that were beyond European colonial control, a strong Zulu state emerged under their leader Shaka. The descendants of the original colonial Dutch settlers, the Boer Voortrekkers (Afrikaans for pioneers, literally “those who move ahead”), began expanding too.

Moshoeshoe (1786–1870), the Basotho leader, brought

together the people of Basutoland, which later came to be called Lesotho. Moshoeshoe came to be known as Moshoeshoe the Great because he was the first one to organize the people of his group, forging a strong Basotho identity. The Boers threatened Moshoeshoe's kingdom in 1834 while advancing toward the northern Orange Free State. Moshoeshoe sought refuge with the British, and his kingdom was made a British protectorate in 1868. In 1871 it became a part of Cape Colony and, in 1884, a separate British colony. Basutoland subsequently became a high commission British territory in South Africa (along with Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland).

Modern party politics began in 1952 when the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP) was formed. In 1955 the BCP started a military campaign and demanded freedom, which was subsequently achieved. Basutoland received limited self-governance from the British with King Moshoeshoe II (1938–96; of the BCP) winning the 1960 elections. In the 1966 elections Chief Leabua Jonathan (1914–87) of the Basutoland National Party (BNP) defeated him, becoming the first

prime minister of independent Lesotho. Chief Jonathan was defeated in the 1970 elections, but he banned the opposition, suspended the constitution, expelled the king, and ruled until 1986 in a one-party Lesotho state.

In 1993 constitutional government was restored after 23 years of military rule. Ntsu Mokhehle (1918–99), leader of the majority Basotho Congress Party, became the prime minister. In 1998 South Africa and Botswana, representing the Southern African Development Community, intervened on the Lesotho government's behalf to quell mutinies and rebellion. In the 2002 elections the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (created from the BCP) won again but had to declare an emergency after a three-year drought in 2004. In the month following the declaration of emergency, the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, which was infamous because of a corruption scandal, finally became functional, supplying much-needed water to the people. With unemployment rising as high as 40 to 50 percent, the functioning of the project was a sign of economic promise as well.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Lesotho is rightly called the “Kingdom in the Sky” because the major portion of the country lies on a highland (Karoo Basin). The terrain is mostly hills, plateaus, and mountains. These mountains separate the country from South Africa, though they completely enclose the country.

Lesotho is also called the “Mountain Kingdom,” with tourists thronging to the region for its crystal clear waters and the greenery on the mountainsides. Geographically most of Lesotho is a high mountain plateau carved out by river valleys. The Maluti Mountains extend to the north and south, forming a plateau of 9,000 to 10,000 feet in height. Thabana Ntlenyana, at 11,425 feet, is the highest point in the nation. These mountains are famous for the rich volcanic soils deposited in their foothills as well as for their remarkable landscape. The sources of the two important South African rivers, the Orange and the Tugeld, are found in these mountains. The Caledon River, whose tributaries flow along the western border, also originates here. Lesotho is an alpine country. It has the highest low point of any country in the world.

The climate is greatly influenced by the highland position of Lesotho in the Karoo basin. Winters are generally dry and cool during the day, and cold during the night. There is heavy snowfall at least once annually. Skies are particularly clear and beautiful during this time. The summers are hot and humid. In fact the country gets 85 percent of its showers during summer. This can be attributed to the fact that Lesotho lies both in the Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) and the Kalahari low-pressure area. The summer days are usually cloudy with strong winds and hailstorms a normal occurrence.

❁ ECONOMY

Water is referred to as “white gold” by the Basotho people; it is Lesotho's key natural resource. Others include agricultural and grazing land, diamonds, and minerals. The Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP) placed Lesotho among the top 10 gross domestic product (GDP) earning countries in Africa in 1995 and 1996. According to the LHWP Treaty between Lesotho and South Africa, Lesotho earns royalties from the sale of water to South Africa without incurring any cost toward transporting the water, thus adding substantially to the national income. The tourism industry also has a major share in the country's GDP. Most small-scale industries are related to animal husbandry and agriculture. These include food processing, footwear, clothing, textiles, and construction.

Agriculture is perennially challenged because of the short farming season. A major problem of the economy is unemployment and the extreme inequality of income distribution. Lesotho is party to the International Monetary Fund's Interim Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility. Increasing importance is being given to the private sector, globalizing trade and production in Lesotho. This emphasis aligns Lesotho with South Africa and other members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and with the larger world economy.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The Basotho are rich in traditions and animist beliefs. The kingdom had originally united under the leadership of Moshoeshe the Great to preserve its identity and cultures from colonizers and the Zulu leader Shaka. They continue their efforts in preserving and promoting their art forms and cultural heritage.

From birth until death, music and dance are included in all important ceremonies. Herding boys are known to play a flutelike instrument called the *lekulo*; women play the *thomo*, a stringed instrument, while men play the *setolo-tolo*, an instrument that resembles and functions much like the Jew's harp, using their mouths to move its strings. Cattle play an important role in the society as they serve as sacrifices and also as a status symbol in village culture.

Fun Fact

More than 80 percent of the country is situated at a height of 5,906 feet (more than a mile) above sea level.

Fun Fact

There is an old tradition in Lesotho of controlling the weather and crops by performing sacred rituals such as rain dances and animal sacrifices.

Fun Fact

Lesotho is a cool mountainous country, and the people have developed clothing well suited to that environment. Dressing in brightly colored woolen Basotho blankets keeps the rain off and wards off the chill.

CUISINE

The hotels in the capital city of Maseru serve international food, and European and Indian cooking styles have both influenced cooking in Lesotho. Though much of the country's food is imported from South Africa, freshwater fish is found in abundance. Traditional food items include corn, pumpkin, sugar beans (a side dish made of beans and legumes), and wild spinach. Corn is eaten ground or as kernels in porridge with sour milk. Some dishes of the Basotho (or Sotho) people include one made with greens like spinach and potatoes called *moroko* (*morogo*), a rice dish called *nyekoe*, and traditional Sotho sour maize porridge, which is prepared from fermented corn. It can be served with meat and/or *morogo*. *Sadza* and *nshima* are similar dishes. Homemade alcoholic drinks or beer are known as *bojoala*, *joala*, or *letting*.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

New Year's Day is one of the most celebrated days in the world. In Lesotho people gather to enjoy music, dance, and feasting. The various tribes of Lesotho welcome the new year with their own traditional dances and feasts.

MOSHOESHOE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 11

This day commemorates the death of the founder of the nation, the Great Moshoeshoe, in 1870. The day's festivities begin with the sitting king's inspection of the honor guard of the Lesotho Defense Force members. He then receives a message and a gleaming torch from a runner, who comes from Moshoeshoe's fort in Thaba Bosiu, a place of great significance in the country's history located about 180 miles away from the capital city of Maseru. After delivering the message of peace to the nation, the king lights the ceremonial flame to mark the beginning of the ceremony. Most leaders of

Fun Fact

King Letsie III underwent five years of painful struggle to find the right woman to marry. He appealed to leaders such as Nelson Mandela of South Africa to help in his search. Finally after a lot of searching, the would-be queen was found in the house of a common family. Thirty-three cows are usually given as bride-price (*labola*), but because it was the royal family, they decided to give the bride's family 40 instead.

Lesotho are then led by the king to place garlands at the Moshoeshoe I monument in the capital city, Maseru. Public institutions remain closed on this day.

NATIONAL TREE PLANTING DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 21

The soil of Lesotho is of very poor quality. Only 1 percent of the total land area has tree cover. The rising population is further taxing the existing per capita availability of land. In light of these concerns, on March 21 trees are planted all over the nation to curb soil erosion. Individuals, communities, and associations plant trees along with the forestry department. Some 1.2 million trees have been planted by the forestry department on various occasions, most prominently on National Tree Planting Day.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

The May 1 observance of Labor Day, also called May Day or Workers' Day, was established in 1889 by the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, as a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world. The first demonstrations and celebrations were scheduled for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. On this day, public as well as private offices in Lesotho are closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

FAMILY DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 4

Family Day was initiated in 1991 by the African Union to draw attention to the rising number of destitute children due to poverty, HIV/AIDS, and divorce. This day especially focuses on orphans and their welfare in African countries.

KING'S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 17

The birthday of the reigning King Letsie III (b. 1963) is celebrated in different districts each year so that more people can appreciate the king and his achievements. The king's birthday is also always celebrated at Matsieng, his hometown. He wears his

traditional red regalia with white stripes and receives a 21-gun salute. The national anthem is sung, and the king inspects the honor guard. This is followed by a prayer reading session sponsored by the Christian Council of Lesotho, which is responsible for the spiritual well-being of the nation. Celebrants recite parts of Psalm 21, offer prayers, and wish the king a long and prosperous life. These ceremonies culminate with traditional dances and music. In Lesotho banks are closed on July 17.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 4

October 4 marks the day Lesotho received its official freedom from British rule in 1966. Since that day Lesotho has continued as a constitutional monarchy with the king as its head. Independence Day celebrations in Lesotho involve developmental initiatives in different parts of the country. For instance, in the 2002 Independence Day celebrations, King Letsie III led the public to the Sekoati village for a tree-planting campaign. This village was chosen because it faces an intense soil erosion problem. The king, the queen, the prime minister, his cabinet, all the heads of diplomatic missions, and general public were all present to mark the occasion.

Religious Holidays

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

This day, also called Black Friday, Holy Friday, or Great Friday (in the Orthodox Church), is observed in remembrance of the Crucifixion of Jesus. Christians in Lesotho attend church, sing hymns, and pray. The life of Jesus is remembered through enacting plays and singing devotional songs. People also conduct processions to reenact Jesus' last journey to Calvary. Most Basotho observe a partial fast.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection on the third day following his death on the Cross. It celebrates the victory over death and the regeneration of life. It falls on the first Sunday after the fasting period of Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. Easter Monday, the day after Easter, is a public holiday in Lesotho, with government offices,

schools, and many businesses closed.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 25

Having been a part of the British Empire, Lesotho's Christmas celebrations are largely influenced by British traditions. Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus on this day by attending church services and singing hymns during the midnight services on Christmas Eve. It does snow in Lesotho, but not in December. Therefore the white color of Christmas celebrations is missing, though not the enthusiasm and joy of getting together with friends and family on this Christian holiday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 26

Boxing Day, celebrated in some Christian countries as St. Stephen's Day, derives from a medieval British custom of giving servants and peasants Christmas gifts the day after Christmas. On this day boxes used for collecting money for the poor were also opened, hence the name, Boxing Day. Also gifts are given to those who render service to the community throughout the year.

A former British colony, Lesotho is a part of the Commonwealth group of nations. The Commonwealth of Nations is an association of independent nations, most of which are former colonies of the British Empire. They share some common cultural links, which were influenced by the British, and Boxing Day is one of them.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ THE MORIJA ARTS AND CULTURAL FESTIVAL

Observed in: Morija
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Late September or early October

This annual festival is celebrated in Morija in late September or the beginning of October. It highlights the varied arts, dance forms, singing styles, films, and dramatic forms that have come to be an integral part of the people of Lesotho's lives. It is an attempt to preserve and promote their diverse culture. Through 40 events in eight venues of Morija,

Lesotho invites people to cherish the art and craft displays at Thabeng Football Ground (the main venue), attend jazz concerts, and eat traditional meals or light snacks from the tearoom. This festival is also meant to promote the tourism industry in addition to cultivating the cultural pride of the people of Lesotho.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

In a village there are several ways of celebrating a child's birth. The village chief can give away young girls to spiritual leaders, entrusting them with bringing these girls up to follow their path. As a ritual the father is usually welcomed to see his newborn daughter, and water drops are splashed on him. Another birth ritual involves wrapping the baby in a special blanket, which can later be used by the mother to tie the baby on her back.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Basotho teenagers are sent for *lebollo*, that is, the practice of initiation into adulthood, at a *lebollong*, or the initiation places, for a month or two. Ideally they emerge mature and courageous enough to handle a family, able to fight (if they are boys), and able to cook and raise children (if they are girls). *Mokorotlo* is the initiation ritual dance for boys. Circumcision of boys is prevalent in Lesotho. A young male is sometimes circumcised under unscientific and unhygienic conditions, which can lead to infection and even death. He is also given a special blanket as a symbol of adulthood.



Traditional warriors parade around the national stadium in Maseru before the royal wedding of King Letsie III to Karabo Motsoeneng on February 18, 2000. (AP Photo/Lori Waselchuk)

❁ MARRIAGE

Traditionally, the groom gives a herd of cattle to the bride's father and includes a special blanket among his gifts (*bokali*). Women from the bride's family chase away the cattle using sticks and rocks, while the groom has to round them up and bring them back. This ceremony takes place on the day of the wedding. The wedding party arrives at the church blowing horns and singing, while those who have already arrived join in with more music and clapping. The groomsmen wear black, while the bridesmaids dress in silver gowns. The bride's brother and the groom's sister escort the couple into the church. Older women sweep the ground in front of the groom, waving a cloth and singing. People gather around to watch them and enjoy the ceremony. Once inside, rings are exchanged and the wedding cake is cut. Usually a preacher is asked to give a sermon about life. When he has finished, everyone moves into the reception tent where there is major feasting and merrymaking.

❁ DEATH

There is a Basotho belief that the spirit hovers around the body after death. If someone were to cut the dead person's tongue or drive a peg through his head, the spirit could be turned into a ghost. Because of this belief, the dead body is carefully protected before being safely buried. The belief that the ancestors' spirits look after the family is widespread, though spirits can also induce illness in some family members so that they will have their company after death. To avoid this condition, a traditional healer, called *ngaka*, contacts the evil spirit and restores good relations between the spirit and the family. Traditional religious healers are also called if the person has died suddenly.

A man shaves his head and wears a black scarf as a sign of mourning on the death of his father. If an important member of the Mosotho tribe dies, the hut is dropped over him, and that place is never visited again. This act symbolizes the complete end of the deceased.

Further Reading

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Libéria

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Western Africa, with the Atlantic Ocean to the west, Sierra Leone to the north, Guinea to the east, and Côte d'Ivoire to the east and south
Size	43,000 sq. mi.
Capital City	Monrovia
Flag Description	Liberia's flag has 11 alternating red and white stripes with a blue square at the top hoist side that contains a white five-pointed star.
Independence	July 26, 1847
Population	3,482,211 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Liberian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	African ethnic groups (95%, including Kpelle, Bassa, Gio, Kru, Grebo, Mano, Krahn, Gola, Gbandi, Loma, Kissi, Vai, Dei, Bella, Mandingo, and Mende); Americo-Liberians (2.5%)
Major Language(s)	English (official); 20 indigenous languages, of which a few can be written and used in correspondence
Major Religion(s)	Indigenous beliefs (40%); Christians (40%); Muslim (20%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Armed Forces Day, February 11; Decoration Day, March; J. J. Roberts's Birth Anniversary, March 15; National Redemption Day, April 12; Samuel Kanyon Doe Day, May 6; Unity Day, May 14; Africa Day, May 25; Independence Day, July 26; National Flag Day, August 24; Thanksgiving, November; Remembrance Day, November 11; President W. V. S. Tubman's Birthday, November 29

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The Republic of Liberia has the distinction of being the oldest republic on the African continent. The word *Libéria* was derived from the Latin word for “freedom” and means “land of the free.” It was founded in 1820 by freed American slaves. Eighty-six Americo-Liberians (as they called themselves) came to Liberia and on February 26, 1820, established their first settlement in Christopolis. Later, in 1824, the main city, Christopolis, was renamed Monrovia in honor of the president of the United States of America James Monroe (1758–1831). Thus Liberia owes its origin to slavery or the, “peculiar institution” as it came to be known in 19th-century America.

Although not much is known about the history of Liberia before 1820, it is believed that the Bassa, Malinke, and Gó tribes were the main inhabitants of the region. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive in the region in 1461.

West Africa generally had been at the center of the European slave trade since the 15th century. Yet until the arrival of the Americo-Liberians in 1820, no Western powers had established an outpost in the region. Thus Liberia was neither a colony nor an independent country. Following the American Revolution, as the United States grappled with the question of slavery, some reformers sought to solve the problem by encouraging emancipation of slaves with the promise that freed slaves would be removed from the country and resettled in Africa. Although most free blacks rejected the proposal, as did later white abolitionists, initially the idea attracted prominent support. The American Colonization

The American Colonization Society

The American Colonization Society (ACS; more formally the National Colonization Society of America) was founded in 1816 by Reverend Robert Finley, a Presbyterian minister. The first president of the organization was a Virginian, former U.S. President James Monroe, and Henry Clay from Kentucky was its president from 1836 to 1849.

Because prominent Southerners were involved in the ACS, U.S. abolitionists attempted to discredit its colonization project as a “slaveholders’ scheme.” Although it is popularly believed that the ACS was established to buy the freedom of slaves and pay their passage to Liberia, this was not the case. In fact the ACS tried unsuccessfully to persuade the U.S. Congress to provide funds to colonize Liberia, but it had better luck with several state legislatures including those of Virginia, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

An early leader of the ACS, Jehudi Ashmun (1794–1828), envisioning an American empire in Africa, began leasing, annexing, or buying tribal

lands, but he was also prepared to use force if necessary to expand the colony’s territory, and his aggressiveness quickly intimidated Liberia’s African neighbors. In an 1825 treaty Ashmun convinced King Peter and several other tribal kings to sell their land to him for 500 bars of tobacco, three barrels of rum, five casks of powder, five umbrellas, ten iron posts, and ten pairs of shoes, among other items.

The ACS controlled Liberia’s development until 1847 when, afraid that the British intended to annex the colony, Liberia declared itself a free and independent state, and enacted a constitution that closely followed its U.S. model. By 1867 the society had sent more than 13,000 emigrants to Liberia. By the end of the U.S. Civil War in 1865, President Lincoln was one of the few advocates of colonization in the U.S. government, and the project was abandoned after he was assassinated, although the ACS was not officially dissolved until 1964. In 1913, and again when it formally dissolved in 1964, the society donated its records to the Library of Congress.

Society (ACS) emerged in 1816 and later chose this region in West Africa to begin the resettlement program for freed slaves.

While the colonization plan failed to end slavery in the United States, some 19,000 freed slaves did find their way to West Africa, along with some 5,000 others recaptured from slave ships. For them Liberia was a “Promised Land.” As American freed slaves arrived in Liberia, they brought with them American ideas and culture. The Americo-Liberians formed the dominant group within the population and founded the Republic of Liberia on July 26, 1847. Joseph Jenkins Roberts (1809–76), an Americo-Liberian who was born and brought up in the United States, became the first president of independent Liberia.

Following the foundation of the country Americo-Liberians dominated Liberia, establishing themselves as an elite class and causing resentment and tension with the indigenous Africans they ruled. Escalating economic difficulties weakened the state’s dominance over the coastal indigenous population. As conditions worsened, Liberia attempted to modernize its economy with little success. By 1909 the government was bankrupt and forced to borrow, particularly from the United States. Liberia leased large areas of land on favorable terms to American companies such as Firestone, which developed a massive rubber plantation. With the complicity of the government, these companies exploited Liberia’s landscape and people. By 1930 the

League of Nations substantiated charges that they employed “forced labor . . . hardly distinguishable from slavery.” The government collapsed, and the new president Edwin Barclay (1882–1955) introduced increasingly repressive laws to maintain control.

If Liberia established some political stability and economic success in the middle decades of the 20th century, by the 1980s ethnic hostilities had reemerged and conditions deteriorated. In 1980 Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe (1950/51–90), an indigenous Liberian of the Krahn ethnic group, staged a military coup against the then-president of Liberia, William R. Tolbert (1913–80), and ordered the execution of the president and several government officials of Americo-Liberian descent. He formed the People’s Redemption Council (PRC) and assumed power in Liberia. Ethnic tensions led to violent protests and killings in different parts of Liberia. All political parties were banned until 1984. Elections resumed in 1985 and, despite allegations of fraud, Samuel Doe’s political party, the National Democratic Party of Liberia, was declared victorious. The situation worsened as ethnic violence engulfed the country, and there were reports of widespread corruption and human rights abuses.

On December 24, 1989, an invasion led by Charles Taylor (b. 1948), a former procurement chief of Doe’s brigade, received the overwhelming support of the Liberian people, who were tired of Doe’s oppressive regime. Taylor and his National Patriotic Front reached Monrovia within six months of their first attack. This marked the beginning of a civil war in Liberia that engulfed the region for

Fun Fact

Liberia’s capitol Monrovia was named for U.S. president James Monroe.

almost 14 years. It is estimated that more than 200,000 Liberians were killed, and millions forced into exile, making it one of the bloodiest civil wars in the region. Although Charles Taylor was declared president of Liberia in 1997, the lives of Liberians failed to show any sign of improvement.

In August 2003, under mounting international pressure, President Taylor resigned and was exiled to Nigeria. A comprehensive peace agreement was signed between different warring factions in the region, and the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL), comprising rebels, civil groups, and government, was placed in charge of Liberia. By 2004 the United Nations had completed the task of disarming former combatants. The country is slowly and steadily moving toward stability and trying to establish a normal life for its people, but the memories of a dark and bloody civil war remain fresh in the minds of Liberians.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in western Africa, the Republic of Liberia is flanked by the North Atlantic Ocean, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, and the Republic of Guinea. Liberia's forests cover 60 percent of the country's area, and it is also home to 40 percent of the rain forests of western Africa. While the savannah (grasslands dotted with trees) covers 20 percent, farmland occupies 6 percent, leaving 14 percent of the land area for human habitation. Mount Wuteve is the most striking geographical feature of Liberia. The largest rivers in Liberia are the St. Paul, St. John, and Cavalla.

Liberia has extensive tropical trees such as mahogany, ironwood, and fig and is also home to a wide variety of animals such as monkeys, chimpanzees, buffalo, and endangered pygmy hippopotamuses. Liberia has a hot, tropical climate, with little variation in temperature. The winters are dry with hot days and cool, sometimes cold, nights, whereas the summers are cloudy with frequent showers. The wet season runs from May to October. The dry dust-laden harmattan wind blows from December to March, making the coastal belt particularly arid. The average mean temperature in Monrovia is 79°F in January and 75°F in July.

❁ ECONOMY

The civil war in Liberia crippled most of the economy from 1980 until the early 21st century. Businessmen fled the country during the war and took their wealth and expertise with them. Three-quarters of the population is engaged in subsistence agriculture.

Liberia has favorable climatic conditions for agricultural activities, and in the past it has been a major producer and exporter of rubber and raw timber. Also the region is blessed with mineral resources, which can serve as an excellent revenue

generator for the country. The unemployment rate nationally is estimated to be as high as 85 percent.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

When Americo-Liberians arrived in Liberia, they brought American culture and prejudices with them. They considered the word "tribal" derogatory since they believed they were more refined than the indigenous people. Accordingly, Liberians who were freed American slaves called themselves Americo-Liberian, while they referred to black Africans who were captured and forced into slavery, but who never reached the West, as Congo. The Congolese, also called African-Liberians, were treated as second-class citizens. Everything that came from the *qui*, or West, commanded great respect in the region. But as Christianity spread among the indigenous people, ironically the Americo-Liberians also began showing keen interest in animistic beliefs. Many of them participated in the secret rituals held by secret societies such as the *poro* for men and *sande* for women.

English is the official language of Liberia, although the different ethnic groups prefer to speak their own languages. The Kpelle, the Bassa, the Grebo, the Gio, the Vai, and the Kru are the main ethnic groups in Liberia, with the Kpelle being the largest among them. Among the Kpelle, the division of labor is clear and defined. Women shoulder the responsibility of gathering, fishing, weaving nets, and baskets, while men, who are mainly farmers, also engage in clearing brush, making furniture, and weaving mats.

Music is an integral part of Liberian culture. The country is home to indigenous folk music as well as Christian and Americo-Liberian music. Call-and-response, voice repetitions, and polyrhythmic tunes figure prominently in traditional Liberian music. Highlife music, which originated in Ghana, is also popular in Liberia.

❁ CUISINE

Rice and cassava form the staple diet of Liberia; rice is cooked twice a day in many homes. Rice bread made with mashed bananas is a Liberian favorite. U.S. influence on Liber-

Fun Fact

Unlike other African countries, the founding of Liberia was privately sponsored by American religious and philanthropic groups with some help from U.S. state legislatures.

Fun Fact

For 133 years (1847–1980) the Americo-Liberian-dominated True Whig Party ruled the one-party state of Liberia.

Fun Fact

Masks figure prominently in most Liberian dances because they are symbolic connections of the living with ancestral spirits and ancient deities. Some dances remain secrets and are shared only within secret societies like the *poro* and *sande*.

Highlife Music

Highlife music originated in Sierra Leone and Ghana, where it was nurtured, and had slowly spread through different parts of West Africa by the 1920s. This unique style of music showcases jazz horns and multiple guitars, which provide the characteristic instrumentation of the bands. In the 1980s reggae was becoming popular worldwide and inspired a growing worldwide audience for other forms of world music that were easy to dance to. In Germany Ghanian immigrants to that country developed a distinctive type of highlife called “burger highlife.” Highlife music, which was often fused with reggae, reached a wider European and U.S. audience during this decade. More recently the style has begun to be more synthesizer-driven and to sound more uptempo.

ian cuisine is pervasive. Desserts are very popular in Liberia. American desserts, namely coconut pie, sweet potato pie, and pumpkin pie, have a tremendous following. Common beverages include special Liberian coffee, palm wine, and ginger beer.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day. However, since the beginning of the civil war, New Year's Day celebrations have been suspended in Liberia. All public and private institutions are closed on New Year's Day.

ARMED FORCES DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: February 11

Armed Forces Day honors the personnel of the armed forces of Liberia. Awards and military honors are conferred on this day. Parades by all branches of the armed forces, in full regalia, and inspections of guards of honor take place in the capital of Monrovia.

DECORATION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Second Wednesday in March

This was originally a legal holiday observed annually on the last Monday in May in the United States, in honor of the nation's armed services personnel

killed in war. The holiday was initially known as Decoration Day because it is a time for decorating graves with flowers and flags. On this day the people honor and pay floral tributes to all those who laid down their lives for their homeland. Decoration Day is a national holiday in Liberia. On this day Liberians also visit the graves of their loved ones and pay their respects.

J. J. ROBERTS'S BIRTH ANNIVERSARY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 15

J. J. Roberts's Birth Anniversary commemorates the birthday of the first president of the Republic of Liberia Joseph Jenkins Robert. He was born on March 15, 1809, in Virginia. He migrated to Liberia with his family in 1829 and became a merchant and a leading exporter. In 1838 the Americo-Liberian settlers decided to form a Commonwealth of Liberia and asked the American Colonization Society (ACS) to appoint a governor for the region. During the Commonwealth period (1839–47) he became the first African governor of the region. When the Republic of Liberia came into existence, he was appointed its first president.

Liberia prospered under his leadership. Among his achievements was the establishment of the Liberia College to spread education in the region. After his death he willed a considerable portion of his estate to a trust that would help improve Liberia's educational facilities. Official speeches and parades by the armed forces used to mark the celebrations before the outbreak of civil war. Celebrations have been suspended since the war began.

NATIONAL REDEMPTION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 12

National Redemption Day commemorates the military coup led by Samuel Kanyon Doe on April 12, 1980, that led to the ouster and execution of President William R. Tolbert Jr. Since its inception Liberia had been governed by the True Whig Party, which was composed exclusively of freed American slaves or their descendants, known as Americo-Liberians. There was resentment among many indigenous native Africans regarding this state of affairs since they suffered years of repression by the Americo-Liberians.

Samuel Doe, a member of the indigenous Krahn ethnic group, led the coup that overthrew the Americo-Liberian regime. He then became the first native African to assume the presidency of the Republic of Liberia. The day commemorates the return of

power of the Republic of Liberia to the indigenous inhabitants displaced by Americo-Liberians.

❁ SAMUEL KANYON DOE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 6

Samuel Kanyon Doe Day commemorates the birth anniversary of former president of the Republic of Liberia Samuel Kanyon Doe. Born in 1951, he was an ethnic Krahn, part of a rural impoverished tribe residing in inland Liberia. The Krahn were part of the large majority of the Liberian population of native African descent who had long been repressed by the Americo-Liberian elite, the progeny of the emancipated slaves-turned-colonists from America, the founders of Liberia in 1847. Doe joined the army after 11th grade and was trained by the American Green Berets; he soon rose to be a master sergeant.

On April 12, 1980, Doe successfully led a military coup and assumed the presidency of Liberia, killing President William R. Tolbert Jr., and establishing a military regime, the People's Redemption Council. Thus he became the first indigenous African to become the president of the republic. Doe was the president of Liberia from 1980 to 1990. His regime was an ethnically based dictatorship that suppressed political opposition and produced turmoil, civil war, and widespread misery.

May 6 commemorates the birthday of Doe. Because Doe is not universally admired, this day is marked by low-key civic ceremonies restricted mainly to his place of birth, Turzon in Grand Gedeh County. The lack of general celebration underscores his lack of popularity and discontent with his policies of blatant ethnic discrimination.

❁ UNITY DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 14

Unity Day, also called Unification and Integration Day, is an annual Liberian celebration that occurs on May 14. This day commemorates the Unification and Integration Policy introduced by President William Tubman on May 14, 1944. This policy aimed to integrate the native inhabitants of Liberia into mainstream Liberian politics.

Prior to this the indigenous African tribes were not allowed to participate in or contest elections. Moreover there were frequent fights between the Americo-Liberians and the ethnic tribes because the indigenous people were treated as second-class citizens in their own homeland. Through this policy, President Tubman aimed to give a fair representation to the ethnic tribes of Liberia and, in the process, help foster unity and camaraderie between Americo-Liberians and African-Liberians.

❁ AFRICA DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 25

Africa Day is celebrated to commemorate the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) on May 25, 1963, at Addis Ababa in Ethiopia. This day salutes the efforts of all African nations to form a unified Africa as well as recognizes their desire to help each other in matters relating to trade and development of the continent as a whole.

The OAU has been instrumental in negotiating and ending disputes, conflicts, and wars within Africa. At present, there are 53 member countries in the OAU. Africa Day is a national holiday in Liberia, marked by lectures and meetings where matters of interest and concern to African nations are discussed.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 26

The Republic of Liberia declared its independence on July 26, 1847. Although Liberia was never ruled by a colonial power, its declaration of independence from the American Colonization Society was an important milestone in its history. It is one of the oldest independent nations of Africa, one which has endured despite great odds. In 1820 freed American slaves were sent to Liberia as a part of an African colonization or resettlement program. These Americo-Liberians, as they were known, established their first settlement in Christopolis (modern-day Monrovia).

With the backing of the United States, on July 26, 1847, the Republic of Liberia came into existence, and Joseph Jenkins Roberts became the first president. Independence Day used to be celebrated on a grand scale and with a great deal of patriotic fervor in Liberia prior to the civil war. The president still presides over the Independence Day parade and pays tribute to the founders of the nation but on a much-diminished scale.

❁ NATIONAL FLAG DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 24

The 11 stripes in the Liberian Flag represent the 11 signatories of the Liberian Declaration of Independence, and the colors red and white signify courage and moral excellence. While the blue square represents the African mainland, the white star stands for the freedom granted to the slaves by the United States. Flag-raising and other civic ceremonies mark the day in Liberian towns and cities.

❁ THANKSGIVING

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First Thursday in November

In Liberia the first Thursday in November is observed as Thanksgiving day. All public and private institutions remain closed on this day. After Liberia became an independent nation, its legislature acknowledged “Liberia’s dependence on the great arbiter of events and established a Thanksgiving to Almighty God for the many good and loving kindnesses shown toward us as a people.” A law to that effect was passed in 1870; since then Thanksgiving has been celebrated in Liberia. Thanksgiving is a very important holiday in the United States, where many of Liberia’s citizens had come from.

See also Volume III: THANKSGIVING

❁ REMEMBRANCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 11

Remembrance Day, also called Veterans’ or Armistice Day, marks the official end of World War I on November 11, 1918. On this day the people of Liberia, together with their counterparts in other nations, observe a minute of silence at 11 A.M. as a mark of respect. Veterans’ organizations hold parades to pay homage to the soldiers who laid down their lives during this war. Over the years it has become an occasion for honoring and remembering the dead of later wars as well.

❁ PRESIDENT W. V. S. TUBMAN’S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 29

This day commemorates the birth anniversary of one of the most popular presidents of Liberia William Vacanarat Shadrach Tubman. He was born on November 29, 1895, and served as president from 1944 until his death in 1971. The hallmark of his presidency was the Unification and Integration Policy, which changed the course of history in Liberia.

Prior to the introduction of this policy, indigenous tribes were denied the basic right of representation in Liberia. The political system was dominated by the Americo-Liberians of the True Whig Party, while the native ethnic groups were not allowed to participate in Liberian elections. His landmark policy

introduced the ethnic groups to Liberia’s politics and gave them a platform to voice their problems and grievances.

Throughout his presidency, he worked tirelessly to foster unity among Liberians. On this day, Liberians pay homage to the legacy of President Tubman and remember his political initiatives and his life. During his lifetime, his birthday celebrations were marked by cultural activities, music, and dance performances. Since his death, and particularly since the civil war, celebrations have been muted.

Religious Holidays

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

The Christian holiday of Good Friday commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. On Good Friday devout Christians attend prayer services in their local churches. Devotional songs sung by church choirs and speeches, as well as plays showcasing the life and teachings of Jesus, are part of Good Friday observances.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a Christian feast that celebrates Jesus’ resurrection from the dead three days after his crucifixion. It falls on the first Sunday following Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas is a day of celebration for Christians all over the world because it marks the birth of Jesus. It is one of the most important holidays for Christians in Liberia. Simplicity is the hallmark of Liberian Christmas celebrations. On Christmas Eve devout Christians attend a special evening service and usher in Christmas with carols. Singing and dancing are an integral part of Christmas celebrations.

Before the civil war era, Christians and non-Christians in Liberia celebrated Christmas together. They would pray for peace and prosperity of the country. The government would also participate in the celebrations. All public and private institutions

Fun Fact

Unlike most countries in the world, decorated Christmas trees and exchanging gifts are not elements of traditional Christmas celebrations in Liberia. Feasting on Christmas is the Liberian way of celebrating this important religious occasion.

Secret Societies

In Liberia life is centered around the village and tribal community, and village elders usually have the last say in important decisions or ending disputes. Secret societies, such as the *poro* (for men) and the *sande* (for women) exercise control, not only of specific rituals and ceremonies, but are also capable of providing community stability during periods of upheaval. It is thought that as many as half of Liberia's population belongs to one secret society or another, including past presidents such as William Tolbert.

One of the crucial social functions of secret societies is initiating young people into the customs and rituals of the tribal community. When the youngsters in a tribe become teenagers, they attend bush schools

set up by secret societies. Although the specifics of what is taught in these schools cannot be repeated, their purpose is to teach young people the values of their tribe and its traditions and to prepare them for adulthood. These bush schools can last from a few months to three years, a period of time organized by the town elders who are also leaders of the secret societies responsible for passing on esoteric information. When they graduate, the young adults emerge into the outside world covered in white body paint, which is believed to make them invisible to evil spirits.

The esoteric information controlled by Liberian secret societies cannot be given to outsiders, and the penalties for such breaches of trust range from banishment to death.

are closed on Christmas.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ KARAMU FEAST

Observed by: Africans and African-Americans

Observed on: December 31

Kwanza is an African American celebration of life, and the penultimate day of Kwanza festivities is celebrated as the Karamu Feast. Beginning on December 26 Kwanza is a weeklong festival that coincides with Christmas celebrations. *Kwanza* is a Swahili word that means "the first fruits." Although it is an African-American holiday inspired by the traditional African festivities after the first harvest of crops, Kwanza is celebrated by people of African origin in different parts of the world.

Founded by noted African-American Dr. Maulana Karega, each day of Kwanza is dedicated to one of the seven principles that form the core of African culture. These include: *umoja* ("unity"), *kujichagulia* ("self-determination"), *ujima* ("collective work and responsibility"), *ujamaa* ("cooperative economics"), *nia* ("purpose"), *kuumba* ("creativity"), and *imani* ("faith"). During the seven-day Kwanza festivities, family members light seven candles in a *kinara* ("candleholder") at the end of each day. People also exchange gifts.

Most African-Liberians wear their traditional clothes while joining in the Kwanza celebrations. The feast is structured with the host at the center of it all. It begins with extending a warm welcome to the elders and all those invited, sharing traditional stories or dancing and singing traditional songs by forming a unity circle, reviewing the year gone by, and making commitments for the coming year; performing rituals and ceremonies to honor ancestors, and

rejoicing with traditional music and dance performances. A feast composed of traditional African delicacies is the highlight of the Karamu celebrations.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

The birth of a child calls for a big celebration in Liberia. Friends and family members are invited from all over the country, and a lavish feast is prepared to celebrate the birth of a child.

❁ MARRIAGE

Among many tribes in Liberia, polygamy is the preferred marital arrangement. The payment of bride-price is an integral part of the marriage structure and has to be paid outright. The Kpelle tribe lives in a patrilocal society; that is, after marriage the couple lives with the husband's family or clan. In lieu of bride-price, some Kpelle also accept bride-service, which means that the suitor will have to work for the bride's family and help them in their daily chores, as well as fulfill their needs, be it money or food.

❁ DEATH

Indigenous Liberians accept death as a part of life and treat it as an occasion to celebrate the life that has passed on to another world. Thus, when a person dies, a special ceremony is held that involves dancing and singing for the departed soul. Liberians believe that after people die, they join the ancestral spirits. There is great regard for ancestors in Liberia's indigenous societies.

Further Reading

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Libya

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	North Africa, on the Mediterranean Sea, bordered by Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Algeria, Niger, and Chad
Size	675,691 sq. mi.
Capital City	Tripoli
Flag Description	Plain green; denotes the traditional color of Islam
Independence	December 24, 1951 (Italy)
Population	5.7 million
Government	Jamahiriya (a state of the masses) (in theory, the populace through local councils; in fact, a military dictatorship)
Nationality	Libyan
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Arabs (92%)
Major Language(s)	Arabic (official)
Major Religion(s)	Islam (Sunni, 95%)
National Holiday(s)	People's Power Declaration, March 3; British Evacuation Day, April 28; Revolution Day, September 1; Italian Evacuation Day, October 7; Independence Day, December 24

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, or Libya, attained its independence from Italy in 1951. The name *Libya* is derived from the name of an ancient Berber tribe and was a term used by the ancient Greeks to denote the entire northern region of Africa.

Libyan history has witnessed a spate of invasions by Vandals and Turks in the ancient past and in modern times, by Italy. The influence of these incursions can be seen in the culture of the region and of Libya. Though predominantly an Arab nation, Libya is home to a mix of diverse ethnic groups such as sub-Saharan Africans, Turks, Tuaregs, and Berbers.

Tripolitania, Fezzan, and Cyrenaica constitute the three distinct regions of Libya, each having a rich cultural and historical identity of its own. The Tripolitanian city of Tripoli served as an important center on the Saharan trade route and was also a haven for pirates and those involved in slave trading. In the seventh century, the Arab Muslims captured the Roman colonies of Tripoli and Cyrenaica. By the 19th cen-

ture, the region had been transformed into an independent Ottoman province. In 1911 it fell to the Italians.

In 1951 after the Italians were defeated by the Allied Forces in World War II, Libya was granted independence from Italy by the United Nations General Assembly. The joy of independence increased exponentially when the nation discovered oil in 1959. A decade later the ailing monarch was overthrown in a bloodless coup led by young Colonel Muammar al-Gaddafi. As of the early years of the 21st century, Muammar Gaddafi was the Arab world's longest serving leader.

The coup and Colonel Gaddafi's policies plunged the nation into an era of uncertainty with the international community stopping just short of labeling Libya a terrorist nation. In 1992 the United Nations blamed Gaddafi for the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, and imposed economic and political sanctions on Libya. Although the country claims to be a socialist state, it has no constitution, and Gaddafi's *The Green Book* is the law of the nation.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in North Africa Libya is flanked by Sudan and Egypt

The Green Book

Colonel Gaddafi is the author of *The Green Book*, wherein he has put forth his ideas and aspirations for Libya. Although Libyans follow a traditional Muslim lifestyle, their adherence to Islam has a slight “Gaddafi twist” for Libyans have their own calendar based on the death of Muhammad rather than the Islamic norm of counting it from the Hegira or the migration of the prophet and his followers from Mecca to Medina. The book offers Gaddafi’s interpretation of Koran and Islamic values as well.

in the east and Tunisia and Algeria in the west, while Niger and Chad border it in the south, and the Mediterranean Sea forms its northern boundary. Libya is the fourth largest country in the African continent.

Agriculture is dependent on the limited rainfall received by the narrow coastal strip, where the Libyan capital of Tripoli is located. Ninety percent of the country’s population resides in this region. Primarily a desert nation, Libya enjoys a touch of the verdant in the Jebel Akhdar region, also known as the Green Mountains, in the northeast. Libya is also home to sand seas, which are vast expanses of shifting sand dunes. While the east boasts of Calanscio Sand Sea, the west takes pride in the Ubari and Murzuk Sand Seas.

Instead of perennial rivers, Libya has *wadis* or watercourses, which owe their existence to the infrequent rainfalls. The discovery of fossil aquifers in the southern and southeastern part of the nation inspired the government to provide water to the coastal areas and thereby assist in agricultural and industrial development. The project has been named the Great Man-Made River project and is touted as one of the world’s largest and most expensive engineering endeavors.

ECONOMY

Oil exports are the backbone of Libya’s economy. Besides oil, textiles and food processing are the other main industries in Libya. The primary crops are dates, olives, citrus fruits, and wheat. Due to the harsh climatic conditions, the nation imports 75 percent of its food requirements. Although the economy has suffered greatly due to the sanctions

Bedouin Poet-Singers

One of the preferred styles of the Bedouin poets was called *huda* or the “song of the camel driver.” It is said that the rhythm of this musical piece resembled the sound produced by the camel’s feet while walking.

imposed by the international community, Libya is slowly but steadily concentrating on improving economic conditions. Privatization of industries is a major step in this direction, and with the lifting of sanctions and with business-friendly economic policies, businesses in Libya were beginning to flourish in the early years of the 21st century.

LIFESTYLE AND CULTURE

Libya has a predominantly Arab population. However, in terms of ethnicity, the country is home to sub-Saharan Africans, Berbers, Tuaregs, and Turks. The nomadic way of life has given way to a more settled lifestyle but not at the cost of tradition. In smaller towns tribalism remains a powerful force in every aspect of life.

Libyans are Sunni Muslims who follow a traditional Muslim lifestyle and are guided by Gaddafi’s *The Green Book*. They are conservative but not fundamentalist and are more accepting of the modern way of life than many other Arab nations. The official language of Libya is Arabic, although English is spoken in major business centers.

Libyan fine art has experienced a revival in the early years of the 21st century with private galleries holding painting and art exhibitions. In addition folk culture is alive both on Libyan soil as well as on the international stage.

Folk music with a distinctly Arabic flavor is popular in Libya. Instruments such as the flute, *zokra* (similar to a bagpipe), and *oud* (similar to a lute) are important in the Libyan Arab music scene. “Complication clapping” is a folk music form that involves rhythmic clapping by a group of people to create a melodious percussive sound. In Ghadames and the southern part of Libya, the people favor Tuareg folk dance and music. The great popularity of Libyan folk songs is attributed to the Bedouin poets who spread them all over Libya.

CUISINE

Libyan cuisine is sprinkled with Mediterranean, Arabic, and Italian flavors. The staple diet of Libya consists of chicken, beef, lamb, nuts, beans, dried apricots, and unleavened bread. Shakshouka (chopped vegetables in tomato sauce with an egg on top) and vegetable and meat stew are some of the most popular Libyan dishes.

Libyans typically have a light breakfast that consists of tea and a roll of bread or couscous (granular pasta) sweetened with milk and honey. Lunch, the biggest meal of the day, is eaten between 1:00 P.M. and 3:00 P.M. during which time all shops and businesses close. Libyans prefer to have a light dinner.

Before and after each meal Libyans say a prayer of thanks. Before eating they dip three fingers in a bowl of water as a ritual cleansing. People do not use knives and forks but prefer to eat using their right hand. Libyans consider the left hand to be unclean.

Libyan tea consists of mint and green tea leaves

with plenty of sugar in it. In addition Libyans enjoy a thick, black, and extremely sweet coffee.

Public/Legal Holidays

PEOPLE'S POWER DECLARATION

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 3

Also celebrated as Declaration of Establishment of Authority of the People, this day marks the adoption of a provision by the Libyan People's Congress in 1977 to move the country toward becoming a more purely socialist state. As a result of the declaration, the country changed its name to the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, wherein the people are the prime authority. Gaddafi's brainchild, this declaration was to put in place a new and revolutionary system that would give rise to a state, which would be run by the people and not the government.

BRITISH EVACUATION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 28

After the Allied defeat of Italian forces in World War II, the British assumed control over Libya. The base of Al-Adam in Tobruk housed British forces that ensured the stability of the government of King Idris, the ruling monarch, as well as the United Kingdom's own interests in the region. On March 31, 1970, after intense and lengthy negotiations between British and Libyan representatives, the British agreed to withdraw their troops from Libya. The base was later renamed Jamal Abdulnasir Base, and the day is celebrated by Libyans every year as Eid al-Jala, or British Evacuation Day.

REVOLUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: September 1

Revolution Day, also known as National Day, is marked by weeklong celebrations in the capital of Tripoli. Military parades, folk dances, music concerts, and a speech by Colonel Gaddafi, are the main highlights of the celebration. This day marks Gaddafi's successful coup against the ruling monarch on September 1, 1969.

ITALIAN EVACUATION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 7

Italian Evacuation Day or Expulsion of Fascist Settlers' Day marks the deportation of thousands of

Shakshouka Recipe

Ingredients:

- 1 finely chopped onion
- 3 eggs
- 6 medium-sized tomatoes
- Salt and pepper
- Cooking oil

Preparation:

- Heat the oil in a large frying pan
- Put in the onions and sauté until it turns light brown.
- Grate the tomatoes and cook the tomatoes along with onions on low heat. Cover the pan with a lid and cook for 25 minutes
- Then gently break the eggs over the surface and gently stir to break the yolk
- Cover the pan once again and cook for 4 minutes or till the eggs appear set
- Then sprinkle salt and pepper

Italians after Colonel Gaddafi came to power. After Libya gained its independence in 1951, around 30,000 Italians continued to live in Libya and owned farms and property there. In 1960 a law was passed that prohibited Italians from purchasing additional land or property. After the coup in 1969 Colonel Gaddafi proclaimed that all the land taken by the Italians would be restored to the people of Libya. Fearing violence, the Italians quickly left Libya, although a small group did return.



Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi is surrounded by guests and aides during ceremonies in Tripoli marking Revolution Day on September 1, the anniversary of the 1969 coup that overthrew the monarchy and brought him to power. (AP Photo/Lino Azzopardi)

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 24

Libya was under Italian occupation until after World War II, when the Allied Forces had defeated Italy. By a resolution passed in the United Nations General Assembly, Libya was granted independence on December 24, 1951.

Independence Day is celebrated with great pride and enthusiasm, and official speeches and celebrations are held in Tripoli. Independence Day, however, is not officially considered as important as Revolution Day, which marks the beginning of Gaddafi's rule in Libya.

Religious Holidays

❁ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

El am Hejir marks the first day of the first month (known as Muharram) in the Islamic calendar. It is believed that on this day Prophet Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

❁ MOULOU

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the fifth month of the Islamic calendar

Mouloud commemorates the birth of Prophet Muhammad and falls in the third month of the Islamic year. Libyans, along with Muslims the world over, offer prayers in honor of the prophet and discuss his life and teachings. A festive spirit rules the day, and the evening skies are lit with fireworks. A special meal is also prepared on this day.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOU

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha commemorates Ibrahim's (Abraham's) willingness to sacrifice his son to obey God's command. Just as Ibrahim was about to kill his son, God replaced the young child with a goat. This day is celebrated with great enthusiasm, and goats and sheep are offered as sacrifices. The holy pilgrimage or hajj to Mecca also takes place in this month. Each Muslim is directed by the Holy

Koran to undertake this journey at least once in a lifetime.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan during which Muslims fast daily from dawn until dusk. On this joyous day marking the end of the time of austerity, Libyans wear new clothes and extend charity to the poor. In addition a special meal and sweets are part of the celebrations.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

Rites of Passage

❁ MARRIAGE

In pre-modern Libya arranged marriages were the norm, since young men and women were not permitted to meet socially. Professional matchmakers and even relatives were enlisted to find a suitable match among young people. Marriage between children of brothers or close relatives, and even within people of the same tribe, was preferred. The Tuareg tribes and other nomads were exceptions to the norm and allowed courtship prior to marriage.

In accordance with Islamic law, prior consent of the couple is required for a marriage to take place. A predetermined amount of money in the form of *meber* or dowry has to be provided to the bride by the groom's family. A husband can easily divorce his wife by repeating the word *talaq* or "I divorce you" in front of witnesses. However, a wife does not have this right and is expected to stay with her husband irrespective of her wishes. In case of a divorce the custody of the children will rest with the husband's family.

Islamic law allows a husband to take up to four wives, subject to certain conditions, while a woman is expected to be faithful to only one man. Polygamy, though legal in modern Libya, is not the norm. Only 3 percent of Libyans have more than one wife. Monogamy continues to be a preferred way of life in modern day Libya.

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Liechtenstein

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Central Europe, between Austria and Switzerland
Size	62 sq. mi.
Capital City	Vaduz
Flag Description	Two horizontal bands of equal size displaying the following colors: Blue (top) and red. The hoist side of the blue band has a gold crown.
Independence	July 12, 1866 (from the Holy Roman Empire)
Population	33,436
Government	Hereditary constitutional monarchy
Nationality	Liechtensteiner(s)
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Alemanni (86%)
Major Language(s)	German (official), Alemannic dialect
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (76%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; National Day, August 15; Birthday of Prince Franz-Josef II, August 16

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Compared to other European countries, the Principality of Liechtenstein has a relatively brief history. It was founded in 1719 and has only been independent since 1866.

Liechtenstein is named after the Liechtenstein Dynasty, which originated in Lower Austria. The family lived in Castle Liechtenstein between the 12th and 13th centuries. Although it acquired large areas of land and increased in power, it wanted a seat in the imperial government and toward that end eventually purchased a small county called Schellenberg in 1699 and then Vaduz in 1712, from the Habsburg Dynasty of Austria.

In January 1719 the purchase was considered complete and legal. Emperor Charles VI gave the two countries the name "Liechtenstein" after the name of his loyal servant, Anton Florian of Liechtenstein. Liechtenstein became a sovereign state of the Holy Roman Empire. In 1806 the French, led by Napoleon, invaded the Holy Roman Empire and the empire dissolved. The French occupied Liechtenstein for a few years; from 1815 to 1866, it was a member of the German Confederation and did not become fully autonomous until 1866.

Liechtenstein was closely linked to Austria until the end of World War I. After the war, the country was forced to seek help from another neighbor, Switzerland, which administered its external affairs. During World War II Liechtenstein remained neutral; after the war it gained popularity and became an important financial center. The country's economy improved rapidly, and today the standard of living of the people of Liechtenstein is one of the highest in the world.

In 1978, Liechtenstein became a member of the Council of Europe (COE). It joined the United Nations (UN) in 1991, and became a part of the European Economic Area (EEA) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The Principality of Liechtenstein is located in central Europe and is flanked by Austria to the east and Switzerland to the west. It is the fourth smallest country in Europe after Vatican City, San Marino, and Monaco.

Geographically Liechtenstein can be divided into three distinct regions: The lowlands in the north, the Rhine valley in the west, and the Tirolean Alps in the southeast. The country has a mountainous terrain; Grauspitz is the highest point in Liechtenstein and stands at 8,527 feet high. The Rhine

Fun Fact

The principality of Liechtenstein is one of only two doubly locked countries in the world. A doubly locked country is a country that is surrounded by landlocked countries. Uzbekistan is also a doubly locked country.

River forms the nation's western boundary with Switzerland.

Around 20 percent of Liechtenstein is covered with forests. The remaining land is used for cattle-grazing as well as the cultivation of crops such as wheat, potatoes, grapes, and vegetables.

Liechtenstein enjoys a continental climate, characterized by cold winters with frequent snowfall or rain, and warm and humid summers. Also a warm, southerly wind known as a foehn blows across Liechtenstein during the summer.

❁ ECONOMY

The Principality of Liechtenstein is one of the most prosperous and highly industrialized nations in Europe. In accordance with the Customs Treaty of 1924, signed between Switzerland and the Principality of Liechtenstein, the country uses the Swiss franc as its national currency, and Swiss customs authorities shoulder the responsibility of securing Liechtenstein's border with Austria. The industrial and service sectors of the economy are the main sources

of employment. Almost 5 percent of the country's revenue is spent on research and development activities, but these also generate substantial revenue for the country. Relatively few Liechtensteiners engage in agricultural activity.

Liechtenstein is often used as a tax haven because of its low tax rates (the maximum tax rate is 20 percent) and a tradition of bank secrecy. The country's specialization in financial services has made it one of the most important financial centers in the world.

Liechtenstein is a member of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and the European Economic Area (EEA), an organization that acts as a bridge between the European Union (EU) and EFTA.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Approximately 86 percent of Liechtenstein's population consists of ethnic Alemmanics. However, the country is also home to people of other nationalities, including Turks and Italians.

Almost 76 percent of the country's population are Roman Catholic, while about 7 percent are Protestant. German is the official language of Liechtenstein, although Alemmanic, a Germanic

dialect, is also spoken in some parts of the country.

Liechtensteiners are great music lovers, and concerts are held throughout the year. From classical music to rock and roll, from opera to rap, Liechtenstein enjoys a wide variety of music. There are many festivals and competitions featuring soloists, bands, and choirs.

Liechtensteiners have many traditions and customs related to holidays as well as to daily life. Despite the advent of Christianity, a number of pre-Christian rituals survive to this day.

Some of the most interesting traditions are observed during religious festivals such as Fat Thursday, when people try to blacken each other's faces using soot from scorched corks in a ritual known as *ruassla* (sooting). Also, in many parts of the country, on this day, people follow the tradition of stealing soup bowls.

An interesting ritual that originated in the Middle Ages is called *kubberzle* (little cow hearts). It is practiced in Oberland (Liechtenstein Upper Country) and takes place at the end of autumn when shepherds return from the Alps to the valley along with their herds. According to tradition a *kubberzle* is carved out of wooden boards, and helpers tie it around the brow of the cow that gives the best quality milk. Huge bells are tied around its neck, and a milking stool is secured firmly at the back of its neck. If there is any accident during the journey from the Alps to Oberland, then the wooden hearts are not tied to express loss and sorrow. People of Oberland also welcome the herders with great joy and decorate the villages with multicolored cloth ribbons and artificial flowers.

❁ CUISINE

Typical Liechtenstein dishes include *crostini di mozzarella* (ham, mozzarella cheese, and white bread), *wurst* (sausage), *abbacchio brodetto* (lamb cooked in sauce), *rösti* (fried shredded potatoes), and banana cuts (a dessert made from bananas). Wine is the favorite beverage and generally accompanies meals.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 1

In Liechtenstein special parties are held in the capital of Vaduz on New Year's Eve, and Liechtensteiners usher in the New Year with singing, dancing, and dining. January 1 (New Year's Day) is a national holiday in Liechtenstein, and all public and private institutions are closed on this day.

In the Liechtenstein village of Triesenberg all the single men of the village assemble in the main

Fun Fact

Liechtenstein's labor force of 29,000 includes 19,000 foreigners, who commute daily from neighboring countries including Germany, Austria, and Switzerland

square and then visit the homes of single women, looking for prospective partners. The first person to get up on New Year's morning is called "Tillitap" (a nickname meaning "the one who taps the meadows"), and the last person (also considered the laziest) is called "Sylvester." Young children visit their godparents, and relatives and receive gifts on New Year's Day.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

The earliest celebrations of May 1 are ascribed to the pagan observances that were practiced by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages. However in more recent times May 1 has been celebrated as Labor Day (also called May Day) in many parts the world to commemorate the important role played by workers. The May 1 observance of Labor Day was decreed in 1890 by the Socialist Second International.

In Liechtenstein May 1 is a national holiday, and all government and private institutions are closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 15

On this day the members of the royal family are honored by the people of Liechtenstein. The Christian Feast of the Assumption also falls on this day. The official state celebrations begin early in the morning with a fair in the meadow and official speeches. A wide variety of events such as laser shows, plays, folk dancing, and concerts, including performances by local pop bands, are part of the National Day celebrations. People participate in a huge procession in the capital city of Vaduz and attend the spectacular display of fireworks at 10 that night.

❁ BIRTHDAY OF PRINCE FRANZ-JOSEF II

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 16

This day commemorates the birth of the late Prince Franz-Josef II of Liechtenstein, who was born on August 16, 1906.

He was the most popular ruler of the principality and is credited with keeping Liechtenstein away from the horrors of World War II by declaring its neutrality. He is also considered the architect of Liechtenstein's booming economy because his pro-growth economic policies transformed the principality from a poor agricultural country to one of the richest countries in the world (in terms of per capita



Prince Alois and Prince Hans-Adam II, right, of Liechtenstein toast each other in the park of Liechtenstein Castle in Vaduz on August 15 to celebrate National Day. Prince Hans-Adam II's castle is open to the public on the holiday and thousands regularly attend the festivities. (*AP Photo/Arno Balzarini*)

income). On this day Liechtenstein pays homage to the late prince and remembers his life and legacy.

Religious Holidays

❁ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: January 6

The Feast of Epiphany is a Christian feast celebrating the arrival of the Magi (the Three Wise Men: Caspar, Balthasar, and Melchior) in Bethlehem to see the infant Jesus. The word *epiphany* means "to reveal" or "to make known" and is so-named because the Magi revealed Christ to the world as the King and the Lord.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EPIPHANY

❁ CANDLEMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: February 2

Candlemas (Blessing of the Candles) is the last religious festival in the Christian liturgical calendar. It marks the end of the Christmas and Epiphany season and falls on February 2 in the Western churches (February 15 in the Orthodox Church). It is also known as the festival of the Purification of the Virgin or Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, since it was on this day that the Virgin Mary underwent a purification ritual in accordance with Jewish religious laws and Jesus was presented at the Temple in Jerusalem.

In Liechtenstein, devout Christians take special

wax candles to church to get them blessed on Candlemas. Then they light candles near each window (or in every room) of their homes, seeking divine blessing for their family.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

ST. JOSEPH'S DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: March 19

Roman Catholics observe the Feast of St. Joseph on March 19. Joseph was the stepfather of Jesus Christ and considered to be the patron saint of workers around the world.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Dates: Friday before Easter

The Christian holiday of Good Friday falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent. It commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Devout Christians in Liechtenstein attend special Good Friday services in their local churches and offer prayers. It is a solemn day during which people mourn Christ's Crucifixion.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Dates: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a celebration of Jesus Christ's Resurrection three days after his Crucifixion. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent, while Easter Monday (a continuation of Easter and a national holiday) falls on the next day, the first Monday after Lent.

In Liechtenstein, the day is also referred to as *Beacon*, *Küachle Sunday*, or *Funken*. Many residents observe a pre-Christian tradition of burning an effigy of winter to banish it and welcome spring. Devout Christians attend Easter Sunday services and remember Christ's Resurrection by singing hymns. They exchange greetings and gather for a special Easter dinner with friends and family members.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

ASCENSION, THE

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Forty days after Easter

Ascension, The celebrates Jesus Christ's ascension to heaven, 40 days after his Resurrection on Easter. Devout Christians in Liechtenstein attend a special Ascension Day service and celebrate Christ's ascen-

sion to heaven with great joy. Also on this day, a procession known as "Walking around the Field" (or Rogation) takes place in which the meadows and the fields are blessed.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fifty days after Easter

In Liechtenstein, the Feast of Pentecost is celebrated on both Sunday and Monday. Pentecost, in Greek means "the fiftieth day." The feast celebrates the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles. Scholars believe that many of the traditions and celebrations were borrowed from pagan celebrations of spring.

Since the third century C.E., this holiday has also been called "Whitsun." This is because of the white garments worn by those who were baptized during the vigil.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; PENTECOST

CORPUS CHRISTI

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Sixty days after Easter

The Feast of Corpus Christi commemorates the institution of the Holy Eucharist, which refers to the ritual offering of sacred bread and wine (Christian sacrament). The word *eucharist* is derived from a Greek word, *eucharisto*, which means, "to rejoice" or "give thanks." In Liechtenstein a Corpus Christi procession takes place in the meadows so that the fields are blessed for a good harvest.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CORPUS CHRISTI

ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: August 15

The Feast of the Assumption commemorates the death and elevation into heaven of Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. On this day devout Liechtenstein Christians attend a special Assumption Mass in their local churches and offer prayers to Mary.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

NATIVITY OF OUR LADY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: September 8

The Nativity of Our Lady celebrates the birth of Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. On this day devout Catholics in Liechtenstein attend church and offer prayers to the Virgin Mary.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day is a Christian feast day honoring all the saints (known and unknown) of Christianity. In Liechtenstein people visit the graves of their deceased relatives on All Saints' Day and place wreaths, crosses, flowers, candles, or a heart made from pine branches on or near the grave, remembering their loved ones.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: December 8

The term *immaculate conception* refers to a Roman Catholic belief that, at the time of her birth, Mary was free from all stain of original sin and filled with God's sanctifying grace. Thus according to Roman Catholic doctrine, God made Mary a suitable mother for his son Jesus Christ. Devout Catholics in Liechtenstein attend church services on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 25

Christmas, a day of celebration for Christians all over the world, marks the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. About two weeks before Christmas Liechtensteiners bring Christmas trees (pine trees) into their homes. Christmas celebrations begin on Christmas Eve (December 24) and last until St. Stephen's Day on December 26.

On Christmas Eve the celebrants decorate their trees and place neatly wrapped presents around them. Many Christians attend a special Christmas Eve service in their local churches and celebrate the birth of Christ by singing Christmas carols and hymns. Children go to bed and wait for *Christkindli* (Father Christmas, or Santa Claus) to bring them gifts. Many families open their gifts on Christmas Eve, while others wait until Christmas Day.

On Christmas Day, Liechtensteiners visit their friends and family and exchange gifts and greetings. Many Liechtensteiners living in the urban areas travel to the countryside to celebrate Christmas with their extended families.

The Feast of St. Stephen is observed on December 26, the day after Christmas. St. Stephen is considered to be the first martyr of Christianity who was stoned to death by Roman rulers for speaking in favor of Christ and his disciples. In Liechtenstein his feast day is a national holiday, with schools and businesses closed for the day, extending the Christmas holiday. In other countries it is sometimes celebrated as Boxing Day.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Rites of Passage

❁ MARRIAGE

In Liechtenstein couples prefer to get married in a church in a solemn wedding ceremony. The bride and groom exchange their wedding vows and rings in the presence of the priest, family members, and friends. After the wedding the bride and groom are wished happiness and good luck in a special ceremony called *Kranzna*. In this ceremony a garland of pine brushwood, decorated with colorful paper flowers, is placed at the front door of the bride's home.

The wedding ceremony is followed by a lavish reception, characterized by dancing, singing, and feasting. Before the wedding dinner, it is traditional for the man who gives away the bride in marriage to stage a fake "kidnapping" of the bride, taking her to a nearby inn or restaurant. The groom has to "find" his bride—as well as foot the bill incurred as a result of the eating and drinking done by the kidnapper and his friends during the fake kidnapping.

Further Reading

Thomas Eccardt, *Secrets of the Seven Smallest States of Europe: Andorra, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, San Marino, and Vatican City* (New York: Hippocrene Books (2005); David Beattie, *Liechtenstein: A Modern History* (London, U.K.: I. B. Tauris, 2004).

Lithuania

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Located in northeastern Europe, it borders the Baltic Sea and is situated between Russia and Latvia, bordering also on Poland and Belarus.
Size	25,174 sq. mi.
Capital City	Vilnius
Flag Description	Three horizontal bands of equal size displaying the following colors: (top to bottom) Yellow, green, and red
Independence	February 16, 1918 (from Imperial Russia, which was recognized only on July 12, 1920); March 1, 1990 (from Soviet Union but was recognized by Soviet Union on September 6, 1991)
Population	3.6 million
Government	Parliamentary democracy
Nationality	Lithuanian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Lithuanian (81%)
Major Language(s)	Lithuanian (official); Polish; Russian
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (predominantly); Lutheran; Russian Orthodox; Protestant; Evangelical Christian Baptist; Muslim; Jewish
National Holiday(s)	New Year's, January 1; Independence Day (1918), February 16; Restoration of Lithuania's Statehood, March 11; Labor Day, May 1; Anniversary of the Coronation of King Mindaugas, July 6

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The Republic of Lithuania, an independent nation in northeastern Europe, obtained its independence from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) on March 1, 1990. Vilnius is the capital.

Not much is known about the early culture of Lithuania. It is believed that an ancient ethnic group known as Balts (Baltic people) were the original inhabitants of the region. The Balts are thought to have lived along the Baltic Sea since the third millennium B.C.E. and to have been made up of several tribes. They mainly spoke languages that belonged to the Indo-European group of languages. The inhabitants of the modern-day nations of Lithuania and Latvia are the descendants of the Balts.

The written history of Lithuania began in the 11th century. There were three dominant tribes in Lithuania at the time: the Samogitians, who ruled over the western parts; the Aukstaičiai, who exercised control in the eastern area; and the Yotvingians, who inhabited the southwestern parts of Lithuania and northern parts of Poland. Besides these three, there were other, smaller tribes scattered around the region. However, there was no unity among these tribes, and they were constantly engaged in tribal warfare.

In the 11th century, taking advantage of this lack of unity, the Ruthenians (people speaking east Slavic language) and the Danes (ethnic group of Denmark) carried out a number of raids on Lithuania. They defeated various tribes in the region and in exchange for peace, extracted exorbitant annual tributes.

In the early 13th century, a major portion of Latvia, Estonia, and some parts of Lithuania were conquered by the Teutonic Knights (German warriors who were part of a

Roman Catholic crusade) and the Livonian Brothers of the Sword (German warrior-monks).

In response to these attacks, a number of tribal groups formed a united front led by the Aukstaitiai tribal leader Mindaugas against the invading forces, and they defeated the Livonians in the Battle of Sauliai in 1236. Mindaugas signed a peace agreement with the Teutonic Order in 1250 and embraced Christianity. He was crowned king of Lithuania on July 6, 1253.

The Baltic people, who held strongly to their pagan beliefs, led a strong army against King Mindaugas. In 1260 the pagan forces successfully defeated Mindaugas, and he was forced to renounce Christianity to keep his crown. He was killed in 1263 by his nephew Tretonia, who gained control of the region as the grand duke of Lithuania.

In 1377 Jogaila (Jagiello), a descendent of Tretonia, became the grand duke of Lithuania and signed a secret treaty with the Teutonic Order to end conflicts in the region. He embraced Christianity and came to be known by his Christian name, Ladilaus Jagiello. He married the monarch of Poland, Jadwiga, and on February 2, 1386, he was declared the king of Poland. On July 1, 1569, by the Treaty of Lublin, the kingdoms of Lithuania and Poland merged to form a single state, which came to be known as Rzeczpospolita (Republic of Both Nations) and Polish became the official language of Lithuania.

Lithuania became a vital center of Jewish life in Europe in the 14th century. Jews first arrived at the invitation of the Grand Dukes Augustus II and Augustus III, who recognized the utility of the merchants, artisans, and traders to the development and livelihood of their country. Jews soon played important diplomatic and strategic roles as well. In return Lithuanian Jews appreciated the tolerance and protection of the Lithuanian dukes. Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital, won a reputation as the Jerusalem of the north; it became a great center of Jewish scholarship, education, literature, art, and theater.

In the beginning of the seventeenth century, conflicts between Rzeczpospolita and Russia began, and by the beginning of the 19th century a major portion of Lithuania and Poland came under Russian dominance. Lithuania and Poland revolted twice (1831 and 1863) against Russian forces but were unsuccessful. Catholics in Lithuania were persecuted by the Russian armed forces, and the use of the Polish and Latin languages was banned in Lithuania.

During World War I Russian forces in Lithuania were defeated by Germany in 1915, and the region came under German occupation. But Germany could not sustain its control. On February 16, 1918, when the defeat of German forces became imminent in World War I, and the Russian Empire was on the verge of collapse, Lithuania declared independence from Russia. On July 12, 1920, a peace treaty was signed between the newly formed Soviet Union and Lithuania, under which the Soviet Union officially recognized Lithuania's independence.

However, during World War II, in accordance

Teutonic Order

The Teutonic Order was a German military order under Roman Catholic religious vows that was formed at the end of the 12th century in the Palestinian city of Acre. It mainly consisted of German Christian forces, who were referred to as Teutonic Knights, distinguished by their white coats and the black cross they carried. Their main objective was to provide medical aid to pilgrims in holy places.

They were headed mainly by the German nobility and even participated in World War I. Even today the Teutonic Order exists in Germany as a charitable organization.

with the non-aggression pact (Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) signed between Germany and the Soviet Union in 1940, Soviet forces once again invaded Lithuania and took control of the region. In 1941 Germany violated the non-aggression pact, invaded Lithuania, and established its control over the region. The Soviet Union joined hands with the Allied forces, attacking Germany. By 1945 Lithuania was freed from German occupation.

The war had a devastating impact on Lithuanian Jewry. On the eve of World War II there were about 160,000 Jews in independent Lithuania and another 60,000 in Vilnius and the surrounding area (about half of the city's population was Jewish), which had been transferred to Lithuania after the Soviet conquest of eastern Poland. That population expanded further as Jewish refugees poured in from German-occupied Poland. During the German occupation and with the help of ethnic Lithuanians, 90–95 percent of Lithuanian Jewry, some 200,000, were killed (a greater percentage than in any other community in Europe). There are some 6,000 Jews in Lithuania today, most of whom immigrated there from Russia during the Soviet era; fewer than 200 Holocaust survivors remained in the

Fun Fact

Mindaugas was the first and the only “king” of Lithuania, since other rulers preferred the title of “grand duke,” to “king.”

Livonian Brothers of the Sword

Founded by the prince-bishop of Riga Albert von Buxhovden in 1202, the Livonian Brothers of the Sword, also known as the Militia of Christ of Livonia, was a military order composed of warrior monks of German descent, who were also referred to as knights.

In 1218, along with the Danish King Valdemar II, the brothers successfully conquered the northern parts of Estonia and also carried out raids in Lithuania. In 1237 they were absorbed in the Teutonic Order after their defeat in 1236 by the unified Lithuanian tribes

Fun Fact

Forests are featured in many Lithuanian folktales, and during times of war, they have served as a haven for refugees. During pre-Christian times oak trees were worshipped as they were looked upon as a symbol of longevity and endurance. Even today oak trees command great respect in Lithuania, and on every special occasion Lithuanians plant oak trees.

country in the early 21st century.

After the war, an agreement was signed between the Soviet Union, Britain, and the United States. Under its terms Lithuania became part of the Soviet Union and remained under its domination until 1990. The administration of the region was controlled by a pro-Soviet party, known as the Lithuanian Communist Party (LCP).

In 1988 a group of Lithuanian intellectuals formed Sajudis, a Lithuanian reform movement. They began propagating ideas of democracy and national rights and actively supported Russian President Mikhail Gorbachev's social and political reforms, also known as policies of *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness).

In the 1990 elections of the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet (Supreme Council of Lithuania), candidates backed by Sajudis won the elections; on March 11, 1990, Lithuania declared its independence from the USSR. Vytautas Landsbergis, one of the founders of the Sajudis, was sworn in as the first president of the Republic of Lithuania.

In response to this act of defiance, the Soviet Union tried to intimidate Lithuania into relinquishing its claim to independence by imposing political and economic sanctions. When that failed, Soviet forces entered Lithuania and captured strategic buildings in the country. After Mikhail Gorbachev was ousted in a military coup in August 1991 and

Boris Yeltsin was sworn in as the new president, the USSR changed its stance on Lithuania and on September 6, 1991, officially recognized Lithuania's independence. On September 17, 1991, Lithuania became a member of the United Nations (UN).

In the fresh elections held in 2003, Rolandas Paksas was sworn in as the president of Lithuania but was thrown out of power for his alleged links with the Russian mafia. In 2004 Valdas Adamkus, a leading Lithuanian politician, won the elections and became president. In the same year Lithuania became a member of the European Union (EU) as well as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in northeastern Europe, the Republic of Lithuania is flanked by Belarus in the southeast, Latvia to the north, the Baltic Sea to the west, and the Russian territory of Kaliningrad and Poland to the southwest. Lithuania is the largest of the three Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia.

Topographically, a major part of Lithuania is flat land, although there are a number of small hills in the western uplands and eastern highland areas. Its highest point is Juazapines, which is 964 feet. The most striking feature of Lithuania is the Curonian Split, which is a sandbar that lies along the Baltic Coast and is 61 miles long, less than 2.5 miles wide, and 216 feet high. The water between the mainland and the Curonian Split is known as the Curonian Lagoon. Numentas River and its tributaries, and Lake Zuvintas are the major source of water in Lithuania.

Lithuania has a temperate climate, which is marked by cold winters and warm, wet summers. During winter the temperature can be lower than 14°F, while during summer, the temperature can be as high as 72°F and there are occasional showers as well.

Lithuania is home to a wide variety of flora such as oak trees, pine trees, raspberries, strawberries, cranberries, and mushrooms.

❁ ECONOMY

Until 1998 Russia was the main trading partner of Lithuania, and the Russian financial crisis in the same year had a great impact on Lithuania's economy. However, the government immediately swung into action and implemented a number of economic measures to revive the economy.

Today, due to pro-growth economic policies and market-oriented monetary and fiscal policies, Lithuania has been able to reduce deficits and enjoys a thriving economy. Privatization of industries has been encouraged, and direct foreign investment has also increased.

Almost 50 percent of the country's population is employed in the service industry, while 30 percent is employed in the industrial sector, and almost 20 percent is engaged in agricultural activities.

Lithuania exports machinery and equipment,



Lithuanians watch fireworks, with the cathedral in the background, during celebrations of the entry of Lithuania into the European Union in Vilnius on April 30, 2004. (AP Photo/Mindaugas Kulbis)

chemicals, textiles, mineral products, food products, and clothing to European countries.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Lithuania today is a country with a largely homogenous Baltic culture. More than 80 percent of the inhabitants are native Lithuanians, while the country is also home to a significant number of Poles, Russians, and Belarusians. Lithuanian is the official language of the country, and different dialects of the language are spoken in different parts of the country. While High Lithuanian is spoken in major parts of the country, a dialect known as Low Lithuanian is spoken in the western parts.

Lithuania has a predominantly Roman Catholic population, although many Lithuanians are Lutherans and followers of the Russian Orthodox Church. The country has a small number of Muslims and Jews.

Today almost 68 percent of the country's population lives in cities, but some maintain their contact with the rural areas by owning small cottages in the countryside, where they grow fruits and vegetables. In former times women acted as homemakers, while men performed salaried work outside the home. However, as in most western countries, women today work alongside men in the labor force.

Lithuania has a rich folk music tradition, and folk songs reflect on every aspect of the daily lives of Lithuanians. While work songs speak about activities such as harvesting, grinding grains, spinning and weaving, there are songs about death known as *raundos* (lamentations), which are sung at funerals. Whether the subject is life, death, war, or love, Lithuanian folk music has a song for every occasion.

Some of the traditional musical instruments used in Lithuania include the *skrabalai* (small wooden bells), the *kankles* (a kind of stringed instrument), *skudueiai* (wooden panpipes), and *daudyte* (long wooden trumpets). Lithuania is known for an ancient tradition of carving images of the Sun, large wooden crosses, and figures of holy saints on poles as well as weathercocks. The region of Hill of Crosses in the Lithuanian city of Siauliai is renowned for its craftsmanship.

❁ CUISINE

Lithuania boasts a wide variety of delicacies, and every region in the country has its own specialties. While the highlanders (Aukstiatii people) who live in the northeastern region feast on cottage cheese dishes and pancakes, the people in the southeastern region include mushroom, potatoes, and buckwheat in their diet. The Bemaieiai (people who live in the lowland regions of Lithuania) take pride in their porridges and herbed dips, and people in the southwest part of Lithuania love *skilandis* (smoked meats), *cepelinai* (minced meat filling in potato dumplings), and *vedarai* (potato sausages). While pork is the preferred meat, Lithuanian dishes also make use of vegetables and potatoes.

During summer cold beet root soup is a favorite, while during winter *barsciai borscht* (hot beet soup) is preferred.

Some favorite Lithuanian beverages include milk, coffee, tea, and beer. *Sula* (beer made from sap of birch tree), *midus* (a honey-based mild alcoholic drink), and *gira* (nonalcoholic fermented drink made from bread) are popular beverages in Lithuania.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

Fortune-telling and predictions play a central role in New Year's Eve celebrations. Predictions relating to marriage, death, life, career, and even weather for the coming year are made on New Year's Eve. For example, if it snows heavily on New Year's Eve, it implies that the weather will be bad for the entire year. But if it is sunny and the day is clear, it implies that there will be a good harvest in the new year.

Lithuanians believe that the nature of the coming year can be predicted on the basis of the events of New Year's Day. Thus children are on their best behavior in order to avoid upsetting elders. People try to be very helpful to each other on this day and smile a lot, hoping the coming year will be filled with happiness for them.

Fun Fact

Bread plays a vital role in Lithuanian society. At dinnertime bread is always placed in the center of the table, in front of the head of the family. Also at the time of laying the foundation of a new house, a piece of bread is placed at the site. Newlywed couples are offered bread, salt, and wine as a symbol of the sweet and salty nature of life.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY (1918)

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 16

Prior to the German occupation of Lithuania during World War I, the nation was under the rule of the Russian Imperial forces. In 1915, however, Germany invaded Lithuania and established control over the region. By 1918 the Allied forces had defeated Germany, and with the Russian Empire in decline, Lithuanians seized the opportunity to declare their independence on February 16, 1918. Antanas Smetona, a prominent Lithuanian freedom fighter, was sworn in as the first president of Lithuania (1919–20). He also had the distinction of being the last president of Lithuania (1926–40), until the Soviet occupation during World War II.

On this day celebrations are organized in different parts of Lithuania, including official speeches, cultural programs, and patriotic songs. Lithuanians come together to celebrate the independence of the nation as well as the progress made by the country since its independence.

❁ RESTORATION OF LITHUANIA'S STATEHOOD

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 11

On February 24, 1990, while still under Soviet rule, the political parties in Lithuania conducted free and fair elections in Lithuania, and Sajudis, a popular political party, won the majority of seats.

On March 11, 1990, Lithuania declared its independence from the Soviet Union and Vytautas Landsbergis, one of the founders of the Sajudis, was sworn in as the first president of the Republic of Lithuania.

On this day huge celebrations are held in different parts of Lithuania. In the capital city of Vilnius, the president presides over the celebrations. All those who lost their lives during Lithuania's quest for independence, are remembered, and the achievements of the republic are also acknowledged on this day. Besides the official speeches, a cultural festival is organized which celebrates the rich cultural heritage of the country.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day, in many parts the world to commemorate the important role played by workers.

The earliest celebrations of May Day are ascribed to the pagan observances that were practiced by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages. The May 1 designation of this date as Labor Day was decreed by the Socialist Second International in 1890. Because it is a national holiday, all public and private institutions are closed in Lithuania on May 1.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ ANNIVERSARY OF THE CORONATION OF KING MINDAUGAS

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 6

King Mindaugas was the founder and first king of Lithuania. He was a Aukstaitiai tribesman, who united the warring tribes in Lithuania to fight against the Livonians. In 1236 in the Battle of Siau-

liai, Mindaugas led his forces to victory. In 1250 he signed a peace treaty with the Teutonic Order and embraced Christianity.

On July 6, 1253, he was crowned king of Lithuania. On this day Lithuanians remember the legacy of this great king and pay homage to the founder of the state of Lithuania. Every year, in honor of King Mindaugas, a special celebration is organized in the capital city of Vilnius, which is presided over by the president himself. Medals of Honor are conferred on brave Lithuanians on this day.

Religious Holidays

❁ ST. CASIMIR DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: March 4

On March 4, Lithuanians commemorate the death anniversary of St. Casimir, the country's patron saint.

St. Casimir was the prince of Poland and Lithuania and was a devout Christian from a very early age. He participated in the fight against the Ottoman Turks to defend Christianity and the Holy Cross. He died on March 4, 1484, at the age of 26.

After a number of miracles were reported to have taken place around his tomb in Vilnius, the Vatican canonized him as St. Casimir, and he became the patron saint of Lithuania. On June 11, 1948, St. Casimir Jagiello was proclaimed the patron saint of all youth by Pope Pius XII.

In Vilnius St. Casimir's fair, which is also known as Kaziuko Muge, is organized and is attended by thousands of people. *Vilniaus verbos*, a neatly braided decorative piece made from dried grass and flowers, used for decorating homes and *muginukas*, specially baked heart-shaped cookies with names of people inscribed on them, are the favorite items sold during this fair.

Lithuanians also celebrate St. Casimir Day by visiting their friends and family. They discuss the life and legacy of the benevolent saint and draw inspiration from his pious life.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

The Christian holiday of Good Friday commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. A somber, solemn occasion, it falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent (an austere season of fasting and penitence). Devout Lithuanians attend Good Friday church services on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

The Christian festival of Easter celebrates Jesus Christ's Resurrection three days after his Crucifixion. It falls on the first Sunday after the month of Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. On Easter Lithuanians attend special Resurrection services in their local churches.

The Easter morning procession is attended by devout Christians and is marked by devotional hymns sung by the congregation as well as the choir. At the end of the service, the priest blesses the Easter food brought by families. Afterward people return to their homes to enjoy a special Easter breakfast.

The woman of the house shells a blessed Easter egg and after breaking it carefully, hands a piece to each family member. Sharing of this egg implies that there will always be love and peace in the family. Besides the blessed egg a number of dishes such as meat, sausages, and cakes are also consumed. Bunny cookies are extremely popular among children. Children hunt for colored eggs, which are hidden by Velyku Senele (the Easter Granny).

Children are told that Velyku Senele travels across Lithuania and stops at homes and places decorated eggs and sweets either in the yard or in special Easter baskets. However, only those children who have behaved well are rewarded with sweets and brightly colored eggs, while those who have been bad receive a single white egg.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

✿ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: August 15

The Christian Feast of the Assumption commemorates the death of Mary, mother of Jesus Christ, when she was raised up to heaven.

In earlier eras people carried herbs, cabbages, and garden flowers for the special church service held in honor of Mary to get them blessed and to ensure a good harvest. Homes were decorated with the blessed herbs to protect the house from being struck by lightning. In the Dzukija region of Lithuania, the blessed herbs were placed under the head of the deceased to act as his pillow in the coffin.

In Lithuania another tradition is observed whereby mothers of deceased children cannot eat apples on this day, which they call Herbal Holy Day, unless they are blessed in church. This tradition stems from the belief that on this day, the Virgin Mary distributes apples among the children in the Kingdom of Heaven, and those children whose mothers have consumed unblest apples do not receive these apples from Mary.

In southern parts of Lithuania, food made with crops from the new harvest is offered to dead ancestors as a token of respect. The remaining food is

placed on the table, and the entire family sits around it. The head of the house lights a candle and passes it to all the members of the family. When the candle is handed back to the head of the house, he gets up and walks three times around the food, which is kept aside for the ancestors. Then he returns to his seat and takes the first bite of food with the others following suit. Any leftovers are given to the poor.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION DAY

✿ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day is a Christian feast, which honors all the saints (known and unknown) of Christianity. It is an annual religious celebration, which takes place on November 1.

On the eve of All Saints' Day people living in small towns and villages do not leave their homes, as it is believed that the roads are filled with the souls of the deceased, and one may encounter a mean soul if they step outside. It is also believed that if the Sun does not shine on All Saints' Day, then the coming year will be filled with misfortunes.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

✿ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25–26

Christmas is a day of celebration for Christians all over the world and marks the birth of Jesus Christ, whom Christians regard as the Messiah. In Lithuania Christmas celebrations begin on Christmas Eve and last until St. Stephen's Day on December 26.

On December 24 Lithuanians fast throughout the day and break their fast with a meatless meal after the first star appears in the evening sky. The meatless meal consists of 12 courses, which, during the pre-Christian period, symbolized the 12 months in a year; today they symbolize the 12 apostles of Jesus. Also, if appropriate, a special place is kept at the table in memory of a family member who has died during the year.

After the meal the family gathers around the Christmas tree to exchange gifts, play

Fun Fact

According to legend Velyku Senele is driven all over Lithuania in a cart by Easter bunnies. It is believed that she uses a sunbeam as a whip to make the bunnies move faster.

Fun Fact

Lithuanians believe that the events on Easter determine the events of the coming year. Thusday if a man sees a needle on Easter, it implies he will see snakes throughout the year. Also if an accident happens on Easter, then, the entire year will be filled with bad luck.

games, and engage in fortune-telling. Families attend Christmas services either on Christmas Eve or on Christmas Day. It is believed that the weather during Christmas will determine the weather at Easter. If it snows heavily on Christmas, it implies Easter will be warm and sunny. However, if there is no snowfall on Christmas, then Easter will be snowy.

The Feast of St. Stephen is observed on December 26, the day after Christmas. St. Stephen is the first martyr of Christianity who was stoned to death by Roman rulers for speaking in favor of Christ and his disciples. In other countries, this day is also celebrated as Boxing Day.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ KIRMELINE

Observed in: Various regions and especially the countryside

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 25

On January 25, Lithuania celebrates Kirmeline. It is also known as the Day of the Serpents.

Fun Fact

In parts of Lithuania people visit the gravesites of their ancestors and decorate the graves with flowers and candles. Also bread rolls are baked especially for the day, and each roll is assigned a name of the deceased. Then these rolls are handed to beggars, who are asked to pray for the soul of the deceased.

This unique festival celebrates the symbolic awakening of the snakes, which have traditionally been considered deities in Lithuania. It is believed that on this day, snakes come out of the forests and visit the homes of their followers. On the eve of Kirmeline, people prepare special dishes and lay them on the table. They also pray for serpents to visit their homes and bless their food. If on Kirmeline serpents visit the home and taste the food, it is believed that the year will be filled with good luck.

However, if the serpents do not pay a visit, then it is implied that the year will be filled with bad fortune.

In ancient times, people believed that if the apple trees were shaken on this day, they would be more fruitful.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

In Lithuania, birthdays are marked by elaborate celebrations. While children celebrate their birthdays,

elders celebrate their name days (for example, a person named Casimir will celebrate his birthday on St. Casimir's Day).

On birthdays, a special garland is placed on the door of the birthday boy or girl. The birthday celebrant also typically sits on a specially decorated chair, which is then lifted in the air three times.

❁ COMING OF AGE

In Lithuania, when a girl gets her first menstrual period, she and her mother participate in a private ritual rite in which the mother slaps her daughter on the face and utters words such as "be beautiful" or "bloom like a rose." The mother also reveals the mystery of birth to her daughter. After this, the girl is deemed fit to be married.

In ancient times a girl's initiation rites required the baking of bread. In accordance with the ritual, the girl would bake her first bread on Saturday, which is the day for taking baths so that close female relatives of the family, who had assembled in the *pirtis* (a Lithuanian bathhouse), could be offered the bread.

Also on this day, the father of the girl declared the girl's share in the property and communicated this information to the assembled female relatives; the girl was thus declared ready for marriage.

For boys, the initiation ceremony included getting inducted in youth communities formed by other boys sharing the same age and interests. Member of such groups participated in collective work assignments, such as cutting rye or hay. The behavior of this collective community reflected on the status of the village. Hence if the youth community behaved badly, then the village would be disgraced, and other villages would be hesitant to get their daughters married in such a disgraced village.

In northeastern Lithuania, the induction into the community was marked by a ritual public dance by the initiates, while in eastern Lithuania the name of the initiate was inscribed in a book, which was followed by ritual drinking.

❁ MARRIAGE

In Lithuania marriages are arranged by families with the help of matchmakers. Even if the couple know each other and have expressed their desire to get married, the families still hire matchmakers to negotiate and fix the dowry.

After the dowry is set, the couple is considered engaged, but the period of engagement varies from region to region.

The marriage ceremony is simple. On the wedding day the bride bids farewell to her family and her home amid sad songs sung by her female relatives. She then heads to her husband's house, where she is formally introduced to his family. Before the arrival of the bride, the *kraitveziai*, or carriers of dowry chests, reach the groom's home. The chests are usually filled with towels, sashes, bedsheets, fabrics, and other

household basics promised by the bride's family.

For the formal introduction of the bride to the groom's family, the bride and groom proceed to the church. The bride wears a wreath of rye, which is symbolic of her childhood days. Then, at the time the vows are exchanged, the bride's matron of honor replaces the wreath of rye with the headdress that belongs to a mature woman, symbolizing the transition of the bride from girlhood to womanhood.

After the traditional vows the couple exchange rings, and the marriage is considered complete. A number of rituals are also performed to ward off the evil and to protect the couple's fertility. In some parts of Lithuania the couple consume wine, salt, and bread, which symbolize the three vital elements of life; joy (wine), tears (salt), and work (bread). Also the newlyweds are showered with water and grains to wish them a life filled with happiness and prosperity (good harvest).

After the wedding the bride and groom visit the bride's family in a ceremony called *atgriztai*. It generally takes place one week after the couple's honeymoon. During this ceremony the bride returns to her home and is treated, not as a family member, but as a guest, thus completing her transition from a maiden to a married woman and her journey from her old home—her parents—to her new home—her husband's.

❁ DEATH

In ancient times Lithuanians looked at death as a continuation of life and celebrated the passage of the soul to the afterlife. Many Lithuanians cremated their dead after keeping the body of the deceased frozen for a considerable period of time and indulged in feasting and dancing prior to the cremation. They placed the ashes in urns and buried them underground. However, after the advent of Christianity, Lithuanians began burying their dead.

Lithuanians also believe that death makes its presence felt through ominous signs, such as bread breaking inside the oven, honeycombs shaped in the form of a cross or a coffin, or dreams involving visits by dead relatives.

Since Lithuanians believe that at the time of death, the soul separates itself from the body, after

the death of a person, all the doors and windows in the house of the deceased are kept open to enable the soul to meet with the souls of his or her dead relatives and to move about freely with them. Then relatives, friends, and neighbors are informed, and they participate in mourning the deceased.

For the burial, Lithuanians dress the deceased in his or her best clothing or specially sewn clothing called "funeral wedding garb" after cleansing the body. Many Lithuanians also wrap the body of the deceased in white shrouds, since many consider white to be the color of mourning and death. Although today Lithuanians wear black clothes and women carry black handkerchiefs to the funerals, women formerly wore white during the period of mourning as well as to funerals.

After the burial the ancient tradition of hosting a funeral dinner in memory of the deceased is still practiced in Lithuania. At the funeral dinner, the living relatives share food with the soul of the deceased as well as with souls of other dead relatives. Then they politely ask them to leave the house and the family without causing any harm, and they seek God's blessing and protection for the family members.

Further Reading

Suzanne LaFont, *Women in Transition: Voices from Lithuania* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1998); Gordon McLachlan, *Lithuania, 3rd: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Bucks, U.K.: Bradt Travel Guides, 2002); Vytas Stanley Vardys, Judith Sedaitis, *Lithuania: The Rebel Nation (Westview Series on the Post-Soviet Republics)* (Bolder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996).

Fun Fact

In Lithuania, until the beginning of the 20th century, married women considered themselves virgins until they gave birth to a son.

Fun Fact

According to traditional Lithuanian folklore, death is a woman named Giltine, who is blind and has hollow cheeks and is very tall and bony. She walks in the darkness of night, carrying a scythe in her hands, and ambushes people, catching them unaware. Animals such as dogs, cats, horses, and even birds sense her presence.

~ Luxembourg ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Western Europe; located between Germany, France, and Belgium
Size	999 sq. mi.
Capital City	Luxembourg
Flag Description	Luxembourg's flag has three horizontal bands of equal size of the following colors: red (top), white, and light blue.
Independence	1839 (from the Netherlands)
Population	468,571 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional monarchy
Nationality	Luxembourger(s)
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Celtic
Major Language(s)	Lëtzebuergesch (also known as Luxemburgish); German and French are administrative languages.
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholics (87%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Grand Duke's Birthday, June 23

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

The recorded history of Luxembourg dates back to 963 C.E. In that year Siegfried, Count of Ardennes (c. 922–98), and founder of the Luxembourg Dynasty, acquired the ruins of an old Roman fort from the monks of the Abbey of St. Maximin in Trier and built a castle, located at what is now the present-day capital of Luxembourg. The castle was called Castellum Lucilinburhuc, which means “little castle”). With time it was steadily strengthened. It became one of the strongest fortresses in Europe and came to be called the “Gibraltar of the North.”

Until 1354 Luxembourg enjoyed an independent status within the Holy Roman Empire. In 1437 the castle was taken over by the Habsburgs of Austria and was then captured by Burgundy in 1443. King Louis XIV of France (1638–1715) annexed Luxembourg in 1684. A bloody war followed at the end of which France was forced to return Luxembourg to the Habsburgs, and it became a part of the Austrian Empire. After the French Revolution, however, France regained control

over Luxembourg and kept it under its control until 1815, when Napoleon (1769–1821) was defeated, and Luxembourg was given the status of a grand duchy. Thereafter the Netherlands ruled Luxembourg.

During World War I Germany conquered neutral Luxembourg; U.S. and French troops had to intervene to liberate it from German rule in 1918. In 1940, despite its neutrality, Luxembourg was again attacked and conquered by the Germans. Germany placed the country under military rule and announced that Luxembourgers would now be German citizens. In addition Germany conscripted 13,000 Luxembourgers into German military service. Many died while fighting in the German army, and others were deported to concentration camps. In 1944 the United States again liberated Luxembourg from Germany, and the Germans finally withdrew in 1945, following their defeat. Luxembourg became a charter member of the United Nations (UN) in 1945. In 1948 it ended its neutrality and joined the Benelux Customs Union; in the following year it joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In 1957 Luxembourg became one of the six founding countries of the European Economic Community (which evolved into the European Union [EU]).

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, a landlocked country located in Western Europe, is surrounded by Germany, France, and Belgium. Luxembourg has a hilly terrain, and the northern parts of the country (known as Oesling or Eisleck) are home to the Ardennes, a stretch of forests and rolling hills that pass through Belgium, Luxembourg, and France. The highest point of the country is Buurgplaat, which stands at 1,834 feet and is located in the Ardennes. A major part of the southern region is known as Gutland (good country); Luxembourg's farmlands are found in this region. The southernmost end of the country is referred to as Minette or Land of the Red Earth, because of the red soil found in the region.

Rivers Moselle, Our, and Sauer (Sure) form the eastern border of Luxembourg, while the Alzette River is one of the important rivers flowing through Luxembourg. Luxembourg enjoys a continental climate characterized by cool summers and mild winters. In summer the average daily temperature during the day is around 68°F, while at night it is around 50°F.

❁ ECONOMY

Luxembourg has a strong economy characterized by growth, stability, low inflation, and a low unemployment rate. More than 83 percent of the population is employed in the service sector, while agriculture employs only about 3 percent of the population.

This highly industrialized nation has an export-oriented economy; its major export items include finished steel products, aluminum, chemicals, glass, rubber, and other industrial products.

Luxembourg is a member of the EU, and since January 1, 1999, it has used the common European currency, the Euro, as its national currency.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The culture and lifestyle of Luxembourg is greatly influenced by Germany and France. This is reflected in the fact that German and French are widely spoken for administrative purposes, although Lëtzebuergesch (also known as Luxemburgish), which is a German-Frankish-Moselle dialect, is the national language of Luxembourg. Luxembourg is ethnically diverse and is home to Italians, Portuguese, Slavs (from Kosovo, Albania, and Montenegro), as well as other Europeans. Almost 87 percent of the country's population is Roman Catholic, while 13 percent are Protestant, Jewish, or Muslim. Luxembourgers enjoy a wide variety of music, including jazz, classical, pop, reggae, and rock and roll.

❁ CUISINE

Traditional Luxembourg dishes include: the national dish *judd mat gaardebounen* (broad beans and smoked

Grand Duchy

A duchy is a territory or a domain ruled by a duke or a duchess. A grand duchy is a principality whose head of state is a grand duke or a grand duchess; he is ranked in honor below a king but higher than a sovereign duke. The title of grand duke or grand duchess is mainly used in Slavic, Baltic, and Germanic countries. Luxembourg has been a grand duchy since 1815, when King William I of the Netherlands (1772–1843) established the independent Kingdom of the Netherlands, and the Congress of Vienna handed over Luxembourg to him. He was given the title of Grand Duke Guillaume I of Luxembourg.

neck of pork); *quenelles* (dumplings made with calf's liver), which are generally served with sauerkraut (white cabbage) and boiled potatoes; *treipen* (black pudding); *bouneschlupp* (green bean soup); sausages; and fried fish. Wine and beer are the favorite beverages, and the Moselle region, renowned for its white wines, has a history of wine making that dates back to the Roman era.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar. In Luxembourg on New Year's Eve, a festive spirit envelops the entire country as people attend parties and celebrate with friends and family. Special *bals* (dance parties) are also organized, and people sing and dance through the night to usher in the new year. When the clock strikes midnight a spectacular display of fireworks lights up the night sky amid cheers from the crowd. Feasting, dancing, singing, and drinking continue until the early morning hours of New Year's Day.

On New Year's Eve people feast on *raclette*, a traditional dish made from boiled potatoes and melted cheese, and generally served with vegetables. Meat dishes and fondue (melted Swiss cheese eaten with chunks of bread) are also popular New Year's Eve dishes.

Fun Fact

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is the sixth smallest country and the only grand duchy in the world.

Fun Fact

Almost one-third of Luxembourg's labor force consists of foreign laborers who come from Italy, Portugal, Belgium, Germany, and France to work in Luxembourg.

Fun Fact

Luxembourg has the highest per capita national income in the world: USD\$43,940 in 2003.

Fun Fact

In 1993 it was estimated that Luxembourg had the highest per capita consumption of alcohol in the world, with an average of three beers a day for every man, woman, and child.

✿ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day and Workers' Day, to commemorate the important role of workers. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, designated May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

In Luxembourg huge demonstrations and rallies are held by trade unions throughout the country, and workers participate with great enthusiasm. In many towns and villages people go to the woods and gather branches (from trees and bushes), which have the first green leaves of the spring season. They use these branches to make Meekranz (May wreathes) and place them outside restaurants, churches, pubs, and town halls.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

✿ GRAND DUKE'S BIRTHDAY

Observed on: General Public
Observed on: June 23

Although the birthday of the Grand Duke of Luxembourg, His Royal

Highness Jean Benoit Guillaume Robert Antoine Louis Marie Adolphe Marc d'Aviano, falls on January 5 (1921), the official birthday celebrations take place on June 23, when the weather is warmer. This holiday is also called National Day.

On this day the grand ducal family, the royal family of Luxembourg, attends a solemn Mass in honor of the grand duke, which is known as the *Tè Deum*. A variety of events are held in every town and village of Luxembourg. In the capital city a military parade, a lavish feast, and a spectacular display of fireworks mark the day. The grand duke's birthday is a national holiday, and all public and private institutions are closed.

Religious Holidays

✿ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

The Christian holiday of Good Friday commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. A solemn occasion, it falls on the last Friday of Lent, the 40-day period of fasting and austerity that precedes Easter. Devout Christians attend special church services on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

The Christian festival of Easter celebrates Jesus' Resurrection. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent. For Christians Easter is considered the most important Christian festival, and its numerous celebrations and observances form the core of the liturgical year, which begins around the time of the vernal equinox in the Northern Hemisphere (the autumnal equinox in the Southern Hemisphere) and stretches out into summer in the Northern Hemisphere (winter in the Southern Hemisphere).

The English name for this celebration, Easter, was almost certainly pagan in origin. According to the Venerable Bede (672–735), a renowned Christian scholar, Easter was named after Eostre (or Eastre), the Mother Goddess of the Saxon tribes of Northern Europe; she was also the goddess of fertility. The Germans knew her as Ostara. After the harsh winters of Northern Europe, she brought the warmth of spring, fertility, and abundance. The ancient deities in all civilizations had patron animals, and the rabbit, an obvious symbol of fertility, is the companion animal of Eostre. The deity was believed to preside over conception and birth in animals and human beings as well as the pollination, flowering, and the ripening of fruits in the plant kingdom. When the Catholic



Luxembourg's Grand Duke Henri, left, and Grand Duchess Maria Theresa, are welcomed by children waving the national tricolor flag upon their arrival in Ehnen, Luxembourg, during festivities to celebrate the country's National Day on June 23. (AP Photo/Nicolas Bouvy)

Church decided to celebrate Jesus' Crucifixion the end of first century C.E., they chose to take the goddess's name and the symbols associated with her festival to convert pagans to Christianity.

In Luxembourg Easter is known as Ouschteren. The devout attend Easter church services. But it is a particularly special day for children. On Easter Sunday children get up early in the morning and start hunting for Easter eggs left by the Easter bunny. Armed with small baskets, they begin their search for Easter eggs and carefully look in every nook and corner of their yards. Besides the colorful decorated Easter eggs, children also receive egg-shaped chocolates from their parents.

On Easter Sunday girls give boys they like egg-shaped boxes that have been decorated and filled with candy. The traditional Easter dessert is either cake or ice cream. Easter Monday is a national holiday in Luxembourg, with schools and businesses closed for the day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ OKTAVE

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Third through fifth Sundays after Easter

The Oktave is an important Catholic festival in Luxembourg. It begins on the third Sunday after Easter and ends on the fifth Sunday after Easter. The Oktave of Notre Dame la Consolatrice des Affliges is celebrated on the fifth Sunday after Easter in honor of the patroness of Luxembourg, the Virgin Mary, also known as Mary of Consolatrice.

It is believed that in 1624 the statue of the Virgin Mary was discovered by some Jesuit students in Consolatrice inside the hollow of an oak tree. They took the statue to their Jesuit College and displayed it there. That same night, however, the statue mysteriously disappeared despite the locked doors, and when an intensive search was conducted, the statue was once again discovered inside the hollow of the oak tree where it had been initially found. Thus a special chapel was built around the area in 1624. And in 1625, when a devastating plague engulfed the region, many people began attributing miraculous cures to the statue. Since then Consolatrice has become a center of pilgrimage for believers. On September 26, 1666, the Virgin Mary was declared the patroness of the city of Luxembourg.

For the celebration of Oktave pilgrims from all over the country flock to Consolatrice to seek the blessings of the Blessed Virgin. The city of Luxembourg is decorated with fir trees and flowers. Also the royal family of Luxembourg, the grand ducal family, always attends the special Mass that takes place in honor of the Virgin Mary.

Celebrations begin in the afternoon after a huge procession, which includes brass bands, boy scouts, girl guides, and religious heads, as well as countless

people who walk toward the cathedral. Then the first communicants, known as "Children of Mary," carry her image underneath a beautifully adorned canopy. The image is neatly wrapped in a dark-blue velvet cloth embroidered with gold and jewels. She holds the infant Jesus in one hand and a scepter (sword of state) in the other. A rosary, golden heart, and keys of the Luxembourg-Ville are tied around the wrist of her right hand. The image is carried through the city of Luxembourg in a solemn procession.

Every day during Oktave, Place Guillaume (named after King William II of the Netherlands and grand duke of Luxembourg) becomes a market of religious artifacts and souvenirs and is thronged by believers and tourists alike. The traditional dish of fried fish is also served during the Oktave.

During Oktave different parishes organize their own pilgrimages to the cathedral and take part in special Masses.

❁ PENTECOST

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Fifty days after Easter

Pentecost, a two-day religious observance, also called Whitsunday and Whitmonday, begins 50 days after Easter. In Greek, *pentecost* means the "fiftieth day." It celebrates the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles. However, a number of scholars believe that many of the traditions and celebrations were borrowed from pagan celebrations of the return of spring. Whitsunday and monday have been celebrated since the third century C.E. Whitsunday is named for the white garments worn by those who were baptized during the disciples' vigil.

In the town of Echternach an annual dancing procession and a handkerchief pageant are held on Whittuesday in honor of St. Willibrord, who founded the abbey in the town in 698 C.E. His body was laid to rest in the abbey, and people visit the basilica and pay their respects to the beloved saint.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; PENTECOST

❁ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: August 15

The Feast of the Assumption, also known as the Virgin Mary's Day, commemorates the death of Mary, the mother of Jesus. It is also celebrates Mary's elevation to heaven. In Luxembourg on the Sunday after the Assumption, many people go on a pilgrimage to the Chapelle du Bildchen, a shrine to the Virgin Mary. It is believed that the statue of Mary in the chapel was found in the region a thousand years ago. People offer prayers and flowers and seek Mary's blessing.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

❁ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day is a Christian feast that honors all the saints, both known and unknown. It is an annual religious celebration that takes place on November 1. In Luxembourg devout Catholics attend a special Mass on this day.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas is a day of celebration for Christians all over the world. It marks the birth of Jesus and falls on December 25. On Christmas Eve (December 24) in Luxembourg people decorate Christmas trees with glittering, colored balls, stars, and wax candles. Beneath the branches of the Christmas tree they place a traditional Nativity scene, which consists of wooden figurines of Joseph, Mary, and the infant Jesus in the crib, along with the Three Wise Men. These figurines are frequently family heirlooms, passed from one generation to another.

St. Nicholas is known as Kleeschen in Luxembourg. His traveling companion, Houëker (Black Peter), wears coarse black clothes and carries a stick with which he is said to chastise naughty children. During the night of December 5 (St. Nicholas's Day), children place their shoes on windowsills or outside their bedroom doors in hopes that Kleeschen will bring them presents and candy. The gifts on Christmas are said to be brought by the baby Jesus.

On Christmas Eve the candles are lit around seven in the evening and the family gathers around the Christmas tree to sing Christmas carols. Children open their presents while parents and other adult family members continue singing carols or indulge in conversation. Around midnight the entire family goes to the local church to attend midnight services.

After the service on a traditional supper, which consists of roasted sausages and black pudding or a roast turkey generally accompanied by boiled potatoes and white cabbage. Wine and beer are the favored beverages. For dessert a *bûche de Noël* (a cake decorated as a log) and *stolen* (fruitcake with rum) are served.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 26

The Feast of St. Stephen is observed on December 26, the day after Christmas. St. Stephen is considered to be the first martyr of Christianity. He was

stoned to death by Roman rulers for speaking in favor of Jesus and his disciples. In Luxembourg visiting friends and families and exchanging Christmas presents and greetings is customary on the Feast of St. Stephen, which is a national holiday. December 26 is also celebrated as Boxing Day in the United Kingdom and nations that are members of the British Commonwealth of Nations.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ DANCING PROCESSION

Observed in: Echternach
Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: May–June

In the town of Echternach, Luxembourg, an annual dancing procession and handkerchief pageant are organized on Whittuesday in honor of St. Willibrord (c. 657–739), who established the abbey in 738 and died there as well. The date has no connection with St. Willibrord, however; he died on November 7. There are a number of stories related to the origin of the procession. According to one, a local thief named Veidt was condemned to death by execution in the town square, and in accordance with the law of the land he was asked for his last wish. Veidt desired to play his fiddle. Legend has it that Veidt's fiddle playing so mesmerized all those assembled for the execution that he was able to make a quick escape and cheat death. Catholic historians are reluctant to ascribe any pre-Christian antecedents to the dancing procession and claim only that its origin cannot be stated with certainty. A neutral observer can, however, recognize elements of pagan cults, such as the ones that were criticized by St. Eligius in the seventh century.

The story is a good one, but many historians believe that the pilgrimage to Echternach began in the 14th century when the region was invaded by the great plague, and people sought divine protection against it by praying in the chapel. Even today many of the faithful flock to the region in May or June to participate in the procession to avert epilepsy, St. Vitus's dance, or convulsions. Before it starts a priest gives an open-air sermon in front of the holy cross. Then in the courtyard of the abbey, pilgrims start assembling, and the procession begins after the bell at the abbey rings. Emperor Maximilian (1459–1519) donated this bell to the abbey to commemorate his pilgrimage to the region in 1512.

The procession is headed by the clergy, followed by the youth, and then the elderly. The dancing procession begins while musicians play an ancient melody, and the pilgrims take three steps forward, then two back, so that five steps are required in order to advance one pace. The result is

that it is well after midday before the last of the dancers has reached the church. At one time the pilgrims would stop and fall to their knees every time Maximilian's bell rang, then move forward a few more steps. At another time they crawled under a stone facing the cross of St. Willibrord. A "cattle-bell dance" was also performed in front of the cross on the marketplace, but this dance was prohibited in 1664.

The procession passes through the streets of Echternach and then climbs the staircases that lead up to the basilica. The pilgrims enter the church, dance around the crypt, which contains the remains of St. Willibrord, and offer prayers to the saint.

❁ SCHUEBERFOUER FAIR

Observed in: Luxembourg

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: End of August–mid-September

The Schueberfouer fair is a two-week annual event, which takes place in Luxembourg in late August through mid-September. The word *Schueberfouer* is derived from the name of the town, Scadeburg (located at the plateau du Esprit) where the event was first held. It is a major attraction, and people from all over Luxembourg visit the Schueberfouer to enjoy beer and food as well as carnival rides such as roller-coasters, carousels, bumper cars, and a Ferris wheel.

The festival begins with the march of the sheep, known as Hämmelesmarsch. Shepherds lead their flocks of sheep, adorned with colorful ribbons, through the streets of Luxembourg, accompanied by musicians playing a traditional playful tune. The origin of the tune is unknown, but the same melody has

Dancing Procession

The annual dancing procession at Echternach has undergone a number of changes over the centuries. At one point the pattern of dance adopted for the procession had earned it the name motionless procession because the pilgrims participating in the procession would stop dancing at the sound of the abbey's bell and would move forward slightly and fall on their knees. Then they would get up and resume dancing until the bell rang again. The "crawling procession" was traditional at another time, when pilgrims would crawl under the stone that was placed in front of the cross of St. Willibrord.

been played during the festival for more than 200 years. The shepherds collect money from houses along the way. A special marketplace is also set where skilled artisans and weavers sell their products.

Further Reading

Ernest Mathijs, ed., *The Cinema of the Low Countries* (New York: Wallflower, 2004); Gerald Newton, ed., *Luxembourg and Lëtzebuergesch: Language and Communication at the Crossroads of Europe* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1996); Elsebet Sander-Jørgensen Rowlett, Homer L. Thomas, and Ralph M. Rowlett, *Neolithic Levels on the Titelberg, Luxembourg* (Columbia, Mo.: Museum of Anthropology, University of Missouri-Columbia, 1980).



Macau

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Macau is located in the eastern part of Asia, bordering the South China Sea and China, at the delta of the Pearl River.
Size	10 sq. mi.
Capital City	Mon de Deus de Macau
Flag Description	Macau's flag is light green with a lotus flower above a stylized bridge and water in white beneath an arc of five golden stars, a large one in the center of the arc and four smaller.
Independence	None
Population	449,198 (2005 est.)
Government	A Special Administrative Region of China with a status similar to that of Hong Kong
Nationality	Chinese
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Chinese (96%)
Major Language(s)	Cantonese (88%); Portuguese
Major Religion(s)	Buddhist (50%); others (35%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Chinese New Year, February; Anniversary of Portuguese Revolution Day, April 25; Labor Day, May 1; Camões Day, June 10; Tuen Yang, April–May; Mid-Autumn Festival, July–August; National Day of the People's Republic of China, October 1–2; Macau Special Administrative Region Establishment Day, December 20; Winter Solstice, December 21

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Evidence of the Chinese presence in Macau goes back almost 5,000 years. It was part of both the Qin Dynasty (221–06 B.C.E.) and the Lin Dynasty (265–420 C.E.). Although it became a stopover for seafarers in the 5th century, there were no permanent settlers until the 13th century when some members of the Song Dynasty arrived there, fleeing from Mongol invaders attacking the mainland. The Chinese continued to immigrate to the peninsula through the years until the arrival of Portuguese traders, who first traveled to the south China coast in the early 1500s. Jorge Álvares (d. 1521) landed in south China in 1513, and this visit was followed by the establishment of Portuguese trading centers in the Pearl

River Delta. These were eventually consolidated on Macau as the first European settlement in the Far East. Serving as a vital base for merchants as well as for Christian missionaries to China and Japan, the settlement prospered along with the trade. Initial misgivings on the part of the Chinese were soon ironed out, and Portugal obtained a lease to Macau. The understanding was that the Portuguese were to pay a ground rent and in return would be the administrators of the territory; sovereignty would remain with the Chinese, and the citizens were to be subject to Chinese law. The Chinese government however, did not formally recognize Portuguese control of Macau until 1887.

In 1974 a military coup in Portugal brought a socialist government to power that was sympathetic to the independence movements in Portugal's overseas territories. Although there was no strong local demand for independence in Macau, Portugal and China signed an agreement on April 13, 1987,

on the future status of Macau. From April 1991 to December 1999, Governor General Vasco Joaquim Rocha Vieira was the head of Macau's government, with a 10-member consultative committee representing the interests of the Chinese community. Half of the 10 members were from Macau, and the other half from mainland China.

After the Portuguese handed over the country to the Chinese on December 20, 1999, it became the Macau Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China under the formula of "one country two systems," a formula which also governs China's administration of Hong Kong. By this formula Chinese socialist economics will not be practiced in Macau until 2049, and Macau will enjoy a high degree of autonomy in all matters except foreign and defense affairs.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Macau is officially known as Macau Special Administrative Region (SAR). The local long form is Aomen Tebi Xingzhenggu (Chinese) or Regiao Administrativa Especial de Macau (Portuguese). Macau is located on the southeast coast of China on the Pearl River. It consists of the Macau Peninsula and the two southern islands of Taipa and Coloane. The islands are hilly, rocky, and largely uninhabitable. The peninsula features low, flat land of which about 90 percent is urbanized.

The city of Macau, which is built on the peninsula side, is linked with the nearest island of Taipa by two bridges (1.5 miles and 2.8 miles long, respectively), and Taipa is linked with the island of Coloane by a 1.4-mile-long causeway. On the western side of the peninsula, one of the main channels of the West River (Xi He) empties into the South China Sea.



Macau residents in traditional Portuguese outfits march in a parade on December 20, 1999, celebrating the return of Macau, the last of Portugal's colonies, to Chinese rule on midnight of December 19, 1999. (AP Photo/Anat Givon)

Macau has a hot and humid summer, a cool and dry autumn, and a relatively mild and dry winter with no frost. Most rainfall occurs during the summer months. Typhoons in summer and early autumn produce heavy rainfall and floods, which frequently cause serious damage to crops and property.

❁ ECONOMY

The country's economy is based mainly on tourism and gambling. About 63 percent of government revenues come from taxes on gambling. Macau has an excellent transportation network that continues to

A-Ma or Ling Ma

Macau's name comes from that of the Chinese goddess who protects seafarers and fishermen, A-Ma, Ling Ma, or Mazu in Macau. According to legend, a junk sailing across the South China Sea found itself in a furious storm, and everyone on board gave up hope of living. But a young woman who had boarded the junk at the last minute stood up and ordered the elements to calm down; miraculously, the gale stopped. The ship arrived at the port of Hoi Keang, where the young woman got down, climbed up the nearby hill and, with a halo of light and perfume, ascended to heaven. At that very spot the temple of A-Ma was built in her honor.

According to legend, Lin Mo was a young girl who became the goddess A-Ma after performing numerous miracles during her short life. She was born on the island of Meizhou off the southeastern coast of China in 960 C.E. Because of her spiritual powers, Lin could predict weather changes and tell sailors and

fishermen when it was safe for them to set out to sea. At 28 Lin bade farewell to her family before she was carried into the heavens in a glow of light. Lin's story is still remembered by many seafarers along the Pacific Rim, and there are as many as 14 million faithful devoted to her in modern-day Taiwan.

The 500-year-old A-Ma Temple, known as Ma Kok Miu by residents, is the oldest temple in Macao. The goddess A-Ma is worshipped as the guardian who protects fishermen from danger. On March 23 of the Chinese lunar calendar, believed to be the birthday of A-Ma, the temple is crowded with her followers. Among the attractions in the temple are a pair of 300-year-old stone lions and a 400-year-old stone carved with an ancient sea chart.

When Portuguese sailors landed here in the 16th century and asked the name of the place, the reply was "A-Ma-Gao" ("the Bay of A-Ma"). The Portuguese renamed the peninsula Amagas, but over time it was shortened to Macau.



improve rapidly. Links with China and nearby countries have led to millions of tourists visiting Macau every year. Macau's economy after its return to China remains one of the most open in the world. Export of goods and services accounts for 39 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), with tourism and textile exports as the mainstays. The economy was hit hard by the Asian financial crisis in 1998, but a rapid rise in tourism, including that from mainland China, led to a quick recovery and economic growth. Fireworks manufacturing businesses have grown in Macau and so have small industries such as those manufacturing toys, artificial flowers, and electronic items.

Macau depends on mainland China for most of its food, fresh water, and electrical supply.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Most people in Macau are ethnic Chinese; either they, or their ancestors, came from the Guangdong Province of China. But Macau had been a Portuguese colony and trading center for more than four centuries and reflects a distinctly Portuguese influence in its culture, lifestyle, and festivals. The people with mixed Portuguese and Chinese ancestry in Macau are known as Macanese.

Most ethnic Chinese in Macau are from the Guangdong Province and are Mahayana Buddhists. Macau has two official languages: Cantonese, the dominant regional language spoken by most of Macau's residents, and Portuguese. Many Macanese, however, have facility with both Cantonese and Portuguese. Many Macanese also speak Putonghua (Mandarin Chinese) and English.

The easygoing nature of Macau's residents, combined with their strong sense of culture, and the mild year-long climate supports great festivals and celebrations throughout the year, although recently some of the specifically Portuguese celebrations have been eliminated, and a few Chinese festivals added.

CUISINE

A combination of Portuguese, Indian, African, Malay, and Chinese foods make up Macanese cuisine, which is one of the most unusual in the world. The Portuguese learned from Africa and India how to use spices in their popular dishes such as African and Goanese chicken and piquant prawn, served baked or grilled with pepper and chilies. Traditional dishes from Portugal include *bacalhau*, Portuguese dried cod, served baked, grilled, stewed, or boiled, and soups such as *caldo verde* and *sopa a alentejana*, both rich with vegetables, meat, and olive oil. Some popular dishes in Macau are seafood curry with papaya, Portuguese duck rice, and pork casserole flavored with tamarind and shrimp paste.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

Although the first day of the year in the Gregorian calendar is January 1, the real celebrations to welcome the new year and mark the end of the old in Macau are held during the Chinese New Year. January 1 is observed only as an administrative holiday.

CHINESE NEW YEAR

Observed by: Chinese and Macanese

Observed on: First day of the First Moon of the Lunar Calendar

Like its Western counterpart, the Chinese New Year celebrates change. In Macau people prepare for the New Year by cleaning their homes, decorating them with bright colors, paying debts, resolving differences with friends and family members, and buying new clothes. The elaborate preparations and rituals, in addition to the color and excitement that go with them, make the Chinese New Year's celebrations, also known as the Chinese Spring Festival or the Lunar New Year, the most important festival in Macau. On the 16th day of the 12th month of the lunar year the mini spring festival begins, a two-week period during which people in Macau are busy preparing for the New Year's celebrations. It is particularly important to offer sacrifices to the Kitchen God (Zao Jun) to ensure that, when he is summoned by the Jade Emperor, the God of heaven, he will have nice things to say about the family. Sugar-cane must be offered to the Kitchen God, which is meant to sweeten his mouth. Rice straws cut in pieces are also included for the Kitchen God's horse because Zao Jun cannot go to the Jade Emperor riding an unfed horse.

The house must be thoroughly cleaned, and all the useless odds and ends discarded to drive out the evil and usher in good luck for the new year. At midnight on New Year's Eve, people open their doors and windows to let the old year go. Fireworks usher in the new year.

The most important event on the eve of the Spring Festival is the family reunion dinner. Everyone in the family tries to return home in time for the occasion. For someone unable to return, a seat is kept at the dinner table and a pair of chopsticks and a bowl are placed in front of it as if he or she were present.

When the bell rings on the first day of the new year, people flock to the Temple of A-Ma and other temples, so that they can be the first to burn incense and obtain the blessing of the Buddha. They also bring home sticks of longevity incense because they believe it will bring them good fortune. Stuffed

dumplings and new year cakes, all made of sticky rice flour, are served for breakfast to ensure family happiness. After lunch the whole family takes a leisurely walk or visits relatives.

In addition to practices that must be observed in order to live happily in the coming year, there are also things that people should avoid doing during the Spring Festival. For example no one should sweep the floor New Year's Day because good fortune might be swept out with the dirt. If it's absolutely necessary to clean the floor, the sweeping should be done inward so as to keep good fortune in the house.

In addition to the customs and rituals observed to bring in the new year, there are also many cultural activities during the Spring Festival in Macau, including Cantonese opera, theatrical performances, concerts, numerous exhibits, martial arts contests, a parade of floats, lion dancing, and the dragon lamp show.

See also Volume III: CHINESE NEW YEAR; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ ANNIVERSARY OF PORTUGUESE REVOLUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 25

This holiday commemorates the day in 1974 when a seven-man junta under General António de Spínola (1910–96) was installed in Portugal by a group of Portuguese army officers after overthrowing the repressive government of Marcelo Caetano (1906–80). The new Spínola government promised democracy at home and peace for the overseas territories ruled by Portugal. Since Macau returned to Chinese rule as an SAR, this day has been observed modestly here.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Labor Day, also called May Day and Workers' Day, commemorates the important role played by workers in their societies. The May 1 observance of Labor Day was set by the Socialist Second International party in 1889. It was planned to coincide with a general strike that the American Federation of Labor (AFL) scheduled for 1890 to win an eight-hour workday in the United States. In China, Russia, and other socialist countries, this day is observed each year as May Day, and workers and peasants stage huge rallies. The May Day celebration in Macau is a recent development since its change of status from a Portuguese territory to a Chinese SAR.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

The Lusíads

The Lusíads, an epic poem completed in 1572 by Luís de Camões (c. 1524–80) is considered Portugal's national epic. The personal life of Camões was one of high adventure, and he wrote *The Lusíads* while he was traveling and fighting in India, Macau, and Mozambique before returning to Lisbon in the 1560s.

The poem tells the story of Vasco da Gama's (c. 1460–1524) voyage to India. It is a lively narrative and makes nostalgic reference to other events in Portuguese history. The word *lusíads*, that is, sons of Lesus, refers to the Portuguese people. The epic is written in 10 cantos in *ottava rima*, patterned after the Latin epic *The Aeneid* by Virgil (70–19 B.C.E.).

❁ CAMÕES DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 10

In 1952 the Portuguese government made this date an official public holiday to be celebrated as National Day, or Day of Portugal, in honor of those who had died in overseas wars. Later persons of exceptional achievement also came to be honored on this day. In 1977 the government redefined the holiday to focus the tribute on Luís (Vaz) de Camões, one of Portugal's greatest poets and adventurers, who had died in Lisbon on this day in 1580. *The Lusíads* is his most famous work. During his military career Camões traveled to India and Macau but was sent back to Portugal, accused of extortion. Although this is still one of Macau's official holidays, the celebrations take place on a much reduced scale since the country was returned to Chinese rule. This holiday was celebrated for the last time in 1999.

❁ TUEN YANG

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Fifth day of the fifth month of the Buddhist calendar

Tuen Yang, or Dragon Boat Festival Day, is observed on the fifth day of the fifth Moon of the Chinese calendar in remembrance of the heroic poet Qu Yuan, (339–278 B.C.E.), who protested against governmental corruption by drowning himself. He lived during the Qi Dynasty (or Spring and Autumn period). On this day people eat *zongzi*, a pyramid-shaped dumpling of glutinous rice wrapped in bamboo leaves, and specially made *zongzi* are sold in restaurants in Macao on this occasion. In the 21st century all celebrations are concentrated on the Dragon Boat Races, which in Macau take place on the Sai

Van Lake. Many local and foreign teams take part in this colorful boat race.

MID-AUTUMN FESTIVAL

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Fifteenth day of the eighth month of the Buddhist calendar

When the Moon is said to be at its fullest and brightest, on the 15th day of the eighth Moon of the Chinese calendar, Macau's residents gather in the beaches and parks for the Feast of Mid-Autumn. Earlier in the day they pay their respects to their ancestors, then prepare or purchase festive moon cakes to be given to friends. Since the full Moon symbolizes completeness and family harmony, giving and receiving moon cakes is considered good luck. In the Macau peninsula, Coloane, and Taipa, hundreds of families gather at the shores of lakes, beaches, and hilltops to appreciate the beauty of the Moon. Traditional celebrations include lighting candles and paper lanterns and setting them afloat in open water or rivers.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM; HARVEST FESTIVALS

NATIONAL DAY OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 1–2

October 1 is the anniversary of the day Mao Zedong (1893–1976), the chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, proclaimed the People's Republic of China in 1949. After the surrender of Japan in World War II, a civil war broke out in China between the Chinese Kuomintang (KMT) government of Chiang Kai-shek and the Chinese Communist Party led by Mao. The KMT lost the war, and

Chiang Kai-shek left mainland China to seek refuge on the island of Taiwan. In China itself, October 1 and 2 are celebrated with massive processions and rallies, but they are commemorated more soberly in Macau.

MACAU SPECIAL ADMINISTRATIVE REGION ESTABLISHMENT DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 20

This day is observed to commemorate Macau's return to Chinese administration in December 1999. Prior to that date (starting in the 15th century), Macau had been a Portuguese colony, even though the government of China did not formally recognize Portuguese control of Macau until 1887. Macau was returned to Chinese administration in 1999, when it became a Special Administrative Region or SAR, with a status similar to that of Hong Kong after its transfer from Great Britain to China. Flag-raising ceremonies, processions, and public speeches mark this holiday.

WINTER SOLSTICE

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 21

On this date the Earth is at the farthest point from the Sun in its orbit in the Northern Hemisphere. This is the shortest day of the year, and each subsequent day gets longer until the following June 21, the date of the summer solstice. In Macau the festivities end with the winter solstice feasts on December 21.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM

Religious Holidays

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, also known as Black Friday, Holy Friday, or Mourning Friday, is observed in remembrance of the Crucifixion of Jesus. Church services are held to commemorate his suffering on the Cross. During the day in Macau there are processions in which people take to the streets carrying crosses. Hymns on the life and deeds of Jesus are sung, and there are readings from the Gospels. In the evening service candles are put out, lights dimmed, and the premises darkened.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

The Passion of Jesus

On Good Friday Christians participate in a solemn procession through the streets of Macau in a reenactment of Jesus' carrying the Cross to his Crucifixion. Starting from the Church of St. Augustine, an image of Jesus carrying the Cross is carried in procession to St. Paul's Cathedral, and the image is left there overnight. The next day worshippers dressed in purple robes carry the image on a platform back to the Church of St. Augustine. Along the route they pause to say the Stations of the Cross, recalling the tragic events that took place, from the condemnation of Jesus to the placing of his body in a tomb after his death on the Cross.

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a Christian feast that celebrates Jesus' Resurrection from the dead three days after he was crucified. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. In Macau people attend Easter church services celebrating the Resurrection. Egg-rolling competitions are a popular Easter tradition for children in Macau.

Easter Monday is the first day of Easter Week and is generally regarded as a continuation of Easter Sunday. The day was once part of a week-long celebration but was later changed to a one-day holiday. It is a day for playing pranks and telling jokes.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ CHENG MING

Observed by: Chinese

Observed on: April 5

Cheng Ming or Tomb Sweeping Day, falls on the 106th day after the winter solstice. Cheng Ming is a family holiday when people visit their ancestors' graves, tidy up the tombstones, burn incense, and place fresh flowers and three glasses of wine before them in the belief that the dead will receive these offerings on "the other side." Some people also offer roast pig, fruit, and other food to the dead. The food does not go to waste, however, since it ends up on the dinner table for a family feast at the end of the day.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM

✿ PROCESSION OF OUR LADY OF FATIMA

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: May 13

In the early 1900s three shepherds from Fatima in Portugal saw a huge flash of light and a vision of Mary, the mother of Jesus. The devout Catholics of Macau show their appreciation of the Virgin Mary in an annual procession on May 13. Her likeness stands in a bed of colorful flowers, and worshippers carry this platform from the Saõ Domingo Church through the streets, up a steep incline to the Penha Chapel. People (mainly Catholics) line the streets and crowd the courtyard of Penha Chapel, where an open-air mass is then held.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

✿ VESAK

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: April or May

Gautama Buddha was born on a full Moon day about 2,500 years ago in Lumbini, an Indian kingdom.

Today his birthday, also known as Buddha's Anniversary, is celebrated in either April or May, depending on the Moon's cycle.

Followers of Lord Buddha in China, Japan, India, and other parts of the Far East observe this day by going to temples and pagodas to pray.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM; VESAK

✿ ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 24

Residents of Macau celebrate two holidays on June 24: Roman Catholics observe it as the feast day of St. John the Baptist. For all residents, it commemorates the victory of a small contingent of Portuguese soldiers, numbering only 150, over 800 Dutch invaders in 1622. For this reason, the holiday is also called City Day of Macau. Since the Portuguese believed it was John the Baptist who helped them win, they proclaimed him the guardian of Macau. Since then, a memorial Mass has been held on this day at St. Paul's Cathedral. In earlier times a 21-gun salute and procession carrying the figure of St. John also marked the occasion. Although this is still an official holiday, there are no longer public celebrations.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

✿ ALL SOULS' DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: November 2

All Souls' Day or Day of the Dead, is a holiday established by the Roman Catholic Church to honor the dead so they will "rest in peace." According to popular belief, the spirits of the dead return to commune with the living on this day. In Macau families clean and decorate the graves of deceased family members, leave offerings for their spirits, and attend open-air festivals in fancy-dress costumes.

See also Volume III: ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

✿ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas marks the birth of Jesus although it is not actually the date on which he was born. Earlier celebrations of his birth were observed on different dates, but the Catholic Church, beginning in the fifth century, has observed Christmas starting on the evening of December 24. In the fourth century the Roman Emperor Constantine reformed the Julian calendar and introduced the seven-day week, thereby changing the way the months were subdivided. Also during that century a calendar was established that emphasized Christian festivals that

gradually took over the dates and seasons of pagan celebrations and rituals.

The latter part of December was one such period. On December 17 (by the Julian calendar) the Saturnalia, a seven-day festival honoring the Roman deity Saturn, the god of agriculture, was observed. This festival included the winter solstice, which usually occurred around December 25. During the Saturnalia, the Romans feasted well, put aside all business and matters of war, exchanged gifts, and freed their slaves for the festival's duration. December 25 was also celebrated as the date honoring the rebirth of the Invincible Sun God of the Romans (Natalis Solis Invicti), and rituals were performed to honor Mithra, the Persian god of light. Both celebrations welcomed the return of the light and the lengthening days. As the days grew longer the winter festivities stretched to include January 1, the festival of Kalends, the day of the new Moon and the first day of the month and year of the Julian calendar.

Christmas is celebrated in Macau with prayers in churches and feasts. Families attend midnight services on Christmas Eve and join in the joyous Christmas celebrations afterward. People exchange gifts and cards and also decorate Christmas trees in their homes.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

FEAST OF THE DRUNKEN DRAGON

Observed by: Fishermen of Macau
Observed on: May 13

This is the most unusual festival in Macau. It dates back to the days of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) in Kangxi Kingdom when there was a terrible plague. The villagers decided to carry a statue of the Buddha to the river to bless the water, but a giant python blocked their path. A Buddhist monk killed the monster python by slicing it into pieces. The pieces were thrown back into the river, and immediately the villagers started to recover from the plague. Even the soil where the python's blood was spilled became fertile. The villagers concluded that they had been saved by a divine dragon, and they had a carving made in its image. Each year on Buddha's birthday, the villagers drank and danced with the carved figure of the dragon.

In Macau the fishermen's association organizes this festival, which starts in the morning at the Kuan Tai Temple. Men wearing red bandannas and shirts with Chinese characters painted on their chests perform dances while carrying portions of the dragon (head, body, and tail). When the long day of dragon dancing is over, everyone joins in a huge feast prepared by the nondancers during the day.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM

CHUNG YEUNG

Observed by: Chinese
Observed on: October 21

The Chinese in Macau share the Chung Yeung Festival of Ancestors, also referred to as Ascending Heights, with their relatives on the mainland. The Chinese believe that long ago a family living in this region went on an excursion to a nearby hill. When they returned home they found that all their animals had died from some unknown disease. Consequently they came to believe that going to a high place would save their lives from similar disasters. To celebrate this holiday they climb hills after offering prayers for their departed relatives at family graves.

Rites of Passage

MARRIAGE

Wedding celebrations in Macau are colorful, whether they are Chinese or Western; indeed, some people combine features from both cultural traditions. When a Chinese-style wedding is held, the bridegroom goes to the bride's home to pick her up. When a wedding is planned according to Portuguese (Western) tradition, the newlyweds go to the church for their wedding ceremony. Some Macanese hold Western-style weddings, while others have weddings that combine Chinese and Western styles. In the latter case, the bride and groom have a Western wedding ceremony at a church in the morning, and then proceed to Coloane Island where they ride in a flower-decorated car. Then the bridegroom takes the bride back to her home. After lunch she removes her white wedding gown and changes into a Chinese wedding dress. The bridegroom, now also in appropriate Chinese wedding garb, comes to take her back. Back home the newlyweds perform the formal Chinese wedding ceremony by bowing to the Heaven and Earth, to the ancestors, and to their parents. After the wedding ceremony the newlyweds and their relatives and friends go to a Chinese restaurant for an extravagant wedding dinner to celebrate.

DEATH

The majority of the population of Macau is Roman Catholic, owing to the missionary zeal of its former Portuguese rulers. Devout Christians in Macau adhere to the basic tenets of the Catholic Church. A traditional Catholic funeral consists of three main parts: the vigil (sometimes called the wake), the Requiem Mass, and the burial and informal after-burial gatherings. During the vigil the family gathers around the dead one to pray for the person, to remember his or her life, and to console each another. If the wake takes place in a funeral home, funeral cards are usually present. On one side they

have a Catholic image and, on the other, a prayer, and the name, birth date, and heavenly birth date of the deceased.

The day after the vigil a Requiem Mass is performed. The body is moved from the place of the vigil to the church or chapel. The priest who will perform the Mass, dressed in a black cope (a large mantle worn by priests), greets the coffin at the church door and sprinkles it with holy water while intoning the *De Profundis* (Psalm 129) and the *Miserere* (Psalm 50). The body is then carried toward the altar and placed outside the sanctuary with the feet toward the altar if the body is that of a layperson, and head toward the altar if a priest. Requiem Masses are usually much like other Masses.

Traditionally, at least in Catholic cemeteries, the bodies of laypeople are buried with their heads facing east, symbolizing their awaiting bodily resurrection by Christ. Priests are buried in the opposite direction to the laity, symbolizing their need to confront the effects of having to minister to the souls entrusted to them by God.

Following funerals it is customary for friends and relatives to gather at the house of the one closest to the departed, to eat, drink, remember, console one another, and pray. At this time bringing food and drink is usually appreciated by those who are grieving, because it is after everyone else has

departed that the survivors begin to face the sad reality of their temporal loss. It is the days after a funeral, when all the distractions of funeral arrangements and greeting people have been performed, that are the most painful.

Funerals for baptized children who have not yet reached the age of reason are quite different and joyful because children go straight to heaven, not having had the opportunity to commit a mortal sin. For children's funerals, the priest wears white, and the Mass performed is either a Votive Mass of the Angels or the Mass of the day if a Votive Mass cannot be performed on that particular day.

Further Reading

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~ Macedonia ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Southeastern Europe, north of Greece
Size	9,781 sq. mi.
Capital City	Skopje
Flag Description	Macedonia's flag is red with a yellow sun in the center whose eight rays broaden toward the end.
Independence	September 8, 1991 (from Yugoslavia)
Population	2,045,262 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary democracy
Nationality	Macedonian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Macedonian (64%); Albanian (25%)
Major Language(s)	Macedonian (official, 67%); Albanian (25%)
Major Religion(s)	Macedonian Orthodox (32%); Islam (17%); other and unspecified (51%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; International Women's Day, March 8; Labor Day, May 1; Ilinden Uprising Day, August 2; Independence Day, September 8; Antifascist Uprising Day, October 11

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

The Republic of Macedonia formally called the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), is in the heart of the Balkan region. Greece lies to its south and Bulgaria to its northeast. Although this republic is in its infancy, its history reaches far back in time.

According to ancient Greek mythology, Makedon was the name of the leader of the Makedones—a tribe of Makednoi that spread throughout western, southern, and central Macedonia. The name *Makedon* comes from *Makednos*, derived from the Greek *makos*, which means “high.” The Makedones (or Macedonians) were extremely tall people, and it is probable they received their name because of their height.

In 2002 archaeologists working at the Tatihev Kamen site in north Macedonia announced that the site once functioned as an ancient observatory as well as a ceremonial site. About 4,000 years ago the site was used to monitor the stars and the Sun, and holes were used to record the motions of the Sun

and Moon. The discovery documents the vitality of a previously unknown Balkan civilization with a developed culture and sophisticated religious ceremonies. Other ongoing excavations in the Balkans may provide additional information regarding this culture and its people.

The territory of ancient Macedon included present-day Macedonia, large parts of northern Greece as it is today, and southwestern Bulgaria. Argos Orestikon, a city located in the southwestern Macedonia region of Orestis, was the birthplace of the Macedonian Argeadae Dynasty between the eighth and seventh centuries. The settlement at Archontiko whose original name is unknown, was the most important urban center in the northern part of the province of Bottiaia during the prehistoric and historical periods until the end of the fifth century, when Pella became the new capital of the Macedonian kingdom.

Recent excavations at an ancient settlement near Pella, located in what is now northern Greece, are also providing more concrete information on Macedonia's historical period, which began with the reign of Caranus, its first known king (808–778 B.C.E.). To date, less than a hundredth of the of the nearly 50-acre site has been explored. Finding intact burial

sites that have escaped the ravages of time and thieves is rare, and archaeologists expect the 3,000-year-old cemetery to produce even more treasures that will further enhance our understanding of the wealth, heroic culture, commerce, and burial ceremonies of the ancient Macedonians. So far, archaeologists have found 396 unlooted tombs that have yielded 5,000 objects from between the seventh and fourth centuries. Recent finds include 80 pit graves that date back to the second half of the sixth century B.C.E. The graves hold the remains of warriors carrying weapons and richly clothed in gold. Nearby lay their wives also richly adorned with gold.

Alexander I Philhellene, who reigned between 498 and 454, expanded the kingdom and, by the fifth century B.C.E., the Macedonians had created a unified kingdom. King Alexander I was the first king to play a major role in Greek politics. His reign was followed by those of his son Perdiccas II (r. 453–13), and his son Archelaus (r. 413–399), who focused the political organization of the Macedonian kingdom and developed it into as a significant economic power.

Macedonian rule extended to northern Greece during the reigns of Alexander II and Perdiccas III, the sons of Amyntas III who ruled Macedonia between 393 and 369. When the brothers died, Phillip II, the third son of Amyntas III, took over the reins of the Macedonian kingdom.

The assimilation of Greek culture and character intensified during the reign of Phillip II of Macedon, during the fourth century B.C.E., when Macedon extended its territory across northern Greece. Under his rule Macedonia was liberated and unified; he made it the most powerful European state with a common national ideal. In 336 Alexander III (356–23), the Great, the 20-year-old son of Phillip II, succeeded his father, and the Macedonian kingdom reached its height during his reign. Alexander the Great pushed the borders of the Macedonian Empire across Turkey, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, and parts of the territory that was formerly Russia, reaching as far India.

Following Alexander's death in 323 serious infighting between his generals splintered the empire. As a result the Macedonian Empire gradually declined, and Rome, which was expanding eastward, defeated the Macedonian army. In 168 Macedonia became a province of the Roman Empire.

Macedonia prospered under Roman domination and soon attracted colonists from Asia and Italy. Jewish communities also entered Macedonia during this period. In 324 C.E. Byzantium became the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire. This promoted further development of Macedonia and particularly that of its capital, Thessaloniki, which soon grew to be the second most important city in the Byzantine Empire. In the 13th and 14th centuries Byzantine control was punctuated by periods of Bulgarian and Serbian rule in the north. In spite of several rebellions and Slavic incursions Macedonia remained a Byzantine territory until the Ottoman Turks conquered it in 1389. For the next five centuries the

Archelaus

Archelaus (413–399) made Macedonia a significant economic power. He built roads and fortresses and reorganized the Macedonian army. He moved the Macedonian capital from Aigae to Pella and founded the Macedonian Olympic Games in Dion (the holy city of the Macedonians), primarily because the Greek Olympic Games were forbidden to barbarians (non-Greeks), which included the Macedonians.

Ottomans maintained a firm grasp, not only in Macedonia but also in adjoining regions as well.

The first significant resistance movements against the Turkish occupation were the Mariovo–Prilep Rebellion (1564–65) and the Karposh Uprising in 1689. After Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria freed themselves from Turkish rule in the 19th century, all three had ambitions regarding the Macedonian territory. The 19th century was a period of growing national awareness among the Macedonians as well, and they began organizing themselves for the fight against the Ottomans at the same time. In 1893, led by Goce Delchev (1872–1903), the Macedonian revolutionary organization known as the Internal Macedonian Odrin Revolutionary Organization (VMORO) was founded in Salonika, with the declared aim of wresting control from the Turks and establishing an autonomous Macedonian state. On August 2, 1903, the VMORO launched the Ilinden Uprising against the Ottoman rulers and declared Macedonian independence. The revolutionaries liberated the town of Krushevo, and established the Republic of Krushevo with its own government.

In 1912 Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria joined forces, defeated the Turks in Macedonia, the country was territorially divided among its three new rulers. After World War I Serbia joined the kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes and in 1929 this new kingdom was officially named Yugoslavia. The People's Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was established at the conclusion of World War II, and the People's

Ilinden Uprising

For the Macedonian people and the neighboring Balkan states, the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century were full of armed insurrections aimed at overthrowing Turkish political domination and forming national states. The first wave of insurrections (1804–30) spread over Serbia, Greece, and Romania, and the second, over Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Albania (1876–89).

Fun Fact

The name *Macedonia* is the oldest surviving name of a country on the continent of Europe.

Republic of Macedonia became one of the six republics of the Yugoslav Federation. When the federation was renamed the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1963, the People's Republic of Macedonia was likewise renamed the Socialist Republic of Macedonia. The republic renamed itself the Republic of Macedonia in 1991 and peacefully seceded from Yugoslavia. The flag of Macedonia was adopted on October 5, 1995. Soon after its declaration of independence, however, a conflict erupted with Greece over its official name because Macedonia is also the name of a northern province of Greece. The dispute continues to this day.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Surrounded by Albania to its west, Greece to its south, Bulgaria to its east, and Yugoslavia to its north, the Republic of Macedonia is a landlocked country, embedded in the Balkan region. It has a mountainous terrain with deep basins and valleys. The major river of Macedonia is the Vardar, which geographically bisects the country. The highest point of Macedonia is Golem Korab, at 9,032 feet. Lake Orhid in the Republic of Macedonia is the oldest lake in Europe and is an oligotrophic lake, which means it has low levels of plant nutrients.

The republic's largest city is its capital Skopje with an estimated 600,000 inhabitants. The other major cities are Bitola, Kumanova, Prilep, and Tetovo. Macedonia has warm, dry summers and very cold winters with heavy snowfall. The average annual temperature in Macedonia is 53°F. The country experiences a lot of seismic activity and has been subject to destructive earthquakes in the past.

Macedonia has a wide variety of flora that includes pine, oak, beech, poplars, white willows, weeping willows, elms, ash, and sycamore trees. The nation's fauna include wolves, squirrels, foxes, lynxes, deer, wild boars, and chamois (a small, goatlike ruminant) as well as the imperial eagle, blackcap, grouse, and forest owl.

❁ ECONOMY

The economy of Macedonia has seen many upheavals in the past years since its independence in 1991. When Macedonia gained independence in September 1991, it was the least developed of the Yugoslav republics. The collapse of Yugoslavia further damaged the economy, because it ended the transfer payments from the center. Other influences that hindered economic growth until 1996 included: the lack of proper infrastructure; UN sanctions on Yugoslavia, which was Macedonia's major trade part-

ner; and an additional economic and trade embargo instituted by Greece over a dispute about the country's constitutional name and flag. The war in Kosovo in 1999 and the 2001 Albanian conflict shattered the economy of Macedonia due to constant border closures, increased deficit spending on security needs, and investor uncertainty, which decreased trade during that period.

The nation has made a sluggish recovery since 2002, and the extent of unemployment and the gray market are areas of concern. Macedonia is rich in natural resources the most important of which are chromium, lead, zinc, manganese, tungsten, nickel, low-grade iron ore, asbestos, sulfur, timber, and arable land. While Macedonia exports food, beverages, tobacco, iron, and steel, it has to import machinery and equipment, chemicals, fuels, and food products. Its major trading partners are Germany, Italy, the United States, Croatia, Greece, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Turkey, Ukraine, and Austria.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The Republic of Macedonia is a predominantly Orthodox Christian nation, with 70 percent of the population adhering to the Christian faith. However, 17 percent of the nation's population is Muslim. Ethnic Macedonians comprise a little more than 64 percent of the Macedonian population, but the country is also home to Albanians, Turks, and Roma (gypsies) as well as Serbs.

Macedonian, a South Slavic language with varying dialects (eastern and western), is the official language of Macedonia. St. Clement of Orhid (who worked in that city between 886 and 916) and other disciples of Sts. Cyrilus and Methodius spread the Slavic language in Macedonia. However, Albanian, Turkish, and Serbo-Croatian languages are also spoken in the region.

Macedonia has a rich musical heritage. Traditional musical instruments include the *gajda* (bagpipes), the *kaval* (flute), the *zurla* (large pipes), and the *tapan* (a big cylindrical drum). Among Macedonian folk dances, the most popular is known as *teskoto* (the hard one). Macedonian men adorn themselves in traditional costumes and perform this dance to the music of the *tapan* and the *zurla*.

❁ CUISINE

Macedonian cuisine boasts a wide variety of delicious dishes. Some of the traditional dishes include soups, breads, lamb kebabs, stuffed vegetables, *burek* (meat pie), *gravce na tavce* (beans), *kjebapchinja* (minced meat), and *tarator* (yogurt and cucumber salad), to name a few. Meat (chicken, lamb, beef, and pork) is generally served with rice, vegetables, and pasta. Macedonians also love desserts and puddings; cakes, pies, pastries, and fruit salads are also very popular. Among beverages, Turkish coffee, wine, and beer, as well as soft drinks, are preferred.

Fun Fact

The unit of currency of the Republic of Macedonia is the Macedonian denar (MKD).

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, and is celebrated as New Year's Day in many countries. Celebrations take place all over the world, with revelries that often begin on New Year's Eve (December 31). On New Year's Eve Macedonians attend parties and sing and dance their way into the new year. On New Year's Eve and on New Year's Day, both, the Macedonian Philharmonic Orchestra holds a traditional New Year's concert in which renowned Macedonian sopranos participate and enthrall the audience with their captivating performances. Traditional Macedonian folk songs and dances are part of the concert.

❁ INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 8

International Women's Day commemorates the social, economical, political, and cultural achievements of women throughout the world and also pays tribute to the contributions of women toward building a better and safer world. In many parts of Macedonia, women activists and organizations take part in street marches; special lectures and discussions on issues concerning women are also organized on this day. Plays encouraging women to fight domestic abuse are also staged.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

In Macedonia trade unions organize rallies and demonstrations all over the country with banners displaying the slogan, "Long Live the First of May." Workers enthusiastically take part in these rallies and show their solidarity.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ ILINDEN UPRISING DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 2

This day commemorates the armed rebellion of 1903, which was started by Macedonians to liberate their nation from Turkish rule. It is known as the Ilinden Uprising since it took place on August 2, which is celebrated as St. Elijah's Day, or Ilinden. Starting in 1389 Macedonia had been under the dominance of the Ottoman Turks. However, local Macedonians dreamed of an independent state and staged many unsuccessful uprisings against the Turks. On August 2, 1903, the Internal Macedonian Odrin Revolutionary Organization (VMORO), under the leadership of Goce Delchev, called for an armed uprising against the Ottoman Turks and were determined to realize the dream of independent Macedonia. The Macedonians fought valiantly against the powerful Turkish forces and were successful in liberating many parts of Macedonia. Although the revolt was brutally crushed by the Turks, Macedonians take pride in remembering the uprising in which their predecessors fought for the integrity and sovereignty of their nation.

On this day a special memorial service is held in Macedonian Orthodox churches across the country to honor the freedom fighters who lost their lives while defending Macedonia; floral wreaths are laid at their graves. Paintings and photo exhibits depicting the important events during the uprising are put on display in different parts of Macedonia. The president of the nation also gives a commemorative speech on this historic day and reminds Macedonians to safeguard the sovereignty of their nation.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 8

Until 1991 Macedonia was a part of Yugoslavia. However in a referendum on September 8, 1991, Macedonians voted overwhelmingly in favor of independence, and the independent state of Macedonia came into existence. On this day in the capital city of Skopje, the president presides over the Independence Day celebrations. The unfurling of the national flag is followed by a parade of the armed forces. Patriotic songs, folk songs, and dance performances are also part of the celebrations.

❁ ANTIFASCIST UPRISING DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 11

This day commemorates the Macedonians' historic uprising against Italian fascist forces on October 11, 1941. During World War II Italian forces, in alliance with Germany, occupied a major part of Macedonia.

More than 60,000 Jews in Thessaloniki were sent to extermination camps in Poland. The Macedonians fiercely opposed Italian occupation. On October 11, 1941, one of the revolutionary parties of Macedonia, Prilep Partisan Detachment, launched an attack on the Italians in the city of Prilep, and started the antifascist uprising.

On this day special prayer services take place in Macedonian Orthodox churches in memory of those freedom fighters who laid down their lives while fighting an oppressive and unjust regime.

Religious Holidays

✿ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, the Feast of Sacrifice or Kurban Bajram, commemorates the unwavering faith of Ibrahim (Abraham) in Allah and his willingness to sacrifice his son to obey Allah's command. On this day Muslims in Macedonia offer prayers at their local mosques and exchange greetings. Children sing *kasida* and *ilabia* (religious songs). Then a ram is sacrificed and its meat is distributed among friends, family members, and the poor.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM



A priest drinks from a chalice handed to him by Macedonian Christian Orthodox archbishop Stefan, left, during a Christmas liturgy at St. Clement Cathedral in Macedonia's capital Skopje, on January 7. Macedonian Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas by the Julian calendar. (AP Photo/Boris Grdanoski)

✿ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: January 6–7

Most Orthodox churches follow the Julian calendar instead of the Western (Gregorian) calendar. Because there is a difference of 13 days between the Julian and the Gregorian calendars, Orthodox Christmas is celebrated on January 7, not December 25. In Macedonia celebrations begin on January 5, which is known as Koelde. On this day Macedonian children go from door to door singing Christmas carols. They receive candies, sweets, nuts, and toys from their neighbors. In the evening a huge bonfire is made, and elderly people assemble around it to discuss the events of the past year and renew their hopes for the coming one.

On Orthodox Christmas Eve (January 6) homes are decorated with pine and oak branches, which symbolize the wishes of the family for a long and healthy life. (The oak tree is symbolic of longevity and endurance.) People also bring a *badnik* (oak log) home. While the traditional Christmas Eve dinner is being laid on the table, the father and the eldest son of the family cut the *badnik* into three pieces, symbolizing the Holy Trinity. Then the father brings in the pieces of the wood, and family members place them on the fire. Next father and son greet each other. Children in the family bring bundles of straw into the dining room and spread it on the floor to give the feel of the manger in which Jesus was born. The family then sits down to dinner. Baked fish is the traditional dish consumed on Christmas Eve. *Pogacha* (homemade bread) is part of the Christmas dinner, and one of the breads is baked with a coin hidden inside it. It is believed that whoever receives this coin will have a successful year. Christmas candles are also lit, and family members sing hymns.

On Christmas Day (January 7) families attend Christmas liturgy in their local churches early in the morning. After the divine liturgy the family returns home and welcomes the guests who arrive at their home on this auspicious day. The hosts greet their guests by kissing them three times on the cheeks and exchanging greetings. Then each guest shakes the burning oak log and, as the sparks fly, he or she expresses good wishes to the family.

The traditional Christmas dinner consists of roasted meat and other traditional dishes and, since it marks the end of Winter Lent as well as the beginning of the three-day festivities of Christmas, meat is considered an essential part of the Christmas dinner.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

✿ ORTHODOX NEW YEAR'S DAY

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: January 14

Most Orthodox churches follow the Julian calendar instead of the Gregorian (Western) calendar. There

is a difference of 13 days between the Julian and the Gregorian calendars. Hence Orthodox New Year's Day is celebrated on January 14, instead of January 1. On Orthodox New Year Macedonians visit their friends and families and exchange greetings.

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Orthodox Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Orthodox Easter is celebrated to commemorate the Christian belief in Jesus' Resurrection three days after his Crucifixion. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. On Orthodox Easter family members and guests are offered Easter eggs and greetings are exchanged. These Easter eggs are dyed and beautifully decorated on the preceding Thursday (known as Holy Thursday). Most eggs are colored red, which symbolizes happiness about Jesus' Resurrection, and many people use the ancient Slavic Orthodox style of making designs on the eggs by scraping the surface with a sharp instrument. According to tradition the first dyed egg is kept separately from the rest and is preserved until the next Easter. It is referred to as the *chuvarsko jajce* ("protector of the house"), and on the next Easter the mistress of the house secretly buries it in her garden.

The game of tapping Easter eggs is also played: Two people hold Easter eggs in their hands and tap each other's egg with the tips. The one whose egg does not break is declared the winner and receives his or her opponent's egg.

Easter dinner consists of lamb soup, lamb, salads, *sarma* (stuffed cabbage), and cakes.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ ST. CYRILUS AND ST. METHIDIUS DAY

Observed by: Orthodox Christians
Observed on: May 24

In Macedonia the Feast of Saints Cyrilus (d. 869) and Methodius (d. 885) is celebrated on May 24 by Orthodox Christians. Sts. Cyrilus and Methodius were brothers and devout Christians who belonged to a renowned family in Thessalonica. The saints introduced Christianity in Bulgaria and convinced the king of Bulgaria, Boris I (d. 907), to embrace Christianity along with his subjects. It is believed that St. Cyril invented the Glagolitic alphabet, in which 24 letters out of 38 resembled symbols used in Greek script. Both the brothers began teaching the Slavonic language in the region. Disciples of these saints spread the use of Slavonic languages in other Slavic countries.

The late Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005) declared St. Cyrilus and St. Methodius co-patrons of Europe on December 31, 1980.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

Winter Lent

In the Eastern Orthodox Church (including the Macedonian Orthodox Church), Winter Lent, also known as the Christmas Lent, Small Lent, or the Nativity Fast, marks the beginning of the holy season and is considered a period of preparation before Nativity, or Christmas. It lasts for 40 days, beginning on November 28 and lasting until Orthodox Christmas on January 6. It is known as Advent in Western Churches.

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr, also known as Ramazan Bajram, marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan. Muslims all over the world observe a month-long dawn-to-dusk fast during Ramadan. The fast ends after the sighting of the new Moon, and Ramazan Bajram is celebrated on the very next day. Fasting on Eid al-Fitr is strictly forbidden in the Koran.

On Eid al-Fitr devout Macedonian Muslims get up early in the morning and eat a light meal. Then they offer prayers along with friends and family members in their local mosques, thanking Allah for his benevolence.

People dress in new clothes, and children sing religious songs and receive special gifts on this day. Macedonians exchange greetings and celebrate Eid al-Fitr by dining lavishly with their families.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

Fun Fact

St. Cyrilus's disciple St. Clement of Orhid simplified the Glagolitic alphabet and created the Cyrillic alphabet and named it in honor of his teacher.

Regional Holidays

❁ SKOPJE INTERNATIONAL JAZZ FESTIVAL

Observed in: Skopje
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October

The Skopje International Jazz Festival takes place in the capital city of Skopje. The festival is renowned for diverse performances and for inviting artists with varying backgrounds to perform. During the festival renowned jazz artists from all over the world

perform and thrill audiences with their captivating music. Jazz legends like B. B. King, Ray Charles, and Herb Hancock have all participated in this festival. The festival also provides a platform for new jazz musicians to show their talent to the world.

Thousands of jazz music fans flock to Skopje in October to enjoy a musical treat and hear their favorite jazz musicians perform live.

On this day Macedonian Orthodox Christians attend a special prayer service in their local churches in honor of the holy saints. The life and teachings of the holy saints are remembered. The prime minister of the country also participates in the special church service held in the Macedonian Orthodox Church in Skopje.

Rites of Passage

MARRIAGE

In Macedonia on the day of the wedding, the bride's guards (a group of relatives) come to her home to escort her to the church accompanied by an orchestra or a band. Before going to church the bride and groom are allowed to see each other for some time and assembled relatives raise a toast in their honor. Then they leave for the church, while the band continues to play traditional Macedonian wedding songs.

During the wedding ceremony the entire wedding party, including the bride and groom, go toward the altar and a brief engagement ceremony follows in which the bride and groom exchange rings. Then the wedding party moves toward the center of the church, where they find a table with the Bible, two crowns, a cross, and a cup filled with wine.

Next an instructive sermon is given by the priest, and the couple is asked if they are getting married at will. On receiving an affirmative answer, the priest takes the hands of the bride and groom and ties them together, symbolizing the spirit of

oneness. Then he places the two crowns on their heads, which symbolize the coronation of glory and the blessings bestowed on the newlyweds for their future. A reading from the Gospels follows, after which the bride and groom drink the wine from the cup. Then the priest leads the wedding party and walks three times around the table, symbolizing the eternal path of life.

A lavish reception follows. People sing songs, perform traditional dances, and toast the newlyweds, wishing them happiness throughout their lives. Instead of gifts Macedonians give money to the couple so they have a good financial beginning for their married life.

After the reception the bride meets little children and gently kisses their cheeks three times. This symbolizes her desire to have children. Then the bride receives a cup of wine and bread from her mother-in-law, which symbolizes her good wishes for happiness and harmony in their new life.

Further Reading

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Madagascar

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Island in the western Indian Ocean, off the southeast coast of Africa
Size	226,657 sq. mi.
Capital City	Antananarivo
Flag Description	Madagascar's flag has one white vertical band (on the hoist side) and two equal horizontal bands of red (top) and green (bottom).
Independence	June 26, 1960 (from France)
Population	18,040,341 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Malagasy
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Malayo-Indonesian; Cotiers; French; Indian; Creole; Comoran
Major Language(s)	Malagasy and French (both official)
Major Religion(s)	Indigenous (52%); Christian (41%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Memorial Day, March 29; Labor Day, May 1; Africa Day, May 25; Independence Day, June 26

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

A former French colony, the Republic of Madagascar occupies the fourth largest island in the world. Not much is known about Madagascar's prehistory, but stone artifacts discovered on the island indicate that the people of an ancient culture once lived here. Around 2,000 years ago Malay-Polynesians from Southeast Asia and people of African and Arab descent began settling in Madagascar.

Archaeologists have found chlorite schist ceramics, along with imported and locally produced pottery at a settlement on Nosy Mangabe, Madagascar, an island in Antongil Bay. The manufactures made with chlorite schist indicate that the settlement, dated between 670 and 980 C.E., had active trade connections with the Near East because that substance was widely used in the Islamic world. The earliest settlement on Nosy Mangabe dates to about the fifth century. Imports discovered at the Manambovo and Linta River mouths suggest that these artifacts were brought to the island by southern sea routes, apparently from the nearby African mainland of present-day

Zimbabwe and Mozambique, not overland from northern Madagascar as one might suppose. This possibility indicates that southern Madagascar's Manda civilization had direct links with the Late Iron Age civilization of the Swahili coast.

In 1500 the islands were noted by a Portuguese adventurer following the new trade route to India, but more than a century passed before Portuguese missionaries attempted to win converts to Christianity in the 17th century. Shortly thereafter both England and France began taking notice of the region and the vast potential it offered in terms of the slave trade. France had more success than the English had and managed to maintain a fort on Madagascar for 30 years, but a massacre in 1674 quickly eliminated them, although France continued to claim rights to the island.

Frequent tropical storms prevented any colonial power from settling along the coasts, making long-term control over the islands impossible. Moreover during the 17th century, the east coast of Madagascar was used by pirates as a refuge and served as a convenient base from which they could launch attacks on ships traveling around the Cape of Good Hope.

During the same period many competing rulers began to establish kingdoms, and by the middle of the 17th century a dynasty forged by the Sakalava tribes controlled almost half

Robert Drury's Ordeal: Fact or Fiction?

In 1705 a young man appeared at the London docks identifying himself as Robert Drury and claiming that he was the lone survivor of a shipwreck off the coast of Madagascar. According to a newspaper account of Drury's story, he said that the ship had sprung a leak, forcing everyone to seek safety on the island. No sooner had they landed, however, than the natives said they would resupply the stranded sailors if they turned over their weapons, and the sailors obliged. Once the Europeans were defenseless, according to Drury, the natives killed all the men, with the exception of himself.

The story might have ended there, but 24 years later, in 1729, Drury published a book describing his experiences on Madagascar entitled *Madagascar; or Robert Drury's Journal, during Fifteen Years' Captivity on that Island*. In it Drury provided what he claimed was a true account of the shipwreck, the massacre of his shipmates, and his subsequent 15 years on Madagascar during which he was enslaved, fought in wars among the various peoples, married, and finally managed to return to England on a slave ship.

It was a captivating tale and, with an apparently credible preface affirming the authenticity of Drury's story, its 18th-century readers regarded it as a trust-

worthy source of information about Madagascar. In the late 19th century, though, two authors raised questions regarding the truth of Drury's *Journal*, and identified the novelist Daniel Defoe (1660–1731) as the skilled perpetrator of a hoax. This theory about the origin of the *Journal* was followed in 1939 and 1943 by the research of a Professor J. R. Moore, who identified numerous sources that Defoe might have used to produce such a credibly detailed account of Madagascar.

Then in 1996, an archaeologist at Sheffield University, Mike Parker Pearson, published evidence that, not only was Drury's book authentic, but its author had provided minute details about life and culture on Madagascar that had proved useful to him in his recent excursion to the island to identify the earliest stone tombs in Androy. One of Pearson's excavations revealed the remains of ancient Ambaro, the likely location of the royal capital of Fenoarivo that Robert Drury claimed to have visited in 1703. During Pearson's next trip to Madagascar, he plans to seek the remains of other royal villages in Androy, including the one where Drury said he was kept as a slave, and discover the ancient Mahafaly capital described by Drury.

the island. In the 18th century however, Sakalava dominance had already begun to decline, and the Merina clan from the central plateau had become dominant by the late 18th century. To counter the constant threat of invasion and colonization posed by European powers, Merina King Radama I (c.

1793–1828) signed a treaty with the British governor of Mauritius in 1820. The treaty provided that the Merina king would accept the British demand for abolition of the slave trade. In exchange for this compliance, the British recognized Madagascar as an independent nation under Merina rule, agreed to provide military and financial support, and the London Missionary Society arrived bringing Jesus' message to the Malagasy peoples.

This happy state of affairs ended abruptly when Radama died in 1828. He was succeeded on the throne by his queen Ranaivalona I (d. 1861), who reversed all his policies. Almost all of the Europeans were forced to leave, the newly converted indigenous Christians endured persecution (some 200 were killed), and in 1835 Ranaivalona formally outlawed Christianity. This political seesawing continued through a succession of queens until the 1880s, when European colonialism became more aggressive.

By the end of the 19th century French influence

in the area had increased and in 1883, in a strategic move, Britain recognized France's sole authority over the country in exchange for French recognition of British sovereignty in Zanzibar. In 1895 French forces invaded Madagascar and proclaimed it a French colony. By 1897 the Merina monarchy had been abolished, and Queen Ranaivalona III (1861–1917) was exiled to Algeria, where she died. French was declared the official language of Madagascar, and attempts were made to outlaw the Malagasy language. The French exploited the local people, introducing forced labor in lieu of slavery.

After World War II the independence movement in the islands gained ground, and unrest increased among the local people. The French were not inclined to leave Madagascar, however, and instead resorted to oppressive measures to crush the freedom movement. A revolt in 1947 resulted in more than 80,000 people being killed all over the country by the French.

When Charles de Gaulle (1890–1970) became president of France in 1958, a plebiscite was held in Madagascar. The Malagasy voted to make Madagascar an autonomous republic within the French community of overseas nations. Madagascar became an independent nation on June 26, 1960, when France granted full independent status to the Republic of Madagascar.

Philibert Tsiranana was sworn in as the first president of independent Madagascar. He remained its

Fun Fact

One of Captain Kidd's favorite ports of call was Madagascar, where he often sought shelter and obtained provisions.

president until 1972, when he was forced to resign by antigovernment demonstrators who demanded an end to his oppressive rule, which had claimed many innocent lives and mismanaged the country's economy. In June 1975 Admiral Didier Ratsiraka (b. 1936) took over the reins of government and began the difficult task of reviving Madagascar's failing economy. Banks and businesses were nationalized, without any compensation to their former owners. As a result the French businessmen left the country.

Ratsiraka introduced a "red book" in which he laid down his own theories and policies for the functioning of the government. He also began establishing diplomatic ties with Communist nations such as North Korea. But some of his pro-growth reforms resulted in a large international debt, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) intervened. In addition, protests against Ratsiraka's government increased after his security guards killed peaceful demonstrators in 1991. Meanwhile the governor of Antananarivo Marc Ravalomanana (b. 1949) had acquired considerable popularity. In the December 2001 elections, both he and Ratsiraka claimed victory. Ravalomanana asserted his claim by declaring himself president of Madagascar in February 2002. By the end of 2002 Ratsiraka had fled to Paris, and fresh elections were held in Madagascar.

Ravalomanana was the clear winner of the second election and was sworn in as president of Madagascar. Under his leadership economic reforms were initiated, and his efforts to obtain international support for the development of Madagascar's economy bore fruit with the IMF, the United States, and the World Bank pledging sizable sums for the region's development.

The development plans suffered a huge setback, however, after the east coast of Madagascar was hit by a deadly tsunami in December 2004. The infrastructure in the coastal region was destroyed, and more than 1,000 people were left homeless.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Madagascar, South America, Africa, Antarctica, India, and Australia formed the southern supercontinent of Gondwana 160 million years ago. It took between 160 and 150 million years for Madagascar, India, Antarctica, and Australia to break away as a tectonic whole from eastern Africa. Madagascar and India split off together from Antarctica and Australia around 120 million years ago and, around 90 million years ago, India broke off from Madagascar and headed north for its merger with what is now southern Asia. This geological fragmentation left Madagascar in the isolation until relatively recently, with the result that 85 percent of the island's flora and fauna are found nowhere else in the world.

Madagascar is located in the Indian Ocean, off the east coast of Mozambique in southern Africa. The fourth largest island in the world, 1,000 miles long from north to south, volcanic mountains dominate the northern part while the southwest is mostly

desert. Madagascar experiences seismic activity and is also vulnerable to the consequences of distant seismic events, as was demonstrated when the island was struck by the tsunami that traveled across the Indian Ocean on December 2004.

Geographically the region can be broadly divided into six distinct parts: the east coast, the west coast, the central highlands, the Tsaratanana Massif, the Mahafaly Plateau, and the desert region in the southwest. The country has varied climatic conditions. While the coastal areas enjoy a tropical climate, the inland areas are temperate, and the southern region is arid. In the central part the rainy season brings thunderstorms, but the east coast receives the most rainfall. Cyclones are common during the rainy season and cause widespread destruction. The worst cyclone to hit Madagascar was Cyclone Geralda, which ravaged the island in 1927, claiming thousands of lives.

❁ ECONOMY

Agriculture, fishing, and forestry form the backbone of Madagascar's economy. Subsistence farming is the primary occupation of most Malagasy even though only 5 percent of the island is suited to agriculture. In the post-independence era, the economy suffered greatly due to the massive strikes staged as antigovernment protests as well as the failure to make economic reforms. Mounting foreign debt, the absence of a good infrastructure, and rampant corruption stunted the country's economic growth. However, the financial support of international organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund has helped shore up Madagascar's failing economy. In addition the government has set up several Export Processing Zones (EPZs) in different parts of the country and obtained increased private investment in many sectors. But the country still faces the challenge of reducing poverty and environmental problems, particularly deforestation and erosion.

Although the country is emerging as a leader in the struggle to end the illegal trafficking of humans on the African continent, Madagascar still has a serious problem to confront.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Madagascar is home to more than 18 ethnic groups, most of which are of Asian and African descent. While the Merina and the Betsileo, who dominate the central highlands, have Asian features, the people living in the coastal regions have a predominantly African look. The Besimisaraka are the dominant tribal group in the coastal areas, followed by the Sakalava and the Tsimihety tribes. These tribal groups maintain their traditional beliefs and rural lifestyle, existing at a subsistence level.

Fun Fact

Just how and when the ancestors of Madagascar's unique animals arrived remains one of the unsolved puzzles for students of natural history.

French and Malagasy are the official languages of Madagascar. Of late the government has undertaken efforts to popularize the English language by making it a part of the school curriculum. Forty-one percent of the Malagasy are Christians and 7 percent are Muslims, but more than 52 percent have managed to maintain their indigenous beliefs. The worship of ancestral spirits and their powers is an integral part of Madagascar's culture. Special ritual offerings are made to these ancestral spirits to appease them.

The most striking feature of traditional Malagasy attire is the *lamba*, a printed wraparound sheet imprinted with scenes from daily life. Straw hats also figure prominently in Malagasy dress. The design and style of the hats vary from region to region—from cone-shaped, to broad-rimmed, to brimless. Some are even tight fitting.

Music and dance play a vital role in Madagascan culture, and Asian and African influences are evident in the rhythms of traditional Malagasy dance and music. The dance rhythms are accompanied by whistle, flute, and *valiba*—a 28-stringed instrument, resembling a bassoon (a woodwind instrument with a double reed) but played like a harp. Other popular instruments include the *lokango voatavo* (chordophone) and *kabosy* (guitar). A popular rhythmic style is the *vaky soava*, a form of singing accompanied by clapping.

Kabary, or traditional oratory, originated in the 1930s when speakers displayed their speaking skills in political assemblies. The tradition evolved into an entertainment that has become part of the *hira gasy*, a popular spectacle held on Sunday afternoons in the capital of Antananarivo. *Hira gasy* includes storytelling, music, and dance performances.

CUISINE

Vary, or rice, is the staple food of Madagascar. *Vary* can be accompanied by fish, poultry, or beef. Stews, including *romazava* (vegetable and beef stew) and *ravitoto* (pork stew with manioc), are Malagasy favorites. *Achards* (hot pickled curry) is also popular. People love to eat fruit; mangoes, pineapples, bananas, and lychees are available throughout the year.

Reflecting the French influence, coffee is more common than tea in Madagascar. The locally made Three Horse Beer, and *gris* (a gray-colored locally produced wine) are extremely popular. Distilled rum called *roma*, *litche* (an alcoholic-fruit drink made from lychees) and *toaka gras* (crude rum made from rice and sugarcane) are also widely drunk in Madagascar.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Gregorian (or Western) calendar, January 1, is widely celebrated as New Year's

Day. The Malagasy usher in the new year with great enthusiasm. On New Year's Eve large parties are held in urban areas, and people dance and sing through the night. Bountiful food and free-flowing alcoholic beverages are an integral part of the New Year's Day celebrations in Madagascar.

MEMORIAL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 29

Memorial Day also called Commemoration Day or Martyr's Day, is celebrated in honor of the people killed by the French during the national revolt of 1947. On March 29, 1947, nationalist tribesmen of Madagascar rose up against the French forces in the region and began widespread demonstrations. The French were forced to bring reinforcements as the uprising spread throughout the country. More than 80,000 people were killed by the French forces. Every year on March 29 the Malagasy people pay homage to those who died for Madagascar's freedom.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Labor Day, also called May Day or Workers' Day, commemorates the important role played by workers in their societies. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

As in France, the government of the Republic of Madagascar observes May 1 as a national holiday, and all public and private institutions are closed on this day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

AFRICA DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 25

Africa Day commemorates the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) on May 25, 1963, at Addis Ababa in Ethiopia. The celebrations recognize the efforts of all African nations to form a unified Africa, as well as their decision to cooperate with each other in matters relating to trade and development of the continent as a whole. The OAU has been instrumental in negotiating and ending disputes, conflicts, and wars within Africa. At present there are 53 member countries in the OAU.

Africa day is a national holiday in Madagascar. On this day the Malagasy recall their struggle for

independence and pay tribute to freedom fighters. Special seminars and workshops on African culture and heritage are organized to help Africans keep in touch with, and take pride in, their heritage and culture.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 26

The Republic of Madagascar was granted complete independence by France on June 26, 1960. Although it was an independent nation until the late 19th century under the Merina rulers, the region lost its sovereignty and was declared a French colony after the French invasion in 1885. French rule was marked by oppression, and voices of protest met with swift suppression. After World War II, the struggle for freedom intensified, and demonstrations were held all over Madagascar. But the French increased their brutality toward the demonstrators. An uprising in 1947 was crushed, and more than 80,000 people died. However, even this incident failed to suppress Malagasy demands, and finally the French granted Madagascar independent status.

On this day grand celebrations are held all over Madagascar. The president presides over the Independence Day celebrations in the capital of Antananarivo. Special tribute is paid to the freedom fighters. Official speeches, a parade by the armed forces, dances, and musical performances are other highlights of this day.

Religious Holidays

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

The Christian festival of Easter celebrates Jesus' Resurrection three days after his Crucifixion. It falls on the first Sunday after the 40-day fasting period of Lent. Malagasy Christians attend church and offer prayers to Jesus. In Madagascar carols sung by church choirs are an integral part of Easter celebrations. It is a joyous day; after church, families gather for special meals.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ ASCENSION, THE

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Forty days after Easter

The Feast of the Ascension is a day of special celebration for Christians all over the world. It commemorates their belief in Jesus' Ascension to heaven, which is supposed have occurred 40 days after his Resurrection from the dead. On this day

Christians in Madagascar attend a special Ascension service in their local churches and renew their commitment to the principles of Christianity. Afterward families gather for simple meals.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

❁ PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Fifty Days after Easter

Pentecost, or Whitsunday, is celebrated 50 days after Easter—according to Christians the day that Jesus rose from the dead—and commemorates their belief that God appeared to the Apostles in the form of the Holy Spirit on this day. *Pentecost* is a Greek word that means “fiftieth,” while *whit* refers to the white robes worn by those who were baptized during the Apostles' vigil. It is a day for church services followed by joyous feasting.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; PENTECOST

❁ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day is an annual Christian feast that honors all Christian saints (known and unknown). In Madagascar Christians attend a special prayer service in memory of the saints. Worshipers offer thanks to God for his benevolence and the gift of the pious saints to believers.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas, a day of celebration and rejoicing for Christians, is the day chosen by the early Christian church to mark the birth of Jesus, whose teachings were compiled in the New Testament. In Madagascar Christmas Eve belongs to the children and features their programs, including theatrical plays about the life of Jesus. Christmas trees are not part of the celebrations due to the problem of deforestation in the region, and there are minimal decorations in churches and homes. Christmas is the day when baptisms are performed in Madagascar. Christmas is also the time to visit elders in the family and important people such as pastors, teachers, and civic leaders. Since December is a summer month in Madagascar, many families also plan a trip to the nearest beach on Christmas Day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Fun Fact

Santa Claus is called Dadabe Noely or Grandfather Christmas in Madagascar. He wears red clothes, but instead of bringing gifts for children, he brings hard-boiled sweet candies for them.

Regional Holidays

❁ ALAHAMADY BE

Observed in: Madagascar
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March

Alahamady Be is the New Year for Malagasy people. It is celebrated in March since this is the first month of the Malagasy calendar, and it is generally a low-key affair. The Malagasy people believe in destiny, or *vintana*. According to them, a year has 28 destinies spanning a 12-month cycle that is based on lunar phases. Alahamady is considered to be the month of kings and queens.

❁ DONIA

Observed in: Nosy Be Islands
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May

Donia is an annual cultural festival in Madagascar. In May, it is celebrated over a five-day period when Nosy Be becomes the cultural hub of Madagascar. The festival showcases the rich musical heritage of Madagascar and the region. Songwriting competitions, traditional dances, and musical performances are highlights of this festival.

For festival-goers, special workshops and tours are organized to lead them through the musical



Relatives and friends remove remains from a grave during a rite known as *famadihana* in Ambatondrazaka, Madagascar.

Famadihana, an occasion toasted with beer and Coca-Cola as traditional songs and the latest Western dance hits blast from strained amplifiers at all-night disinterment parties, is central to Madagascar's strong tradition of ancestor worship. (AP Photo/Toussaint Raharison)

history of the region. These include music workshops in Anatananarivo (the capital of Madagascar), which introduce various traditional musical instruments, such as the *lokanga*, a three-stringed fiddle. There are also live performances of *bira gasy*, a popular spectacle that includes storytelling, dancing, and other musical events.

❁ FAMADIHANA

Observed in: Madagascar
Observed by: Betsileo and Merina
Observed on: June–September

The Famadihana or the “turning of the bones” is an important custom celebrated in Madagascar. It involves reburying the remains of deceased ancestors, or *razana*. It generally takes place between the months of June and September.

This is one of the most important festivals for the Malagasy, and families save money for performing the ritual, which takes place anywhere between two and seven years after the performance of the last Famadihana, after the mourning period for the family of the deceased has ended. Friends, relatives, and neighbors are invited to participate in these rituals. On the day of the ritual, the relatives of the *razana* are expected to wear new clothes, and the tomb as well as the home of the *razana* should be clean and well decorated. A large procession heads toward the burial site of the *razana*. The remains are exhumed and neatly draped in a hand-woven silken shroud, called a *lambabena*.

Mpibira gasy is the term used to refer to the traditional performers of *bira gasy*, a traditional spectacle involving storytelling, dance, and musical performance. The performers play the *razana*'s favorite songs and dances, and cows (or *zebus*) are sacrificed for the traditional feast. The remains are then returned to the beautifully decorated tomb.

A Kabary is the custodian of the family and village history. He is responsible for welcoming the guests and talks about the life of the *razana*. He also thanks God for his kindness and recites a prayer before and after the main ritual. The Kabary usually belong to the lower stratum of society but command immense respect for their oratorical skills and their ability to remember the history of their village and its people.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

The birth of a child is celebrated with great joy in Madagascar. Relatives and friends from all over the island participate in a lavish feast hosted by the newborn child's family and welcome the child with songs and dances.

In Madagascar there exist various *fadys*, or beliefs, related to pregnancy. One states that a pregnant woman should not sit in open doorways because they are the doorways to life, and she can easily fall prey to evil eyes. This could cause complications during delivery or harm the unborn child. Among the Antanosy (“the people of the island,” a Malagasy ethnic group), a pregnant woman is forbidden from conversing with men, and people who do not have children are not allowed to sleep in her house.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Male circumcision is an important ritual in rural Madagascar and is performed at the onset of puberty. It is widely believed that without undergoing this ritual the transition from boyhood to manhood remains incomplete. Among the rural people, a man who is not circumcised is subject to banishment from his clan and condemnation by the society at large.

Along the east coast of Madagascar, the Antambahaoka tribe practices a collective circumcision ritual, known as Sambatra. This ritual lasts for four weeks and takes place every seven years. During the first three weeks of the month, the clanspeople assemble in the main village to prepare for the ceremony. Except on the taboo day, which is Thursday, the elders and the wise men of the village gather at the hut of the village chief (or king) at sunrise and sunset, while the women perform traditional dances to please the ancestors and seek their blessings.

During the last, or holy, week, men carve wooden pigeons and place them on the king’s hut, while the women make dresses and bonnets for the boys who will be circumcised. The king performs his regal dance during this week. On the Friday of the holy week, other young men from the village, who themselves have undergone the initiation ceremonies, demonstrate their virility to the fathers of those to be circumcised. They stage a symbolic attack by pushing the fathers, without causing any real harm. This gesture indicates that after the initiates undergo the circumcision ceremony, they develop endurance and attain the strength of a man, thereby completing the transition into adulthood. Cows are sacrificed, and the boys are led by the villagers to the mouth of the river for a sacred bath. Then the initiates proceed to the king’s hut, where skilled and experienced tribesmen perform the circumcision; thus, the journey from boyhood to manhood is deemed complete.

❁ MARRIAGE

According to Malagasy tradition, engagement, or *fanateram-bodiondry*, is the first step toward marriage. The families of the couple throw a lavish engagement party, and friends and relatives are invited to take part in the celebrations. The groom

Fadys

In Madagascar, the everyday life of people is influenced by a complex system of beliefs, often referred to as *fady*. These *fadys* vary from tribe to tribe and even from family to family. For example, in the eastern region of Madagascar, a *fady* suggests that the living should not use the door to the east of the house. This is used only to take the deceased out for burial rituals. Among the Merina, according to local *fadys*, burial rituals do not take place on Tuesdays since this might cause another death in the family. Another *fady* restricts access to burial sites unless a local guide accompanies the visitor.

and his family bring special gifts for the bride and her family as tokens of appreciation for raising a wonderful daughter as well as to honor them. The groom brings the engagement ring, and a ring ceremony takes place.

Between the 17th and the 19th centuries, the engagement ceremony was considered the couple’s actual wedding. However, traditions evolved, and today the engagement and wedding ceremonies are held on different days.

Among the Zafimaniry tribe, who inhabit the eastern highlands of Madagascar, the wedding ritual involves building a house for the new couple. The first step toward solemnizing the marriage requires the groom’s family to bring timber to the bride’s family. This timber is used to build the central posts of the house and, therefore, should be strong, durable, and of good quality. Then, after obtaining more wood, a site near the house of the groom’s parents is selected. Three posts are erected, and wooden mats are spread throughout the house. A hearth (fireplace) is set up, and a ring of stones placed around one of the posts. This will be the bride’s special area; the central post will be the husband’s special place.

On the appointed day for the marriage, the groom’s family leads a procession to the bride’s house and escorts her to her unfinished future home. The bride takes her trousseau, wedding gifts (especially a wooden cooking pot), and other gifts given by her parents to equip her new house. Then she cooks a family meal on the hearth using the cooking pot. Everyone enjoys the meal, before leaving the bride and groom in their house.

When the couple has children and is considered settled in society, carved wooden boards replace the wooden mats. These symbolize the strong bond between the husband and wife.

Fun Fact

In some parts of Madagascar, a cow is slaughtered during the traditional marriage ceremonies, and everyone present at the wedding has to drink the cow’s blood.

Death Rituals among the Mahafaly

The Mahafaly tribe has a unique burial ritual. Before the body of the deceased is placed in a specially carved tomb, the mourners wait for it to decompose. A new name, which always begins with the word *andria*, is given to the deceased. The tombs prepared by the Mahafaly are carved out of stone and are rectangular in shape. They rise three feet above the ground and are beautifully decorated with *aloalo* and horns of the cattle, or *omby*, slain during the funeral feast. The *aloalo* are specially sculpted wooden posts, placed upright on the tomb, that depict important moments in the life of the deceased.

DEATH

In Madagascar people believe in an afterlife and ancestral spirits, so the dead are treated with great respect. The Malagasy believe that after death the deceased joins the rank of divinity and even in the afterlife cares for the living. Every effort is made to appease the dead. Offerings are made, and the ancestral spirits are called upon to bless the living. If the living believe that their rituals have failed to please the dead (in case of illness or a death in the family following the appeasement ritual), more rituals are performed.

Among the Betsileo and Merina, the reburial practice of *famadibana*, literally,

“turning over the dead,” is quite prevalent. In this ritual people visit the graves of their relatives and remove their remains, wrap them in a new silk shroud, and, after performing religious ceremonies to honor them, they are replaced in their tomb.

Further Reading

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Fun Fact

Among the Merina tribe, consumption of a considerable quantity of *toga gache*, or distilled sugarcane rum, is a must for everyone participating in funeral rites. Although brewing and selling this rum is illegal, it continues to be an integral part of the Merina's death ritual.

Malawi

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Southern Africa, bordered by Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zambia
Size	45,745 sq. mi.
Capital City	Lilongwe
Flag Description	Malawi's flag is divided horizontally into three equal sections: black (top), red, and green. There is a rising Sun on the black strip. Red represents martyrs of Africa, green represents Africa's vegetation, and black symbolizes the indigenous peoples of Africa. The rising Sun signifies the dawn of hope for Africa.
Independence	July 6, 1964 (from United Kingdom)
Population	12,158,924 (2005 est.)
Government	Multiparty democracy
Nationality	Malawian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Chewa; Nyanja; Yao
Major Language(s)	English (official); Chichewa (official, 57%); other regional languages
Major Religion(s)	Protestant (55%); Roman Catholic (20%); Muslim (13%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; John Chilembwe Day, January 15; Martyrs' Day, March 3; Labor Day, May 1; Republic Day, July 6; National Tree Planting Day, December 13

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Malawi, formerly called Nyasaland, is a small landlocked country in the south of Africa, east of Zambia. Malawi was first inhabited between 2000 and 800 B.C.E. Evidence suggests that around 2,000 years ago, during the Stone Age in Africa, Malawians were displaced from their settlements by the Bantu-speaking tribes, who migrated into Malawi from the Congo region.

In the 19th century the native inhabitants, who had taken refuge in the highlands of southern Malawi, were captured and forced into slavery by the Yao tribe of western Mozambique. Arab traders supplied arms to the Yao tribe in return for slaves. Around the same time the Zulus from modern-day South Africa also entered Malawi from the south and began conquering local tribes and annexing their kingdoms.

Although the Portuguese had reached Malawi in the 16th

century, they did not establish a trading post or military base. The European revival of interest in the region was triggered by the expeditions of Scottish explorer David Livingstone (1813–73) in the 1850s and 1860s. Livingstone was the first European missionary to explore Malawi, but more British and Scottish missionaries soon followed. They introduced the native people to Christianity and led the fight to end the slave trade in the region. In 1878 a group of traders from Glasgow extended their support to these missionaries and formed the African Lakes Corporation to supply goods and services for them. The British began taking an interest in the region as well and forged ties with the local chiefs. In 1889 the British declared the Shire Highlands of Malawi a British Protectorate, and by 1891 the regions lying to the west of Lake Malawi were controlled by Britain. This led to the establishment of the Nyasaland Protectorate. The word *nyasa* means “lake” in Chichewa, the language of the Malawi Bantu.

British colonial powers faced stiff opposition from the local people. There was a heavy influx of white traders, missionaries, planters, and hunters in the region, and the locals

Fun Fact

Having seen the name Lake *Maravi* on an old French map of the land of the Bororos, Banda chose the name for the new nation because he liked the sound and appearance of the word “Malawi.”

feared that they might soon be outnumbered by the “white rulers.” In the early 20th century the local inhabitants launched a number of revolts against the British. However, none could stand the might of the well-armed British troops, who suppressed dissent.

In 1944 the Nyasaland African Congress (NAC) was formed, and Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda (1898–1997), a medical doctor and an active Malawian politician, was elected its president. In 1953 the British merged the territories of Nyasaland and Northern and Southern Rhodesia to form the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. This move was not acceptable to the local inhabitants, who wanted complete freedom from British rule. Widespread demonstrations, protests, and rioting followed.

In 1959 Banda, who himself had led many demonstrations, was imprisoned for his political activities, but the freedom struggle continued to intensify. In 1960 the British began to respond to Malawian demands for independence. They released Banda from prison and asked him to participate in a constitutional conference in London.

In 1961 Banda renamed the NAC the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), and it won the legislative elections that were held in Nyasaland on April 15, 1961. The pressure on the British government to grant total independence increased, and on December 31, 1963, the federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was dissolved. On July 6, 1964, Nyasaland became an independent nation within the British Commonwealth, and the country was renamed Malawi.

In 1966 the country adopted a republican constitution, and Dr. Banda became the first president of Malawi. He declared Malawi a one-party state. Then in 1971, he made constitutional changes that gave him the title “president for life.”

Dr. Banda led an authoritarian regime and enjoyed the full support of the country’s armed forces. However, he came under sharp criticism from other African nations for his alleged support of the white government of South Africa, which was internationally censured for the brutal treatment of its black population. On the domestic front as well, there was growing discontent regarding Dr. Banda’s rule. In the early 1990s violent protests and demonstrations within the country and mounting international pressure to introduce multiparty democracy in the region forced Dr. Banda to hold a referendum. On June 14, 1993, the people of Malawi voted in favor of a multiparty democracy; as a result, the first free and fair elections were held in Malawi on May 17, 1994.

In the elections of 1994, a coalition government, formed by the United Democratic Front (UDF) and Alliance for Democracy (AFORD), came to power, and Bakili Muluzi (b. 1943), the leader of

the UDF, was sworn in as president of Malawi. In 1996 the alliance between UDF and AFORD fell apart, and fresh elections were held in 1999. Muluzi was reelected president of Malawi after his party won a landslide victory over the MCP-AFORD alliance. Bingu wa Mutharika (b. 1934) was elected in May 2004 but struggled to assert his authority against his predecessor, who sought to amend the constitution to prolong his own rule. Malawi continued to face great challenges in the early 21st century, including corruption, population growth, pressure on agricultural lands, and HIV/AIDS. It has one of the lowest life expectancy rates at birth in the world—a mere 37 years.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Malawi is a landlocked country almost as large as the U.S. state of Pennsylvania. Situated in southeast Africa, its neighboring countries are Mozambique, Zambia, and Tanzania. Lake Malawi, located at the eastern border, is very important economically because it provides fish. The smaller lakes in south Malawi are Malombe, Chiuta, and Chilwa. Mount Mulanje is Malawi’s, and Central Africa’s, highest peak at 1,006 feet.

Malawi’s climate changes as one ascends. Shire Valley, with temperatures averaging 74°F and 78°F, experiences hot and humid weather. The highlands have a more temperate climate. Malawi receives rain from November to April. The average rainfall in Malawi is almost 6 feet in the highlands and 3 feet in the lowlands.

❁ ECONOMY

Malawi is one of the poorest and least developed countries of the world. The economy is primarily dependent on agriculture, and almost 90 percent of the population lives in rural areas. In 2001, Malawi received 88 percent of its export revenues from agriculture. The tobacco industry in Malawi accounts for more than 50 percent of these exports.

Malawi survives on the economic help provided by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and other donor countries. The country was granted a relief fund in 2002 under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) program. In the same year, the World Bank sanctioned a \$50 million loan to Malawi for drought relief.

Malawi faces numerous obstacles to stabilizing its wavering economy. The country has poor educational facilities, numerous environmental problems, and rapidly increasing numbers of HIV/AIDS cases.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Gule Wamkulu is a popular form of dance performed by the native Chewa people. The dance represents the sect’s belief in spirits and is associated with a secret society. Dancers perform Gule

Wamkulu wearing animal skins and sometimes standing on stilts and wearing masks. All ethnic groups have their own traditions and languages, but the Chewa language predominates. English, the official language, is mainly spoken in towns and some rural areas.

❁ CUISINE

Nsima, a porridge made from cornmeal or cassava (also known as manioc or tapioca), is the staple food of Malawi. *Chambo*, a species of fish caught in Lake Malawi, is an important ingredient in Malawian cuisine. Also Malawians catch trout from streams on the Zomba, Mulanje, and Nyika plateaus. Fried white ants (termites) are said to taste a lot like popcorn and are a favorite snack.

Malawians are known for having a sweet tooth. They feast on *mbatata* (sweet potato) and love cookies and biscuits made from *mbatata*. They also relish desserts such as *nthochi* (banana bread), *mtedza* (peanut puffs), and *zitumbuwa* (banana fritters).

Dairy products and poultry are abundantly available, as are seasonal fruits. Malawians are fond of the local beer, soft drinks, and Malawi gin, a popular and cheap drink that is widely available.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day throughout much of the world. New Year's Day festivities in Malawi are quite different for urban and rural residents. In the towns and cities, citizens dine in restaurants and hotels to enjoy the occasion. The 90 percent of the Malawian population living in rural areas does not usher in the new year as lavishly as the urbanites. Instead rural Malawians have simple family dinners with music and dancing.

❁ JOHN CHILEMBWE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 15

This day honors the memory of John Chilembwe, the rebel who led protests against British rule in Malawi. It was on this day in 1915 that Chilembwe initiated a revolt against the British. The uprising ended when Chilembwe was killed only a few weeks after starting the demonstrations. Malawians have great respect for Chilembwe, and as a token of this regard the Reserve Bank of Malawi printed his photograph on currency notes in the 1990s.

Ritual Healing Music of Malawi

The music used for healing is a traditional form of Malawian music. It comes from northern Malawi and involves a ritual in which the healer is possessed by a spirit; the possession is achieved through dancing, clapping, and singing to the beat of drums in the background. Malawians believe that drums can be used to summon gods and spirits, whom they associate with the healing process, a common practice in shamanistic cultures.



MARTYRS' DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 3

Martyrs' Day commemorates those who died in an uprising against the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in 1959. It was on this day that 40 people lost their lives fighting the British. Martyrs' Day is a public holiday, and Malawians honor the sacrifice of these patriots. All public and government institutions are closed on this day, and no business or trade takes place.



LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

The May 1 observance of Labor Day, also called May Day and Workers' Day, is celebrated to honor workers and the contributions they make to their societies. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by

Banana Fritters

Ingredients:

- 3 ripe bananas
- 1 tsp. sugar
- $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp. salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ c. cornmeal (*ufa*)
- oil for frying

Preparation:

Mash bananas with sugar and salt. Stir in the cornmeal flour and drop spoonfuls of batter into hot oil. Fry until golden on both sides, remove from oil, and drain on paper towels. To satisfy that Malawian sweet tooth, roll the fritters in sugar.

The Reverend John Chilembwe

The Reverend John Chilembwe is a revered hero and martyr, who died fighting for the cause of Malawi's freedom. Originally Chilembwe believed that, if the Africans adopted European-style etiquette and propriety, they would earn the respect of their rulers. He founded the Providence Industrial Mission, which operated seven schools in the region and taught the principles of equality and morality. It placed great emphasis on values such as self-help, hard work, and personal hygiene.

However, in 1913 Nyasaland was struck with famine. Many of the peasants suffered hardships and starvation, and the brutal manner in which the white plantation owners exploited them angered

Chilembwe greatly. During World War I Chilembwe protested against the recruitment of black Africans for the British Army. When he confronted the ire of the white rulers, they burned down many of his schools to punish him. This further infuriated Chilembwe, and he began planning an attack on a plantation that treated its workers in an especially brutal manner. In 1915 he led a group of 200 followers that succeeded in killing three plantation managers. Within days Chilembwe was captured by the colonial forces and shot dead. Even though Chilembwe was killed, his legacy lived on and inspired an entire generation of Malawians to fight for their freedom.

the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. Malawi pays tribute to its workers on this day, and all public and private institutions are closed.
See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

REPUBLIC DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 6

Fun Fact

On New Year's Day in 2005, Malawian President Bingu wa Mutharika pardoned 651 prisoners who were suffering from AIDS.

Republic Day in Malawi is a national holiday and, perhaps, the country's most important holiday observance. It is the day on which Malawians honor the nationalist activities and sacrifice of lives that resulted in Malawi's independence from the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Ultimately, it was this same spirit that caused Britain to grant Malawian independence on July 6, 1964.

Republic Day celebrations begin with the unfurling of the national flag by the president of Malawi and are followed by military parades and a host of cultural activities. Gule Wamkulu, a traditional Malawian dance performed by the Chewa tribes wearing heavy masks and feathers, is also part of the Republic Day celebrations.

NATIONAL TREE PLANTING DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 13

National Tree Planting Day, also called Arbor Day, reflects a conscious effort by the people of Malawi to

reconstruct and revive the damaged environment of their country. Since 90 percent of the population is engaged in agricultural activities, it has become imperative to conserve and restore the environment. Many have come to regard deforestation as a serious threat to the quality of life. The public holiday is intended to encourage residents to plant trees.

Religious Holidays

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Last Friday of Lent

This Christian holiday commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. Observed as a somber, solemn occasion, it falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent (a 40-day period of fasting and penitence observed by devout Catholics). On Good Friday devout Malawian Christians visit their local churches and offer prayers to Jesus. The day is marked with processions in which people carry crosses on their backs to reenact Jesus' final journey to Calvary.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; LENT

EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a joyous Christian feast celebrating Jesus' Resurrection from the dead three days after his Crucifixion. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent. The name *Easter* is derived from the name of a Germanic mother goddess, Eostre or Eastre, a fertility deity

worshipped during spring festivals. In Malawi devout Christians attend church services of their choice, and their houses of worship are decorated with flowers for the occasion. They pray and listen to biblical readings. Easter Monday, the day after Easter, is a national holiday in Malawi, and schools, businesses, and government offices remain closed.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians because it celebrates the birth of Jesus, whom they believe came to redeem their souls. After Easter Christmas is the most significant occasion for Malawian Christians. Roman Catholic Churches hold special midnight Masses on Christmas Eve. Christmas Day features a lavish feast with fish and meat dishes, and a special Christmas cake. Santa Claus brings gifts for the children. Dancing and singing are also part of the festivities.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 26

Boxing Day, also known as St. Stephen's Day, is a popular holiday in Malawi and other nations that are or were members of the British Commonwealth. On this day employers present gifts (generally money) to employees and tradespeople to show appreciation for their services throughout the year. Since Boxing Day is a national holiday directly following Christmas, the festive spirit of Christmas is often carried over to Boxing Day.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ LAKE OF STARS FESTIVAL

Observed in: Lilongwe

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 10–12

The Lake of Stars Festival is a popular festival in Malawi. It serves several purposes: attracting

tourists, promoting music, and fund-raising for the underprivileged children of Malawi. The festival is a vibrant music show that is enjoyed by tourists and Malawians alike. It brings together some of the region's finest DJs and bands, and many national and international artists perform.

Rites of Passage

❁ COMING OF AGE

In earlier times young boys and girls were taken to different camps for their initiation ceremonies, where they were taught about the duties and responsibilities they would have as adults. They were also given specific instructions about their adult life, which were to be kept a secret from the opposite sex. Male circumcisions and female clitoridectomies were part of the initiation ceremonies. After the end of the initiation ceremonies, young boys were encouraged to have sex with a partner of their choice to demonstrate their adulthood. However, due to the rise in the number of HIV/AIDS cases in Malawi, this sexual practice has been removed from the initiation ritual. Instead the elders of the community use the initiation as an opportunity to create awareness about HIV/AIDS, safe sex, and the use of condoms.

Further Reading

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Malaysia

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Southeastern Asia, south of Vietnam, Malaysia is a peninsula bordering Thailand and the (northern) one-third portion of the island of Borneo, Indonesia, Brunei, and the South China Sea.
Size	127,317 sq. mi.
Capital City	Kuala Lumpur
Flag Description	The flag of Malaysia has 14 equal horizontal stripes of red (top) alternating with white (bottom); there is a blue rectangle in the upper hoist-side corner bearing a yellow crescent and a yellow 14-pointed star; the crescent and the star are traditional symbols of Islam.
Independence	August 31, 1957 (from United Kingdom)
Population	23,953,136 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional monarchy
Nationality	Malaysian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Malay and other indigenous peoples (61%); Chinese (24%)
Major Language(s)	Bahasa Melayu (official); English; Chinese dialects (Cantonese, Mandarin, Hokkien, Hakka, Hainan, Foochow); Tamil; Telugu; Malayalam; Punjabi; Thai. In East Malaysia several indigenous languages are spoken; the most common are Iban and Kadazan.
Major Religion(s)	Muslim; Buddhist; Taoist; Hindu; Christian; Sikh. Shamanism is practiced in East Malaysia.
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Chinese New Year (date varies); Labor Day, May 1; National Day, August 31

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

There is no recorded evidence connected with the ancient history of Malaysia. However, historians are firm in their opinion that *Homo sapiens* (earliest human beings) have inhabited Malaysia for a considerable period of time. This idea was strengthened by the discovery of a human skull, dated to 40,000 years ago, at the remote Great Cave of Niah in the rain forest of coastal Sarawak during the mid-20th century. The Niah Cave Project, a collaborative dig involving experts from universities in Britain, Australia, Sarawak, and the United States, is reinvestigating the archaeological stratigraphy of the huge cave.

On the Malaysian peninsula several tools belonging to the Stone Age (around 10000 B.C.E.) have also been discovered; apparently they belonged to the predecessors of the Negrito aborigines, one of the earliest groups of human beings to inhabit the Malaysian peninsula. Around 2500, a fairly advanced group migrated from China to Malaysia. They were known as the Proto-Malays and were primarily seafarers and farmers. Soon after another group the Deutero-Malays arrived. They comprised Indians, Chinese, Siamese, Arabs, and Proto-Malays as well. They had mastered the use of iron. Along with the people of Indonesia, the Deutero-Malays formed the racial basis for the group commonly known as Malay.

In ancient Indian literature and scriptures there are many references to a place called Suvarnadvipa, the "Land of Gold." This mysterious kingdom beckoned adventurous sailors to the

land now identified with the Malaya peninsula. Traversing the Bay of Bengal and taking advantage of the favorable climatic factors (including the southwest monsoon), these people reached the region of Kedah sometime around 100 B.C.E. Thereafter hordes of Indian traders arrived in the region seeking gold, fragrant wood, and spices.

The Indians brought with them Hinduism and Buddhism. The temples and other elements of Hindu culture swept through the land very quickly. The local rulers, who had links with the Indian subcontinent, were so impressed by the efficiency of the Hindu courts that they began to call themselves rajahs (the Indian name for “king”).

Until the 15th century, the Hindu kingdoms of peninsular Malaysia were eclipsed by powerful kingdoms in Cambodia and Indonesia. The strongest of them all was the Malay kingdom of Srivijaya, which had the reputation of being the best trading port in the region. With the gradual emergence of other kingdoms, Srivijaya’s influential position declined, and the once glorious kingdom was reduced to the region around the port city of Malacca.

In the succeeding period Malacca reached the acme of its glory and power and emerged as the most influential port in Southeast Asia. Traders from neighboring countries traveled there for commercial purposes. Among them were the Arabs, who brought in Islam. Malacca’s rulers now came to be known as sultans. These sultans established well-organized municipal governments to take care of all aspects of trade and commerce. Attacks by pirates were curbed. Moreover a regional maritime fleet was organized to guard the seawaters nearby and escort friendly vessels to the ports.

In time Malacca extended its control over the entire west coast of the Malay peninsula, the kingdom of Pahang, and major portions of Sumatra. But with the arrival of the colonial powers, its glory passed into oblivion. The decline started in 1511, when a Portuguese fleet led by Alfonso de Albuquerque (1453–1515) sailed into Malacca’s harbor firing cannonballs and capturing the city. Later the Portuguese constructed a massive fort in Malacca called A Famosa. It was captured by the Dutch in 1641. This gave the Dutch almost exclusive powers to control the spice trade in the region until 1785, when the British East India Company became active here. France captured the Netherlands in 1795; in a bid to avoid handing over Malacca to the French, the Dutch government in exile allowed the British to oversee the port on a temporary basis. The British returned Malacca to the Dutch in 1808, but the Dutch gave it back to them in return for Bencoleen, Sumatra. In 1819 Britain sent Sir William Raffles to establish a trading post in Singapore. Three British colonies—Penang, Malacca, and Singapore—came to be known as the Straits Settlements.

After Malacca passed into the hands of the colonial rulers, a new Muslim trading center was established in Johor. Johor is the southernmost state of the

The Malay People

The Malay belong to Malaysia’s largest ethnic group, comprising over half of the population, and the national language can be traced back to them. Being the oldest indigenous peoples of the country, they form a huge category known as *bumiputera*, which means “sons or princes of the soil.” Most of the Malays are Muslim, though the Islam practiced here is less severe than that found in the Middle East. Traditional Malay culture centers on the *kampung*, or village, though nowadays a good number of Malays live in urban areas.

Malaysian peninsula and is also known as the southern gateway to Malaysia. It is linked to Singapore via a causeway. Johor is now one of the most developed states in the country with a flourishing economy and a number of places of tourist interest. Later, another trading center was built in the area known as Perak, one of the 13 states of Malaysia. The ruler of the state is a sultan, who is assisted by the executive and administrative arms of the state government. Minangkabau immigrants from Sumatra and the Bugi people from Celebes immigrated to the peninsula in large numbers, thereby making strong cultural impacts.

During the 1860s many Malay kingdoms began fighting with each other in order to gain control of the throne of Perak. The British intervened and forced the Malay rulers to sign a peace treaty known as the Pangkor Agreement in 1874. The treaty gave Britain a stronger hold in the region, which helped it to maintain its monopoly over the mining of tin in the peninsula. Along with White Rajahs in Borneo, Britain ruled over what was then known as the region of Malaya until the Japanese invaded the peninsula and drove them out in 1942. During this time, hordes of Chinese fled to the jungles and organized an armed resistance.

White Rajahs of Borneo

Around 300 years ago the territory of Sarawak, located on the northwestern shore of Borneo, came under the control of the Sultanate of Brunei. In the 1840s an English trader and adventurer James Brooke arrived on the island and helped the sultan of Brunei suppress a rebellion. As a token of gratitude, the then-ruler of Brunei ceded to James Brooke a portion of his territory and made him rajah of Sarawak in 1846. Brooke founded a dynasty that ruled independently and lasted until 1941. Thus, Sarawak became an independent country ruled by a white monarch. The “white rajahs” were in fact British citizens.

After World War II ended, this became the basis for a Communist uprising. In 1945 Britain regained control over the area again, but in the meanwhile Malaya's independence movement had gained tremendous strength and organized itself as an alliance under Tunku Abdul Rahman (1903–90). The British had to yield, and in 1957 Tunku became the first prime minister of Malaya. In 1963 Sabah, Sarawak, and Singapore joined Malaya to establish Malaysia, but in 1965 Singapore withdrew from the confederation.

The formation of Malaysia was opposed by the Philippines and Indonesia, both of whom had territorial claims on East Malaysia. In 1963 Indonesian troops began crossing Malaysia's borders but were defeated by Malaysian and Commonwealth forces. In 1969 there were violent riots between the Malays and the Chinese. The United Malays National Organization (UMNO) has been in power since 1974. Dr. Mahathir Mohammad (b. 1925) was the prime minister until 1997, during which time the economy enjoyed a temporary boom; but slipping Asian currencies caused the Malaysian ringgit to crash, too.

In September 1998 the country hosted the Commonwealth Games. Around that time students and citizens vehemently protested against the allegedly unfair ouster and later imprisonment of Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim (b. 1947). There followed a long phase of political unrest and turmoil. This, coupled with the economic fluctuations, tarnished Malaysia's image as one of the prosperous and progressive countries of the region. The controversial Dr. Mahathir Mohammad remained in power until October 2003. His successor Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (b. 1939) won a massive popular mandate in the 2004 elections. In August 2004 Anwar Ibrahim was liberated after the country's highest court upheld the appeal against his sentence.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Malaysia is located on the South China Sea in the center of Southeast Asia. The country is shaped like a crescent, starting with Peninsular Malaysia (West Malaysia), and extending to Sabah and Sarawak (East Malaysia), which is located on the island of Borneo. The total area of Malaysia is a little less than 127,500 square miles, with most of it located on the island of Borneo. Peninsular Malaysia only forms 40 percent of the total area.

Malaysia's climate is hot and humid; the relative humidity ranges from 80 to 90 percent, except in the highlands. The average temperature ranges from 68° to 86°F throughout the year. The rainy season on the west coast lasts from September to December, while the east coast receives rains from October to February. The eastern parts of Malaysia get up to 200 inches of rain annually while western Malaysia gets "only" about 100 inches. Forest tracts cover more than half of Malaysia.

The Sungai Pahang River is the longest river on the Malaysian peninsula (295 miles), followed by the Sungai Perak (249 miles). One of the major mountain chains in Sabah is the Crocker Range, separating the narrow lowland of the northwest coast from the hinterland. The highest peak is Gunung Kinabalu (13,450 feet).

The common vegetation in the region includes casuarinas (Australian hardwood), coconut palms, mango, and jackfruit trees as well as coral (thorny trees with red or yellow flowers) and gardenia (yielding sweet-scented flowers) trees. The local fauna includes squirrels, monkeys, (rare) bearded pigs, and pangolins (scaly anteaters). The birds found here include white-bellied sea eagles, pied hornbills, green herons, sandpipers, pink-necked green pigeons, bulbuls, babblers, flycatchers, swiftlets, and sunbirds. Reptiles include the huge monitor lizards and snakes.

ECONOMY

Malaysia boasts of having one of the highest standards of living in Southeast Asia, mainly because of its expanding industrial sector, which created an 8 to 9 percent annual growth rate during the 1987–97 period. Malaysia is a major producer of rubber and tin; the other important industries of the country include palm oil, crude petroleum and petroleum products, electronics, logging, and textiles. Since the 1980s, the Malaysian government has made efforts to privatize large industries that had hitherto been under state control, and these changes have resulted in increased foreign investment in manufacturing.

Subsistence agriculture is the main occupation for about 20 percent of the population, and agriculture provides about 15 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). On the peninsula the major crops are rubber, palm oil, and rice; Sabah's most important products are rubber, timber, coconuts, and rice, while in Sarawak the main crops are rubber, pepper, and timber.

Penang city is the chief port of the country. The major cities on the Malay Peninsula are all connected by railroad to Singapore. The main trading partners of Malaysia are Japan, the United States, and Singapore. The travel and tourism industry in Malaysia is also heavily reliant on the overall growth and development in the global economy, particularly that of the United States, Japan, and Singapore. These countries account for more than half of the tourist activity in Malaysia and indirectly affect its economy. The effects of SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) and the war in Iraq adversely affected the country's tourism industry throughout 2003, but this sector is quickly recovering.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Though the bulk of the population is Muslim and adheres to the Islamic lifestyle, music and dance are an integral part of Malaysian culture, which has

been influenced by diverse cultural components. Traditional music is centered on the gamelan, an orchestra of percussive instruments from Indonesia. The spirited, rhythmic beats of Malaysian drums are improvised in a rich communal performance. The drums have always been a part of the daily lives of the people.

In earlier times *rebana ubi*, or giant drums, were used to communicate messages across hills and meadows. Wedding and other important announcements, such as danger signals, were transmitted by using different beats on the drums. The Giant Drum Festival is held in Kelantan in May or in June every year.

Silat, a Malaysian dance form, originated as a martial art. This weaponless form of self-defense reduced fighting to a bare minimum. *Silat* performances are still common at weddings, festivals, and other social events. Another dance is the candle dance. It is breathtakingly beautiful. Dancers hold candles on small plates in their hands while performing. The dancers' graceful movements create wonderful light and shadow designs, entrancing spectators. The popular *joget* is a lively dance with a gradually increasing tempo. Performed by couples who combine fast, graceful movements with humor, the *joget* can be traced back to Portuguese folk dances introduced in Malacca during the colonial era. The *datun julud* is the centuries-old tradition of storytelling through the medium of dance. The *sape*, a musical instrument, accompanies this dance. *Mak Yong* is an ancient classic court entertainment that combines romantic stories, opera, and an abundance of humor. Malaysia is also famous for its batik art form.

❁ CUISINE

Malaysia's culinary arts, like its other art forms, have been influenced by diverse cultural currents—Chinese, Indian, Malay, Indonesian, and Thai, to name a few. The basic features of its cuisine are fresh tropical fruits, seafood, chilies, and curries from India and Thailand. Coconut milk is the central feature of Malaysian cuisine; it imparts a delicious, sweet taste to all kinds of dishes. Rice is the staple food item of the Malaysians. At each meal everyone eats rice accompanied by a number of dishes—fish, seafood, vegetables, and poultry. Though the basic ingredients may be similar, the method of cooking and type of accompaniments differ from one state to another because of the availability of some local items. Roadside food stalls are popular and provide all the local delicacies.

Breakfast is the major meal of the day. *Nasi kandar* is a fish curry that is served, along with meat in chili sauce and boiled eggs. *Nasi dagang* is glutinous rice cooked in coconut milk and served with fish curry, coconut sambal (spicy, hot chutney), and pickled cucumber. Satay is the most popular dish of Malaysia. To prepare it, small pieces of beef, mutton, or chicken are marinated in spices, skewered with thin bamboo strips, and barbecued over a charcoal fire. Satay is served with *ketupat* (rice cake) and a raw

Batik

Though it originated in Indonesia, batik has now become an integral part of Malaysian culture. Malaysian batik, purported to be the best in the world, is created by one of four methods: block-printed, drawn freestyle, silk-screened, or tie-dyed. The basic fabrics are either cotton or silk. Batik cloth is produced by drawing a design with wax and dyeing the material. The wax is then melted away by boiling the cloth, and a second wax design is etched on it. This lengthy process creates an intricately beautiful, colorful design.

salad of cucumber, pineapple, and onions. A sweet and spicy peanut sauce customarily accompanies the dish. Yet another well-known dish, *nasi lemak*, is rice cooked in coconut milk and served with *ikan bilis* (anchovies), sambal, boiled eggs, fried peanuts, and cucumber slices. This is a favorite breakfast item.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

As in many other countries around the globe, both New Year's Eve and New Year's Day are celebrated enthusiastically by Malaysians in every community. New Year's Eve is welcomed with great fanfare and rejoicing in the public squares of cities and towns, luxury hotels, and upscale restaurants, especially in Kuala Lumpur, the capital. New Year's Day is a public holiday in Malaysia, and most people spend the day with their loved ones in a lingering spirit of festivity.

❁ CHINESE NEW YEAR

Observed by: Chinese

Observed on: The second new Moon after the winter solstice

Malaysia has a sizable Chinese population, for whom the most important festival is the New Year, a two-week holiday that begins on the second new Moon after the winter solstice (December 21 of the Gregorian calendar). A two-day public holiday in Malaysia, it is ushered in by the lighting of firecrackers at midnight on New Year's Eve.

Long before the actual day, however, hordes of shoppers can be seen buying all kinds of essential items: among them oranges for good luck and flowers and kumquat trees to beautify their homes. Kumquats have been hailed as "the little gems of the citrus family." The name means "gold orange" in

Chinese. The kumquat tree is a slow-growing, shrubby plant. It produces a small, round edible fruit with a golden yellow, reddish-orange skin; the outer layer is spicy, and the inner layer is sweet.

It is mandatory for all Chinese people to settle their debts and clean their homes before the onset of the new year. On the eve of the new year, family ties are renewed by means of special reunion dinners. Younger members of the family visit their relatives to pay their respects and seek blessings; in return they are customarily given red packets containing money (called *ang paws*). A festive atmosphere prevails on the streets with stilt walkers, lion and dragon dancers, acrobats, and colorful floats, all accompanied by the clanging of cymbals and the beating of gongs and drums.

See also Volume III: CHINESE NEW YEAR

✿ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

In many parts of the world May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day. Also known as May Day or Workers' Day, it commemorates the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

In Malaysia the day is celebrated with processions and rallies, inspiring public speeches by trade union leaders and other union activities. On this



Malaysian Muslims pray during special morning prayers for Eid al-Adha at a mosque in Kuala Lumpur. Eid al-Adha, or the Festival of Sacrifice, falls on the 10th day of Dhu al-Hijjah, the final month of the Muslim year. (AP Photo/Vincent Thian)

occasion the government, as well as private employers, often draws up and implements welfare schemes for the benefit of the workers. Outstanding workers are also given awards on the occasion.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

✿ NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 31

On this day in 1957 Malaysia attained its freedom from centuries of colonial rule. This historic occasion, also known as Malaysia Day or Independence Day, is celebrated with great pomp and show in various parts of the country, including Kuala Lumpur. In Putrajaya the administrative capital (in the vicinity of Kuala Lumpur), spectacular parades and displays of fireworks after sunset form a part of the national celebrations. Young students perform traditional Malaysian, Indian, and Chinese dances in the city's squares. Such public functions are often attended by royal personages, the prime minister, and other conspicuous political personalities.

Religious Holidays

✿ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, also called Eid ul-Zuha, Bakr-Eid, or Hari Raya Hajji, recalls Ibrahim's (Abraham's) display of unflinching faith in God by his willingness to sacrifice his young son because the Almighty commanded him to do so. In Malaysia devout Muslim families customarily sacrifice sheep, goats, rams, or cattle in the name of God; this meat is then shared with friends, family, and distributed among the poor. During the entire month prior to this festival, devout Muslims who are physically and financially capable undertake the hajj, a pilgrimage to Mecca, one of the Five Pillars of the Islamic faith.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

✿ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

El am Hejir, also called the Islamic New Year, is celebrated on the first day of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar. Islam's calendar is based on the revolutions of the Moon. Thus it is only 354 days long. Compared to Western calendars, the Islamic year is 11 days shorter, so the Western date of the New Year varies from year to year. The beginning of the new year is a fairly low-key

affair in contrast to the mad revelry and hullabaloo associated with the calendars of other faiths.

In Malaysia devout Muslims attend services in their local mosques for special prayers and readings from Islamic scriptures. The Muslim, or Hajji, era dates from July 15 or 16, 622 (Julian). This was the beginning of the Arab year in which Muhammad and his followers made their withdrawal (Hegira) from Mecca to Medina. On this day the faithful recount this momentous event.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

❁ MOULoud

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

Mouloud, also called Mawlid al-Nabi, marks the birth of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, in 570. It is a well-known fact that Muhammad exhorted his followers not to make an ostentatious display on his birthday. Hence in Malaysia (as in other parts of the world) this is a very low-key affair. In Malaysia on this day devout Muslims focus on the life and teachings of Muhammad and offer special prayers. These recall the prophet's qualities of compassion and mercy. Alms are also given to the poor.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULoud

❁ VESAK

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: Full Moon of Vesak, the sixth month of the Buddhist calendar

This is the most important festival for Buddhists all over the world because it celebrates all the major events of Buddha's life: his birth, enlightenment (*moksha* or nirvana), and death. On this day in Malaysia Buddhist practitioners through the temples throughout the country where they offer prayers and release doves (symbolizing peace). On this occasion the devout offer alms to monks in addition to feeding the poor and the hungry.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM; VESAK

❁ DIWALI

Observed by: Hindus

Observed on: Five days from the 13th day of the waning half (Krishna Paksha) of the lunar month Asvina to the second day of the waxing half (Shukla Paksha) of Karttika

The famous Hindu Festival of Lights Diwali, Divali, or Deepawali, is celebrated during the seventh month of the Hindu calendar. In Malaysia Hindus observe the occasion by decorating their homes with dozens of lights or oil lamps, locally known as *vikku*. Nearly a month before Diwali people clean their homes and arrange for the whitewashing and paint-

ing of their houses. They also buy jewelry and new clothes for this festival and exchange gifts and sweets with their family and friends. Hence, during the countdown to Diwali, there is a flurry of activity: shopping sprees, placing orders for jewelry and ornaments, preparation and packing of dry fruits and sweets (major gift items), and so forth. For quite a few days prior to the main day of the festival there are crowds of people on the streets, all in a frenzy to finish distributing their gifts, causing frequent traffic jams in all the larger towns and cities.

This ritual is highly philosophical and celebrates the triumph of good over evil and of light over darkness. Diwali was first celebrated to commemorate the triumphant return of King Rama of Ayodhya (the seventh manifestation of Vishnu, the Protector), Sita (his wife), and his brother Lakshmana to the capital city Ayodhya, after 14 years of exile. During the exile, Lord Rama had vanquished the demon Ravana, the king of Sri Lanka. As night had already fallen before the arrival of the royal trio, the people, delighted to have their king back in their midst, lit clay lamps along the way to dispel the darkness and illuminate their path. People visit their friends and relatives and exchange good wishes. They also give large dinners. There is an overall atmosphere of camaraderie, gaiety, and mirth.

See also Volume III: DIWALI; HINDUISM

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr, the second *eid* ("festival") of the Islamic year, is also called Hari Raya Puasa in Malaysia. This is a major Islamic festival signifying the end of Ramadan, the austere Islamic month of fasting and abstinence. In Malaysia Hari Raya Puasa officially begins with the sighting of the Moon (by the *moulvis*, or priests) on the day before the commencement of the month of Shawwal (or Syawal). The festival begins the following day with early morning prayers in the local mosques, then people visit local cemeteries to pray for their deceased friends and relatives. The rest of the day is spent enjoying lavish meals and general rejoicing. The Koran forbids fasting on this day.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Though Malaysia is an Islamic country, the spirit of Christmas is visible, especially in luxury hotels, department stores, and the homes of Christians. The conventional features of this winter festival—Christmas trees, decorations, brilliant lights, Santa Claus,

and carol singing—are all conspicuous in Malaysia on this occasion.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

KUCHING FESTIVAL

Observed in: Kuching, the capital of Sarawak

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July–August

Kuching, the Cat City, probably so named after the cats-eye trees that grow there, comes alive during the months of July and August. Originally a celebration of the arts of the Sarawak region, the Kuching Festival has come to include food fairs, handicraft exhibits, and a host of sporting events for the local people as well as visitors. The food stalls, more than 200 of them, serve a variety of Asian delicacies, such as barbecued stingray, as well as ostrich or camel burgers and fried ice cream. The Kuching Festival has also been extended to include shopping, garden shows, and a variety of activities for the fun-loving townsfolk and their families. The festival begins with a huge fireworks display, and the street parade at the end of the first week of August is the highlight of the festival.

Rites of Passage

COMING OF AGE

In the view of many Malaysian Muslims, the circumcision of the male is an act of purification. The rite is held sometime between 12 and 15 years of age. Favorite times for conducting the procedure include the sacred months of Islam or when the youth has completed a study of the Koran.

MARRIAGE

In Malaysia, bride and groom are considered “king and queen for a day.” Their wedding culminates a courtship of many milestones. When the couple gets engaged, the amount of the dowry and date of the wedding are determined. The signing of the marriage contract, or Akad Nikah, is presided over by a *kadbi*, an official of the religious Muslim court.

The *mas kabwin*, a small sum of money, seals the contract. Children attired in traditional dress noisily proceed to the bride’s house carrying gifts from the groom, which include abundantly heaped trays of food and currency folded into animals and flowers. Prior to the wedding, the bride-to-be has her palms and feet decorated with henna vegetable dye in a *berimai* ceremony. Guests receive decorated hard-boiled eggs that symbolize fertility.

Among Malaysian youth there is a trend emerging to hold weddings in mosques. In this culturally diverse nation, weddings frequently draw from the Hindu traditions of southern India.

DEATH

Like Muslims elsewhere and followers of some other faiths, Malaysian Muslims tend to bury their dead as soon as possible, preferably before sunset on the day of death. Before burial the body is cleaned by someone of the same sex as the deceased. Then the body is shrouded in a white cloth. As mourners carry the corpse through the streets to a mosque for prayers or to its final resting place, prayers are chanted. As the procession passes, onlookers join the chanting and help carry the coffin a short distance. The body is laid in the grave on its right side with the face turned to Mecca. For several days after death, it is customary to recite prayers in memory of the deceased. In the course of the prayers, when a dead person’s name is mentioned, the words *rahimahu Allah* (for a man) or *rahimaha Allah* (for a woman) are uttered. This phrase entreats God to show mercy towards deceased.

Further Reading

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Maldives

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Maldives is a group of 26 atolls forming a chain in the Indian Ocean about 419 miles southwest of Sri Lanka in southern Asia.
Size	116 sq. mi.
Capital City	Malé
Flag Description	The Maldives's flag is red with a large green rectangle in the center, bearing a vertical white crescent; the closed side of the crescent is on the hoist side of the flag.
Independence	July 26, 1965 (from United Kingdom)
Population	349,106 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Maldivian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	South Indians; Sinhalese; Arab
Major Language(s)	Maldivian Dhivehi (dialect of Sinhala, with script derived from Arabic); English
Major Religion(s)	Muslims (Sunni)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; National Day, April 9; Huravee Day, July 8; Independence Day, July 26–27; Martyrs' Day, September 4; Victory Day, November 3; Republic Day, November 11–12

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The Maldives is one of the smallest countries in the world. It is located in the Indian Ocean, 419 miles southwest of Sri Lanka. Formed as a result of intense volcanic activity almost 150 million years ago, the islands are, in fact, coral deposits resting on underwater mountains.

Archaeological findings indicate that the Maldives islands were inhabited as early as 1500 B.C.E., but it is generally thought that permanent settlements did not exist until about 500 B.C.E. with the arrival of Aryan immigrants from India. The early Maldivians were probably immigrant Hindus from India, as well Buddhists who came from Sri Lanka for the purpose of preaching Buddhism.

According to local folklore the first king to establish a dynasty (the Theemuge Dynasty) in pre-Islamic times was named Koimala. He sailed to the islands with his bride, the daughter of the Sinhalese king, from Kerala in southwestern

India. The kings of the Theemuge Dynasty managed to bring the entire country under their rule. They were Buddhists who remained in power until the arrival of Islam.

Because the Maldives are located along the ancient east-west trade route, early travelers used to stop here for supplies and were sometimes forced to land as a result of shipwrecks on the coral reefs. Among the visitors to these islands were the famous Arab traveler Ibn Batuta (1304–77). Ma Huan (b. c. 1380), a Chinese historian who spoke fluent Arabic also traveled here. In addition, the Maldivians used to venture out far beyond their shores.

As trade grew along this sea route, the Maldives became an important stop for Arab traders. The islands held two main attractions for them. Maldives were famous for the small seashells called *Cypraea moneta*, which were used as a currency in India and the Middle East, and so Maldives was sometimes called “The Mint of the Region.” Traders would collect shiploads of these shells in exchange for rice, spices, and other goods. Secondly, the Maldives islanders used to catch and process high-quality tuna by boiling, smoking, curing, and

drying the fish. This proved to be an ideal food for long sea voyages and was regarded as a delicacy in Sri Lanka and many parts of the world.

Arab traders also brought Islam to the islands. Some credit Abu Barakat Yusuf, a Moroccan, for converting the Maldivians to Islam, while others credit Sheikh Yusuf Samsuddin, a scholar. According to legend the Maldivians were plagued by a sea-demon that had to be supplied with young girls every so often to keep him from devouring the rest of the populace. Abu Barakat rid the islanders of this menace by dressing as a girl and reading the Koran (the Islamic Holy Book) to the monster, who then departed forever. This impressed the king so much that he and his subjects converted to Islam. After the death of the king Barakat became the first sultan of the Maldives.

Unlike most Islamic countries, Maldives has had a number of women rulers. The most famous of them was Sultana Khadeeja Rehendi (r. 1342–80). In all there have been 84 sultans and sultanas from six dynasties.

The tranquility of these islands was at times disturbed by the sea powers of the day. In 1558 the Portuguese invaded and captured the Maldives. They were overthrown by a local chieftain, Muhammad Thakurufaanu Al-Azam, also known as Al-Sultan Ghazi Muhammad Bodu Thakurufaanu, who used a military strategy now known as “guerilla tactics” in 1573. In the 17th century the islands became a Dutch protectorate. Later, with the expansion of the British Empire and growing British influence, the islands became a British protectorate in 1887. An arrangement was reached whereby the sultan would run the country, but the British would ensure the defense of the islands. During World War II, military bases were set up here. A Royal Air Force (RAF) base was established in Gan in 1957 but was closed in 1976.

The first constitution of the Maldives was framed in 1932, after which the sultans were elected and did not inherit the throne. This continued until 1953, when the islands were proclaimed a republic, and the sultanate was abolished. Mohammed Amin Didi (b. 1910) became the first president, but he was ousted in less than a year owing to public discontent arising out of persistent food shortages and the ban he had imposed on all tobacco products. The sultanate was once again reestablished with the return of the son of the former sultan Mohammed Farid Didi (b. 1901), the 94th and last sultan of Maldives.

In 1957 the British succeeded in obtaining a 100-year lease for building and operating an air force base on Gan in the southern Addu atoll. This was unpopular and led to the resignation of the then prime minister Ibrahim Ali Didi. Former foreign minister Ibrahim Nasir (b. 1926) became the next prime minister and immediately set about changing the terms of the agreement, reducing the lease period and placing other restrictive terms on the British, particularly with respect to the hiring of locals.

Soon the island nation was facing a secessionist revolt from the three southernmost atolls (whose inhabitants were most affected by Nasir’s policies). The movement was crushed swiftly and brutally. At the same time negotiations opened with the British to gain Maldivian independence and to reduce the length of the lease on Gan. It was decided that the lease would run until 1976. On July 26, 1965, the Maldives was granted its independence by the British. Ibrahim Nasir became the first prime minister of an independent Maldives. Then after three years, as the result of a referendum in 1968 that did away with the sultanate once more, the Maldives became a republic for the second time, with Ibrahim Nasir emerging as the first president of the Second Republic.

In 1978 Maumoon Abdul Gayoom (b. 1937) was elected president. He was subsequently reelected to a second term and survived coup attempts in 1980, 1981. Again in 1988, a coup attempt by Tamil mercenaries from Sri Lanka was foiled with the help of Indian troops who had been asked to help.

Maldives has been a member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) since 1985 and a member of the United Nations since 1965, the year of its independence.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Maldives is an archipelago, 511 miles long and 81 miles at its widest point, but the total land area is only 116 square miles. There are 26 natural atolls and 1,192 islands, of which 200 are inhabited. Each of the atolls is surrounded by a coral reef and is like a small, protected island. There are neither rivers nor mountains nor hills on the islands, and the only sources of fresh water are aquifers, which are quickly being depleted. The atolls are totally coral-based, and the soil is not suitable for cultivation. Some vegetation is present; the coconut, banana, and some other tropical trees are the main plants of the islands. In 1985 the coconut palm and the yellow rose were declared the national tree and the national flower of Maldives.

The climate of Maldives is warm and humid. The temperatures on the islands remain in the range of 75° to 86°F all year round. The southwest monsoon brings rain from April to October, and the northeast monsoon brings more rain from December to March. The islands are located away from any seismic zone, but Maldives was seriously affected by the tsunami of December 2004, started by an earthquake in the Indian Ocean. The highest point in the country is less than eight feet above sea level, making the islands vulnerable to any increase in sea level.

ECONOMY

Currently, tourism dominates the economy of the country. Tourism alone accounts for 60 percent of

the country's foreign currency income. The atolls and the sea attract international tourists to the Maldives year-round. Besides tourism, fish processing, ship and boat building, coconut processing, garment manufacturing, woolen mat and rope making, handicrafts, coral mining, and the mining of sand are other major economic activities. The service sector, including tourism, constitutes 62 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP). The shares of industry and agriculture in the GDP are about 20 percent each. About 60 percent of the total employment, too, is in the service sector.

A major concern of the country is possible global warming and the resultant rise in sea levels, since 80 percent of the land area is only about three feet above sea level.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The Maldives has a proud heritage and a rich culture adapted and assimilated from the people of various countries who came for commerce or to spread their religion. The main center of daily life and culture is



A fisherman walks on his traditional fishing boat at a port, which brings goods to and from the nation's remote atolls in Malé, the capital of the Maldives. The sea is at the center of culture and daily life for this nation of islands. (AP Photo/Ed Wray)

Dhoni

A *dhoni* is a traditional boat built and used by the Maldivians. The Raa atoll is famous for its craftsmen, who have been building *dhonis* for generations. The hull of the boat used to be made from the trunk of a coconut tree, but now *dhoni* hulls are usually fabricated from imported wood. Customarily the boat is painted with fish oil to prevent corrosion from seawater. Earlier these boats were fitted with sails to take advantage of favorable winds, but most of these boats now have motors. It is said that a *dhoni* ride is a great experience, especially on a gentle sea on a starry night. The boat is steered by the helmsman with his legs, according to his captain's commands.

the surrounding sea. Maldivians love the sea. A marine school has been set up at Malé to teach diving and scuba diving to tourists and local residents. Boat racing and wind surfing are also popular water sports in Maldives. The local fishermen use a locally built traditional boat for fishing, called a *dhoni*.

Traditional Maldivian handicrafts include mat weaving, embroidery work on traditional dresses, lacquer work, and making products out of coir (a stiff coarse fiber from the outer husk of the coconut). Each of the handicrafts requires specialized skills and is confined to specific atolls or islands. For example, Ribudhoo in the atoll of Dhaalu is famous for its gold and silver work. The island of Gadhdhoo in Gaafu Dhaalu atoll is famous for its handwoven prayer mats made of dried *hau* (a resilient grass).

Among the local people, poems and songs in the Dhivehi language (Indo-European in nature containing Sanskrit, Tamil, Sinhalese, Persian, Urdu, and Arabic words) and group dances are popular.

Some of the islanders believe in myths and supernatural forces, such as evil spirits, which they fear. Rituals, such as group dancing at night, are

Kadhaa Maali

This is a dance from the Kulhudhuffush Thiladhummatt atoll located in the northern part of the Maldives. Percussion is provided by drums and *kadhaas*, which are copper plates struck with rods. The name of the dance is derived from these copper plates, which are called *kadhaas*. The Kadhaa Maali is a group dance in which 25 men, dressed in traditional costumes, seek to drive away evil spirits, collectively called *maali*, in order to cure sickness. The dance is generally performed in the evening.

performed on some of the islands in order to drive off the evil spirits.

🌸 CUISINE

The Maldives are constrained by limited land for growing crops and a shortage of domestic labor. Fish and rice are the staple foods of Maldivians; beef and chicken are eaten only on special occasions. The staple diet of the islanders consists of fish, coconut, breadfruit, and honey made out of coconut toddy (fermented sap of the coconut palm). A typical traditional Maldivian meal may have a fish broth mixed with smoked tuna (*garud-biya*), tubers, millet, or breadfruit, with coconut, green chilies, and lime added to the broth. National dishes include fried fish, fish curry, and fish soup. Rice is imported but has become a staple of local meals. Curries with spices and unleavened bread are also popular. Areca nut (an oval nut chewed with betel leaf, cloves, and lime) is the Maldivian equivalent of an after dinner mint. Alcohol is only available in tourist resorts. The local brew is *raa*, a sweet and delicious toddy tapped from the crown of the palm. Apart from coconuts, there are very few fruits and vegetables grown on the islands, so most of the food served at tourist resorts must be imported.

Public/Legal Holidays

🌸 NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

Even though the Maldives is a Muslim country and generally follows the Islamic lunar calendar, January 1, which is New Year's Day on the Gregorian calendar, is still observed as a public holiday in Maldives. There are no public celebrations, which is in keeping with prevailing Islamic sentiments, but all offices and institutions are closed.

🌸 NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 9

Maldives came under Portuguese rule in 1558, when the Portuguese invaded the islands and murdered Sultan Ali VI. Their brutal colonial rule lasted for 15 years. It was ended in 1573 (on the first day of Rabbil-Awwal, 981 A.H.) by Muhammad Thakurufaanu (d. 1585), who, along with his brothers, killed the Portuguese and liberated Malé in 1573. This was the night before the day when the Portuguese planned to force all the Maldivians to convert to Christianity or be killed. Parades and marches are held on the streets of Malé and other islands to commemorate this day.

🌸 HURAVEE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 8

In 1752 invaders from South India attacked Malé, destroyed the palace, and carried off Sultan Mukarram Muhammad Imadudheen (Safar 13, 1166 A.H.). But some of the invaders stayed to rule Malé. Within a few weeks, on Jumad Awal 3, 1166, Malé was liberated by Muleege Hassan Maniku, who was from a clan known as Hurra, in the Malé atoll. Later Maniku became Sultan Hassan Izzudheen of Malé. He is revered as a national hero and honored on Huravee Day in Maldives.

🌸 INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 26–27

The Maldives remained a British Protectorate for 78 years, gaining independence from British rule on July 26, 1965. Maldivians observe July 26 as Independence Day. Special celebrations held on this occasion include military parades and parades by schoolchildren. The next day, July 27, is also a public holiday.

🌸 MARTYRS' DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: September 4

When the Portuguese fleet invaded Malé in 1558, the ruling Sultan Ali VI was not supported by his countrymen and was killed while fighting. Later he was recognized as a hero and was declared a martyr. The sultan was killed on the first day of the month of Shaban in 965 A.H., and this day is observed as Martyrs' Day in the memory of Sultan Ali VI.

🌸 VICTORY DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 3

A Tamil terrorist group from Sri Lanka attacked Malé and tried to overthrow the government in 1988. The attempt was foiled and the terrorists fled from islands. In memory of this event, Victory Day is celebrated on November 3 in the Maldives.

🌸 REPUBLIC DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 11–12

The Maldives first became a republic on January 1, 1953. It was short-lived, however, and the sultanate was restored within the same year. A second republic emerged on November 11, 1968, three years after the country's independence from Britain in 1965. Republic Day is a two-day celebration, and

parades and other street events are held at Malé and other islands.

Religious Holidays

❁ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

Muharram is the first month of the lunar Islamic calendar and the first day of Muharram is the Islamic New Year. On this day, in 622 C.E., Muhammad fled with his family and followers from Mecca to Medina, also known as the Hegira. It is a public holiday and a day of celebration in the Maldives.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; EL AM HEJIR

❁ MOULLOUD

Observed by: Sunni Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

Mouloud, or Mawlid al-Nabi, the birthday of the prophet Muhammad, is celebrated on the 12th of Rabbi al-Awwal by Sunni Muslims. Shia Muslims celebrate it five days later, on the 17th. Muhammad told his followers not to imitate Christians by reveling on his birthday, so this is usually a reverent observance in the Maldives. Arabic verses in praise of the prophet are sung, special prayers are offered in homes, and special foods, including *aweli*, a noodle dish, are prepared for the occasion.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULLOUD

❁ RAMADAN

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar

During the month of Ramadan, devout Muslims observe day-long fasts and stay away from any kind of food and even water. The fast is broken only after sunset on each day. Ramadan is the holiest month of the Islamic calendar because Muslims believe that Allah began to reveal the Koran to Muhammad on the 27th day of Ramadan. The first day of the month of Ramadan, when the fasting season begins, is observed as a holiday in Maldives.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr, also called Fithru Eid or Kuda Eid in Maldives, marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan

with the sighting of the new Moon. The appearance of the Moon is announced by the imam (priest) of Malé via television, and celebrations start that same evening with grand feasts to mark the end of a month of dawn-to-dusk fasting. The following day features a mass prayer after which people greet one another saying “Eid Mubarik” (greetings). Feasts are shared among relatives and friends. People wear new clothes. Money and food are given away to the poor. Malé adopts a festive mood on this day, and people fill the streets in the afternoon to watch parades with colorful bands playing. In villages celebrants play traditional drum music (on a *boduberu*, meaning “big drum”) and hold sports competitions to mark this day.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha is known locally as Bodu Eid or Azhaa Eid and is celebrated after the completion of the annual hajj pilgrimage to Mecca on the previous day. Of the two *eids* celebrated by Muslims (the other is Eid al-Fitr), this three-day event is the more significant. This is also the Festival of Sacrifice, when animals are sacrificed to remember that Ibrahim (Abraham) was willing to sacrifice his son because he was ordered to do so by God. The Maldives has been an Islamic country since 1153 and special prayers, games, and feasts are held on this day on Malé and other islands of the archipelago.

Even in the days of the monarchy, special customs characterized this major *eid* including the use of drums to announce special events and the official procession of the sultan, accompanied by bands and military displays, to the *eid* prayer. People wear new clothes and are in a festive mood.

People travel from one island to another to participate in the festivals. Cultural events differ from island to island, and visitors who want to see traditional customs should visit one of the smaller islands. In some islands, water is splashed on people as part of the fun.

Over the centuries the customs associated with celebrating the *eid* have changed, and performances of Western and other kinds of contemporary music can be seen on Malé and other islands. Brass bands and squads of cadets from various schools parade through the streets.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

❁ HAJJ DAY

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Last of the month of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Officially the hajj begins on the eighth day of Dhu al-Hijjah when pilgrims stream out of Mecca

Fun Fact

The entire city of Mecca is an Islamic holy site and non-Muslims cannot enter it.

(Makka) toward Mina, to meditate and pray as Muhammad did. Every able-bodied Muslim must make the pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca at least once in his or her lifetime if he or she can afford it. The hajj is the fifth of the Five Pillars of Islam in Sunni Islam and one of the 10 Branches of Religion in the Shia sect. Ordinarily women must make the hajj with a male relative (father, husband, or brother); or, if she cannot do so for some reason, the Saudi government will allow her to enter if she is traveling in a group with other women and has written permission to do so from a male relative.

When pilgrims from the Maldives leave on or return from the hajj, people crowd the Malé airport to see the pilgrims off and to welcome them back from this physically demanding journey. The concluding day of the annual hajj in Saudi Arabia is observed as Hajj Day, and it is a holiday in Maldives. This is also the eve of the Islamic new year.

See also Volume III: HAJJ; ISLAM

Rites of Passage

BIRTH

In the Maldives, where Islam is the state religion, all rites are performed according to the tenets of that religion. Immediately after the birth, a baby is thoroughly washed in order to remove biological impurities. According to Islamic doctrine, the first sound that a baby ought to hear should be the sacred name of Allah. This should be uttered by its father (or a male relative). The male relative whispers the call to prayer, or *adhan*, first into the child's right ear and then into its left. The underlying idea is to make the child aware of Allah's omnipresence and his power over the lives of mortals. A baby is

Bodu Beru

A *bodu beru* is a big drum, as well as the name of the best-known Maldivian traditional music and dance. Both the music and the dance reflect a strong African influence. An ensemble usually consists of four to six drummers. The dancers' movements follow the rhythm set by the drummers, beginning with a slow, gentle swaying and swinging of the arms, then becoming livelier as the tempo increases, and ending in a rhythmic frenzy. Local rock bands sometimes incorporate elements of *bodu beru* in their music, featuring lots of percussion and extended drum solos when they perform at clubs and resorts.

given his or her Islamic name on the seventh day following birth. This is an important family celebration. Relatives and friends are invited for a banquet, and food is also given away to the poor. In some of the islands, the week-old baby's head is shaved on this occasion.

COMING OF AGE

In Islamic practice, all boys are circumcised between the ages of four and eight years, usually during the annual school holidays. While in Malé the operation is generally performed by doctors, on other islands a *bakeem*, or local medicine man, does it. This event is an occasion for joy and celebration in a family. Houses are decorated, and local dancers and live bands are hired to entertain guests. Many people stop by during the festivities, mainly to enjoy a game of *carrom* (or *carrom*) or join in a *bodu beru*, a uniquely Maldivian form of music and dance. Friends and relations visit the house on the day of the circumcision and for a week or so afterward too, until the boy recovers. Every visitor brings some gift for him. Various delicacies are offered throughout the week to the visitors and guests.

MARRIAGE

In the Maldives, most marriages are conducted in the traditional Muslim manner. The matches are created by agreement between the two sets of parents. However, according to Islamic tenets, both the bride and the groom are free to refuse the spouse selected by their parents, guardians, or elders. Prior to the actual wedding, the two families decide on a specific amount of money or articles in kind that the groom's family must give to the bride. This sum of money provides security for the bride in case the marriage breaks up. As in all Islamic societies, Maldives weddings take place in the bride's home.

The wedding rites are conducted by an imam. Iraqi tradition requires that, while the *nikah* (wedding contract) is being recited by the imam, the bride has to read the "*surat al fatb*" (verse 48) from the Koran. The imam asks her whether she gives him permission to marry her to the groom upon payment of the specified amount. Muslim brides customarily wear a white dress for the wedding and place their feet in water (symbolizing tranquility), while kinsmen place a *sufra* in front of her, which consists of fruits, six candles, different types of sweets, bread and cheese, rice, honey, and yogurt. These items symbolize plenty and prosperity.

DEATH

All religions accept death as a part of human life. Since death is unpredictable and can happen at any time, anywhere, Muslims are exhorted always to be prepared. When Muslims are faced with death, they

are encouraged to recite prayers and declare their faith. Muslims believe that a baby who is born dead or stillborn must nonetheless have a name before it is buried.

Muslims are taught to treat the dead body with gentleness and respect. A dead person's face is turned toward Mecca, the arms and legs are straightened out, and the mouth and eyes are closed.

In the Maldives (as in all Islamic societies), it is customary for Muslims to ritually wash the dead body, perfume it, and drape it in a fresh white cloth before burial. The burial is supposed to take place as quickly as possible after death.

Further reading

Asian Development Bank, Programs Dep. West and Office of Environment and Social Development, *Women in the Republic of Maldives* (Manila: Author, 2001); Sam Harwood, *The Maldives* (London: New Holland, 2004); T. W. Hockly, *The Two Thousand Isles: A Short Account of the People, History, and Customs of the Maldivian Archipelago* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2003).

Fun Fact

Carom (or *carrom*) is a popular Asian game for two players. Each player has 18 pieces, either white or black, and the object is to be the first to pocket all 18 of one's pieces plus the red queen.

❧ Mali ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Western Africa, bordered by Algeria, Niger, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Senegal, and Mauritania
Size	478,767 sq. mi.
Capital City	Bamako
Flag Description	Mali's flag has three vertical bands of equal size: their colors are green (hoist side), yellow, and red.
Independence	September 22, 1960 (from France)
Population	12,291,529 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Malian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Mande, including Bambara, Malinke, and Soninke (50%); other tribes, including Peul (17%), Voltaic (12%), Songhai (6%), and Tuareg and Moor (10%)
Major Language(s)	French (official); Bambara and other native African languages (80%)
Major Religion(s)	Islam (90%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Day of Democracy, March 26; Labor Day, May 1; Africa Day, May 25; Independence Day, September 22; Army Coup Day, November 19

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

Not much is known about the region's prehistory, but it is believed that the Dogon, based around the Niger River Valley, were the original inhabitants of Mali. Mali has the distinction of having been an integral part of all three great African Empires, Ghana, Malinke, and Songhai. The Ghana Empire ruled the region from 770 until 1075. A powerful state, it controlled the trans-Saharan trade route from the 4th until the 11th century. The Ghana Empire came to an end as a result of the invasion of Muslim Almoravids, and Mali, too, fell to the invaders. In the early 13th century, the region became part of the Malinke Empire after the conquest of Timbuktu and Gao by the legendary Mali king Sundiata Keita (c. 1190–c. 1255), the Lion King.

This was the beginning of Mali's golden era as trade expanded to other parts of West Africa and the entire trans-Saharan gold trade came under the control of the Malinké. Timbuktu became the fabled city of untold riches and the most famous gold trading post.

Internal and external conflicts led to the fall of the Malinke Empire in the 15th century, and the region was overtaken by the Songhai Empire. The Songhai Empire came to power in 1435 and dominated the region until 1530. It finally crumbled after the Moroccan invasion in 1539.

The French military began showing interest in the region in 1880. It was not until 1890, however, that the French established a colony. Moreover French ambitions met with stiff resistance on the part of the great Malinke warrior Samory Touré (c. 1830–1900), and the French were strategically challenged in their advance.

By 1893 the French had succeeded. The region was renamed French Sudan and placed under the rule of a civilian governor. Touré and the other tribal leaders were determined to drive the foreigners out. But after the arrest and killing of Samory Touré in 1898, the French army was able to crush the rebellion.

French Sudan later became part of the Federation of French West Africa. After a French constitutional referendum was passed on October 4, 1958, the République Soudanaise became an integral part of the overseas French Community and was granted autonomous status.

The French Community

The French Community was established in 1958 and consisted of the French Republic (which included metropolitan France, or continental France, Corsica, Algeria, and the Sahara), the overseas territories (Comoros, French Polynesia, the Territory of the Afars and the Issas, New Caledonia, Saint Pierre and Miquelon, the French Southern and Antarctic territories, and the Wallis and Futuna Islands), the overseas departments (French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Réunion), and six independent African republics (the Central African Republic, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon, the

Malagasy Republic, and Senegal). Though self-governed, the member states were represented in matters of common interest such as foreign policy, defense, economic and financial policy, policy on strategic raw materials, supervision of courts, higher education, and communications—at first through the institutions of the Community and later through bilateral agreements between the French Republic and other members. Gradually, as the former French African possessions evolved their own political and economic structures, the French Community ceased to function as an entity, although it still exists in principle.

In January 1959 Senegal and French Sudan came together to form the Mali Federation. On July 20, 1960, the Mali Federation was granted independent status within the French Community. However, the federation collapsed after Senegal withdrew in August 1960. On September 22, 1960, French Sudan declared itself a republic and changed its name to the Republic of Mali.

Modibo Keita (1915–77) was elected the first president of independent Mali. He was the leader of the popular pre-independence party Union Soudanaise du Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (US/RDA). After assuming power he declared Mali a one-party state and followed a socialist economic policy based on extensive nationalization. But the policy failed, and the economy suffered. There was also growing discontent among the people. On November 19, 1968, a bloodless coup by a group of young people ousted Keita, and a Military Committee for National Liberation (CMLN) was formed to look after the nation's affairs. Lieutenant Moussa Traore (b. 1936) was sworn in as the new president. But internal political conflicts, lack of sound economic policies, and the great Sahelian drought, further crippled the economy.

In 1974 a new constitution was adopted, and Mali was once again declared a one-party state. In 1976 a new political party, the Democratic Union of the Malian People (UDPM), was established based on the principle of “democratic centralism.” Moussa Traore won the single-party presidential elections held in 1979 and was reinstated as president of Mali.

In the early 1990s the demand for multiparty democracy increased in Mali. Student riots broke out in different parts of the country, and the idea even received support from government workers. On March 26, 1991, President Traore was arrested by 17 military officers, and the constitution was suspended. The first multiparty National Assembly elections were held on June 8, 1992, and the candidate of the Association for Democracy in Mali (ADEMA), Alpha Oumar Konaré (b. 1946), became president of the Republic of Mali.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The Republic of Mali is the largest country in West Africa. A landlocked nation, Mali is flanked by Burkina Faso in the southeast, Niger in the east, Senegal and Mauritania in the west, Guinea in the southwest, Algeria in the north and northeast, and Côte d'Ivoire in the south. Bamako is the capital of the Republic of Mali.

Topographically, Mali is divided into three natural zones: Saharan in the north, semi-arid Sahelian in the central parts (Sahel refers to the central region of West Africa), and cultivated Sudanese in the south. While the northern plains are flat and covered with desert sand, there are rugged hills in the Air Massif (also known as the Air Mountains) marked with faults (cracks in the Earth's crust leading to seismic activity that includes earthquakes) and the Djado Plateau in the northeast, and savannah grasslands in the south.

The Niger River is the country's lifeline. The source of sustenance and transportation for the country, it is also referred to as “the Nile of Mali.” On the whole, Mali has subtropical to arid climatic conditions. The daytime temperature is usually around 75°F, while during the extremely dry winter season, the temperature exceeds 89°F. Also during the winter season, harmattans blow across the northeast at a very high speed.

Fun Fact

According to the epic *Sundiata*, Sundiata Keita was born unable to walk.

Democratic Centralism

A political concept, the term *democratic centralism* refers to the internal governance of political groups and parties. It means that the members of the political parties are free to discuss and debate on matters of policy, but once the party makes a decision, all members must abide by the decision.

Sahelian Drought

The central region of western Africa is referred to as the Sahel, which means “central.” This region has a history of droughts. The worst of the Sahelian droughts lasted for more than a decade, beginning in 1972 and continuing until 1984, claimed over 100,000 lives, and left almost 750,000 people at the mercy of others for food. The people suffered as did the economy. Mali, Niger, and Mauritania bore the brunt of the worst Sahelian drought to hit the region in recent times.

ECONOMY

Although the government has started implementing the International Monetary Fund’s structured plan to help revive the country’s failing economy, the Republic of Mali is one of the poorest countries of the world. More than 80 percent of its population is engaged in farming and fishing, while 10 percent lead a nomadic life. Processing of farm-based commodities forms the core of industrial activity in Mali. Cotton and gold are the major exports.

Because more than 65 percent of the country’s land is covered by desert or semi-desert, all economic activities, including agriculture, are restricted to the

areas irrigated by the Niger River. The economy suffered immensely from a series of droughts in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Mali is home to many indigenous ethnic groups. The Dogon are believed to have been the original inhabitants of the region. The Bambara tribe is now the dominant group in Mali, followed by the Dogon and the Tuareg. The Dogon live in the inland delta areas and refer to their territory as Pays Dogon. They are industrious farmers and are also famous for their artistic masks. Pays Dogon has been declared a United Nations World Heritage Site because of its rich, well-preserved cultural heritage.

The Tuaregs, an ancient nomadic tribe, are often referred to as “the blue men of the desert” because of their indigo-colored dress and turban. They still lead a nomadic life in the desert regions.

Although French is the official language of Mali, Bambara is the most popular language. It is spoken by more than 80 percent of Malians. Almost 90 percent of the population is Muslim, while 9 percent adhere to indigenous beliefs. Christians make up only 1 percent of the Malian population.

The traditional music of Mali is preserved by the *jalis* and the griots, professional storytellers who preserve the history of kings and villages. Accompanied by a 21-string harplike instrument, they narrate through their songs the detailed history of the empires as well as the genealogies of the villages and villagers.

Fun Fact

Mali derives its name from the ancient empire of Mali. The word *mali* means “land of wealthy people.”



A Tuareg woman, hands colored by the traditional indigo dye in her clothes, performs a dance in Timbuktu. (AP Photo/Ben Curtis)

❁ CUISINE

In Mali, classic dishes include *riz yollof* (meat or vegetables cooked in a sauce made from tomato and oil), couscous, and *poulet yassa* (grilled chicken made in chili sauce). Along the Nile fish is the staple food. The most popular fish is Nile perch (*capitaine*), which can be either grilled or baked. Tea is a popular beverage and is drunk out of small glasses.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 is the first day of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar and is celebrated as New Year's Day all over the world. In Mali on New Year's Eve, people gather in public places for mass celebrations with food, music, and dancing. At midnight the skies light up with fireworks, and people greet their friends and neighbors with good wishes for the coming year. In Mali all government offices, schools, and many businesses are closed on January 1.

❁ DAY OF DEMOCRACY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 26

Day of Democracy commemorates the bold move taken by 17 military officers who arrested President Moussa Traore on March 26, 1991. President Traore had declared Mali a one-party state and banned all political parties, just like his predecessor Mobido Keita. However, by the early 1990s there was growing demand among Malians to restore multiparty democracy. Traore was opposed to this and brutally crushed demonstrations challenging his authority. But the struggle against Traore's regime persevered and intensified, leading to widespread student riots. The military siding with the popular protesters, arrested President Traore on March 26, 1991.

This day celebrates the establishment of democracy in the country. People pay tribute to those who died for the cause of democracy and honor the military officers who rescued the nation from Traore's tyranny.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, May Day, or Workers' Day in many parts of the world. On this day the contributions and achievements of workers are honored. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world

and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

International Labor Day on May 1 has always been more radical than the U.S. holiday celebrated in September. As it is a national holiday in Mali, all government and private institutions are closed on May 1.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ AFRICA DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 25

Africa Day commemorates the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) on May 25, 1963, at Addis Ababa in Ethiopia. The idea of a unified African organization was the brainchild of the president of the Independent State of Ghana Kwame Nkrumah (1909–72) and the Emperor of Ethiopia Haile Selassie (1892–1975). Kwame Nkrumah was a Marxist-Socialist who, after studying at U.S. universities, returned to Ghana and joined the independence movement. He was a champion of the nonviolent movement against British rule in the region. When Ghana was granted independence, he was sworn in as the first president of the independent nation.

Haile Selassie was the emperor of Ethiopia who led his country to victory against Italian occupation in World War II, and he worked along with Kwame Nkrumah to foster a spirit of unity among all African countries. As more and more colonies in Africa were gaining independence from colonial rule, Nkrumah and Selassie believed that it was critical to bring together different African nations to form a unified continent. This vision became reality when 32 African countries confirmed their commitment to build a united Africa. Today there are more than 53 member nations in the OAU.

Since its inception, the OAU has been instrumental in ending colonial rule in Africa and has also acted as a peacemaker and negotiator in solving regional disputes, internal conflicts, and wars throughout Africa. The stated goals of the OAU are to promote peace, human rights, and unity among all African nations.

In Mali, Africa Day is a national holiday, and all public and private institutions are closed. Seminars and workshops on Africa are held in Bamako.

Fun Fact

The nomadic Tuareg created the fabled city of Timbuktu in the 12th century. The city was built around a well (*tim* in the Tuareg language), and the female caretaker of this well was named Buktu. Hence, the city was named Timbuktu, which means "Bktu's well."

Fun Fact

Harmattans are dry dust-laden winds that irritate the eyes.

Fun Fact

The Tuaregs are called "the blue men" because the indigo used to dye their clothes also dyes their skin.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 22

The Republic of Mali came into existence on September 22, 1960. Mali had been under French rule since the late 1800s and was part of French Sudan until World War II. On October 4, 1958, after a French constitutional referendum, the République Soudanaise became a part of the French Community and was granted autonomous status. In January French Sudan joined Senegal to form the Mali Federation. Independent status was granted to the Federation on June 20, 1960. In August, however, Senegal withdrew from the federation and declared its independence. On September 22, 1960, Mali declared its independence and severed ties with the French Community.

Fun Fact

In Mali, tea is drunk in three rounds; with each round the tea gets sweeter.

The president presides over Independence Day celebrations in Mali. Besides parades by the country's armed forces and patriotic speeches, the day is celebrated with cultural festivals that include traditional dance and musical performances.

❁ ARMY COUP DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 19

Army Coup Day, or Liberation Day, commemorates the bloodless coup led by a group of young Malians on November 19, 1968. After Mali became an independent republic in September 1960, Modibo Keita was elected president of the nation. Later, the power-hungry Keita declared Mali a one-party state and banned all other political parties. His dictatorial handling of economic issues crippled the country. There were widespread demonstrations demanding Keita's ouster. A group of young Malians led a bloodless coup against Keita and gave power to the Military Committee for National Liberation (CMLN), under the leadership of Lieutenant Moussa Traore.

This day is celebrated all over Mali by official speeches, military parades, and cultural activities.

Religious Holidays

❁ MOULoud

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

The birthday of Muhammad, the holy prophet of the Muslims, falls in the third month of the Islamic year. For Muslims all over the world, this is a day of

great joy and celebration. In Mali devout Muslims offer morning prayers at local mosques. Teachings of the prophet are remembered, and people draw inspiration from his life. A festive spirit rules the day, and people host lavish feasts for friends and relatives who gather to celebrate this auspicious day.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULoud

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Muslims all over the world observe a month-long dawn-to-dusk fast during the holy month of Ramadan. Eid al-Fitr also known as Korite, or the Feast of Fast-Breaking, marks the end of Ramadan. It is a day of celebration for Malian Muslims. In every village, town, and city, people dress in new clothes or their best attire to participate in the festivities. Women adorn themselves with silver and bronze jewelry. Mass prayers are held at different locations, presided over by the imams of the local mosques. After prayers, people greet each other and exchange gifts. According to the Koran, fasting is strictly forbidden on this day.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, also called Tabaski or the Festival of Sacrifice, is celebrated in honor of Ibrahim's (Abraham's) willingness to sacrifice his own son at God's command. After offering prayers at a local mosque, the head of each Muslim family in Mali sacrifices a male sheep in honor of Allah. The meat of the sacrificed sheep is distributed among friends, family, and poor neighbors.

The holy pilgrimage or hajj to the holy city of Mecca also takes place this month. The holy book of the Muslims, the Koran, requires that every Muslim should undertake this journey at least once in his or her lifetime if physically and financially capable of doing so.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; HAJJ; ISLAM

Regional Holidays

❁ FÊTE DES MASQUES

Observed in: Dogon villages

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April–May

Fête des Masques is an annual cultural festival held in April and May. This five-day event showcases the

traditional Malian art of making masks. The famous Dogon masks are donned by artists during the performance of ancient Dogon rituals that have been performed for more than 1,000 years. Dogons also narrate their history through special dances performed with their masks.

One of the rituals performed is called Sigi. It is based on an agrarian calendar and is traditionally performed only once every 60 years. The Dogon agrarian calendar is based on the orbital cycles of a “white dwarf star,” which is invisible to the naked eye.

❁ CROSSING OF THE CATTLE

Observed in: Diafarabe

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December

The Crossing of the Cattle is an important annual event that takes place in December at Diafarabe, a small village on the banks of the Niger River. A tradition that started in the 1840s, it celebrates the traditional crossing of the river by the herders and their cattle to enter the grasslands of Diafarabe.

This has long been a practice of the local Fulani tribes. Since the region gets flooded during the rainy season, these tribes take their cattle toward the north to protect them from the floodwaters. In November and December, when the water recedes, they return to Diafarabe with their cattle.

Prior to the event the village elders and chiefs discuss the order of the crossing so that the herdsmen and their cattle are treated in a fair and democratic manner. This is done to ensure that no injustice is done to any ethnic group or tribe, and the cattle of each group get a fair share of grass in Diafarabe.

As December approaches Diafarabe gears up to face the heavy influx of herders and cattle that assemble on the banks of the river. These herders return to their village in Diafarabe after spending months in the desert region. Following the order of crossing decided in the meeting of the elders, the herders and their cattle cross the river and enter Diafarabe.

This is a day of great joy for the herders and their families because it celebrates their reunion after months of separation. Special competitions such as judging the fattest, best bred, and best cared-for cattle are part of the festivities. The first day after the crossing of the cattle is called Promenade des Jeunes (“Walk of Youth”), and unmarried young men and women dress in their best clothes in order to be attractive to one another.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

Among the Tuareg tribe in Mali, the naming ceremony of a newborn child takes place a week after the birth. The night before the actual ceremony, the

elderly female relatives of the newborn give him or her a secret *tamacheq* (local language) name. On the day of the naming ceremony, the father of the child refers to the Koran and whispers an Arabic name in the child’s right ear. At the same time the presiding priest cuts the throat of a ram, and the festivities begin. Friends and family celebrate the birth with a huge feast.

❁ COMING OF AGE

The circumcision of males at puberty is traditional. Malians believe that by undergoing this ritual a boy becomes a man. The ritual is performed by trained older men who use knives, razors, and other sharp instruments. They perform the circumcision without anesthetic. This practice enjoys social backing, and families take great pride in it. Huge celebrations also follow this coming-of-age ritual.

❁ MARRIAGE

Among the Fulani tribe in Mali, a wedding is an elaborate affair involving dancing, singing, and feasting. One interesting wedding ritual requires the friends of the bride-to-be to take her to the forest. Here, the friends of the groom-to-be must find the bride, chase her, and then carry her back to the groom’s house. The bride must cry her heart out on her way back, to show her emotional self. Then the bride and groom sign in a book that has, “Do you Love (name of the bride or groom)?,” written inside.

Guests are expected to give gifts to thine bride and groom. Cooking pots are favorite gifts at most Fulani weddings.

❁ DEATH

The Dogon believe in the power of the supernatural and ancestral spirits. They have three main cults: that of Lebe (worship of the Earth god), Binu (a totemic practice), and Awa (worship of the dead). The Lebe cult involves rituals related to agriculture, and the chief priest of its practitioners is called the *hogon*. The cult of Binu has a complex association with the sacred beliefs of Dogon. The Binu shrines are home to the mythical ancestors who lived in the legendary realm before death made its appearance in the world.

The Awa cult is the custodian of ancestral spirits and has the responsibility for placing the spiritual forces in order. It is believed that the order of the spirits has been disturbed since the death of a mythological Dogon ancestor named Nommo. It is widely believed among the Dogon that the mythical Nommo lived alongside several others who inhab-

Fun Fact

Modern scientists discovered the “white dwarf star,” also known as “Sirius B,” in 1915 years ago. But the Dogon calendar, which is based on the star’s orbital cycles, has been in existence for more than a millennium.

ited this world before death became part of human fate. Nommo was the first victim of death in the Dogon culture. The term *nommo* also refers to amphibious beings that were sent to live on Earth by Sirius for the benefit of humanity. *Nommos* are often called “monitors” or “masters of the water” or “teachers.”

The Awas wear ceremonial masks and perform dance rituals on the occasion of death or death anniversaries. Through their ceremonial dance, it is believed that the Awas lead the souls of the deceased to their eternal resting place and also sanctify their journey into the ranks of ancestors.

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Malta

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Southern Europe; an archipelago in the Mediterranean Sea, off the coast of Italy, south of Sicily
Size	122 sq. mi.
Capital City	Valletta
Flag Description	Malta's flag has two vertical bands of equal size, one white (hoist side), the other red; a representation of the George Cross, edged in red, is located at the upper hoist-side corner.
Independence	September 21, 1964 (from the United Kingdom)
Population	398,534 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Maltese
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Maltese (descendants of ancient Carthaginians and Phoenicians, with strong elements of Italian and other Mediterranean people)
Major Language(s)	Malti or Maltese (official); English (official)
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (98%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Freedom Day, March 31; Labor Day, May 1; Sette Giugno, June 7; Independence Day, September 21; Republic Day, December 13

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

It is believed that a prehistoric civilization existed in Malta starting around 5200 B.C.E. The Phoenicians colonized Malta about 800 B.C.E. and named it Malat (which means "safe haven"). In 400 B.C.E. Malta came under the control of the Romans and prospered under their rule.

In 870 C.E. the Arabs conquered the island of Malta. Their rule lasted until 1090, after which it was taken over by the Sicilian Normans. After the Sicilians the islands passed to the Knights of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, who strengthened the defense of the islands just in time to defend them from the Turks, who invaded in 1565. The Maltese and the knights fought and defended the islands successfully. The knights were called "the saviors of Europe" due to their bravery.

Napoleon (1769–1821) conquered the islands in 1798. The Maltese despised French rule, especially because of the rigid stance on religion enforced by the French, and the

Maltese revolted against it. To assist Malta, Great Britain sent its navy, munitions, and other aid. Eventually France was forced to withdraw, and their forces surrendered in 1800. Malta then became a British protectorate. The Treaty of Paris, signed in 1814, officially made Malta a part of the British Empire. Malta's proximity to the Suez Canal was a big advantage to Britain. During World War I Malta played an important role because of its strategic location. In 1930 the British Mediterranean fleet was moved to Alexandria through Malta, since it is located close to Italy.

During World War II Malta was bombed by Germany and Italy. The island endured the heaviest bombardment. To honor the contributions of the Maltese people in this war, King George VI (1895–1952) awarded the George Cross to the "Island Fortress of Malta" in 1942. The cross appears today on the Maltese flag.

Malta was granted independence in September 1964. However, a fully independent status was not granted, and British forces still controlled the harbors, airport, and postal services of Malta. On December 13, 1974, Malta became a

Phoenicians

The Phoenicians were a group of people who lived on the Mediterranean coast in what is now Lebanon around 1350 B.C.E. These people were originally called Canaanites but were renamed Phoenicians. They emerged as great sailors and traveled all over the Mediterranean engaging in trade. As they became stronger they started their own colonies, the most important of which was called Carthage. In 539 the Phoenicians were conquered by the Persians and became part of the Persian Empire. In 332 B.C.E. Alexander the Great (356–23) attacked Persia, and the Phoenicians became a part of his empire. Some of the Lebanese, Syrians, Maltese, Tunisian, and a small percentage of Somalis still consider themselves to be descendants of the Phoenicians.

separate republic within the Commonwealth, and this day is celebrated as Republic Day in Malta.

Malta joined the European Union (EU) in May 2004. It is the smallest of the EU member countries.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in Southern Europe, the Republic of Malta is an archipelago in the central Mediterranean Sea. Three of the five islands in the Republic of Malta are inhabited: Gozo (Ghawdex); Malta Island (Malta), which is also the largest island; and Commino (Kemmuna). The islands have indented coastlines that provide them with a number of good harbors. Low hills and terraced fields characterize the terrain of the islands.

Malta enjoys a Mediterranean temperate climate, which is characterized by hot and dry summers and mild winters with frequent showers. In summer the average daily temperature is around 86°F, while in winter it is around 59°F.

Malta is home to a wide variety of Mediterranean flora that includes trees like the holm oak (a Mediterranean evergreen tree), the carob tree, the white poplar, the bay laurel, the *gharghar (araar)* tree (a species of cypress), the Judas tree, the common myrtle, and the orange tree. Flowers like the bumblebee, the acanthus, the spider orchid, the buttercup, and the lesser chickweed abound.

Malta also has diverse fauna including the *zring* (painted frog), *serpiswed* (black whip snake), *gremuxla tamalta* (Maltese wall lizard), and the Moorish gecko, as well as the endangered white shark. The Maltese government has declared three species of Mediterranean sharks endangered.

Fun Fact

Zring, painted frogs, are the only amphibians found in Malta.

❁ ECONOMY

Malta has a relatively stable economy that is dependent on tourism, manufacturing (textile and electronic products), and foreign trade (it is an important freight transshipment point). Malta has a huge deposit of limestone. However, the islands have limited freshwater resources and produce only 20 percent of their food requirements. The nation's workforce is highly productive, with more than 71 percent employed in the service sector, while agriculture employs only 5 percent.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Almost 98 percent of the nation's population is Roman Catholic, and the Catholic Church is the custodian of Malta's rich cultural heritage. Maltese are devoted to their religion and celebrate the feasts of various Catholic saints extravagantly. Some feasts are celebrated over a period of three days and are marked by religious services in local churches in honor of the saint, along with band processions and amazing fireworks. On the final day of many celebrations, the statues of saints are carried around the streets.

Malti and English are the official languages of Malta.

Traditional Maltese music is known as L-ghana, and the most popular style of L-ghana is known as *spirtu pront*, a singing duel between two or three singers (*ghannejjas*). It requires the participants to come up with rhyming lyrics while playing with



Women wear the faldetta, a traditional veil, on the Mediterranean island of Malta. Ninety-eight percent of the population is baptized Roman Catholic. (AP Photo/TLC)

words in a light-hearted manner. Brass band music is extremely popular during annual festivals in villages and towns. The tambourine and guitar are the most common musical instruments used in Maltese music.

Malta is renowned all over the world for its expertise in handcrafted products such as handwoven fabrics, silver filigree, blown glass, and hand-made lace.

❁ CUISINE

Maltese cuisine is heavily influenced by its Sicilian neighbor. It boasts a wide variety of ethnic dishes that include *timpana* (macaroni, egg pie, and cheese), *fenek* (a dish made from rabbit meat that is either fried or baked into a pie), *brungjel mimli* (stuffed eggplant), *braggoli* (beef rolls), *stuffat tal-qarnit* (octopus stew), *stuffat tal-fenek* (rabbit stew), and *pastizzi* (cheese pastries). Having been a British protectorate, many British food items (like grilled chops and roasts) are also featured on Maltese menus. Wine is the preferred beverage in Malta.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Gregorian, or Western, calendar year and is celebrated as New Year's Day in many countries. Revelries begin New Year's Eve (December 31) for celebrations that take place all over the world. In Malta people greet the new year with special parties that celebrate the occasion. They usher in the new year by singing, dancing, feasting, and drinking champagne and wine. At midnight people wish each other well and honk the horns of their cars as well as those of boats in the harbors to announce the arrival of the new year.

❁ FREEDOM DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 31

Freedom Day also called National Day or Jum il-Helsien, commemorates the departure of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and British forces from Malta on March 31, 1979, marking the end of British rule in the region. At the War Memorial at Floriana a special commemorative service is held on this day to honor all those who lost their lives to uphold the integrity and sovereignty of Malta. At the Grand Harbor in Malta there is a traditional boat race in the afternoon. Since it is a national holiday, all public and private institutions are closed.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. In Malta May 1 is a public holiday and all public and private institutions are closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ SETTE GIUGNO

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 7

This day commemorates the violent uprising in 1919 by the already impoverished Maltese population against the British administrators because of the increase in the price of bread. In 1814 Malta became a part of the British Empire. However, despite taking advantage of the Maltese harbors and making it a prominent naval base, British administrators totally neglected the needs of the Maltese people. As a result people were living in dire poverty. There was growing discontent regarding British rule, and a decision by the British administration to increase the price of bread in 1919 triggered a violent reaction. Many people lost their lives as British police brutally tried to crush the voices of dissent.

On this day a commemorative service is held at the Palace Square in Malta, and everyone remembers the protestors who lost their lives fighting British injustice.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 21

On September 21, 1964, Malta obtained total independence from the United Kingdom. Malta had been a British colony since 1815, and its strategic position gave British traders a competitive edge after the opening of the Suez Canal. However, the Maltese lived in an impoverished state and the British administration did nothing for their betterment. This resulted in the Uprising of 1919, when the Maltese people began demanding independence from British rule. The British pacified the local people by establishing the Maltese parliament in 1921 and gave more representation to the native Maltese. After World War II, despite a British promise to grant the Maltese the right of self-governance, the people univocally expressed their desire for total

Fun Fact

Malti is the only Semitic language (ancient languages mainly spoken by non-Arab populations in the Middle East) that is officially written in Latin characters. The Malti alphabet has 30 letters but does not use the letter y.

independence. Eventually the British government relented, and an independent Malta came into existence on September 21, 1964.

To commemorate this event, the president of the country presides over the Independence Day celebrations in the capital city of Valetta. Military parades, official speeches, and a host of cultural activities, as well as the Independence Day soccer match (played by regional teams to win the coveted Independence Day Cup), mark the Independence Day celebrations in Malta.

❁ REPUBLIC DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 13

According to a special resolution passed by the House of Representatives in the Maltese parliament, Malta was declared a republic on December 13, 1974. This event is celebrated with great enthusiasm on Republic Day. In the city of Marsa a horse race is organized on this day.

Religious Holidays

❁ FEAST OF ST. PAUL'S SHIPWRECK

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: February 10

In the Bible, the Acts of the Apostles reports that a ship carrying St. Paul, one of the prominent Christian saints, to Rome was wrecked at the island of Malta around 60 C.E. St. Paul came ashore and preached Christianity in the region for a while, and soon the local inhabitants embraced the religion. On this day devout Maltese Christians go to church and pray to St. Paul. They also thank God for the shipwreck that sent St. Paul to Malta and for communicating his message of love and peace through his disciple.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ ST. JOSEPH'S DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: March 19

Roman Catholics consider St. Joseph (the father of Jesus) the patron saint of workers, and they observe the Feast of St. Joseph on March 19. If the feast falls during Holy Week (Easter Week), then it is observed eight days after Easter or is observed on the Monday after Low Sunday (the first Sunday after Easter). Also if it falls on a Sunday, then it is observed on the previous Saturday (March 18).

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, also called Mourning Friday, Black Friday, or Holy Friday, commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. Thus it is observed as a somber, solemn occasion. It falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent (an austere season of fasting and penance). Many churches across Malta are splashed with red-colored water, which symbolizes Jesus' blood. In addition, Jesus' life, Crucifixion, and Resurrection are reenacted in plays that are performed in local churches. Many people participate in huge Good Friday processions and carry statues representing different scenes from the life of Jesus; some even dress as biblical characters like Adam and Eve, Noah, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. As a form of penance for their sins, they walk barefoot or carry heavy stones on their backs.

In Malta, and especially in the city of Rabat, devout Roman Catholics abstain from eating meat, since the Catholic Church forbids the consumption of meat on this solemn occasion.

A special prayer service is held that includes the Adoration of the Cross as well as other religious ceremonies. However, no Masses are held because this is an aliturgical day in the Roman Catholic Church. In many churches across Malta, a wooden rattle called a *cuqlajta* takes the place of church bells on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a Christian feast that celebrates a belief in Jesus' Resurrection from the dead three days after his Crucifixion. It falls on the first Sunday after the 40-day period of fasting called Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. In Malta Easter celebrations begin in complete darkness. Then at an appointed hour, church bells break the silence of the night, and the churches are illuminated with chandeliers, candles, floodlights, and bulbs announcing Jesus' Resurrection. On Easter a huge procession is organized in which pallbearers carry the statue of Jesus through the streets to symbolize his Resurrection. This tradition is carried out mainly in the cities of Valletta, Senglea, Vittoriosa, and Cospicua.

Families exchange gifts (especially chocolate-shaped eggs and rabbits, symbols of fertility taken from ancient pagan spring rites) and *figolli*, a special pastry shaped like a human, dove, fish or basket. It is filled with marzipan and coated with icing or chocolate. Over the next few days priests visit the homes of their parishioners and bless the inhabitants. Every-

one receives olive leaves. In ancient times they would burn these leaves in order to ward off evil spirits.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY, EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ FEAST OF ST. PETER AND ST. PAUL

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: June 29

The Feast of St. Peter is observed on June 29 to commemorate his death. St. Peter was one of the original 12 disciples and the first pope. Christians believe that he holds the “keys to heaven” and that devout Christians who have not sinned will meet him after death at the gates of heaven.

The Feast of St. Paul is also celebrated on this day. St. Paul is considered the best interpreter of Christ’s teachings. In Malta the feast is known as *Mnarja*, a name derived from the Maltese word *luminarja* (which means “illumination”), which refers to the huge bonfire built in Mdina, the medieval capital of Malta, as part of the feast. On the eve of *Mnarja* traditional folk concerts and other musical events take place until early the next morning. Fried rabbit is the traditional dish for the occasion.

In the city of Buskett an agrarian exhibition and band marches commemorate this special feast, while a traditional horse race is organized in Rabat, the capital of Gozo, an island in the Maltese Archipelago. Rabat, also known as Victoria, has no connection with the Moroccan city of the same name.

❁ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: August 15

Assumption, also known as Virgin Mary’s Day, commemorates the Assumption of Mary, the mother of Jesus, into heaven. In Malta devout Catholics attend a special prayer service in Mary’s honor and ask her to continue to bless them. On the island of Gozo, Catholics attend a Mass in the cathedral dedicated to Assunta, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

❁ OUR LADY OF VICTORIES DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: September 8

Our Lady of Victories Day commemorates the birth of Mary, the mother of Jesus, believed to have been born on September 8. It is a day for the Maltese to offer special prayers to Mary, the patron saint of Malta. Additionally on this day the Maltese celebrate various victories recorded in the history of Malta,

including the lifting of the Turkish siege from Malta in 1565, the defeat of France in 1800, and the defeat of the Axis (Germany, Italy, and Japan) by British forces in 1943 in Malta. In the capital city of Valetta, a commemorative ceremony is held to celebrate these historic victories on Maltese soil, and there is a traditional boat race at the Grand Harbor.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: December 8

The Immaculate Conception celebrates the Roman Catholic belief that Jesus’ mother Mary was born free from all sin and was filled with God’s grace, unlike other mortals. On the island of Gozo, worshippers go to the cathedral dedicated to Assunta (the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin) and participate in a special Mass held on this day.

More elaborate celebrations are held in the small Maltese village of Qala, which has a national shrine dedicated to the Immaculata (Immaculate Conception). On the morning of December 8, a special Mass is attended by thousands of the faithful in the cathedral. The priest addresses the congregation, praising the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary and exhorting worshippers to have unwavering faith in the immaculate mother of Jesus. Church choirs sing hymns as people offer prayers to Mary. In the evening, a huge procession takes place.

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world. It celebrates the birth of Jesus, whom they believe was the son of God. In Malta Christmas is the most important of all the religious festivals. On Christmas Eve, homes, streets, and churches are adorned with multicolored lights (*festuni*) while families decorate Christmas trees (*is-sigra tal-Milied*) with ribbons, colorful balls, and candles. In almost every home a crib (*preseppi*) is placed beneath the tree along with clay figurines (*pasturi*) representing the infant Jesus, Mary, Joseph, donkeys, cows, and other objects from the Nativity scene.

People attend the Christmas Eve Mass and in many parts of the country young children recite the sermon regarding the birth of Jesus during Mass. On Christmas Eve in the St. John Co-Cathedral in the capital city of Valletta, a special candlelit carol service is held. Special processions are held in different towns and villages in which children sing Christmas carols while carrying small statues of the infant Jesus.

On Christmas Day the Maltese visit their friends and families, and gifts and greetings are

exchanged. Children open their presents, which they believe have been delivered by Santa Claus. The traditional Christmas meal consists of *qagħaq tal-ghasel* (a kind of honey treacle rings), *timpāna* (macaroni with crusty pastry), *il-pudina tal-Milied* (pudding), and *id-dundjan* (turkey).

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ FIREWORKS FESTIVAL

Observed in: Valletta

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 29–30

The Fireworks Festival is one of the most spectacular events held in the capital city of Valletta. The festivities take place near Grand Harbor, where fireworks factories light up the evening skies through spectacular pyro-musical (synchronized fireworks and music) displays. The festival authorities use an innovative technology called “Fire One” to showcase the superiority of Maltese fireworks. The Fire One uses a sophisticated firing technology that employs a computer-controlled system to orchestrate the entire event. Fireworks manufacturers and experts enthusiastically participate in this festival and display their products. Thousands of people from all over Malta flock to the capital city to take part in the festivities.

❁ MALTA INTERNATIONAL CHOIR FESTIVAL

Observed in: Valletta

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 8–12

The Malta International Choir Festival is an annual musical event that takes place in the capital city of Valletta. The main objective of the festival is to provide a platform for the best choirs in the world. Its aim is to enthral its audiences while fostering a spirit of camaraderie among the choirs. This event was first organized in 1989 and has enjoyed increasing popularity ever since.

Choirs are attracted to this prestigious event by a variety of awards and cash prizes. A commemorative silver plaque is also given to every participating choir. During the festival each choir is required to perform a repertoire that should include one national song as well as songs from at least three

different periods of musical history (such as classical, baroque, romantic, and modern).

On the night of the semifinals the selected choirs are required to perform a test piece selected by the organizers of the event. An international jury judges the semifinals and final acts on the basis of set criteria.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

In ancient times the Maltese believed that a marriage is truly blessed only if the couple has children. Most marriages took place in the months of January, April, and August, since they also believed that these were the months that women were most fertile. In addition it was believed that a woman would have a safe delivery if the couple got married during days known as *stilla*, or “star.” On the Maltese calendar there are six such auspicious days in a year, three of which are: St. Ursula’s Day (October 21), St. Catherine’s Day (November 23), and St. Lucy’s Day (December 13).

Maltese parents seek the blessings of a number of saints to ensure a safe delivery and even make votive offerings such as infant dresses and flowers as tokens of thanks for ensuring a safe and easy delivery of a healthy infant. The Shrines of St. Blaise, St. Raymond, and St. Ludgarda are visited before and after the birth of the child.

In addition, in different parts of Malta different religious practices have been associated with childbirth. At Naxxar pregnant women tried to ensure an easy delivery by drinking water mixed with a special powder believed to be made from the bones of an 18th-century saint St. Victor, the patron saint of pregnant women.

The date of one’s birth was also very significant in Malta. The Maltese believe that a person born on August 15, the Feast of the Assumption, might grow up to be a jockey and participate in horse races, since horse racing was one of the major activities associated with the Assumption. December 24 was considered the most inauspicious day for birth since there is a Maltese superstition that people born on Christmas Eve were doomed to be transformed into ghosts, called *gewgaws* and would frighten others by their horrifying appearance at least once a year throughout their lives.

❁ MARRIAGE

In ancient Malta parents never consulted their daughters about marriage, and, as a way of communicating that their daughter had reached marriageable age, parents would place a pot filled with sweets

Fun Fact

After the wedding the Maltese bride remains at her father’s house. On the eighth day she goes to her husband’s home. This ritual is known as *il-hagra*.

on the outer wall of their house. Interested suitors sent their proposal through a *buttab*, or elderly marriage broker, to the girl's parents. If the proposal was accepted and the amount of dowry determined, then the suitor attached a gold ring to the mouth of a fish and sent it to his bride-to-be's family.

Next a feast of engagement, known as *ir-rabta*, was celebrated. During the feast the bride introduced her fiancé to her parents and other family members. Then a ring in the form of two joined hands was presented to the woman by her fiancé, while she presented a handkerchief with beautiful lace to him.

On the day of the wedding, a troupe of musicians and singers accompanied the bride and groom to the church and sang special songs of praise and happiness for the couple. After a solemn church

wedding, they were showered with wheat, grains, and nuts by the guests. A lavish wedding feast followed, and the bride received gifts from the guests.

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Marshall Islands

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Group of atolls and reefs in Micronesia (Oceania) in the north Pacific Ocean, about halfway between Hawaii and Australia
Size	70 sq. mi.
Capital City	Majuro
Flag Description	The flag of the Marshall Islands is blue with a white star with four large rays and 20 small rays on the hoist side above two stripes, one orange, the other white, radiating from the lower hoist-side corner.
Independence	October 21, 1986 (from a UN trusteeship administered by the United States)
Population	59,071 (July 2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional government in free association with the United States
Nationality	Marshallese
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Micronesian
Major Language(s)	English and two major Marshallese dialects from the Malayo-Polynesian family are official; Japanese
Major Religion(s)	Christian (mostly Protestant)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Memorial and Nuclear Victims' Day, March 1; Constitution Day, May 1; Fisherman's Day, July 4; Rijeherhal Day (worker's Day), September; Manit Day, September 24; President's Day, November 17; Thanksgiving, November; Gospel Day, December

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

According to historical findings, eastern Micronesia, including the Marshall Islands, was occupied by the Melanesians and people from western Micronesia around the second millennium B.C.E., but little is known about the Islands' prehistory. Artifacts found on the Majuro Islands have yielded carbon dates of 30 B.C.E and 50 C.E.

There are conflicting histories regarding the European colonization of the Marshall Islands. According to one version Spanish navigator Alonso de Salazar was probably the first European to notice the Marshall Islands on August 21, 1526. Another version claims that a total of seven Spanish navigators encountered the islands sometime between 1529 and 1568 and credits another Spaniard, Alvaro Saavedra, with the first

sighting of the islands in 1529. The seventh Spanish captain in the sequence, Alvaro de Mendana, is said only to have "passed" the Marshall Islands on a return trip to Acapulco, Mexico. But as far as is known none of these navigators actually attempted a landing.

The first version delays actual European contact for several centuries following de Salazar's passing notice in 1526, until the arrival of the English navigator John Marshall in 1788. The alternative history mentions a gap of merely 200 years and credits Britain's sea captain Samuel Wallis (c. 1720–95) with the next European sighting. It claims he accidentally found the Rongerik and Rongelap atolls while sailing from Tahiti to Tinian in 1778. Both versions agree that mapping of the islands began in 1788 with John Marshall (1748–1819), for whom the islands are named. However, one history omits any reference to a certain Thomas Gilbert, who is mentioned, in the second account, as Marshall's companion.

Proas

In all probability many, if not all, of the Pacific island groups were settled by Southeast Asians whose primary mode of ocean travel was the proa, a type of canoe. Far from the primitive vessel that one might imagine, the proa was among the fastest sailing craft in existence well into the 20th century, and many modern boats built for speed-sailing competition continue to borrow design features from the proa. The traditional proa consists of two unequal, parallel hulls, much like an outrigger canoe in appearance, with very sharp keels. The hulls are painstakingly carved out of breadfruit trees and joined by skillful patching and shaping. The main hull, called the *vaka*, is generally larger than the windward hull, which is called the *ama*. The *vaka* and the *ama* are connected by crossbeams called *akas*. The sails, made of woven strips of pandanus leaves, are still used on traditional proas and are called crab-claw sails because of their shape.

Micronesian proas were designed in different sizes for different purposes. The smallest proa is the *riwut*, often used by children for racing. The *kor-kor* is also a small paddling outrigger, similar to the canoe, averaging about 15 feet in length, used for short distances inside lagoons and sometimes rigged with a sail. The *tipnol* is a medium-sized boat, with hulls averaging between 20 and 30 feet. Used

primarily as a fishing vessel and capable of ocean travel, it is faster than the largest size proa the *walap*. The latter is the design best adapted for long sea voyages. It can reach up to 100 feet in length and carry 40 people and their supplies. Although proas may differ in their design features, their chief characteristic is their ability to switch direction as they change tack: The bow becomes the stern and the stern becomes the bow. This feature, called shunting, enables sailors to keep the same hull to windward, providing ballast. In a strong wind the weight of the crew also provides ballast, counteracting the wind's force on the sail. A gentle breeze would be a one-man wind, whereas an extremely strong wind would require four men.

The Micronesians recorded the swells of the sea. They also used stick charts to teach navigation skills. There are two basic kinds of stick chart: *Mat-tang* is used to teach recognition of oceanic swell patterns; the *rebbeli* shows the relative position of islands in the group or one of its chains. Cowrie shells are used to represent islands on stick charts. The maps are constructed from strips of coconut midrib or pandanus root attached to a frame. The curved strips indicate the direction taken by swells when deflected by an island, and island currents are represented by short straight pieces.

Moving into the early 19th century, the details become somewhat clearer. The mapping project started by Marshall was apparently continued by Russian expeditions under Adam Johann Krusenstern (1770–1846) in 1803 and Otto von Kotzebue (a Russian naval officer who accompanied von Krusenstern on his voyages; 1787–1846) in 1817 and 1823.

U.S. whalers were frequent visitors to the islands in the 1820s. American missionaries who landed at Jaluit in 1857 embarked on the process of converting the islanders. In 1878 Germany established a coal-loading station at Jaluit Atoll and signed a commercial treaty with its chiefs. In 1885 with the sanction of Great Britain, Germany declared the Marshall Islands a protectorate, and it remained a German possession until 1914. Germany chose Jaluit as the administrative center of the Marshall Islands, a decision maintained under the Japanese when they seized the islands in 1914.

In 1920 along with neighboring islands, the Marshall Islands were incorporated into the League of Nations Mandate administered by Japan. Japan embarked on an aggressive economic development program that promoted immigration, and the original islanders were quickly outnumbered by Japanese, Okinawan, and Korean immigrants. Strategic battle-

grounds in World War II, these islands were liberated from Japanese occupation by U.S. forces in 1944 and came under U.S. administration when the war ended. On April 2, 1947, the Marshall Islands, along with their Pacific neighbors, became the UN Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands administered by the United States. The Trust Territory covered roughly three million square miles of the Pacific Ocean, but the actual land-mass was only about 600 square miles.

Soon afterward the island of Bikini (known before World War II as Escholtz Atoll) became the venue of a vast scientific-military experiment to determine the effects of atomic bombs on naval vessels. The islands of Bikini and Eniwetok were the site of 66 confirmed nuclear test explosions between 1946 and 1958. The United States relied on

Fun Fact

There are an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 islands in the Pacific Ocean, but the precise number is unknown. The Pacific island nations are grouped into three more encompassing categories: Melanesia, which means “black islands”; Micronesia, which means “small islands”; and Polynesia, which means “many islands.”

Fun Fact

Two atolls in the Marshall Islands, Rongerik (“small cheeks”) and Rongelap (“large cheeks”), are said to have been named after two brothers. The Islands’ version of the legend has not been recorded, but other stories about them and their seafaring family abound throughout Oceania.

appointed officials to administer the region. During the 1950s criticism from the UN Trusteeship Council and also from within the United States initiated a movement toward autonomy for the islands. In 1965 the peoples of the Trust Territory elected the Congress of Micronesia, which had genuine legislative powers. Thus the process of self-determination began. The Marshallese preferred to maintain strong but autonomous ties with the United States. They eventually chose to become a sovereign nation in free association with the United States.

In 1978, after voting to separate from the other units of the Trust Territory, the Marshall Islands drew up a constitution. The voters approved it in 1979, thus forming a republic and bringing about internal self-government. Under the constitution, the republic is headed by a president elected by a unicameral 33-member parliament (*nitijela*). The council of chiefs (*iroji*) has a consultative function with regard to traditional laws and customs. The first president of the republic of the Marshall Islands was Amata Kabua (1928–96), who held office for four consecutive terms

The formal signing of the compact by the United States and the Republic of the Marshall Islands on June 25, 1983, came as the finale to 13 long years of negotiations. In a plebiscite on September 7, 1983, the Marshallese approved the compact by a margin of 58 percent. In 1986 the *nitijela* approved the compact in accordance with the constitution.

On May 28, 1986, the UN Trusteeship Council noted that the Marshallese had freely exercised their right of self-determination. Without the technical approval of the UN Security Council, the United States unilaterally declared the end of the trusteeship. Finally on December 22, 1990, the Security Council confirmed the termination of the Trusteeship Agreement for the Republic of the Marshall Islands. The Marshall Islands became a member of the United Nations on September 17, 1991.

Meanwhile the compact had been enforced on

October 21, 1986 (subsequently amended and renewed as of May 1, 2004, until 2023). Under the compact the Marshall Islands became a sovereign nation with full internal self-government, as well as full authority to engage in international relations in its own name and right. As laid down in the compact, the United States is required to provide defense and external security for the republic, as well as financial assistance. The compact entitles the United States to maintain and use various military bases on the islands, including the key space-tracking station on Kwajalein.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The Republic of the Marshall Islands consists of 5 islands and 29 atolls, each comprising many islets in the central Pacific between 4° and 14° north and 160° and 173° east. The islands and atolls are situated in two chainlike formations, called, respectively, the Sunrise (Ratak) and Sunset (Ralik) groups. They look so much like rich strings of pearls that visitors have named them the “Pearl of the Pacific.” The total number of islands and islets in the whole republic is approximately 1,225, spanning an area of over 750,000 square miles. The total land area is about 117 square miles. The mean height of the land is less than 7 feet above sea level, with the highest point being an unnamed location on Likiep Island (approximately 33 feet).

The weather in the Marshall Islands is tropical—hot and humid—but cooled by trade winds that blow throughout the year. The average temperature hovers around 81°F, without many fluctuations. As elsewhere in the Pacific, the skies are quite cloudy although tropical storms are very rare. The waters near the island abound in numerous species of coral, 250 species of reef fish, and all the major species of turtles. Whales, dolphins, and porpoises are also attracted by the islands’ warm waters. Around 70 bird species live on the islands, and other fauna include the Polynesian rat, lizards, blind snakes, and coconut land crabs.

The coconut palm is Micronesia’s most important plant. Copra (the dried flesh of the nut from which coconut oil is made) is a major export item. Local edible flora are breadfruit, pandanus, taro, arrowroot, yams, pumpkins, tapioca (manioc), and bananas. Most of the land is privately owned by families or clans, so there is little scope for developing national parks or reserve forests for providing a safe haven for animals.

ECONOMY

U.S. government assistance is the mainstay of the island nation’s economy, and the Marshallese use U.S. currency. Agricultural production, primarily for subsistence, is concentrated in small farms; the most important commercial crops are coconuts and breadfruit. Small-scale industry is limited to handicrafts, tuna processing, and copra. Although the

Blind Snakes

Blind snakes are often called “worm snakes” because of their resemblance to earthworms. Although they have black spots where the eyes would be, they are blind and are only able to distinguish between light and darkness. However, they are able to track ants and termites to their nests by following their scent trails.

tourist industry is a source of foreign exchange, it employs less than 10 percent of the labor force. The islands have few natural resources, and imports far exceed exports. Under the terms of the Amended Compact of Free Association, the United States will provide millions of dollars per year to the Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI) until 2023, at which time a trust fund made up of U.S. and RMI contributions will begin perpetual annual payouts. Government downsizing, drought, a drop in construction, declines in tourism and foreign investment due to Asian financial difficulties, and less income from the renewal of fishing vessel licenses have held the growth of gross domestic product (GDP) to an average of 1 percent over the past decade.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The Marshallese are maintaining their cultural values and customs, known as *manit*, which make their society unique. Land is the focal point of social life. All Marshallese possess land rights as part of a clan, or *jowi*, that owes allegiance to a chief (*iroij*), supervised by the clan head (*alap*), and supported by the workers (*rijerbal*). The *iroij* have supreme control over land tenure, resource use and distribution, and dispute settlement. The *alap* supervises the maintenance of lands and daily activities. The *rijerbal* are responsible for all daily work on the land including cleaning, farming, and construction activities. The Marshall Islands' social structure is matrilineal, and land is inherited through the women's side of the family. Marshallese belongs to the Austronesian language family, of the Malayo-Polynesian subgroup.

The Marshallese are mainly Protestants, although the Catholic Church has also established a strong presence in the islands. Sundays are set aside for rest and relaxation and attending church services. The Marshallese are known throughout the Pacific and the world for their friendly, peaceful nature. Among their outstanding qualities are sharing their resources and possessions with family and friends, showing a warm and friendly attitude toward strangers, and care and consideration for others.

Family and community are inextricably entwined in Marshallese society, and the people live in large close-knit families, counting grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins—even distant relatives—among their close kin. The strong family ties contribute to communities similarly sustained.

Marshallese handicrafts are known throughout the central Pacific region for their high-quality workmanship and originality, as well as for their judicious use of natural products. The handicrafts (*amimono*) include a broad range of durables and utility items such as woven baskets, fans, hats, wall hangings, purses, mats, and coasters. These utilize raw materials like coconut, pandanus leaves (*maan*), and shells. Also commonly available is an array of coconut oil products ranging from handsoaps to laundry detergents. Not only are these products good for the skin but they are eco-friendly as well.

❁ CUISINE

Two-thirds of the nation's population is concentrated in Majuro, the capital, and Ebeye. Because of the limited space available for agriculture, the urban dwellers are heavily dependent on rice as their staple carbohydrate. Although the outer islands are not as densely populated (because there is little gainful employment), their life remains comparatively traditional and their diet is generally better than that of many city dwellers because it is fresh.

Nevertheless, the people of the Marshall Islands have an austere diet, mostly limited to seafood, breadfruit, pandanus, and swamp taro, in addition to the ubiquitous coconut. In the north, where rain is scarce, arrowroot is cultivated for its starch. The plant needs little looking after. In its natural state the roots are bitter. To obtain flour these tubers are scrubbed, macerated, pounded, and sieved repeatedly until a lump of pure carbohydrate is produced, which is then dried in the sun. By this stage, the bitterness disappears, and the dried flour can be stored for an indefinite period.

Fun Fact

A Marshallese story explains that their traditional greeting, *lokwe yuk* (literally, "love to you"), used as both "hello" and "good-bye," is derived from *iakwe*, literally, "you are a rainbow," because rainbows are frequently seen in Majuro.

Fun Fact

Micronesian bogymen are cannibal spirits or ogres whose singular features are their brute strength and stupidity.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 is the first day of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, and is widely celebrated as New Year's Day. Celebrations take place all over the world, starting on the evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve). In most parts of the world, New Year's Day is enthusiastically celebrated by everyone regardless of ethnic or religious affiliation. The Marshallese joyously welcome the new year with the ringing of church bells. All educational and commercial organizations remain closed.

❁ MEMORIAL AND NUCLEAR VICTIMS' DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 1

This day commemorates a significant event in world history. During the period from June 30, 1946–August 18, 1958, the United States conducted

67 nuclear tests in the Marshall Islands. The most powerful of those tests was the Bravo Shot, a 15-megaton device detonated on March 1, 1954, at Bikini atoll. Bikini was denuded, along with the neighboring atoll of Eniwetok. That test alone had 1,000 times the force of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Altogether, six of the Marshall Islands were vaporized by the surface detonation of 67 atomic and hydrogen thermonuclear bombs. These tests brought in their wake untold sorrow and misery for the Marshall Islanders. Many of them lost their lives in the aftermath of the explosions. Others were maimed, diseased, and crippled for life. This day is therefore a somber and sorrowful occasion. On this day the Marshallese honor those who lost their lives and pray for the health and well-being of those who survived the devastation. All public and government offices remain closed on this day.

❁ CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Constitution Day, or Proclamation of the Republic, is a major public holiday in the Republic of the Marshall Islands. It has dual significance. On this day the proclamation of the republic status of the Marshall Islands was followed by the adoption of the constitution. Both of these events took place in 1979. These very important occasions are celebrated with parades, public speeches, and processions.

❁ FISHERMAN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 4

With its 29 coral atolls, spanning an area of 750,000 square miles across the tropical Pacific Ocean, the Marshall Islands may well be considered a fishermen's heaven. More than 1,000 species of fish (860 inshore/reef, 7 freshwater/brackish, 67 open water, and 125 deep sea fish) provide a unique opportunity for angling and large-scale fishing within the lagoons and on the reefs, as well as in the vast ocean waters. It is easy to understand why this country became the venue for this annual event, which includes two days of fishing and attracts participants from even neighboring Pacific Island countries. All public and government offices are closed on this day.

❁ RIJERBAL DAY (WORKER'S DAY)

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First Friday in September

Reflecting the Marshall Islands' history of U.S. administration, Riberjal, or Worker's Day, occurs in early September to honor the contributions of the

society's workers, called riberjal in the Marshall Islands.

Marshallese commemorate the day with public speeches, processions, and other activities.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ MANIT DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 24

Manit Day, or Customs Day, has been set aside by the Marshallese to celebrate their rich heritage of cultural traditions and customs (*manit*). This official holiday upholds, showcases, and promotes the culture of the Marshall Islands among the indigenous peoples as well as to the entire world. All the public schools participate and set up booths at the Alele Museum (a cultural museum) to sell handicrafts, food, and other local products.

❁ PRESIDENT'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 17

This day commemorates the birthday of Amata Kabua, who was elected the first president of the Republic of the Marshall Islands in 1979. Subsequently, he occupied the post of president for four consecutive terms, having been elected in 1983 and reelected in 1987, 1991, and 1996. On this day Marshall Islanders recollect the significant contributions of President Kabua to the nation and pay homage to him.

❁ THANKSGIVING

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Last Thursday in November

Because the Marshall Islands was under U.S. administration for a considerable period of time, the country adopted the practice of celebrating the U.S. Thanksgiving holiday, which is known locally as Kamolol Day. As in the United States, the festival is observed with church services, family reunions, and a customary turkey dinner.

See also Volume III: THANKSGIVING

❁ GOSPEL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First Friday in December

When Protestant missionaries from southern denominations of the United States brought Christian doctrine to the Marshall Islands, they also introduced the joyful, celebratory style of Gospel music. Perhaps because it is a physically active kind of religious music, the indigenous people readily adopted it along with Christianity. This happy meeting of

different cultures is celebrated annually on the islands on the first Friday in December.

Religious Holidays

✿ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, also called Black Friday, Holy Friday, or Mourning Friday, commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. Good Friday is a day of mourning in memory of Jesus' Crucifixion, even though it contains within it the miracle of the Resurrection, and some churches are darkened to symbolize this sad event. This Christian festival has been in the Roman Catholic liturgical calendar even longer than Easter, but many Protestant churches also hold special services from noon until three in the afternoon on this day to symbolize Jesus' last hours on the Cross. Many of the faithful fast on this day; at any meals served fish is preferred over meat.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

For Christians, Easter is the most important holiday of the year, and the numerous celebrations and observances associated with it—Fat (or Shrove) Tuesday, Ash Wednesday, Lent, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Pentecost, and Ascension Day—form the core of the liturgical year. It begins around the time of the vernal equinox in the Northern Hemisphere (the autumnal equinox in the Southern Hemisphere) and stretches out into summer in the Northern Hemisphere (winter in the Southern Hemisphere).

This occasion celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus three days after his Crucifixion. Christians believe Jesus was the Son of God and died on the Cross to redeem humanity from sin. The agonizing and gory Crucifixion of Jesus took place on what is now called Good Friday. In the early morning of the third day after the Crucifixion, which happened to be Sunday, some of Jesus' disciples went to the cave (tomb) where the body had been laid. They were astonished to find that the heavy rock that had covered the mouth of the tomb was moved and the body had vanished. They learned that Jesus had been resurrected, or raised from his dead. Grief turned into celebration following this amazing occurrence, and Easter is a joyful Christian holiday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world. It celebrates the birth of Jesus, whom Christians believe to be the Son of God. Christmas has been celebrated in the Marshall Islands since the 1850s, when the first U.S. Protestant missionaries arrived and gradually converted the majority of the natives. This festival is the most eagerly awaited holiday in the Marshall Islands.

The Christmas season in the Marshall Islands is celebrated by lively music and foot-stomping dances, as well as such traditional activities as religious services, carol singing, exchanging gifts, tree-trimming (for better and more effective illumination on this festive occasion), family gatherings, and a general spirit of goodwill.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Rites of Passage

✿ BIRTH

One of the significant family events among the Marshallese is the *kemem*, or the first birthday of a child. On this occasion the relatives and family friends of the child's parents come together to celebrate with eating and singing.

✿ COMING OF AGE

Prior to the advent of missionaries to these islands, tattooing was a highly popular and common practice among the Marshallese. It was an integral part of the rite of passage to man- or womanhood. Considered the sole attribute to be carried to the grave, it also served to confirm ties of family and birth. Facial tattooing was practiced, but this was not part of the coming-of-age rituals. It was done to conceal the onset of wrinkles and was the sole prerogative of the chiefs of the various clans.

✿ DEATH

The pre-Christian mythology of the Micronesian peoples who settled the Marshall Islands apparently took for granted that the gods intended for humans to be mortal. There is no single heroic cultural figure who attempts to steal the secret of immortality for human beings. The souls of the dead must travel north or west to a "leaping place" that sends them to an island of the dead, or into the heavens, or underground. Among some Marshall Islanders it is believed that the dead have to swim a channel to the island of Nako, where the spirit food is everlasting. But not every spirit reaches Nako:

Those that are made heavy by their many sins sink instead.

Funerals on the Marshall Islands comprise the *ilomij*, or wake, the *kallib*, or burial, and the *araek*, or feast—held six days later.

Further Reading

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❧ Martini ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	An island between the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean, located north of Trinidad and Tobago
Size	425 sq. mi.
Capital City	Fort de France
Flag Description	Martinique's flag has a light blue background divided into four quadrants by a white cross; in the center of each rectangle is a white snake. (On official occasions, the flag of France is used.)
Independence	None. Martinique is an overseas department of France.
Population	432,900 (2005 est.)
Government	Martinique is administered as a department of France.
Nationality	Martiniquais
Major Ethnic Group(s)	African and African-white-Amerindian mixture (90%)
Major Language(s)	French; Creole patois
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (85%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Bastille Day, July 14; Armistice Day, November 11

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

When Columbus (1451–1506) discovered the island of Martinique in 1502, it was inhabited by the Carib Indians, who called it Madinina, or the Island of Flowers. More than a century after Columbus's voyage, the first party of French settlers, led by Pierre Belain d'Esnambuc (1585–1636), landed on the northwestern side of this island in 1635. They built a small fort in 1635 and established a settlement that became the island's first capital city Saint Pierre. The primary purpose of the colony was to produce sugar using slave labor. The indigenous Caribs were expelled from the island and forbidden to return in 1660.

Between 1794 and 1815 the British also attempted to establish their control over the island. This period witnessed a continuous shuffling of power between Britain and France until 1802, when the Treaty of Amiens handed Martinique back to France. Finally in 1848, slavery was officially abolished for good.

In 1946 Martinique became an overseas department (state) of France. In 1958 when they were given the choice between independence and integrating with France, they opted for the latter. French currency, stamps, and the French flag are used in Martinique. Its administrative and political structures have been identical to those of the other French departments since 1946. It was granted the status of a region in 1974. Fort de France is the administrative and commercial capital of the island.

❧ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The climate of Martinique is tropical and largely humid, though trade winds moderate the humidity. The rainy season lasts from June to October. The entire island is vulnerable to devastating hurricanes that occur approximately every eight years. The island's average temperature remains around 79°F. The terrain is dominated by Mount Pelée, a volcano that last erupted on May 8, 1902, completely destroying the city of Saint Pierre and killing 30,000 inhabitants.

ECONOMY

The economy of Martinique is based on sugarcane, bananas, tourism, and light industry. Sugar production is in decline, with most of the sugarcane now being used for the production of rum. Banana exports are increasing, with France as the principal market. The bulk of meat, vegetables, and grain required for the local population has to be imported, contributing to a chronic trade deficit that requires considerable monetary aid from France to counterbalance it. Tourism, which employs more than 11,000 people, has become more important than agricultural exports as a source of foreign exchange.

Fun Fact

Josephine, the wife of Napoleon Bonaparte, was born on Martinique.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Martinique is a young society formed with contributions from a variety of social groups: Caribbean, West African, French, and East Indian (mainly Tamil). While French remains the official language, Creole is the everyday language used by the people. Such a bilingual society, in which the vernacular tongue remains in active use without an official status, has encouraged the emergence of a parallel culture based on oral tradition. The use of Creole, notably in public contexts, has become an important symbol of identity for the people of Martinique, culturally differentiating them from France.

The island's population of approximately 432,000 is comprised largely of the descendants of West African slaves and their *métissages* (mixed-race descendants, mainly with the French and later with the Tamils). Like other Creole areas, the island is markedly multicultural, and its musical practices are complex and drawn from multiple sources, old and new. Martinique is famous for the musical style called zouk, which became popular in the 1980s.

CUISINE

Martinique's cuisine reflects its many cultures. The local Creole specialties combine the finesse of French cuisine with the spices of African cooking and the flavors of East Indian and Southeast Asian recipes. Fresh seafood appears on most menus.

Skeet Shoots

A round of skeet consists of 25 shots fired at clay targets thrown from either a high house to the left or a low house to the right. Normally five shooters compete at one time and shoot alternatively from eight different positions (stations). Each shooter aims first at a target falling from the high house, then at one thrown from the low house.

Some specialties include shellfish, smoked fish, stuffed land crabs, stewed conch, and curry dishes. The meals are preceded by local rum drinks and accompanied by imported French wines. *Le déjeuner*, or lunch, is often the main meal of the day.

Legal/Public Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

In Martinique New Year's Day is celebrated with family reunions and festivities centered on the home. The first day of the new year is considered an ideal time to reflect on abandoning bad habits and changing one's life for the better. The New Year's buoyant mood is ushered in by the festivities on New Year's Eve. On December 31 families throughout the island take part in traditional midnight suppers, dancing, and putting up decorations. Parties are also held in hotels and restaurants. Cultural events, such as arts and crafts exhibitions, concerts, and dance performances, are a part of the celebrations held across the island. People greet each other with good wishes for the coming year and exchange gifts.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Labor Day, also called May Day and Workers' Day, is celebrated throughout much of the world to honor and recognize the contributions of workers to economic development and progress. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union the American Federation of Labor (AFL) demanding an eight-hour workday.

In Martinique the day features parades, skeet shoots, which are organized throughout the island. Boat races are also popular on this day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

BASTILLE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 14

On July 14 the people of Martinique celebrate Bastille Day, which commemorates the end of the French monarchy and the start of the French Revolution. Bastille Day is the most important French holiday; because of its close ties to France, Martinique also observes the holiday. Most people on the island celebrate on both July 13 and 14. On this

joyous occasion people enthusiastically take part in balls held at various places. There are also fireworks displays, parades, and concerts.

❁ ARMISTICE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 11

Armistice Day, also known as Remembrance Day or Veteran's Day, commemorates the official end of World War I on November 11, 1918. On this day the people of Martinique observe a minute of silence at 11:00 A.M. as a mark of respect.

Veterans' organizations sponsor parades to honor the soldiers who died during this and subsequent wars.

Religious Holidays

❁ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: January 6

Epiphany, also called La Fête des Rois or the Festival of Kings, celebrates the visit paid by the Three Wise Men (the three kings of the East—Balthazar, Gaspar, and Melchior), to the infant Jesus at Bethlehem. The event was believed to have occurred on January 6, though there is no mention of a specific date in the Scriptures. As in France the traditional dishes served at dinner on this day in Martinique include a cake known as *galette des rois* (the cake of the kings). These cakes start appearing in the island's bakeries and stores immediately after Christmas. A lucky charm (*une fève*), traditionally a bean, is baked into the cake. Whoever finds the charm in their slice of cake becomes the king or queen and gets to wear a paper crown. The king or queen then has to choose his queen or her king by dropping the lucky charm into the glass of the person they choose.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EPIPHANY

❁ CARNIVAL

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: February

In Martinique Carnival is both a religious and a public holiday. The official beginning of Carnival is Samedi Gras (Fat Saturday, preceding Fat Tuesday, or Mardi Gras), when people attend parties and dance all night. King Vaval, a giant mannequin, is the king of Carnival and is featured, along with beautiful floats and revelers, in the big parade on Dimanche Gras (Fat Sunday). Lundi Gras (Fat Monday) is the day of the red devils. On this day everyone wears red devil costumes adorned with shimmering silver and glittering embellishments.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; LENT

❁ ASH WEDNESDAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: First day of Lent

Ash Wednesday, also called Day of the She-Devils in Martinique, is the first day of Lent. The name originated from the age-old custom, practiced by the Catholic faithful, of smearing the forehead with ash in the shape of a cross. In Martinique it is considered a time for prayers as well as celebrations. Drinking of locally brewed rum, reputedly among the world's best, is common on this day. People customarily dress in black and white, and revelers mourn the end of the Carnival season.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; LENT

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, also known as Holy Friday, Mourning Friday, Great Friday (in the Eastern Orthodox Churches), and Vendredi Saint in Martinique, is a solemn observance that recalls Jesus' agony and death on the Cross. In Martinique on this occasion, Christians remember the original events of this day with public reading of the Psalms and Gospels, and with singing hymns about Jesus' death. Religious processions are also held on this occasion.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter, also called Dimanche de Pâques ("Easter Sunday") in Martinique, celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus on the third day after his Crucifixion. Easter is both a solemn and a joyous occasion. In Martinique prayer services and worship begin before daybreak. These early services symbolize the empty tomb that was found in the morning of the day of Resurrection and of Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem before sunrise on the same day. Parades and get-togethers are held to mark the special day across the island. Martiniquais prepare a special dish, *matoutou* of crab (rice mixed with crab), on Easter Sunday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

Fun Fact

The armistice that ended World War I was signed at 11 a.m. on the 11th day of the 11 month.

Fun Fact

Martinique is one of three countries in the world where Carnival does not end on, or before, Ash Wednesday. In fact it ends in the early morning hours after Ash Wednesday.

❁ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: November 1

In Martinique on All Saints' Day (La Toussaint in French), the faithful honor and recognize the patron saints of all the villages on the island. Masses are held in every cemetery, and the graves are illuminated with candles in the evening.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINT'S DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ ALL SOULS' DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: November 2

On All Souls' Day, also known as Defunct's Day in Martinique, the people remember the souls of their ancestors and loved ones, and they clean and decorate the graves and tombs of their relatives in the local cemeteries. Special prayer services for the dead, especially those who may be in purgatory, are also held on this occasion.

See also Volume III: ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 24–25

On Martinique Christmas celebrations commence on Christmas Eve (December 24). Catholics attend a Midnight Mass and then return home to *le réveillon* (a very late supper), which consists of warm pâtés, *boudin creole* (spicy black pudding), and pork stew, accompanied by fine rum drinks. Singing and dancing are also important parts of the festivities.

People in Martinique celebrate Christmas day mainly in the company of family and friends. They decorate their homes with garlands and Christmas trees. In Martinique the Christmas tree is called *fil à eau*. Because pine trees do not grow on Martinique, they are imported. Crèches (Nativity scenes) are made to symbolize the birth of Jesus. In the evening people gather for *chantes noëls*, singing Christmas songs all night long. At midnight people drink champagne and open gifts.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ GOMMIER RACE

Observed in: Sainte Luce
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 24

The Gommier Race, also known as the Fête du Gommier, is a popular event held annually in the region of Sainte Luce in Martinique. The local fishermen enter their newly made *gommiers* ("fishing boats") in intensely competitive races. Dance and music competitions are also held on this occasion.

Rites of Passage

❁ MARRIAGE

For weddings in Martinique white is the predominant color—whether flowers, dresses, or decorations are being considered. On the wedding day the groom meets the bride at her home and accompanies her to the church in a procession. After the ceremony the couple head for their reception. Laurel leaves are scattered on the path outside the church for the couple to tread on. At the reception the newlyweds raise a toast, using a special two-handled cup called the *coupe de mariage*, which is passed from generation to generation.

After the reception close friends of the couple tease them and play pranks by banging pots and pans and singing loudly outside the nuptial chamber. It is customary for the groom to invite the pranksters in for refreshments.

Further Reading

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~ Maurítania ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Northern Africa; on the North Atlantic Ocean, bordered by Western Sahara, Algeria, Mali, and Senegal
Size	397,956 sq. mi.
Capital City	Nouakchott
Flag Description	The flag of Mauritania is green with a yellow five-pointed star above a yellow crescent in the center. The concave side of the crescent faces upward.
Independence	November 28, 1960 (from France)
Population	3,086,859 (2005 est.)
Government	Single-Party Republic
Nationality	Mauritanians
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Mixed Maure/Black (40%); Moor (30%); Black Africans (30%)
Major Language(s)	Arabic (official); Wolof (national language); French; other indigenous languages include Soninke, Pulaar, Hassaniya
Major Religion(s)	Islam (100%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Africa Day, May 25; Independence Day, November 28

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

It is believed that the Bafours (ancestors of the famed Soninke tribe) were the original inhabitants of Mauritania. They were also the first Saharan tribe to forsake their nomadic lifestyle in favor of settling down and practicing agriculture. Between the third and the seventh centuries, the nomadic Berber tribes of North Africa migrated to Mauritania and displaced the Bafours.

The Berbers established their own empire in the northern part of the region, and the Arab-Berber territories spread across the Mediterranean into Portugal and Spain. Meanwhile, however, the Bafours also gradually grew in numbers, and by the 11th century they had established the powerful Soninke Empire in Ghana. The empire's territories included the present-day Mauritania, Senegal, and Mali.

In 1076 Islamic warrior monks (Almoravid, or Al Murabitun) launched an offensive against the empire of Ghana and

quickly brought the region under Islamic domination. During the next 500 years, the Muslims struggled against pockets of resistance by local Berber and non-Berber tribes. Ultimately, the Islamic armies proved superior to the Berbers and, after the Mauritanian Thirty Years' War (1644–74), the regime of the Yemeni Maqil Arabs, led by the Beni Hassan tribe, was successful in silencing all voices of dissent in the region.

Descendants of the Beni Hassan warriors formed the upper strata of Moorish society. Moors, or Maures, as this North African ethnic group is referred to, are medieval Muslims who lived in Al-Andalus (the Arabic name for the Iberian Peninsula) and the Maghrib (a region in North Africa).

In the territory of modern-day Mauritania, society was divided into nobility and servant classes. The three main groups were the White Moors (the nobility), the Kewri (the indigenous people, who were never enslaved), and black Moors or Haratins (the ones who were formerly enslaved). The Arab-Berbers tried to maintain their dominance by producing the largest number of *marabouts*, or religious leaders who preserve and teach Islam. Hassaniya, an Arabic dialect

Fun Fact

Mauritania was named after the ancient kingdom of the Berbers, Mauretania.

Fun Fact

Chinguetti, the seventh holiest city of Islam, is in Mauritania, and construction found in the city indicates that it has been in existence for almost 700 years.

Fun Fact

The dust carried by the sirocco invades homes and destroys mechanical devices. Siroccos can blow at 62 miles per hour during the month of March

that derived its name from the Beni Hassans, became the dominant language.

French influence in the coastal region of Mauritania began in 1814. However, the Moorish factions did not allow the French to establish dominance over the country until 1904. The French and Moors fought several battles for Mauritania and, in the end, the French army was successful in defeating its opponents. French rule in the region was relatively benign, since Mauritania did not have anything substantial (gold, minerals, or slaves) to offer to the colonizers. A major part of the population led a nomadic lifestyle under colonial rule.

After World War II the voices of dissent and a demand for independence that were common in most African colonies were less violent than in other countries. Nevertheless, when France began granting independent status to its colonies in the region, it extended that opportunity to Mauritania as well.

On November 28, 1960, the French government ended its rule, and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania came into existence. Moktar Ould Daddah (1924–2003) was sworn in as the first president of Mauritania. Members of previously displaced indigenous tribes (including the Soninke) who had been educated in France, returned to Mauritania to take the most coveted jobs in the country.

The Moors were disturbed by the return of the indigenous people and tried to introduce Arab influence in every aspect of Mauritanian life. They sought to portray Mauritania as an Islamic state, a concept that did not find favor with the indigenous tribes. This led to growing tensions and violent skirmishes, which eventually escalated into full-fledged fighting in April 1989. At the behest of the government and members of both communities, a political dialogue was initiated. The two factions sought to resolve their disputes peacefully and amicably, and the violence subsided. But in the early years of the 21st century, ethnic tensions between the black minority and the Maures (Arab-Berber) were still strong.

After leading a coup in 1984, which resulted in the ouster of then-President Mohamed Khouna Ould Haidallah (b. 1940), Maaouya Ould SidAhmed Taya (b. 1941) assumed power. Another coup was instigated in July 2003, this time against President Taya; but Islamic clerics were imprisoned in the wake of the U.S.-led Iraq War, and the coup was unsuccessful.

 **GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE**

While a major part of Mauritania (60 percent) is covered by desert, with many areas featuring prominent shifting sand dunes, the verdant region includes grazing land in the north and a fertile region in the Senegal River Valley to the south. Thus a major part of the population is concentrated in the northwestern cities of Nouakchott and Nouadhibou and along the Senegal River Valley.

The Senegal River is Mauritania's most important natural feature, providing water to the region through its tributaries: the Karakoro, Gorgol, and Faleme. The Ras Nouadhibou Peninsula (formerly known as Cap Blanc) forms the Dakhlet Nouadhibou (formerly known as Levrier Bay) to the east, which is the largest natural harbor in West Africa. The peninsula is 31 miles long and 8 miles wide. Cape Timiris is the only promontory (cape) in Mauritania and is 23 feet high.

Mauritania has an extremely hot, dry climate. From June to October, the hottest season, the temperature reaches 104°F. November is pleasant, with daytime temperatures reaching a high of 86°F, while at night the temperature can dip down to 55°F. The sirocco, a strong southeasterly dry and dust-laden wind, blows across the desert areas of Mauritania.

 **ECONOMY**

The export of iron ore is the driving force of the Mauritanian economy since it constitutes 40 percent of total exports. However, agriculture and animal husbandry are the main occupations of more than 50 percent of the population of Mauritania and also make important contributions to the nation's gross domestic product (GDP). Dates, millet, corn, sorghum, and rice are the main crops.

Mauritania's economy suffered a major setback when the country witnessed a series of droughts in the early 1980s, and the country has been faced with a mounting foreign debt ever since. Mauritania qualified for debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative. Mauritania has also received generous donations and financial support from nations around the world.

Exploration activities have resulted in the discovery of oil exploratory tracts almost 50 miles offshore and have paved the way for foreign investment in the country. In the meantime, the Mauritanian government is working with the International Monetary Fund to formulate an effective fiscal policy that will help revive the country's economy.

 **CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE**

Citizens of an Islamic republic, Mauritians are nearly all Sunni Muslims. As established by the Constitutional Charter of 1985, Islam is the state religion, and the laws of the land are governed by *sharia* (traditional Islamic law) in combination with French civil law, a legacy of Mauritania's colonial past. The

residents observe the Mailiki rite, which is one of the four schools of law or *fiqh* within Sunni Islam. It is the second largest school of law followed and is practiced by 25 percent of Sunni Muslims in different parts of West and North Africa.

There are three main ethnic groups in Mauritania: Mixed Moors and Black Moors, who constitute 40 percent of the country's population; White Moors, who account for 30 percent; and Black Africans, who constitute 30 percent of the country's population. Religion is the unifying factor between the Moors and Black Africans.

Although Mauritians have traditionally lived as nomads, the series of droughts that plagued the country in the 1980s and continuous desertification of the region have severely affected these people, and many of them have given up their nomadic lifestyle in favor of a more settled and stable life in the cities and larger towns of Mauritania.

Arabic is the official language of the Republic of Mauritania, while Wolof is its national language. Other native languages, such as Soninke, Pulaar, and Hassaniya, are also widely spoken.

Lineage plays an important role in traditional Mauritanian society. Like most African countries, Mauritania follows patrilineage, which traces descent through male ancestors. Elders meet frequently to discuss lineage concerns, ways to preserve the group, defining the rules of etiquette, and finding amicable ways for resolving disputes within the lineage. Lineage exerts an incredible influence in the day-to-day life of Mauritians. It provides the individual's identity and governs every aspect of his or her life, including birth, marriage, and death. Every lineage has its own set of rules and regulations, which are scrupulously adhered to by its members.

Marriages between members of the same lineage are given preference in Mauritanian society. Polygamy is the norm, and the laws of divorce favor men.

Some rural Mauritanian families from the Pulaar, Wolof, and related tribes send their sons to work, study, and live with a *marabout* (religious master). They do so knowing that their sons will spend a large amount of time begging to pay for their education. *Talibes*, as these boys are locally known, sometimes beg in the streets for up to 12 or more hours a day. While most *marabouts* do provide comprehensive Koranic instruction to their charges, others do little more than run networks of child beggars.

Mauritania has a rich musical heritage in which musical instruments such as the *tidnit* (a four-stringed lute) and *ardin*, or harp, figure prominently. These instruments accompany the wailing voice of a singer, which forms the crux of a traditional musical performance. The elite Moors are patrons of entertainers, poets, musicians, and singers since patronizing these artists is a status symbol in Mauritanian society.

Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Relief

The Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Relief is a landmark initiative that was endorsed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1996. This debt-relief is aimed at reducing the external debts faced by the poorest and most heavily indebted countries around the world. It is seen as an important means of reducing poverty in extremely poor countries. In the absence of this initiative these countries would probably not be able to break out of the vicious cycle of poverty in which they are trapped. This initiative has the support of all nations in the world, most of whom encourage the World Bank and IMF to provide financial aid to these debt-ridden nations.

CUISINE

Some of the favorite local dishes include *mechoui* (roasted lamb), spiced fish, rice, and dates. Rice is also eaten along with fish balls, dried fish, dried meat, vegetables, and couscous.

Because Mauritania is an Islamic nation, the consumption of alcohol is strictly forbidden in line with Koranic doctrine. Instead, *zrig*, or camel's milk, is a favorite beverage, along with the traditional Arab tea.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western (or Gregorian) calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day throughout much of the world. It is a national holiday in Mauritania, and all government offices and private and public institutions are closed. Private parties and social gatherings are held on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day but are kept simple as is appropriate for an Islamic nation.

Traditional Arab Tea

Arabs have a tradition of drinking mint-flavored tea. The tea-drinking process is divided into three phases and spans more than an hour. In every phase a traditional glass of tea is offered, and as each phase progresses the tea becomes stronger and sweeter. Every sip is relished as people discuss domestic and international issues over cups of tea.

Fun Fact

The Islamic Republic of Mauritania is the only country in West Africa governed by people with a nomadic heritage.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

The May 1 observance of Labor Day, also called May Day or Workers' Day, originated with the Socialist Second International. In 1889 it set the date for an international observance in 1890 to coincide with a general strike in the United States organized by the American Federation of Labor (AFL) to win the eight-day workday. The United States made efforts to discourage the May 1 commemoration because of the radical socialist connotations, and so it celebrates Labor Day in September.

In Mauritania Labor Day is a national holiday, and marches and union demonstrations are a part of the celebrations. Speeches by union leaders, who reflect on the achievements of the workforce and take this opportunity to voice their grievances, are the major highlights of Labor Day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

AFRICA DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 25

Africa Day, also called Organization of African Unity (OAU) Day, commemorates the historic decision of 32 African nations announced on May 25, 1963, to coordinate their efforts to unite the continent.

The idea of forming a unified African organization was conceived by the president of the independent state of Ghana Kwame Nkrumah (1909–72) and the emperor of Ethiopia Haile Selassie (1892–1975). In the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa, 32 countries of the African continent came together in 1963 to form the Organization of African Unity (OAU). This day marks the commitment of African nations to foster a spirit of camaraderie and to work together for the overall development of the continent.

As of the early years of the 21st century, there were 53 member nations in the OAU. The OAU promotes peace, human rights, and unity among all African nations. It has been instrumental in ending colonial rule in Africa and has also played a key role in resolving regional disputes and internal conflicts in Africa.

Africa Day is a national holiday in Mauritania. Special conferences and seminars are organized in different parts of the country, where problems faced by Mauritania and the entire continent of Africa are discussed.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 28

On November 28, 1960, the Republic of Mauritania was granted independence by its French rulers. The region had come under French control in 1904 and was governed by the French until 1960. Each year Mauritania celebrates their independence on November 28. The president of the country presides over the Independence Day celebrations, which are marked by an official parade led by the armed forces of the nation, followed by official speeches and cultural activities such as traditional dance and song performances. All government offices and public and private institutions are closed on November 28.

Religious Holidays

EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

The first month of the Islamic calendar is Muharram, and El am Hejir is observed on the first day of that month. It is believed that on this day in 622, the prophet Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina and formed the first Islamic state there. For this reason the Islamic calendar began in that year, and this day is celebrated as the start of the new year. Muslims refer to their calendar as the Hegira (or Hijrah, meaning “emigration”) calendar, since it began with the prophet’s emigration to Medina. The first day of the year is celebrated in a low-key manner in the Muslim world.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

MOULOU

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

Mouloud, which commemorates the birthday of the prophet Muhammad, falls in the third month of the Islamic year. Muslims believe that Muhammad was chosen by Allah to be his messenger and reveal God’s message to the world. This is stated in the Koran, the holy book of the Muslims, which was revealed to Muhammad by God.

Mouloud, or Mawlid al-Nabi, is the most important festival for Muslims in Mauritania. It is celebrated by offering prayers to Allah and the prophet as well as by discussing Muhammad’s life and teachings. The prophet’s life and his unwavering faith in Allah are sources of inspiration for the entire Muslim community. Mauritania is enveloped in a festive air during Mouloud. People greet each other warmly on this day, and a special meal is prepared in every Muslim household in honor of Islam’s great prophet.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOU

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

For Muslims the month of Ramadan is holy, and they observe a dawn-to-dusk daily fast for the entire month. Consumption of water and food is prohibited, as is sexual intercourse, during the daylight hours. Eid al-Fitr, also called Korite and the Feast of Fast-Breaking, marks the end of the month of Ramadan, and fasting on this day is strictly forbidden by the Koran. On this day Muslims wake up early, put on new clothes, and offer prayers at mosques along with their friends and relatives. They also share special meals prepared for the occasion. A festive spirit prevails in Mauritania as people exchange gifts and greetings.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th or pilgrimage month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, also called Tabaski, the Festival of Sacrifice, and Festival of Sheep in Mauritania, is an Islamic holy festival that commemorates Ibrahim's (Abraham's) readiness to sacrifice his own son at God's command. As a Muslim country Mauritania holds Islamic principles in the highest regard, and the preparations for Eid al-Adha begin a week in advance. People buy new clothes, and goats are fattened for the ritual sacrifice.

On Tabaski Mauritians get up early in the morning and wear new clothes. They go to their local mosques with their friends and family and offer prayers to the Almighty, thanking him for his benevolence. Abraham's selfless sacrifice is remembered, and the Muslim clerics remind all the faithful to follow his example. Goats or sheep are sacrificed all over the country, and their meat is the highlight of the lavish feast that is an integral part of Eid al-Adha festivities.

Tabaski celebrations can last from two to 10 days in Mauritania. Also the holy pilgrimage, or hajj, takes place this month. Each Muslim is directed by the Koran to undertake this journey at least once in his or her lifetime if it is physically and financially possible.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM; HAJJ

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

In Mauritania the birth of a child is greeted with great joy and calls for a big celebration. After the

birth two rituals are performed: the naming ceremony, and the shaving of the baby's head. In Muslim families, the child's father whispers "Allah is great!" in the child's right ear during the naming ceremony. This is because Muslims want their children to hear Allah's name before they hear anything else. Then a Muslim name is given to the child.

During the tonsuring ceremony, the hair of the newborn child is shaved, and a goat is sacrificed in the name of Allah. Then the infant's hair is buried along with the bones of the sacrificial goat.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Male and female circumcisions hold a central place in Mauritanian society. Circumcision is considered an important ritual, since Mauritians believe that the transition from childhood to adulthood is complete only after the circumcision ritual is performed. It is considered a matter of pride and great honor and is endorsed by the family members of the initiates.

❁ MARRIAGE

The laws of Islam govern marriages in Mauritania. The couple should belong to the same clan; marriages within the same lineage are the norm. (Islamic tradition gives first preference to marriages within the same lineage and then to marriages on one's social level.) In line with Islamic custom, marriage between first cousins is encouraged, but there is also a list of relatives with whom intermarriage is forbidden. The free consent of the couple is a prerequisite for Islamic marriage. Polygamy is an accepted practice in Mauritania.

As in most African societies a bride-price is negotiated prior to the actual ceremony. Among the Fulbe, a marriage can be consummated only after the payment of the bride-price. However, marriage is not legalized until the birth of a child, underscoring the extreme importance of procreation in Mauritania.

Force-Feeding of Girls in Mauritania

Mauritania is one of the few African nations where girls get more food than boys. Obesity is revered among the White Moors of Mauritania, because obesity is linked with wealth and prosperity. The fatter the person, the more affluent he or she is. A fat wife is traditionally looked upon as a sign of wealth. Girls who are thin are looked down upon as poor and are not respected in the society. Force-feeding is an accepted norm in White Moorish society.

Starting in childhood, children in general and girls in particular, are force-fed to attain a particular weight. Girls are forced to eat dates, sweets, and other fattening food to make them fatter.

❁ DEATH

The laws of Islam govern every aspect of life among Muslims in Mauritania. The Koran stipulates that, when devout Muslims are dying, their faces should be turned in the direction of the holy city of Mecca, and they should be encouraged by those present to recite the holy *shabada*. If anyone is unable to recite it, someone else can recite it for the sick person. After an individual has passed away, incense sticks are burned to help keep his or her spirit at bay. Then the Muslim cleric performs the ritual cleansing of the corpse with perfumed water.

In accordance with the laws of Islam, the body is buried before sunset and as soon following death as possible. Mourning is considered essential since it is a mark of respect for the deceased. Loud wail-

ing and wild gesticulation are part of mourning for the dead, and this continues for days after burial. Depending on the region widows have to abide by a defined mourning period, during which they eat only enough to maintain themselves and cease all other activity.

Further Reading

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❧ Mauritius ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Island in the Indian Ocean, in Southern Africa, east of Madagascar
Size	788 sq. mi.
Capital City	Port Louis
Flag Description	The flag of Mauritius has four equal horizontal bands of red (top), blue, yellow, and green.
Independence	March 12, 1968 (from United Kingdom)
Population	1,230,602 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary democracy
Nationality	Mauritian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Indo-Mauritian (68%); Créole (27%)
Major Language(s)	French (official, 3%); Créole (lingua franca, 81%); Bhojपुरी (12%)
Major Religion(s)	Hindu (48%); Christian (32%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Eve/Day, January 1–2; Independence Day, March 12; Labor Day, May 1

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

Arab seafarers from the 10th century, perhaps earlier, probably knew about Mauritius. The Portuguese visited early in the 16th century but did not settle on the island. The Dutch took possession of the island from 1598 to 1710. They called it Mauritius, after Prince Maurice of Nassau (1567–1625). After the Dutch left, the island was taken over by pirates. In 1721 the French East India Company occupied Mauritius and renamed it Île de France. Then in 1810 the British took control of the island. While French influence remained in the island's customs, laws, and language, the Dutch name "Mauritius" was restored.

Mauritius was a slave society; indeed slave revolts played a role in undermining Dutch control of the island, explaining (at least in part) their departure. Slavery was abolished by the British in 1835, though forms of indentured servitude continued.

Since its independence in 1968, Mauritius has been a stable democracy with regular free elections and a good human rights record, factors attracting considerable foreign investment. In 1992 the country became a republic within the

British Commonwealth. Because of its stability the citizens of Mauritius earn one of Africa's highest per capita incomes.

Mauritius is one of the most densely populated countries of the world, and almost a third of the population is under 15 years of age.

❧ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The island nation of Mauritius, together with Réunion and Rodrigues, is part of the Mascarene Islands, lying about 500 miles east of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean. The Mascarene archipelago, of which Mauritius is a part, was formed 8 to 10 million years ago, after a series of undersea volcanic eruptions caused by the drift of the African tectonic plate over the Réunion hotspot. The volcanoes are no longer active. The highest peak in the region is Pitón de la Rivière Noire (2,717 feet). In northern Mauritius a plain forms a plateau ranging in height from 900 to 2,400 feet above sea level. The island has two major rivers: Grand River South East and Grand River North West. These rivers are major sources of hydroelectric power. Mauritius's capital and largest city is Port Louis. Rose Hill, Curepipe, Quatre Bornes, and Vacoas are other important towns.

The climate of the island is tropical. Winters (from May to November) are dry and warm; summers (from November

Fun Fact

When Mark Twain visited the island country in 1897, he declared, “God created Mauritius first and then paradise was copied after it.”

to May) are hot, wet, and humid. Cyclones normally hit the country between November and April. Mean temperatures vary from 74°F at sea level to 67°F on the plateau. Annual rainfall varies from 35 inches on the west coast to 60 inches on the southeast coast and about 200 inches on the central plateau. Sugarcane is the main crop.

The local fauna include *samber* (a long-tailed, dark brown deer), tenrec (a spiny mammalian insectivore), and the mongoose, as well as a variety of birds and insects. When Mauritius was discovered by Europeans, it was home to a previously unknown species of bird. Going by its dull appearance, the Portuguese named the bird “dodo,” which means “simpleton.” Weighing up to 50 pounds, the dodo was a welcome source of fresh meat for the sailors, who killed the bird in large numbers. The Dutch became infamous for eating all the dodos (down to the last bird!), and by 1681 the entire population of dodos was gone.

ECONOMY

Fun Fact

In 1847 Mauritius became the fifth country in the world to issue postage stamps. Two of the world’s rarest and most expensive stamps—the Red Penny and the Blue Penny—are Mauritian.

At the time of its independence in 1968, Mauritius depended mainly on what was a poor agriculture-based economy. However it has since developed an increasingly robust economy with burgeoning industries and a booming tourism sector. The agricultural sector, which employs one-sixth of Mauritius’ workforce, accounts for one-eighth of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP). Sugarcane accounts for 25 percent of the total export earnings. Imported petroleum is used to generate power.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Mauritius’s mixed colonial past is reflected in its culture. *Sega* (pronounced say-gah) is perhaps Mauritius’s richest contribution to the world of music. The *sega*, a dance invented by the Mauritians, is of African origin and has become synonymous with high spirits.

Architecture

Mauritius’s local architecture, reflecting its European colonial past, has been finely adapted to suit the sunny, humid climate. The traditional Créole houses have sharp roofs, balconies with geometric glass panes, metal handrails, and a painted canopy on the roof.

The instruments that accompany traditional *sega* are the *ravanne* (a small circular drum), the *maravanne* (a rattle made of bamboo and sugarcane stems), and the triangle. The *sega* is performed by shuffling one’s feet back and forth, just as the African slaves performed it on the sandy beaches at the end of a hard working day. The rest of the body supplies the real zest and emotive movement and when danced with passion, the *sega* is genuinely erotic. It is similar to the Caribbean calypso and the Latin American salsa, and all three dances have the same African roots. *Sega* parties are regularly organized at the larger hotels and are usually well-choreographed productions. Nowadays, however, the musical accompaniment is often played with modern instruments. Although this dance has been influenced by contemporary music, *sega* remains distinctly Mauritian, with its characteristic foot-rubbing, hip swaying, and Créole lyrics. There are now several versions of the dance form on Mauritius.

The two official languages of Mauritius are English and French. The latter is still the more widely spoken, but English is used as the lingua franca. Mauritius has also developed a unique patois, the French-based Créole language that incorporates elements borrowed from English, Portuguese, and Hindi. Since the late 1960s, a written Créole language has been evolving. It does not resemble French and has been exclusively an oral tradition until recent attempts to codify it. Hindi and Urdu are among the several other South Asian languages spoken.

Among contemporary Créole writers, René Asgarally and Ramesh Ramdoyal are perhaps the best known. Mark Twain (1835–1910) and Joseph Conrad (1857–1924) visited the island and wrote about their experiences in the 19th century. Charles Baudelaire’s (1821–67) very first poem, “À une Dame Créole” (“To a Créole Woman”), was written in the Mauritian town of Pamplemousses.

CUISINE

The eating habits of the Mauritians reflect the ethnic diversity of its people. Créole *rougailles*, Indian curries, Muslim biryanis, Chinese sweet-and-sour pork, French delicacies, English bacon and eggs—you name it; Mauritians have it, and they eat it. The basic ingredients of Créole cuisine are tomatoes (known as *pommes d’amour*, or “love apples” in French), onions, ginger, garlic, and chilies. Palm hearts and *camarons* (giant prawns), venison, and wild boar are favorite ingredients used in French cuisine on the island. Fresh fish and seafood are the main ingredients of Chinese cooking. The traditional blends of home-crushed spices are the sauce base for spicy Indian curries.

Lassi, a refreshing and healthy yogurt drink, and *alouda*, a syrupy brew of agar, milk, and flavorings, are the favorite local beverages. They are available everywhere—from street vendors to posh restaurants. Locally produced beer and rum are also abundantly available. They are strong and cheap. Wines, usually imported from France or South Africa, are expensive.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 1–2

The new year of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar is celebrated all over the world. The festivities generally begin on December 31, the last day of the Western calendar. In Mauritius, however, January 1 is celebrated as New Year's Eve, while January 2 is regarded as New Year's Day. Perhaps this difference from other countries can be attributed to differences in time zones. Whatever the day, the celebrations are both solemn and joyful because the end of one year and the beginning of another is a time for reflection and making changes in one's life. At the same time, the opportunity for starting again is something to be welcomed.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 12

After centuries of foreign rule—first by the Dutch, then the French, and later the British—Mauritius finally became independent on March 12, 1968, and Independence Day celebrates that event. The Mauritian constitution was based on the British parliamentary system, but the country officially changed its status to that of a republic on March 12, 1992. For this reason the holiday is also called Republic Day or National Day. The national ceremony is held at the Champ de Mars in Port Louis, where the prime minister delivers his message to the people of Mauritius, and members of the police force parade.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, is celebrated in many countries around the world to pay tribute to workers. The Labor Day observance has a tenuous American origin but is associated more prominently with international socialism. The first Labor Day occurred in 1890, established in 1889 by the Socialist Second International to coincide with an American Federation of Labor (AFL) general strike in the United States to win the eight-hour day. Thereafter, international Labor Day became more radical than the U.S. Labor Day observed in early September.

Mauritians observe Labor Day by participating in public meetings and seminars on current conditions and hopes for the future of workers. All businesses, government offices, and educational institutions remain closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

Religious Holidays

❁ THAIPOOSAM CAVADEE

Observed by: Hindus
Observed on: January–February

Hindu Tamils (Hindu refugees from Sri Lanka) celebrate the major Thaipooosam Cavadee in January or February at temples all over the island. This observance is mainly an event to purify one's soul. Devotees conduct processions carrying flower-covered wooden arches (*cavadees*) and pots of purification milk. The faithful, having pierced and skewered their tongues and cheeks and bodies, walk in a trance, paying homage to Muruga, the second son of the god Shiva. They also walk barefoot over hot coals. The wooden arches are placed at the feet of the statue of Muruga. In spite of the scorching Sun and the long arduous walk, the milk should neither spill nor curdle. Around the same time, the resident Tamils mark the end of the harvest season by feeding rice pudding to decorated cows in the festival of Pongal.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS; HINDUISM

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter, also called Pascha in many countries, is a celebratory Christian holiday. Easter is the most important Christian festival, and its numerous celebrations and observances form the core of the liturgical year, which begins around the time of the vernal equinox in the Northern Hemisphere (the autumnal equinox in the Southern Hemisphere) and stretches out into summer in the Northern Hemisphere (winter in the Southern Hemisphere). This occasion celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus three days after his Crucifixion. Christians believe Jesus was the Son of God, and died on the Cross to redeem humanity from sin. Apart from its religious aspect, the Resurrection symbolizes the resurgence of hope and a renewal of life for all human beings. Christians on Mauritius attend special Easter church services and then spend the day with family and friends.

Chinese Origins

Sino-Mauritians are primarily of two groups—the Hakkas, who constitute the majority of the Chinese community of the island, and the Cantonese. Both groups practice Buddhism. These Sino-Mauritians attach a great deal of value to ancestral cultures and values and embrace traditional Chinese celebrations.



See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ ASHURA

Observed by: Shia Muslims and some Sunni Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

After the two *eids*, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, Ashura is the third most important Islamic festival. It falls on the tenth day of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar. The day marks the martyrdom of Hussein bin Ali (d. 680), Muhammad's grandson, and the third Shia imam, at the Battle of Karbala in 680 C.E. *Ashura* means "ten" in Arabic; the festival's name means "the tenth day." The Battle of Karbala was a watershed in the history of Islam because it was fought between Sunni and Shia Muslims over who was Muhammad's legitimate heir to the leadership of Islam.

This important Muslim festival is called Yamsey in Mauritius, where its celebration features figures and towers called *gboons*. These figures are carried in procession through the streets in commemoration of the death of the grandson of Islam's prophet.

See also Volume III: ASHURA; ISLAM

❁ MAHA SHIVRATRI

Observed by: Hindus

Observed on: Thirteenth or 14th of the dark half of Phalgun, 12th month of the Hindu calendar

Shiva is one of the gods in the Hindu trinity, comprised of Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva, or Mahesh, the destroyer and reproducer of life. Shivratri means "the great night of Shiva." Thus all the ceremonies take place chiefly at night. This is a festival observed in honor of Shiva, and it is believed that on this day Shiva was married to the Hindu goddess Parvati. Maha Shivratri, also called Shiv Chaturdashi, also marks the night when Shiva danced the *tandav*, a violent, furious dance. Shiva is the most sought-after deity among the Hindus. Devotees pray to him for his compassion and believe that he will grant them their wishes.

In Mauritius following an all-night vigil, faithful Hindus, clad in white, carry light wooden arches beautifully decorated with flowers, paper, and small mirrors, called the *kanwar*, in pilgrimage to Grand Bassin (the crater of an extinct volcano) in the Savanne district, to fetch holy water from the lake to be poured over a statue of Shiva. This ritual reenacts Shiva's need to have his throat cooled off after he drank poison from the sea in order to save humanity. Grand Bassin is regarded as holy by Hindus, and they take water from it to bless their local temples. *Pujas*, ritual worship with food, are observed that night in temples along the lake's banks, and devout Hindus place small lights on banana leaves, which

they set afloat in the belief that their offerings will reach the Ganges River. This observance of Maha Shivratri is thought to be the largest celebration of its kind outside of India.

See also Volume III: HINDUISM

❁ HOLI

Observed by: Hindus

Observed on: The full Moon day of Phalgun, the 12th month of the Hindu calendar

It is widely believed that Holi, also called Phagwa, marks the day when Bhakt Prahalad, a devotee of Vishnu, was saved from the demoness Holika. According to Hindu mythology there was a demon king in India called Hiranyakashipu, who wanted to punish Vishnu for killing his brother, also a demon. The arrogant king ordered everyone in his kingdom to worship him instead of God. But the king's young son Prahalad was a devotee of Vishnu. Going against his father's wishes, Prahalad constantly prayed to Vishnu. Unable to make Prahalad change his ways, the demon king decided to kill him. He asked his sister Holika (from whom the name of the festival is derived) to help him because she was supposedly impervious to fire. They planned to burn Prahalad to death, so Holika sat on a burning pyre with Prahalad on her lap. Yet Prahalad emerged unscathed by the flames and Holika, the demoness, was burned to death. The bonfire on the eve of the festival celebrates that event.

There is another legend, which says this day is marked to celebrate the slaying of Putana, the demoness, by Krishna, another Hindu god. Some link the festival with the worship of Kama, the Hindu god of pleasure and destiny.

This festival falls in the Hindu month of Phalgun and is the most colorful of the Hindu festivals. Essentially, it is a festival of revelry. Men and women spray colored water and smear everyone with colored powder. There is singing, dancing, and lots of music. It is a time for festive rejoicing. In the evenings, people visit each other's homes and exchange greetings.

See also Volume III: HINDUISM; HOLI

❁ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: August 15

The Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary on August 15 has a double focus: the departure of Mary from this life, and the assumption of her body into heaven. It is Mary's principal feast. On this day Catholic Mauritians bake and eat special Marie cakes. Traditionally, all Catholic women bearing the name of Mary, or a name derived from it, keep open house in her honor and welcome all who come on this day.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

❁ GANESH CHATHURTHI

Observed by: Marathi Hindus

Observed on: Fourth of the month of Bhadrapada, the sixth month of the Hindu calendar

Ganesh was Shiva's younger son. He is worshipped by Hindus as the god of wisdom who can remove all obstacles. In Mauritius Hindus of Marathi origin celebrate Ganesh Chathurthi, the birthday of Ganesh.

See also Volume III: HINDUISM

❁ FATHER LAVAL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 9

Father Jacques Desire Laval (known on Mauritius as Père Laval) died on September 9, 1864, and on the anniversary of his death pilgrims, irrespective of their faith, gather at the priest's grave in St. Croix, Port Louis, to honor him on Father Laval Day. Father Laval, born in France in 1803, qualified as a medical doctor before he became a priest. After arriving in Mauritius in 1841 he converted thousands of recently freed slaves to Catholicism. He became known as the Apostle of the Blacks. He is the national saint of Mauritius, a status recognized by the Vatican. He has become a symbol of compassion and love, and Mauritians attribute healing powers to this holy man. His grave is known as the Lourdes of the Indian Ocean because of its importance as a pilgrimage site.

❁ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians; also Hindus

Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day is a Christian feast that honors and remembers all Christian saints, both known and unknown. In Western Churches and especially among Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Anglicans, it is observed on November 1. The Orthodox Churches observe it on the first Sunday after Pentecost. The dead are honored on the following day, which is All Souls' Day. In Mauritius, Hindus too observe the holiday.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINT'S DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ GANGA ASNAN

Observed by: Hindus

Observed on: In Karttika, the eighth month of the Hindu solar calendar

Ganga Asnan, observed during the month of Karttika (usually in November of the Western calendar) is the time when devout Hindus purify themselves by ceremonial bathing in the sea. They do this because they believe the holy water of the Ganges

will be able to reach them through its waters. Special lifeguards work at the beaches of Albion, Belle Mare, Baie du Tombeau, Blue Bay, Flic-en-Flac, Mont Choisy, Perebere, Pointe aux Roches, Pointe aux Sables, and Tamarin in order to ensure the safety of bathers.

See also Volume III: HINDUISM

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr marks the end of Ramadan, the Muslim holy month of fasting. This day is also called the Feast of Fast-Breaking because it marks the end of the month-long period when Muslims are required to observe a daily dawn-to-dusk fast. The Koran forbids fasting on this day. Though the date varies from year to year, it is always a public holiday.

Mauritian Muslims celebrate Eid al-Fitr with great enthusiasm, decorating their local mosques for the occasion. Muslims wear new clothes on this day to pay visits on their friends and relatives. Big feasts are planned, and there is a lot of food and sweets. Special prayers are offered in the mosques in the mornings. Wealthy Muslims also give gifts to the poor on this day.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ DIWALI

Observed by: Hindus

Observed on: Lasting for five days from the 13th day of the waning half (Krishna Paksha) of Asvina, the seventh month of the Hindu calendar, to the second day of the waxing half (Shukla Paksha) of Karttika, the eighth month of the Hindu calendar

Diwali, the Hindu Festival of Lights, also called Divali or Deepavali, is celebrated to mark the return of Rama the king of Ayodhya after slaying the demon Ravana, the rescue of Goddess Lakshmi from King Bali, by Vishnu, and Krishna's victory over the dreaded demon Naraksura. Diwali comes from two Hindi words: *deepa*, which means "light," and *avali*, which means "row," as in a row of lights. This feast celebrates the triumph of good over evil, and lasts for five days.

Diwali is the most spectacular of all Hindu festivals in Mauritius. Hindus illuminate their homes, shops, and offices with rows of *diyas* (oil lamps), candles, and electric lights. Buildings are freshly painted and decorated to welcome the gods. Both children and adults set off fireworks. Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, is worshipped on this day. The day also marks the end of the Hindu calendar.

See also Volume III: DIWALI; HINDUISM

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas, which marks the birth of Jesus, is one of the two most important festivals for Christians. (Easter is the most important observance.) Christianity in general, and Roman Catholicism in particular, were introduced to Mauritius by the French. For Christmas Mauritians decorate their living rooms with Christmas trees adorned with lights, and gifts are given to the children. Santa Claus makes his appearance in shopping centers everywhere, and shops are decorated for the festive season. The celebrations continue until the end of year.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

CHINESE NEW YEAR

Observed in: Chinese Communities

Observed by: Sino-Mauritians

Observed on: The second new Moon after the winter solstice

The Chinese New Year, also called the Spring Festival, is a huge, noisy event on Mauritius. It falls on a different day each year because the lunar calendar is out of sequence with the solar calendar used throughout the Western world. Preparations for New Year's include a thorough house cleaning. The Chinese do not use scissors or knives on this day, since they are considered bad luck. Red, which is believed to ward off evil spirits, is used extensively—especially in the paper lanterns and decorations hung in homes and streets. Elaborate feasts are prepared to symbolize hoped-for abundance for the coming year. The traditional honey cake (also known as a wax cake because of its texture) is distributed to relatives and friends. To ward off evil spirits, firecrackers are set off at the turn of the New Year, and traditional dragon dances are performed around the island.

The Chinese community on Mauritius tends to celebrate the day at the beach, in leisure activities, or visiting pagodas to pray.

See also Volume III: CHINESE NEW YEAR; SPRING FESTIVALS

Rites of Passage

COMING OF AGE

Mauritian Hindu girls wear a *phuli*, or nose ring, when they come of age, a sacred custom observed for generations. The *phuli* is significant for a girl who

has come of age and is connected with the worship of Saraswati, the goddess of learning. Bejeweling the left nostril pays homage to this deity and is said to enhance the positive energies latent in this area. Mauritians believe that there are seven chakras in the body, and the fifth chakra (*adi-chakra*) is located in the nose. (In yoga, a chakra is one the seven centers of spiritual energy in the human body.)

MARRIAGE

Although Mauritians traditionally marry at age 18, those between 16 and 18 years of age may marry with their parents' consent. Mauritius is a complex mixture of cultures with influences from three continents. In light of this, interethnic marriages are becoming more common. Before the 1960s, however, they were not very common at all.

Family bonding remains an integral aspect of Mauritian society and, until a few years ago, most young people would not marry outside their community for fear of offending their parents. Kinship is very important in the society, and most of the employment opportunities rely on family connections. For these reasons young people did not make marital decisions without parental or community consent. In the early 21st century, the concept of marrying for love is replacing the traditional arranged marriage. Parental consent, however, is still required in most Hindu as well as Muslim communities.

Hindu marriages are extremely elaborate and colorful. Traditional marriage rituals used to last for a week. In modern times, however, the festivities have been shortened to four days. The rituals usually start on a Friday with a musical ceremony known as the *sandhya* rites. The *bardi* ceremony takes place the following day. The actual wedding takes place on a Sunday. The fourth day of the nuptial feasting—*chowthari*—takes place the next day, Monday.

DEATH

Christians and Muslims bury—and do not cremate—the dead because they believe that on Doomsday (or Judgment Day) all the dead will be resurrected from the grave. On Doomsday according to Christian and Muslim teachings, the deeds of the dead will be weighed on a scale and, if the good deeds outweigh the bad, then the soul will be sent to heaven. However, if the bad deeds outweigh the good, the soul will languish in hell for eternity. It is because of this belief in resurrection and redemption that cremation is forbidden.

Unlike Hindus everywhere else in the world who cremate the dead, Mauritian Hindus quite often bury the dead in cemeteries. These Hindus also participate in the Roman Catholic observance of All Souls' Day, which is held on November 2 (All Saints'

Day is November 1). This is the day when Catholics pay homage to their deceased friends and relatives. They gather at their tombs and graves and offer floral tributes. Similarly many Hindus also go to the cemetery on this day to pay respects to their relatives and friends who are dead.

Further Reading

Richard B. Allen, *Slaves, Freedmen, and Indentured Laborers in Colonial Mauritius* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Common Denominators: Ethnicity, Nation-Building, and Compromise in Mauritius* (New York: Berg, 1998); Marie Lourdes Lam Hung, *Rights of Women in Mauritius* (Port Louis, Mauritius: High Quality Press, 2003); Ashley Jackson, *War and Empire in Mauritius and the Indian Ocean* (London: Palgrave, in association with Kings College, London, 2001); Megan Vaughan, *Cre-*

Jewish Citizens

One little-known cemetery at Bambous has a burial ground with Muslim and Jewish sections. Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe, particularly from Poland, in their attempt to escape Nazi persecution, tried to reach Palestine in the early 1940s. They traveled down the African west coast and across the Indian Ocean. The British brought them to Mauritius and made them stay there until the end of the war.

ating the Creole Island: Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Mauritius (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005).



Mexico

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	North America, west of the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico and east of the North Pacific Ocean; the United States lies to the north, and Belize and Guatemala, to the south
Size	761,606 sq. mi.
Capital City	Mexico City (Distrito Federal)
Flag Description	Mexico's flag has three equal vertical bands of green (hoist side), white, and red; the coat of arms (an eagle perched on a cactus with a snake in its beak) is centered in the white band.
Independence	September 16, 1810 (from Spain)
Population	106,202,903 (July 2005 est.)
Government	Federal republic
Nationality	Mexican
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Mestizo (Amerindian-Caucasian; 60%): Amerindian, or predominantly Amerindian (30%)
Major Language(s)	Spanish; various Mayan dialects, Nahuatl, and other regional indigenous languages
Major Religion(s)	Nominally Roman Catholic (89%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Constitution Day, February 5; Flag Day, February 24; Birthday of Benito Juárez, March 21; Labor Day, May 1; Cinco de Mayo, May 5; Independence Day, September 16; Anniversary of the Revolution of 1910, November 20

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

It has generally been thought that the first people to inhabit Mexico were probably hunter-gatherers who had worked their way south from the Beringia landbridge during the last Ice Age about 13,000 years ago. However, in the early 21st century archaeologists announced the recovery of the bones of three skeletons—two extremely well preserved—that are over 13,000 years old. Found in a submarine Caribbean cave off Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, their radiocarbon date is the oldest in the Americas yet obtained from a human bone. Nothing is known about the culture of these people because no artifacts were found with the skeletons. The research of a British archaeologist, however, promises to push the date for human habitation in the Americas even further back into prehistory.

A Liverpool archaeologist has said that humans occupied a site near Puebla, east of Mexico City, 21,000 to 28,000 years ago.

Between 9,000 and 6,000 years ago, teosinte, the ancestor of modern corn was first domesticated in southern Mexico. Early horticulturists morphed teosinte into a more useful crop by cultivating those plants that had desirable characteristics so that by 3500 B.C.E. the corn kernels were significantly larger. Only 1,100 years later, the gene variants found in modern corn could be found in crops grown in Mexico.

For more than 3,000 years, several Mesoamerican civilizations rose and fell in what is now Mexico: the Aztec, Olmec, Teotihuacan, Toltec, Mixtec, Zapotec, and Maya. These indigenous civilizations are credited with many inventions, including towering pyramid-temples, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, writing, highly accurate multiple calendars, fine arts, sophisticated agriculture, engineering, an abacus, a complex theology, and the wheel.

Archaic inscriptions on rocks and rock walls all over northern Mexico (especially in the state of Nuevo León) demonstrate that numbers and counting became extremely important at an early time in Mexico. Since a system was developed to track astronomical activities, such events were clearly important in the lives of indigenous Mexicans early on. These petroglyphs prefigure the role of astronomy in succeeding Mexican civilizations when their cities and ceremonial centers would be built in accordance with astronomical events.

At a unique site, also in southern Mexico, archaeologists have been able to trace the evolution of religion over a 7,000-year period. Like similar sites found in other parts of the world, the site is unique because the stratigraphic record allows scholars to “read” the relationship between an evolving social structure—from foraging to settlement to an archaic state—and how religion also changed structurally to pace the changes in society. Around 7000 the pre-Zapotec people inhabiting the area were nomadic hunter-gatherers; their religious ceremonies were performed on a plain dance floor, its area defined by stone borders, and the ritual dances were probably performed by all the people.

Around 1500 the so-called Oaxacans were living in villages throughout the year. Four dwellings from this period have been excavated, and all of them are oriented toward the same direction. Archaeologists think that the orientation could have been determined by the path of the Sun at the spring equinox. If this hypothesis is an accurate interpretation, the now sedentary Oaxacans had formalized the ad hoc rituals of their ancestors and were so advanced in astronomical observation that they were able to schedule their ceremonies at fixed times based on the position of the Sun or stars. Furthermore this elite may have been a priestly caste who performed rituals open only to initiates.

During the third stage of development, around 1150, a social hierarchy had begun to develop; there was now a social elite who lived in houses larger than most other dwellings, so large that they served as temples. These “temples” were all oriented in the same direction (like those of the second phase), and a complicated system for marking the passage of time had developed: There was one calendar that consisted of 260 days and another of 365 days. These two calendars synchronized with each other every 52 years, a number that figured importantly in the later Mayan calendar.

Then in 500, a populous and warlike society developed at Monte Albán, which archaeologists are calling the Zapotec state. By the time this state appeared, the temples were more complex and had special rooms for a new elite, the priests. Religion was now controlled by a special caste of men who, in their priestly role, also controlled the people and thereby the society. In its first stages religion may have served a cohesive function, bringing communities together for shared rituals. By the time that elite castes—the priests and nobility—appear, religion

was a system of social control used to justify power and its uses. Religion and its attendant rituals had become the means for controlling masses of people by teaching them to fear supernatural punishment for their social transgressions. In this way elites consolidated, justified, and maintained their privilege through omnipotent, moralistic gods.

At different times, three Mexican cities were the largest in the world: Teotihuacán (capital of the Tōltec Empire), Tenochtitlán (capital of the Aztec Empire and now Mexico City), and Cholula. These cities, and others, were once centers of commerce, ideas, ceremonies, and theology, and by their greatness influenced other early cultures. The first of Mexico’s ancient civilizations, the Olmec, established themselves in the states of Veracruz and Tabasco around 1000 B.C.E. They gradually spread across central and southern Mexico until the civilization mysteriously vanished around 400. Later a series of successful civilizations (the Tōltec, Mayan, and Zapotec) flourished and made significant contributions to Mexican history. The Aztecs, who settled in Mexico in the early 14th century, were the successors of this series of empires.

The Aztecs, so-called because their city Aztlán was where their wandering had begun, considered themselves latecomers to the central plateau of Mexico, the heirs of the arts, sculpture, architecture, engraving, and the invention of the calendar created by the Tōltecs. (The Tōltecs’ civilization had peaked in the 10th and 11th centuries.) The Mexica, an Aztec tribe, were the first people in the world to provide mandatory education for all people, regardless of gender, rank, or station. The Mexica educational system had two educational channels: the *telpochcalli*, which provided practical and military studies, and the *calmecac*, which provided advanced learning in writing, astronomy, statesmanship, theology, and other areas.

The underlying concept of the Aztecs’ religious system was that only constant human sacrifices could keep the

Fun Fact

The corn plant and its kernels were so changed by the purposeful cultivation that it was no longer capable of growing in the wild and had to depend on farmers in order to survive

Fun Fact

Several of the famous and mysterious crystal skulls that have been found in Mexico in the ancient ruins of Maya and Aztec civilizations are believed to be between 5,000 and 36,000 years old. These are made of solid chunks of quartz, except for those with detachable lower jaws, and it is now possible to determine their age using an electron microscope. One skull is held by the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. One of the skulls, now in Canada, was examined by Hewlett-Packard in California. However, no one has been able to determine who made them or what their purpose was.

universe working, a belief prevalent in all Nahuatl communities. In order to secure enough humans to keep the universe going, when the Aztecs waged war their goal was to return with live enemies who could be sacrificed. To achieve this their weapons were made to injure enemies, not to kill them. When the Spanish conquistadors arrived in Mexico in the early 16th century, this kind of warfare left the Aztecs unprepared to fight the Spanish, who fought to kill.

After the Spaniards had conquered the Mexica in 1521, with considerable help from other indigenous tribes seeking an end to the Aztecs' insatiable need for sacrifices, Mexico became a Spanish colony. The Spanish conquerors exploited the mineral wealth of the land, using the native population as laborers. This created the Mestizo class (persons of mixed race, especially of European and Amerindian ancestry). During the colonial period (1521–1821), Mexico was known as Nueva España, or New Spain, and included, in addition to present-day Mexico, the Spanish Caribbean islands, Central America, and part of what is now the southwestern United States.

Mexico's long War of Independence, led by Miguel Hidalgo (1753–1811), started on September 16, 1810. Hidalgo was a priest of Spanish descent with progressive ideas. The war lasted for 11 years; the liberating troops finally entered Mexico City in 1821. Although Mexican independence had first been proclaimed in 1810, it was not achieved in the true sense until August 1821, when Augustín de Iturbide (1783–1824) proclaimed himself emperor. His reign lasted only one year. He was overthrown by a revolt in 1823, and the Republic of Mexico was established. In 1824 Guadalupe Victoria became the first president of Mexico. A continuous change of governments in the 19th century caused a long period of political instability in the country.

Benito Juárez (1806–72), known as the Abraham Lincoln of Mexico, became president in 1861.

During his tenure of more than 30 years, the infrastructure improved, and large-scale foreign investments were made. In 1910 another civil war broke out in Mexico. After a 20-year struggle for control over Mexico's government, President Lázaro Cárdenas del Rio (1895–1970) assumed power in 1934 and transformed Mexico completely. He nationalized the oil and gas industry and introduced land reforms as well as a free education system in

Mexico. But in 1976 the country suffered a severe economic crisis. Until 2000 the end of each presidential term was followed by devaluation and a period of recession. In the early 21st century Mexico was still grappling with problems of economic control and development, especially in the petroleum sector and the evolution of trade relations with the United States. Civil unrest, corruption, and violence have spawned other associated problems.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Mexico is bordered by the United States on the north, the Pacific Ocean on the west, the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea on the east, and Guatemala and Belize to the south. It is characterized by an extraordinary diversity in topography and climate. Two major mountain chains, the Sierra Madre Occidental and the Sierra Madre Oriental, run north to south the length of the country.

High temperatures and moderate to low rainfall are the dominant influences on Mexico's weather. The highland climates vary considerably with elevation, but the central plateau generally has a moderate climate with few extremes.

ECONOMY

Mexico has a free market economy with a mixture of modern and outmoded industry and agriculture, increasingly dominated by the private sector. Mexico faces many structural problems as it strives to modernize its economy and raise living standards. Income distribution is very unequal, with the top 20 percent of income earners accounting for 55 percent of the nation's income. Trade with the United States and Canada has nearly doubled since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was implemented in 1994. In the early 21st century Mexico was pursuing additional trade agreements with most countries in Latin America and with the European Union to decrease its dependence on the United States.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Mexican culture reflects a complex blending of pre-Hispanic, indigenous civilizations, and Hispanic culture, later followed by influences from France, Germany, and the United States. African and Asian influences are also clearly visible in Mexican culture. The vast majority of Mexicans are nominally Christians—95 percent. The most striking example of this fusion of diverse traditions is the widespread veneration of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The Day of the Dead is yet another example in which the Catholic Feast of All Saints is fused with the indigenous rites of ancestor veneration.

Mexico has many different holidays and regional festivals. Such festivals usually feature visual arts exhibits, storytelling for children, museum tours, arts

Fun Fact

In order to secure enough live captives during times of peace, the Aztecs waged ritual warfare, what they called "flower wars."

Fun Fact

According to the Maya Long Count calendar, several cycles will end in 2012: the completion of a Galactic Year (the time it takes for the Milky Way galaxy to complete one rotation); the end of a 26-million-year Earth cycle, a 78,000-year Earth cycle, and the termination of the 26,000-year Mayan calendar.

and crafts activities, and games. Because food is important in Mexican culture, many celebrations incorporate food-related activities, including hunters' feasts (the hunters prefer to consume the game that they have freshly killed) and theme dinners, honoring Mexico City's distinguished chefs and fine cooks.

❁ CUISINE

The blending and fusion of very different cultures have contributed significantly to the development of Mexican culinary arts and eating habits. Corn has been the staple food of this region for more than 4,000 years. The corn kernels are softened in water and lime and then ground and fashioned (most commonly) into tortillas (thin pancakes). Protein-rich beans and a seemingly infinite variety of chilies are integral to Mexican cuisine. The Spanish, who liked the array of indigenous foodstuffs, added a few elements of their own such as European meats, sugar, and cheese. Mexican cuisine is further enhanced by a rich variety of fruits and vegetables: tomatoes, squash, sweet potatoes, avocado, coconut, pineapple, papaya, and prickly pear cactus, to name but a few. Herbs and spices including cinnamon, clove, anise, cumin, cilantro, thyme, marjoram, and the pungent *epazote* are used freely.



A museum worker hands out flyers at a Day of the Dead costume contest at the Dolores Olmeda Museum in Mexico City. Mexicans celebrate Day of the Dead on November 1 to honor the deceased. (AP Photo/Jose Luis Magana)

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

On New Year's Day (Año Nuevo) most business establishments and schools are closed in Mexico. People meet their relatives and friends to wish them a happy New Year. The celebrations feature concerts, street performances, theater shows, and displays of fireworks.

❁ CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 5

Constitution Day (Día de la Constitución) is observed in remembrance of the finalization of Mexico's new constitution in 1917. Toward the end of 1916, the revolutionaries had met in Querétaro to reform the constitution of 1857. They finally decided to draw up a new one since circumstances in Mexico were very different from those when Benito Juárez had created the original. Accordingly the new constitution was enacted on February 5, 1917.

It embodied the ideas of all the revolutionary groups and provided for the liberties and rights of citizens, in addition to incorporating the democratic and federal concepts of the 1857 constitution. It recognized social rights, such as the right of workers to strike and to organize themselves into unions, the right to education, and the right of the nation to regulate private property in accordance with the common good. To celebrate this highly significant and historic occasion in Mexico, people exchange greeting cards and attend public speeches during the day. In the evening they participate in various cultural events, such as musical performances.

Fun Fact

People in Mexico consider it good luck to wear colorful underwear on New Year's Day. Different colors denote good luck, charm, fortune, and love, and people choose the color of their underwear on the basis of what they want or need in the coming year.

Wearing red underwear, for instance, means that the wearer hopes to find his or her true love in the coming year.

❁ FLAG DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 24

On Flag Day (Día de la Bandera), public festivities and civic ceremonies are held in front of the monument dedicated to the memory of General Don

Vicente Guerrero, the first Mexican military leader, who swore to the flag in the famous agreement of Acatempan on March 12, 1821. It is common for people on this day to wear the colors of the national flag: green (hope and victory), white (purity), and red (bravery). Cities and towns are decorated with lights and flowers. Special TV and radio programs highlight this historic event.

❁ BIRTHDAY OF BENITO JUÁREZ

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 21

This occasion marks the birthday of Benito Juárez, known as Día del Natalicio de Benito Juárez or Day of the Indian Chief, an Amerindian by birth who held a variety of political posts and became the president of Mexico in 1861. All government offices, banks, and schools remain closed on this day. Celebrations begin with children's parades on March 20. On the next day military and civilian parades are held across the country. Speeches by eminent personalities and cultural programs are also held.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

On Labor Day (Día del Trabajo), or Primero de Mayo (May Day), Mexicans celebrate the accomplishments and struggles of workers. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

In Mexico trade unionists and workers gather at the *zócalos* (town squares or plazas) nearest to them, where meetings and speeches are held. This is followed by parades of workers and schoolchildren.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ CINCO DE MAYO

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 5

In Spanish Cinco de Mayo means the "fifth of May." It is a national holiday that honors the small army of farmers who defeated the better trained French invaders in the Battle of Puebla under the leadership of General Ignacio Zaragoza on May 5, 1862. This was a strategic battle, fought in the small town of Puebla during an important phase of the French invasion of Mexico. Puebla lies midway on the road leading from the landing sites at Vera Cruz to Mexico City. Cinco de Mayo is celebrated by reenacting the Battle of Puebla; drumming, swordplay, games, food stalls for hungry participants, mariachi bands, and bullfighting are also popular events on this day. The celebrations culminate with a display of fireworks. This holiday is also known as Batalla de Puebla, "the Battle of Puebla." Cinco de Mayo is also celebrated in the United States by Mexican Americans with big parades, mariachi bands, fireworks, and barbecues, and Yankees (Anglos) also join in the festivities.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: September 16

The Independence Day celebrations remember the courage of the Mexican people called to arms by Catholic priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla in Dolores, Guanajuato. In the early hours of September 16, 1810, Hidalgo roused his congregation with the first

What Is Mariachi?

Mariachi, a Mexican folk music, is a variation of the French word *mariage*, which means "wedding" or "marriage." For a while *mariachi* was believed to go back to the 19th century when Maximilian, a Frenchman, was emperor of Mexico. But this explanation was recently discredited when a use of the word was found that predated the French arrival in Mexico. Scholars now believe that the word *mariachi* has native roots. One theory is that it comes from the name of the wood used to make the platform on which the performers danced to the music of the village musicians. Whatever its source, mariachi remains one of the most exciting and enchanting

musical ensembles found anywhere in the world. The complete mariachi ensemble is composed of six to eight violins, two trumpets, and a guitar—all standard European instruments. There is also a high-pitched, round-backed guitar called the *vihuela*, which, when strummed in the traditional manner, gives mariachi its typical rhythmic vitality; a deep-voiced guitar called the *guitarrón*, which serves as the bass of the ensemble; and a Mexican folk harp, which usually doubles the base line, but also ornaments the melody. While these three instruments have European origins, in their present form they are uniquely Mexican.

grito (“cry”) and the ringing of the church bell. Hidalgo exhorted his congregation to fight against hundreds of years of oppression and brutality at the hands of the hated *gachupines*, the Spanish ruling elite. The call spread far and wide across the land, sparking the Mexican War of Independence. In Mexico the celebrations start on the previous night when the president of Mexico rings the historic liberty bell and then shouts, “*Mexicanos, viva Mexico*” (“Mexicans, long live Mexico”). This is an imitation of the cry of independence given by Father Hidalgo on that night in 1810. The president waves the flag, and the national anthem is sung. The next day is marked with civic ceremonies, a military parade in the capital city, and the decoration of the statue of Father Hidalgo in Mexico City with flowers. There are rodeos, banquets, fireworks, dances, bullfights, and horseback-riding competitions in different regions of Mexico. This observance is also known as *Dieciséis de Septiembre*, “September Sixteenth.”

❁ ANNIVERSARY OF THE REVOLUTION OF 1910

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 20

The Anniversary of the Revolution of 1910, also known as *Revolución Mexicana* (“Revolution Day”), is celebrated on November 10. The Mexican Revolution arose from, among other factors, tremendous popular discontent that had been simmering during the 31-year dictatorship of President Porfirio Díaz. Francisco Madero, a supporter of democracy, led the movement to topple Díaz. Madero promised to return all land that had been confiscated by Díaz, to guarantee universal voting rights, and to limit presidents to a single term. Madero’s call for an uprising on November 20, 1910, marked the beginning of the Mexican Revolution. People celebrate this important day with military parades, children’s parades, musical performances, and fireworks.

Religious Holidays

❁ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: January 6

Epiphany, also called *La Día de los Tres Reyes* (Three Kings Day), or Day of the Wise Men, originated as a celebration of the Three Kings (or Wise Men) from the East who came with gifts to behold the infant Jesus in Bethlehem. It is a local belief that on this day Papa Noel visits Mexican children who have conducted themselves well during the previous year and leaves gifts and sweets for them while they are asleep. Adults celebrate the day with *rosca* (a ring-shaped fruitcake).

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EPIPHANY

❁ DÍA DE LA CANDELARIA

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: February 2

Día de la Candelaria, in English called *Candlemas*, relates to the purification of Mary, the mother of Jesus, following his birth according to ancient Jewish custom. Candlelit processions and dances mark the end of Mexico’s Christmas celebrations on this day, and statues of Jesus are carried through the streets. Also, whoever got the baby Jesus in the *Rosca de Reyes* at Christmas plays godparent to the Christ and holds a Christening party. Families buy scenes that depict Bethlehem and the infant Jesus for good luck. Musical events, parades, and dances are organized in many regions (especially at Veracruz, and in the neighboring areas of Tlacotalpán).

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ CARNIVAL

Observed by: General Public
Observed: Week before Lent

Carnival is the last burst of fun and frivolity before the austere Christian 40-day fast observed as Lent. Carnival is celebrated for five days in Mexico, when people throw and crack *cascarones* (confetti-filled eggshells) on each other. Celebrations include parades, dances, processions, fireworks, an array of delicacies, and traditional Mexican music.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; LENT

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: Thursday before Easter

In Mexico the region of Iztapalapa (including the eight districts of La Asunción, San Ignacio, Santa Bárbara, San Lucas, San Pablo, San Miguel, San Pedro, and San José) is famous for its pre-Easter celebrations on Maundy Thursday. White and purple shades adorn the streets while actors ready themselves for the performance, and the jail where Jesus will end up is filled with fruit and flowers. An angel and a child lead the procession; they are followed by virgins, Jesus, the Nazarenes (residents of Nazareth as depicted in the Bible), the priests, and the Roman dignitaries, flanked by soldiers. The procession goes through the streets of the eight districts and arrives at the Church of El Señor de la Cueva, where they touch an urn and offer their thanks. Hundreds of Nazarenes, who form a part of the procession, wear crowns of thorns and flowers on their heads. Finally the Last Supper is reenacted in the *Cuitláhuac* Garden followed by Jesus’ washing of the Apostles’ feet, his arrest, and the prayer in the orchard. (The words do not follow those of the Scriptures. They have been adapted over the years according to the tastes of the participants.) Maundy Thursday is also called

Holy Thursday or, among Orthodox Christians, Great Thursday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday is a somber observance for Christians around the world because they mourn Jesus' death on this day. In Mexico on this occasion, Christians recall the events of Jesus' Crucifixion by attending public readings of the Psalms and Gospels and by singing hymns about Jesus' death. Good Friday is also called Holy Friday, Mourning Friday, or, among Orthodox Christians, Great Friday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

For Mexican Christians, like others around the world, the religious festivities culminating with Easter are the most important of all Christian festivals. Mexican Easter is not confined to a single day or a weekend. On the contrary it comprises an entire week of holy days. This is collectively known as Holy Week or *Semana Santa*. Maundy Thursday and Good Friday are also integral to the *Semana Santa*. In Mexico the Easter festivities begin on Palm Sunday (the day Jesus victoriously rode into Jerusalem and the common people, waving palm fronds, hailed him as the king of Jews). In parts of Mexico there are elaborate celebrations with people reenacting scenes from Jesus' life. On Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, young people gather outside the churches and in public places to reenact the events that took place during the last few days of his worldly life: his betrayal, his bearing the burden of the wooden Cross to Calvary, his trial, and his enemies crowning him with thorns. Such vivid enactments help to drive home the message as to how Jesus died to save humanity from sin and evil.

On Easter Sunday in Mexico, prayer services and worship begin quite early in the morning. The day memorializes the empty tomb that was found on the morning of Jesus' Resurrection and his arrival in Jerusalem before sunrise on the same day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY

DAY OF THE DEAD

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: November 1–2

The Day of the Dead (*Día de Muertos*) is one of the major celebrations in Mexico. Although observances differ among regions, it is nearly universally celebrated in this Catholic country. The holiday is a melding of indigenous ancestor worship and the Catholic holidays of All Saints' Day (November 1) and All Souls' Day (November 2). In general, November 1 is for honoring dead children and infants and November 2 is for honoring dead adults. For weeks before the holiday, stores are filled with statues, toys, candies, and foods in the shape of skeletons, tombstones, coffins, and other macabre shapes. Families clean and decorate family graves and gather in cemeteries for family reunions that involve much eating and drinking and often fireworks. The Day of the Dead is celebratory rather than solemn and reflects the comfortable relationship with death that is prevalent in Mexico.

DAY OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: December 12

According to a Mexican legend, the Virgin Mary appeared to Juan Diego (a Mexican Indian) in 1531 on the Cerro de Tepeyac in the north of Mexico City. She appeared three times in the guise of an Indian princess and commanded that a church be built in the area where the Basilica de Guadalupe now stands. Moreover she imprinted her image onto Juan Diego's cloak (as evidence of her appearance, so that other people would believe him). This cloak is now preserved and set in gold and on display at the shrine. From early December on Mexicans celebrate the day of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The pilgrimage to the Basilica de Guadalupe ends on December 12. This pilgrimage is a huge affair with about five million Mexicans making the journey to the Basilica, which holds round-the-clock services to cater to the throngs of worshippers. The Virgin de Guadalupe is depicted as an Indian "dark Madonna," and this has helped assimilate the indigenous people and their traditional spirituality into the Roman Catholic Church.

This festival is also called *Día de la Virgen de Guadalupe* ("Virgin of Guadalupe Day").

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

LAS POSADAS

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: December 16–24

Christmas celebrations begin nine days before December 25 with *Las Posadas* in Mexico. This ritual is performed on each of the nine nights preceding Christmas. Many Mexicans take part in candlelight processions as they reenact Joseph and Mary's frustrating search for accommodation on the

night of Jesus' birth. It is customary for households to take turns refusing lodging to the wandering family; finally they are symbolically offered shelter for the night. In addition huge processions carrying sacred figures and statuettes crowd the streets. These images are used to re-create the Nativity scene at the town's church. A big fiesta is organized, which lasts until December 31. People spend most of their time enjoying parties, fireworks, and loud celebrations. Breaking piñatas adds an element of fun for the children.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY, CHRISTMAS

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

In Mexico Christmas, called *Navidad* ("the birth") in Spanish, celebrations are not confined to a single day. Rather actual Christmas celebrations commence with *Las Posadas*, which continues for about nine days leading up to Christmas and continues well past the new year. In Mexico devout Catholics attend *Misa de Noche Buena* ("The Mass of the Good Night"), which is conducted at midnight on Christmas Eve. After the Mass, everyone goes home to have dinner with family and friends. Anyone who does not have a family is always welcome to be part of a family celebration and, most important of all, to ceremonially place the baby Jesus in the manger in the Nativity scene set up in every home on this occasion. Mexicans greet each other with "Feliz Navidad!" ("Merry Christmas").

An interesting departure from Christmas observances elsewhere is that in Mexico presents are not exchanged on Christmas but a few days later. On the night of December 31 a *Misa de Gallo* ("Rooster's Mass") takes place at midnight, and families attend to give thanks for the blessings they received during the year.

The presents for Christmas are finally given on January 6, *el Día de Reyes*, the Day of the Kings, or the Wise Men's Day. It is the *Magi* (the Three Wise Men from the east) who brought gifts to the infant Jesus; hence, they are believed to bring gifts for all the boys and girls who have been well-behaved during the year. The children place their shoes by the window in order to receive the gifts.

El Día de Reyes is celebrated with a *Merienda* and the *Rosca de Reyes*. *La Merienda* is the meal enjoyed any time in the early evening. (It is more like a high tea than a heavy meal.)

Made of egg bread and decorated with dried fruit and sprinkled with sugar, the *Rosca de Reyes* conceals a little Jesus doll. Whoever gets it in his or her slice plays godparent to Jesus on *Día de Candelaria*.

Piñatas—large brightly colored hollow cardboard containers shaped like rabbits or reindeer and filled with gifts and candies—are hung in the

streets on Christmas Day. Children are blindfolded and take turns trying to break these piñatas to collect the gifts and candies inside. Santa Claus, known as *Papa Noel* in Mexico, brings gifts for children.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ THREE KINGS BREAD FIESTA

Observed in: Malinalco

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 6

The Three Kings Bread Fiesta, also known as *La Rosca de los Reyes*, an Epiphany celebration, is observed in Malinalco, Mexico. A *rosca* (a ring-shaped fruitcake, also known as Wreath of the Kings) is specially prepared for this occasion. People hide a small doll inside the *rosca*. The doll symbolizes the infant Jesus being hidden from Herod's army.

❁ AMARANTH FESTIVAL

Observed in: Xochimilco

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 16–18

Amaranth, the legendary pre-Hispanic grain, was the staple diet of the pre-Columbian Aztecs, who believed that it had supernatural powers and incorporated it in their religious ceremonies. The Amaranth Festival, celebrated in Xochimilco, located 10 miles south of Mexico City, features amaranth in its many forms. These include not only cereals and noodles (as one would expect), but also wonderful moles, hot drinks, and *alegrías* (sweet snack bars). A large crafts market is a permanent feature of this festival, which is also known as *Festival del Amaranto*.

❁ XOCHIMILCO FESTIVAL

Observed in: Xochimilco

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Two weeks before Easter

The Lakeland area of Xochimilco, a city situated south of Mexico City, with its famous canals, colorful barges, and beautiful floating gardens, provides the backdrop for this annual festival honoring the ancient Aztec deities of flowers (*Xochipilli*) and dance (*Macuilxochitl*). A lucky girl is chosen as *La Flor Mas Bella del Ejido* (The Most Beautiful Flower of Ejido), and she leads a floating parade of flower-bedecked barges through the canals. The four-day festival includes canoe races and horticulture contests.

Amaranth

The name *amaranth* is derived from the Greek for “never-fading flower.” The plant is an annual herb and is a relative of pigweed, a common wild plant also known as lamb’s-quarters, and the common garden plant known as cockscomb. There are approximately 60 species of amaranth, and there is no distinction between amaranth grown for the leaf (vegetable) and the seed (grain). Amaranth is a bushy plant that grows 5 to 7 feet in height, with broad leaves and a showy flower head of small, red or magenta cloverlike flowers, which are profuse and constitute the plant’s exquisite, feathery

plumes. The seed heads resemble corn tassels but are somewhat bushier. The seeds are tiny ($\frac{1}{32}$ of an inch), lens-shaped, and a golden to creamy tan color, with some occasional dark colored seeds. Each plant is capable of producing 40,000 to 60,000 seeds. The leaves of ornamental varieties, such as Joseph’s Coat, resemble the coleus plant and are quite striking. Their coloring can range from deep red, purple-red, orange, pink, green, to white. The sight of a full-grown amaranth field with its vividly colored leaves, stems, and flower or seed heads is an amazingly beautiful and unforgettable sight.

❁ GUADALAJARAS FIESTAS DE OCTUBRE

Observed in: Guadalajara
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 1–31

During the month of October Guadalajara, the second-largest city in Mexico, jumps into party mode for the grand Fiestas de Octubre. It becomes the venue for more than 300 cultural, social, and sporting events spanning five weeks. The range of activities includes live performances by leading Mexican musical stars, traditional cockfights, romantic musical performances, and carnival rides for youngsters. Shops and stands offer typical crafts, jewelry, shoes, clothing, and other locally produced merchandise. For the gourmet there is a vast spread of international and regional Mexican food. Painting, sculpture, graphics, and photography exhibitions are also part of this festival.

❁ NIGHT OF THE RADISHES

Observed in: Oaxaca
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 23

There is an interesting story behind the Night of the Radishes. When the Spanish invaded Mexico, they brought with them the radish, which grew well in the fertile Mexican soil. Around 250 years ago, a particularly abundant harvest produced more radishes than could be sold, and some were left in the ground. A few days before Christmas, the local friars pulled some up and were astonished by their size—up to 2 feet long and perhaps 4 inches in diameter—and by their strangely misshapen forked roots, which resembled monsters or demons. They took the roots to the market by the cathedral and displayed them to a highly amused public. After a while the idea came to improve on nature by carv-

ing these giant roots. Traditionally the carvings were mainly Nativity scenes, but now others are common, including figures drawn from local life and the traditional Zapotec and Miztec religions. Parades and traditional dances accompany this annual festival held in the city of Oaxaca. Local artisans and sculptors set up stalls around the main square to display giant radishes that have been carved and sculpted into imaginative shapes. *Buñuelos* (a tortilla-like dessert, whose plate is broken after it has been used, is commonly eaten on this occasion. This celebration is also called Festival de los Rábanos, La Noche de Rábanos, or Radish Festival.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

Children are highly valued and protected in Mexican society. Many women in Mexico believe that motherhood is the most important achievement of their lives. The news of pregnancy in a family is a joyous occasion, often celebrated with a banquet. The purpose of the banquet is to thank God for the unborn baby and to seek blessings for the mother-to-be.

At the moment of birth the midwife lets out a cry to greet the newborn and to honor the mother. After the birth the midwife washes the bodies of both the mother and child, which on a symbolic level is meant to cleanse and purge them of spiritual and worldly evil. The cleansing begins with the chant: “O child, receive the water of the Lord of the World, which is our life.” Each new birth is celebrated with a lavish dinner. On such occasions Mexican families invite all their friends, relatives, and often elderly people in their neighborhood to join in. After the partying is over, each of the older family members makes a wish for the baby and mother.

❁ MARRIAGE

On the day of a traditional Mexican wedding, the parents of the groom come to the place where the bride waits to welcome them into her family. An old woman then wraps the already dressed bride in a black blanket and carries her off on her back through the streets to the couple's new home. The people of the village come out in the streets to greet the new bride.

When they enter the house, the bride and groom are made to sit on the hearth. The mother of the bride gives the groom a cloak, and the mother of the groom gives the bride a skirt and a blouse. When the cloak and the blouse are tied together, the couple is formally married. The couple then feed each other tamales. The priestess then leads the couple to a room and stands guard in front of the door. Later the couple is blessed by a priest, who sprinkles holy water over them.

Further Reading

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❧ Micronesia, ❧ Federated States of

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	An island group in Oceania in the north Pacific Ocean, about three-quarters of the way between Hawaii and Indonesia
Size	271 sq. mi.
Capital City	Palikir
Flag Description	The flag of Micronesia is light blue with four white five-pointed stars arranged in a diamond pattern in the center.
Independence	November 3, 1986 (from UN trusteeship administered by the United States)
Population	108,105 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional government in free association with the United States
Nationality	Micronesian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Asian (Nine Micronesian and Polynesian groups)
Major Language(s)	English (official and common language); Trukese; Pohnpeian; Yapese; Kosrean; Ulithian; Woleaian; Nukuoro; Kapingamarangi
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (50%); Protestant (47%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; FSM Constitution Day, May 10; Micronesian Day, July 12; Kosrae Liberation Day, September 8; Pohnpei Liberation Day, September 11; United Nations Day, October 24; National Day, November 3

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

The various islands, atolls, and volcanic crests that make up what is now known as the Federated States of Micronesia were probably settled at different times, starting with Yap. The first settlers canoed from the Philippines and Indonesia to Micronesia, pulling their outriggers up on the sands of Yap between 4000 and 2000 B.C.E.

Much later voyagers from Melanesia worked their way from Kosrae to Pohnpei, Chuuk, and Yap. Yet no Micronesian people have legends telling of their life before they reached the islands. The early settlers had no metals and worked

mainly with stone, leaving many impressive carvings. They were also superb ocean navigators and had a rich oral history that did not survive the later European invasions.

Ferdinand Magellan (c. 1480–1521) sailed past Micronesia on his way around the world in 1521. In the decades that followed ships used the islands as a stopover on the way to the Spice Islands. Because they apparently had nothing that the Europeans valued, the islands were relatively safe during this period. But in 1817 Europeans began to chart Micronesia, and soon British whalers began to arrive, followed quickly by U.S. whalers. The whaling crews, not known for observing social niceties, often harassed and killed islanders, who then replied in kind. Whalers brought venereal diseases, as well as other scourges like the flu and measles, and in 1854 a smallpox epidemic killed 50 percent of Pohnpei's population. The whaling

crews were followed by Protestant missionaries, equally untutored with respect to unfamiliar traditions, and they imposed Western clothing, language, and laws along with their religious beliefs.

In 1899 Germany tried to catch up with the other European imperialists by purchasing Micronesia from the Spanish, hoping to make a profit from the production of copra (dried coconut meat). Micronesians were “encouraged” to plant coconuts and work for the new colonists; some were forced to move from their islands to the German plantations, while communally held land was seized and given to private investors.

When World War I began, the Germans abandoned Micronesia. The Japanese eagerly replaced them and set about developing the infrastructure and administration necessary to annex Micronesia. The Japanese intended to make Micronesia a look-alike of their homeland and built Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines, geisha houses, and public baths. Their administrative centers were merely smaller versions of Tokyo. In 1920 the League of Nations gave Japan a mandate over the islands. Eventually the Japanese population reached 100,000, while the indigenous population was only around 40,000. The islands’ social infrastructure was remade to meet Japanese needs, while Micronesians were second-class citizens. Although Micronesia was largely a resource for the Japanese, the colonial power created a strong economy and a high level of agricultural activity. During this period sugarcane production, mining, fishing, and tropical agriculture emerged as the major industries.

On December 7, 1941, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor and seized Guam. In February 1944 the United States finally retaliated and attacked Chuuk Lagoon, Japan’s most important naval base in the central Pacific. Over 200,000 tons of equipment was sunk in two days, and the United States succeeded in neutralizing the base. The fighting was heavy in Micronesia and the surrounding islands during the months that followed, and particularly long and brutal battles occurred in the Marianas, to the north, and Palau, to the west. Almost all the infrastructure built up by the Japanese was destroyed, and many Micronesians were caught in the crossfire, although history glosses over their misery.

When the war ended the occupation continued, and the United States took over from Japan. The U.S. Navy wasted no time taking over the islands and sealed them off to visitors. The Yanks had plans for Micronesia. The Marshall Islands, for example, in Micronesia’s eastern region were given the cruel task of serving as a guinea pig for the nuclear ambitions of the U.S. military. Between 1946 and 1958, 67 bombs were exploded in the region, seriously damaging the Marshallese gene pool. In 1947 the United Nations set up a Trust Territory in the Pacific that included Truk (now Chuuk), Kusaie (now Kosrae), Ponape (now Pohnpei), and Yap, and gave administrative rights over the islands to the United States. In its role as trustee the United States’s responsibility was to “promote the economic

Nan Madol

Nan Madol was the ceremonial and political center of the Sau Deleur Dynasty that united Pohnpei’s estimated 25,000 people in late prehistoric times. The oral history of the islanders supported by archaeological evidence substantiates Nan Madol’s position as Pohnpei’s political and religious center until the 1500s, when the centralized system collapsed. Nan Madol was occupied for at least 2,000 years with a 1,000-year span of major construction between 500 and 1500 C.E. Nan Madol covers almost 7 square miles including the stone architecture on a coral reef flat along the shore of Temwen Island, several other artificial islets, and the adjacent Pohnpei main island coastline.

The stone walls of the site’s central area enclose a space almost 1 mile long and 1/3 mile wide. Within the walls are nearly 100 artificial islets—stone and coral-filled platforms—bordered by tidal canals. One investigator has estimated that between 490,000 and 738,000 tons of building material had to be moved across differing distances to the site.

Although several thousand artifacts have been recovered at Nan Madol including shell tools and ornaments, pottery, and stone tools, questions remain about the purpose of Nan Madol and how it fits in the broader Pohnpeian sociopolitical system.

advancement and self-sufficiency of the inhabitants.” Instead the United States immediately constructed a series of military bases, effectively preventing another country from doing the same. Micronesia was under the control of the U.S. Department of Defense until 1951, when it was transferred to the Department of the Interior.

Although the United States was supposed to be grooming the Micronesians for self-government, it chose instead a combination of neglect and increasing dependency. Micronesia’s economy relied entirely on government services and money from the United States, and there was no industrial or agricultural basis to replace it. In 1965 America agreed to form a Congress of Micronesia, a body elected by islanders empowered to determine the islanders’ future, but executive control remained with the U.S. High Commissioner. Just to be sure nothing would come of the plan, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) bugged the Congress’s offices.

In 1966 the arrival of a bunch of idealistic young Peace Corps volunteers did nothing to improve the U.S. cause. They were supposed to spread the word about the wonders of U.S. society; instead the volunteers began to educate the Micronesians about their legal and social rights, encouraging serious agi-

Fun Fact

The only empire known to have originated in Micronesia was based in Yap.

Fun Fact

Sakau is a narcotic drink made from the roots of pepper shrubs. It is hugely popular on Pohnpei, where sakau bars outnumber other bars two to one.

tation for independence. On July 12, 1978, following a constitutional convention, the people of four of the former districts of the Trust Territory—Chuuk, Yap, Pohnpei, and Kosrae—voted to approve the Constitution of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). UN observers certified this referendum as a legitimate act of self-determination.

With the implementation of the FSM Constitution on May 10, 1979, the former districts became states of the federation, and, in due course, adopted their own state constitutions. Nationwide democratic elections were held to elect officials of the national and four state governments. Tosiwo Nakayama (r. 1979–87), the former president of the Congress of Micronesia, became the first president of the FSM, and a judicial system was established.

Under a 15-year compact signed with the United States in 1982, and put in force on November 3, 1986, Micronesia agreed to continue allowing the United States to control its relations with other countries and maintain its exclusive military access to the islands. In turn the United States guaranteed to continue annual funding to buoy the Micronesian economy. In 1991 the FSM was admitted to the

United Nations. In 1997 President Bailey Olter (1932–99) suffered a stroke, and vice president, Jacob Nena (b. 1941), replaced him for the remaining two years of his tenure. In May 1999 Leo Falcam (b. 1935) was elected president for a two-year term.

Recently the Federated States of Micronesia has been seeking different ways to boost the productivity of its economy because it remains heavily dependent on U.S. money. Current sources of income are fishing fees, selling its Internet domain name (.fm) to radio stations, and producing sakau (kava) crops.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

In an area of Oceania known as Micronesia is a conglomeration of different countries that are islands in the western Pacific, about 2,500 miles southwest of Hawaii, located just above the equator. They are united in their history by having been at some point in time part of the U.S. Trust Territory of Micronesia. Of these, Guam is still a U.S. territory; the Republic of Palau and the Marshall Islands are independent nations; the Mariana Islands are a commonwealth associated with the United States; and Pohnpei, Yap, Chuuk, and Kosrae are the largest of the islands that make up the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM).

FSM includes a total of 607 islands. Although they occupy a total land area of only 271 square

El Niño: Southern Oscillation (ENSO) Event

El Niño was first identified by fishermen off the western coast of South America when unusually warm water appeared in the Pacific Ocean near the beginning of the year. El Niño means “The Little Boy” or “Christ child” in Spanish, and the phenomenon was so named because it tends to show up around Christmas. In normal, non-El Niño conditions the trade winds blow toward the west across the tropical Pacific, piling up warm surface water in the west Pacific, causing the sea surface to be a little more than $\frac{1}{2}$ foot higher at Indonesia than it is at Ecuador. The sea surface temperature is about 46°F higher in the west, whereas the upwelling of cold water from deeper levels causes the temperatures off South America to be cooler. This cold water is rich in nutrients and supports high levels of primary productivity, diverse marine ecosystems, and major fisheries.

El Niño disrupts the ocean atmosphere system in the tropical Pacific, with important consequences for weather around the globe. These worldwide effects cause changes in tropical rainfall, which then influence wind patterns over much of the world. Dense tropical rain clouds distort the air

flow aloft (5–10 miles above sea level) on a horizontal scale of thousands of miles. The waves in the air flow, in turn, determine the positions of the monsoons and the storm tracks and belts of strong winds aloft (the jet streams) that separate warm and cold regions at the planet’s surface. In El Niño years, when the rain area usually centered over Indonesia and the far western Pacific moves east into the central Pacific, the waves in the flow aloft are affected, causing unseasonable weather around the world.

Every two to seven years, off the western coast of South America, ocean currents and winds shift, bringing warm water westward, displacing the nutrient-rich cold water that normally wells up from deep in the ocean. The invasion of warm water disrupts both the marine food chain and the economies of coastal communities that are based on fishing and related industries. The eastward displacement of the atmospheric heat source overlaying the warmest water results in large changes in the global atmospheric circulation, which in turn force changes in weather in regions far removed from the tropical Pacific. Rainfall follows the warm water eastward, with associated flooding in Peru and drought in Indonesia and Australia.

miles, they occupy more than one million square miles of the Pacific Ocean, ranging 1,700 miles from east to west. Pohnpei occupies nearly half of the country's land area, and the balance is almost equally divided among the other three states.

The islands of Pohnpei, Kosrae, and Chuuk are volcanic islands, while Yap is an elevated portion of the Eurasian plate. These islands are similar to the volcanic islands of Hawaii, with fertile soils, lush vegetation, and an abundance of water.

The Federated States of Micronesia have a tropical oceanic climate that is consistently warm and humid, with uniform temperatures (varying between 81°F and 90°F, sometimes dropping as low as 70°F). Rainfall is quite heavy; Pohnpei actually has the reputation of being one of the wettest places on Earth since it receives up to 330 inches of rain annually. During the typhoon season (August–December) the low-lying atolls are often hit by tropical typhoons. The wettest months are April and May. Drought conditions also occur periodically throughout FSM, especially when El Niño conditions develop over the western Pacific. At that time groundwater supplies dwindle drastically.

Due to the heavy rainfall in the area these islands are crisscrossed by a number of rivers, such as the Nanpil on the island of Pohnpei. The highest point on the islands is Dolohmwar (Totolom) at a height of 2,595 feet.

Apart from a few Asian sambar deer left on Pohnpei, the only land mammals that inhabit the Federated States of Micronesia are bats. Fruit bats, with wingspans of up to 3 feet, can be seen at dusk on most of the islands. There are also plenty of monitor lizards (up to 6 feet long), geckoes, and skinks (a type of lizard). Marine life includes hard and soft corals, anemones, sponges, whales, porpoises, and shellfish (including the giant tridacna clam). Some species of sea turtles lay their eggs on the local beaches, and there are more than 200 species of birds in Micronesia. The surrounding coral reefs abound in colorful tropical fish, turtles, and manta rays. The ocean waters house lots of game fish like marlin, mahi-mahi, tuna, barracuda, sailfish, and assorted bottom fish (literally, fish from the bottom of the ocean).

FSM offers a diverse range of natural ecosystems, ranging from mangrove swamps to verdant tropical rain forests and pristine coral reefs. A wild profusion of tropical shrubs, flowers, and more than 600 species of trees grow in the FSM states. These include hibiscus, Hong Kong orchids, ironwood, eucalyptus, Honduras mahogany, papaya, bananas, coconuts, and plumeria (Frangipani) trees.

❁ ECONOMY

In FSM economic activity consists primarily of subsistence farming and fishing. The fishing industry is very important. Foreign commercial fishing fleets pay over US\$20 million annually for the right to

operate in FSM territorial waters. These licensing fees account for nearly 30 percent of the islands' domestic revenue. Additionally exports of marine products, mainly re-exports of fish to Japan, account for nearly 85 percent of export revenue. Other than high-grade phosphate, the islands have few mineral deposits worth exploiting. There is tremendous potential for the tourism industry to boom, but the remote location and the lack of basic infrastructure and facilities are major hindrances.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

It is believed that the people of Micronesia arrived here from Asia thousands of years ago. With the arrival of Europeans, Micronesian cultural traditions were eroded over the decades of colonial rule. In the 21st century Micronesians are earnestly trying to preserve and promote what remains of their culture.

Micronesian societies are made up of clan groupings, with descent traced through the mother (except on Yap, where descent is patrilineal). The clan groupings extend across islands. Extended families are prevalent, and most households include grandparents, cousins, children, and adopted hangers-on.

In the traditional music of Micronesia singing always predominates. It is accompanied by few instruments except for conch shell horns, sticks, and a box beaten by a multitude of hands to provide the rhythm. With no written language, the traditional music of Micronesia is a rich repertoire of the spirituality and culture of the Micronesian people. Micronesian chants have a haunting, mesmerizing quality about them that reflects the resilience of ancient seafarers who sailed by the stars, the wave patterns, movements of the birds, and distinct cloud formations. These chants are highly spiritual in nature; in fact they invoke mythological gods or ancestors for their blessings and favor in any venture about to be undertaken.

Traditional dancing is highly valued through-

Fun Fact

La Niña means “The Little Girl.” La Niña is also called El Viejo, “The Old One,” anti-El Niño, or simply “a cold event” or “a cold episode.” El Niño is often called “a warm event.”

Fun Fact

Kosrae is the easternmost island in the Caroline Islands chain.

Fun Fact

Mt. Finkol, merely the tip of a submerged mountain peak that rises from the abyssal plain thousands of feet below, is Kosrae's highest point at 2,064 feet above sea level. Kosrae is called the Land of the Sleeping Lady because the gods became angry with Kosrae long ago and laid her on her back so that she became an island. From the top of Mt. Finkol her head, hair, stomach, and breasts can be seen outlined against the sky.

Fun Fact

There are no snakes in Micronesia.

out Micronesia, but especially so on the island of Yap, which is averse to Western culture and lifestyle. The shuffling and the shaking of the bodies are performed by groups, with members of the two sexes dancing separately. The dance is accompanied by chanting in unison.

Community buildings in Micronesia were generally constructed with planks of mahogany, while the roofs were thatched by the leaves of Nipa palm. Though Western architecture has left its mark, there are still a number of examples of traditional architecture to be seen in Micronesia.

Micronesia also has a rich tradition of canoe-building that can be traced back to the first sailors who reached the islands.

Fun Fact

Chuukese lovesticks—slender, dagger-shaped wooden rods carved on each side—are now sold in handfuls to tourists looking for “exotic” souvenirs, but in the past island men carved their personal notches on a lovestick. At night, lovestick in hand, a would-be suitor would kneel beside the thatched wall opposite the position where a woman slept, poke the stick through the wall, and entangle her hair, hopefully waking her without also waking her family. The wordless language of the lovestick would begin when the girl felt around the shaft’s notches and identified its owner.

Fun Fact

One of Yap’s outer islands Woleai Atoll illustrates how serious the Yapese are about preserving their traditions: On the atoll there are rules against wearing T-shirts, pants, baseball caps, and other Western clothing. Although tourists are not required to observe the clothing regulations, they are more readily welcomed if they wear traditional outfits.

☼ CUISINE

Breadfruit and seafood are staple ingredients of the cuisine on all the islands, although Pohnpeians are especially fond of yams and *sakau*, a narcotic drink made from the roots of pepper shrubs. In addition these islanders use both turtles and eggs for food.

Micronesians habitually chew *burw* (betel nut), mixing it with mineral lime, which keeps the active ingredient in its freebase or alkaline form, enabling it to enter the bloodstream via sublingual absorption. Its effects are often further enhanced by the addition of plain tobacco, or tobacco soaked in vodka, to the nuts. Betel nut juice dyes the teeth of Micronesians red.

Public/Legal Holidays**☼ NEW YEAR’S EVE/DAY**

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 is the first day of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar and is widely celebrated as New Year’s Day. Celebrations take place all over the world starting on the evening of December 31 (New Year’s Eve). In FSM, as in most parts of the world, New Year’s Day is the harbinger of new hopes and aspirations. It is celebrated in the company of one’s family, friends, and acquaintances with dance and musical programs, as well as parties and get-togethers.

☼ FSM CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 10

This official holiday commemorates a significant event in the history of FSM. On this day the FSM adopted a new constitution, thereby becoming a sovereign state. This event is observed with speeches and parades.

☼ MICRONESIAN DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 12

This day is very important to the people of Micronesia. Whether by accident or design, several historic events took place on this day, though in different years. On July 12, 1965, the Congress of Micronesia met for the first time; then the first Micronesian Constitution Convention opened on this day in 1975. Next FSM citizens approved the constitution by a plebiscite on July 12, 1978. Finally the Supreme Court of the Federated States of Micronesia assumed its official duties on July 12, 1981.

☼ KOSRAE LIBERATION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 8

Though celebrated throughout all of UFM, this is one of the chief holidays in Kosrae. It commemorates the defeat of the Japanese on the islands by American troops toward the end of World War II. Celebrations include canoe races and other sports competitions.

☼ POHNPEI LIBERATION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 11

Following immediately after Kosrae Liberation Day, this official holiday marks the end of the Japanese

occupation of the island of Pohnpei during World War II. It is preceded by a week of sports and traditional events.

✿ UNITED NATIONS DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 24

This is one of the epoch-making events in the history of the modern world. In the aftermath of World War II, a centralized world organization known as the United Nations (UN) was founded to control, monitor, and supervise the maintenance of peace and harmony around the world. All major nations were represented. In FSM on this day people recall the significant contributions of the UN to maintaining global peace continuously for the past six decades. This day is observed by means of religious prayers for peace, UN flag-raising, and parades. All educational and public institutions remain closed.

✿ NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 3

The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) gained its independence on this day in 1986, after over 400 years of foreign domination—by Spain, Germany, and finally the United States.

Religious Holidays

✿ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Last Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, commemorating the last week of Jesus' mortal life. Jesus was the prophet of Christianity, and Christians believe him to be the second person of the Holy Trinity, made up of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Palm Sunday is as much about the beginning of Jesus' journey to the Cross as it is about his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. His arrival in Jerusalem was indeed the way to the Cross. After two of his disciples had fetched a donkey for him to ride, they placed their clothes on it to make a comfortable seat. The disciples then cut branches and covered the path, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the words of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. People welcomed him by waving palm and olive branches, and strewing garments and branches on the road. There were different perceptions at work: Jesus rode in on a donkey, the humble entry of a peaceful nature for a spiritual king; the people of Jerusalem welcomed him with palm and olive branches and the laying of garments in his path because they wanted a worldly king to defeat the Romans.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

✿ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: Thursday before Easter

The rituals observed on Maundy Thursday are based on a sequence of events supposed to have occurred during the meal Jesus had with his Apostles. First Jesus washed the feet of his disciples; then he announced that he had been betrayed by one of them. The traitor Judas left the table. Finally Jesus instituted the Eucharist: a ritual of consuming bread and wine as symbols of his body and blood, also referred to as communion in Christian churches.

In the Roman Catholic Church, Maundy Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist, the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week, and gives priests an opportunity to prepare for the many rituals associated with Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

✿ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, also called Mourning Friday, Holy Friday, or Great Friday, falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent. It is observed in most parts of the world when Christians contemplate the meaning of Jesus' Crucifixion. Some Micronesians observe a fast from Ash Wednesday (first day of Lent), for 40 days up to Good Friday and a partial fast from then until Easter. Some fast only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. On Good Friday people visit their local churches and pray to Jesus, taking inspiration from his life and teachings.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

Fun Fact

A traditional Chuukese dish called *oppot* is made by digging a pit and filling it with alternating layers of ripe breadfruit and banana leaves. Once the preparation is covered with rocks, it may be left for months or years before the pit is opened and the dish eaten.

Fun Fact

The name *Maundy Thursday* may be linked to the Latin word *mandatum*, "command," because Jesus commanded his Apostles to observe the ritual now called the Eucharist.

☼ HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: Saturday before Easter

Holy Saturday is the day Jesus was laid in the tomb. This was the Sabbath (the Jewish day of rest is Saturday), the day before he rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. It is also regarded as the second Sabbath after Creation. This is the final day of Holy Week, which begins with Palm Sunday and includes Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. It marks the threshold between death and Resurrection and is a day of silence and contemplation for devout Christians.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

☼ EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. On Easter entire extended families gather to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus. They often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to offer prayers. Easter eggs have become associated with the festival because they are symbols of rebirth and regeneration taken from the ancient pagan spring festivals.

In Micronesia people attend midnight prayer services for Easter and celebrate Jesus' Resurrection by lighting candles. A festive spirit envelops churches as people sing devotional hymns.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

☼ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Date: December 25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world. It celebrates the birth of Jesus, whom they believe to be the Son of God. In FSM on Christmas day, Protestant Christians attend their local churches and spend the major part of the day there. Every minister, lay preacher, and missionary in the area delivers a message during an elaborate worship service. Worshipers spend a good deal of time singing hymns and carols. Christmas on Kosrae is much livelier. There are formation marches, singing competitions, and a grand feast, open to all.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

☼ KOSRAE CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed in: Kosrae
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 11

This is an important day in the history of Kosrae Island. On this day in 1980 the island of Kosrae proclaimed its independence and adopted its own constitution.

☼ YAP DAY

Observed in: Yap
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 1

Yap Day is celebrated every March by the four islands of Yap; it is an official holiday. The festivities are an authentic expression of the rich culture of Yap, which has only recently been opened to visitors. It is primarily a way of celebrating dance by holding competitions among Yapese villages. Each year a different village hosts the Mit-mit, providing free traditional and Western food and drink to those who attend. Traditional Yapese dances are performed including sitting dances, kneeling dances, standing dances, and stick dances. Female dancers attired in richly colored grass skirts and men in loin cloths (*thuwis*) perform sitting and standing dances. The most popular and exciting, however, are the stick dances, and crowds gather to see how well each village performs and to cheer for their favorite.

The villages spend most of the previous year choreographing their dances and practicing them. Villages prepare and rehearse as many as 12 dances, and each dance tells a story. However, after all that effort, Yap Day dances can only be performed once in public and then once in the village before they have to be retired.

Competitions in traditional tattooing are also held. Farmers exhibit fresh produce with contests for the largest and best local offerings. The children also participate in traditional games and tests of skill in spear throwing, fishing, and making handicrafts.

On the last day of the festival, the Yap Visitors Bureau hosts a welcome reception to honor guests and the visitor who traveled farthest to get there. Most guests at the Yap Day festivities come from neighboring islands. Only a small number of tourists is allowed, making it a privilege to attend.

☼ POHNPEI CULTURE DAY

Observed in: Pohnpei
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 31

Yap Currency

Yap consists of four islands joined inside a coral reef and part of an uplift of the Eurasian plate. An outer barrier reef surrounds the islands and encloses a lagoon between fringing reefs and the inner edge of the barrier reef. Twelve thousand people live in Yap. The people of Yap speak five languages, including English, and their society is divided into seven distinct social classes. As the center of a huge sea empire, Yap once controlled most of the trade in the Pacific.

No one knows why the Yap islanders began to use stone currency, especially a currency so cumbersome and difficult to obtain. The coins of Yap are huge stone rounds called *vai* (or *fe*). They are often made of aragonite, a mineral that is not found on Yap. That is why they had to be brought by sea from the island of Palau, almost 500 miles away. Transporting the stones would have required at least five days over the rough Pacific, and men often died in the process. The value of individual coins is based on two factors: the diameter of the coin (some are 12 feet in

diameter) and how many men died bringing it to Yap. The more casualties, the more the coin is worth.

The *vai* is not currency as this term is defined in the West; it is a symbol of prestige and wealth. When the need arises, the coin can be carried from one place to another by inserting a sturdy pole through the hole in the middle of the coin. While small coins can be managed by only two men, the larger ones may require as many as 20 strong men. Moving the stones is not always necessary either. Sometimes a coin can change hands but remain stationary because everyone can remember who it belongs to.

In 1929, 13,821 stone rounds of different diameters were counted on the island, but only about half of them remain. The decrease in their numbers, is their “bank value.” The Bank of Hawaii buys them at the ordinary exchange rate, which is calculated by their diameter and the number of men who died bringing them from Palau. A *vai* that measures 1 inch in diameter is worth about US\$72, so a *vai* 7 feet in diameter represents a fortune for Yap islanders.

A number of indigenous traditions have survived two centuries of colonial rule by the Spanish, Germans, Japanese, and Americans and still influence Pohnpei's social and political character strongly. Of these, Pohnpei's cultural dances and the local brew, *sakau*, have become popular attractions for visitors to the island.

One of the highlights of this holiday is a *sakau*-making ceremony. It is an elaborate ritual that dates back to Pohnpei's prehistory and is a regular feature of any cultural performance.

❁ KOSRAE ARTS FESTIVAL

Observed in: Kosrae
Observed by: General Public
Observed in: Early September

The Kosrae Arts Festival is an annual week-long celebration of the Kosrae people, culture, and traditions. The arts festival is held early in September to commemorate the September 8, 1945, liberation of Kosrae, marking the end of World War II and the suffering it caused.

Visitors who want to see more of Kosrae should take a break and hike to the Menka ruins, one of Kosrae's greatest treasures. This is where the temple of the goddess of breadfruit Sinlaku is located. She spent her last days on Kosrae before fleeing to Yap when the first Christian missionaries arrived in 1852. According to legend, an islander heard a strange voice from Sinlaku one night, describing a light coming in from the horizon, a very strong light that this goddess was afraid of. This occurred on the

night before the missionaries arrived on the SS *Morning Star*. This is one reason that it was easy for locals to be converted to Christianity.

YAP CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed in: Yap
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 24

This official holiday commemorates the legal enforcement of the constitution of Yap in the year 1982.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

In the Federated States of Micronesia there are no ceremonies before childbirth, although certain customs are strictly followed by expectant mothers. Micronesians believe that a pregnant woman should not go out at night. If she does she will become very weak and sick when her child is born. The woman is encouraged to do exercises and swim in saltwater. There are also many restrictions regarding the food she can eat.

Responsibility for the pregnant woman is usually her mother's, but other women familiar with delivering babies may be asked to assist. After the delivery and the severing of the umbilical cord, the husband buries the cord and plants a coconut tree to



mark the place. The new mother is given healthy food and local medicine to help her regain her strength. The baby is kept warm with a large leaf that is warmed up and placed on its body.

According to Kosraean custom, the husband stays in a different room or house for a fairly long time after a child is delivered. This ensures that the mother or the child will not contract any diseases or infections and enables the new mother to devote her full attention to the newborn child.

The main celebrations following childbirth take place a year after the child is born. Plans for the occasion are made well in advance, and the child's father is expected to assume all the responsibilities and expenses. Early in the morning on this day, the mother feeds and bathes the child and dresses it in its finest clothes. The preparations for the feast begin quite early in the day and include items such as breadfruit, taro, pigs, and chicken. Cooking takes place at the houses of the relatives of both the husband and the wife. Most of the festive cooking is done by men. On this occasion the female visitors bring gifts for the baby. After the cooking is done, the food is brought together, and the father of the child selects several men to distribute it. The child's mother is responsible for keeping track of the gifts and the food.

✿ MARRIAGE

Traditionally two young people willing to get married must get to know each other's feelings before they marry. They usually make arrangements to meet each other secretly outside their homes. These meetings will continue until they both want to get married. After they make up their minds, both the young man and his future wife inform their parents. If the boy's parents agree, then a date is fixed for visiting the bride. On this occasion the boy carries with him the ingredients for making the Pohnpeian drink called *sakau* and is accompanied by a number of relatives. When they arrive at the young lady's house, they cut the root of the *sakau* plant and pound it into a drink. Then they squeeze the liquid into coconut shell cups and offer it to the relatives of the young woman. When the groom-to-be offers the drink to the prospective father-in-law, he explains the purpose of his visit. After an agreement is reached, the young man and woman are asked if they are willing to marry each other and live together for the rest of their lives. If both say "yes," the wedding date is set. Finally, on the wedding day, the boy's family organizes a large party to entertain all the friends and relatives who attend the ceremony.

✿ DEATH

Funerals in Micronesia still follow indigenous traditions. When a person dies, the family notifies the leader of the community, as well as the individual's

relatives. It is customary for those who attend the funeral to bring rice, biscuits, coffee, canned meat, and other edible items. These will be given to the family and served during their period of mourning. Stationed near the coffin, there is always a woman who awaits new arrivals. When someone approaches to greet her, she cries and wails. At night groups of men and women place themselves by the coffin to sing and pray aloud. At daybreak, the male relatives of the dead return to their homes to gather yams, pigs, dogs, and breadfruit to prepare a meal that they cook in an underground oven called an *ubmw*. This is the most important aspect of the funeral. All kinds of food items go into the *ubmw*. A massive feast takes place in the traditional Pohnpeian feast house (*nabs*) before the body is taken to be buried. A high-quality *sakau* (an intoxicating drink made from the roots of pepper shrubs) is brought before the chief (*nabm-warki*) and pounded to extract the liquid. Only after the chief has drunk the liquor will the other guests drink it.

Meanwhile, the family members prepare for the burial. People approach the coffin to weep and say their last words in prayers and songs, in addition to donating money. Before burial a priest or minister recites a prayer. After the prayer the women and children weep ceremonially. Then the men come to take the corpse to the burial site. On the way to the burial ground people sing and cry. At the burial ground the priest completes the prayers. After the prayers are over one by one all those who have assembled throw handfuls of soil on the coffin, and the grave is sealed. After the burial those of higher rank take their share of the food and go home, while others stay on at the *nabs* to drink *sakau*.

From the fifth to the ninth day after the funeral, members of the immediate family and some friends get together to drink *sakau*, dine together, and fondly recall the deceased. Some relatives remain at the house of death until the 10th day. On the 10th night the immediate family hosts a farewell party for the deceased. A number of visitors come to the deceased's home where they are presented with floral garlands, oil, loincloths (*lavalawas*), and many more gifts. Then they drink *sakau* together. This marks the end of the funeral.

Further Reading

William H. Alkire, *An Introduction to the Peoples and Cultures of Micronesia* (Menlo Park, Calif.: Cummings Publishing, 1977); Maureen H. Fitzgerald, in collaboration with Eugenia Samuel and Linda Phillip, *Whisper of the Mother: From Menarche to Menopause among Women in Pohnpei* (Westport, Conn.: Bergin & Garvey, 2001); Elizabeth Keating, *Power Sharing: Language, Rank, Gender, and Social Space in Pohnpei, Micronesia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Paul Rainbird, *The Archaeology of Micronesia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

~ Moldova ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Eastern Europe, northeast of Romania
Size	13,067 sq. mi.
Capital City	Chisinau
Flag Description	Moldova's flag has three equal vertical bands of blue (hoist side), yellow, and red; a coat-of-arms positioned in the center of the yellow band depicts a golden eagle carrying a shield.
Independence	August 27, 1991 (from USSR)
Population	4,455,421 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Moldovan
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Caucasian (Moldovan/Romanian, 78%)
Major Language(s)	Moldovan (official; almost identical to Romanian); Russian, Gagauz (a Turkish dialect)
Major Religion(s)	Eastern Orthodox (98%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; New Year's Day (Orthodox), January 14; International Women's Day, March 8; Labor Day, May 1; National Heroes' Day, May 9; Independence Day, August 27; Limba Noastra, August 31

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The Moldovans and Romanians are both descended from the Dacians, an Indo-European tribe of Thracian lineage, who inhabited a large area of Central Europe, roughly as big as present-day Moldova and Romania, in ancient times. Dacia's capital was Sarmizegetusa. Dacia existed at least as early as the third century B.C.E., and in the second century it was ruled by a king named Oroles. Certainly by the time the Romans encountered them, the Dacians had already attained a high level of social organization. There were two basic social classes: the aristocracy (tarabostes) and the common people (comati). Only aristocrats were permitted to cover their heads. Because they wore felt hats, the Romans called them *pileati*.

Dacians spoke an Indo-European (I-E) language, but linguists cannot agree about its characteristics because there is little archaeological evidence and very little linguistic evi-

dence. Some scholars think it belonged to the Satem branch of Indo-European.

Traces of the Dacian language are believed to have been preserved in modern Romanian, some scholars have argued that Albanian is descended from a dialect of Dacian. (This would be hard to prove since linguistic scholars do not agree on the most basic features of the Dacians' language.)

The Dacians were an agrarian people and were primarily farmers, although they also raised bees and grapes, tended herds, and created objects of clay and knew metallurgy. They also worked the gold and silver mines of Transylvania.

Since Moldova is strategically located between Russia and Romania, it has suffered from innumerable disputes and invasions over the centuries. The country of Moldova was part of the Principality of Moldavia, a prosperous nation until the 14th century, but the Turks invaded Moldavia, and the country was controlled by the Ottoman Empire until 1711, when the Russians stepped in and fought to lay their claim over the territory. During the 18th century the Turks and the Russians fought intermittently to gain control of Moldova.

Eventually Russia and Turkey signed the Treaty of Bucharest in 1812, according to which the eastern half of the region (current Moldova) went to the Russians, who named it Bessarabia. Then in 1918, the Bessarabian legislature voted to become part of Romania. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), however, signed an agreement called the Molotop-Ribbentrop Pact with Germany in 1940, one result of which was that the USSR occupied Bessarabia. Their rule was short-lived. In 1941, the Romanians regained control of the territory and held it until 1944, when they found themselves on the losing side in World War II. Moldova was ceded back to Moscow when hostilities between the USSR and Romania ended. The boundary between Moldova and Romania established in 1947 is still in effect.

After the collapse of the USSR in August 1991, Moldova declared its independence. In March 1992 the Republic of Moldova became a member of the United Nations. Although Moldova became independent, there are still traces of internal tension and strife. After independence the minorities in the region of Transnistria wanted to retain their ties with Russia and still do not consider themselves a part of Moldova. Sporadic fighting between the rebels and the Moldovan military occurs, and the issue was still unresolved early in the 21st century.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in Eastern Europe, the Republic of Moldova is a landlocked nation between Romania and Ukraine. Moldova has a hilly terrain with grasslands in the northern and central parts of the country; the region has rolling plains. The two most striking geographical features of Moldova are the Dniester River and the Prut River, which form natural boundaries with Ukraine and Romania, respectively. The highest point of Moldova lies in the northern part of the country, Dealul Balanesti, which is more than 1,410 feet high.

Moldova enjoys a temperate continental climate characterized by mild winters and warm summers. The average temperature in summer is 77°F, while in winter it averages around 25°F. The climatic conditions and its fertile black soil make Moldova a prime area for farming and ideal for growing a wide variety of fruits and vegetables.

In terms of flora, Moldova is home to trees such as the oak, elm, beech, fir, and hornbeam, while its fauna includes badgers, roes, stags, wild boar, carp, salmon, bream, and a wide variety of reptiles and birds.

ECONOMY

In terms of per capita gross domestic product (GDP), Moldova is the poorest country in Europe. The nation's economy is weak. It depends on agriculture, namely vegetables, fruits, wine, and tobacco. Around one-third of the nation's labor force is employed in the agriculture sector. Extensive vineyards are found

all across Moldova, and it produces good wines that are exported throughout the world. Moldova is also known for its champagne and liqueurs.

Moldova is dependent on the Russian Federation to meet its needs for raw materials and energy. Thus the devaluation of the Russian ruble in 1998 had a serious impact on Moldova's economy. Also a severe drought and poor climatic conditions in recent years have diminished Moldova's agricultural production and aggravated its economic woes.

At present the government of Moldova is working with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to introduce economic reforms to revive its ailing economy.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Moldova's society reflects its ethnic diversity. Only 65 percent of its citizens are ethnic Moldovans (or Romanians); the country is also home to Russians, Ukrainians, Jews, Germans, Greeks, Bulgarians, and Gagauz (an ethnic group of Turkey). It is a predominantly Christian society. Around 98 percent of the nation's population adheres to Eastern Orthodox beliefs. Moldovan, similar to Romanian, is the national and official language of Moldova, although Russian and Gagauz (a Turkish dialect) are also spoken in different parts of the country.

Although there are regional differences in how Moldovan holidays are celebrated, common threads run through them. The traditions and customs of the country include both Christian and non-Christian holidays, which originated during the pre-Christian era. Since Moldovan is now mainly an Eastern Orthodox country, this form of Christianity permeates the spirit of the holidays, with other themes such as the seasons or common trades being blended within Christian motifs.

In the expression of popular customs there are the living and the ancestors who preceded them. Moldova culture carefully preserves the memory of ancestral peoples. The focus of their popular spirituality differs from one village to the next.

Traditionally Moldovans continue to live much as their ancestors, the Dacians, did. They are farmers who work the land, keep vineyards, raise cattle, or live as shepherds, and their spiritual expression reflects these pursuits. Spring and summer are devoted to working the land. Autumn is the time for harvesting the fruits of one's labor, and winter is the time for artistic creativity and spiritual growth. Delicate, graceful, and sober, the popular art of Moldova has been kept alive by the villages. Village leaders assumed the task of guarding the originality, individuality, and permanency of artisans' work.

In a Moldovan house, the most important part is the living room, also known as *casa mare* (house of happiness). The walls of the room are covered with portraits of family members (parents, children, grandparents, and grandchildren) and homespun towels. All important feasts and celebrations take place in the *casa mare*. Also, Moldovans do not dig

wells in their courtyards but along the streets so that thirsty people can quench their thirst easily.

Especially during winter, men and women gather together to sing, dance, and practice traditional handicrafts. These social meetings are known as *sezatorile*.

Moldovans are known for their expertise in traditional folk art forms such as pottery, carpet-making, weaving, and wood and stone carving. Folk songs and dances are an integral part of Moldovan society, and an ancient ballad, “Miorita” (“The Little Ewe Lamb”), which belongs to the country’s pastoral folklore, is extremely popular. Traditional musical instruments include the flute, bagpipes, the violin, and panpipes.

❁ CUISINE

Some of the traditional dishes of Moldova include *mamaliga* (maize porridge), *tochitura moldoveneasca* (pan-fried pork cooked in spicy pepper sauce), chicken soup, fried meat, cabbage rolls, *mangea* (chicken sausages), *sorpa* (spicy ram soup), *pelmeni* (rolls stuffed with meat), noodles, jelly, pies, biscuits, and cakes. In addition, fruits, vegetables, and milk products are integral foods in Moldovan cuisine.

Traditional drinks include wine, fruit juices, tuica (plum brandy), and stewed fruits.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR’S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, and is celebrated as New Year’s Day all over the world. Celebrations and revelry begin the evening of December 31 (New Year’s Eve). In Moldova special parties are held on New Year’s Eve, and people sing and dance their way into the new year.

❁ NEW YEAR’S EVE/DAY

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: January 14

Because Orthodox Churches follow the Julian calendar, there is a 13-day difference between the traditional New Year’s and the celebration of Orthodox New Year’s. Moldovans consider New Year’s Eve auspicious. They believe it should not be spent alone since it marks the birth of a child (the new year) and the departure of a tired, old man (the past year). A Moldovan folktale also claims that, on New Year’s Eve, the sky opens for a moment so that God can view his people on Earth, and the faithful can catch a glimpse of him.

The well-wishers are expected during the afternoon of New Year’s Eve, groups who extend

wishes for a happy life, prosperity, and fertility in the coming year. The children, who symbolize purity and hope, usually receive apples, nuts, and home-baked bread. The old fertility rite is a poem describing, in a mythical manner, the labors to be performed by the plowman, ranging from sowing to bread-making, and including reaping the harvest. These events are celebrated with festive parties throughout Moldova, and everyone rejoices and ushers in the new year with great enthusiasm. People feast at a traditional New Year’s Eve dinner that consists of turkey and then leave to attend social gatherings where they will celebrate the new year. Friends and family members visit each other and exchange greetings with wishes for a happy, healthy, and prosperous new year.

On New Year’s Day Moldovans recite an old fertility rite poem that narrates the labor of a plowman (or farmer) since they consider wheat a symbol of prosperity and wealth. Folk songs expressing the desire for good fortune, good weather, a good harvest, good health, and happiness are sung. Folk dances too are an important part of the New Year’s Day celebrations. Many dances are performed by dancers wearing costumes such as sheepskin and masks. Children receive gifts of apples, breads, and nuts on this day because these are all considered symbols of purity.

Moldovans see no conflict in celebrating two new years, one right after the other. On the contrary they regard themselves as twice blessed.

❁ INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 8

International Women’s Day is celebrated on March 8. It commemorates the social, economic, political, and cultural achievements of women throughout the world. It is a time for reflecting on the past and contemplating the future. It began in 1909, to honor the women of the New York garment worker’s strike the year before. Since 1977, it has had the official backing of the United Nations.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers’ Day, in many parts of the world, commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the

Fun Fact

Moldova has some of the finest and biggest vineyards in Eastern Europe, and wine-tasting is a national passion.

world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

May 1 is a public holiday in Moldova and all public and private institutions remain closed on Labor Day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ NATIONAL HEROES' DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 9

National Heroes' Day, or Victory Day, commemorates the victory of Allied forces over Nazi Germany in World War II, on May 9, 1945. On this day people all over the country remember those Moldovan soldiers who fought against the Nazis and defeated them in World War II. On this day in the capital of Chisinau people gather at the War Memorial and lay floral tributes at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Also the head of state and senior government officials, as well as foreign diplomats and ambassadors, lay wreaths on the tomb and join the entire world in honoring the brave soldiers of World War II.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 27

On August 27, 1991, Moldova declared its independence from the USSR and proclaimed its sovereignty. Since 1945 Moldova had been under the dominance of the United Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and was known as the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova. The Soviet practice of deporting ethnic Romanians from Moldova and the migration of Russian workers into the region created a lot of discontent. After the collapse of the USSR in August 1991, Moldova got the opportunity for independence it was seeking.

On this day Independence Day celebrations are organized in the capital of Chisinau. The president presides over the celebration, which is marked with military parades, official speeches, musical concerts, and Independence Day parties. Every region also holds its own special Independence Day celebrations.

❁ LIMBA NOASTRA

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 31

Limba Noastra ("Our Mother Tongue"), or National Language Day, is celebrated in honor of Moldovan, the national language of Moldova. On this day Moldovan literary figures such as poets, novelists, dramatists, and playwrights are honored in special ceremonies throughout the country. In the capital of Chisinau, there is an open-air concert

where many go to hear the sound of traditional Moldovan music and watch folk dances and performances by Moldovan and international pop stars and bands. "Limba Noastra" is also the title of Moldova's national anthem.

Religious Holidays

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: January 7

Most Orthodox Churches follow the Julian calendar instead of the Gregorian, or Western, calendar. There is a difference of 13 days between the Julian and the Gregorian calendars, so Moldovan Orthodox Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus on January 7.

Orthodox Christmas also marks the end of the six-week fast—called Little Lent, Nativity Fast, Winter Lent, or the Christmas Lent—undertaken by Orthodox Christians to honor the Virgin Mary for carrying Jesus in her womb. (It is called Little Lent to distinguish it from Great Lent, which precedes Easter.) During the fast Moldovan Christians abstain from eating any animal product, including meat, eggs, milk, cheese, or fish. Christmas marks the end of this fasting period (also known as Orthodox Lent or Advent in Western churches) and is celebrated with great fanfare.

On Christmas Eve (January 6), Christmas trees are decorated and carol singers go from door to door singing beautiful Christmas carols in the afternoon and evening. A traditional family dinner is prepared where two of the most favorite traditional dishes, beef salad and pigs-in-the-blanket (cabbage rolls), are served. Children also love to feast on walnut and raisin cakes. Families attend midnight liturgies in their local churches. Children believe that Santa Claus will leave a present under their Christmas tree on Christmas Eve, and, as in many parts of the world, adults dressed as Santa Claus visit them on Christmas Eve and give them their presents. There are also some interesting traditions and symbols of Christmas Eve associated with the hope for a prosperous New Year. These include folk dances, masked plays, folk theater, and performances of the plowman's song (about sowing seeds and reaping a good harvest).

On Christmas Day (January 7), Moldovans visit their friends and family members and exchange gifts and greetings. Visits and celebrations continue the second day of Christmas (January 8) in Moldova.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS; LENT

❁ HOLY WEEK

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: Begins on Palm Sunday and ends on Easter

In the Eastern Orthodox Church 100 days are dedicated to Easter, 50 before it for preparation, and another 50 after it for commemorating the glorification of Jesus. The 50 days before Easter, known as part of the period called Triodion (“three” + “odes”; the Triodion is the book that contains services for the movable feasts from the 10th Sunday preceding Easter through the Great Saturday of Holy Week.) are the period for strengthening one’s faith. The means are repentance, prayer, and self-control. This preparation is necessary before entering Holy Week.

The Saturday before Palm Sunday is celebrated as the Morning of St. Lazarus because Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, thereby earning the respect and faith of the people, but also the hatred of the fanatics. The church calls this day the Saturday of Lazarus to remember the resurrection of Lazarus and its promise of universal resurrection for all.

As in other Christian Churches, Holy Week is the center of the church’s liturgical calendar. Also called Great Week or Passion Week for the triumphant entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem until Easter, the Resurrection, remembers events in the final week of Jesus’ life, linking prophecy with its fulfillment.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

✿ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: Last Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday celebrates the glorious and brilliant feast of the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem. Zechariah had prophesied the entrance of the Messiah into Jerusalem, and the contemporary Jews associated this prophecy with the expected Messiah. The news that Jesus was in Bethany provoked indignation among the high priests, who had decided to kill him. The multitudes, with palm branches in their hands, spread their cloaks on the road as a show of respect. The custom of giving branches of palms to the people in the church commemorates the victory of Jesus over evil.

The Sunday before Easter Sunday is called Flowers’ Sunday in Moldova. On this day a special celebration takes place for all who have names associated with flowers. Fish may be eaten that day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

✿ HOLY THURSDAY

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

On Thursday in Holy Week the Orthodox Church celebrates four events: the washing of the disciples’ feet, the institution of the Holy Eucharist, the Marvelous Prayer, and Judas’ betrayal. These were the closing moments of Jesus’ life. After the washing of the Apostles’ feet, he identified his betrayer, initiated

the Eucharist, and pronounced the new commandment to love one another.

In the Eastern Orthodox Church, the evening service on Holy Wednesday is the evening of repentance, confession, and remission of sins, preparing the faithful to receive Holy Communion, usually on Holy Thursday morning.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

✿ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday celebrates the passion of Jesus. After the reading of the Fifth Gospel a cross is carried around the church. During this service, the removal of Jesus’ body from the cross is reenacted with a sense of mourning for the terrible events that took place. The priest removes the body of Jesus from the cross, wraps it in a white cloth, and carries it to the altar. The priest then carries the cloth on which the body of Jesus is painted or embroidered around the church before placing it inside the sepulcher, a carved bier that symbolizes the Jesus’ tomb. Devout Christians observe Good Friday with fasting, prayer, cleanliness, self-examination, confession, good works, and repentance. On Good Friday, devout Moldovans offer prayers in their local churches and remember the life and teachings of Jesus.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: Saturday before Easter

On Holy Saturday, the day before Easter and the celebration of Jesus’ Resurrection, Psalms are read and resurrection hymns are sung that relate Jesus’ descent into hell and subsequent triumph over death.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is the “Feast of Feasts.” The dates on which most of the holidays will be celebrated are determined on the basis of the date on which Easter is celebrated.

In the Orthodox Church, what is called Easter in Germanic countries is called Pascha in most others and connects the events of Holy Week with the Jewish celebration called Pesach (Passover) because it is believed that the Last Supper (Christ’s last meal with his Apostles) was a seder. Easter Eve is marked by total fasting. Before midnight the Odes of Lamentation of the previous day are repeated. A midnight liturgy takes place with a remarkable

candle procession as part of the ceremony. The service begins in complete darkness. The priest takes light from the vigil light and gives it to the faithful, who are holding candles. From this moment, every Christian holds the Easter candle as a symbol of deep faith in Jesus' Resurrection. In many churches the priest leads the people outside the church. All believers exchange greetings on this joyous occasion that marks Jesus' Resurrection. The first Easter meal takes place that night after the Divine Liturgy. Expressing good wishes through dance is present in most Moldovan/Romanian customs.

Easter Sunday afternoon the faithful gather again for prayer with lighted candles and again greet one another joyously, saying: "Christ is Risen," the Easter salutation, which is answered, "Truly He is Risen." In addition to the Easter celebrations, there is a spring celebration in which, before the shepherds leave for the mountains, all who plan to send their sheep along with them gather on a particular Sunday. Each person milks a sheep and afterwards, a meal, songs and dances take place.

Because a six-week fast precedes the Easter holiday, the rituals of traditional food preparation resemble those of Christmas. Lamb, cheese cake, colored eggs, and feta cheese appear on every Easter table. The egg as a symbol represents the miracle of creation. A ritual coloring of the eggs takes place to express this symbolism, copied from the pagan spring festivals in Old Europe and reinterpreted by the early church. The first egg colored for Easter belongs to the children and it must be colored red. It is placed in the children's room to protect them from evil. The second egg colored is blue, representing the "love of young women." It is meant to bring good luck in a marriage. On the first day of Easter, one egg is placed in a pot of water. A silver coin and some fresh basil are added to the water. All household members will wash their faces with this water.

Easter Monday falls on the first Monday after Lent.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY; PESACH; SPRING FESTIVALS

RISE OF THE HOLY CROSS

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: September 14

In September, when the year gradually becomes autumn, the Rise of the Holy Cross is celebrated. In the Orthodox faith the deep meaning of the cross was its ability to produce miracles. The frail and elderly particularly prayed for their own well-being on this day. The harvest is also celebrated by each family, as well as by the entire community.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; HARVEST FESTIVALS

Regional Holidays

MARTISOR DAY

Observed in: Moldova

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 1

In Moldova the first day of March is celebrated as Martisor. It marks the end of the winter season and the beginning of spring. On this day Moldovans tie knitted red-and-white ropes on their collars. The red color symbolizes spring, and the white color symbolizes winter. People give small presents to each other such as flowers, shells, animals, and even snowmen, as tokens of good luck for the season and the coming year. Young girls and women are also given red-and-white ribbons on this day.

Musical concerts and cultural dance programs are part of the grand Martisor day celebrations organized in the capital city of Chisinau. The president of the country is the chief guest at the celebrations.

WINE FESTIVAL

Observed in: Chisinau

Observed by: General Public

Observed in: October

The annual Wine Festival in Moldova takes place in October in the capital city of Chisinau. The government of Moldova organizes the festival, and the president presides over the celebrations. The objective of the festival is to encourage and promote the winemaking industry and the standard of viticulture in Moldova. It is also intended to popularize Moldovan wine among tourists who come to Moldova especially for this festival.

The main highlights of the festival are the parade of the wine makers; tasting sessions (by industry professionals and the general public) to prove the authenticity and superior quality of Moldovan wines; wine fairs, where wine products are displayed; promotional programs; competitions, lotteries, business meetings, consultations with specialists over the quality of the wines, and cultural programs such as folk songs and folk dances.

Rites of Passage

BIRTH

In Moldova a number of rituals are observed after the birth of a child. It is traditional for the "first bath" ceremony of the child to take place under the guidance of the eldest female relative of the child's father. In a ritual performed only by women, clean water is mixed with milk, honey, money, and flowers

and then used to bathe the child. The child is handed to his mother by the eldest female relative with wishes that the child should grow up to be an adult with moral and spiritual integrity and also be blessed with a happy, healthy, and long life. Also she expresses her wish that the child be respectful toward his or her parents, have patience in abundance, and grow up to be a hardworking person. The child is also wished a happy married life. Moldovans believe birth to be a transition from blackness (an unknown world) to whiteness (the known world).

Another important ritual involves the christening of the child in a local church. Godparents play a vital role in the ceremony, and the child is named after one of the godparents or a close and respected relative.

❁ MARRIAGE

A Moldovan wedding ceremony includes colorful costumes, poetry, songs, and dance. It is traditional on the day of the wedding for a representative of the bridegroom to go the bride's home to escort her to the ceremony. Around the same time the groom's best men go around the village, distributing invitations among the men of the village. Then everyone joins the representative of the bridegroom, who narrates the story of a young emperor (used metaphorically to describe the bridegroom) who went hunting in the forest along with his warriors (the best men) and caught a glimpse of a fairy. The emperor instructed the warriors to find the whereabouts of the fairy, and in the process of following the trail of the fairy, they arrived at the bride's house. He also tells them that they have a flower (in this case, the bride) in the garden, which cannot bear fruit due to the soil. However, according to the story the flower would blossom and bear fruit if planted in the emperor's garden. The representative then hands the bride over to them, and they promise to escort her to the emperor's garden.

In many parts of Moldova, in order to win the bride and demonstrate his readiness to get married, the bridegroom has to pass a test of his cleverness. Generally this involves solving a number of riddles to prove his worthiness.

For her wedding the bride wears a ceremonial dress and flowers. As a married woman she is expected to wear a different hairstyle, and so a group of married women cover her head with a scarf in a

special song-filled ceremony during the wedding. Thus the bride is accepted into the community of married women.

At the wedding reception after the ceremony everyone sings, dances, and feasts.

❁ DEATH

Moldovans believe every person is represented by three stars and a fir tree. They believe that after someone dies the stars fall from the sky. Young men go to the woods to bring the branches of a fir tree. A group of women receives them at the entrance to the village and sing songs about the link between the life of the deceased and the fir tree. They also express the grief of the fir tree, since it is destined to be laid near the head of the deceased person (considered brother or sister of the fir tree since their lives are linked) and eventually rot away.

Also at dawn between the two days that separate the death and the funeral, a group of elderly women sing the "Dawn Song," also known as the Bocetul (or "Great Song"). Moldovans believe this song serves as a guide to the soul of the deceased and describes the path he or she must take to reach the land of ancestors in the afterlife. The women also pray to the Sun asking it to rise later to allow the grieving family time to make preparations for the funeral.

The body of the deceased is never left alone, and there is a wake held at which friends and family members share their memories of the deceased. For the funeral the family of the deceased makes arrangements for the coffin, the shroud to cover the body, the bull-carriage for taking the body to the cemetery, and the food that will be served after the burial.

Further Reading

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Monaco

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Western Europe, between France; near Italy, bordering the Mediterranean Sea
Size	1 sq. mi.
Capital City	Monaco-Ville
Flag Description	Monaco's flag has two horizontal bands of equal size, one red (top) and the other white.
Independence	1297 (from Italy)
Population	32,409 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional monarchy
Nationality	Monacan (Monegasque)
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Caucasian
Major Language(s)	French (official); English; Italian; Monegasque
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (90%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; National Day, November 18–19

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Although the recorded history of this principality is only available from the late 1200s, stone-age relics provide evidence of prehistoric habitation in the area. The earliest inhabitants of this region are believed to have been the Ligures (or Ligurians), who came from the coastal area of Liguria in Italy through Provence in France.

The sector was also visited by the ancient Phoenicians and other seafarers of the time. Controlled first by the ancient Greeks and then the Romans, the land was laid waste subsequently by the so-called barbarians and the Saracens. These tumultuous times continued until the 10th century.

A Genovese dynasty has ruled Monaco since the 13th century. In 1297 Francois Grimaldi, the leader of the Guelphs—a faction of the Holy Roman Empire—seized control of the fortress protecting Monaco and assured the rule of the House of Grimaldi over the country.

From 1524 to 1642 Monaco was under Spanish protection; thereafter it became a French protectorate. However, it

has remained an independent state almost continuously since the Grimaldi's came to power. During the French Revolution France annexed Monaco in 1793, but the Grimaldis were returned to power by the Congress of Vienna in 1814, which placed them under the protection of the kingdom of Sardinia. This status remained in effect until 1860. Eventually, a treaty called the Franco-Monegasque treaty was signed in 1861, according to which Monaco again became a French protectorate but still continued to be independent. Another treaty signed with France states that, if the ruling member of the Grimaldi Dynasty dies without a successor, Monaco will become an autonomous region of France.

In the 20th century, Prince Rainier III (b. 1923–2005) assumed the throne in 1949, when King Louis II (1870–1949), his grandfather, died. Under Prince Rainier's rule Monaco became a modernized country. In May 1993 Monaco was admitted to the United Nations. Its visibility on the international stage was also advanced when Prince Rainier married Grace Kelly (1929–82), a glamorous Hollywood star whose family was quite prominent in Philadelphia society.

The 700th anniversary of the Grimaldi reign was celebrated in Monaco in 1997. In 2002 Prince Rainier revised the

The Ligures

The area of northern Italy and southern Gaul once inhabited by the Ligures (also called Ligurians) is now northern Tuscany, Piedmont, part of Lombardy, and parts of southeastern France. Classical references and place names suggest that the Ligurians may have lived farther south, perhaps as far as central Italy.

This ancient group has so far eluded positive identification. They may have been a pre-Indo-Euro-

pean people related to the Iberians, a separate Indo-European branch related to the Italic and Celtic groups, or perhaps a Celtic tribe. It has also been suggested that the Ligures may have been related to the Lepontii, a people who once inhabited Rhaetia in the Alps between modern-day Switzerland and Italy.

Before the Ligures were assimilated by the Romans they had been assimilated by the Gauls even earlier, producing a Celto-Ligurian culture.

constitution, abolished capital punishment, provided for women's suffrage, and established a supreme court to guarantee fundamental liberties. He also passed a law contravening an earlier treaty with France, stating that the Grimaldis will continue to rule Monaco even if the reigning monarch dies without an heir.

In March 2005 when Prince Rainier III became too ill to perform his royal functions, his son Prince Albert (b. 1958) took over the royal duties. After the death of Prince Rainier on April 6, 2005, Prince Albert succeeded him as Albert II of Monaco. Albert's elder sister HRH Caroline, Princess of Hanover acquired the title of Hereditary Princess of Monaco and follows him as heiress-presumptive in the line of succession to the Monegasque throne.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The Principality of Monaco is located in Western Europe and is flanked by France on two sides. It is a little over 11 miles east of Nice, on the Mediterranean Sea, bordering the western coast of Italy. With less than 1 square mile of land area Monaco is the second smallest independent state in the world. (Vatican City is the smallest.)

Monaco has a hilly, rocky terrain. The highest point of the principality is Le Rocher at Mont Agel, which stands 459 feet high.

Monaco enjoys a Mediterranean climate characterized by wet winters and hot, dry summers. The average minimum temperature in Monaco is 46°F, while the average high temperature is 79°F. In terms of flora Monaco is home to trees such as pine, olive, aloe, and agaves.

❁ ECONOMY

Monaco has a booming economy with tourism as its main source of revenue. A pleasant climate, relaxed lifestyle, and picturesque architecture make Monaco a preferred travel destination. The casinos in Monaco are also a major tourist attraction. Monaco is a tax haven as well. The residents of Monaco do not pay any income tax, and in the past this has made

Monaco a hotspot for wealthy businesspeople, who conduct business operations around the world while enjoying Monaco's tax advantages.

Monaco is not a member of the European Union (EU), but it shares a customs union with France, which is a member of the EU. This enables it to participate in trade activities with the member nations. The official currency of Monaco was the franc (French national currency) until France converted to the Euro. On January 1, 1999, Monaco too adopted the currency that is used by most member nations of the EU. However, the country has also continued using Monacan coins, which are minted and circulated by the government authorities.

❁ LIFESTYLE AND CULTURE

In terms of national origins, Monacans constitute only 16 percent of Monaco's population, while the French community dominates with 47 percent. Monaco is also home to Italians and other foreigners, since businesspeople prefer to embrace the tax-free status that comes with Monacan citizenship. French is the offi-

Fun Fact

No one has positively identified the Lepontii, either. Recent archaeological discoveries indicate a possible Celtic relationship, but it is also possible that they were a mixed people with both Rhaetian and Celtic blood. (The Rhaetians were an Etruscan group.)

Monaco

Monaco derives its name from the nearby Greek colony Monoikos founded in the sixth century by the Phoceans (people from the Greek district of Phocis). According to local legend Hercules passed through the Monaco area, so the Phoceans built a temple there called the temple of Hercules Monoikos, which means "single house or temple."

Fun Fact

Monaco is also the Italian word for “monk.”

cial language of Monaco, although English, Italian, and the local Monegasque (a mixed dialect derived from Italian and French) languages are also widely spoken in Monaco.

The Principality of Monaco is a predominantly Christian state with more than 90 percent of the population adhering to Roman Catholic beliefs.

The House of Grimaldi has been patrons of art and music and has instituted a number of competitions and awards to honor musical talents in Monaco. The late Prince Rainier III started a musical competition known as the Prince Rainier III Prize for Musical Compositions to encourage new musicians in Monaco as well as to provide them a platform to showcase their musical talents; under the patronage of his consort Princess Grace of Monaco Les Ballets de Monte Carlo blossomed. It continues to enthrall audiences across the globe with its theatrical performances.

Monaco is also the venue of the high-profile motorcar race the Formula One Grand Prix held in May every year and attended by many international celebrities.

❁ CUISINE

Some of the traditional Monacan specialties include: *brandamincium* (salted cod cooked with garlic, curd, and oil), *barba-Giuan* (a crisp pastry, filled with herbs and cheese), *stocafi* (dried cod stewed in tomato sauce), *fougasses* (crisp biscuits sprinkled with red and white aniseeds and flavored with rum), *socca* (a thin pancake), and *cardu* (cardoon, related to the artichoke) with white sauce.

Wine, beer, and martinis are the preferred beverages in Monaco.



From left background, Prince Albert, Prince Rainier, Princess Caroline and her three children Pierre, Andrea, and Charlotte wave from the Palace balcony during Monaco's National Day festivities on November 19, 1995. (AP Photo/Patrick Herzog)

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Gregorian, or Western, calendar, and is celebrated as New Year's Day in many countries. Celebrations take place all over the world with festivities that begin on New Year's Eve (December 31). In the Principality of Monaco, special parties and gala events are held in restaurants and pubs throughout the country on New Year's Eve. People are also treated to the music of local and U.S. bands, choirs, and orchestras in special concerts that usher in the new year. The highlight of the celebrations is the performance by Les Ballets de Monte Carlo at the Opéra de Monte Carlo. At the stroke of midnight Monaco's skies light up with a spectacular display of fireworks, and people greet each other on this special occasion.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, in many parts of the world. It is a day of recognition to acknowledge the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

In the Principality of Monaco, Labor Day is a public holiday, and all government and private institutions remain closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 18–19

In Monaco, National Day celebrations take place over a period of two days. The official launch of National Day celebrations occurs on the eve of the National Day (November 18) with a well-orchestrated display of fireworks at Port Hercule. The next day members of the House of Grimaldi, the royal family of Monaco, attend a special Thanksgiving Mass at the Cathedral of Monaco and thank God for his benevolence.

A festive atmosphere envelops the entire nation, and special events are planned throughout the country. The Knights of Malta (a militant monastic order, recognized by the pope), distinguished diplomats,

consuls, and state officials dressed in their medal-laden uniforms assemble at Place St. Nicholas in Monaco where state officials and citizens of Monaco receive medals of honor. Then the royal family goes to the prince's palace, where they wave to the crowds and greet them. Also Les Ballets de Monte Carlo captivates its audience with a powerful theatrical performance at the Opera de Monte Carlo.

Because late Prince Rainier III of Monaco was named after St. Rainier, whose feast is observed on November 19, National Day is also known as Prince of Monaco Day.

Religious Holidays

❁ ST. DEVOTE'S DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: January 27

St. Devote was a pious woman who dedicated her life to the service of God. She lived on the Island of Corsica, which was under Roman control. The Romans persecuted Christians and tortured them if they did not comply with Roman orders to renounce Christianity. For proclaiming herself a Christian and for her refusal to renounce her faith, the government imprisoned St. Devote, and Roman soldiers tortured her to death. Christians believe that in hopes of getting her a Christian burial the faithful sent Devote's body on a boat to Africa. They also believe that early one morning during the voyage, a storm arose, and a dove appeared from Devote's mouth that guided the boat toward Monaco. On January 27, 312 the boat reached Monaco where the Monacans received Devote's body and gave her a proper burial. As a result she became the patron saint of Monaco.

Charles III (1856–89) built a cathedral in honor of St. Devote near the site of her burial. On St. Devote's Day, worshippers flock to St. Devote's Church, and in the evening they take part in a torchlight procession. A special prayer service is held in honor of the saint, and then a boat decorated with pine, olive, and laurel branches is set on fire. The Monacans do this to reenact the burning of an ancient boat and wipe out the traces of an unpardonable crime committed by a man who tried to steal the relics of St. Devote so that he could sell them (for their magical powers) to traders from another country. However, Monacan fishermen caught him, and his boat was burned to ashes.

Later that night, people enjoy a special display of fireworks at the Monaco harbor.

❁ CARNIVAL

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Last Tuesday before Lent

Carnival, also known as Mardi Gras (in English, Fat Tuesday or Shrove Tuesday) falls on the Tuesday

before Ash Wednesday, which is the first day of Lent. The word *shrove* means "to absolve oneself from sin," and in ancient times people absolved themselves of their sins by confessing them to a priest, who was also known as a *shriner* (absolver of sins).

In Monaco on this day there is an elaborate Carnival. Monacans clad in colorful attire and wearing masks parade through the streets of the principality. Musical bands play music nonstop, and singing, dancing, and feasting takes place throughout Shrove Tuesday.

In ancient times people dressed themselves in old clothes and indulged in mock fights using rotten eggs, chickpeas, lemons, and oranges. Revelers threw dummies stuffed with straw and rags on unsuspecting passersby. At the end of Carnival the dummies were burned, and people would sing and dance in merriment to the sound of carnival music.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; LENT

❁ MI-CARAME

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Middle Thursday of Lent

The festival of Mi-Careme (which means "mid-Lent") takes place on the middle Thursday of Lent. It celebrates the end of the first half of the period of abstinence and fasting observed by Christians during Lent. Monacans celebrate this day with carnivals and masked parties. They adorn themselves in costumes and fancy masks and sing and dance their way through the night. There are special balls held on this occasion, the biggest of which is at the Théâtre des Variétés.

❁ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, commemorating the last week of Jesus' mortal life. Jesus was the prophet of Christianity, and Christians believe him to be the second person of the Holy Trinity (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). The day is as much about the beginning of Jesus' journey to the Cross as it is about his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. His arrival in Jerusalem was indeed the way to the Cross.

After two of his disciples had fetched a donkey for him to ride, they placed their clothes on it to make a comfortable seat. The disciples then cut branches and covered the path, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the words of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. People welcomed him by waving palm and olive branches, and strewing garments and branches on the road. There were different perceptions at work: Jesus rode in on a donkey, the humble entry of a peaceful nature for a spiritual king; the people of Jerusalem welcomed him with palm and olive branches and the laying of garments in his path

because they wanted a worldly king to defeat the Romans.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

The rituals observed on Maundy Thursday, also called Holy Thursday, are based on a sequence of events supposed to have occurred during Jesus' last meal with his Apostles. First Jesus washed the feet of his disciples; then he announced that he had been betrayed by one of them. The traitor Judas left the table. Finally Jesus instituted the Eucharist—a ritual of consuming bread and wine as symbols of his body and blood, also referred to as communion in Christian churches. In the Roman Catholic Church Maundy Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist, the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week, and gives priests an opportunity to prepare for the many rituals associated with Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter. The name Maundy Thursday may be linked to the Latin word *mandatum*, “command,” because Jesus commanded his Apostles to observe the ritual now called the Eucharist.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent. It is observed in most parts of the world to remember the Crucifixion of Jesus. Some Monacans observe a fast from Ash Wednesday (first day of Lent), for 40 days up to Good Friday and a partial fast from then until Easter. Some fast only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. On this day devout Monacan Christians participate in the Procession of the Dead Christ that takes place in the evening and starts from the Chapel of Monaco-Ville. Armed with torches, people reenact the final moments in the life of Jesus and many even carry crosses to feel his pain and agony during his final journey (the Stations of Cross).

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Saturday before Easter

Holy Saturday is the day Jesus was laid in the tomb from which he rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. It was the Jewish Sabbath (the Jewish day of rest is Saturday). It is also regarded as the second Sabbath after Creation. The final day of Holy Week, which begins with Palm Sunday and includes Maundy

Thursday and Good Friday, it marks the threshold between death and resurrection, and is a day of silence and contemplation for devout Christians.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection. For this reason, it is sometimes known as Resurrection Day. This day is of utmost importance because the fundamental teaching of Christianity is that Jesus through his death freed all his believers from the penalty of sin. The holiday falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. On Easter the entire family gathers to celebrate. They often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to offer prayers. Easter eggs have become associated with the festival because they are symbols of rebirth and regeneration taken from the ancient pagan spring festivals. On Easter most Monacans attend a special Easter Mass that takes place at the Cathedral of Monaco. They offer prayers and celebrate Jesus' Resurrection by greeting each other on this joyous occasion.

The first Monday after Lent is celebrated as Easter Monday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Forty days after Easter

Ascension Day is a day of special celebration for Christians all over the world. It commemorates their belief that Jesus rose to heaven 40 days after his Resurrection on Easter. In the Eastern Orthodox Church Ascension Day is one of the 12 Great Feasts.

Ascension Day is celebrated on a Thursday in Monaco. On this day devout Christians attend Ascension prayer service in the Cathedral at Monaco and offer prayers to God. Also the Monaco Grand Prix takes place on the Sunday following Ascension Day, and its practice session takes place on Ascension Day, enabling Monacans to witness the best Formula One drivers of the world in action.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION DAY; CHRISTIANITY; LENT

PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fifty days after Lent

Pentecost, also called Whitsunday and Whitmonday, celebrates the Christian belief that the Holy

Spirit descended upon the disciples 50 days after Easter.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; PENTECOST

✿ CORPUS CHRISTI

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Sixty days after Easter

The Feast of Corpus Christi is a religious feast celebrated by Catholics all over the world to commemorate the institution of the Holy Eucharist. It is celebrated 60 days after Easter and falls on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday, the first Sunday after Pentecost.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

✿ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day is a Christian feast that honors all the saints (known and unknown) of the church. It is an annual religious celebration observed on November 1. In Monaco devout Catholics attend a special prayer service in honor of all the Christian saints in their local churches. Also they visit the graves of deceased family members and decorate their graves with flowers and candles.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

✿ IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: December 8

Immaculate Conception is a celebration of the Roman Catholic belief that Jesus' mother, Mary, unlike ordinary people, was born free from all sin. The Cathedral at Monaco is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception. On this day a special Mass is said at the cathedral in honor of Mary, and most Monacans attend to pay their respects and seek blessings from the Virgin Mary.

✿ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world. It is the day chosen by the Roman Catholic Church to celebrate the birth of Jesus, although no one knows when Jesus was actually born. This day was selected because the time was also a major pagan festival celebrating winter solstice, or the return of the light (Yule).

In earlier days family members assembled at their parent's house on Christmas Eve (December 24), to perform a traditional olive branch ritual

before dinner. This rite required the oldest or youngest member of the family (or a guest) to take an olive branch, soak it in wine, and approach the fireplace where pine and laurel branches were already burning. Then, tracing the sign of a cross, the individual would speak about the virtues of the olive tree (considered to be a source of all good things, as is evident from its use). Next all the members of the family would wet their lips from the glass of wine that was served. The traditional dinner was *brandamincium*, *barba-Giuan* (which means "Uncle John"), *fougasses*, and *cardu*. In addition a Christmas loaf baked with four walnuts (symbolizing the cross), surrounded with olive twigs and called *u pan de Natale* was placed on the Christmas table.

Many people continue to celebrate Christmas the traditional way, starting by attending a Midnight Mass at the Cathedral of Monaco. On Christmas Day they visit their friends and family members to exchange gifts and greetings.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

✿ INTERNATIONAL CIRCUS FESTIVAL

Observed in: Chapiteau de Fontvieille (Monte Carlo)

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January or February

The International Circus Festival is an annual event held in Chapiteau de Fontvieille (Monte Carlo) in January or February. The festival was started in 1974 under the patronage of the late Prince Rainier III of Monaco. Since then performers at the International Circus Festival have entertained children and adults alike.

Every year hundreds of performing artists from renowned circuses all over the world participate in the weeklong festival that boasts of showcasing the best performers in the world of circus. A number of events are organized during the weeklong festival that includes animal acts, acrobatic feats, and comic performances by clowns. Each performance is judged by experts (renowned circus professionals) on the basis of creativity and technical expertise. The two best performers receive the coveted Gold and Silver Clown Awards.

✿ MONTE CARLO INTERNATIONAL FIREWORKS FESTIVAL

Observed in: Monte Carlo

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July or August

The Monte Carlo International Fireworks Festival is a prestigious annual event that takes place in Monte Carlo in July or August. The festival attracts

pyrotechnic specialists from all over the world who enthrall the audience with original and creative fireworks displays. Around 9:30 each night, these experts begin working their magic in the night skies through their well-orchestrated displays. The winner of this event wins the right to orchestrate fireworks during the National Day celebrations on November 18.

The competition has been in existence since 1966, and the number of participants has continued to increase over the years.

Rites of Passage

BIRTH

Because most Monacans are Roman Catholics, their children are baptized in the local church shortly after birth. Baptism is one of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church. John the Baptist baptized Jesus, and people believe that after baptism the child will grow up to be a devout follower of Jesus.

The baptism of a child in Monaco is a family event and is considered essential in order to welcome the child into the community where it will be showered with love. At the time of baptism two or three relatives are chosen by its parents to be the godparents of the child. Parents make a careful choice since Monacans believe that the child may inherit the qualities of the godparents. Along with the biological parents godparents share the responsibility of caring for children as well as encouraging them to follow Christianity. It is traditional for a female child to have two godmothers and one godfather, while for a boy, the opposite is true.

Before the actual ritual, the priest confirms with the parents and godparents of the child that they will bring up him or her as a devout Christian. After this affirmation the ritual begins. The priest calls out the name of the child while tracing the sign of the cross on the child's forehead. After reading verses from the Bible, the priest prays for the child, the parents, and the godparents. Since water is the sign of new life, it is used extensively in the ritual of baptism. After the priest anoints the chest of the child with the oil of catechumens, he brings the child near the altar and pours water three times over the child's head. During baptism one of the godparents holds a baptismal candle, a symbol of parental hope that the

child will be a Christian. After the ritual the priest and everyone present says the Lord's Prayer.

MARRIAGE

In accordance with Monacan law couples get married in a civil ceremony in the presence of the state authorities and two witnesses. They sign the registry of marriage and are declared husband and wife under the law.

The civil ceremony is followed by a church wedding in which friends and relatives of the couple participate in the celebrations. After a sermon that emphasizes the duties and responsibilities of a husband and wife, the wedding ceremony begins. The bride and groom exchange wedding rings and recite their wedding vows in front of the entire community. The priest solemnizes their marriage, and the newlyweds are congratulated by friends and family members.

After the wedding a lavish reception is held in honor of the bride and groom, characterized by singing, dancing, and feasting.

DEATH

In Monaco the funeral ceremony takes place in a church where family members and friends share their memories about the deceased and celebrate his or her life and legacy. The body of the deceased is cleansed, draped in new clothes, and laid to rest in a coffin. Family members pay their final respects, and in a solemn ceremony the body is laid to rest.

On death anniversaries and religious occasions such as All Saints' Day, people visit the graves of their loved ones where they leave flowers and candles.

Further Reading

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❧ Mongolia ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Northern Asia, between China and Russia
Size	603,909 sq. mi.
Capital City	Ulaanbaatar
Flag Description	Mongolia's flag has three equal, vertical bands of red (hoist side), blue, and red; centered on the hoist side red band is the national emblem in yellow—soyombo (a columnar arrangement of abstract and geometric representations for fire, sun, moon, earth, water, and the yin-yang symbol).
Independence	July 11, 1921 (from China)
Population	2,791,272 (July 2005 est.)
Government	Mixed parliamentary/presidential
Nationality	Mongolian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Asian (Mongol, mostly Khalkha, 95%)
Major Language(s)	Khalkha Mongol (90%)
Major Religion(s)	Buddhist Lamaist (50%); no religion (40%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Tsagaan Tsar, late winter; International Women's Day, March 8; Day of Children and Mothers, June 1; Independence Day, July 11–13; Celebration of the Revolution, July 21; Proclamation of Mongolia Day, November 26

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

Situated between China and Russia, Mongolia is an ancient nation. Relics and human remains dating back approximately 500,000 years have been found in the Gobi Desert and other areas of Mongolia. As early as the 10th century Mongolian tribes inhabited eastern central Asia and parts of northern Manchuria (now China).

The earliest known political system in the region that is now Mongolia belonged to the Xiongnu, or Hun, state. The Huns lived in this Central Asian territory under the rule of a monarch called the *shanyu*; they practiced shamanism and worshipped various spirits and demons.

In 209 B.C.E. Shanyu Modun (or Maodun; d. 174) defeated neighboring nations to create a domain comprising

most of Mongolia and some portions of Central Asia, which provoked ongoing conflict with China for supremacy in the region. The Huns had an efficient administrative system and a superb military. Though Modun's army was outnumbered by the Chinese, he managed to defeat them, and the Chinese emperor had to recognize Modun and the Hun state.

Eventually the ruling house of Modun began to stagnate, and princes spent their time feuding and defending themselves against factional power plays. In 90 Chinese Emperor U-di launched a massive attack on the Huns, and the Battle of Yangjjan was the last great victory of the Hun state. After that the Hun princes once again became immersed in struggles for power. Instigated by Chinese emissaries, the non-Hun subjects began to secede, and the kingdom declined considerably. In 48 C.E. the Hun state disintegrated into northern and southern parts, and the southern Huns came under the rule of the Chinese emperor. The northerners had their own share of problems. Continual attacks by the Chinese and other tribes

Fun Fact

In Neolithic times (9000–8000 B.C.E.) small groups of hunters, reindeer breeders, and nomads roamed what is now Mongolia.

Fun Fact

The Turkics, who also practiced shamanism, left behind stone monuments with inscriptions written in an ancient Turkic alphabet. These inscriptions tell much about their lifestyle and religion.

forced the northern Huns to migrate westward in 150 C.E. Some moved to China and central Asia, while others traveled as far as Europe under their leader Attila (? 406–53), whose empire disintegrated when he died.

The years from 250 to 550 were filled with political turmoil, social chaos, and violent clashes. In Mongolia the Joujan Kingdom emerged. It subjugated the neighboring tribes. However, in 545 the Turkic leader Bumin Khan (d. 552) rejected Joujan dominance and drove the Joujans into China, where they either perished or assimilated with the natives. (Although the Turkic people are related to the Turks, they are not the same.) Bumin and his partner Istemi created a truly Eurasian empire that stretched from the Yellow Sea to the Urals. Bumin also defeated the Avars, another tribe of Turkic people, and founded the Kokturk state, which expanded, in less than one century, to cover much of Central Asia. He died, however, in the same year he founded his state. Between 555 and 590, the Turkic army reached the Caspian Sea and occupied Byzantium and Iran.

Internal strife and political intrigues, however, weakened the Turkic Empire, and it disintegrated. The following centuries saw the rise to prominence of the Uighurs, a Turkic-speaking nomadic nation also of Central Asia. They were succeeded by the Kidans, who were of Mongolian stock. The Kidans had an elective monarchy. The representatives of eight Kidan clans elected a single ruler for three years. In 907 a triumphant ruler named Elui Ambagan (d. 927) refused to relinquish his position after three years and claimed the title of emperor. Subsequently Elui Ambagan conquered the neighboring nations and strengthened his position in

Central Asia. After Elui Ambagan died, his son Deguan became king. During the decades that followed, Deguan gradually conquered parts of China, subjugating many tribes, including the Tatars and the Tzibus. He went on to found the Liao Dynasty. The next group to gain prominence was the Jurchens—a Manchu-speaking community that acknowledged the supremacy of the Liao Dynasty. Witnessing the gradual decline of the Liaos, due to mounting expenses and internal bickering, the Jurchens rebelled and toppled the Liaos from power in 1125.

But the Mongolian rulers by and large failed to defend their land properly due to disunity among the various clans. In 1162 Temujin (“the ironsmith”) was born. When he was 10 years old, his father was poisoned by the Tartars, and his family was abandoned by their relatives. By the time he turned 20, Temujin had successfully gathered a band of loyal and brave followers. In 1185 at the grand assembly of Mongolian noblemen, Temujin was proclaimed khan (ruler) of Mongolia, and the name Genghis (or Chinggis) Khan (which means “universal ruler”) was unanimously bestowed upon him.

Though most of the warlords recognized his supremacy, there were some who opposed him and took up arms against him. Genghis suffered defeats and even exile, but around 1193 he had regained considerable power in Central Asia. He routed his foes, succeeded in uniting the dozens of tribes into a single Mongolian nation, and managed to build a huge Eurasian empire stretching from Beijing to the Caspian Sea.

After his death, the empire was divided into several powerful Mongol states. Kublai Khan (1215–94), the grandson of Genghis Khan, conquered China and established the Yuan Dynasty.

Tibetan Buddhism gained ascendancy in Mongolia in the 16th century, and in 1650 the son of Mongol Khan of Uрга (now Ulaanbaatar) was named a living Buddha (*Bogdo gegeen*). An alliance of Buddhist theocracy and secular Mongol aristocracy ruled the country from 1691 until the 20th century, under the Manchu Dynasty of China.

After the Chinese revolution of 1911 Mongolia

Genghis Khan

Genghis Khan was born as Temujin in 1162. He was a Mongol ruler who was given the title of Genghis Khan, which means “universal ruler.” In the history of the medieval world he is credited with unifying the numerous independent Mongol tribes under him by the year 1206 and founding the Mongol Empire. He is venerated by Mongols (as well as people of Mongolian origin) as a dynamic conqueror and leader who wiped out centuries of discord and chaos and ushered in political and economic stability in the region of Eurasia (comprising sections of

Europe as well as Asia). This was achieved, however, at the cost of tremendous bloodshed, wanton loss of life, and destruction of property. The reason was that Genghis ruthlessly annihilated anyone and everyone who dared to oppose him.

Genghis is believed to have died on August 8, 1227. Many famous rulers and conquerors claimed to have been descended from him. His grandson and successor the legendary Gublai Khan was the founder of the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368) in China. Also claiming kinship with Genghis are Timur (Lenk) and Babur, founders of India’s Mughal Dynasty.

declared its independence from China, though China did not recognize it until 1946. In 1920 a military force financed by Japan and anti-Bolshevik Russia set up a puppet government in Mongolia after seizing the capital of Urga. In 1921 the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, formed by Russian-trained Mongols, defeated the Japanese-Russian forces and established an independent provisional government. Then followed a terrible period in the country's history, when thousands of Buddhist monks were killed, and countless monasteries destroyed.

The Communist party was the sole legal party in Mongolia until 1990. This was the second Communist government founded after the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). In 1990 the Mongolian constitution was amended to allow opposition parties and to institute a presidential system of government. The first free presidential elections were held in Mongolia in 1993, but they served only to bring the old Communist leaders to power again.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Mongolia is bounded on the north by Russia and on the east, south, and west by China. The topography of Mongolia consists mainly of a plateau between 2,952 feet and 4,921 feet in elevation, broken by mountain ranges in the north and west. The Altai Mountains in the southwest rise to above 13,123 feet. The Gobi Desert covers a wide and arid tract in the central and the southeastern areas. The important rivers in Mongolia are the Selenge River and its tributary and the Orhon Gol. There are large lakes such as Har-Uvs, Hyargas, Uvs, and Hovsgol.

The Mongolian climate is harsh, with temperatures ranging in winter from 6°F to a low of -22°F. In summer the temperature stays between 50°F to 81°F. Winters are dry, and in summer there is some rainfall in the mountain and desert areas.

❁ ECONOMY

Traditionally farming wheat and raising livestock have been the basis of the Mongolian economy. Manufacturing has also been largely devoted to the processing of agricultural and livestock products. Mongolia, however, has extensive mineral deposits, such as copper, tin, tungsten, gold, and coal, which have created new manufacturing activities. The country used to receive economic assistance from the USSR, but, with the disintegration of the USSR in 1990-91, the support disappeared overnight, leaving Mongolia in a deep economic crisis. Finally the government had to embrace free-market policies, ease price controls, undertake privatization programs, and invite foreign investment. The economy started improving in 1999, and the growth in gross domestic product (GDP) in 2002 and 2003 was 4 and 5 percent respectively.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Mongolians believe they are descendants of Grey Wolf and Beautiful Deer. The traditional religion in Mongolia is Lamaist Buddhism, which the Communist government had kept suppressed since the 1920s. Many Mongolians are now nonreligious or atheistic as a result of the longtime suppression of religion. In 1992 the country adopted a democratic constitution that established the separation of church and state, and there has been a slow return to Buddhism. However, there are still no religious holidays celebrated officially. But this should not be taken to mean that Mongolians have no holidays.

Mongolia's ethnic minorities maintain the pace of Mongolia's festivals with celebrations of their own at different times of the year. The Buriat peoples, for example, divided between Northern Mongolia and southern Siberia, celebrate their common heritage with cross-border celebrations during the summer. The Bayan-Olgii, the Kazakh peoples, enjoy an active calendar of Muslim festivals according to the Islamic lunar calendar.

About 60 percent of the Mongolian population lives in urban areas. The rest are mostly nomadic herders who tend large herds of cattle, sheep, goats, camels, and horses that graze on the rich prairie land in the north-east and northwest. Hospitality remains an important custom in Mongolia, where so many people are still nomads, and a complicated and dignified ritual still accompanies the traditional offering and acceptance of hospitality. Likewise the seating arrangements in the *yurt* (cabin) are carefully arranged. When talking to someone, Mongolians customarily put their right palm on the left hand of the other individual, a symbol of mutual esteem; the

Fun Fact

Genghis Kahn called himself "the ruler of those who live in felt tents."

Fun Fact

Genghis Khan ruled most of the five million square miles, of the civilized world, that included China, Iran, Iraq, and Burma, as well as most of Korea and Russia, ruling an empire that stretched from Poland down to Iran in the west, and from Russia's Arctic shores south as far as Vietnam in the east.

Fun Fact

In 1281 Kublai Khan tried for a second time to conquer Japan. In order to approach from the sea (no Mongol had ever fought a sea battle), he had his men build a fleet of 400 ships, and the Mongol army of 45,000 from Korea joined an armada with 120,000 men from southern China. The invading fleet attempted a landing at Hakozaki Bay, but a typhoon destroyed the armada, leaving the soldiers to death or slavery.

The Altaic Languages

The Altaic group of languages is spoken by nearly 130 million people who occupy the territory stretching from eastern Europe across the central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan to the Pacific Ocean. Altaic languages fall into three categories: Turkic, Mongolian, and Tungusic. The Tungusic category has the lowest number of speakers. It includes Manchu (spoken in Manchuria, a part of China) and Tungus, spoken by the people living in eastern Siberia. The Altaic languages are characterized by vowel harmony and the use of suffixes one after the other in a single sentence. With vowel harmony, the vowel in a suffix corresponds to the vowel of the root to which the suffix is added. In addition the Altaic languages lack grammatical gender.

same gesture, with a light bow, expresses gratitude, greeting, or good-bye.

Mongolians speak an Altaic language. Other languages in this group include Korean, Turkic, and Fin. The written language of Mongolia dates back to the 11th century, but the script has changed a few times. Since 1940 Cyrillic script has been in official use for transcribing the Mongolian language.

Music is important in the cultural life of Mongolians; it is also a means of communication. Mongolian music is predominantly vocal and is divided into two genres: *tuuli* (epic songs) and *ardyn duu* (folk songs). *Tuuli* are mainly narrative, whereas in *ardyn duu* the essential element is variations in vocal tones. The folk song tradition is also old, and it has two principal forms: *urdyn duu* ("long songs") and *bogino duu* ("short songs"). There are many kinds of traditional Mongolian literature, including epics, legends, tales, *yuroi* (the poetry of good wishes), and *magtaal* (the poetry of praise), as well as numerous proverbial sayings.

The Cyrillic Alphabet

The Mongolian language is very old and has been in existence at least since the 11th century, but the written alphabet has changed over the last 900 years. Cyrillic script is the alphabet used by most Mongolians today. Cyrillic script was adopted after the 1921 revolution, on the basis of the Khalkha dialect, which is the official language of Mongolia. The script was introduced in 1940 in order to modernize the Mongolian language and as a result of Russian influence. Thirty-five alphabets use Cyrillic script.

❁ CUISINE

The Mongolian diet depends on where one is in Mongolia, and what time of the year it is. In the south a diet of mutton and camel dairy products is common. In the mountains beef is more common. The Mongolian climate demands a higher caloric intake in the winter months than in summer, and a Mongolian will often eat boiled animal fat in winter.

The Mongolian people regard cooked mutton as a delicacy. It is only prepared for important occasions such as offering sacrifices to gods or ancestors, wedding ceremonies, or celebrating an elder's birthday. It is customary among the Mongolian people to cut a piece of meat from the fat tail first and taste it. Roast lamb is a traditional Mongolian food, but it, too, is reserved for special occasions, such as a dinner party to honor distinguished guests or a great celebration. Roast lamb, a beautiful golden red color with a delicious flavor, is served on a square wooden platter. *Boodog*, a preparation made from goat, or the meat of marmot (a large rodent, the size of a house cat, that lives in burrows in the steppes) is another traditional Mongolian dish. Vegetables are a recent addition to Mongolian cuisine.

Generally, the Mongolian people drink their milk sour, preferring its taste to that of fresh milk. Milk tea is the traditional hot drink of Mongolians. It is made by boiling the water with brick tea and fresh milk. Mongolians usually put a little salt into the milk before drinking it. Sometimes butter or stir-fried millet is also added to the milk tea.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1, the first day of the new year according to the Gregorian, or Western, calendar, is one of the few public holidays observed in modern-day Mongolia.

❁ TSAGAAN TSAR

Observed by: General Public

Observed in: End of January to early March (lunar calendar)

The lunar new year celebration depends on the cycles of the Moon and can fall anytime between the end of January and early March. Tsagaan Tsar, which means "the white month," is a spring festival celebrated at the same time as the Chinese New Year. (The people of Mongolia say that this is coincidence, and there is no connection between the two holidays.) The color white stands for purity, happiness, wealth, and well-being. Tsagaan Tsar is the start of the lactating and breeding period of cattle. and the

people anticipate that spring will bring an abundance of dairy products. Families start planning for the holidays a month in advance, preparing plenty of food and gifts. Houses, *gers* (tents), and sheds are all given a thorough cleaning before the new year. On Tsagaan Tsar, as on other Mongolian holidays, people sing songs and play games.

The New Year's Eve corresponding to Tsagaan Tsar is called Bituun—the last dinner of the old year. The following morning, everyone awakes early to greet the rising Sun, then family members exchange greetings and gifts. The value of the gift is not important; often it is merely some socks, a pack of cigarettes, or a bottle of drink. Mongolians celebrate the new year for three days full of eating and drinking fermented mare's milk, *airag*, and *arkhi*, vodka. In the past people went to an *ovoo*, an arrangement of stones on a hilltop, with trays of food and other offerings to show their gratitude to nature.

Maidari observances occur every day in various seasons, and there are also special holiday celebrations that accompany other religious and seasonal festivals. During the 16 days of the New Year celebrations, a number of rites devoted to the 12 miracles of Buddha are performed, and fire plays a very important part. One of these rituals, called Sor, is observed during the lunar new year celebrations. When the fire, *sora*, gains strength, its sparks fly high into the cold winter sky, and the participants toss lumps of red dough, which symbolize enemies of the faith, into the blazing fire. This ritual is one of the final episodes of Sagaalghan—the holiday of the White Moon—the most spectacular ritual of Lamaism. In another new year ritual, people burn their misfortunes in the fire and make wishes for the coming year: May the fire in the hearth burn (may it be warm at home) and may everybody enjoy good health.

See also Volume III: SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 8

International Women's Day (IWD) celebrates the economic, political, and social achievements of women. In February 1908 a group of working women in the United States, supported by a declaration of the Socialist Party of America, initiated the first Women's Day when large demonstrations took place demanding the right to vote for women and other political and economic rights. This movement grew, and the first IWD was held on March 19, 1911, in Germany, Austria, and Denmark. Since 1975 the United Nations has sponsored the event. Mongolia observes IWD like most other socialist and former socialist countries with meetings and workshops highlighting women's issues.

Bogino Duu

As a result of leading a nomadic life for several centuries, the Mongolians have developed their own special way of handling livestock. *Bogino duu* ("short song") is a type of folk song that uses, repeatedly, some special coaxing word, which is called *toig*. For example, when a ewe is being coaxed into accepting a rejected lamb, a Mongol will sing a specific *bogino duu* for such a situation. He or she will sing gently, over and over again, until the ewe suckles the lamb.

❁ DAY OF CHILDREN AND MOTHERS

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 1

This day is observed to emphasize the need for providing the nation's children with care and protection and for ensuring their welfare, as well as to glorify motherhood and a mother's role in the family and society. This holiday is common in most socialist and former socialist countries. In Mongolia seminars, workshops, and health check-up clinics for children and young mothers are held on this day.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 11–13

July 11, 1921, was the day on which the Mongolian People's government, a limited monarchy, was formed. Before that Mongolia had broken away from Chinese rule and established an autonomous theocratic government, which led to a 10-year period of internal disagreements and political and social conflict.

The Naadam Festival, which is two centuries old, is celebrated on the same day. Naadam was originally associated with religious ceremonies: the worship of spirits of the mountains, rivers, and other beauties of nature. The founder of the people's government changed the tradition in 1922 by holding the national athletic competition in July to coincide with the first anniversary of the new People's Republic Independence Day.

The major events of the festival are scheduled for the first two days, beginning with an opening ceremony early on the morning of the first day,

Fun Fact

Tibetan Buddhism is the body of religious Buddhist doctrine and institutions characteristic of Tibet and the Himalayan region. At one time this Buddhist sect was called Lamaism, after its religious gurus, who are called lamas.

Fun Fact

The Mongolian style of chess is a traditional game of long standing. Called *shatar*, the king is a stern khan, a dog—the cattle breeder’s traditional devoted friend—is the “queen,” and a camel is used as a bishop.

when men on horseback present the flags of Genghis Khan in the main square of Ulaanbaatar. The entry of the processional chariot of the Maidari (the future Buddha) is a high point of the Tsam. It is a great honor to be asked to pull the Maidari chariot, which features a horse’s head covered in green velvet. Tradition has it that those who participate in the procession are assured of rebirth as his disciples when the Maidari Buddha returns to Earth.

The opening ceremony also involves music, a variety of performances, and speeches. During the Naadam Festival, the sports of wrestling, horse racing, and archery—called the Three Main Games of Men—are the primary attractions. The Mongolian style of wrestling

is similar to Sumo. The wrestlers are required to wear a traditional costume of knee boots with upturned toes, tight pants, and a silk vest that covers the shoulder and arms, but not the chest. This strange requirement is intended to ensure that all the contestants are male.

Before beginning contestants perform a special eagle dance, which the winner performs again at the end; the loser passes under the winner’s “wing” so as to indicate submission.

Unlike wrestling, in which women are forbidden to compete, archery is a contest in which both men and women compete. At one time the contest required the archers to hit a live marmot (a creature similar to the groundhog) from a distance of 110 yards, but modern competitions can be stationary or performed on horseback, where the archers must hit small leather targets 75 to 110 yards away. Contestants usually wear traditional attire: pointed hats and long robes tied with brightly colored silk sashes. The archers often use traditional bows made of reindeer



Mongolian horsemen ride during the opening ceremony of the Naadam Festival, at a stadium in Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia on July 11. Naadam is an annual sports festival that revolves around the “three manly sports” of horse racing, wrestling, and archery. Mongolians travel hundreds of miles each summer to join in festivities in the country’s capital. (AP Photo/Minoru Iwasaki)

bone and sometimes entertain the spectators by doing a brief song and dance of praise when they hit the target.

The horse race is the highlight and the grand finale of the Naadam Festival. It involves as many as 200 horses racing at top speed over rugged terrain for about 20 miles, a distance set when Genghis Khan ruled. Originally adults raced on wild, untamed horses, but now children, aged from 4 to 12 years ride bareback or in saddles. The horse race has just as much ceremony as other aspects of the festival. The race follows a parade of all the participants, the singing of the traditional hymn, “Tumnii Ekh,” and the chanting of the Buddhist mantra, Giingoo, which is done to help the riders concentrate. Prizes are given to the winner of the race and the rider who comes in last. A Mongolian proverb says, “Better to break one’s spine than one’s spirit.” Awarding a prize to the loser encourages the children to race again the next year instead of giving up.

❁ CELEBRATION OF THE REVOLUTION

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 21

This holiday commemorates the victory of the Mongolians, trained and equipped by the new Soviet army, over Chinese invaders who captured Ulaanbaatar a few years after Mongolia had established an autonomous theocratic government.

❁ PROCLAMATION OF MONGOLIA DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 26

The country of Mongolia was proclaimed the Mongolian People’s Republic on November 25, 1924, and a Soviet-style, state-oriented constitution was adopted. On the same day the name of the country’s capital was changed to Ulaanbaatar from its earlier name Niyslel Huree.

The annual commemoration of this event is marked by a presidential address to the nation and the laying of wreaths at the memorial at Sukhbaatar Square in Ulaanbaatar.

Religious Holidays

❁ FESTIVAL OF MAIDARI

Observed by: Lamaist Buddhists
Observed on: At various times

The Festival of Maidari (Mongolian for *Maitreya*, the Buddha of the Future) was first held in Tibet in

1049 and introduced into Mongolia in 1656.

The appearance of Maidari, the Buddha of the future, will signal the beginning of a new age; he awaits his final rebirth as Buddha in his Tushita, “heaven of joy.”

❁ TSAUL-KHURAL

Observed by: Lamaist Buddhists

Observed on: Twenty days after the first winter Moon

Tsaul-khural is celebrated in the fall of the 20th day following the first winter Moon. This observance combines the teaching of reincarnation and the ancient spiritual cult of animals and ancestors. During the celebration candles are lit because the people believe that their light causes the devout to repent of treating animals badly. Treating animals well is not only important to people whose lives depend on their animals, but also because they believe that people’s souls can be reborn (reincarnated) into other living things.

Fun Fact

Mongolian wrestling is thought to be about 7,000 years old. In Mongolian wrestling (which is different from wrestling in Inner Mongolia [northern China]), there are no weight classes or time limits.

Rites of Passage

❁ MARRIAGE

The traditional Mongolian wedding is an agreement between two families. The bride’s family provides a dowry of jewelry, clothing, and home furnishings, and the groom’s transfers bride-wealth in livestock. The wedding ceremony is not really a religious ceremony, and for the wedding feast as many relatives of the bride and the groom are invited as the two families can afford to feed. The bride moves to the camp of the husband’s family, and a new tent (*ger*) is provided for the couple.

Nowadays, urban marriages often take place between schoolmates or coworkers. For a modest fee the couple has a civil ceremony and a wedding certificate. They rent wedding attire, a reception hall, the services of a photographer, and a car service to carry them to their new home. Colleagues and fellow workers attend as guests and bring gifts that contribute toward setting up the married couple’s new household.

Further Reading

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Morocco

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	North Africa, bordered by the Mediterranean Sea, Algeria, the Western Sahara, and the Atlantic Ocean
Size	172,414 sq. mi.
Capital City	Rabat
Flag Description	Morocco's flag is red, with a green five-pointed star, called Suleiman's seal, in the center.
Independence	March 2, 1956 (from France)
Population	32,725,847 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional monarchy
Nationality	Moroccan
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Arab-Berber (99%)
Major Language(s)	Arabic (official); French (used in business, government, and diplomacy); Berber dialects
Major Religion(s)	Muslim (99%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Throne Day, July 30; Revolution of the King and People Day, August 20; King's Birthday, August 21; Green March Day, November 6; Independence Day, November 18

Introduction

HISTORY

The history of Morocco is the history of two cultures: Berber and Arab. The Berbers have lived in Morocco since the second millennium B.C.E. The Arabs brought Islam to Morocco when they invaded the region, around 685 C.E.. The Berbers willingly embraced Islam and even welcomed Arab rule in the region. But the Arabs treated the Berbers as inferiors, never as their equals. This resulted in constant skirmishes between the two cultures.

As much as the Berbers and Arabs of Morocco have been at odds with each other, they united against a common external enemy, becoming serious about unification when Portuguese and Spanish forces attacked the country.

In 1660 Morocco came under the rule of the Alawite Dynasty, which still controls it in the 21st century. In the 17th and 18th centuries the country also became a haven for pirates

who plundered ships sailing in the Mediterranean. Due to its rich reserves of minerals, such as phosphate and iron ore, Morocco attracted more European invaders in the 19th century. In 1840 both France and Spain annexed Morocco, leading to conflicts between those two nations. After reaching an agreement in 1844 they divided Morocco between them, with France acquiring almost the whole country and Spain colonizing the southwest portion, which was later known as Spanish Sahara.

Morocco was the flashpoint for another clash of European powers when Germany tried to annex the country in 1905. In 1906 the Algeciras Conference gave the sultan of Morocco the right to govern the nation, but in 1912 the sultan allowed the country to become a protectorate of the French.

During World War II Morocco took up the cause of nationalism. To secure their position the French overthrew Sultan Mohammed V (1909–61) in 1953 and placed his uncle Mohammed Ben Aarafa on the throne. However, the whole nation revolted against the move, and the sultan was reinstated in 1955. In March 1956 France and Spain recognized

Berbers

Berbers are non-Arabs who settled in North Africa around 3000 B.C.E. and now make up a large part of the population there. Since their arrival they have mixed with the ethnic groups of these areas. Berber, the language of the Berbers, belongs to the Afro-Asiatic linguistic family.

Nearly 40 percent of Morocco's population is Berber. Berbers have traditionally engaged in cattle and sheep raising. Many Berbers still live in tents and huts in the rural areas of Morocco. However, the Berber culture is being transformed since the Berbers are gradually adopting the culture and traditions of the Arabs.

Morocco's independence. When Sultan Mohammed V died in 1961, his son Hassan II (1929–99) was crowned king. On the death of King Hassan II in 1999, his son King Muhammad VI (b. 1963) succeeded him.

King Muhammad VI entrusted more powers to representative government and stressed women's rights and the education of Moroccan youth. He also encouraged foreign investment in the country and was more open to economic reform than his predecessors.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The Kingdom of Morocco is flanked by the Mediterranean Sea on the north, Algeria on the east and southeast, the Western Sahara on the south, and the Atlantic Ocean on the west. Spain possesses numerous small islands off Morocco's northern coast. On the Mediterranean coast are the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla.

Morocco experiences a wide range of climatic conditions. The weather of the coastal region is mild, while the rest of the north can be wet and cool. The temperatures vary from 24°F in winter to 75°F in summer. In the desert area the daytime and nighttime temperatures are at two extremes due to the lack of moisture in the air.

Among the North African nations, Morocco

Er Rif

Er Rif is a mountain range in northwestern Africa that extends along the coastline of Morocco. It runs from the city of Tangier to the western frontier of Algeria. Er Rif is a range of the Atlas Mountains, a line of steep cliffs with a few harbors. The highest point in the country is Mt. Toubkai at 13,665 feet in the mountains south of Marrakech.

boasts the broadest plains and the highest mountains. Er Rif, an area of highlands, runs parallel to the Mediterranean coast. In addition the Atlas Mountains extend across Morocco in a southwesterly to northeasterly direction.

ECONOMY

Morocco's economy is mainly dependent on agriculture, although only 22 percent of the land is under cultivation. Agriculture is adversely affected by regular droughts. The principal crops are sugar beets, sugarcane, wheat, barley, and potatoes. The people living in the highlands raise sheep and poultry.

Morocco has a booming tourist industry and a low rate of inflation.

Lately, Morocco has been encouraging investment by foreign companies, but both unemployment and the population growth rate are high.

LIFESTYLE AND CULTURE

Lifestyles vary widely in the different regions of Morocco. Moroccans hailing from different parts of the country wear different styles of dress. Architecture and crafts also differ from region to region. Famous for its traditional arts and crafts, Morocco boasts wonderful leatherworks, jewelry, and carpets.

The Berbers of Morocco have musical storytelling traditions. Modern composers use a fusion of African, French, pop, and rock. Another type of music called *rai*, which originated in Algeria, is also becoming popular in Morocco.

Due to the dominance of Islam, Morocco does not emphasize dance as some African nations do. The exception, however, is an ancient Berber dance called the *abidous*, which, with the *abouach*, is the most complex example of the musical and dance traditions of the Berber-speaking Berbers of the Middle Atlas regions. It is performed on various occasions during the calendar year, especially during harvest rites, and the entire community participates. It is a circle dance consisting of alternating men and women; the musicians occupy the center.

Melodic instruments are sometimes used, particularly flutes, but the traditional instrumental group consists only of *bandirs*. A *bandir* is a single-headed tambourine without "jingles," a circular frame covered with goatskin on one side. It is held in the left hand (with a thumb-hole cut in the wood) and played with the right. The Berbers call it a *tagnza* (in the Grand Atlas) or *allun* (in the Middle Atlas). The *bandir* comes in various sizes with skins more or less taut (tension is determined by placing the drum near a heat source) to obtain different timbres.

The *abidous* begins with an invocation (*tama-wouet*) by a soloist and the vocal part is then developed by way of an antiphonal pattern. The melody, based on short, strongly rhythmic and repeated phrases, is chromatic. The basic rhythm, also char-

acteristic of the *abouach*, is three-eighths and three-quarters.

Moroccans are passionate about soccer. Morocco's soccer team qualified for the 1994 World Cup held in the United States. Hicham El-Guerrouj, world-renowned middle distance runner, holds the world record in the 1500 meters and mile and was a double gold-medal winner at the 2004 Olympics (1500 and 5000 meters—a rare double).

❁ CUISINE

In Morocco eating is an important social ritual. The Moroccans' main meal is a midday dinner, which starts with hot and cold salads or stew. These are followed by lamb or chicken. Next a platter of piled couscous (made from the coarsely ground grains of durum wheat) is served topped with meats and vegetables. The people living along the Atlantic coast eat seafood in abundance.

Moroccan cuisine has a distinctive Arab flavor, but it has also been influenced by Jewish culture (at one time the Jewish population in Morocco was sizable). Characteristics of the Arab and Jewish traditions are found in Morocco's couscous, *bisteeya* (a pie made of alternating layers of phyllo dough, shredded chicken, ground almonds, and spices), *mechoui* (roasted leg of lamb), and *djej emshmel* (chicken with lemons and olives).

While Moroccans import many spices, there is no dearth of homegrown condiments such as mint, olives, and oranges. In Morocco people are fond of sipping cups of sweet mint tea. It is a common practice to eat with the first three fingers and to use bread as a utensil.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 begins the new year of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar. Families and friends gather to celebrate the start of the new year with a sumptuous meal, wishing each other a joyous and prosperous year ahead. All businesses, government offices, and educational institutions are closed on New Year's Day.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, to commemorate the important role played by workers. The May 1 observance of Labor Day (as opposed to the September

holiday in the United States) has its origins in the international socialist movement, which declared the day in 1889 to coincide with an 1890 general strike in the United States called by the American Federation of Labor (AFL) to demand an eight-hour workday. International Labor Day has always been more radical than the September observance in the United States. In Morocco it is a public holiday and all government, commercial, and educational institutions are closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ THRONE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 30

Throne Day, or Feast of the Throne, is a national holiday in Morocco, marking the accession of King Mohammed VI to the throne on July 30, 1999. Mohammed VI became the new king of Morocco after the death of his father, the former king Mohammed V. On Throne Day King Mohammed VI delivers a speech to his subjects. The speech generally focuses on recent reforms and the nation's progress. It is a national holiday on which government offices and schools are closed.

❁ REVOLUTION OF THE KING AND PEOPLE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 20

The Revolution of the King and People Day (or Anniversary of the King's and People's Revolution) commemorates the exile of the sultan of Morocco Mohammed V by the French in 1953. Mohammed V, a proponent of Morocco's struggle for freedom, was dethroned by the French in an attempt to stem the growing tide of nationalism in the country. In his place the French installed his uncle Mohammed Ben Aarafa as the new sultan, sparking widespread protests and demonstrations against the French regime and Aarafa. Giving in to pressure from the Moroccans, France allowed Mohammed V to return to Morocco and reclaim his throne in 1955. He received a tumultuous and joyous welcome, and in 1956 he began negotiations with the French to gain independence for Morocco.

On this day people remember the legacy of Mohammed V and pay homage to a great leader and visionary. The day is marked by speeches given by the ruling monarch of Morocco as well as prominent government officials, honoring the late sultan as well as the people of Morocco.

Fun Fact

On March 21, 2002, King Muhammad VI married Salma Bennani (b. 1978), a computer engineer. She was given the title of princess. It was the first time that a Moroccan ruler's wife was so prominently acknowledged.

❁ KING'S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 21

On August 21, 1963, the reigning monarch of Morocco King Mohammed VI (Mohammed Ben al-Hassan) was born. He is the eldest son and the second child of the late King Hassan II and his second wife, Lalla Latifa Hammou. Mohammed VI ascended the throne on July 23, 1999, after the death of King Hassan II.

Every year a lavish dinner is organized in honor of the king at the royal palace; special guests include royalty and diplomats from around the world. Moroccans take pride in their traditions and culture as they wish King Mohammed VI a long and healthy life. This day is also celebrated as Young People's Day.

❁ GREEN MARCH DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 6

Green March Day, also called Anniversary of the Green March, is celebrated to honor the 350,000 Moroccans—young and old, men and women—who marched into Western Sahara in 1975 to claim the territory for Morocco. Green March Day is one of



A Muslim man carries his sheep, preparing for Eid al-Adha, the Feast of the Sacrifice, in Casablanca. (AP Photo/Jalil Bounhar)

the most important holidays in Morocco since it is viewed as a reunification of the country.

A final resolution of Western Sahara's status has not yet been determined. A guerrilla war with the Polisario Front contesting Rabat's sovereignty ended in a 1991 UN-brokered cease-fire; a UN-organized referendum on final status has been repeatedly postponed. Reunification Day is celebrated in Morocco on August 14 with parades and processions to commemorate the occasion.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 18

Independence Day celebrates Morocco's independence from European domination. It was achieved after a long struggle on the part of the Moroccans against Spanish and French forces. Independence Day also marks the return of Mohammed V to power. The day is celebrated with civic ceremonies such as flag-raising, military parades, and public speeches. It is public holiday on which government offices and schools are closed.

Religious Holidays

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th or pilgrimage month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, also Eid al-Kebir or the Feast of the Sacrifice, commemorates the willingness of Ibrahim (Abraham) to sacrifice his own son at God's command. Eid al-Adha is widely celebrated by the Islamic community in Morocco and is marked by sacrifices and devotion. The day falls at the end of the hajj (the traditional pilgrimage to Mecca), which, according to the Koran, every Muslim must undertake at least once in his or her lifetime if it is physically and economically possible. The pilgrimage to Mecca is the fifth of Islam's Five Pillars of the faith.

In Morocco Eid al-Adha is a public holiday, and citizens celebrate it with lavish feasts and charitable gestures. On this day Moroccan families slaughter sheep. A third of the sacrificial meat is consumed by the family; another third is given to relatives and friends; and the final third goes to the poor and needy.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

❁ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month in the Islamic calendar

Because the Muslim calendar is based on the phases of the Moon, the date of the Muslim New Year each

year occurs 11 days earlier than in the previous year. In Morocco families and friends get together to wish each other a joyous new year, and even the poorest of families partakes of some meat dishes on this day.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

❁ MOULoud

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

Mouloud falls in the third month of the Islamic year and is celebrated throughout Morocco to commemorate the birthday of the prophet Muhammad. On this day Moroccans offer prayers and remember the life and teachings of the prophet. Evenings are made spectacular by a display of fireworks, and special dishes are prepared in every home.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULoud

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr, or the Feast of Fast-Breaking, marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, a holy month for Muslims all over the world. During Ramadan, Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset every day. Eating, smoking, drinking, and even physical intimacy are prohibited during daylight hours.

Moroccans celebrate Eid al-Fitr by wearing new clothes, preparing sweets and sweet dishes, and visiting their kinsmen and family members. Children receive money and gifts from their elders. All government, educational, and commercial establishments are closed on this day. The Koran forbids fasting on this day.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

Regional Holidays

❁ ALMOND TREE BLOSSOM FESTIVAL

Observed in: Tafraoute

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Second week of February

The Almond Tree Blossom Festival attracts throngs of people to the beautiful valley of Tafraoute every year during the second week of February. Tafraoute is home to Morocco's best almond trees, which bloom in February. Tourists from other parts of Morocco and abroad flock to watch the blushing pink almond trees. There is dancing, singing, and storytelling. A colorful *souk* (market) also springs up

during this time. These activities give a festive atmosphere to this otherwise sleepy village.

❁ WAX CANDLE FEAST

Observed in: Salé

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May

The Wax Candle Feast is held on the Bouregreg estuary in the town of Salé in May. The wax lantern procession, or Mawkib Esh Shomouaa, is held on this occasion. The event began in the Barbary period in Salé when the town's patron Sidi Abdallah Ben Hassoun had embarked on a long voyage. (*Barbary* is a 19th-century term used by Europeans to refer to the coastal regions of Tunisia, Libya, Morocco, and Algeria.) A procession of wax lanterns was carried out to appeal to Allah for Ben Hassoun's protection. Since then the procession has been held annually.

❁ IMILCHIL FESTIVAL

Observed in: Imilchil

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: August

Imilchil is a tiny village located at 8,430 feet in the Atlas Mountains. The festival that takes place here in August centers on a courtship ritual. It evolved from an ancient Berber custom in which young men and women got married on the day of the Mousseem (a day when people assemble to celebrate and feast and take a break from their busy lives). It is believed that a holy man used to bless the couples, ensuring their future happiness.

The Imilchil Festival is celebrated to honor that holy man at the site of his tomb in the high Atlas Mountains. At this betrothal fair, matchmaking is sacred. During the festival approximately 3,000 men gather in tents for three days along with their flocks, horses, and camels. They wear *djellabas*, outer robes, and embellish themselves with silver daggers as a demonstration of their status and wealth. The young women wear silver jewelry and fine dresses and dance day and night. It is the woman's responsibility to make the first move while the men just sit and wait. If a woman likes a man, she asks him to accompany her for a walk. During the walk she asks him many important questions, and if she is satisfied with his answers and decides that he is the man for her, they go to a tent where scribes marry them.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

The tribal women in Morocco apply henna when expecting a child and dress like brides before going into labor. They also apply makeup such as *kohl* and

swak. *Kohl* is a black eye makeup made of antimony, while *swak* is a dark lip stain made of walnut root. Moroccans believe that, by doing this, they are shunning unwanted spirits and also preparing women for the possibility of dying during delivery. They believe that, if a woman dies while delivering a child, she will enter paradise, so she should be dressed appropriately. At the time of delivery the expectant mother is made to sit in a hole in sand inside a tent. Women move around the expectant mother, performing a belly dance to help her bear the labor pains. Men are not allowed to enter the tent.

Moroccans dig a shallow hole in the center of the tent where the child is placed after birth. Once the child is born, it is cleaned with soft white tufts of lamb's wool and placed in the hole. The umbilical cord is cut with a silver knife and is buried in the hollow in which the child was placed after birth.

❁ MARRIAGE

Weddings are gala affairs in Morocco. They have both social and religious importance and are generally celebrated on a large scale. The marriage negotiations start with the *khutba*, a sermon given at the midday prayer in the mosque on Fridays. During *khutba* the family of the groom visits the bride's family and asks for her hand. If the proposal is accepted, then the date of the marriage is set.

Next the *adouls* (Islamic notaries) ask the bride and the groom whether they consent to the union. If both say "yes," then the *adouls* sign the marriage contract, and the couple is to all intents and purposes married. The next day the bride goes to the *nekachat* (a group of henna artists), who paint her hands and feet with henna. The *nekachat* hand the bride to the next group of women who are called *negafat*. These women are responsible for the attire, makeup, and other aspects of the bride's grooming and preparations. They also escort her on the day of the wedding celebration.

After noon prayers the women and girls, dressed in their traditional caftans and jewelry, gather around the bride and share the joy of the family in a ceremony called *lambita*. During this ceremony, the bride has to wear a number of traditional

dresses given to her by her future husband and by her mother as per the *shoura* (list of gifts given to the bride by her parents). This ceremony ends at sunset when the bride and her relatives wait for the arrival of the groom and his relatives.

The groom and his family arrive at the bride's house accompanied by music. The groom's family presents a wide array of gifts to the bride's family in the ritual called *labdya*. The bathing ritual follows in which the bride-to-be is bathed by unmarried girls and her friends. The bathing ritual is intended to purify the bride. At night the groom will once again come with his friends and family to take the bride to her new home.

The next day the bride's family bids her a last farewell by bringing her breakfast in her new home. The newly wedded couple share this breakfast. Then the groom hosts the bride's relatives for the wedding feast to celebrate the beginning of their new life.

The couple's entire family attends the wedding feast, which is prepared with care and precision. Marriages in rural areas are celebrated on an even larger scale, since the whole village comes together to participate in the celebrations. This is evidence of the community pride and solidarity in the rural areas of Morocco.

Further Reading

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❧ Mozambique ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Southeastern Africa, bordered by Swaziland, South Africa, Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, and the Indian Ocean
Size	309,496 sq. mi.
Capital City	Maputo
Flag Description	The flag of Mozambique has three horizontal bands of equal size of green (top), black, and yellow. A red isosceles triangle is based on the hoist side; the black band is edged in white. The red triangle has a yellow five-pointed star in the center with a crossed rifle and hoe in black superimposed on an open book.
Independence	April 25, 1975 (from Portugal)
Population	19,406,703 (2005 est.)
Government	Multiparty democracy
Nationality	Mozambican
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Indigenous tribes (99%, including Makhuwa, Tsonga, Lomwe, Sena, and others)
Major Language(s)	Mozambican languages (32%); Emakhuwa (26%); Xichangana (11%); Portuguese (9%; official; spoken by 27% of population as a second language)
Major Religion(s)	Catholic (24%); none (23%); Zionist Christian (17%); Muslim (18%); other (18%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Heroes' Day, February 3; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day, June 25; Lusaka Agreement Day, September 7; Armed Forces Day, September 25

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

Archaeological evidence shows that humans inhabited Mozambique as early as two million years ago. As far as is known, San hunters and gatherers, ancestors of the Khoisani peoples, were the first to move into what is now Mozambique.

Between the first and fourth centuries C.E., Mozambique witnessed an influx of Bantu-speaking tribes, migrating from the northern parts of Africa, moving down through the Zambezi River valley. The Bantus, mainly farmers and ironworkers, established their settlements on the plateau and coastal regions of Mozambique. The Bantu also established ports in the coastal areas and carried on trading activities with the Middle East, India, and other African countries. The Arab traders introduced the Bantu to Islam. Gradually the Arabs

began dominating the trade (mainly gold and ivory) as well as political power in the region through a number of local rulers known as sultans.

Vasco da Gama (c. 1460–1524), the famed Portuguese navigator, was the first European to reach Mozambique, landing there in 1498 while seeking a sea route to India. The flourishing trade in the region caught his eye, and around 1500 the Portuguese began establishing ports and forts in the region.

Initially the name *Mozambique* referred to a small coral island situated at the mouth of Mossuril Bay. The Portuguese constructed forts and towns on the island, and over time the name *Mozambique* came to encompass the Portuguese colonies along the east coast of Africa. In 1510 the Portuguese built a square fort in the northernmost part of the island of Mozambique.

Between 1580 and 1640, after the kingdoms of Spain and Portugal were unified, investments were diverted from the

San Tribe

The San, formerly called Bushmen, are considered to be the first inhabitants of southern Africa. The Bushmen were mainly hunters and gatherers and led a largely peaceful existence until they were displaced by Bantu-speaking tribes.

The San are known for their silent hand-signal communication, which they use during hunting. The manual communication involves using the hands, body language, gestures, and facial expressions to communicate a message to another person.

The word *san* means “outsider,” and the tribe was given this name by its ancient rivals, the Khoikhoi (meaning “men of men”) tribe. The Khoikhoi and San both belong to the Khoisan ethnic group. Since *san* was considered a derogatory term by its own tribesmen, many preferred to be called Bushmen.

coastal colonies of Mozambique to the growing trade with India and the Far East, as well as to the colonization of Brazil. Lack of sufficient funds adversely affected the Portuguese settlements in the region, and in order to raise funds land was leased to other Europeans. In the 19th century the European leaseholders also served as tax collectors in each district and took on the responsibility for collecting taxes from native farmers, either in the form of agricultural produce or labor.

In 1891 the Portuguese government handed over control of the region for 50 years to a large private company Companhia de Moçambique, which was financed and controlled by the British and had its headquarters in the Mozambican city of Beira. It was mainly involved in issuing postage stamps and building railroad lines to the neighboring countries.

Traditional Trade Route of Mozambique

In an ancient coastal guide, called the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, written in the first century C.E., the flourishing trading ports of Mozambique lay on the southernmost end of the trading world at that time. According to this guide the traditional trading world included the Red Sea, the Hadhramaut (part of modern-day Yemen), the coast of Arabia, and the Indian coast. The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* takes its title from the Greek word *periplus*, which means “going around.” Although Erythraean is generally considered an ancient name for the Red Sea, the Greeks used it to refer to an area encompassing the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean.

In the early 20th century under the Companhia de Moçambique, slave trade flourished in the region as cheap African labor was being provided to the white settlers in Mozambique as well as to British colonies in other parts of Africa. Mozambican men were forced to go to neighboring South Africa and Rhodesia to work as laborers. The slave trade had long since been banned by the British and other Europeans, but it continued under the guise of forced labor and indentured servitude.

In 1932 when Antonio de Oliveira Salazar (1889–1970) was sworn in as prime minister of Portugal, things got worse for the Mozambicans. After the expiration of the lease held by the Companhia de Moçambique, Mozambique once again came under the direct jurisdiction of the Portuguese. During his tenure as prime minister of Portugal from 1932 to 1968, Salazar introduced cash crops like rice and cotton in Mozambique and made it compulsory for all males over the age of 15 to work in rice and cotton plantations for at least six months. The men were subjected to brutal treatment; besides being made to work long hours in terrible conditions, they were chained to prevent them from escaping. Thus many Mozambican men, after completing their mandatory six months’ work on the plantations, used every means possible to escape from Mozambique.

There was growing resentment among native Mozambicans about the oppressive Portuguese rule, which often manifested itself in the form of protests and demonstrations. In 1960 during one of the peaceful demonstrations led by the people of Mozambique, Portuguese police opened fire and killed more than 600 people. This massacre launched a full-fledged independence movement in Mozambique. In 1962 several anti-Portuguese political groups combined forces to form the Front for Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO). In September 1964 under the leadership of Eduardo Mondlane (1920–69), a leading Mozambican freedom fighter, FRELIMO launched an armed campaign against Portuguese colonial rule. Mondlane was murdered in a bomb blast in 1969.

The war lasted 10 years until 1974, when FRELIMO led a successful coup against Portuguese rule, establishing its control in the capital of Maputo. The Portuguese, who had already incurred heavy losses due to a war in Angola, lacked the will to fight. By 1975 all Portuguese colonists had either been expelled from Mozambique or left the country out of fear. And on June 25, 1975, Mozambique declared its independence from the Portuguese. FRELIMO established a one-party state in Mozambique, and Samora Machel (1933–86), a prominent leader of FRELIMO, was sworn in as the first president of Mozambique.

Post-independence Mozambique was economically dependent on South Africa and its apartheid government. Machel, however, allowed members of the African National Congress (ANC) and Rhodesian rebels to train in Mozambique and continue their freedom struggle in South Africa.

In 1982 Resistência Nacional Moçambicana, or Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO), an anti-Communist rebel group led by Mozambican rebel Afonso Dhlakama (b. 1953) and sponsored by South Africa and the United States, initiated a civil war in Mozambique by attacking schools, hospitals, and transportation routes all over the country. In 1984 Machel signed a peace accord with the South African government. According to this agreement (the Nkomati Accord), Mozambique had to expel all ANC members, while South Africa agreed to withdraw support from RENAMO.

South Africa, however, did not keep its promise and continued to supply arms and ammunition to RENAMO. In 1986 Samora Machel was killed in an airplane crash, and Joaquim Chissano (b. 1939) was sworn in as the president of Mozambique.

In 1990 after the fall of the apartheid government in South Africa, support to RENAMO quickly dried up, and a peace move was initiated by the Mozambican government. Multiparty democracy was reinstated in Mozambique in November 1990, thanks to a new constitution that promised a free and democratic Mozambique. Peace finally prevailed in Mozambique after a UN-negotiated peace agreement was signed between the Chissano government and RENAMO leader Afonso Dhlakama on October 4, 1992, in Rome. The agreement took effect on October 15, 1992, and a UN peacekeeping force called United Nations Operations in Mozambique (ONUMOZ), oversaw Mozambique's transition to democracy over a period of two years.

In 1994 the first free and fair democratic elections were held, and Chissano was reelected president of Mozambique, while Afonso Dhlakama became the leader of the opposition.

Chissano remained president of the country until 2004 but decided not to run for reelection, explaining that he wanted to give young leaders a chance. He appointed the country's first woman prime minister Luisa Diogo (b. 1958) in 2004. FRELIMO enjoyed an overwhelming victory in 2004, and Armando Guebuza (b. 1943), a prominent leader of FRELIMO, was sworn in as president of Mozambique.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The Republic of Mozambique is located in the southeastern part of Africa and is flanked by Swaziland, South Africa, Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, and the Indian Ocean. Madagascar is located across the Mozambique Channel, while Comoros is situated offshore to the northeast. The southern part of the country is characterized by coastal plains that rise and become mountains and plateaus in the northern and western parts of Mozambique. At 8,081 feet, Mt. Binga is the highest mountain in Mozambique. Two of southern Africa's longest rivers, the Zambezi (which divides Mozambique) and the Limpopo, flow through

Mozambique. Other rivers include the Save and the Rovuma, which forms the northern border with Tanzania. Lake Malawi (also known as Lake Nyasa) forms Mozambique's boundary with Malawi.

Mozambique has tropical to subtropical climatic conditions. The dry season lasts from April to September, with average daily temperatures reaching 80°F along the coastal areas. The rainy season lasts for the rest of the year, with average daily temperatures reaching as high as 88°F.

Mangrove swamps and woodlands cover a large part of Mozambique. The mangrove swamps serve the population along the coast by providing them with insect-resistant wood for buildings and furniture. Also, they provide natural protection against erosion as well as serving as nurseries for many varieties of fish.

Mozambique is home to a wide variety of animals including elephants, wildebeests, and zebra. Many mammals were killed during the civil war that gripped the region from 1982 to 1992; as a result, the number of animals has significantly declined in Mozambique.

The coastal waters of Mozambique are home to several species of turtles and dolphins as well as the nearly extinct sea cow (also called the dugong or manatee), an endangered marine mammal that is being mercilessly killed for its meat.

Fun Fact

In 1995 Mozambique joined the British Commonwealth and became the only member country in the Commonwealth that was never ruled by the British. The Commonwealth is an association of independent nations, most of which are former colonies of the British Empire.

Fun Fact

Two islands—Likoma and Chizumulu—are maritime enclaves. They belong to Malawi but lie entirely within Mozambique's Lake Nyasa (Lake Malawi) territorial waters.

The Dugong and Greek Mythology

The dugong, also called manatee or sea cow, is mentioned in Greek mythology in connection with the legend of the sirens. Sirens were said to be maidens whose upper bodies were those of women and the lower, those of a fish (mermaids). It was believed that their songs lured sailors who listened to them to their deaths at the bottom of the sea. The dugong belongs to the family of Sirenia, which was named after the Greek legend of the sirens. In Homer's *Odyssey* Circe the sorceress warns Odysseus about the dangers posed by the sirens and their enchanting song. She even instructs him to fill his sailors' ears with wax to prevent them from hearing the sirens' song.

Fun Fact

According to some reports there were only five engineers in the whole of Mozambique at the time of independence in 1975.

ECONOMY

Throughout their colonial rule, the Portuguese adopted a policy of not investing in the development of the infrastructure (transportation routes, schools, hospitals, and other social niceties) of their colonies. They rented out resources such as land and skilled human labor to other Europeans. Due to the labor practices of the Portuguese and the *Companhia de Moçambique*, many Mozambican men were forced to work in British colonies and other parts of Africa. Also, during the reign of Portuguese Prime Minister Salazar, Mozambicans fled the country to escape the brutal treatment meted out to them in the rice and cotton plantations.

After independence, Mozambique was economically dependent on South Africa, its main trading partner. In 1982, the country was forced into a civil war, which further drained the economy. It was only after multiparty democracy was established in Mozambique that the government began initiating pro-growth reforms to revive the economy. Both the successful resettlement of war refugees and economic reform have led to a high growth rate: between 1993 and 1999 the growth rate averaged almost 7 percent, and between 1997 and 1999 it averaged better than 10 percent a year. Destructive floods in early 2000 slowed the growth of the gross domestic product (GDP) to a mere 2 percent, but the GDP fully rebounded in 2001, with growth of nearly 15 percent.

The government's ability to control spending and the money supply, combined with financial reform, successfully reduced inflation from a high of 70 percent in 1994 to less than 5 percent in 1998–99. However, economic disruptions stemming from the floods of 2000 caused inflation to jump to almost 13 percent that year, and it was 13 percent again in 2003. The government expects the economy to continue to expand in the early years of the 21st century.

Rapid expansion in the future, however, depends on several major foreign investment projects, continued economic reform, and the revival of the agriculture, transportation, and tourism sectors.

Agriculture is the driving force of the economy, and almost half of the country's population is dependent on farming for its livelihood. Fishing is also pursued along the coast of Mozambique. The country exports aluminum, prawns, shrimp, cashews, cotton, sugar, citrus, timber, and bulk electricity. It is also exploring titanium extraction and pro-

cessing and garment manufacturing. It imports machinery and equipment, vehicles, fuel, chemicals, metal products, foodstuffs, and textiles.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Mozambique is home to almost 16 major ethnic groups that account for 99 percent of its population. The Makua, the dominant ethnic group, live in the northern parts of Mozambique. Other prominent ethnic groups include the Makonde (also in the north), the Sena (in the central region), and the Shanagaan (in the south). The Portuguese, along with other Europeans and Asians, make up the remaining 1 percent of the population.

Portuguese is the official language of Mozambique, although the ethnic groups prefer to use their own languages. There is also overlap in religion; a majority of Mozambicans hold some animist beliefs, while two-thirds of the population follow Christianity or Islam.

Traditional medicine is an important part of Mozambican culture, and healers called *curendeiras* are much sought after. They combine traditional medicines with Western medical practices to cure disease. In the rural areas they are often the only medical help available due to lack of hospitals and trained doctors. Mozambicans also seek the help of religious healers like *profetas* (spirit mediums) and *feticiceiros* (religious healers) to solve their problems.

Mozambique is well-known for its artistic sculptures, masks, and wall-paintings.

Traditional music and dance form an integral part of Mozambican culture. The *mapika* dance is a popular traditional dance. Although its exact origins remain unknown, it deals with relations between the sexes, attempting to define the relationship between a man and woman and also exploring the male urge to dominate women. For the *mapika* dance, a man dons a wig and wears a specially decorated mask, which has drawings made from dyes. He also wears five pieces of cloth that cover his entire body except the fingers and toes. The dancer assumes the role of the spirit of a dead person. The purpose of the dance is to instill fear among the women and children and convince them that men are their only saviors.

Marrabenta is the most popular form of music. It is very urban. The word *marrabenta* is derived from a Portuguese word *rebrantar*, which means "to break," referring to the low-quality guitars, whose strings snap easily while playing. Other musical instruments used by Mozambicans include the *lupembe*, a wind instrument used by the Makonde tribe and the marimba, a type of xylophone used by the Chope tribe in the southern parts of Mozambique.

CUISINE

Cornmeal, millet, rice, and hot stews, so common in the diet of other African peoples, are mainstays of Mozambique's cuisine as well.

Fun Fact

The largest and most famous mural in Mozambique is 311 feet long and is located near the airport in the capital city of Maputo. It reflects the images and captures the stories of the independence struggle against the Portuguese.

Mozambique is known for its wide variety of seafood, which many believe to be the best there is. Delicacies made from crab, shrimp, prawns, and lobsters are preferred. The food is generally cooked in coconut sauce or a special red-pepper sauce called *piri-piri*.

Piri-piri can be used either as a sauce or as a marinade. *Galinha piri piri*, for example, is a favorite dish that consists of chicken cooked in *piri-piri* sauce.

Charcoal grilling is the most popular method of cooking in Mozambique. Another popular recipe is *frango a cabrial*, which means “chicken, the African way.” Chickens heavily rubbed with *piri-piri* are roasted over charcoal—so peppery that few tourists even dare try them.

Curries are called *caril*, and they are also served very “hot,” along with *manga achar*, a mango chutney served in one of the (several) small dishes that accompany the curry. Chopped peanuts, coconut, cucumber, bananas, and other foods that can be added to the main dish are served in small bowls.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day. Because this is a public holiday in Mozambique, all public and private institutions are closed on January 1.

❁ HEROES' DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 3

This day honors Eduardo Mondlane, the leader of the Front for Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO), who was killed in a bomb blast on February 3, 1969. He is considered the father of the Mozambican independence struggle. In 1962 Eduardo Mondlane was elected president of the newly formed FRELIMO, a coalition of anti-Portuguese political parties that had united in order to free Mozambique from Portuguese rule. For the safety of the organization, the FRELIMO headquarters were based in Dar-es-salaam, Tanzania.

Under his leadership, FRELIMO launched a guerilla war against the Portuguese; he was supported in this effort by the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and several Western countries. The Portuguese took heavy casualties as a result of this guerilla warfare and made several attempts to eliminate FRELIMO leaders. In 1969 a bomb placed underneath Mondlane's chair in the FRELIMO headquarters exploded, killing him instantly.

On this day Mozambicans pay homage to Eduardo Mondlane, who led the fight against



Men perform a traditional dance in the Marracuene district, 20 miles north of Maputo. (AP Photo/Ferhat Momade)

oppressive forces in Mozambique culminating with independence in 1975. On Heroes' Day the president lays a wreath at the Mozambican Heroes' Square in the capital city of Maputo. Huge rallies, attended by the general public as well as members of FRELIMO, are held all over the country.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

On this day Mozambican trade unions organize large demonstrations throughout the country. Labor Day, also called Worker's Day or May Day, provides them with a platform to voice their opinions and express their grievances concerning government policies and the labor laws. In recent years Mozambican workers have been protesting against privatization programs, as well as the companies that have taken over key industries, causing low wages and mass unemployment in Mozambique.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 25

On June 25, 1975, Mozambique was granted complete independence from the Portuguese in compliance with the Lusaka Agreement, which was signed

Fun Fact

An advanced rumba developed by Pello El Afrokán, called the Mozambique, was a popular style of music during the 1960s.

by the Front for Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) and the Portuguese government on September 7, 1974.

Mozambique had been under Portuguese rule since the early 1500s and, throughout that period, had been treated brutally. The actual freedom struggle, however, did not begin until 1962, when anti-Portuguese political groups combined to form FRELIMO. In 1964 FRELIMO launched a 10-year guerilla war against the Portuguese colonists. They received popular support as well as the support of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Western countries. After suffering heavy casualties at the hands of FRELIMO for 10 years, the Portuguese signed a peace agreement and granted independence to Mozambique on June 25, 1975.

On this day people in Mozambique pay homage to the freedom fighters who died to liberate Mozambique. Independence Day celebrations take place all over the nation. In the capital city of Maputo, the president unfurls the national flag of Mozambique to start the celebrations. Parades by the armed forces and cultural programs are highlights of Independence Day celebrations in Mozambique.

LUSAKA AGREEMENT DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 7

Lusaka Agreement Day, also known as Victory Day, marks the historic peace agreement signed between FRELIMO and the Portuguese government on September 7, 1974. In accordance with the treaty, Portugal agreed to grant independence to Mozambique in exchange for ending all hostilities against the Portuguese by FRELIMO.

On this day the president of Mozambique lays a wreath at the Monument of Mozambican Heroes in the capital of Maputo, where FRELIMO leaders Eduardo Mondlane and Samora Machel are buried. Presidential speeches, military parades, and music and dance programs mark the Victory Day celebrations. Since this is a national holiday, all public and private institutions are closed.

ARMED FORCES DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 25

Armed Forces Day, also known as Revolution Day, commemorates the beginning of the armed struggle led by FRELIMO (Front for Liberation of Mozambique against Portuguese in Mozambique) on September 25, 1964. FRELIMO's guerilla warfare tactics helped Mozambique win its freedom from the Portuguese.

The occasion is celebrated with huge rallies throughout the country that recall the sacrifices of the freedom fighters. In the capital of Maputo the

president presides over the events, calling on Mozambicans to protect the integrity and sovereignty of Mozambique as well as to work together to develop a stronger and more self-reliant nation. Military parades are a major highlight of Revolution Day celebrations in Maputo.

Religious Holidays

EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, the Feast of Sacrifice, is celebrated on the 10th day of the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj). It is a three-day festival, also called Eid al-Kabir, the Great Feast. The pilgrims, having returned from Arafat (another Muslim observance associated with the hajj), slaughter cows, rams, lambs, or similar animals. The sacrifice is performed in remembrance of *alaih is salaam* (Ibrahim's act of obedience to God—his willingness to sacrifice his son). According to tradition, family members consume one-third of the slaughtered animal, one-third is distributed among friends and relatives, and the rest is given to the poor. This act of giving symbolizes the willingness of Muslims to give up things important to them. On this day people also visit friends and relatives and exchange gifts.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; HAJJ; ISLAM

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

For Christians Easter is considered the most important Christian festival, and its numerous celebrations and observances form the core of the liturgical year, which begins around the time of the vernal equinox in the Northern Hemisphere (the autumnal equinox in the Southern Hemisphere) and stretches out into summer in the Northern Hemisphere (winter in the Southern Hemisphere). This occasion celebrates the resurrection of Jesus three days after his Crucifixion. Christians believe Jesus was the son of God and died on the Cross to redeem humanity from sin. This is a day for celebration among all Christians, and Mozambicans join in the festivities, wearing their best clothes to attend special Easter services in their local churches.

Determining the date of Easter determines when many of the Christian holidays associated with it will occur. Early on, the Catholic Church decided to impose Easter on the pagan spring festivals held at the vernal equinox. The usual statement—that Easter Day is the first Sunday after the full Moon that occurs next after the vernal equinox—however,

is not an accurate statement of the actual ecclesiastical rules. The full Moon involved is not the astronomical full Moon but an ecclesiastical Moon (determined from tables) that keeps, more or less, in step with the astronomical Moon.

The ecclesiastical rules are:

- Easter falls on the first Sunday following the first ecclesiastical full Moon that occurs on or after the day of the vernal equinox;
- this particular ecclesiastical full Moon is the 14th day of a tabular lunation (new Moon); and
- the vernal equinox is fixed as March 21.

The result of these calculations is that Easter can never occur before March 22 or later than April 25, which, in Mozambique, is celebrated in the fall because the nation is in the Southern Hemisphere.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ MOULLOUD

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

In Mozambique the celebration of Mouloud, the birthday of the prophet Muhammad, is celebrated by Muslims across the country. This date is also called Mawlid al-Nabi, Mawlid al-Nabi, Maulid-ud-nabi, or Birth of the Prophet Muhammad. Speeches on the life of Muhammad, the embodiment of Islam, and public feasts are typical on this day. These stories also recall his suffering, his leadership, and his spirituality. Conservative Muslim sects, the Wahhabis, for example, disapprove of celebrating any human, including Muhammad. They believe that such celebrations interfere with the unwavering worship of Allah, although other sects consider this a great holiday and celebrate it with enthusiasm.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULLOUD

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus, who Christians believe was the Son of God. In Mozambique the most important celebrations take place on Christmas Eve services. Most Mozambicans living in urban areas travel to the countryside to join their friends and extended families for the festivities. On December 24, Christians attend church for the Christmas Eve services. Church choirs sing Christmas carols and devotional hymns. After church people sing and dance through the night.

Mozambicans prefer to celebrate Christmas simply. Friends and family exchange greetings only. Exchanging gifts is not part of traditional Christmas celebrations, and no special Christmas meal is prepared. The menu consists of the daily diet of corn porridge, seasonal fruit, and boiled vegetables.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Rites of Passage

❁ COMING OF AGE

Male and female circumcision ceremonies are an integral part of Mozambican culture. Circumcision is considered an essential ritual that helps complete the transition from childhood to adulthood. Among the Makonde tribe, trained elders perform this ceremony using knives or razor blades, and no anesthesia is administered. The initiates are expected to endure pain and are discouraged from showing any sign of discomfort during the ceremony.

❁ DEATH

Among the Tsonga tribe in Mozambique, death is associated with the passing of a person into the spirit world. After the death of a person the family members cleanse the body and perform rituals to ease his or her passage into the next world. Also it is believed that the death of a family member renders the family unclean, so special purification rituals are performed for the survivors over a period of a few months following the death. During these ceremonies the family members gather at a special place and pay tribute to their ancestral spirits. They also offer food and drink to the spirits as a token of thanks for having provided for the family and to seek their protection from evil spirits in the future.

Further Reading

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Myanmar

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Myanmar is located on the southeastern part of Asia, bordering the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal, between Bangladesh and Thailand.
Size	261,970 sq. mi.
Capital City	Rangoon (government refers to the capital as Yangon)
Flag Description	Myanmar's national flag is red with a blue rectangle at the upper hoist-side corner bearing 14 white five-pointed stars encircling a cogwheel containing a stalk of rice; the 14 stars represent the 7 administrative divisions and 7 states.
Independence	January 4, 1948 (from United Kingdom)
Population	42,909,464 (2005 est.)
Government	Military regime
Nationality	Burmese
Major Ethnic Group (s)	Asian (Burman, 68%)
Major Language(s)	Burmese; minority ethnic groups have their own languages
Major Religion(s)	Buddhist (89%)
National Holiday(s)	Independence Day, January 4; Union Day, February 12; Peasants' Day, March 2; Armed Forces Day, March 27; New Year's Day, April; Thingyan Water Festival, April; Labor Day, May 1; Martyrs' Day, July 19; National Day, November; Karen New Year, December-January;

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Archaeological findings reveal that parts of Myanmar were inhabited some 5,000 years ago. Many of the diverse groups now living in Myanmar (formerly Burma) migrated south from Tibet and China, down the Irrawaddy River. The Mon tribe is thought to have arrived as early as 3000 B.C.E. from what is now Cambodia and established settlements in central Myanmar, in the Irrawaddy delta, and along the eastern coast of the Bay of Bengal. They constructed irrigation systems and developed commercial and cultural contacts with India.

Around 100 the Pyus, the first Tibeto-Burman group, moved south along the western side of the Irrawaddy and established their capital near what is now called Prome. The Burmans arrived later, entering the Irrawaddy valley in the ninth century. They assimilated with the already settled Mon and Pyu communities. Both the archaeological record and epigraphic evidence indicate that Buddhism was already well

established in lower Myanmar by the fifth century. In 832 the Pyu Kingdoms were conquered by the state of Nanchao, and the Pyus again assimilated, this time with the Mons and the second wave of Tibeto-Burmans, the Bamars (Burmese). In 849 King Pyinbya founded Bagan (also Pagan) as a walled city with 12 gates and a moat.

Still later waves of immigration brought in the Shan, Karen, and Kachin tribes from the Yunnan Province of China; these peoples played a significant role in the development of the country. The first unified Myanmar state, the Pagon Kingdom, was founded by King Anawrahata (1047–77 C.E.) in upper Myanmar. The internal structure was similar to that of a Hindu kingdom. Kingship was legitimated by both Hindu ideology and Buddhist faith. During the 250 years of their rule the religious kings built many pagodas, places of worship for Buddhists, throughout Myanmar. In 1287 the Pagon Kingdom was conquered by the Mongols under Kublai Khan (1215–94).

In the 16th century a new Burmese dynasty (the Taungoo Dynasty) emerged in central Myanmar. However, after the death of their third king, a series of encroachments and raids

by the Portuguese and the neighboring Thais and Manipuri horsemen (from the state of Manipur in northeast India) brought about the decline of the Taungoo Dynasty. It was finally toppled by a Mon rebellion in 1752.

By the early 19th century political friction arose between the British and Burmese over an Arakanese independence movement based in Bengal, which later came under British rule. The situation was exacerbated by the military successes of the Burmese general Maha Bandula in Assam, also under British rule. The British responded with a naval attack on Burma, thereby starting the first Anglo-Burmese War (1824–26). The British ultimately captured Burma and brought administrative and social modernization to Burma. They moved the capital from Mandalay to Rangoon in 1886 and annexed Burma to India.

During World War II, the temporary British retreat from Burma before the invading Japanese military forces provoked a nationalist movement in Burma for separation from India and independence from British rule. On January 4, 1948, Burma gained independence and became the Union of Burma, a democratic state.

Democratic rule in Burma ended in 1962 with a military coup led by General Ne Win, who initiated harsh reforms during his 26-year rule. After the resignation of Ne Win (? 1910–2002) in 1988, free elections were held again in 1990 (the last free elections had been held some 30 years earlier). Despite the landslide victory of the NLD (National League for Democracy), the party led by Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi (b. 1945), the military refused to relinquish political power and instead maintained its repressive regime. It was still in control of Myanmar in the early years of the 21st century.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Myanmar is about 1,295 miles long from north to south and about 575 miles wide from east to west. The coastal region of Upper Myanmar, a horseshoe-shaped mountain complex and the Irrawaddy River Valley, are the country's main geographical features. The 19,295-foot-high Hkakabo Razi is the highest peak in Myanmar. The Arakan Yoma range of mountains form a natural barrier between Myanmar and the Indian subcontinent, and the Bilauklaung range lies between Myanmar and Thailand. The deltaic plains, covering about 18,000 square miles, are extremely fertile and are the most important economic region of Myanmar.

The climate of Myanmar follows a monsoon pattern similar to other South Asian countries. There are three distinct climates:

- hot and wet—tropical monsoon: cloudy, rainy, very hot, humid summers (southwest monsoon, May to October);
- cold—lower humidity (northeast monsoon, December to April);
- the rest of the year—less cloudy, scant rain fall, mild temperatures (November)

Aung San Suu Kyi

Aung San Suu Kyi is the daughter of General Aung San, the founder of the NLD (National League for Democracy) party in Myanmar. In the 1990 election in Myanmar the NLD won 83 percent of the seats, but Ms. Suu Kyi was prevented by Myanmar's military leaders from becoming prime minister. Since then Ms. Suu Kyi has earned international praise as an icon of democracy, freedom, and world peace. She has repeatedly been placed under house arrest by the military rulers but has fought tirelessly for the restoration of democracy in her country. Ms. Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991.

❁ ECONOMY

Before the Second World War, Myanmar was the world's most important rice exporting nation. Farmers used to grow rice mainly in the fertile Irrawaddy delta region with the help of floodwaters. Since the war, although total arable land in Myanmar has increased, rice production has not kept pace with population growth, resulting in the decline of rice exports. Nevertheless Myanmar remains an important rice producer in south Asia. In Myanmar the economy revolves around agriculture, with 73 percent of the total workforce engaged in cultivation and only about 10 percent in industry. It is also the world's second largest producer of illicit opium (Afghanistan is first).

Although forestry was once a major export earner—Burmese teakwood was famous all over the world for its quality—deforestation and inadequate reforestation efforts have caused exports to decrease. Presently tourism is the main source of foreign-exchange income for Myanmar, although it is not among the top tourist destinations in south Asia.

During the 26 years' military rule of General Ne Win (1962–88), most major industries were nationalized. The policy was a failure, however, and led to an economic decline. Subsequently the economy was opened up to attract foreign investments, but due to ongoing losses by state-owned industries, heavy government spending on defense, and a high rate of inflation, as well as the withdrawal of international assistance after Myanmar's suppression of democracy, the economy remained weak. In 1997 the United States imposed economic sanctions against Myanmar, and in the same year the entire south Asian region suffered from an economic downturn.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Myanmar was earlier known as Burma. On gaining independence in 1948, the country became the Union of Burma. But in 1989 the ruling military

The Burmese Script

Three-fourths of the Myanmar population, numbering close to 30 million, use the Burmese language. The Burmese alphabet consists entirely of circles or portions of circles. This circular pattern evolved long ago when the Burmese used to write on leaves (such as the palm leaf) with a stylus, not a modern-day pen or pencil. Straight lines were impossible, because they would cause the leaf to split. There are 42 letters in the Burmese alphabet—32 consonants and 10 vowels.

government renamed the country the Union of Myanmar. The change of name has been opposed both outside and within the country. The name Union of Myanmar has been recognized by the United Nations but not by the United States, Great Britain, and other countries, which do not recognize the legitimacy of the military government.

Myanmar's official language is Burmese, which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group of languages. These languages are spoken in the terrain covering the eastern parts of Bangladesh in the west to Vietnam in the east, in addition to Nepal, Bhutan, parts of Thailand, and the Yunnan and Sichuan provinces of China. Burmese is spoken by 75 percent of the population in Myanmar.

After Buddhism was introduced it spread rapidly, and by the 11th century Myanmar was a major center of the Buddhist religion, philosophy, and practices.

Myanmar is one of the least westernized countries because of its isolation from the rest of the world. It is a land of Buddhist people and is considered a major cultural and religious center of Buddhism, with many monasteries and pagodas throughout the country. The daily village life in Myanmar begins with the monks (*pongyis*) making their rounds in the morning with their begging bowls. The monks, forbidden by their religion to

Shinphyu Ceremony

Of the major ceremonies of the Myanmar Buddhists, the ceremony of Shinphyu is among the most important. Young boys of Buddhist parents are ceremoniously paraded on their fathers' shoulders under golden umbrellas to reenact the childhood of Prince Siddhartha (the birth name of Buddha) 2,500 years ago. Parents, friends, and relatives from all over the country participate in this unique ceremony. It is held on the full Moon day of the month of Tabaung (March of the Gregorian calendar).

work for a living, go from door to door, and the villagers earn spiritual merit by donating food to them. Festivals, central to the practice of Buddhism, are held on the full Moon day of every month, and there are many pagoda festivals as well. The influence of Indian culture on Myanmar's sort of Buddhism can be seen in the Buddhist Festival of Lights; it is much like the Hindu festival of Diwali, in which small lamps are lit to welcome Rama home after his 14-year exile.

❁ CUISINE

Myanmar food in taste and presentation is somewhere between Chinese and Thai. It is richer than Chinese food but less spicy than Thai. Rice is the staple carbohydrate and is normally eaten with fish, chicken, or pork. Some popular Myanmar dishes include fish steamed in banana leaves, Nga Baun Doke (Burmese Fish), Kyether Susie Kyawo (stir-fried chicken with chili), Moat Hin Car (rice noodles in fish soup), Kyauk Swe Pyoke (crab meat and noodles), Khow Swé (rice noodles in a broth, usually nonvegetarian).

A Myanmar favorite is *lephet*, green tea salad, made of pickled green tea leaves. These tea leaves are largely grown in the Palaung Hills in the north-east region of Myanmar because the tea leaves like cool weather and thrive at 4,000 feet high above sea level. The tea sprouts are harvested between April and October every year. Only two leaves and a sprout at the top of the tea plant are plucked. Tea leaves plucked before April are the best.

Lephet is served to welcome guests to one's house, as a peace offering after an argument, as a snack in front of TV, as an appetizer or last course, a palate cleanser after a meal, and as a stimulant to ward off sleep during all-night Myanmar opera performances. Other popular Myanmar snacks are variations of pancakes made of a batter of ground rice and glutinous rice. *Beimoun* is a small fried pancake with poppy seeds and coconut flakes sprinkled on top. *Mounpyathalet*, honeycomb pancakes, have steamed garden peas, roasted sesame powder, and onion added to the batter. Similarly *kbaukmounpyu*, a white folded pancake, is made by adding tomato, coriander, cabbage, green chilies, and curry powder to the batter. These snacks are available at food stalls in the cities.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 4

On January 4, 1948, the country won its independence from British rule to become the independent

and sovereign Union of Burma. This is a national holiday, and it begins with flag-raising ceremonies. The army parades in the capital Yangon (formerly Rangoon) passing in review before the military rulers of the country.

❁ UNION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 12

This day commemorates the conference held on February 12, 1947, that led to the formation of the independent Union of Burma. This day is also known as Pyidaungsa Day.

❁ PEASANTS' DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 2

On March 2, 1962, a military coup in Myanmar, led by General Ne Win, toppled the democratically elected government and seized control of the country. General Ne Win's rule lasted for 26 years and was marked by harsh measures. Peasants' Day is observed on March 2 to commemorate the military coup he led.

❁ ARMED FORCES DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 27

During the Anglo-Burmese war (1824–26), the British general Willoughby Cotton, who attacked the Burmese forces led by General Bandula at Danubyu, had to retreat after facing stiff resistance from Bandula's defending forces. This setback occurred on March 27, 1825, and the day is observed in Myanmar as Armed Forces Day, a public holiday marked by parades and other functions organized by the military.

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Mid April

Myanmar's New Year's celebration usually falls on April 13, and the festivals (including the Thingyan Water Festival) last for three or four days, beginning on New Year's Day. The people of Myanmar usher in their new year with the Thingyan Water Festival, observed since the Tagaung era, but more important since the Bagan Dynasty. The Burmese splash water on friends and even strangers on the streets because water symbolizes purity and cleanness. According to legend Thagyarmin, the king of the celestials, comes



Myanmar youths sing during New Year celebrations. (AP Photo/Apichart Weerawong)

down to Earth to bring in the Myanmar new year. New Year's was also the time when people washed the hair of their elderly relatives with tayaw, a shampoo made with acacia.

❁ THINGYAN WATER FESTIVAL

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Mid April

Myanmar is known to be a land of festivals, and the year begins with Thingyan, the four-day Water Festival, which welcomes the new year and usually falls in April. During the festival, water is splashed and thrown on friends as well as strangers and even on the police officers on duty. Symbolically, sprinkling of water washes away the bad luck and sins of the previous year.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

Labor Day, also called May Day and Workers' Day, is an international holiday that honors the workers of every nation for their contributions to their society. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

Myanmar observes Labor Day with massive rallies by workers and peasants. In the capital of Yangon, the leaders of the ruling military government give speeches during the Labor Day rallies.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ MARTYRS' DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 19

One of the principal figures of modern Myanmar history was U Aung San, the first prime minister of British Burma after the Anglo-Burmese war (1824–26). Aung San was a student turned activist, and he devoted himself to the struggle to free Myanmar from British rule. He fled to Japan in 1940 and returned with the invading Japanese army as head of the Burma Independent Army.

After the war General Aung San negotiated Burma's independence from British rule but was assassinated on July 19, 1947, before the country had gained full independence. The people of Myanmar observe Martyrs' Day to commemorate U Aung San's supreme sacrifice for the nation.

❁ NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Late November

National Day is observed on the 10th day of the waning Moon in the lunar month of Tazaungmon, in late November or early December of the Western calendar. In 1920 the British colonial government passed the Yangon University Act. There was great public outcry against it because it was perceived as supporting colonial education, designed only to train Burmese youth to become servants of the British colonial administration.

The act was resisted, and people set up a council for national education to open a national college as well as schools throughout the country. The British government finally gave in, recognizing the national schools and giving them financial aid. The success of this boycott empowered the people's freedom struggle. This day of boycott is commemorated as the National Day of Myanmar.

❁ KAREN NEW YEAR

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December or January

Karen New Year is a national holiday, although it is mainly celebrated by the Karen community, which makes up 7 percent of Myanmar's population. On this day the Karen people, wearing their ethnic costumes, dance in groups with their friends and families. Sports activities, such as boxing matches, are held at Innsen, a suburb in Northwest Yangon where the Karen community is concentrated. However, the grandest New Year celebrations are held in Pa-an, the capital of the state of Karen.

Religious Holidays

❁ VESAK

Observed by: Buddhists
Observed on: Late April or early May

Vesak, the holiest of Buddhist festivals, is celebrated to mark the birth, enlightenment, and death of Lord Buddha on the full Moon day of the month of Kason. All of these events in the life of Lord Buddha are believed to have taken place on the same day (but in different years) beneath a bo (banyan) tree. This is why people carry scented water pots in procession, chanting verses and hymns in praise of Lord Buddha in Pali, the language of the ancient Buddhist scriptures. Bo trees, which are found in all pagodas, are watered on this day. Watering the trees is regarded as a holy service and a symbolic preservation of the sacred trees. The procession, as usual, is attended by music troupes. Burmese folk music troupes consist of

simple instruments, namely, the drum, cymbals, bamboo clappers, and flute with one or more dancers.

It is the season of the Nyaung Yethun Festival. The water in all ponds, lakes, and creeks reaches its lowest level. During the month of Kason the days are longer and the nights are shorter. The seasonal flower of Kason is the *sagar*. On the full Moon day of Kason Buddhist devotees celebrate not only the water-pouring ceremony at the bo tree but also perform meritorious deeds by meditating and offering flowers, lights, water, and incense to the images of Lord Buddha.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM; VESAK

❁ BUDDHIST LENT

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: July

The full Moon of Waso in July heralds the start of the three-month Buddhist Lent (or Rains Retreat), the date of Lord Buddha's first sermon about 2,500 years ago. After this day Buddhist monks are forbidden to travel and must spend the entire period in their monasteries. This is a period of meditation, self-restraint, and abstinence, and weddings are forbidden during this time. This period of confinement coincides with the rainy season, during which traveling is difficult. People in Myanmar observe this day by offering robes to monks.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM

❁ MAHA DOK FESTIVAL

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: August

The Maha Dok Festival is celebrated on the full Moon day of Wagaung, the month of August of the Western calendar. The festival is named for a very poor man who became rich overnight after he made offerings to Kassapa Buddha.

A tent large enough to hold as many alms bowls as there are monks (*bikkhus*) in the *sangha* (a community of ordained Buddhist monks or nuns) is set up, and passersby put their contributions in the bowls, whatever they can afford. Once the bowls are full they are distributed to the *sangha* by the drawing of lots.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM

❁ FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: September or October

Thadingyut, the seventh-month of the Burmese calendar, is the end of the Buddhist Lent (Rains Retreat). This three-day celebration, which is similar to the Hindu festival of Diwali, starts on the day before the day of the full Moon, and ends the day

after the full Moon. The lights celebrate the Buddha's return from the celestial abode where he had spent Lent delivering a discourse called Abhidamma, or higher teaching to the celestials. Among the gods was the Buddha's mother, who had been reborn there. On the full Moon day of Thadingyut Buddha returned to Earth. He and his disciples were attended by a host of celestials who made a star ladder for his descent. Buddhists on Earth illuminate their homes and streets to welcome Buddha's return with his disciples.

Many prefer to visit small towns and villages because they find the festival celebrations more enjoyable than they are in the cities. In small towns earthen saucers are filled with sesame oil and pieces of cotton serve as wicks. The streets are filled with amateur dancing groups, music troupes, stalls with food, and spectators enjoying all the free entertainment. On the festival day groups of young people can be seen walking with candles and gifts in their hands to pay respect to their elders. In Burmese this is called *kadarw*, but it is more than just paying respects or doing obeisance. The Buddha taught that parents and teachers are the first to be served; next come those who are older and those to whom we are grateful.

This is also a time when lovers plan their wedding ceremonies, which were not allowed during the Rains Retreat.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM; DIWALI

❁ TAZAUNGMON FULL MOON DAY

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: October or November

Tazaungmon is the first month of the cold season in Myanmar. This festival is held on the full Moon of Tazaung to welcome the cool season ahead. On this day Buddhists illuminate the Sulamani Pagoda, where celestial beings are said to live. The pagoda is festooned with lamps and paper lanterns, and hot air balloons are released to pay homage to the deities in the pagoda. Food stalls are also set up near the pagoda.

In Taunggyi, capital of Shan state, this festival is very colorful, with candlelit processions accompanied by traditional Shan and Pa-Oo dances and music, along with fireworks and hot air balloons.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM

Fun Fact

According to a Myanmar proverb, "Look at the flowers, if you don't know the season."

Fun Fact

Kassapa Buddha, one of only seven Buddhas mentioned in the Pali canons, is said to have lived for 20,000 years. He is the 24th Buddha of the Pali tradition; and the third Buddha of the present era.

Regional Holidays

❁ KACHIN MANAO FESTIVAL

Observed in: Kachin state
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 10

This is a colorful annual festival, which is celebrated by the Kachin tribe. Animal sacrifices are made to the traditional home gods. Community feasts are held and traditional home-brewed Khaung Yay wine (made from millet) is drunk throughout the day. This is followed by all-night group dancing, in ethnic costumes, on the sacrificial ground. Food stalls are set up for the dancing crowd.

❁ NAGA TRADITIONAL NEW YEAR'S FESTIVAL

Observed in: Sagaing Division, Northwest corner of Myanmar
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 14–15

Most of the Naga people of Myanmar live in Sagaing Division, close to the Indian border, in the northwest corner of Myanmar. They belong to the Tibeto-Myanmar group, and their traditional New Year's festivals have always been community celebrations when friends from far and near came to join in. Hoping to expand the scope of their New Year's observances, the Naga elders decided in 1990 to make the event a regional celebration rather than a local one. At that time they also decided to schedule their traditional New Year's on the same date every year January 15. The location for the festivities will rotate among four Naga towns of Khamti, Leshi, Namyung, and Lahe.

On New Year's Eve, January 14, the New Year Festival pole is put up, and everyone gathers for the opening ceremony. A huge bonfire is lit to celebrate a good harvest, and everyone enjoys a traditional feast.

This provides Naga farmers a chance to share their farming experiences, and this exchange also gives them renewed energy for the work of the coming year. Then on January 15, hundreds of tourists and about 10,000 local people gather to enjoy traditional

Naga music and dancing along with traditional cooking and rice wine.

All of the singing and dancing is about health, wealth, happiness, and another good harvest in the coming year. There are usually at least 29 dance groups representing the local towns, and the dancers wear beautiful costumes decorated with hornbill's feathers and plumes, elephant tusks, the canine teeth and paws of tigers, bears, and boars, buffalo horns,

shells, and horse's and goat's tails. The dancers also adorn themselves with silver and bronze beads, bangles, bracelets, pendants, and eardrops.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM; HARVEST FESTIVALS

❁ SHWEDAGON PAGODA FESTIVAL

Observed in: Yangon (or Rangoon)
Observed by: Buddhists
Observed on: February or March

Shwedagon is a world-famous pagoda located in Yangon. The Pagoda Festival begins on the full Moon day of the month of Tabaung, which falls in March of the Gregorian calendar and lasts for several days. Stalls and shops selling food items and other local products are set up at the foot of the hill for the festival crowd. In the evenings theatrical shows are performed by various dance troops of Myanmar.

❁ PINDAYA CAVE FESTIVALS

Observed by: Buddhists in Shan state
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: February or March

The Shwe Oo Min Pagoda cave, located at Pindaya in Shan state, is noted for its centuries-old Buddha images, numbering over 8,000. The Pagoda Festival is celebrated on and around the full Moon day of Tabaung (March). Thousands of Buddhists from Shan and other places in Myanmar visit the cave during the festival and pay homage to Lord Buddha. A shopping mall springs up at the foot of the hill to sell food, seasonal fruits, and other local products.

❁ WASO CHINLON FESTIVAL

Observed in: Mandalay
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June or July

Mandalay, the second capital city of Myanmar, takes pride in maintaining ancient Myanmar traditions. One such event is the Waso Chinlon Festival, which has been held annually for more than 70 years. (In 2003 the diamond jubilee of the festival was celebrated.) Chinlon is the national sport of Myanmar, but it's about more than athleticism: While the players play chinlon, the Myanmar Orchestra plays music to accompany the activity on the field, and the tempo is synchronized to follow the players' grace and agility. Chinlon can be played by anyone—women and men, old and young, citizen or tourist.

Chinlon is played using a ball made of woven rattan. The ball has 12 pentagonal holes in it and is usually four inches in diameter. The area is usually a circle 22 feet wide in which six players strive to keep

Fun Fact

Every Naga man wears special palm leaves on both feet during the festival.

the ball in the air. In formal games, such as those played during festivals, each player has to keep the ball aloft using only six areas on the feet and legs for five minutes for each play. He or she has to use 30 different techniques and receives one point for each kick. Points are subtracted for losing the ball or using the wrong body part. The players must not stop or move out of the area during the specified time. Variations in style and methods are accepted, however, as long as the basic principles are adhered to.

At the end of the Waso Chinlon Festival the players make offerings of flowers, lights, and Waso robes to the Maha Myat Muni Buddha Image Pagoda with the money they get for playing Chinlon.

❁ TAUNGBYONE NAT FESTIVAL

Observed in: Taungbyone, Mandalay state

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Late July to mid August

Taungbyone (or Taungpyone) is located about 12 miles north of Mandalay and is famous for its annual Spirit Festival, which is held in memory of the Taungbyone Brother Lords. The Taungbyone Brother Lords were accidentally killed when the king ordered that they be subjected to some mild form of punishment. The remorse-stricken king had a shrine built to honor them and placate their spirits, and gave the Nats the surrounding area as a province of their own. This promise has been honored since the Bagan Dynasty in the 11th century. In Myanmar it is commonly believed that Nats, or spirits, must be ceremonially mollified or they will cause immense misery and chaos in peoples' lives. This festival is meant to appease the Nats.

Wooden figures representing the brothers are given a ceremonial bath and then paraded through the thousands of people gathered for the occasion. There is a great rush as people try to touch each wooden figure at least once for good luck, prosperity, and the fulfillment of their wishes. An enormous bazaar is set up so people engage in a lot of eating and gambling. Other events include ritual offerings, ceremonial spirit dances, and consultations with shamans during the Spirit Festival.

❁ POPA CEREMONY IN YADANAGU PAGODA

Observed in: Amarapura

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August

This popular festival takes place in August, just one week after the end of the Spirit Festival, and is another of those held to appease the Nats. This one is held at Yadanagu village in Amarapura State. The festival, held to honor Popa-Madaw (Mother of Mount Popa), celebrates the kinship between human

beings and spirits. A special kind of music is played in the ceremony, compelling people to dance as if they are possessed by the spirits.

❁ PHAUNG-TAW-OO PAGODA FESTIVAL

Observed in: Inle Lake

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August

The Phaung-Taw-Oo Pagoda Festival is an 18-day event that ends with leg-rowing boat races. Four Buddha images from the Phaung-Taw-Oo pagoda are placed on a royal barge and ceremoniously towed around the lake from one village to another by the leg-rowing boats.

Fun Fact

The Intha, one of Myanmar's minority groups, live along Inle Lake. They are renowned for their silversmithing and weaving.

Rites of Passage

❁ COMING OF AGE

Buddhism is the center of an individual's life in Myanmar. A rite of passage for every adolescent Buddhist boy is the Shinphyu, in which the boy briefly relives the princely life of Siddhartha Gautama, who would later become the Buddha.

A Buddhist boy enters a monastery as a novice monk of his own free will. After a few years he usually returns to his family, gets married, cultivates his land, and carries on a nondescript family life. In later years he may again return to the monastery to be a monk. But if he is married, he has to seek permission from his wife in order to leave the family life to become a monk.

❁ MARRIAGE

The Buddhist religion, which is followed by the majority of the people in Myanmar, favors chastity in marriage, and in fact it does not advocate matrimony, since marriage violates the principle of abstinence from worldly desires. Thus no religious ceremony is held to solemnize a marriage, nor is it considered necessary under law. In fact common-law marriage (living together as husband and wife without getting married) used to often be the only option available to couples in traditional Myanmar society.

Nowadays, especially in urban areas, people feel the need to host some sort of ceremony and reception for their families and other guests. As these ceremonies are completely secular, there are no priests or religious functionaries. Instead a master of ceremonies, or Beitheik Saya, conducts the ceremony. The Beitheik Saya leads the bride and groom to the stage, reads the vows, delivers the benediction, and

oversees certain marriage rites, such as garlanding the couple with a four-foot long chain, placing the bride's scarf around both of them, putting their palms together while they face each other, and immersing their joined hands in scented water contained in a silver bowl.

The ceremony is followed by music and refreshments. The newlyweds go around greeting the guests and thanking them for attending. Then the couple goes back to the dais where they have their first meal together before the assembled guests, in keeping with an important Myanmar custom, which is a condition for being recognized as a couple. Afterward the young couple approaches their parents and the elders, bowing and making *kadaw* ("obeisance"), seeking their blessings and instructions for leading a happy and pious life.

After a round of visits to a few well-known local pagodas, where they offer prayers for a blissful marriage in this and successive lives, they return home, where friends and relatives are waiting, ready to play pranks on them. One common prank

involves barring the entrance to their nuptial chamber with a gold chain and demanding payment (known as *gare-boe*, "stone-money") for entry. This harks back to the traditional custom of the youth of the locality threatening to throw stones at the house of a newly married couple unless they were paid some money.

In rural villages and among the urban poor, elopement is the favorite practice for marriages, since it saves both families considerable expense.

Further Reading

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~ Namibia ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Southern Africa, bordering the South Atlantic Ocean, between Angola and South Africa
Size	318,696 sq. mi.
Capital City	Windhoek
Flag Description	Namibia's flag is divided in half by a red stripe with white borders with a large blue triangle with a yellow sunburst in the upper section and a green triangle in the lower section.
Independence	March 21, 1990 (from South Africa)
Population	2,030,692 (2005 est.)
Government	Presidential Republic
Nationality	Namibian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Black (86%; about 50% of the population belongs to the Ovambo tribe and 9% to the Kavangos tribe)
Major Language(s)	English (official; 7%); Afrikaans (common language of most of the population and about 60% of the white population); German (32%); indigenous languages (Oshivambo, Herero, Nama)
Major Religion(s)	Christianity (80%–90%; Lutheran, at least 50%); indigenous beliefs (10%–20%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Independence Day, March 21; Labor Day, May 1; Cassinga Day, May 4; Africa Day, May 25; Heroes' Day, August 26; Human Rights Day, December 10

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Although it is thought that Namibia has been inhabited for about one million years, the archaeological record is piecemeal until about 30,000 years ago, when a relatively consecutive record of habitation is evidenced by stone tools, beads, and other artifacts. Namibia was formerly the land of the Bushmen, a group of people referred to as San or Sans. (The term *Bushman* is now considered derogatory.)

The San have the oldest surviving culture in the world. They have been hunting and gathering in sub-Saharan Africa for over 100,000 years. The remaining San (around 95,000 people) live in and around the Kalahari Desert, which stretches across South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia, but many San are

compelled to live in permanent settlements because the land they hunted and gathered on is now privately owned. Many people are familiar with the traditional lifestyle of the San from the popular movie *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1980)

Namibia's archaeological importance is due to the numbers and quality of its rock art. Maack's Shelter in the Brandberg, Twyfelfontein, and Piet Alberts Kopjes are three sites in western Namibia that have been given the most attention. Maack's Shelter, a granite overhang in the Tsisab ravine, is filled with an immense number of paintings.

Twyfelfontein is probably the most densely engraved site in southern Africa. There are at least 2,500 engraved figures on the sandstone boulders at Twyfelfontein, and a few paintings, making it one of the few sites in southern Africa where paintings and engravings have been found. Piet Alberts Kopjes (hillocks) contains hundreds of engravings carved out of

Fun Fact

Dr. Reinhard Maack discovered the so-called White Lady on the Brandberg Massif in 1918.

In 1918 Abbé Henri Breuil described the painting as that of a “white lady,” but the figure is neither a woman nor a European. It is now thought to represent a male shaman in white body paint.

hard granite with great difficulty. These three sites are remarkable because they are less than 100 miles apart.

Twyfelfontein is Namibia’s most famous rock art site, much of it easily accessible. What appears to observers is a gallery of local wildlife, images of giraffe, lion, oryx, zebra, rhino, springbok, wildebeest, and steenbok. There are also geometric patterns and designs, as well as humans, usually what appear to be hunters. It is estimated that there are over 2,000 paintings and engravings, all fragile because of their exposure to weather, the years, and

man. Researchers speculate that the Twyfelfontein rock art was probably created by the San and may date from about 6000 B.C.E., although some estimates think it may go back as far as 25,000. Several painted slabs found in a Namibian cave had fallen from their original location on the ceiling, and the layers the slabs were found in have been dated to 27,000 years ago, making them the oldest rock art in Africa.

The Hungorob Ravine is only one ravine removed from the more famous Tsisab Ravine in the Brandberg of Namibia, but it is reputed to have better rock art than the Tsisab. The sites with paintings began to be occupied around 4,500 B.C.E. by hunter-gatherers. Then around 2,000, although pottery was introduced, the people appear to have remained hunter-gatherers. Finally around 500 B.C.E., stock was introduced, and the residents apparently became herders. Rock art continued into the pottery phase, but it becomes engravings of four rows of dots, without any other subject matter.

It was only in the years just prior to World War I that the English and Germans colonized the area.

Skeleton Coast

The Skeleton Coast is the coastline between where the Kunene and Ugab Rivers flow out into the Atlantic. However, the name is used to refer to the entire desert coastline, even as far south as Lüderitz. The coastal parks in this area are huge, almost 7,720 square miles of dunes and gravel plains. It is one of the world’s bleakest and savagely inhospitable waterless areas. Shipwrecked sailors who were washed up on this shore had almost no chance of survival, making it a maritime graveyard for unwary ships over the centuries. A misty fog that hangs in the air for much of the year gives this barren coast its unusual name and also its eerie feeling.

The country, formerly known as South-West Africa, was occupied by the British during World War I. In 1920 the League of Nations gave South Africa a mandate to administer the country. Succeeding the League after World War II, the United Nations (UN) sought to continue South African trusteeship, but South Africa annexed the territory instead. In 1966 the UN revoked the trusteeship, and a war for independence was launched by the Marxist guerrilla group, the South-West Africa People’s Organization (SWAPO).

South-West Africa was renamed Namibia in 1968, but it was not until 1988 that South Africa, harried by years of guerrilla warfare and pressure from the UN, agreed to end its control and governance of Namibia. Namibia became independent on March 21, 1990. Multiparty elections and the framing of a constitution followed. In November 2004 after a landslide victory, Hifikepunye Pohamba (b. 1935) replaced Sam Nujoma (b. 1929), who had headed the country since its independence.

CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Namibia is a vast country, which ranks 31st in the world in terms of area but is relatively sparsely populated. South Africa borders Namibia in the south, while Angola and Zambia border it in the north and Botswana and Zimbabwe in the east. To the west are the Atlantic Ocean, with a coastline hundreds of miles long, and the Namib Desert, the oldest desert in the world. The Kalahari Desert runs along the southeastern border with Botswana. Namibia’s highest mountain is the 8,400-ft. Brandberg in the southern Kunene region, where some of the finest ancient rock art in the world is found.

Namibia has a semidesert climate—hot days and cool nights. The cold Benguela current cools the temperate desert coast, which is also known as the Skeleton Coast. However, it also causes fog and hinders rainfall. It is a sunny land with 300 days of sunshine on average every year. There is rain only during the summer months and then only thunderstorms. January and February are the hottest months. Winter days in some areas can be frosty, but in most parts of the country, they are sunny and clear.

ECONOMY

Namibia is abundant in natural resources. It has a good infrastructure and access to markets, but in spite of its potential, the country’s economy is not very strong. It is heavily dependent on the export of minerals. Mining accounts for 20 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP). Namibia is one of the world’s main sources of gem-quality diamonds. It is also the fourth largest producer of non-fuel minerals on the African continent. This mineral-rich country also produces vast quantities of uranium, lead, zinc, tin, silver, and tungsten. However, only 3 percent of the population is employed in the mining sector.

More than half the population depends on subsistence farming. Namibia has to import more than 50 percent of its foodstuff, and still there are serious supply shortages in drought years.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The Ovambos and Kavango are Namibia's two main tribes; they make up 60 percent of the population. The other tribes are the Hereros, Damaras, Namas, and the Caprivians. The original inhabitants of the country, however, were the San, who lived in this territory for thousands of years. The Basters, who settled in the Rehoboth area in 1870, are a product of the union between the European farmers and Khoi women in the cape. Immigrants from South Africa, called the Cape Coloureds, live primarily in the urban areas. Among the whites, 50 percent are South Africans, 25 percent are of German descent, 20 percent are Afrikaners (South Africans of European ancestry, primarily descendants of 17th-century Dutch settlers), and a small minority are British.

With so many tribes, Namibian culture is quite varied. The Afrikaners are the descendants of Dutch and French Huguenots who settled in southern Africa. (The people are known as Afrikaners, their language is Afrikaans, sometimes referred to as Taal.) They are also commonly known as the Boer, which means "farmer" in Afrikaans. The Afrikaners have also been called the white tribe of Africa. Their culture is completely different from that of the German-speaking community or the Creole culture. The Rethbother tribes have a culture similar to that of the rural Afrikaners of the mid-20th century. The Namas are more similar to the other pastoral black communities. The Cape Coloureds (modern-day descendants of slaves imported into South Africa by Dutch settlers) have an urban culture with a fusion of black and European elements. The San culture suffered from serfdom and exploitation during the colonial wars. Concerted efforts to revive the culture have been largely thwarted by limited knowledge and resources and the hindrance of self-appointed guardians.

Sports are popular in Namibia in both the black and European communities. Soccer is the favorite sport of the blacks. The Namibian government owns broadcast stations as well as a newspaper. In spite of government ownership, the media has considerable intellectual and operational freedom.

Although Namibia's literature is still in a nascent stage, other forms of art, such as music and dance, have been a part of the country's cultural history for a long time. The San were the earliest musicians; they imitated the sounds of animals to accompany dancing and storytelling. Among the instruments introduced by the early Namas are drums, flutes, and thumb pianos. They also used stringed instruments. The Bantu—an ethnic and linguistic group that composed the main

inhabitants of the African continent—introduced instruments such as the marimba and gourd rattle. They also made trumpets out of animal horns. The Christian missionaries introduced the concept of the religious choir.

Traditional Namibian dances are performed at community events such as festivals and weddings. The Caprivi Arts Festival is a showcase of the country's various dance forms.

❁ CUISINE

Each Namibian group has its own preferred dishes. The Ovambos generally eat a carbohydrate-rich meal of *mielie pap*, or cornmeal porridge. It is eaten with meat sauce, or *mahango*—millet cooked as a porridge or soup. Both these dishes are eaten with a meat stew. Pumpkins, peppers, and onions are primary ingredients in Namibian cuisine.

The Namas, who inhabit the deserts, not only eat the spiky Nara melons, but also revere them, as they have for thousands of years. The annual harvest of these melons is a significant event. These fruits, which are a common sight in the desert, are a principal source of nutrition in the Namib Desert. The Herero tribes are dependent on dairy products like curds and butter. The influence of German food also remains as a vestige of Namibia's colonial past. The most prominent dish is *boerewors*, an assortment of sausages. The German influence may also be seen in baked goods such as cakes, pastries, and bread. *Mataku* (watermelon wine) and *walende*, a distilled palm spirit that tastes like vodka, are the traditional beverages.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

New Year's Day is the first day of the year in the Gregorian calendar. It is the oldest and most universal holiday. The Romans were the first to observe January 1 as New Year's Day in 153 B.C.E. In 1582 Pope Gregory XIII (r. 1572–85) instituted the Gregorian calendar, now used widely, designating January 1 as the first day of the new year. Before this many countries celebrated the new year on March 25, because it was related to the Feast of the Annunciation. In England and New England this did not change until 1752. From its earliest days New Year's was celebrated very much the same way it is today with parties and dancing into the late hours of the night.

In Namibia New Year's celebrations are primarily an urban phenomenon. Namibians, especially in Windhoek, hold big parties to welcome the new year. Fireworks and musical performances are organized by the city.



Namibian president Sam Nujoma at Namibia's 10th Independence Day celebrations March 21, 2000, at Independence stadium in Windhoek. (AP Photo/Jutta Dobler)

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 21

Namibians observe March 21 as their Independence Day to commemorate the day they became a free country. Locals celebrate the day with feasts and festivities. Namibians raise their national flag and sing their national anthem, "Namibia, Land of the Brave."

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

The Namibian Constitution very clearly addresses the rights of workers. Hence, workers enjoy many liberties in the country. There is also an organized trade union movement in the country with more than 20 trade unions, representing about 90,000 workers.

In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. Even though the AFL demonstration was cancelled, the international holiday was still observed.

Labor Day, also called May Day and Workers' Day, is observed with huge rallies and processions. There are also efforts to remind workers of their rights and liberties. It is a public holiday and all government, commercial, and educational institutions are closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ CASSINGA DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 4

Namibians observe Cassinga Day on May 4 to commemorate the 1978 airborne attack by South African forces on a South-West African People's Organization (SWAPO) base in the old mining town of Cassinga in Angola. Hundreds of Namibians died in the military operation. Conducted as part of Operation Reindeer by South Africa, it was the first of three major operations intended to destroy the Namibian Marxist guerrilla movement. This was at the height of the anti-apartheid struggle. Most of the victims of this massacre were women, children, and the elderly. The camp was used by SWAPO as a transit center for people crossing from Namibia into Angola.

Namibians observe this day with solemn ceremonies in which Cassinga survivors speak of the ordeal and their experiences. In Namibia Cassinga Day is a time to remind people of the sacrifices made by patriots both within the country and in exile for the nation's liberation. Forgiveness and reconciliation are the dominant themes of the day.

❁ AFRICA DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 25

Africa Day or Africa Liberation Day is observed to commemorate the founding of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) on May 25, 1963. (The OAU was disbanded on July 9, 2002, and the African Union [AU], modeled on the European Union [EU], took its place.) On this day, many African nations celebrate their hard-fought and hard-earned freedom from European colonial rulers. Africans pay tribute to the leaders who had a common vision of unity and the wisdom to seek a joint solution to the problems facing the continent in the 1960s. This inter-African organization of independent states was formed to lead the continent on the path of decolonization, liberation, equality, justice, and progress.

Africa Day recognizes the achievements made by the African leaders and looks toward the goal of making the 21st century the African century. The Namibian government celebrates this day by organizing cultural activities such as poetry readings and music and dance performances. Namibians of different tribes come together to celebrate this important day.

❁ HEROES' DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 26

Heroes' Day in Namibia commemorates the beginning of the South-West African People's Organization's (SWAPO) armed struggle against the South African regime and those killed in the struggle. The

nation unites to pay tribute to the brave men, women, even children who suffered and fought for the liberation and independence of the country. They fought not only on the battlefield, but also on the political and diplomatic fronts. On Heroes' Day Namibians take a pledge that they will never allow their country to be subjugated again and also rededicate themselves to the service of the nation.

The Namibian government has constructed a multimillion dollar memorial and remembrance ground in Windhoek in memory of the heroes. Previously most of the celebrations were held at Omugulugombashe in Ongandjera, the site of the first clash between SWAPO combatants and South African forces. A 21-gun salute and a religious ceremony performed by the bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia are some of the highlights of Heroes' Day celebrations. The local tribes, many of them wearing traditional dress, gather to commemorate the dead. There are processions to celebrate the tribes' martial glories and traditional dances are performed.

❁ HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 10

Human rights, according to the UN, are those inherent rights without which we cannot live as human beings. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed on December 10, 1948, by UN members in New York. Canadian John Humphrey was the main author of the declaration, which was intended to serve as a universal code of conduct to govern human and national behavior and to avoid the horrors of war.

Human Rights Day is observed in Namibia to remember those killed in 1959, when residents of a black township near Windhoek resisted being forcibly driven out to the present-day Katutura. Namibians proudly celebrate this day, reinforcing their commitment to the moral principles on which their nation was founded.

Religious Holidays

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday is a sad, somber observance because it marks Jesus' Crucifixion. Devout Christians fast on Good Friday. They offer prayers from noon to 3:00 p.m. to commemorate Jesus' hours on the Cross. Some congregations also enact Jesus' carrying of the Cross, known as Stations of the Cross. In Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Anglican traditions, church services involve worship of the cross and retelling of the Passion narrative.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter, the most important Christian observance, is celebrated to mark the Resurrection of Jesus on the third day after his death. Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday after the full Moon, which is seen on or following the vernal equinox on March 21. The date falls between March 22 and April 25.

In Namibia Catholics flock to church for the Easter Vigil. Churches are beautifully decorated for this special occasion. Hymns, accompanied by drums, are heard everywhere. After the Mass is over, the faithful perform traditional dances in the churchyard. They then return home for food and revelry. In some parishes celebrations continue into the night.

Easter is not only a religious festival in Africa. It also has a social aspect. It is an opportunity for families to gather and dine together. Non-Christians also join the celebrations and share the special meal of boiled or roasted rice with meat.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Forty days after Easter

The 40th day after Easter Sunday is celebrated as Ascension Day to commemorate the Ascension of Jesus into heaven. It is believed that, by ascending to heaven, Jesus completed the task of redeeming humankind.

In Namibia, Roman Catholics and Lutherans celebrate Ascension Day by attending church. This feast always falls on a Thursday. Ascension is one of the most solemn feasts of the Christian calendar, along with those of Easter and Pentecost. There are certain customs associated with this feast, which include the blessing of the new harvest and the first fruits, and torch-lit processions outside the churches. All of these celebrate Jesus' entry into heaven. The scene of the Ascension is also dramatically reenacted in some churches.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HARVEST FESTIVALS

❁ PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fifty days after Easter

The festival of Pentecost commemorates the descent of the Holy Ghost on the twelve Apostles 50 days after Jesus' Resurrection. (*Pentecost* means "fifty" in

Greek.) Faithful Christians attend church services on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; PENTECOST

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas marks the birth of Jesus. In Namibia this period is called the Festive Season. Since the country lies in the Southern Hemisphere, it is the peak of summer, and most business establishments close down to avoid the sweltering heat. People generally head for cooler destinations. In the rural north of Namibia, everyone walks for miles to reach the nearest church to attend Christmas service, which sometime starts at 3:00 a.m. It is a joyous time and Christmas is celebrated with great enthusiasm. It is also an ideal time for family gatherings and feasts.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

WINDHOEK CARNIVAL

Observed in: Windhoek

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March–April

Namibia hosts as many as six carnival societies of which the Windhoek Carnival Society of 1952, commonly known as Wika, is the oldest. The Carnival was first celebrated in 1953 and has since then become one of the highlights of the local cultural calendar. The Windhoek Carnival is based on a carnival celebrated in Germany's Rhine Valley. However, over the years it has acquired a distinctly Namibian identity.

Stage programs consisting of art, dance, music, and political satire are held. There are events in English, too, for the non-German-speaking community. There are programs for children and youth as well. It is a joyous event in which people of all colors, races, and creeds participate.

Since the country's independence, the Carnival has been expressly promoted as a multicultural affair. Artists from foreign countries like South Africa, Germany, Canada, and the United States come and perform in the Windhoek Carnival. The festivities stretch over a period of two weeks beginning with the traditional Biwak. During this event the reigning royal couple, crowned the previous year, addresses the revelers as everyone enjoys the sunny day, live music, beer, and good food. The Royal Ball that follows is the high point of the event. The newly crowned royal couple leads a long procession of beautiful floats along Windhoek's Independence Avenue.

MAHERERO DAY

Observed in: Okahandja

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Last week of August

Maherero Day, also called Okahandja, is observed over the weekend nearest to August 26 to commemorate the slaying of two Herero tribal chiefs Kahimunua and Nikodemus by Germans in Gobabis. The two are buried at the Bantu Kirche, off Martin Nieb Street, Okahandja. On this day thousands of Hereros come to Okahandja to pay tribute to their heroes. The Hereros wear their traditional garb, adorned with bright motifs and participate in a grand procession to Okahandja. From the heroes' graves they move on to a site on the other side of the main road, where a great tribal banquet and celebration is held.

OKTOBERFEST

Observed in: Windhoek

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October

Oktoberfest, one of Germany's best known regional festivals, began with a Bavarian royal wedding in 1810. King Ludwig I (1786–1868) wanted the whole city of Munich to celebrate his marriage to Maria Teresa of Saxonia (1792–1854), so he proclaimed a state fair and dedicated it to the autumn harvest and to beer, Bavaria's most famous product. German tradesmen and merchants came from all over the country to participate in the revelry. They examined the crops, made merry, and tasted the first beer of the season. So successful was the festival that it prompted King Ludwig to issue a royal decree making the month of October a festive time in Munich.

In Namibia a former German colony, Oktoberfest, with its traditional beer drinking and sausage eating, is celebrated throughout the country in late October.

See also: Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

Rites of Passage

BIRTH

Namibians believe that the infant comes from heaven and is born into the community for the community's benefit. They believe that the child has a fixed purpose and that it has been sent to deliver a message to them. The family members and community elders feel it is their duty to initiate the child and make a birth chart to guide the child on its journey through life. The infant is also given a name that reflects its mission.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Circumcision of young boys when they attain puberty is a common practice in Namibia, especially among the Herero tribes. While most of the tribes are now letting go of this practice, the Hereros have vowed to retain their tradition. According to their beliefs if a boy is not circumcised he cannot be regarded as a man. They also feel that circumcision is hygienic. Most black males are initiated when they reach 15 or 16. After the circumcision, the boy is recognized as a man. Young initiates are often taken away from the community and kept in seclusion. During this period they are taught about what will be expected of them as adults, including their social responsibilities and the rules of society.

❁ MARRIAGE

Marriage in Namibia is more about the union of two families and societies than of two individuals. Thus the wedding rites are performed not only for the bride and groom, but also for the unity of the two families. The bride or groom's personal choice and looks are considered less important than the interests of the two families and the betterment of the larger community.

If the groom is already married, then the consent of his first wife, or wives, is mandatory. Polygamy in Africa is not encouraged unless a man is wealthy enough to support his wives comfortably. In earlier days polygamy was seen as a way of reducing infidelity. Taking a girlfriend in addition to having several wives was not accepted. Lobola, or a bride-price, is paid in many African societies.

Namibian women slather themselves with red ochre and butterfat mixed with herbs and resin on their wedding day. Upon arrival at her new husband's house, the bride is told her duties and given instructions on the expectations of her new family,

who show their acceptance by anointing her arms, breasts, and belly with butterfat from the cows belonging to the groom or his father. This is a rural practice not common among urbanites.

❁ DEATH

The majority of death rituals are concerned with the transition of the soul and laying of the dead person to rest. These rituals sometimes stretch over a period of years. There is a lot of thought given to the selection of burial places. Some Namibian families bury their dead in private or community compounds, while others bury the body at a distance. Each community has its specific laws regarding burial of the dead, what they should wear, and what food they should be offered for their transition. Belief in life after death figures importantly in the funeral rites.

Further Reading

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~ Nauru ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	A small oval island in the western Pacific Ocean, south of the Marshall Islands and near the equator
Size	8 sq. mi.
Capital City	No official capital; government offices are located in the Yaren District
Flag Description	Nauru's flag is blue with a narrow, horizontal, yellow stripe across the center and a large white 12-pointed star below the stripe on the hoist side. (The star represents the country's location in relation to the equator, indicated by the yellow stripe, and the 12 points symbolize the 12 original tribes of Nauru.)
Independence	January 31, 1968 (from UN trusteeship)
Population	13,048 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Nauruan
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Asian (Nauruan, 58%; other Pacific Islander, 26%)
Major Language(s)	Nauruan (official; a distinct Pacific Island language), English (widely understood, spoken, and used for most government and commercial purposes)
Major Religion(s)	Protestant (66%); Roman Catholic (33%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Independence Day, January 31; Constitution Day, May 17; Angam Day, October 26

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Nauru was first settled by Polynesian and Melanesian navigators. There is very little information available about the history of Nauru before Captain John Fearn (a whale hunter) arrived in 1798, during his voyage from New Zealand to China. He must have noticed a good number of dwellings on the island and on landing found the general conditions suitable because he named it Nauru (which means "pleasant island" in the local dialect). During the next three or four decades the island was frequented and used by other European whale hunters and pirates.

Nauru remained an independent society, ruled by a king (the most widely known being King Auweyida). However, the 12 tribes who originally inhabited the island were almost eradicated by the firearms and alcohol that European voy-

agers introduced. The population further declined due to wars and diseases, also introduced by the foreigners. Gradually the inhabitants of Nauru amassed so many guns that the Germans who had come there for commercial purposes were scared and sought protection from their government. Germany invaded Nauru in 1888. Subsequently Nauru was incorporated into the German Marshall Islands and remained part of that federation until 1914.

In 1899 a British prospecting company stumbled upon vast deposits of phosphate on Nauru. Mining began, and Australia's first action during World War I was to seize Nauru from Germany. After the war Nauru became a British-mandated territory under Australian administration, and the mining of phosphate continued unabated. In December 1940, heavy shelling by Germans destroyed several Australian and British vessels anchored offshore during a cyclone. The Japanese invaded Nauru in 1942 and shipped nearly half of the population (1,200 people) to Truk Island (now Chuuk) in Micronesia as forced labor.

Nauru Government

Nauru's governmental structure is based on its parliament, made up of 18 legislators elected every three years. The president is elected from the parliament's members, and he in turn appoints a cabinet made up of five or six people. The president functions as both Nauru's head of state and its head of government. While a loose multiparty system exists, the major parties are the Democratic Party and the Nauru Party (informal).

Because of several "no-confidence" votes between 1999 and 2003, two men, René Harris (b.

1948) and Bernard Dowiyogo (1946–2003), ended up alternating with each other as president. Dowiyogo died while in office following heart surgery on March 10, 2003, in Washington, D.C. Ludwig Scotty (b. 1948) was elected president on May 29, 2003, but in August 2003 another "no confidence" vote resulted in René Harris being reelected president. Scotty regained his seat in parliament in 2004. On October 1, 2004, Scotty declared a state of emergency and dissolved parliament after it failed to pass a national budget.

After World War II Nauru remained under Australian administration as a UN Trust Territory. The British Phosphate Commission offered to resettle Nauru's inhabitants on Curtis Island, off the Queensland coast of Australia, but the Nauruans rejected the offer.

By 1951 the Local Government Council was established, granting a small measure of self-determination to the natives. Nauru was granted full independence in 1968 and accorded special member status in the British Commonwealth. In 1970, Australia, New Zealand, and Britain handed over their former joint control of the phosphate operations to the Nauru Phosphate Corporation.

In 1989 Nauru lodged a claim against Australia demanding compensation for the depletion of mineral resources that occurred before independence. Australia and Nauru signed an out-of-court settlement in 1993 for Australian \$66,000,000. New Zealand and Britain each agreed to contribute nominal sums.

Since independence the Nauru Phosphate Royalties Trust has invested some of the revenues from the sale of phosphate and has extensive investments in Australia, the state of Hawaii, and other countries as insurance for the day when the phosphate deposits in Nauru are exhausted. It also pays the natives holding land in mined areas half a penny for each ton of phosphate shipped; the annual amount shipped is generally between one half and two million tons.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Nauru, the world's smallest non-European country, is a coral atoll located in the Pacific, west of Kiribati and 26 miles south of the equator. It is surrounded by a reef that is exposed at low tide. A century of phosphate mining has eroded four-fifths of the land area and has left the central plateau, which rises to 213 feet, infertile and devoid of population. There are no rivers in Nauru. The island has a fertile coastal strip, anywhere from 492 to 984 feet wide, covered by coconut palms and pandanus trees.

There are also indigenous hardwood trees such as the tomano. Bananas, pineapples, frangipani, and vegetables grow near the Buada lagoon, and there is some secondary vegetation to be found near the coral pinnacles that dot the island's beaches. Native seabirds throng the area in large numbers. The climate is tropical with temperatures ranging between 76°F and 93°F, but the climate is kept temperate by sea breezes. Most of Nauru's land vertebrates are birds. The Reed warbler, also known as the Nauru canary, is native to the island. Rats, cats, and mice were brought by European ships.

❁ ECONOMY

The people of Nauru have traditionally subsisted on exports of phosphates, but the resource is now almost depleted. Few other resources exist. Most items are, of necessity, imported, mainly from Australia, its former owner and more recently, a major source of support. The rehabilitation of mined land and the replacement of income from phosphates are serious long-term problems facing the country. To cut costs the

Fun Fact

Pandanus tectorius is a small tree that grows up to a height of about 20 feet. It is supported by prop roots that firmly anchor the tree to the ground and has long leaves with sawlike edges.

Frangipani

Frangipani, also known as *plumeria* or the lei flower, is a native of the warm tropical regions of the Pacific islands, the Caribbean, South America, and Mexico. The widely spaced, thick, succulent branches of this tree are round or pointed, and have long fleshy leaves in clusters near the tips of the branches. It has intensely fragrant, lovely, spiral-shaped, reddish blooms. The leaves tend to fall in early winter since they are deciduous and sensitive to cold.

government has launched a freeze on wages, a reduction of overstaffed public service departments, privatization of numerous government agencies, and the closure of some overseas consulates. Of late Nauru has encouraged the registration of offshore banks and corporations.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Nauru's citizens rank among the wealthiest in the world in terms of per capita income. Most people possess cars, refrigerators, and other gadgets. The diseases of affluence—diabetes, obesity, and cardiac ailments—are rampant here.

Fun Fact
Nauru is the only country in the world without an official capital city.

When the Germans annexed Nauru in 1888, they imposed a blanket ban on the local tribal styles of dancing. Since then many traditional cultural practices have passed into oblivion. The islanders' lives today revolve around the television programs broadcast from Australia and New Zealand. English and Nauruan, a unique Pacific language with recognizable elements of Melanesian, Polynesian, and Micronesian, are spoken. English is the language used for both official and commercial purposes.

❁ CUISINE

There is no indigenous local cuisine in Nauru. Some vegetables and tropical fruits do grow on the island. However, since the island is an environmental disaster area (due to decades of phosphate mining), there is little possibility for agriculture. Nauru is heavily dependent on imports for its food and water. A small chicken farm produces the poultry on the island. The rest of the meat and most vegetables are imported from Australia. Most of the restaurants serve standard Western and Southeast Asian foods. Junk food is common.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western (or Gregorian) calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day throughout the world. Since Nauru is located in the Southern Hemisphere, the weather is hot and sunny at this time of year. Because New Year's is a public holiday residents tend to spend the day with their loved ones at beaches or outdoors.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 31

This day commemorates the achievement of Nauru's independence in 1968 from the UN trusteeship administered by Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. This is a public holiday marked on the island by civic ceremonies.

❁ CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 17

This holiday commemorates the adoption of the new constitution of Nauru in 1968, a few months after the island country obtained its independence. This is a public holiday in Nauru, and all government and public institutions remain closed.

❁ ANGAM DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 26

This day commemorates the various times in the history of Nauru when the Nauruan population reached 1,500, the number thought to be the minimum necessary for survival. Nauru experienced its worst drop in population in 1920 due to an influenza epidemic. The total number of Nauruans decreased terrifyingly, reaching a level of only 1,068 people, and this raised fears about the survival of the community. The health situation was in a precarious state: In addition to the loss of people, those who had escaped death were seriously debilitated. After this catastrophe it took 12 years for the population to reach the level of 1,500 once again. It was not until October 26, 1932—when a baby girl named Eida ruwo was born—that the population of the island again reached 1,500. There was great jubilation, and the event was commemorated by declaring the day a public holiday. The day is called Angam Day (which means “homecoming”) because the baby girl brought with her a ray of hope for the survival of Nauruans. This is a public holiday.

Religious Holidays

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, also called Holy Friday, Great Friday, or Mourning Friday, commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus and his suffering on the Cross. Hence it is a

sad, somber occasion. It falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent (an austere season of fasting and penitence). As in other Christian communities around the world, religious services are conducted on this day in Nauru. They are solemn services, and afterward the devout spend the day attending public readings of the Gospels, listening to the Psalms, and singing hymns from the scriptures.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday and Monday after Lent

Easter, also called Resurrection Day, is a Christian feast that celebrates belief in Jesus' Resurrection from the dead. It falls on the first Sunday after the end of Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. This day is central to the Christian religious calendar because so many other observances are scheduled on the basis of the date on which Easter falls. On Easter Sunday (and Easter Monday), the Roman Catholics of Nauru attend a special Easter Mass, while other Christians attend prayer services.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world because it celebrates the birth of Jesus, whom they believe was the Son of God. On Christmas Day in Nauru residents attend church services early in the morning. People wear new clothes and exchange gifts and greetings with each other. Homes are gaily decorated, and everyone prepares and partakes of special meals on this occasion.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Further Reading

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Nepal

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Southern Asia, between China and India
Size	54,363 sq. mi.
Capital City	Kathmandu
Flag Description	Nepal's flag is red with a blue border around the unique shape of two overlapping right triangles; the smaller, upper triangle bears a white stylized Moon and the larger, lower triangle bears a white 12-pointed Sun.
Independence	1768 (unified by Prithvi Narayan Shah)
Population	27,676,547 (2005 est.)
Government	Multiparty parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy
Nationality	Nepalese
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Brahman, Chetri, Newar, Gurung, Magar, Tamang, Rai, Limbu, Sherpa, Tharu, and others
Major Language(s)	While about a dozen different languages and 30 major dialects are spoken in Nepal, the official language is Nepali, which is spoken by 90 percent of the population. In government and business English is also used.
Major Religion(s)	Hinduism (86%); Nepal is the only official Hindu state in the world.
National Holiday(s)	Sahid Divas, February; Prajatantra Divas, February; King Gyanendra's Birthday, July; Nepal Sambidhan Divas, November

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Neolithic tools found in the Kathmandu Valley provide some evidence that sections of Nepal have been inhabited for tens of thousands of years. The shrines of Swayambhu and Changu Narayan, located on hilltops, suggest that people may have worshipped there as much as 200,000 years ago, while a primordial lake covered the valley floor.

The recorded history of the kingdom of Nepal, high in the Himalayas, may have begun with the reign of the Kiratis, who arrived in the seventh or eighth century B.C.E. from the east. It was around this period that Buddhism was introduced to the country. The Buddha (?563 B.C.E.–?483 B.C.E.; né Siddhartha Gautama), a prince from the Shakya clan, which ruled from Lumbini (a city in Nepal), was a native of Nepal. However, by 200 C.E. Buddhism had yielded to Hinduism, brought

by the Licchavis, who entered Nepal from northern India and deposed the last Kirati king. A few stone inscriptions—the earliest, dated 464 C.E., can be seen at Changu Narayan—provide much of what is known about the Licchavis, but their historical accuracy is dubious. The Hindus also introduced the caste system, which still predominates, and ushered in the classical age of Nepalese art and architecture.

By 879 C.E. the Licchavis had been replaced by the Thakuri Dynasty. There followed a period of instability and invasion, known as the Dark Ages. However, the strategic location of the Kathmandu Valley ensured the kingdom's survival and growth. In 1200 Arideva, a Thakuri king, founded the Malla Dynasty; he is noted for ushering in a renaissance of Nepali culture that lasted from 1201 to 1768. King Jayasthiti Mall (1354–95) provided a centralized stable period, but his most lasting contribution to Nepal's social structure may have been to force his Buddhist subjects into a Hindu hierarchy of 64 castes, a rigid social stratification that remained in place until 1964. In spite of earthquakes, invasions, and feuds

between the independent city-states of Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur, the dynasty flourished, reaching the pinnacle of its glory in the 15th century under King Yaksha Malla (1428–82).

The rulers of Gorkha, the easternmost region of the country, coveted the Mallas's prosperity. Under the leadership of Prithvi Narayan Shah (1769–75), the Gorkha launched a campaign to conquer the valley. In 1768, after 27 years of fighting, they won and shifted their capital to Kathmandu. From this new base the kingdom's power expanded, aided by a strong army, until progress was hampered by a brief war with Tibet in 1792. Around 1814 there was a dispute with the British over territorial issues. The British prevailed and compelled the Nepalese to sign the Sugauli Treaty of 1815, which established Nepal's present eastern and western boundaries. A British "resident" was also installed to look after political affairs in the country.

The Shah Dynasty continued in power throughout the first half of the 19th century, until the gruesome Kot Massacre of 1846. Taking advantage of the intrigue and assassinations that had plagued the ruling dynasty, Jung Bahadur (r. 1846–77) seized power, slaying hundreds of the politically important personalities while they assembled in the Kot courtyard. He assumed the prestigious title of rana, declared himself prime minister for life, and made the office hereditary. For the next century the ranas and their progeny enjoyed luxurious lives in Kathmandu's palaces, while the majority of the population lived in poverty.

The ranas' regime ended shortly after World War II. In 1948 the British withdrew from India and with them vanished the ranas' primary support. Around this time several rebellious movements, intent on reshaping the country's politics, began to emerge. When the sporadic fighting spilled into public places, the ranas reluctantly agreed to negotiations. King Tribhuvan (1906–55) was anointed ruler in 1951 and set up a government comprising the ranas and members of the newly formed Nepali Congress Party. In 1960 the Nepali Congress, under its leader B. P. Koirala (1914–82), headed the first popular government. His policies, however, were opposed by King Mahendra (1920–72), who dismissed Koirala, banned all political parties, and took over direct control of the government. During the period that followed and up until 1989, cronyism, corruption, and financial malpractices were rampant throughout Nepal. The Nepalese populace, fed up with years of hardship, coupled with a trade embargo imposed by India, revolted in what is known as the Jana Andolan or the "People's Movement." In the aftermath of this uprising, detention, torture, and violent clashes left hundreds of people dead. To curb the turbulence, King Birendra (1945–2001; the incumbent ruler who succeeded his father in 1972) dissolved his cabinet, legalized political parties, and invited the opposition to form an interim government.

The Licchavis

In the late fifth century a clan of rulers calling themselves Licchavis gained prominence in Nepal. The Licchavis were known in early Buddhist legends as a ruling family in India in Buddha's time. In all probability some members of the Licchavi family married members of a local royal family in the Kathmandu Valley. The Licchavis of Nepal were a strictly local dynasty based in the Kathmandu Valley and were responsible for the growth of the first truly Nepalese state.

The changeover to democracy proceeded in an orderly, albeit leisurely, manner. In the May 1991 elections, the Nepali Congress Party and the Communist Party of Nepal shared most of the votes. Girija Prasad Koirala (b. 1925) of the Nepali Congress assumed office as the first popularly elected prime minister in 30 years.

In July 1994 Koirala resigned after being defeated in a parliamentary vote sparked by differences within his party. Then followed a long phase of political instability and frequent breakdowns of the weak coalitions. In 1996 Maoist rebels began a guerrilla war aimed at abolishing the monarchy and establishing a people's republic. In January 1999 King Birendra dissolved the parliament. Elections took place in May 1999 under heavy security on account of Maoist unrest.

The fragile political scene in Nepal was shattered in June 2001 with the massacre of the entire royal family, including King Birendra, by his son (also the crown prince) Dipendra, who allegedly shot his family members to death while in a drunken state after a brawl; later Prince Dipendra fatally shot himself. Civil unrest erupted in Kathmandu, with a curfew imposed to quell violence and arson. In the absence of an heir, the brother of the late king, Prince Gyanendra (b. 1947), was crowned king. About a month later (July 2001) the Maoist rebels unleashed renewed violence across Nepal. Sher Bahadur Deuba (b. 1946) became the prime minister, leading the 11th government in 11 years. He succeeded Girija Prasad Koirala, who resigned over the violence. Later that month Deuba initiated a truce with the rebels. About four months later (November 2001) the Maoists attacked army and police posts, ending the so-called truce with violence and bloodshed, killing at least 45 people. King Gyanendra had to declare a state of emergency and branded the Maoists a "terrorist organization." In March 2004 Nepali troops killed 500 Maoist rebels in a prolonged 12-hour battle, which was probably the goriest incident since the revolt began in 1996. Citing the need to defeat the Maoist rebels, King Gyanendra assumed direct political power in early 2005.

Fun Fact

Nepal is the only Hindu kingdom in the world today.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Nepal may well possess the world's most imposing and breathtaking mountains. Though the country is only 54,363 square miles in area, 80 percent of its territory is occupied by the Himalayan peaks. Nepal has gradually emerged as a popular destination for travelers, who flock there in quest of mountaineering thrills and adventures as well as spiritual solace. Mt. Everest, the highest mountain peak in the world (29,035 feet), is located near Nepal's border with China and Tibet. The other world-famous peaks located in Nepal are Annapurna (26,545 feet) and Dhaulagiri (26,820 feet). There are three categories of rivers in Nepal: The first category includes the Koshi, Gandaki, and Karnali Rivers, which originate from glaciers and snow-fed lakes. The rivers that originate from the Mahabharata mountain range comprise the second category; these include the Mechi, Mahakali, Bagmati, Kamala, and Rapti. The third and final category of river includes those that have their sources in the Chure Mountains. They flow during the monsoon and remain dry during the remainder of the year.

The land of Nepal can be broadly divided into three geographical regions, each stretching from east to west across the country. The southernmost strip of land, the Terai, is bordered in the north by the foothills of the Himalayas and stretches in the south to the Gangetic Plain of India. The Terai is famous as the breadbasket of Nepal. The central section of Nepal is formed by the Mahabharata Mountains, with peaks 6,500 to 9,800 feet high. Terraced farming is an important activity in the area, yielding rice, corn, and wheat. The Kathmandu Valley, located in the middle of the Mahabharata range, is the site of Nepal's capital and other historic cities. The Great Himalayas (higher than about 14,100 feet) form the northern part of the country.

The climate varies considerably with the altitude of a particular place. The monsoon season is between May and October, when heavy rains lash the Terai region and there is snowfall on the high mountain peaks. The mid-October to mid-December period is the ideal time for mountaineering, while the months of March and April are suitable for trekking. At Pokhara the temperature ranges from 39°F in January to about 100°F at the peak of summer, just before the onset of monsoon. In winter temperatures during the day rise to around 70°F, providing warm days and cool nights.

On the lower slopes of the mountains, pines flourish amid oaks and wildflowers. Firs and shrubs thrive in the higher regions, most notable among them being the rhododendron, Nepal's national flower, which blooms from March to April. Smaller plants, such as mosses and grasses, grow at elevations above 12,140 feet; above the snow line of the Great Himalayas there is no vegetation.

The Terai region of Nepal abounds in wildlife: tigers, leopards, deer, and elephants. The Royal

Chitwan National Park, located in the Terai, is a haven for several endangered species such as the rhinoceros, tiger, sloth bear, gaur (a large, dark-coated wild ox), and Ganges River dolphin. Wild goats, sheep, and wolves are found at higher elevations.

❁ ECONOMY

The primary occupation in Nepal is agriculture, which contributes about 40 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). In the Terai region the farmers grow rice, pulses, wheat, barley, and oilseeds. Other important crops include tobacco, cotton, indigo, and opium. The forests of the Terai provide sal wood as well as bamboo and rattan, which are used for making furniture. Medicinal herbs are grown on the Himalayan slopes and sold in markets worldwide. Animal husbandry is the second largest occupation in Nepal. Cattle, yaks, sheep, goats, and poultry are found in abundance. Substantial quantities of mica and small deposits of ochre, copper, iron, lignite, and cobalt are found in the hills of Nepal. Hydroelectric power is the main source of electricity in the country; plans are in the works to further harness the country's rivers. Tourism is the major source of foreign exchange for Nepal and makes a large contribution to the country's economy.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The capital and main city of Kathmandu is fairly congested and consists of crooked streets and by-lanes bordered on both sides by irregular, multi-roofed pagodas, a multitude of stone sculptures, and stupas (dome-shaped monuments used to house Buddhist relics or to commemorate significant facts of Buddhism). The shops and stores in the bazaars are full of grotesque well-chiseled masks, colorful *thangkas* (wall hangings with Buddhist motifs), and Tibetan carpets. The air is heavy with the echoes of chants and hymns; also audible are strains of folk music played on the *saringhi* (a stringed instrument) or flute. There are a lot of restaurants and food stalls located in cities and towns that cater to the many tourists, offering all kinds of international cuisines and snacks. Traditional folk musicians (*gaines*), gather in the evenings for singing and socializing; classical dancing and masked dances enthrall both visitors and residents of Kathmandu Valley and the Bhaktapur regions; while the slightly hoarse music made by the *damais* (tailor community, which also makes music during social ceremonies) is a regular feature of Nepali weddings.

The Hindu Bikram Era calendar is Nepal's official calendar. This solar calendar was started by King Bikramditya.

❁ CUISINE

Nepali meals center on rice, wheat, corn, and lentils combined with fresh vegetables and meats. A typical

Nepali meal includes dal (lentil soup), *bhat* (steamed plain rice), and *tarkari* (curried vegetable or meat preparation). Typical dishes include *bhutuwas* (stir-fried meat or vegetables), *sekuwas* (grilled meat or vegetables), *chewayalas* (grilled meat marinated in mustard oil), *rotis* (unleavened bread), *momos* (stuffed dumplings), *thukpas* and *chow-chows* (Himalayan stewed and stir-fried noodles), and *sukutis* (crispy and spicy meat slices).

Public/Legal Holidays

SAHID DIVAS

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: February

Sahid Divas, Martyr's Day, is a solemn occasion when the people of Nepal pay homage to their former ruler King Tribhuvan (1906–55) and to the numerous martyrs (both known and unknown) who died for their country. King Tribhuvan, with the support of the military, finally ended the rana's despotic rule in Nepal and initiated the beginnings of democratic government in Nepal. On the Nepalese calendar, it occurs on the 16th day of Magha, the 11th month.

PRAJATANTRA DIVAS

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: February

This day is officially observed in Nepal as Rastriya Prajatantra Divas, or National Democracy Day. It commemorates the People's Revolution, which took place in 1950–51. This day is also observed as King Tribhuvan's official birthday. It was on this day that King Tribhuvan, considered the father of Nepal, brought about epoch-making changes in Nepal's political landscape by putting an end to the rana regime. The day is marked by processions and public speeches. The seventh day of Phalgun, the 12th month of the Nepalese calendar, is the local date for this observance.

HIS MAJESTY KING GYANENDRA BIR BIKRAM SHAH DEV'S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July

Nepal is the only Hindu kingdom in the world today. For the loyal Nepalese their king is second only to God and, therefore, held in high esteem. In Nepal the citizens celebrate the birthday of the reigning monarch (presently King Gyanendra) and pray for the long life and good health of their ruler.

The Nepalese follow their own calendar, which is quite similar to the Hindu calendar. The official date for this holiday currently is the 23rd of Ashadh, the third month of the Nepalese calendar. However, the date changes, depending on the actual date of the current king's birth. Since it is a public holiday, all educational institutions and government and commercial organizations are closed.

NEPAL SAMBIDHAN DIVAS

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November

This day has great significance in the political history of Nepal. The new democratic constitution became the law of the kingdom on this day in 1990. Since then the Nepalese have celebrated Constitution Day with processions, parades, and speeches by public figures. This is a public holiday in Nepal, with schools, government offices, and commercial establishments closed. On the Nepalese calendar, it falls on the 23rd day of the eighth month of the year, Kartik.

Religious Holidays

MAHA SHIVRATRI

Observed by: Hindus
Observed on: March

Lord Shiva is the third deity of the Hindu Trinity (Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva the destroyer). Hindus believe that Maha Shivrati is the day Shiva performed the Tandav, his heavenly dance of the cycle of creation, preservation, and destruction. Shiva is one of the most popular gods in Nepal. Nepalese celebrate this holiday on the 13th or 14th day of the waning half of Falgun, the 11th month of the Nepalese calendar. The day before the Night of Shiva, his followers eat only once, and share stories about him. On the night of Maha Shivaratri, the Nepali Hindus, along with their counterparts across the Indian subcontinent, worship the deity. Devotees from across the country flock to the Pashupatinath Temple (near Kathmandu) to worship Shiva, also known as Pashupatinath (lord of all animals and living creatures), and to bathe in the Bagmati River. A number of mendicants or ascetics, dressed up as Lord Shiva—with matted hair, ash rubbed all over their bodies, and clad only in loincloths made out of tiger skins—wander through the streets of cities and towns, where the devout pay obeisance to them. Bonfires are lit and people gather with their neighbors, friends, and relatives for celebratory feasts. Devotional songs, dance, and music continue throughout the night.

See also Volume III: HINDUISM



A young Buddhist monk supports the weight of traditional instruments blown by two other monks during a peace parade on Vesak, a festival to mark the birth anniversary of Lord Buddha in Kathmandu. (AP Photo/ Binod Joshi)

❁ HOLI

Observed by: Hindus

Observed on: March

Originally a spring festival, Holi (also Falgu Purnima, the Festival of Colors), named for Holika, is one of the most colorful and exuberant Hindu festivals. Holika was the evil sister of an arrogant king who tried to kill his good son Prince Prahlada numerous times because he was jealous of Prahlada's reverence for the Lord Vishnu. Holika—who believed she was immune to fire—held the boy on her lap in the middle of a huge bonfire. Prince Prahlada, however, came out of the fire unscathed, while his aunt burned to death.

Nepalese celebrate Holi on the 23rd of Falgun, the 11th month of the Nepalese Hindu calendar. In Nepal this weeklong holiday is called Rung Kelna, or “playing with color.” The night before Holi begins, on the night of the full Moon, festival-goers light huge bonfires to burn images of Holika to cleanse the city of evil spirits and to symbolize Holika's death.

On the first day of the festival the *chit pole* (a greased pole decorated with colorful flags) is erected at Durbar Square in Kathmandu to mark the beginning of the festival. People wear old clothes because old and young alike throw water balloons and colored powder at each other throughout the day.

A variation of this is the building of a three-tiered umbrella 25 feet high. At its base people light sticks of incense and leave flowers and red powder. They toss water-filled balloons out of upper windows instead of squirting each other, a method of getting someone else wet without exposing oneself to the same treatment.

On the last day of the festival, certainly the wildest one, young men cover themselves with red

powder, making themselves willing targets as they roam the streets of the city. They do this, it is said, because one day Hanuman, the monkey god, swallowed the Sun, leaving the people in utter darkness. The other gods, pitying the miserable people, suggested they rub color on each other and laugh. When they mixed the color in water and squirted it on each other, Hanuman laughed loudly, thereby spitting out the Sun. Yet another tale is that the Mongol Emperor Akbar thought that everyone would be equals if they were all the same color and ordained the holiday to do away with castes.

See also Volume III: HINDUISM; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ RAM NAVAMI

Observed by: Hindus

Observed on: April

This Hindu festival marks the birth of Lord Rama (the seventh of the 10 incarnations of Vishnu). On this day Vishnu's devotees fast, recite stories from the Ramayana, the epic poem of which Rama is the hero, and fill the temples dedicated to him to pray for release from the cycle of birth and death. This festival is celebrated with great enthusiasm at Janakpur (in southern Nepal), which is believed to be the birthplace of Lord Rama's consort Sita.

See also Volume III: HINDUISM; RAM NAVAMI

❁ NEW YEAR'S DAY

Observed by: Hindus

Observed on: April

The Hindu Bikram Era calendar is Nepal's official calendar. This solar calendar was started by King Bikramditya. The year 2060 of the Bikram Era corresponds to 2003–04 of the Western calendar. This official holiday in Nepal begins on the first day of the first month of the Hindu calendar, Baisakh (April 14). Hindu faithful visit the Pashupati Temple to bathe in the holy waters of the Bagmati River, which flows nearby. Pilgrims also visit other religious spots and spend the day picnicking. On this day the young are particularly respectful of the elders in their families and society, seeking their blessings and good wishes for the coming year. It is a day to seek blessings from family priest and one's elders as well.

See also Volume III: HINDUISM

❁ VESAK

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: May

Prince Siddhartha, who later became the Buddha, was born in Nepal. Buddhism, the religion founded

by him, is the second most popular faith in the kingdom. Vesak, which is also called Buddha Jayanti, or Buddha Purnima, commemorates the three major events in the life of the Buddha—his birth, enlightenment, and death. It is observed on the full Moon day in Jestha, the second month of the Nepalese calendar. In preparation for the festivities the monasteries, stupas, and shrines are cleaned; the images and statues are polished, and the neighborhoods are decorated with prayer flags, which flutter gaily in the breeze. On this day the people awake very early, visit sacred shrines to make offerings, and pray before the images of the Buddha and his various incarnations.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM; VESAK

❁ JANMASHTAMI

Observed by: Hindus

Observed on: August

This Hindu festival, which Nepalese call Shree Krishna Janmashtami or Krishnaashtami, celebrates the birth of Lord Krishna (the frivolous cowherd king), one of the 10 incarnations of Lord Vishnu. It is celebrated on the second of Bhadra, the fifth month of the Nepalese calendar. On this day impressive, highly elaborate prayer ceremonies and rituals take place at the Krishna Temples in Patan and Changu Narayan, to which zealous devotees flock in large numbers.

See also Volume III: HINDUISM; JANMASHTAMI

❁ DASHAIN

Observed by: Hindus

Observed on: October

Also called Durga Puja, this celebration comprises 10 days of festivities centered around Durga (the Mother Goddess, or vital creative force). Nepalese celebrate it on the tenth to 20th of Asoj, the sixth month of their calendar. It is by far the longest and the most important Hindu festival celebrated in Nepal, and it is Nepal's most thrilling and memorable festival as well. The Nepalese worship Durga in her various manifestations because of her victory over Mahishasura (an evil, demon king who had assumed the form of a buffalo). The devout offer animal sacrifices, usually buffalos, ducks, and goats, to appease the mother goddess.

Before *puja* (Sanskrit for “worship”) begins, artists build figures made of straw and bamboo covered with clay, many of them representations of Durga riding a lion. Some of the figures are 10 feet high. After people have been able to view the statues for four days, they are carried on bamboo stretchers, accompanied by the music of bagpipers and other musicians, to the Hooghly River and thrown in. Once in the river, the figures lose their form and dissolve once more into straw, bamboo, and clay.

People wear new clothes and fly kites during this 10-day festival. On Dashami (the 10th day), young people wear new clothes to pay their respects to elders and senior members of their families. As a token of blessing and good wishes, the elders mark the youngsters' foreheads with large red *tika* (a long mark made with vermilion paste). During the next few days, families and friends enjoy lavish feasts and exchange greetings and gifts. Meat, a luxury for poor and lower-middle-class people, is a big part of Dashain feasts. Often animals are bought live from markets and sacrificed at home or in temples, after which the whole family helps to cut up and prepare the meat.

See also Volume III: HINDUISM

❁ DIWALI

Observed by: Hindus

Observed on: November

Diwali, or the Festival of Lights is known as Tihar (also Panchak Yama, or “the five days of the underworld lord”) in Nepal. It is among the most dazzling festivals of the Hindus. It is a five-day festival (observed on the tenth to 15th day of Kartik, the seventh month of the Nepalese calendar) focused on life and prosperity, replete with candlelight illuminations, tinsel decorations, and consumption of sweetmeats and other delicacies. Each day of the festival a different animal is honored, beginning with the worship of crows (Kag tihar, “crows' day”)—messengers from Yama, the god of death—on the first day, and dogs on the second (Kukur tihar, “dogs day”). Early on the third day cows, sacred to Lakshmi and Nepal's national animal, are worshipped. That night, Lakshmi (Hindu goddess of good fortune, wealth, and beauty) will visit every home, so floral garlands are hung and oil lamps lit around every home to welcome her in hopes of enjoying prosperity and affluence during the coming year.

The fourth day most Nepalese worship oxen and bullocks (Guru puja), but others devote the day to Goverdhan puja (worship of Lord Krishna and his herd of cows). Those who live in the Newar community perform Mha puja, worshipping themselves, and their New Year begins. (Many Nepalese communities have their own calendars; Newar is one of them.)

On the fifth and last day of Diwali, the women observe Bhai tika: Sisters make offerings to their brothers and pray for their long life, good health, and happiness. In order to protect their brothers from Yama, sisters break walnuts, place floral garlands around the necks of their brothers, and encircle them with rings of mustard oil. When the brothers and sisters meet, each puts a red dot of sandalwood paste, called *tika* (symbols of good luck), on the other's forehead, and this ritual is performed throughout Nepal at exactly the same time.

See also Volume III: DIWALI; HINDUISM

Regional Holidays

MANI RIMDU

Observed in: Chiwong
Observed by: Sherpas
Observed on: November

Mani Rimdu (or Mani Rimdu) is a noisy, colorful festival celebrated among Sherpas (a Nepalese community regarded as expert mountaineers) during the fall season at the Tengboche and Chiwong monasteries in the vicinity of Mt. Everest. It occurs on the full Moon of Kartik, the seventh month of the Nepalese calendar or the full Moon of Mangsir, the eighth month. For five days, the lamas (Buddhist monks) and Sherpas, many of whom walk for many days to participate, gather for “the good of the world.” The festival features plays, masked dances, prayers, and feasting. The demons are symbolically quelled, and the pious rewarded. The days are full of colors, fanfare, and many activities. Around this time trips to the Everest peak are launched; these generally attract large crowds.

Rites of Passage

BIRTH

Nepalese society is traditional, orthodox Hindu, and male-dominated. Therefore the birth of a male child is welcomed with great happiness and enthusiasm. Like the Hindus in India, the Nepalese celebrate Annaprashan (initiation of solid food) of each infant before he or she cuts the first tooth. This implies that the ceremony must take place when the teeth begin to emerge. After this ceremony the infant is allowed to eat solid food regularly apart from breast-feeding. On this occasion relatives come together, and a prayer ceremony is held, followed by a lavish feast.

COMING OF AGE

In the villages of Nepal when a girl begins to menstruate, she has to spend the entire period alone in the stables. She is not allowed to enter the house, and, although she may be permitted to work in the fields, she cannot fetch water or do any cooking. After she has stopped menstruating, she thoroughly washes her body and hair, as well as her clothes, bedclothes, and the utensils used during this period in the nearby stream. Then the floor of the house is plastered with a solution of mud and cow dung (the Hindus consider all products and derivatives of the cow as sacred). The young woman is also supposed to purify herself by drinking a few drops of cow’s urine and to sanctify the house by sprinkling some of the cow’s urine around it.

MARRIAGE

In traditional Nepalese society, marriages are usually arranged by the parents of the bride and the groom. Both families consult astrologers to determine an auspicious day for the wedding and other ancillary rites and rituals. The Nepalese generally marry quite young. The actual marriage is preceded by the betrothal ceremony. The wedding rituals usually take place at the bride’s home. The bride wears a rich, resplendent sari, red in color because red is considered auspicious by all Hindus. The bridegroom generally dons a loose pajamalike suit with a very short *kurta* (tunic or shirt) and a waistcoat. Bridegrooms also wear the typical Nepali cap.

The groom arrives at the wedding venue in a procession along with his family and friends, where the bride’s family members and relatives receive him. The priest (a Brahmin) conducts the ritual under a canopy, specially made and decorated for the ceremony. The priest invokes the blessings of God for the couple. The bride accepts her change of status from an unmarried woman to a wife by spreading

The Sherpas

The Sherpas are a Tibetan ethnic group that arrived in Nepal about 450 years ago from the eastern province of Tibet, called Kham. The name *Sherpa*, which they pronounce sher-wah, comes from a central Tibetan word *sharba*, meaning “easterner.” No one knows why they left Kham and traveled 1,250 miles to settle in Nepal. They now live in the high mountain region of the Himalayas and continue to live in a traditional manner, growing most of their food and herding yaks. About 3,000 of Nepal’s 10,000 Sherpas live in the Khumbu Valley, famous to mountaineers because it provides access to the southern side of Mt. Everest.

Although some Sherpa villages have modern conveniences such as telephone service and energy

for lighting and cooking, Sherpas continue to live much as their ancestors did. Potatoes, introduced in the 1800s from British gardens in Kathmandu and Darjeeling (in India), provide a staple of the simple Sherpa diet because they grow well at altitudes up to 14,000 feet. Although only 1 percent of Khumbu can be farmed, other areas of the valley are good pastureland, allowing the Sherpas to herd yaks, which provide wool for clothing, leather for sturdy shoes, dung for fuel and fertilizer, in addition to food staples such as milk, butter, and cheese.

The Sherpas are Buddhists, of the Nyingmapa sect, the most common and oldest sect of Tibetan Buddhism.

turmeric powder on her hands. *Kanya Dan* (*kanya* means “young girl” and *dan* means “to give in charity”) is performed by the father (or an uncle or a male guardian) of the bride in the presence of all guests, friends, and relatives.

The couple exchange floral garlands as a symbol of mutual acceptance. Then the bride and the groom make offerings of puffed rice and clarified butter (*ghee*) to Agni, the Hindu god of fire, who is supposed to be the prime witness to bless and sanctify the marriage. The groom holds the hand of his bride, and together they walk seven times around the sacred fire, while the mantras (hymns) are being chanted. During the rounds, the couple utters the sacred vows of loyalty, devotion, fidelity, responsibility, and honesty, among others. Toward the end of the ceremony the groom smears the bride’s forehead and the part in her hair with *sindoor* (vermilion), signifying his acceptance and authority over her. At the conclusion of the ceremonies and the wedding feast, the bride departs from her parental home to take up residence in her husband’s house along with his extended family.

A Hindu married woman in Nepal must wear bangles on her wrists, a *bindi* (circular dot) on her forehead, and *sindoor* in the part of her hair. Widowhood is regarded as a curse, and widows are generally ostracized from social and religious functions. In the Sherpa community of Nepal polyandry (having more than one husband at one time) is commonplace; however polygyny is nonexistent. Divorce is uncommon in Nepal. The various ethnic groups inhabiting Nepal are clan-based; hence marriages are generally exogamous; that is, the groom and the bride are not even remotely linked by blood.

❁ DEATH

In Nepal, as in other Hindu communities around the world, people cremate their dead. The oldest son of the deceased (and in his absence any other male relative) performs the funeral rites. A wake or vigil is

generally not held; after the friends, relatives, and acquaintances have taken a last look at the body and paid their homage, the body (draped in a shroud and profusely decorated with flowers, incense, votives, and other symbolic ornaments) is carried on a makeshift cot or bamboo structure to the cremation ground by the pallbearers, typically the sons and close male relatives of the deceased. Women generally do not accompany the body to the cremation ground. After the body is laid on a pile of firewood, the eldest son lights the pyre with a flaming torch. Because it is the son’s duty to liberate his father’s soul by shattering all ties and bonds to this world, it is customary for him to smash an earthen pot filled with water (which is brought from the deceased’s home). The pot filled with water symbolizes the world and earthly attachments.

After the cremation is over, the family members return home to observe an 11-day mourning period during which they are prohibited from eating salt, certain vegetables, and nonvegetarian food of any kind. It is customary for the family members to wear only white clothes and abstain from using objects made of leather, such as shoes, handbags, belts, and wristwatch bands.

On the 10th day, Hindu priests visit the home to perform an elaborate ceremony in which numerous Hindu deities are invoked and worshipped on behalf of the deceased. An array of special dishes is prepared and offered to the departed soul so that it may be appeased. On the 11th day, the priests perform the rite of absolution, thereby freeing everyone from the austerities and restrictions of mourning. Thereafter the family members are free to return to their normal lives.

Further Reading

Deepak Thapa, *A Kingdom under Siege: Nepal’s Maoist Insurgency, 1996 to 2004* (London: Zed, 2004); John Whelpton, *A History of Nepal* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

~ Netherlands, The ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Western Europe, between Belgium and Germany; bordering the North Sea
Size	16,033 sq. mi.
Capital City	Amsterdam (constitutional capital); The Hague (seat of government)
Flag Description	The flag of the Kingdom of the Netherlands has three horizontal bands of equal size displaying the following colors: red (top), white, and blue.
Independence	January 23, 1579 (from Spain)
Population	16,407,491 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary democracy under constitutional monarchy
Nationality	Dutch
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Caucasian
Major Language(s)	Dutch; Frisian (both official)
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (31%); Protestant (21%); none (41%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Koninginnedag, April 30; Labor Day, May 1; Herdenkings Day, May 4; Liberation Day, May 5; Koninkrijksdag, December 15; Boxing Day, December 26

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Archaeological research to date indicates that the prehistory of the Netherlands began at least 8,000 years ago with the Bog People, so-called because their bodies (or parts thereof) have been found in bogs in Denmark, the Low Countries, and England and Ireland. Over the centuries hundreds of such bodies have been dug out of the peat in these countries, most of the remains indicating some sort of violence connected with their deaths. The oldest skeletal part found in the Netherlands is the skull of a woman estimated to be about 8,000 years old, around 6000 B.C.E.

Numerous dolmens have also been found in the Netherlands; 54, 52 of them have been identified in the province of Drenthe. (A dolmen, called *hunebedden* in Dutch, consists of two or more upright stones supporting horizontal stone slabs.) Around 4000, Neolithic (New Stone Age) peoples settled in what is now the Netherlands. They were early farmers, but around 3450 they began to build dolmens to mark their

burial sites, using huge boulders left behind by the last glacial period. (There are no “native” rocks in the Netherlands as large as these; many of them weigh several tons.) Most of them are actually passage graves (true dolmens have no entryways), burial sites with an opening that allowed entry, associated with the European Funnel Beaker culture (5300–2000).

For much of its historic period, the Netherlands was associated with Belgium and Luxembourg. Collectively these three countries were known as the Low Countries, because so much of the territory is at or below sea level, making it vulnerable to flooding. It was not until the 16th century that the Netherlands defined its boundaries.

In the 16th century, Philip II (1527–98) of Spain tried to annex the Netherlands. The Protestants of the northern region united to fight the Spanish, and this led to the Eighty Years' War, which began in 1568. Eventually in 1648, the Spaniards were expelled, and the Netherlands became an independent nation.

After its independence, the Netherlands' economy went through a major revival. The country prospered, and the Dutch East India Company was formed in 1602. Ships were sent to the Far East for trade, and the Cape of Good Hope,

Indonesia, Suriname, Antilles, and New Amsterdam (modern-day New York) were colonized. Toward the close of the 17th century, the Netherlands was one of the major colonial powers of Europe. The colonies were administered by the Dutch East India Company and later by the Dutch West India Company. Finally in the 19th century, the Dutch government took over control directly, and the colonies were officially annexed.

The Netherlands stayed neutral during World War I, but in World War II Germany invaded the country and, although the Dutch resisted them, the Germans claimed the lives of over 100,000 Dutch Jews.

After the war the economy made a quick revival, and the country prospered again. The Netherlands joined NATO in 1949, and in 1958, the European Economic Community (EEC), which evolved into the European Union (EU).

In 1949 the Netherlands granted independence to the Dutch East Indies, which became the Republic of Indonesia. Suriname attained its independence in 1975. The Antilles, off the coast of Venezuela, are still a colony but are largely self-ruled.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in western Europe, the Netherlands is flanked by the North Sea, Belgium, and Germany and is located at the mouth of three major European rivers—the Rhine, the Meuse (also known as Maas), and the Schelde. The Netherlands is still considered one of the Low Countries. Scattered hills are found only in the southernmost parts of the region and the highest point of the country is Vaalserberg. It stands 1,053 feet tall and is located in the southeastern part of the country. The vast majority of the terrain is flat, and almost 50 percent of the nation's surface is a little over three feet above sea level, while the other half is below sea level.

In the 17th century the famous Dutch windmills were developed to drain the water from the lowlands; in addition they were used to grind corn and saw lumber. These windmills, though not much in use now, are the most visible element of the Netherlands and are symbolic of the ingenuity of the Dutch.

Nowadays, a large number of water pumps in the pumping stations placed throughout the country monitor the level of the groundwater. Also, a series of dunes and dikes (a long wall that protects the land from the sea water) protect the country from flooding. In 1916 Flevoland (a province of the Netherlands) was severely affected by a flood. However, by constructing dams, and with the help of the pumping stations, the region was reclaimed from the sea along with other parts of the country. These areas are known as polders, which are low-lying areas of land that form an artificial water body. Dikes surround them, and the water is drained with the help of water pumps, thus maintaining the level of the water table.

The Netherlands enjoys a temperate, maritime climate characterized by mild winters and relatively

Low Countries

The name *Low Countries* generally refers to the region of de Nederlanden (region under Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V [1500–58]). This includes the countries located in the low-lying delta region at the mouth of the rivers Rhine, Meuse, and Scheldt: the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Belgium. These countries were not centers of trade in ancient times but were developed as trading centers during the 12th century.

cool summers. The average temperature in the coastal regions varies from 34°F to 41°F in winter and 57°F to 70°F in summer; in more populated regions, the average temperature varies from 34°F to 39°F in winter and 55°F to 72°F in summer.

The Netherlands is home to trees such as oak, pine, beech, and ash, as well as tulips (famous all over the world), while the fauna includes rabbits, deer, and migratory birds.

❁ ECONOMY

The Netherlands has a strong, prosperous, and open economy. It is home to global leaders like Philips (electrical machinery), Unilever (food-processing industry), Shell (petroleum refining), and Dutch State Mines (chemicals).

Around 73 percent of the Dutch labor force is employed in the service sector, and even though the agricultural sector employs only 4 percent of the labor force, it generates large surpluses for export as well as for the food-processing industry. In terms of the value of agricultural exports, the Netherlands ranks third in the world (behind the United States and France). Major export items include cheese,

Delta Project

In order to end the threat of flooding from the ocean, the government of the Netherlands started the Delta project in 1958. The project involved the construction of 6,214 miles of inner dikes, and 1,864 miles of outer, canal, and river dikes. These were elevated to the height of the delta, thus closing the estuaries along the Zeeland province in the Netherlands.

As a result of the construction, the risk of flooding in the Netherlands was reduced to once in 10,000 years. This project has been touted by the American Society of Civil Engineers as one of the seven wonders of the modern world since it is considered to be the largest construction effort undertaken in human history. By 2002 a major part of the construction work was complete.

Fun Fact

The Netherlands is often called Holland, but that name actually applies to only two of the country's provinces, North and South Holland.

potatoes, sugar beets, beer, fruits, vegetables, and grains as well as commodities such as chemicals, fuels, machinery, and equipment.

Amsterdam has been a center for the diamond industry for over 400 years. The industry expanded when diamonds were found in South Africa in 1867, and the largest diamond monopoly, located in the Netherlands, has recently bought into the diamond mines just opened in Canada's Northern Territories, where kimberlite tubes (where diamonds are created) have been found.

The Netherlands is a member of the European Union (EU) and on January 1, 1999, it adopted the Euro (common currency of many member nations of the European Union) as its national currency.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The Netherlands has an open and liberal society where people of different religions and beliefs coexist in peace and harmony. Both the Baptist and Congregationalist churches were founded in the Netherlands. The Dutch are the dominant ethnic group in the Netherlands, but the country is also home to other ethnic groups such as Antilleans (an ethnic group from the islands in the Caribbean), Surinamese (an ethnic group of the Republic of Suriname in South America), Turks, Moroccans, and Indonesians.

Around 52 percent of the Dutch are Christians while 8 percent follow Islam or other faiths. However, 40 percent of the population does not follow any religious faith.

Dutch and Frisian (a Germanic language spoken along the North Sea) are the official languages of the Netherlands. The Netherlands does not have a national dress, but it has a wide variety of traditional costumes that vary from region to region. Wooden shoes are an integral part of the traditional attire and

are popular among farmers as working shoes. In ancient times leather shoes were expensive and were worn by the elite. The common people wore wooden shoes because they were more affordable and durable. People who live in the countryside still wear clogs since they find them more comfortable in the warm weather than rubber boots.

The Dutch enjoy a wide variety of music ranging from traditional Frisian folk songs, Interpol (pop music of the Netherlands), Indo-rock (music by Indonesian immigrants), rap, punk, and jazz.

Many famous artists were Dutch including Rembrandt van Rijn, Jan Steen, Vincent Van Gogh, and M. C. Escher; the Netherlands has also produced philosophers like Erasmus and Spinoza as well as the famous astronomer and mathematician Christian Huygens, the inventor of an accurate clock and discoverer of Titan, Saturn's largest Moon. *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1947) was also written in the Netherlands.

In 2001 the Dutch government approved same-sex marriage and legalized euthanasia, reaffirming the Netherlands' liberal and progressive approach to social issues.

CUISINE

Dairy products form an integral part of traditional Dutch cuisine.

A typical Dutch meal consists of potatoes, meat, boiled vegetables, and a wide variety of dairy products, including cheese, buttermilk, and *vela* (thick milk pudding).

Patat (potato chips) is the national fast food of the Netherlands and is generally served with mayonnaise. Some traditional Dutch delicacies include *stamppot* (mashed potatoes with varied vegetables), *snert* (pea soup), *watergruwel* (berry soup), bacon, *rookworst* (roasted sausage), *karnemelk* (buttermilk), *advocaat* (Dutch eggnog), *kroket* (meat croquette), *vlaai* (sweet pies), and *pannekon* (pancakes).

Beer is the traditional drink and is extremely popular.

The Diary of Anne Frank

During World War II a German Jewish girl, Annelies Marie Frank (Anne Frank; 1929–45), wrote a diary while she was hiding with her family (from the Nazi forces) in Amsterdam. Her family had moved to the Netherlands when the Nazis took over Germany and began killing Jews. However, after German forces occupied that country, they had to go into hiding for two years, during which Anne wrote about her experiences in a small diary presented to her on her 13th birthday.

The book provides an in-depth view of the life of

a teenager during Nazi occupation. Events related to her life from June 12, 1942, until August 1, 1944, are well-documented in the diary. After two years, Nazi forces discovered the family's hideout, and they were sent to concentration camps. Anne died of typhus in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. She was only 15. However, her father Otto survived the camp, and on his return to Amsterdam after World War II, he discovered Anne's diary and got it published.

It is one of the most widely read books in the world and has inspired operas and theatrical productions.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Gregorian (or Western) calendar and is celebrated as New Year's Day in many countries. Celebrations usually begin on New Year's Eve (December 31). In the Netherlands people attend special parties on New Year's Eve and dance and sing their way into the New Year. However, many Dutch stay home and celebrate the occasion with friends and family members. As the clock strikes midnight, they raise a toast to the new year and greet each other. Then they go out into their backyards and light up the night sky with fireworks. After exchanging greetings with their neighbors, they either visit pubs or attend parties and dance until the early hours of New Year's Day. Wine and beer are an integral part of Dutch New Year celebrations.



Dutch Queen Beatrix waves to the crowd in the Dutch beach resort of Scheveningen, near The Hague. The Dutch celebrate Koninginnedag (Queen's Day), a Dutch national holiday marking the birthday of the Queen's mother, and the 25th anniversary of Beatrix's coronation as Queen of the Netherlands. (AP Photo/Bas Czerwinski)

❁ KONINGINNEDAG

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 30

Koninginnedag, or the Queen's Day, commemorates the birth of the present queen of the Netherlands Beatrix (b. 1938), as well as her ascension to the throne on April 30, 1980. Actually Beatrix's birth date is January 31; April 30 was the birthday of her mother the late Queen Juliana, Queen Mother of the Netherlands (1909–2004). However, when her mother abdicated, permitting Beatrix to ascend the throne on April 30, 1980, Queen Beatrix decided to celebrate Queen's Day on April 30 as a mark of respect for her mother. Also, this permitted outdoor celebrations that her real birthday, falling in January, could not.

Celebrations begin on the night before Queen's Day. Many people paint the national flag on their faces, wear clothes in the national color (orange), and walk through the streets of Amsterdam drinking beer and having a good time.

The next day fairs and open-air markets are part of the Queen's Day celebrations. These celebrations are held throughout the country. In addition Amsterdam plays host to an elaborate celebration, complete with fairs, flea markets, and musical bands that play Dutch music and songs especially written for the queen.

Also, Queen Beatrix visits at least two Dutch towns every year on her birthday. The selected towns and villages celebrate the visit of the queen with great joy and enthusiasm. The streets are decorated with ribbons and flowers as well as huge portraits of the queen, and the monarch is welcomed to the town amid great fanfare. While she visits the village in her special carriage, people dress themselves in their best attire and try to catch a glimpse of their queen.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first

Fun Fact
the Netherlands still has about 1,000 traditional working windmills.

Fun Fact

Scientists assert that, in terms of average height, Dutch men and women are the tallest people in the world, due to the high consumption of dairy products in their daily diet.

Fun Fact

Amsterdam, which is entirely built on piles (underground columns used for support), has 160 canals and over 1,200 bridges.

Fun Fact

the Netherlands is known as the land of cheese and it is the largest exporter of dairy products in the world.

demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

In the Netherlands, trade unions organize huge rallies in different parts of the country, and workers participate in these rallies with great enthusiasm. Also, parades by workers and recreational activities are part of the Labor Day celebrations.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

HERDENKINGS DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 4

Herdenkings Day, also Dodenherdenking or Remembrance Day, is observed in memory of all the people who lost their lives during World War II. The whole of the Netherlands unites in remembering the fallen heroes and innocent victims and prays for them. Thousands of people gather at war memorials in different parts of the country in the evening. As the clock strikes 8:00 the entire nation observes two minutes of silence as a mark of respect. This event is broadcast live on television across the country, and Queen Beatrix and her ministers join their citizens on this solemn occasion. At the national memorial monument at Nieuwe Kerk in Dam Square in Amsterdam, people lay wreaths. Memorial services also take place in local churches.

Fun Fact

The Cullinan, the world's largest diamond, and the famous Kohinoor, were cut in Amsterdam

LIBERATION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 5

Liberation Day, Nationale Bevrijdingsdag, commemorates the withdrawal of Nazi forces from the Netherlands on May 5, 1945, toward the end of World War II. The Dutch celebrate this day as the day of democracy and freedom. In Wageningen, where the historic surrender documents were signed by German forces in the Netherlands, thereby ending their occupation, a parade of war veterans is organized with people cheering them and offering them flowers as tokens of appreciation.

On this day in every part

Fun Fact

Renowned Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh aptly depicted the love of potatoes among the Dutch in his artwork entitled *De aardappeleters* ("The Potato Eaters"), wherein he portrayed a Dutch family enjoying a traditional Dutch meal composed of potatoes.

of the Netherlands, special Liberation Day events are organized including open-air concerts where renowned Dutch and international musicians perform. Liberation Day events are theme-based (from 2000 to 2005 the theme for the events was freedom and responsibility) and many international organizations, such as War Child and Amnesty International, organize special workshops for the public on issues such as human rights, the effects of war on children, and so on.

In the capital city of Amsterdam along the Amstel River, the traditional venue of the concert, Queen Beatrix and government officials participate in a major open-air concert organized to conclude the Liberation Day festivities.

KONINKRIJKSDAG

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 15

Koninkrijksdag, also called Kingdom Day, commemorates the institution of the charter for the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26

Boxing Day, celebrated as the Feast of St. Stephen in the Netherlands is observed on December 26, the day after Christmas. St. Stephen is considered the first martyr of Christianity because he was stoned to death by the Roman rulers for speaking out in favor of Jesus and his disciples.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY

Religious Holidays**PALM SUNDAY**

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Last Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, commemorating the last week of Jesus' mortal life. Jesus was the prophet of Christianity, and Christians believe him to be the second person of the Holy Trinity (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). The day is as much about the beginning of Jesus' journey to the Cross as it is about his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. His arrival in Jerusalem was indeed the way to the Cross.

After two of his disciples had fetched a donkey for him to ride, they placed their clothes on it to make a comfortable seat. The disciples then cut branches and covered the path, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the prediction of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. People welcomed him by waving palm and olive branches, and strewing garments and branches

on the road. There were different perceptions at work: Jesus rode in on a donkey, the humble entry of a peaceful nature for a spiritual king; the people of Jerusalem welcomed him with palm and olive branches and the laying of garments in his path because they wanted a worldly king to defeat the Romans.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

The rituals observed on Maundy Thursday are based on a sequence of events supposed to have occurred during the last meal Jesus ate with his Apostles. First Jesus washed their feet; then he announced that he had been betrayed by one of them. The traitor Judas left the table. Finally Jesus instituted the Eucharist—a ritual of consuming bread and wine as symbols of his body and blood, also referred to as Communion in Christian churches. In the Roman Catholic Church Maundy Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist, the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week, and gives priests an opportunity to prepare for the many rituals associated with Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter. The name *Maundy Thursday* may be linked to the Latin word *mandatum*, “command,” because Jesus commanded his Apostles to observe the ritual now called the Eucharist.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent. It is observed in most parts of the world to remember the Crucifixion of Jesus. Some Dutch Catholics observe a fast from Ash Wednesday (first day of Lent), for 40 days up to Good Friday and a partial fast from then until Easter. Some fast only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. In the Netherlands on Good Friday, people visit their local churches where they pray to Jesus and draw inspiration from his life and teachings.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Saturday before Easter

Holy Saturday is the day Jesus lay in the tomb and the day before he rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. This was the Jewish Sabbath (the Jewish day of rest is Saturday). It is also regarded as the second Sabbath after Creation. The final day of Holy Week, which begins with Palm Sunday and includes Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, it marks the threshold between death and resurrection, and is a day of silence and contemplation for devout Christians.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter, *Paas* in Dutch, is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. For this reason it is sometimes known as Resurrection Day. This day is of utmost importance because the fundamental teaching of Christianity is that Jesus, through his death, freed all his believers from the penalty of sin.

The Dutch celebrate Easter Sunday (*Paas Zondag*) and Easter Monday, which falls on the first Monday after Lent. On Easter devout Dutch Catholics attend Mass in their local churches and greet each other. A beautiful Easter wreath hangs on every door, and homes are decorated with spring flowers. In the rural areas, almost every village celebrates Easter by lighting an Easter bonfire on a hill or a high point. Each village tries to outdo the others with as big a bonfire as possible, and people start collecting wood for this well in advance.

On Easter families gather to celebrate. They often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to offer prayers. Easter eggs have become associated with the festival because they are symbols of rebirth and regeneration taken from the ancient pagan spring festivals.

Easter eggs also play a part in Easter celebrations. Parents generally hide beautifully decorated Easter eggs all over the courtyards of their homes. On Easter children go egg-hunting and collect the eggs, which they believe have been put there by the Easter bunny. *Paasbrood* is a delicious sweet bread stuffed with raisin and black currants served on Easter, and a favorite among old and young alike.

Feasting and celebrations continue even on Easter Monday. While the younger children hunt for colored Easter eggs, the older people participate in *Eiertikken*, an egg-cracking game.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

Fun Fact

When Dutch school-children pass their exams, they hang a Dutch flag and a schoolbag outside their homes.

ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Forty days after Easter

Ascension Day commemorates the Christian belief that Jesus rose to heaven 40 days after his Resurrection on Easter. The Eastern Orthodox Church has recorded Ascension Day as one of the 12 Great Feasts.

Ascension Day is known as Hemelvaart in the Netherlands. On this day devout Catholics attend the Ascension Day Mass, offering prayers to God and thanking him for sending Jesus to Earth to spread the message of love and peace. The Dutch believe that the dew on Ascension Day has healing properties. Thus, in many parts of the Netherlands, teenagers embark on *dauwtrappen*, which means “dew-kicking” on Ascension Day. This requires them to get up as early as 5:00 in the morning and ride into the country on their bicycles. It is called *dauwtrappen* because it involves kicking the pedals in the wee hours of the morning while the dew is still in the air. Families also go for walks on the dewy grass in gardens and parks and pick spring flowers.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY

PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fifty days after Lent

Pentecost Sunday and Monday (called Pinksteren in the Netherlands and also known as Whitsunday and Whitmonday in many countries) celebrate the Christian belief that the Holy Ghost descended to the disciples 50 days after Easter. Devout Catholics attend their local church on the first day and offer prayers. Afterward they visit their friends and families and make short trips to the countryside to celebrate this break.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; PENTECOST

FEAST OF SINTERKLAAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 5

This day commemorates the death of St. Nicholas, the bishop of Myra (a place in modern-day Turkey), who died on December 6, 343 C.E. St. Nicholas (who is popularly called Santa Claus) is known as Sinterklaas in the Netherlands.

Many Roman Catholic countries celebrate St. Nicholas's Day primarily as a feast for small children on December 6. However, like most of the other Low Countries, the Netherlands observes the holiday on December 5. In addition the feast is observed by adults as well as children, and by non-Christians as well as Christians.

Dutch poems and songs relate that Sinterklaas lives today in Spain (although why the Dutch chose Spain as the home of Sinterklaas remains unclear). Dutch children also believe that through the year Sinterklaas keeps track of their behavior in a special red book, and Zwarte Piet (Black Peter) helps him by wrapping gifts for those children who have behaved well. Then in the first week of November, Sinterklaas fills his sack with the presents, and with his white horse and Piet embarks on his trip to the Netherlands aboard a steamship. The children look forward to their arrival, because they believe the three will visit them and give them the presents they want.

In the Netherlands this magical trip comes alive on national television in the form of a special staged arrival of Sinterklaas in the country. In mid-November Sinterklaas and his companions are portrayed as reaching one of the Dutch harbors (a different one every year), where they are welcomed by the mayor and the people of the town. Then a parade follows, with Sinterklaas and the mayor in the lead, and people welcome Sinterklaas and his companions with deafening cheers. This marks the beginning of the Sinterklaas season in the Netherlands and the arrival of Sinterklaas is shown live on national television.

Dutch children believe that throughout this season Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet travel throughout the Netherlands; at night the children leave hay or a small carrot in their shoes for the white horse on which Sinterklaas rides. On the night before the Feast of Sinterklaas, Piet takes the hay and leaves a small candy or a gift for the child if he or she has behaved nicely in the past year.

The Feast of Sinterklaas is a day of fun and frolic in the Netherlands. Many Dutch hide gifts in the house, and the recipient has to embark on a treasure hunt (armed with clues) to find the gifts. Gifts are hidden in potato bins and puddings as well as inside pillows. Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet also give presents to children at schools and hospitals and even shopping malls all over the country. People traditionally camouflage their gifts in an innovative and creative manner, and an appropriate poem is supposed to accompany every gift.

A special dinner table is set. Each family member is presented with a large chocolate letter that is the first initial of the person's name, and every family member takes a turn opening his or her presents and reading their poems aloud. Gingerbread men and women share the table with the family. It is a Dutch tradition to refer to these guests as lovers.

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas, Kerstmis in Dutch, is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world. It celebrates the birth of Jesus, whom they believe was the Son of

God. In the Netherlands Christmas celebrations begin on Christmas Eve (December 24) and last until St. Stephen's Day (Boxing Day) on December 26.

On Christmas Eve the Dutch exchange Christmas presents with family members and friends and enjoy a simple family dinner. Then they attend a Christmas Eve service in their local churches and celebrate the birth of Jesus. On Christmas the traditional breakfast consists of *krentebolletjes* (buns with black currants), *roomboter* (butter), and *kerststol* (bread with fruit and almond-paste). Many people also attend special prayer services in their local churches on Christmas Day. Afterward, they visit friends and extended family and exchange gifts and greetings.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ BREDA JAZZ FESTIVAL

Observed in: Breda

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May

The Breda Jazz Festival is an international jazz fiesta that takes place in the month of May in Breda, the Netherlands. The festival started in 1970, and since then thousands of jazz music lovers have flocked to Breda to watch their favorite musicians perform live in one of the concerts.

The festival attracts renowned jazz musicians from all over the world and also provides a platform for local jazz musicians and performers to show their talent to the world. During the festival, musical concerts take place all over the city, and music lovers are treated to different styles of jazz. Entry is free for all outdoor concerts, but indoor concerts require an entrance fee. Concerts generally begin during the day and go on until the early hours of the next day.

Recently performers of different styles of music including pop, rock, as well as folk have also been invited to perform during the festival in order to add variety.

❁ INTERNATIONAAL FOLKLORISTISCH DANSFESTIVAL

Observed in: Op Raokeldais (Warffum)

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June, July, or August

Internationaal Folkloristisch Dansfestival (International Folklore Festival) is an annual cultural event that takes place once a year in Op Raokeldais at Warffum, the Netherlands. Started in 1965, this festival has attracted professional folk dance groups from all over the world; they have captivated the audience with mesmerizing performances. Each folk dance provides a particular glimpse of the cultural heritage of its country of origin and thousands of

people from across the globe flock to Op Raokeldais to enjoy the different cultures on display.

Because the festival is known for excellent organization, stage management, and hospitality, many professional folk dance groups show interest in participating in this folk dance expo. Besides folk dance performances, the festival features other cultural events such as creative and theater workshops, a car show, and an old-timer's rally that showcases vintage cars. A major highlight of the festival is the grand Parade of the Continents, in which all participating nations present themselves in their traditional attire as they walk through the streets and are cheered by the assembled crowds.

Fun Fact

The Dutch do not like for people to not make plans in advance of their arrival, and surprise birthday parties are also unpopular.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

The Dutch do not celebrate birthdays in an elaborate way, but gift certificates are popular birthday gifts in the Netherlands. Parties are rare and, if held, will involve celebrating the birthday over a cup of coffee.

❁ MARRIAGE

Dutch weddings generally take place in the church in the presence of family members and friends. A day before the wedding, the families of the couple host a party in honor of them. It is traditional for the couple to sit under the trees on a beautifully decorated throne so that all the guests can come to them and give them their blessings.

During the wedding the presiding officiant introduces the couple to the community as husband and wife after the exchange of rings and wedding vows. Friends and family members greet the newlyweds, and a banquet follows.

Dutch weddings are known especially for the amazing quantity of food served. Two traditional menu items that are an integral part of every Dutch wedding are a sweetmeat (known as "bridal sugar") and a special spiced wine known as "bride's tears."

It is also traditional for Dutch couples to plant flowers—mainly lilies-of-the-valley—around their houses. These symbolize the return of happiness. The Dutch believe that, just as the flowers will bloom with every passing year, in the same way the couple will renew their love and their relationship.

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~ Netherlands Antilles ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Two island groups in the Caribbean Sea, composed of five islands: Curaçao and Bonaire, located off the coast of Venezuela, and St. Maarten, Saba, and St. Eustatius, located east of the U.S. Virgin Islands
Size	371 sq. mi.
Capital City	Willemstad
Flag Description	The flag of the Netherlands Antilles is white, with a blue stripe in the center superimposed on a vertical red band; there are five white, five-pointed stars arranged in an oval pattern in the center of blue band.
Independence	N.A. (Still part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands)
Population	219,958 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary
Nationality	Dutch Antillean
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Mixed Black (85%); Carib Amerindian; White; East Asian
Major Language(s)	Papiamentu (65%; a Spanish-Portuguese-Dutch-English dialect); English (16%; widely spoken)
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (72%); Protestant (21%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Queen's Birthday, April 30; Labor Day, May 1; Antilles Day, October 21; Mini Winter Carnival (December)

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

The Netherlands Antilles is a collection of five islands, divided into two groups: the Leeward Islands, which include Saba, St. Eustatius, and St. Maarten; and the Windward Islands, Bonaire and Curaçao. It is believed that the earliest inhabitants of these islands were the Arawaks and the Caribs. However, little is known about these islands prior to colonization.

The Leeward Islands are believed to have been discovered by Columbus (1451–1506) in 1493, and the Windward Islands by Alonso de Ojeda (1466–1516) in 1499. The initial colonists were the Spanish, but the Dutch West India Company sent settlers to the area in the 17th century to start a base for their slave trade. Saba was colonized by the Dutch in 1640. The island where St. Maarten is located was divided between

the Dutch and the French. The island St. Eustatius is found on has a colorful history of being colonized by the Dutch, French, and Spanish.

In 1845 the Leeward Islands united with the Windward Islands, plus the island of Aruba, to form the Netherlands Antilles. Aruba was a part of the federation until 1986, at which time it was granted independent status. Although the issue of independence from the federation for the other islands comes up now and then, the Dutch government has resisted any change, maintaining that these islands cannot support their own governments, banks, military, and police forces.

✿ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The five islands that make up the Netherlands Antilles are of volcanic origin and are not suitable for intensive agriculture. The highest point in the Netherlands Antilles is Mt. Scenery (536 feet), situated on the island of Saba. The country has

tropical climatic conditions marked by warm weather throughout the year. The Leeward Islands of Bonaire and Curaçao are prone to hurricanes in the summer.

The flora and fauna of these five islands are typically tropical in nature, with a variety of flowering plants and thick shrubs. Exotic birds and animals also live on these islands, and reptiles are abundant.

❁ ECONOMY

When slavery was abolished, the economy of these islands was badly hit. Matters improved in the 20th century, however, with the construction of oil refineries to service the oil fields of Venezuela. Tourism, petroleum refining, and offshore finance are the major contributors to gross domestic product (GDP) in the Netherlands Antilles. Crops such as aloe, sorghum, peanuts, vegetables, and some tropical fruit are also cultivated. The country exports petroleum products, while importing crude petroleum and manufactured goods. Almost all the consumer goods used in the country are imported, mainly from the United States, Mexico, and Venezuela.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The different origins of the population and the location of the islands give the Netherlands Antilles a diverse culture. The Dutch influence is evident in every area of life, but at the same time African, Caribbean, Spanish, Indian, and East Asian influences are obvious. A huge influx of tourists is seen here during the Carnival season.

This region is famous for the unique musical genres found here, and the carnivals that feature these musical forms are world famous. Other art forms, such as woodcarving, fabrics, paintings, sculptures, crafts, and jewelry reflect the diverse Caribbean culture of this region.

The most noted personality of this area is the famous poet and artist Christiaan Engels (c. 1838–1912). He was born in the Netherlands, but after he arrived in Curaçao in 1936, Engels became instrumental in bringing about major changes in the cultural life of this country. He founded Willemstad's Curaçao Museum in 1948.

John de Pool was another famous personality who wrote the satirical lament "Del Curaçao Quese Va" ("That's How Curaçao Was"), which catalogued the country's old customs and traditions.

❁ CUISINE

Dutch influence is seen in the cuisine as well as lifestyle of the people of the Netherlands Antilles. The favorite recipes on the

islands include a variety of seafood and meat dishes. *Piska kora* (red snapper), *karko* (conch meat), shrimp, lobster, and *kabritu stoba* (goat meat) are some of the specialties found here. Plantains (fried bananas), *keshi yena* (filled cheese), and *funchi* (cornmeal mush) are other indigenous items served on the islands. French fries, rice with beans, white rice, and baked potatoes are often featured as side dishes.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 is the first day of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar and is celebrated as New Year's Day all over the world. Celebrations often begin the evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve). In the Netherlands Antilles many towns have fireworks on New Year's Eve. New Year's Day is a national holiday, and schools and offices remain closed.

❁ QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 30

This day commemorates the birth of Queen Beatrix (b. 1938), the present queen of the Netherlands, as well as her ascension to the throne on April 30, 1980. Her actual birth date is January 31; April 30 is the birthday of her mother the late Queen Juliana (b. 1909), the queen mother of the Netherlands. Queen Beatrix decided to retain the celebration of Queen's Day on April 30 as a mark of respect for her mother, who abdicated in her favor. Another reason for keeping this date was that Juliana's birthday falls in one of the coldest months of the year, precluding outdoor celebrations. As a result in 1980 Queen Beatrix decided to celebrate her birthday along with her mother's on April 30.

All the islands of Netherlands Antilles hold celebrations on this day. Fairs and open-air markets are held as part of the celebrations. The streets are decorated with ribbons and flowers as well as huge portraits of the queen, while musical bands play Dutch music and songs specially written for her.

❁ LABOR DAY

Celebrated by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day and Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the

Fun Fact

In an earlier era the kitchens in this region were painted red with white polka dots. It was believed that this kept flies away because the dots made them dizzy.

importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

In the Netherlands Antilles, government and labor unions hold marches and other activities on this day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ ANTILLES DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 21

On this day the Netherlands Antilles celebrates the unity of the five islands that make up this country. This day is celebrated by all Dutch-owned islands in the Caribbean region. Residents attend fetes, enjoy cultural events, and participate in various games. Along with honoring all the people who contributed to the history of this region, this day is seen as a time to relax and have fun with one's family.

❁ MINI WINTER CARNIVAL

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December

The Mini Winter Carnival is held the first weekend of December. This is a big event all across the country, especially on the island of Saba, so it is also called Saba Days. Sports events, musical bands, donkey races, dining, and dancing are the highlights of the holiday, which attracts a large number of tourists from all over the world.

Religious Holidays

❁ CARNIVAL

Observed by: Christians

Observed in: February or early March

Carnival is the name of a festival that is held on the Tuesday—called Shrove Tuesday in English-speaking countries and Mardi Gras in French-speaking nations—before the 40-day period in the Christian calendar called Lent. Lent is devoted to fasting, abstinence, and penance in preparation for Easter, especially by Roman Catholics, all over the world. Carnival is celebrated in all nations with sizable Catholic populations, including the Netherlands Antilles. It is normally celebrated with parades made up of beautiful floats. Various contests, street parties (known as jump-ups), and the excessive consumption of meat also mark this day's festivities. The emphasis on food is due to the fact that the consumption of meat and fatty items during Lent is prohibited.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT

❁ ASH WEDNESDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed in: February or early March

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent, a 40-day period of fasting, abstinence, and penance for Catholics and other devout Christians all over the world. Special Masses are held in all Catholic churches, during which the priests bless ashes. These ashes are made by burning palm leaves that were used for the previous year's Palm Sunday observance. The priest uses the ashes to mark a cross on each parishioner's forehead on Ash Wednesday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

❁ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, commemorating the last week of Jesus' mortal life. Jesus was the prophet of Christianity, and Christians believe him to be the second person of the Holy Trinity, made up of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The day is as much about the beginning of Jesus' journey to the Cross as it is about his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. His arrival in Jerusalem was indeed the way to the Cross.

After two of his disciples had fetched a donkey for him to ride, they placed their clothes on it to make a comfortable seat. The disciples then cut branches and covered the path, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the prediction of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. People welcomed him by waving palm and olive branches, and strewing garments and branches on the road. There were different perceptions at work: Jesus rode in on a donkey,



A reveler in a colorful costume parades during carnival festivities at Front Street in Philipsburg, St. Maarten. (AP Photo/Gromyko Wilson)

the humble entry of a peaceful nature for a spiritual king; the people of Jerusalem welcomed him with palm and olive branches and the laying of garments in his path because they wanted a worldly king to defeat the Romans. In the Netherlands Antilles Catholics who attend Mass on this day receive small symbols of the cross made of a piece of palm leaf.

✿ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

The rituals observed on Maundy Thursday are based on a sequence of events supposed to have occurred during the last meal Jesus had with his Apostles. First Jesus washed the feet of his disciples; then he announced that he had been betrayed by one of them. The traitor Judas left the table. Finally Jesus instituted the Eucharist—a ritual of consuming bread and wine as symbols of his body and blood, also referred to as Communion in Christian churches. In the Roman Catholic Church, Maundy Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist, the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week, and gives priests an opportunity to prepare for the many rituals associated with Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter.

See also VOLUME III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

✿ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent. It is observed in most parts of the world to remember the Crucifixion of Jesus. In the Netherlands Antilles, Catholics observe a fast on Good Friday, and a ritual called the Stations of the Cross is performed, a reenactment of Jesus' final journey to Golgotha.

See also VOLUME III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Saturday before Easter

Holy Saturday is the day Jesus was laid in the tomb; the next day he rose from the dead. This was the Sabbath (the Jewish day of rest is Saturday), and Christians regard it as the second Sabbath after Creation. The final day of Holy Week, which begins with Palm Sunday and includes Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, it marks the threshold between death and resur-

rection, and is a day of silence and contemplation for devout Christians.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection. For this reason, it is sometimes known as Resurrection Day. This day is of utmost importance because the fundamental teaching of Christianity is that Jesus, through his death, freed all his believers from the penalty of sin. The holiday falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over.

On Easter the entire family gathers to celebrate. They often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to offer prayers. They usually attend special Easter services and enjoy a special meal together.

Easter eggs have become associated with the festival because they are symbols of rebirth and regeneration taken from the ancient pagan spring festivals. In the Netherlands Antilles Easter also signifies the advent of spring.

Festivities on the islands continue into the next day, Easter Monday, the first Monday after Lent. This day is often set aside for musical performances and other such activities.

See also VOLUME III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

✿ ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Forty days after Lent

The Ascension is a day of special celebration for Roman Catholics all over the world because it celebrates Jesus' Ascension to heaven 40 days after his Resurrection on Easter. The Catholic Church has recorded Ascension Day as one of the 12 Great Feasts, and the people of the Netherlands Antilles celebrate this day by attending special prayer services. The period from Easter Sunday to Ascension Day is often seen as a suitable time in this region for Catholic children to receive their first Holy Communion.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

✿ ST. JOHN'S DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: June 24

This day is the feast of St. John the Baptist. He was known as "the Baptist," because he baptized Jesus and other early Christians in the Jordan River. He was later imprisoned and beheaded for remaining

Fun Fact

The name *Maundy Thursday* may be linked to the Latin word *mandatum*, "command," because Jesus commanded his Apostles to observe the ritual now called the Eucharist.

devoted to Jesus' teachings. Special prayer services are held on this day in the Netherlands Antilles. Concerts featuring songs dedicated to St. John are also held in different parts of the country.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ ST. PETER'S DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: June 29

This day is the feast of St. Peter, who is believed to have been the first pope of the Catholic Church and is the patron saint of fishermen. Catholic churches hold special prayer services on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ ST. NICHOLAS DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: December 5

On the eve of the Feast of St. Nicholas, the children of the Netherlands Antilles put out a bucket of water and a shoe filled with hay to feed St. Nicholas's horse. It is believed that children who have been good throughout the year will awake to find their shoes filled with gifts the next morning. Children who were mischievous, on the other hand, will be put in a sack and carried away to Spain by a scary goblin named Zwarte Piet (Black Peter). Special church services are held in the saint's honor on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of celebration for Christians all over the world because it is the date selected by the Catholic Church to celebrate the birth of Jesus, whom they believe to be the Son of God. In the Netherlands Antilles Christmas celebrations begin on Christmas Eve (December 24), and last until Boxing Day (December 26). Christmas decorations are often prepared well in advance. A manger with figures of Joseph, Mary, and the baby Jesus, along with shepherds and the Three Wise Men, are placed in all churches and homes.

On December 24, Catholic families attend special Masses held before Christmas. They return home to have a meal during which they slice a cake specially made for the occasion. Then they gather around the Christmas tree and light candles. Children sing carols and are rewarded with small sums of money.

On Christmas Day the festivities continue with church services and special family meals where Christmas delicacies are served. Friends and relatives visit each other and exchange gifts. Children open presents left for them by Santa Claus.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ TUMBA FESTIVAL

Observed in: Curaçao

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Day before Carnival

Curaçao is famous for a kind of music called *tumba*, named after the conga drums. During the Tumba Festival, local bands perform new Carnival songs. During this annual event the best composition is selected, and the composer is crowned the king of Tumba for that year. The prize-winning Carnival song is played on Carnival the following day.

❁ BONAIRE SPRING HARVEST FESTIVAL

Observed in: Bonaire

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First week of April

The first week of April is set aside on the island of Bonaire to celebrate the Spring Harvest Festival. Farmers take this opportunity to showcase their produce. Dance, music, food, and good cheer are the highlights of this week's festivities. Visitors get to taste a variety of local cuisine, mainly made of sorghum. They also enjoy traditional music and dance.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ CURAÇAO SALSA FESTIVAL

Observed in: Curaçao

Observed by: General public

Observed in: Early August

The Salsa Festival held in Curaçao is a world-renowned international event. This is a two-day event. On the first day various dance and musical performances take place in the Curaçao Festival Center; on the second day, the festivities take place in the streets. These include live band performances, workshops, dance exhibits, and parties. This event also features salsa instructors from Puerto Rico, New York, Los Angeles, Amsterdam, and Miami.

Tumba

Tumba is one of the most important musical genres of Curaçao. This music is originally African, but the word *tumba* comes from a 17th-century Spanish dance. In an earlier time, *tumba* lyrics were famous for being scandalous in nature. For this reason, *tumba* music was played at parties but rarely sung.



Rites of Passage

✿ BIRTH

Fun Fact

Even though same-sex marriage is recognized in the Netherlands, it is illegal in the Netherlands Antilles.

The population of the Netherlands Antilles is predominantly Roman Catholic. For this reason a newly born child is baptized in the church according to Catholic tradition. The godparents are the child's spiritual guides and have some financial obligations toward the child as well. They are chosen months before the birth. On the day of the christening the family hosts a small party. The godmother often sponsors the party, while the godfather is supposed to give jewelry to the godmother. The dinner served later on this day is lavish. Goat soup, goat stew, rice, beets, and green peas are served.

✿ COMING OF AGE

The religious sacrament of the first Holy Communion is generally perceived as the coming of age rite in Catholic countries like the Netherlands Antilles. On this day the child in question is dressed in its best clothes and accompanied by its godparents to the church. During a special Mass, the child receives Holy Communion for the first time.

The preparations for this day start off well in advance. The house is repainted, and white curtains, draped in red and blue ribbons, are hung. A goat is fattened for the coming family feast. After the Mass, the communicant's family hosts a lavish party for friends and relatives. The child is seated on a small throne decorated with crepe paper. Different cakes and other delicacies, such as *lèter* (s-shaped peanut

cookies), *sunchi* (meringues), *panlefti* (sponge cake), and *tèrt* (pie) are served on this occasion.

✿ MARRIAGE

In earlier times slaves were not allowed to marry; so the right to marry was a symbol of social status in the Netherlands Antilles, and it is still a big affair there. The wedding ceremony normally takes place two years after a couple's engagement. In the interim both of their families save money for the function. The civil marriage takes place without much show, but the church wedding is elaborate. The bride's father and the groom's mother are the godparents of the wedding couple during the ceremony. The bride wears something old, something new, something borrowed, and something blue on her wedding evening.

The wedding reception has an air of cheerfulness and hospitality. There is a lot of food and drink, as well as singing and dancing on the occasion. The traditional wedding cake is cut, and various delicacies such as the *bolo pretu* (dark fruitcake) are served.

Further Reading

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~ New Zealand ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Oceania, in the South Pacific Ocean, southeast of Australia
Size	103,738 sq. mi.
Capital City	Wellington
Flag Description	New Zealand's flag is blue with the UK flag in the upper hoist-side quadrant. Four red five-pointed stars edged in white, representing the Southern Cross constellation, are centered in the outer half of the flag.
Independence	September 26, 1907 (from United Kingdom)
Population	4,035,461 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary democracy
Nationality	New Zealander
Major Ethnic Group(s)	White (European, 70%) Polynesian (Maori, 8%)
Major Language(s)	English; Maori (both official)
Major Religion(s)	Protestant (39%); None (26%); Unspecified (17%); Roman Catholic (12%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Waitangi Day, February 6; AnZAC Day, April 25; Queen's Birthday (June); Labor Day, October 28; Boxing Day, December 26

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

One of the last major land masses to be inhabited by human beings, New Zealand was discovered by navigators from Polynesia, who arrived in their canoes (*waka*) between 800 and 600 years ago to become the indigenous Maori culture.

The Maori adapted to eating the local marine resources, plants, and animals for food. They hunted the giant flightless moa (which was soon extinct) and ate the Polynesian rat (*kiore*) and sweet potato (*kumara*), which they brought with them.

Settlement of the Chatham Islands to the southeast of New Zealand produced the Moriori people, but it is uncertain whether they moved there from New Zealand or Polynesia.

It is thought that around 1350 a mass exodus of people from Kupe's home island of Hawaii headed for the region of New Zealand. The newcomers either overpowered or intermingled with the indigenous people, resulting in a new culture that was mainly hierarchical and based on ties of blood and kinship.

The first European to reach New Zealand was the Dutch explorer Abel Tasman (1603–59), in 1642; if he had plans, they were thwarted by hostile natives who killed and ate some of his crew members.

In 1769 British Captain James Cook (1728–79) circumnavigated the two main islands of New Zealand. His initial contact with the Maoris also proved unpleasant, but he was impressed by their bravery and fierce spirit. Realizing the potential of this newly found area, Cook grabbed it for the British crown before leaving for Australia. Between 1839 and 1841 the country was under the jurisdiction of New South Wales, Australia.

Since the influx of European settlers continued unabated, a policy was urgently required regarding land deals between the settlers (*pakeha*) and the Maori. In 1840 the Treaty of Waitangi was signed, with the Maori handing over the sovereignty of their land to the British in exchange for protection and guaranteed possession of their lands. But relations between the Maori and *pakeha* were soon estranged. The Northland War of 1844 disrupted the treaty, and by 1860 a war ensued between the two groups that continued for most of the

Moa

The descendants of the original ratites, moas were the tallest birds ever known in the world's history. Ratites were a group of early birds that lacked a ridge (keel) on their sternum (breast bone) to which wing muscles could be attached so the birds could fly. They proliferated and developed distinctively for 80 million years in splendid isolation in New Zealand until the arrival of humans. The moas' sole natural predator was the Haast's eagle (*Harpagornis moorei*), the largest eagle ever known, with a wing span of 10 feet and talons as big as a tiger's claws. After the arrival of human beings, the moas quickly ended up as food, and much of their habitat was destroyed by fire.

decade. By the late 19th century, however, there was a semblance of peace. The discovery of gold generated prosperity, and large-scale sheep farming helped to make New Zealand an efficient and self-reliant country.

During this period there were social changes and liberalization, including women's suffrage, social security, and the introduction of child-care services. New Zealand was involved, along with the then-Australian colonies, in a constitutional convention that took place in 1891 in Sydney. Its underlying purpose was to consider a constitution for the proposed federation between the two British colonies, but New Zealand lost interest in federating with Australia after this convention.

In 1907 New Zealand was given dominion status in the British Empire, and in 1931 it was granted autonomy. Full-fledged independence was proclaimed in 1947. The country's economy continued to prosper until the time of the global recession of the 1980s, when unemployment began to rise.

General elections are held every three years. Eight parties are represented in the House of Representatives, which since 1990s has been elected by a form of proportional representation called Mixed Member Proportional (MMP).

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

New Zealand consists of two major islands—North Island and South Island—plus several smaller ones including Stewart Island, which is often referred to as “third island.” North and South Islands are separated by the 20-mile-wide Cook Strait. To the north and east lies the Pacific Ocean, and between New Zealand and Australia is the Tasman Sea.

New Zealand is just about the size of Italy, the United Kingdom, or the state of Colorado in the United States.

Although less mountainous than South Island, North Island is volcanically active, with a central plateau. South Island has the high snow-covered mountain peaks and glaciers of the southern Alps, a mountain range running almost 310 miles that divides the island. The highest point is Mt. Cook on South Island (12,316 feet). Over 75 percent of New Zealand's terrain lies 656 feet above sea level.

New Zealand has a largely temperate climate and mild temperatures, moderately high rainfall, and unlimited sunshine throughout most of the country.



Two Maori men play a traditional musical instrument called a *putatara*, or a conch shell. (AP Photo/Tourism New Zealand)

The climate is dominated by two geographical features—the mountains and the sea. The extreme north has subtropical weather during summers while the inland alpine areas of the South Island can experience lows of 14°F in winter. Since New Zealand lies in the Southern Hemisphere, the average temperature decreases toward the south. The extreme north of the country has an average temperature of about 59°F, while the south has an average of 48°F. January and February are the warmest months of the year, and July is the coldest. New Zealand's average rainfall is high, between 24 and 59 inches, which is evenly spread throughout the year.

Between 80 and 100 million years ago, New Zealand drifted away from the massive super-continent of Gondwanaland into the South Pacific. This isolation led to the evolution and development of unique flora as well as fauna. Large forests and bushes supported a variety of bird life. As these birds evolved, their wings became vestigial since there were had no natural predators to fly away from, and many of the native birds became flightless. They include the Kakapo parrot, the kiwi, the endangered takahe (a member of the rail family), and the world's largest (now extinct) bird, the moa.

The other well-known native birds include the kea (native parrot), weka, *tui*, and *morepork* owl. The native tuatara, a living fossil, is a reptile with evolutionary links to the dinosaur. The tuatara is found mainly on islands around New Zealand's coast, the only beak-headed reptile left in the world. Every species of this reptile family, except the tuatara, died out around 65 million years ago. Tuatara can live for over 100 years and were once found throughout New Zealand. Now they can be found only on protected offshore islands. New Zealand has an abundance of marine life, and whale-watching and swimming with dolphins are two of New Zealand's highly popular tourist activities.

New Zealand's heavy rainfall and profuse sunlight produce a large variety of plant life including shrubs, a range of ferns, moss, and lichens, the native *rimu* and *totara*, the Kauri forests of the north and the beech forests and alpine tussock of the Southern Alps. The bright yellow flowers of the kowhai tree are a feast for the eyes. So is the *pobutukawa* tree, which bursts forth with scarlet flowers during the Christmas season, earning it the title of New Zealand's Christmas tree.

❁ ECONOMY

With the progress of the 20th century, the character of New Zealand's population began to undergo radical changes. In the early part of the century New Zealand's economy was largely dependent on agriculture and the export of primary produce. After World War II more and more people moved to the cities, and manufacturing and tertiary industries were established. In the 1970s large numbers of Pacific Island immigrants settled in New Zealand,

followed in the 1980s and 1990s by Asians and Europeans. These new arrivals contributed greatly to technological and economic change. During the last two decades New Zealanders have embraced the global economy and the latest technology.

New Zealanders are among the highest mobile phone and Internet users in the world. They are also readers of the most newspapers. The farming sector has diversified and embraced technology, making New Zealand one of the most productive and efficient agricultural producers in the world. The nation still has a sizable rural population, and farming continues to account for a lot of the country's exports. While its traditional exports are wool, meat, and dairy products, new products, including New Zealand venison (*cervena*), flowers, fruit, biotechnology, and wine now contribute substantially to its export revenues.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

New Zealand has a unique and dynamic lifestyle. The culture of its indigenous Maori people affects the language, the arts, and even the accents of all New Zealanders. The Maori are the indigenous people of New Zealand (Aotearoa). A bold and courageous race, they had voyaged thousands of miles across the vast uncharted oceans to reach these territories. In the process they had mastered the skills of using the stars and the ocean currents to develop a full-fledged navigation system. The Maori comprise 14 percent of the population.

Their language and culture has a major impact on all facets of New Zealand life. Traditional arts such as carving, weaving, group performance (*kapa haka*), oratory (*whaikorero*), and tattooing (*moko*) are

Fun Fact

Many historians believe that the first people to discover New Zealand were Kupe, a Polynesian navigator, and his wife Hine-te-aparangi who found it around 800 C.E. According to legend Hine-te-aparangi named it Aotearoa, which means "Land of the Long White Cloud."

Fun Fact

On a world map of 1645–46, the islands were labeled Zeelandia Nova, Nieuw Zeeland, perhaps to match New Holland, as Australia was then known.

Tane Mahuta

New Zealand's most famous tree is a member of the kauri species and is called *Tane mahuta*. (It is named after the Maori god of the forest.) The *Tane mahuta* stands over 167 feet high, has a girth of over 42 feet, and is believed to be more than 2,000 years old. Its location is on the west coast of Northland.

Fun Fact

Following the 1999 election, Helen Clark became the first woman elected prime minister of New Zealand.

practiced throughout the country. Maori culture also includes art, film, television, poetry, and theater. The Maori costume, called *kakahu*, is woven from the fibers of the flax plant. An ornament called a *tiki* is generally worn by men and women as a pendant around the neck. It is made of green stone or New Zealand jade and is in the shape of a fetus. The women also wear *mako*, or shark-tooth, earrings.

The European settlers who arrived in New Zealand at different points in time were also matchless in their bravery and their spirit of adventure. Since they lived in utmost isolation on these islands, braving all the natural elements, these New Zealanders gradually evolved as a hardworking and multi-skilled community. These qualities have contributed substantially to the national character of

Fun Fact

In the early 21st century popular films such as *Lord of the Rings* (based on J. R. R. Tolkien's three-volume work, first published in 1954–55) and *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (based on C. S. Lewis's book first published in 1950) were filmed in New Zealand because of its beauty, which director and New Zealander Peter Jackson would know about.

New Zealand. The qualities are amply evident in the present generation of young Kiwi (another name for New Zealanders) business executives, computer software professionals, filmmakers, fashion designers, and athletes.

In addition to New Zealand's official public holidays, there are also numerous provincial anniversary days to celebrate the founding or landing days of the first colonists of the various colonial provinces. The observance of such anniversary days can vary even within each province due to local custom, convenience, or the proximity of seasonal events or other holidays. The celebration of these holidays can also differ from the historical observance day and can vary by several weeks from the historic date of the events being commemorated.

Fun Fact

Although the Maori language Te Reo Maori had almost disappeared from use, it has begun to thrive once more because the government actively supports the use of the language in public schools and a Maori language television channel.

New Zealanders are the masterminds behind the tranquillizer gun, seismic "base" isolators (rubber and lead blocks that minimize earthquake damage), electric fences, the fastest motorbike in the world, freezer vacuum pumps, stamp vending machines, wide-toothed shearing combs, and the electronic gas pump. The idyllic environs of the islands of New Zealand

have lured many film directors from Hollywood (as well as Bollywood) to shoot scenes for their movies in these breathtaking and panoramic locales. This in turn has led to an increase in tourism.

A large number of New Zealanders enjoy all kinds of outdoor sports such as hiking, mountaineering, and kayaking. The world-famous adventurer and mountaineer Sir Edmund Hillary (b. 1919), who conquered Mt. Everest, the world's highest mountain, in 1953, was a New Zealander.

❁ CUISINE

The cuisine of New Zealand is a fine blend of British influences and native Maori dishes. A vast range of native fruits and vegetables are available in New Zealand, including the kiwifruit and the kumara, a root vegetable resembling a sweet potato. Fish and shellfish are plentiful, and New Zealanders who have a penchant for fish also enjoy muttonbird, a native bird that tastes like fish. A Maori specialty is the *hangi*, a pit in which meat or fish are cooked with vegetables. The pavlova, a meringue filled with whipped cream and fresh fruit, named in honor of the world-famous Russian ballet dancer Anna Pavlova, is a popular dessert invented in New Zealand.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, January 1 is celebrated as New Year's Day throughout the world. In New Zealand New Year's falls in midsummer (in contrast to countries in the Northern Hemisphere, which are in the grip of winter during this part of the year). Since this is a part of the holiday season (just after Christmas), people tend to go to the beaches with their families to swim, surf, or simply relax. This is an official holiday in New Zealand.

❁ WAITANGI DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 6

Waitangi Day commemorates the signing of a historic treaty at Waitangi in 1840 by a group of Maori chiefs and the British government, which was represented by Lt. Gov. Hobson. The treaty has never been officially ratified by the New Zealand Parliament (although it did pass a Treaty of Waitangi Act in 1975 that sought to honor the terms of the agreement) and has been a perpetual source of discontent and discord so far as land rights are concerned. The importance of

this historic document lies in the fact that it seeks to clarify the rights of the Maori people and the European settlers. Moreover it helped pave the way to nationhood for the people of New Zealand.

On this day the New Zealand navy raises the New Zealand flag, Union Jack, and White Ensign on the flagstaff in the treaty grounds. The other ceremonies held during the day include a church service and dancing and singing shows. Several *waka* and a navy ship also reenact Hobson's landing to sign the treaty. The day closes with the flags being lowered by the navy in a traditional ceremony. During recent times communities throughout New Zealand have taken to celebrating Waitangi Day in a number of ways including public concerts and festivals. This is an official holiday in New Zealand.

❁ ANZAC DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 25

On this day every year New Zealanders observe ANZAC Day; ANZAC is an acronym for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. The name was established in 1914 (during World War I) to represent the grouping of the Australian Imperial Force and New Zealand Expeditionary Force stationed in Egypt. On April 25, 1915, the ANZACs began their combat at Gallipoli, located off the Aegean Sea in Turkey, where hundreds of ANZAC soldiers were killed or wounded. This day is celebrated by placing floral wreaths at the heroes' memorials. Marches by war veterans are held in the capital as well as other cities and towns. The ANZAC Day parade from each state capital is televised live with commentary. This is also an official holiday and all offices, businesses, and educational institutions are closed.

❁ QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: First Monday in June

This holiday celebrates the birthday of Queen Elizabeth II (b. 1926), who rules Australia and New Zealand as well as Great Britain and Ireland. The Queen's Birthday is not celebrated on the actual date in New Zealand (or Australia) because it falls too close to ANZAC Day (four days later) and the long Easter weekend. Because New Zealand's climate tends to be colder than Australia's, this holiday usually opens the country's winter season.

On the occasion of the Queen's Birthday, New Zealanders enjoy the extended weekend in a variety of ways. An honors list is released on the Queen's Birthday. People who have contributed in significant ways to New Zealand are recognized and honored with various titles such as "knight" and "dame" and with awards like the Queen's Service Medal (QSM) and the Queen's Service Order (QSO), among others.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 28

Labor Day, also called Eight-Hour Day in New Zealand, commemorates the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. A unique feature of New Zealand is that its Labor Day celebrations take place in October instead of the usual observance on May. 1

The first Labor Day in New Zealand was celebrated on October 28, 1890, when crowds of trade union members and supporters attended parades in the main centers across New Zealand. Government employees were given the day off to attend. It celebrated the struggle for an eight-hour working day, a right that New Zealand workers were among the first in the world to claim, when in 1840 Samuel Parnell (a carpenter) had won an eight-hour day in Wellington. Nowadays, New Zealanders enjoy an extra day off from work and a nice long weekend for picnics and recreational activities.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 26

Since New Zealand was a part of the British Empire, some of its customs have been incorporated in local traditions and culture. The origins of this holiday are found in an ancient practice (particularly among the British) of giving cash or durable goods to those of the lower classes the day after Christmas. While gifts among equals were exchanged on or before Christmas Day, servants were given gifts the day after. New Zealanders celebrate this day with their loved ones, generally by taking part in outdoor activities, since the holiday occurs during the peak of the summer season.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY

Religious Holidays

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

This day commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus, a somber, solemn occasion for Christians all over the world. It falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent (an

Fun Fact

North Island's tallest mountain, Mt. Ruapehu, is an active cone volcano almost 9,177 feet high.

Fun Fact

The kiwi lays large eggs equal to about 20 percent of its body weight!

Fun Fact

Among the early settlers of New Zealand, there were many people from Scotland, with the result that New Zealand may have more bagpipe bands than Scotland.

austere season of fasting and penitence). In New Zealand on Good Friday, all the shops and public establishments are closed. Prayer services are held in churches, which also include a reenactment of Jesus' last journey to Golgotha.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a Christian feast that celebrates belief in Jesus' Resurrection from the dead. It is preceded by Lent, a 40-day period of austerity and atonement. In New Zealand people abstain from eating rich foods during Lent.

The actual Easter ceremonies commence on the night of Holy Saturday. There is a special service held in the churches on Easter Sunday. People light large candles (symbolizing hope) and pass them from hand to hand. In New Zealand it is also customary to eat chocolate eggs; the parents hide them in their houses or their gardens for the children to find after the Easter services are over. People also enjoy a special cake called *simnel*, prepared with dried fruits and whisky or brandy.

A spirit of festivity, joy, gaiety, and mirth carries over to Easter Monday. Beginning with Good Friday (the Friday before Easter) and continuing up to the following Tuesday, New Zealanders enjoy a five-day holiday. Therefore they sometimes use this time for traveling or spend it at their family homes or farms in the countryside.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a time of great joy for Christians all over the world. It celebrates the birth of Jesus, whom they believe was the Son of God. Since people from the Northern Hemisphere now live in New Zealand, it has become a tradition to celebrate Christmas twice—once on December 25 and again in July, which is mid-winter.

In New Zealand there is a tree known as a Christmas tree (also called a *pobutokawa*) that bursts into blossom during the Christmas season. Since Christmas in New Zealand occurs in summer, the tradition of snow and ice is conspicuous by its absence. That, however, does not deter the lovable Santa Claus from visiting homes in the cities and towns. Smaller towns and suburban areas have Santa parades, where community groups proudly display brightly decorated floats. Many people in New Zealand adhere to the English traditions of eating

turkey and plum pudding, which are often accompanied by cold salads. Many times the Christmas dinner is cooked on a barbecue outside. Christmas in New Zealand is incomplete without the pavlova, a dessert prepared with whipped egg whites and sugar cooked in a slow, low-temperature oven and then decorated with fruit, such as kiwifruit and strawberries, and piled high with whipped cream.

For many people in New Zealand, this is also an occasion to prepare the traditional *hangi*. A big hole in the ground is lined with heat-resistant rocks. Then covered baskets containing food are placed on the rocks and a fire is lit nearby. Next the hole is covered so that the foodstuffs cook underground. The *hangi* is generally served in the late afternoon or early evening. After the meal the assembled diners sit around and sing carols as the shadows of the evening lengthen.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ SOUTHLAND GARDEN FESTIVAL

Observed in: Southland

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February

The salubrious climate of this island, its fertile soil, and profusion of sunlight all help to create a richness and brilliance in the colors of the many plants that flourish in these conditions. The most common flowering plants that grow here in abundance include peonies, roses, hydrangeas, rhododendrons, and magnolias, to name a few. People from various parts of the country flock to Southland to feast their eyes on the endless varieties of blossoms that adorn both private and public gardens.

Rites of Passage

❁ DEATH

Among the Maoris the *tangi*, or *tangihanga*, includes the funeral rites accorded a person before the body is finally interred. They believe that the *tupapaku* (the corpse) should not be left on its own at any time following death, so people will gather to take the *tupapaku* to the community meeting ground used for social occasions (*marae*) or place it where it can be looked after until it can be buried. All relatives, friends, and acquaintances arriving for a *tangi* have to undergo the routine rituals of call of welcome (*karanga*) and greeting (*mibi*). The mourners hold small twigs of green leaves in their hands, a symbol of sorrow and grief.

The coffin is left open, and the people respectfully touch the *tupapaku*. Those who have assembled directly address the *tupapaku* and deliver speeches, firmly convinced that the spirit does not leave the vicinity of the body until it has been buried. The significance of the *tangi* held at the *marae* is to seek fulfillment of the *wairua*, or spiritual being, of the Maori. It is believed that those who have died always hover around the *marae*; moreover those who have died recently are placed in the care of those who died a long time ago. It is therefore imperative that all the dead (new or old) be brought together to be greeted, respected, and given a proper farewell. Some of the people remain at the *tangi* for a few hours while others may remain overnight and some others for a couple of days. The Maori establish the cemeteries or burial places (*urupa*) in such a way that each family can take care of the place where their loved ones have been buried. A visit to the *urupa* is important if one is returning home after a long absence to reinforce family ties and bonds. At the *urupa*, places are reserved for the family members in terms of their hierarchy. On leaving the *urupa*, its sanctity or sacredness (*tapu*) is to be removed by washing one's

hands in water. Many *urupa* have containers of water placed outside their gates for this purpose. In case there is no water available, home-cooked bread (*rewana*) is crumbled and used to "wash away" any traces of the *tapu*. This symbolic action restores the state of *noa*, or freedom to socialize normally with other people.

Further Reading

Claudia Bell and Steve Matthewman, eds., *Cultural Studies in Aotearoa New Zealand: Identity, Space, and Place* (Oxford U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2004); Wiremu Cooper, et al., *Taonga Maori: Treasures of the New Zealand Maori People* (Sydney, N.S.W., Australia: Australian Museum, 1989); Richard Dawson, *The Treaty of Waitangi and the Control of Language* (Wellington, N.Z.: Institute of Policy Studies, Victoria University of Wellington, 2001); Geoff Lealand, *A Foreign Egg in Our Nest?: American Popular Culture in New Zealand* (Wellington, N.Z.: Victoria University Press, 1988); Robert Patman and Chris Rudd, eds., *Sovereignty under Siege?: Globalization and New Zealand* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2005).

☺ Nicaragua ☺

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Central America, bordering both the Caribbean Sea and the north Pacific Ocean, between Costa Rica and Honduras
Size	49,998 sq. mi.
Capital City	Managua
Flag Description	Nicaragua's flag has three equal horizontal bands of blue (top), white, and blue, with the national coat of arms centered in the white band; the coat of arms features a triangle encircled by the words República de Nicaragua on the top and America Central on the bottom.
Independence	September 15, 1821 (from Spain)
Population	5,465,100 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Nicaraguan
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Mestizo (mixed Amerindian and Caucasian, 69%)
Major Language(s)	Spanish (official; 98%); English and indigenous languages are spoken on the Atlantic coast
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (73%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Liberation Day, July 19; Battle of San Jacinto Day, September 14; Independence Day, September 15

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

The earliest traces of human habitation in Nicaragua are the 10,000-year-old footprints preserved under layers of volcanic ash—*huellas de Acabualinca*—of people and animals in the vicinity of Lago de Managua (Lake Managua). Around the 10th century C.E. (some 9,000 years later) Aztecs from Mexico migrated to Nicaragua's Pacific lowlands. When the Aztecs again moved south during the 15th century to establish a trading colony, much of Aztec culture was adopted by the indigenous groups. The country probably takes its name from Nicarao, the leader of an indigenous community that inhabited the shores of Lake Nicaragua. He was defeated in 1522 by Spanish invaders.

In 1524 conquistador Francisco Hernández de Córdoba (d. 1526) founded the first Spanish permanent settlements in the region, including two of Nicaragua's principal towns—

Granada, on Lake Nicaragua, and León, east of Lake Managua. Settled as a colony of Spain in the 1520s, Nicaragua became a part of the Mexican Empire, then gained its independence as a part of the United Provinces of Central America in 1821, and finally emerged as an independent republic in 1838.

Much of Nicaragua's politics since independence has been characterized by a rivalry between the liberal elites of León and the conservative elites of Granada. In 1855 the liberals invited William Walker (1824–60), a military adventurer from Tennessee intent on taking over Latin American territory, to help seize power from the conservatives based. Walker, a proslavery maverick from the U.S. Confederacy, and his band of mercenaries took Granada easily, and he proclaimed himself president of Nicaragua. One of his first moves was to institutionalize slavery. He was soon overthrown and exiled from the country. Walker, however, showed great tenacity by repeatedly trying to invade the country; his efforts set a precedent for ongoing U.S. interference in Nicaragua's affairs.

On November 18, 1909, U.S. warships were sent to the area after 500 revolutionaries (including two Americans) were executed by order of President José Santos Zelaya (1853–1919). The United States justified its intervention by claiming it essential to protect the lives of U.S. nationals and their property, and U.S. Marines occupied Nicaragua until 1933. From 1927 until 1933, liberal General Augusto César Sandino (1895–1934) led a sustained guerrilla war, first against the conservative regime and subsequently against the U.S. marines as well.

When the Americans left in 1933, they set up the Guardia, a combined military and police force trained and equipped by the United States and designed to be loyal to U.S. interests. In 1934 General Somoza (1896–1956), head of the U.S.-trained National Guard, engineered the assassination of Sandino and, after fraudulent elections, became the president in 1937. Somoza ruled Nicaragua as a dictator for the next 20 years, amassing huge personal wealth and landholdings nearly the size of El Salvador. Although General Somoza was shot dead in 1956, his sons upheld the regime in a Somoza dynasty until 1979.

Two groups were set up to counter the regime: the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN), also known as the Sandinistas, and the Democratic Union of Liberation (UDELA), led by Pedro Joaquín Chamorro (1924–78), publisher of *La Prensa*, a newspaper critical of the dictatorship. In 1990 the Sandinistas, who seized power through a violent rebellion, voluntarily handed over the power to Chamorro's widow, the democratically elected Violeta Chamorro (b. 1929) and peacefully relinquished power. Violeta Chamorro's failure to revive the economy and her increasing reliance on Sandinista support, led to U.S. threats to withhold aid. The ex-mayor of Managua, anticommunist Liberal Alliance candidate Arnoldo Alemán (b. 1946) was sworn in as president on January 10, 1997.

In January 2000 the National Assembly approved a series of amendments to the constitution that appeared to concentrate power in the hands of the two largest political parties. Drafted by the Liberal Party and the Sandinistas, the amendments limit seats in the National Assembly to candidates whose parties receive at least 4 percent of the vote. The two largest parties also won the power to appoint members of the previously independent Supreme Electoral Council, which supervises voter registration and elections. In the 2001 elections Liberal Party candidate Enrique Bolaños Geyer (b. 1928) was elected president, defeating Daniel Ortega (b. 1945), who ran as the Sandinista candidate. In the National Assembly the Liberal Party won a majority of seats, followed closely by the Sandinistas.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Nicaragua is the largest country in Central America. Geographically it boasts the largest freshwater lake in Central America, the Lago de Nicaragua. The

country's terrain comprises extensive Atlantic coastal plains rising to central interior mountains and narrow Pacific coastal plains interrupted by volcanoes. The climate is tropical in the lowlands and relatively cooler in the highlands. Nicaragua frequently experiences natural catastrophes such as severe earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and landslides; it is extremely vulnerable to hurricanes.

❁ ECONOMY

Nicaragua is one of the poorest countries in the Northern Hemisphere. Low per-capita income, massive unemployment, and huge external debts are some of the country's chronic problems, while distribution of income is among the most unequal in the world. While the country has made progress toward macroeconomic stability over the past few years, the annual growth has been far too low to meet the country's needs, but the government has undertaken significant economic reforms expected to help the country qualify for more than \$4 billion in debt relief. Donor nations have made aid conditional on the openness of government financial operations, the alleviation of poverty, and human rights.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

In Nicaragua the majority of people, including mestizos, Europeans, and mulattoes, share a Hispanic heritage. Only a small percentage of the population, living on the Caribbean coast, is non-Spanish-speaking and non-Catholic. Nicaraguans are much more divided by the lingering effects of the Sandinista Revolution of 1979 and the subsequent civil war of the 1980s than by their ethnic origins. Peace has been restored, but the people continue to grapple with their national identity. The majority of Nicaraguans are Catholics, and their religious calendar features many festive parades honoring various local patron saints.

As with many Central American countries, the coastal culture of the Caribbean lowlands varies from that of the more westerly, majority groups. In Nicaragua the coast is inhabited by the descendants of Africans and indigenous peoples (Miskito, Rama, and Sumu), who in the past preferred to deal with the British rather than the Spanish. These indigenous groups, dominated by the Miskito, are clustered near the northern border with Honduras. Blacks are concentrated in the southeastern town of Bluefields, where their cultural traditions are manifest in such celebrations as Mayo Ya, which combines English Maypole traditions with Caribbean folklore and African music and dance. Bluefields is also home to a lively reggae community.

❁ CUISINE

A typical Nicaraguan meal consists of eggs or meat, beans and rice, salad (cabbage and tomatoes), tor-

tillas, and seasonal fruits. The most common Nicaraguan food is *gallo pinto*, a blend of rice and beans, with the stock from the beans used to color the rice. Other traditional dishes include *bajo* (a mix of beef, green and ripe plantains, and yucca, or cassava) and *vigorón* (yucca served with fried pork skins and coleslaw). Street vendors sell drinks like *tiste*, made from cacao and corn, and *posol con leche*, a corn-and-milk drink. Nicaragua claims to have the best beer and rum in Central America.

Public/Legal Holidays

✿ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

On this day in Nicaragua, people say farewell to the old year with some sadness, renewing their resolutions to give up bad habits and adopt good ones. People mainly celebrate the day in the company of friends and family.

✿ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

Labor Day, also called May Day or Workers' Day, is an annual holiday that pays tribute to the workers and laborers for their contributions to the socioeconomic development of the country. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world, and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

In Nicaragua this day is marked by parades in which local politicians often participate. Labor unions also organize speeches and rallies. Schools, government offices, and businesses remain closed on this day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

✿ LIBERATION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 19

Liberation Day, or Day of National Liberation, is observed in remembrance of the 1979 uprising when Nicaraguans rebelled against the dictator Anastasio Somoza. On this day the streets are beautifully decorated and a festive atmosphere prevails. Colorful parades by costumed marchers, spectacular floats, music, and fireworks displays are organized on this occasion.

✿ BATTLE OF SAN JACINTO DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: September 14

San Jacinto Hacienda came to prominence on September 14, 1856, when it was the site of an historic battle. In this international conflict Nicaragua's General José Dolores Estrada bravely led his men against the powerful forces of William Walker and his mercenaries (from the United States), who sought to take over Nicaragua (and ultimately all of Central America). The triumph of the Nicaraguan soldiers in this battle signaled Walker's impending defeat and is celebrated every year as a national holiday. The battle's heroes and brave soldiers are honored and remembered on this day. Students also participate in parades.

✿ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: September 15

This date commemorates the independence of all of the countries of Central America (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica) from Spain in 1821. It was not until 1838 that Nicaragua achieved true independence, emerging as an independent sovereign nation (no longer part of a federation). This significant day is marked by parades of schoolchildren, cultural events, beauty pageants, and agricultural exhibitions.

Religious Holidays

✿ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Last Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, commemorating the last week of Jesus' mortal life. Jesus was the prophet of Christianity, and Christians believe him to be the second person of the Holy Trinity (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). The day is as much about the beginning of Jesus' journey to the Cross as it is about his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. His arrival in Jerusalem was indeed the way to the Cross.

After two of his disciples had fetched a donkey for him to ride, they placed their clothes on it to make a comfortable seat. The disciples then cut branches and covered the path, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the words of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. People welcomed him by waving palm and olive branches, and strewing garments and branches on the road. There were different perceptions at work: Jesus rode in on a donkey, the humble entry of a peaceful nature by a spiritual king; the people of Jerusalem

welcomed him with palm and olive branches and the laying of garments in his path because they wanted a worldly king to defeat the Romans.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

The rituals observed on Maundy Thursday are based on a sequence of events supposed to have occurred during Jesus' last meal with his Apostles. First Jesus washed their feet; then he announced that he had been betrayed by one of them. The traitor Judas left the table. Finally Jesus instituted the Eucharist—a ritual of consuming bread and wine as symbols of his body and blood, also referred to as Communion in Christian churches. In the Roman Catholic Church Maundy Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist, the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week, and gives priests an opportunity to prepare for the many rituals associated with Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, alternatively known as Mourning Friday, Sorrowful Friday, or Holy Friday, is a somber day for Roman Catholics and other Christians all over the world and is observed on the Friday before Easter. It commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus more than 2,000 years ago. Some Nicaraguans observe a fast from Ash Wednesday (first day of Lent) for 40 days up to Good Friday and a partial fast from then until Easter. Some fast only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Special prayer services are held on this day with readings from the Gospel narrating the events leading up to the Crucifixion. In Nicaragua every church holds a Procession of the Carpets. A path of elaborately crafted "carpets" made from multicolored sawdust is laid out for the procession, which symbolizes Jesus' path to Calvary. This day is also a national holiday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Saturday before Easter

Holy Saturday is the day Jesus was laid in the tomb and the day before he rose from the dead on Easter

Sunday. This was the Jewish Sabbath (the Jewish day of rest is Saturday). It is also regarded as the second Sabbath after Creation. The final day of Holy Week, which begins with Palm Sunday and includes Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, it marks the threshold between death and resurrection, and is a day of silence and contemplation for devout Catholics.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection. For this reason, it is sometimes known as Resurrection Day. This day is of utmost importance because the fundamental teaching of Christianity is that Jesus, through his death, freed all his believers from the penalty of sin. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. On Easter families gather to celebrate. They often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to offer prayers. Easter eggs have become associated with the festival because they are symbols of rebirth and regeneration taken from the ancient pagan spring festivals.

It is a day for wonderful celebrations throughout Nicaragua. Churches celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus with fireworks and joyous processions. During this time of the year people across Nicaragua tend to pack up and head for the beaches. This is also a national holiday.

The first Monday after Lent is celebrated as Easter Monday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: December 7–8

The celebration of the Immaculate Conception, called La Gritería or La Purísima in Nicaragua, is one of the most important holidays in Nicaragua. It is a day dedicated to Mary, mother of Jesus, also known as the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception. In honor of Mary, the Catholic Nicaraguans observe holidays on both December 7 and 8. Families build altars inside their homes, close to the entrance, so that when the door is left open the altar is visible from the street. Guests are invited to come in and worship at the altar, and they are offered sweets made from sugarcane.

An especially large-scale celebration takes place in León, attended by Catholics

Fun Fact

The adoration of the Blessed Virgin Mary is an ancient Catholic tradition, but Nicaragua is one of the few countries in the world that continues to practice it.

from all over Central America. After an evening prayer the León cathedral bells ring, and people set off fireworks. Street performers regale the crowds of spectators, and parties continue all night.

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 25

In Nicaragua Christmas Day is celebrated enthusiastically with dining, fireworks displays, and much dancing. Streets are colorfully decorated and loudspeakers broadcast Christmas carols. People decorate Christmas trees in their homes. This is also a national holiday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ SANTO DOMINGO DAY

Observed in: Managua
Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: August 1

Santo Domingo Day, also called St. Dominic's Day, is a two-day celebration held in honor of St. Dominic, the patron saint of Managua. The decorated statue of Santo Domingo is taken out from Las Sierritas de Santo Domingo Church in a procession followed by worshippers and ornately adorned purebred horses. The streets along the procession route are lined with white and yellow flags symbolizing the Vatican (where the pope resides). Crowds of people follow the statue bearers, shouting praise of their patron saint. The statue is placed in a small boat adorned with colorful flowers—even though there are no waterways along the procession route—so that the tiny statue can symbolically “sail” through the city. Finally the ceremonies culminate in bursts of firecrackers. This is also a national holiday.



A woman covered in red coloring attends a celebration in honor of the patron saint of Managua, Santo Domingo de Guzman, in Managua on August 1. (AP Photo/Esteban Felix)

❁ LAS FIESTAS DE SAN JERÓNIMO

Observed in: Masaya, León, Bluefields
Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: September–December

This festival honors San Jerónimo, or St. Jerome (340/2–420), the patron saint of Masaya. The festiv-

Masaya Volcano

The Masaya Volcano, called Popogatepe, which means the “mountain that burns” in the language of the indigenous Chorotega tribe, is the most active volcano in the area. Before the arrival of the conquistadors, the volcano was worshipped by the Chorotega, who believed its eruptions were signs of the Gods' anger. To appease the gods they often sacrificed small children and young women. When the Spaniards arrived, they named the volcano “La Boca del Infierno,” or “The Mouth of Hell.” Then they proceeded to plant a cross on the crater's lip, “La Cruz de Bobadilla” (after Father Francisco Bobadilla) in order to exorcise the devil.

Masaya is an unusual basaltic volcano in that it has had explosive eruptions. Its eruption in 4550 B.C.E. was one of the biggest on Earth in the last 10,000 years. Since the arrival of the Spanish, Masaya has erupted at least 19 times. The most recent eruption was in 1993. Pyroclastic eruptions have constructed three main cones: Masaya, Nindiri, and Santiago. Santiago was formed in 1850–53. Unlike the strato-volcanoes that characterize subduction zones, Masaya has a shieldlike structure. Sometimes the volcano emits large amounts of sulfur dioxide gas: In 1981 the Santiago crater was releasing 500,000 tons of sulfur dioxide a year.

In 1979 Masaya became Nicaragua's first national park (Parque Nacional Volcan Masaya).

ities, beginning on September 20 and ending the first week of December, last 80 days. In Masaya the celebration commences with el Día de la Bajada, the day when the statue of the saint is brought down from the church altar into town. The tremulous sound of the marimba, the rhythmic bands known as *chicheros*, the lavish flower arrangements, the ecstatic worshippers, and the traditional dances such as El Torovenado and the Noche de Ahuizotes are all part of the festivities honoring San Jerónimo in Masaya.

In León cathedral parishioners carry a baroque image of the saint to the Church of St. John the Baptist. People celebrate with music, dance, and food. Because the image of San Jerónimo that is kept in the Catholic Church in Bluefields is not taken out in procession as in Masaya, families who possess figurines of the saint carry it into the streets as part of their celebration.

❁ TOROVENADO DEL PUEBLO

Observed in: Masaya

Observed on: October 22

The Torovenado dance uses masks and costumes representing farm animals that are now commonly found in the Americas, though they were introduced by Europeans. Since these dances are organized almost exclusively during religious festivals, many of the participants “pay tribute” (*pagando promesas*) to the Virgin Mary, the patron saint of the locality, for fulfillment of their wishes.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

The baptism ceremony for the newborn is of utmost importance in Nicaragua. When an infant is baptized, the parents choose a *madrina* (godmother) and *padrino* (godfather) for their child. Though this practice is common among Roman Catholics around the world, in Nicaragua it assumes greater social significance because the godparents are responsible for the baptism ceremony and the festivities that follow. They are also expected to concern themselves with the well-being of the child throughout his or her life.

❁ DEATH

In Nicaragua a person is buried within a day of his or her death. The family gathers together to mourn, and branches of trees with flowers on them are laid around the door of the house. Other rituals include a novena for the Catholic deceased and, of course, the funeral ceremony. The novena—a prayer lasting nine consecutive days—is usually performed at home. An altar is built in the house on which a photograph of the deceased is placed. With offerings of

flowers, candles, and memorabilia, it often remains there for a month or so. Special prayer ceremonies are held a month, and then again a year, after the individual's demise.

Further Reading

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Fun Fact

Francisco de Bobadilla was appointed in 1499 to succeed Christopher Columbus as the governor of Spain's new territories in the Americas. When he arrived in 1500, de Bobadilla confirmed the accusations of mismanagement against Columbus and sent him back to Spain. However, when de Bobadilla was returning to Spain, his ship was caught in a hurricane, and he drowned.

Animal Power

In certain traditional Nicaraguan dances, performers dress as animals such as horses, pigs, and mythical creatures. Significantly the animals represented are not native to Nicaragua but were introduced into the country by Spaniards; the choice of animals symbolizes Spanish colonial power. The dancers wear pink-colored masks to look like Europeans, rounding out the satire of the European conquerors.

The Torovenado (bull-deer dance) characters powerfully depict the diverse segments of Nicaraguan colonial society. Originally the music that accompanied the dances was a combination of drumbeats and whistles. Torovenado is a melding of native traditions (drums and whistles) and the imported culture (European-inspired costumes). The marimba is currently the main instrument used in the dances.

~ Niger ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Western Africa interior, southeast of Algeria
Size	489,191 sq. mi.
Capital City	Niamey
Flag Description	The flag of the Republic of Niger is horizontally divided into three equal parts of orange (top), white (middle), and green (bottom). The center of the flag has a small orange disk symbolizing the sun.
Independence	August 3, 1960 (from France)
Population	11,665,937 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Nigerien
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Black (Hausa, 56%; Djerma, 22%)
Major Language(s)	French (official); Hausa; Djerma
Major Religion(s)	Islam (80%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; National Concord Day, April 24; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day, August 3; Republic Day, December 18

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Archaeological excavations have amassed considerable evidence that about 600,000 years ago humans inhabited what is now the desolate Sahara of northern Niger. Because of its interior location, Niger was an important economic link along the lucrative trans-Saharan trade route that linked the Saharan regions to the Middle East, making it a bone of contention among many rival empires; the empires of the Songhai, Mali, Gao, and Kanem-Bornu, as well as a number of Hausa states, have claimed control over portions of the area during its long history.

The Kanem-Bornu Empire was the first recognized empire to rule the region between the 10th and 13th centuries. Around the 14th century, the Hausa clan began migrating from Nigeria to Niger and established their settlements in the southeastern parts of the country. In the 16th century the Djermses, who were relatives of the Songhai, also began settling in the region; the Songhai were the dominant ethnic

group of the Songhai Empire. The Djermses established their supremacy over the bend of the Niger River where Niger and Burkina Faso are now situated. In the 19th century the Fulani entered Niger and claimed most of the Hausa colonies and states. This led to constant conflict between the Hausa and the Fulani, since both wanted to control the lucrative Niger. Over a period of time, however, the nomadic Tuareg, who were mainly traders and merchants, became the dominant population of Niger. They sided with the Hausa states and helped them resist the Fulani Empire. During the rule of the various empires, Niger became an important player in the slave trade. The region's rulers catered to the demand of the market, supplying slaves in large numbers.

The first contacts with the Europeans came in the 19th century when two explorers Mungo Park (British; 1771–1806) and Heinrich Barth (German; 1821–65) were searching for the mouth of the Niger River. Around the same time the French established a foothold in the region because they hoped to share in the flourishing slave trade. In 1896, using both force and diplomacy, the French began the long and ultimately successful process of establishing their control in Niger. There was intense resistance from the local ethnic

groups, especially the desert Tuareg, who led violent uprisings against growing French dominance. It was only in 1922 that the French forces managed to silence these voices of dissent, and Niger was officially declared a French colony. A French governor was appointed to look after the administrative matters of the region.

In 1946 the French government conferred French citizenship on the inhabitants of Niger and began delegating powers to the local people. On December 4, 1958, Niger was granted autonomous status within the French Overseas Community. Hamani Diori (1916–89), a prominent Niger politician, was sworn in as the first prime minister of Niger.

But the Nigerien people wanted more than just autonomy and favored complete independence from French rule. As a result on August 3, 1960, Niger relinquished its membership in the French Community and declared its independence. After independence Hamani Diori was sworn in as the first president of independent Niger. He administered the country through a single-party civilian regime from 1960 until 1974.

In the early 1970s Niger was severely affected by droughts, which crippled the economy. Also around 1974, reports of widespread corruption in the government started surfacing. In 1974 a successful military coup, led by Colonel Seyni Kountché (1931–87), led to the ouster of the Diori regime. Kountché became president of Niger and ruled the nation with the help of a small group of trusted military officers. During his regime all political parties were banned, and any voices of dissent against his autocratic rule met with a gruesome fate. During Kountché's tenure the people of Niger suffered untold human rights violations.

Kountché remained the president of the country until his death in 1987. He was succeeded by his cousin and chief of staff Colonel Ali Saibou (b. 1940), who was more liberal than he. Immediately after assuming power, Saibou released all political prisoners and liberalized the laws and policies of Niger. However, his reluctance to install a multiparty democracy in Niger led to nationwide protests and demonstrations. In 1990 Saibou, yielding to public demand, convened a national conference in July 1991 to decide the framework of a new constitution as well as the date for holding free and fair elections in the country.

In 1993 the first multiparty democratic elections were held in Niger. Saibou was defeated, and a coalition government came to power. Mahamane Ousmane (b. 1950), a leading Nigerien politician, was sworn in as the first democratically elected president of Niger. Disagreements within the coalition that brought him to power led to the dissolution of the legislative government in 1994, but Ousmane continued to serve as president. After fresh legislative elections were held, Hama Amadou (b. 1950) was chosen prime minister.

Around the same time, there were growing problems with the nomadic Tuareg and Toubou

groups that had rebelled against the Niger government in 1991. The Tuareg and Toubou had been severely affected by the droughts of the 1970s, as well as by the devastating drought of 1985, which killed a large number of their livestock. They blamed the government for treating them unfairly, neglecting their condition, and not providing them with central government resources for development purposes. They decided to unify all Tuareg in Mali and Niger to form an independent state of Tuareg. However, in April 1995, a peace agreement was signed between all warring Tuareg and Toubou groups and the government of Niger.

On January 27, 1996, Colonel Ibrahim Baré Maïnassara (1949–99) led a successful coup against the government of Niger. This led to the ousters of President Ousmane and Prime Minister Hamadou. In June 1996, Maïnassara ordered new presidential elections in which he and Ousmane competed, along with two other candidates. However, before the results could be declared, Maïnassara dissolved the national electoral committee and established a new one that declared him the winner.

The economy of the country was in trouble, and despite an international embargo on Libya Maïnassara asked Libya for funds to aid in redevelopment. On the domestic front his regime resorted to ruthless means to suppress the opposition parties and political leaders. Journalists were brutally beaten, and independent media offices that voiced concerns over his policies were looted and destroyed.

In April 1999, Major Daouda Malam Wanké (d. 2004) led a successful coup against Maïnassara. In October and November 1999 fresh legislative and presidential elections were held that were deemed free and fair by a committee of international observers. A coalition government, headed by Tandja Mamadou (b. 1938), a prominent Nigerien politician, was voted into power.

Since 1999 Niger has been politically stable, but the government of President Mamadou has been faced with the daunting task of reviving Niger's failing economy. Niger also came under criticism when the United Kingdom and the United States alleged that Iraq wanted to buy "yellowcake," enriched uranium, from Niger in order to build nuclear weapons. This was presented as proof that Iraq was building up its nuclear program to justify the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in April 2003, though the charges, based on a forged document, were shown to be fraudulent.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Niger lies in western Africa's Sahara region. It is almost twice as large as the U.S. state of Texas, or about four-fifths the size of Alaska. Mali, Algeria, Libya, Chad, Nigeria, Benin, and Burkina Faso surround Niger. Niger's land is fertile only in patches; the arable land is concentrated in the southwest where the Niger River flows.

Niger River

The Niger River is the primary river of Niger. The Niger, along with its tributaries, flows over an area of approximately 745,645 square miles. It rises in Guinea and flows for 2,600 miles to drain into the Gulf of Guinea. Upstream, the Niger is easy to navigate all through the year and is navigable in patches at other places. The Niger's main tributary is the Benue, which meets it at Lokoja. The Niger Delta, which forms a coastline of 14,000 miles, is the largest delta in Africa.

Niger is primarily hot and dry throughout the year. The average yearly temperature in Niamey, its capital, is about 85°F. Rainfall occurs from June to October, but is almost nonexistent in the north.

Scattered acacia, palm, tamarind, mahogany, silk-cotton, and baobab trees (an indigenous African tree), represent the flora of Niger. The country aggressively pursues tree-planting activities to counter the problem of desertification. Niger is home to buffalos, elephants, hippos, giraffes, and leopards.

ECONOMY

Niger's economy centers on agriculture and animal husbandry. In January 1994 the West African franc was devalued by 50 percent. This increased Niger's exports of livestock, cowpeas, onions, and cotton products. At one time uranium was also a major source of income for Niger.

The country's economic condition is still very poor. Niger had been dependent on foreign aid, but it was banned after the 1999 coup d'état. Reforms were difficult to enact due to the government's poor financial condition. In 2000 the International Monetary Fund (IMF) sanctioned a \$73-million poverty reduction and growth facility loan for Niger, along with \$115 million in debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative.

Mineral Resources

Niger, although a poor country, holds diverse mineral resources. Uranium has been a major factor in the country's development and has been a principal export item for years. Niger has huge deposits of uranium. This high-quality uranium is mined in the north at Arlit and Akouta. Other minerals, such as phosphates, are mined in the Niger Valley, and coal and tin ore deposits have also been exploited lately. Salt is produced on a large scale. Niger also has reserves of iron ore, copper, diamonds, and tungsten. Due to financial constraints, many mineral resources have yet to be exploited in this mineral-rich country.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The Republic of Niger is an ethnically diverse country. The ancient culture of the Hausa began in the heartland of Niger before spreading across the country. The Hausa are now the dominant ethnic group in Niger, constituting almost 56 percent of the population. The Hausa language is the most widely spoken language in Niger. However, French is the official language, and other ethnic languages such as Djerma are also spoken in different parts of the country.

Among the other prominent ethnic groups are the Tuareg, Inadans, Fulani, Kanouri, and Toubou. The nomadic Tuaregs speak a Berber language called Tamashek and generally reside in the arid areas of the north and central parts of Niger. The Inadans are skilled artisans who are an integral part of the Tuareg family system. They are not paid for their work and often act as servants for the Tuareg even though they are highly respected by the Tuaregs for their silversmithing abilities. They also make saddles, utensils, tools, camel bags, and talismans (amulets believed to have mystical powers).

The Tuareg are also known for informal love poems that are recited by men and women. These poems are accompanied by clapping, drumming (for women), and one-stringed viols (for men).

The Bororo Fulani, also known as Wodaabe, are often referred to as "people of the taboo." This is because every aspect of this ethnic group's life is subject to a predefined set of taboos, moral codes, and traditions.

Almost 80 percent of the Nigerien population is Muslim, while 20 percent adhere either to indigenous beliefs or Christianity. The Hausa Muslims of Niger have adopted the *kulle* tradition of Islam, which means that they keep their women in seclusion. It does not translate to total seclusion; the women are free to meet other women in the evening as well as go on extended visits to their relatives. Due to the seclusion they need not work for long hours in the fields, and they focus entirely on their homes.

Some of the musical instruments used by the various ethnic groups of Niger include viols, lutes, flutes, *kakati* (trumpets), and *alghaita* (an instrument belonging to the woodwind family).

CUISINE

Niger is not known for its food. In the north the food may consist of a combination of yogurt, mutton, and rice. In the south, the main ingredients include rice, couscous, and ragout (stew). Traditionally Nigeriens also enjoy eating locusts.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day throughout the world. Dancing, singing, and dining characterize the New Year's Eve (December 31) celebrations in the urban areas of Niger, including the capital city of Niamey. Because it is a national holiday, all government offices and private institutions are closed on January 1.

❁ NATIONAL CONCORD DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 24

National Concord Day commemorates the signing of the peace agreement between the government of the Republic of Niger and the Armed Resistance Organization, made up of Tuareg and Toubou militants, on April 24, 1995.

In 1991 the nomadic Tuareg and Toubou groups initiated a joint rebellion against the central government. These ethnic groups had suffered immensely, both as the result of natural disasters and government policies. Primarily nomads, their lives were severely affected by the droughts of 1970 and 1985, which took a heavy toll on their livestock. Also the Nigerien government appeared to have ignored their situation and did not offer any kind of support or rehabilitation for the benefit of these ethnic groups. Eventually they united to fight for an independent Tuareg nation in Mali and Niger.

With the mediation of France, the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, and Burkina Faso, a peace accord was brokered between the government of the Republic of Niger and the warring Tuaregs and Toubous. Niger agreed to induct the ethnic Tuaregs and Toubous into the armed forces and to provide rehabilitation for their territories with the help of the French.

This historic day, which marked the end of ethnic war in the region, is a national holiday in Niger.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

The May 1 observance of Labor Day, also called May Day or Workers' Day, is celebrated to recognize the contributions workers make to their respective countries. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

Niger observes a national holiday on May 1, and all public and private institutions remain closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 3

It was on the third day of August in 1960 that Niger gained freedom from the French after decades of colonial rule. Since becoming independent Niger has experienced many coup d'états, but a democratic form of government was finally realized with the election of Tandja Mamadou as president in 1999.

Independence Day celebrations take place all over the country. In the capital city of Niamey the president presides over the celebrations, which begin with the unfurling of the national flag. Then after military parades, there are cultural and dance programs that show off the rich and diverse cultural heritage of Niger.

❁ REPUBLIC DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 18

Throughout Niger the institution of republican government is commemorated with various parades on December 18 every year. The most notable Republic Day celebrations take place in the southern city of Dosso. In the cavalry parade, horses and riders are attired in colorful dress. It is a public holiday and all public and private institutions are closed.

Fun Fact

Tuaregs are famous for making talismans, amulets believed to have mystical powers that provide protection against evil. The most widely used of these talismans is the Croix d'Agadez, a silver filigree cross that protects the Tuaregs against the evil eye. The Croix d'Agadez is extremely popular among the locals as well as foreigners.

Religious Holidays

❁ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

The first day of the Islamic New Year is called El am Hejir. The date of the Islamic New Year is not fixed on the Gregorian, or Western, calendar and varies from year to year according to the Islamic lunar-based calendar. This day is not celebrated with a lot of pomp and show like the New Year's celebrations of other calendars. It is spent quietly, and many Muslims visit mosques to offer prayers. They also listen to stories of the Hegira, the prophet Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

❁ MOULLOUD

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

Mouloud marks the birth of the prophet Muhammad on this day in 571 C.E., the founder of Islam, so this festival holds great significance for Muslims all over the world. Nigerien Muslims visit mosques to offer prayers, while wealthy Muslims distribute alms to the poor.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULLOUD

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, the month when devout Muslims all over the world observe a daily dawn-to-dusk fast. It is believed that Allah revealed the Koran, the holy book of Islam, to the prophet Muhammad during this month.

The fasting ends after the sighting of the new Moon in Saudi Arabia, and Eid al-Fitr is celebrated on the next day. Fasting on Eid al-Fitr is strictly forbidden by the Koran. On Eid al-Fitr Nigerien Muslims offer prayers in their local mosques and thank Allah for his benevolence. They greet each other on this day, and children receive gifts and money.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th or pilgrimage month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, also called Tabaski, Eid al-Kebir, and the Feast of Sacrifice, commemorates the unwavering faith of Ibrahim (Abraham) in Allah and his willingness to sacrifice his son to obey God's command. But just as Ibrahim was about to sacrifice his son, Allah caused a ram to appear on the altar. After prayers are offered at their local mosques, Nigerien Muslims greet each other. Goats are sacrificed, and the meat is distributed among friends, family, and the poor.

On Eid al-Adha, the Tuaregs in the Nigerien city of Agadez celebrate with their favorite pastime—camel racing. The Tuaregs race through the narrow streets of Agadez amid cheers and excitement. The race ends at the square in front of the sultan's palace.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

Regional Holidays

❁ NATIONAL FESTIVAL OF ARTS

Observed in: Niamey

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Mid-April

The National Festival of Arts is an annual cultural event held in the capital city of Niamey in April. This weeklong celebration showcases Niger's cultural diversity. Ethnic groups from all parts of Niger participate, enthraling audiences with their traditional dance performances. Wrestling competitions and camel racing are other attractions of this festival.



Wodaabe men perform a dance of male beauty at a festival in InGall, near Agadez. The Wodaabe, a nomadic West African tribe, value male beauty and are taught from an early age to look into mirrors to consider their appearance. The Wodaabe men perform a dance, showing off the whiteness of their teeth and eyes, to compete for honor and selection as the most beautiful man by women of the tribe at a festival celebrated at the end of the rainy season. (AP Photo/Christine Nesbitt)

❁ GEREWOL

Observed in: InGall

Observed by: Wodaabe

Observed on: September

Niger's Wodaabe (a nomadic tribe of herders) celebrate an annual festival called Gerewol, held every September. Gerewol is part of the West African celebration called the Cure Sale, which takes place before the rainy season begins. The Cure Sale is an annual socializing event for the herders, who meet around the salt pans of InGall (an oasis town situated in the semi-desert area of the Sahara in Niger) and rest there while waiting for the rain to arrive.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

Among Nigerien Muslims, a woman's genitals cannot be touched by anyone except her husband. Hence, at the time of delivering a child, the midwife does not actually perform the delivery but only aids the woman in labor by giving her herbal drinks to stimulate the muscular contractions. She may also apply herbs over the woman's abdomen and recite prayers for the safe and speedy birth of a healthy child. The birth of a child is celebrated with a lavish feast after the child's naming ceremony.

❁ COMING OF AGE

The most prevalent form of female genital mutilation (FGM) in Niger is excision, and it is estimated

that 20 percent of the country's female population has been subjected to it. While there is no legislation specifically prohibiting FGM, in 1990 a government decree established the Niger Committee against Harmful Traditional Practices (CONIPRAT), which has studied the prevalence of FGM and organized sensitization seminars and workshops.

Among the dominant Muslim population, boys are circumcised as a matter of course although there is nothing in Islamic scripture that requires the practice.

Further Reading

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Fun Fact

Wodaabe men are very particular about their beauty, as well as the cosmetics they use. The face powder is made from secret ingredients available in a special mountain near Jangooria in central Niger. Some Wodaabe travel up to 870 miles round-trip on foot to obtain this special face powder.

~ Nigeria ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	West Africa, bordered by Benin, Niger, Cameroon, and Chad
Size	356,669 sq. mi.
Capital City	Abuja
Flag Description	Nigeria's flag is vertically divided into three parts and is twice as wide as it is tall. It has two vertical green stripes representing agriculture and a white stripe in the center representing unity and peace.
Independence	October 1, 1960 (from United Kingdom)
Population	128,771,988 (2005 est.)
Government	Federal republic
Nationality	Nigerian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Black (Hausa and Fulani, 29%; Yoruba, 21%; Igbo or Ibo, 18%;
Major Language(s)	English (official); Hausa; Yoruba; Igbo (Ibo); Fulani
Major Religion(s)	Muslim (50%); Christian (40%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Democracy Day, May 29; National Day, October 1; Boxing Day, December 26

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Bit by bit, new discoveries force archaeologists to reexamine their assumptions about the antiquity of African cultures and the development of various technologies. In 1987 a Fulani herdsman found a dugout canoe made of African mahogany in the village of Dufuna in northeastern Nigeria. Although information on the period when it was made is skimpy, several radio-carbon tests have dated it as belonging to the Later Stone Age, roughly 8000 B.C.E., making it about 10,000 years old. The canoe is not only Africa's oldest boat discovered to date, but also the third oldest in the world. Only boats found in the Netherlands and France are older, but the boat's existence and its fine workmanship, said to be superior to that of the Netherlands canoe, have already required rethinking what is known about African water transport in prehistory. The high quality of the Dufuna canoe—its thin sides and carefully pointed bow and stern—contrasts sharply with the craftsmanship of the canoe from the Netherlands, which has blunt ends

and thick sides. The difference in skill indicates that artisans in Africa had been making boats for an extended period of time without the European and Middle Eastern influences previously assumed. The find suggests that the beginnings of water transport in Africa lie even further back in time. Prior to this the oldest boat found in Africa was in Egypt and was determined to be 5,000 years old.

Earlier in the 20th century, in 1928, archaeologists found artifacts—sculptures of people and other animals made of terra cotta—from a culture that apparently flourished for around 700 years, between 500 B.C.E. to 200 C.E., near the village of Nok, which, like Dufuna, is in northeastern Nigeria. What is amazing is that the Nok culture seems to have made a sudden leap from the Stone Age to the Iron Age, skipping the intermediate phase of copper and bronze smelting that so many other cultures went through. The ability to fashion tools and weapons of iron would have given the Nok people a distinct advantage over their neighbors.

Subsequently other inhabitants including the Kanuri, Hausa, and Fulani migrated to Nigeria. The Kanem-Bornu Empire, situated near Lake Chad, controlled northern Nigeria for over 600 years, flourishing as the intermediary in north-

south trade between the Berbers of North Africa and the forest people to the south. To the southwest the Ife and Oyo kingdoms and Benin in the south—perhaps better known for their artistic accomplishments with ivory, wood, bronze, and brass—also evolved complex political systems over the course of the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries. In the southeast, the heavily populated village networks of the Igbo and other egalitarian cultures (like the Ibibio) were organized around indigenous African democratic ideas. Although the artwork discovered in this area remains among the oldest yet found in West Africa, the Igbo-Ukwu bronze sculptures are among the most renowned for their beauty and detail.

Beginning in the 17th century European traders began to settle in coastal ports in order to take advantage of the increasing traffic in slaves headed for the Americas, but by the mid-19th century trade in commodities was replacing the slave trade. Although Islam had been introduced into Nigeria in the 13th century, by the early 19th century Usman dan Fodio (1754–1817), a Fulani Muslim writer, had succeeded in bringing much of the northern region of Nigeria under his Islamic empire, headquartered in Sokoto.

The Niger River, the closest major river and source of water to the Sahara Desert, was strategically positioned along the Saharan trade route and therefore the focal point of trade in the Western Sahara. Sir George Taubman Goldie (1846–1925), a British administrator, wanted to bring the lucrative trade route of the lower and middle regions of the river under British control. With this in mind, he brought chartered companies into the region that negotiated some 400 separate treaties with the local chiefs and conducted trade with them. In 1879 he formed the United African Company, which merged British commercial interests into one company. Around the same time, French traders had firmly established themselves in the lower regions of the Niger, with the result that there was constant conflict between the French and British traders as each sought to establish dominance over the region.

In 1886 the British government chartered the Royal Niger Company, with Goldie at its head. In 1900 the company's territory came under the control of the British government, which moved to consolidate its position in modern Nigeria; both northern and southern Nigeria became British protectorates in 1901 and were combined in 1914 as the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria. However, Nigeria remained divided administratively. Western education and the development of a modern economy proceeded more rapidly in the south than in the north, with consequences felt in Nigeria's political life ever since.

In response to the growth of Nigerian nationalism following World War II, the British moved the colony toward self-government on a federal basis. After it gained independence in 1960, Nigeria became a member of the Commonwealth of Nations and the United Nations (UN), but independence did not

bring peace to the country. From the start its ethnic, regional, and religious differences were magnified and aggravated by the disparities in economic and educational development between the south and the north. Its political parties reflected the makeup of the three dominant ethnic groups: The Nigerian People's Congress (NPC) represented conservative, Muslim, largely Hausa interests, and controlled the northern region; the National Convention of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) was Igbo- and Christian-dominated, and was in control of the eastern region; and the leftist Action Group (AG) controlled the Yoruba west.

Conflicts among Nigeria's 250 ethnic groups led to riots in 1966. The military leaders of the Igbo (an eastern ethnic group) took control of Nigeria by assassinating the federal prime minister and the premiers of the northern and western regions. But the military government failed to soothe ethnic tensions or formulate a constitution capable of uniting the rest of the country. Its failures led to another coup by primarily northern officers in July of that year, which established the leadership of Maj. Gen. Yakubu Gowon (b. 1934). The massacre of thousands of Igbo in the north prompted hundreds of thousands of them to flee back to the southeast, where strong Igbo secessionist sentiment began to develop.

As coup followed coup without significant improvement in Nigeria's situation, in May 1967, the military governor of the eastern region, who had emerged as the leader of increasing Igbo secessionist sentiment, declared the independence of the eastern region as the Republic of Biafra. Civil war broke out and continued until January early 1970, ending in Biafra's defeat.

With the civil war over, reconciliation was rapid and effective, and Nigerians turned to improving their economic situation. The rapid increase in oil prices in 1973–74 helped greatly with this project, and the country's foreign exchange earnings and revenues increased.

In 1975 in yet another coup, a Muslim military officer Muritala Rufai Mohammed (1938–76) came to power, accusing the government of corruption and delaying the promised return to civilian rule. Gen. Mohammed announced a timetable for the resumption of civilian rule by October 1, 1979, but he was assassinated on February 13, 1976, in an aborted coup. His chief of staff became head of state and adhered meticulously to the schedule for return to civilian rule, streamlining and updating the military and using oil revenues to diversify Nigeria's economy. In 1978 a new constitution was published and the Second Republic was born.

The military leadership was interrupted in 1979 when Alhaji Shehu Shagari (b. 1925) was elected president. Under his leadership the Nigerian economy boomed, mainly because of oil revenues. Beginning in December 1983 when the Supreme Military Council (SMC), under the leadership of Maj. Gen. Muhammadu Buhari ousted the democratically elected government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari, the

Fun Fact

Nigerian Muslim men are legally allowed to have four wives at a time. The first wife enjoys the highest status, while the latest is generally the favorite of the husband.

Fun Fact

The Yoruba contact their ancestors and spirits by wearing wooden masks in the traditional ceremony of Gelede (“masquerade”). There are many types of Yoruba masks, but the most dramatic are the large helmet masks of the Epa cult.

leader of the National Party of Nigeria, the country was plunged into chaos by ambitious military leaders who wanted to rule the country. Buhari was ousted by Army Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Ibrahim Babangida in August 1985. However, the change of leadership failed to improve the country’s economic problems. Moreover, there were widespread human rights violations and, with a deepening economic crisis, growing discontent among the people. Babangida promised that he would restore democracy and even conducted farce elections.

Through fraud and rigging of ballots, he managed to retain his hold on the country. However, with growing protests against his regime, he was forced to step down as president in favor of Ernest Shonekan, a nonpartisan businessman, who would be the caretaker president of the country until fresh elections could be held in February 1994.

With the country sliding into chaos, Defense Minister Sani Abacha (1943–98) seized power and forced Shonekan’s “resignation” late in 1993.

Promising to yield to civilian control eventually, Abacha proceeded to dissolve all democratic political institutions and to replace elected officials with military officers.

Although many initially welcomed Abacha’s takeover, their disenchantment rapidly intensified. Abacha’s reign was also marked by human rights violations and widespread protests led by opposition leaders. Voices of protest against his government were brutally crushed and opposition party leaders

imprisoned. His autocratic rule led to mass rioting in the country.

In June 1994 another businessman (who had previously been elected president in the 1993 elections M. K. O. Abiola [? 1937–98]) went into hiding after declaring himself president. When he reemerged, he was promptly arrested. With Abiola in prison, petroleum workers called a strike, demanding his release, bringing economic activity in the southwest to a standstill. Although the union workers returned to work after several labor leaders were arrested, Abacha had his opponents arrested and suppressed all dissent.

Late in 1994 the government established a special tribunal to try those accused of killing four prominent politicians; the accused included prominent author and Ogoni activist Ken Saro-Wiwa (1941–95) and eight others. Although all pled not guilty to the charges, they were hanged on November 10. Throughout his regime, Abacha’s government used the nation’s security forces to commit similar human rights abuses including restricting freedom of speech, press, assembly, association, and travel; allowing violence and discrimination against women; and perpetuating female genital mutilation (FGM).

Abacha, expected by many to succeed himself as a civilian president in 1998, died of heart failure in June of that year. Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar (b. 1942) succeeded him. Under Abubakar, a new constitution was adopted in 1999 and a peaceful transition to civilian government was completed when Yoruban general Olusegun Obasanjo (b. 1937) was elected president.

After 16 years of coups and military rule, Nigeria must still cope with the legacies of corruption, mismanagement, and an underperforming economy. Nevertheless, it is still considered a local superpower in West Africa, and oil remains the biggest asset for its economy. Poverty still reigns in the country, which is also afflicted with ethnic and religious conflict. Religious clashes between fundamentalist Muslims and Christians have resulted in violence. Despite some irregularities, in April 2003 Nigerian elections represented the first successful civilian transfer of power in the country’s history.

Saro-Wiwa

Saro-Wiwa (1941–95) was a Nigerian playwright and novelist who was hanged by the Nigerian government after he protested against corruption among government officials. Saro-Wiwa was best known for his television programs, satirical novels, children’s stories, and plays. He was imprisoned in 1994 when he protested against Sani Abacha (1943–98). He played a major role in defending the rights of the Ogoni people and opposed the government’s oil policy with Royal Dutch/Shell. He was hanged in public on November 10, 1995, with eight other dissidents. This event was widely condemned by the international community.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Nigeria, whose name is derived from the Niger River, has the largest population in the whole of Africa. Situated on the Gulf of Guinea, it lies in West Africa with Benin, Niger, Cameroon, and Chad as its neighbors. The Niger flows through western Nigeria into the Gulf of Guinea. The southern coast of Nigeria is covered with swamps and mangrove forests, while the hinterland comprises hardwood forests. The country has two different climatic zones. The coastal region has high humidity and heavy rainfall, while dry and dusty winds from the Sahara envelop the northern region. The temperature and amount of rainfall vary with the seasons.

Yoruba Festivals

Although Christianity and Islam now overshadow the ancient indigenous religions, the Yoruba continue to observe the festivals of their ancestors. Yoruban festivals are held primarily to honor the pantheon of gods and mark the installation of a new *oba*. The *obas* are the leaders of the Yoruba. Most still live in palaces, but they were once more powerful and governed with the help and advice of a council. Today the position is mainly honorary, and the *oba's* most significant function is overseeing festival observances.

The Eyo Festival occurs only in the Lagos area and on Eyo Day the main highway that passes through the heart of the city is closed to traffic so that the long procession can proceed without hindrance. The festival is held whenever the occasion or tradition demands, but it is usually held as the final burial rite for a highly regarded chief, a time when the people all pay homage to the *oba* of Lagos.

The Engungun (pronounced en-GOON-gun) Festival, which honors the ancestors, lasts 24 days. Each day a different *engungun* (in the person of a masked dancer) dances through the town, possessed

by one of the ancestors. On the last day a priest goes to the shrine of the ancestors and sacrifices animals, then pours their blood on the shrine. The sacrifices are gathered up, because they will provide the meat for the feast that follows.

The Shango, or Sango, Festival celebrates the god of thunder, an ancestor who is said to have hanged himself. This festival goes on for almost three weeks, and many sacrifices are made at Shango's shrine, located in the compound of the hereditary priest. On the last day people believe that Shango possesses the priest and gives him magical powers enabling him to eat fire and swallow gunpowder without harming himself. The Festival concludes with a long procession that wends its way to the *oba's* palace. Then a grand feast begins, accompanied by palm wine, roast meat, and dancing.

In earlier days, Shango's priest would have been a very rich and powerful man. But times have changed. The power of the *obas* has declined, and many people have abandoned worship of their ancestral gods, leaving the priests of the Yoruba much poorer and less powerful than they used to be.

ECONOMY

Although Nigeria has large oil reserves, internal conflicts and political instability have severely affected its economy. The oil sector is the only positive aspect of Nigeria's economy. It provides 20 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), 95 percent of foreign exchange returns, and approximately 65 percent of budgetary revenues. The large agricultural sector has not been able to keep up with the rapidly growing population, and Nigeria now has to import food.

In recent years the Nigerian government has tried to reform the economy. In 2000 the Paris Club (a financial institution based in Paris that gives credit to underdeveloped countries, especially those that are under military rule) gave Nigeria a debt-restructuring deal and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) provided a \$1 billion credit for economic reforms. In 2002 Nigeria had a 3 percent growth in foreign investment in oil production, but the government has failed to implement practices suggested by the IMF as imperative for market-oriented growth. These include: renovation of the banking system, restraining inflation by resisting unnecessary wage demands, and resolving internal conflicts focused on how returns from the oil industry are to be shared.

LIFESTYLE AND CULTURE

There are more than 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria, but the three prominent ones are: the Hausa (north-

ern Nigeria), the Igbo (eastern Nigeria), and the Yoruba (western Nigeria). While Muslims dominate the northern region, Catholics and animists dominate the east and the west, respectively. Nigeria's population also includes innumerable smaller sects that are a mixture of two or more religions.

Many Nigerians practice animism. They believe that ancestral spirits play a role in conserving their land and taking care of them. They perform many sacrificial ceremonies to contact the spirits of dead people, which make use of animal skulls, dried insects, and other materials considered sacred. They also use charms such as *ibej* or twin dolls to promote good luck.

Among the musicians of Nigeria Fela Kuti (1938–97) was the most famous until his death. He was globally renowned for his eclectic fusion of Yoruba call-and-response chanting with jazz, called Afrobeat. Some of the other popular musicians of Nigeria are King Sunny Ade (b. 1946), Sonny Okosun, and Sade (b. 1959). Nigeria, known for its writers more than any other African nation, has produced writers of high caliber such as Wole Soyinka (b. 1934; 1986 winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature), Chinua Achebe (b. 1930), and Ben Okri (b. 1959).

Fun Fact

Many people think that the spectacular modern Carnival celebrations held in Brazil and other Catholic countries originated in the Eyo Festival.

Yoruba

The Yoruba are a Sudanic-speaking people of southwest Nigeria. They once ruled the kingdom of Oyo, but they scattered after Nigeria became a colony of Britain.

Nigerians began making exceptional masterpieces of woodcarving and bronze casting as early as the 13th century. The Yoruba are especially famous for their trade and craftwork.

The Yoruba have a history of being town dwellers, and they remain so. In modern Nigeria they constitute about 21 percent of the total population.

Like many other Nigerian ethnic groups, a majority of Yoruba adhere to the Christian faith, while a minority follow Islam or traditional beliefs. However, Yoruba spirituality is animistic, and the people worship several gods.

CUISINE

Nigerians usually consume a variety of grains in their food. South Nigerians commonly prepare peppery stews, while North Nigerians thrive on grains and beef. *Tuwo*, a stew made from corn, rice, or millet, is very popular among Nigerians. Other popular stews are *egusi* and *isi-ewu*. Nigerians like to have fried yam chips, meat pastries, and fried plantain for snacks. They also enjoy drinking palm wine, fermented sap extracted from palm trees.

Fun Fact

The Yoruba are said to produce the most esteemed writers of Nigeria.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western (or Gregorian) calendar, January 1 is celebrated as New Year's Day. On New Year's Eve (December 31) a festive atmosphere envelops Nigeria. People attend private celebrations or participate in large public celebrations and sing and dance all night long. As the clock strikes midnight, the night skies light up with fireworks, and people wish each other a happy and prosperous New Year. Drinking and feasting continue into the early morning hours of New Year's Day.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

The May 1 observance of Labor Day, also called May Day, is observed as Workers' Day in Nigeria. In



Dancers perform in New Karu village near Abuja. (AP Photo/Ben Curtis)

1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

Worker's Day is a national holiday in Nigeria, and all public and private institutions are closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ DEMOCRACY DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 29

May 29 commemorates the restoration of democracy in 1999 after 16 years of dictatorial rule. The day is marked by a presidential speech. The president joins thousands of Nigerians in paying tribute to those who died for the cause of democracy in Nigeria. All government offices and private businesses are closed on May 29 in honor of Democracy Day.

❁ NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 1

On October 1, 1960, the Federal Republic of Nigeria was granted independence from British rule. To

commemorate this event celebrations are held throughout the country. In the Nigerian city of Lagos, the president presides over the National Day celebrations, which include a flag-raising ceremony, a presidential address, and a parade by the armed forces of Nigeria. Music and traditional dance performances are part of the cultural activities during the National Day celebrations.

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 26

Boxing Day is a British custom started during the Middle Ages when servants and peasants were given Christmas gifts the day after Christmas. On this day church boxes used for collecting money for the poor are opened, which is believed to be the reason for the name Boxing Day. In addition, gifts are given to those who render service to the community throughout the year.

Because Nigeria is a former British colony and a member of the Commonwealth group of nations, Boxing Day celebrations are a part of the festive season that begins at Christmas. The Commonwealth of Nations is an association of independent nations, most of which are former colonies of the British Empire. They share some common cultural links as a result of British colonial influence, and Boxing Day is one of them. No special celebrations take place on Boxing Day in Nigeria. It is a holiday spent either picnicking on beaches or staying at home.

December 26 is also celebrated by Christians as the feast day of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr.
See also Volume III: BOXING DAY

Religious Holidays

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

The Muslim festival of Eid al-Adha, also called Eid al-Kabir, commemorates the unwavering faith of Ibrahim (Abraham) in Allah. Muslims believe that God visited Ibrahim in a dream and instructed him to sacrifice his most valued possession, his son. When Ibrahim told his son about the dream, the boy asked his father to follow God's command. However, as Ibrahim was about to perform the sacrifice, he was surprised to find a ram on the altar instead of his son.

Nigerian Muslims offer the customary morning prayers in their local mosques and then exchange gifts and greetings. To commemorate Ibrahim's sacrifice, goats are sacrificed, and the meat is distributed among family, friends, and the poor. Special celebrations include the Durbar Festival of martial skills and music.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

❁ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

The Muslim festival of El am Hejir marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar and a new year. On this day in 622 C.E. Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina, about 200 miles to the north, to establish the first Islamic state. El am Hejir is a low-key affair as celebrations in the Muslim world mainly take place during Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr. Nigerian Muslims offer prayers in the local mosque and listen to the Hijrah, which narrates the story of prophet Muhammad's journey from Mecca to Medina.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

The Christian holiday of Good Friday, also called Mourning Friday, Black Friday, and Holy Friday, falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of the austere period of Lent, when devout Christians fast for 40 days. Good Friday sorrowfully recalls the Crucifixion of Jesus and the last day of his mortal life. Nigerian Christians attend Good Friday services in their local churches. Politicians also deliver special Good Friday speeches and call upon Nigerians to emulate the exemplary values of love and sacrifice demonstrated by Jesus.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

The Christian festival of Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection three days after his Crucifixion. It celebrates the victory of life over death and falls on the first Sunday after Lent. Nigerian Christians attend special Easter services at their local churches. The celebrations that follow are marked by dining, dancing, and drumming. Easter Monday, the day after Easter, is a national holiday in Nigeria, and businesses, schools, and government offices are closed.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ MOULLOUD

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

The birth anniversary of Muhammad, the prophet of the Muslims, falls in the third month of the Islamic year. For Muslims all over the world, this is a day of great joy and celebrations. On this day,

Muslims in Nigeria offer special prayers in honor of Muhammad and thank Allah for sending them his messenger. Giving generously to the poor is associated with Mouloud in Nigeria.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOU

❁ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day is a Christian feast honoring all the saints of the church, both known and unknown. It is believed that All Saints' Day celebrations began after the consecration of the Pantheon at Rome to the Blessed Virgin by Pope Boniface IV. The Feast of All Saints has been celebrated on November 1 since the time of Charlemagne. In Nigeria devout Christians attend a special church prayer service.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, when, in accordance with the fourth pillar of Islam, Muslims all over the world observe a daily dawn-to-dusk fast. During the fast, consumption of food and water is strictly forbidden. It is believed that Allah himself revealed the Koran, the religious book of Muslims, to Muhammad during Ramadan. This is why it is the holiest of holy months for devout Muslims.

The fast ends after the sighting of the new Moon, and Eid al-Fitr is celebrated on the very next day. Fasting on Eid al-Fitr is strictly forbidden in the Koran. On Eid al-Fitr the emirs (kings), along with their subjects, assemble and collectively offer prayers to Allah. Then they greet each other on this special day and gather for large banquets. Special celebrations include the Durbar Festival, a traditional, colorful parade whose participants include flamboyantly dressed horsemen, wrestlers, emirs in their ceremonial dresses, and lute-playing musicians.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of celebration for Christians all over the world because it marks the birth of Jesus.

On Christmas Day Nigerians living in urban areas visit their relatives in the countryside and celebrate with friends and family. Catholics attend a Christmas Mass on December 25. In Nigeria, dancing, drumming, and feasting mark the Christmas celebrations.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ DURBAR FESTIVAL

Observed in: Nigeria

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Dhu al-Hijjah and Shawwal

The Durbar festival is an integral part of two important Muslim celebrations in Nigeria—Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr—and its roots can be traced back to the glorious period of the emirate when the region was largely untouched by Western influence. During those times various regiments of the army used to meet for the Durbar once or twice a year. The Durbar was a military parade hosted by the military chiefs for the emir (king) and chiefs. In the Durbar the regiments displayed their prowess with swords and horsemanship skills. Today, Durbar festivals are part of celebrations honoring visiting heads of states or the Islamic festivals of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Kabir. The modern-day Durbar festival includes a traditional colorful parade whose participants include flamboyantly dressed horsemen, wrestlers, emirs (kings) in their ceremonial dresses, and lute-playing musicians.

After offering the morning prayers, the Fulani Hausa horsemen lead a procession to the public square in front of the palace of the emir. Every village group is assigned a place in the public square, and they take their positions before the emir arrives. Then as the emir appears, the horsemen gallop toward him with their swords drawn and salute him. The emir and other village chiefs then retire to the palace while dancing, drumming, and dining continue throughout the day and into the night.

❁ ARGUNGU FISHING AND CULTURAL FESTIVAL

Observed in: Sokoto and Argungu

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February

The Argungu Fishing and Cultural Festival is an annual cultural festival held at Argungu in the month of February. The town of Argungu is located along the Argungu River in the state of Kebbi. The festival originated in 1934 when the village chief of Argungu started it to honor the supreme Islamic leader of northern Nigeria, the sultan of Sokoto Mallam Hassan Dan Muazu. The sultan had trav-

Fun Fact

Christmas trees, exchanging gifts and a visit from Santa Claus are not part of Christmas traditions in Nigeria.

eled along the Rimi River in order to restore peace between Sokoto and Argungu.

In 1804 Shehu Danfodio, a fundamentalist Islamist, led a jihad (holy war) in Argungu to force unification with the northern part of Nigeria and, thereby, bring it under the rule of the sultan of Sokoto. This led to conflicts between Sokoto and Argungu that lasted until Sultan Hassan undertook a peace mission to Argungu. Since then this festival has been celebrated as a festival of peace, friendship, and reconciliation. The festival marks the end of the growing season and the harvest. This four-day festival includes fishing, duck hunting, camel racing, wrestling, archery, dancing, swimming, and storytelling. It draws about 5,000 participants from all over Nigeria, Benin, and Niger who are joined by canoes filled with drummers and men rattling huge seed-filled gourds to drive the fish to shallow waters. Vast nets are cast, and a wealth of fish are harvested.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

❁ SHANGO FESTIVAL

Observed in: Lagos

Observed by: Yoruba

Observed on: July

The Yoruba tribe honors all their deities during a month-long festival in July. One of the deities of the Yoruba is Shango, the god of thunder and lightning. Shango is a revered god in the Yoruba culture, and it is believed that he comes to administer justice when a person swears by his name. The festival is held in the Nigerian city of Lagos. Nigerians of Yoruba descent are devotees of Shango. During the Shango Festival Nigerians make sacrifices in the shrine dedicated exclusively to Shango and also make sacrificial offerings at the compound of the priest.

It is believed that on the final day supernatural powers manifest themselves through the priest as he eats fire and swallows gunpowder with ease and without any bodily harm. Then he leads a procession of worshippers to the palace of the *oba* (the king), where a lavish feast is prepared for the participants. Roasted meat and palm wine are served during these festivities.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

After the birth of a child, Nigerians wait for the baby to be pronounced healthy before they start celebrating and feasting. The names for babies are selected on the basis of the context in which they were born. For example, if a child is born during rains, his or her name would be associated with rain. Most Nigerian names have a clear and definite meaning. The child may also be named after his or her ancestors. The naming ceremony is held anywhere from

three days to a week following birth.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a widespread initiation practice throughout Nigeria and among all ethnic and religious groups. No Nigerian law specifically prohibits FGM. The National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives (NANNM) has been active in the fight against FGM, and nurses and pediatricians have campaigned throughout the country, conducting educational activities at the state and community levels.

Among the Muslim population, boys are circumcised as a matter of course although there is nothing in Islamic scripture that requires the practice.

❁ MARRIAGE

Modern-day weddings in Nigeria have been influenced by Western traditions. The bride dresses in a white gown, while the groom wears a suit, and the ceremony is held in a church. For receptions held after weddings, the newlyweds wear traditional dress and savor the traditional dishes of Nigeria. Both U.S. and Nigerian music can be heard playing in the background.

Before the wedding ceremony the groom's family visits the bride's family to ask for her hand. The bride's family prepares for the visit and welcomes the groom's family. Both families wear traditional dress. When the groom's family enters the house, his father prostrates himself before the bride's parents, while the groom's mother kneels.

Before a wedding, the bride is looked after in a "fattening room," where she is provided with plenty of food to make her gain weight. She is also given lessons on how to be a good wife. Before she goes to her husband, the bride is bathed. According to tradition the bride arrives at the groom's house before he does. When he gets there, she washes his feet and welcomes him. After the wedding she washes her own feet before she goes to her husband. After the couple's marriage, the bride lives in the groom's house.

According to Yoruban culture, both the bride and groom are supposed to be virgins on their wedding night, unless the groom has been married before.

Nigerian Muslims observe Islamic traditions: The free consent of the bride and groom is essential, and parents cannot force their children into marriage. On the day of the ceremony the imam meets the bride and groom in separate ceremonies and asks them if they willingly agree to marry each other. If both

Fun Fact

Fishing in a one-mile stretch of Argungu River is permitted only during the Argungu Festival. Anyone caught fishing after the festival can face a jail term of two-years. This ensures that there are plenty of fish available at the time of the main festival.

answer “yes,” he signs the marriage certificate, and the marriage is considered official. The amount of *meber*, or dowry, to be paid to the bride is specified in the certificate. In case of divorce the amount of *meber* should be paid to the bride and her family. Feasting and celebrations follow but, unlike Christian weddings, no wine or any kind of alcohol is served because drinking alcohol is prohibited in Islam.

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~ Norway ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Northern Europe, bordering the North Sea and North Atlantic Ocean, west of Sweden
Size	324,220 sq. mi.
Capital City	Oslo
Flag Description	Norway's flag is red with a blue cross outlined in white; the vertical part of the cross is shifted to the hoist side.
Independence	June 7, 1905 (Norway declared union); October 26, 1905 (Sweden recognized the union)
Population	4,593,041 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional monarchy
Nationality	Norwegian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	White (97%)
Major Language(s)	Bokmål Norwegian, Nynorsk Norwegian (both official); Sami; Finnish
Major Religion(s)	Evangelical Lutheran (Church of Norway; 86%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Constitution Day, May 17; Midsummer's Eve, June 21

Introduction

🌸 HISTORY

Toward the end of the last Ice Age, about 10,000 years ago, hunters and gatherers settled in Norway. Evidence amassed from archaeological excavations attest to continuous human habitation as the glaciers withdrew. More than 100,000 items from the Stone, Bronze, and Iron Ages, the oldest dated to 9000 B.C.E., have been found in southern Norway, including 12 fireplaces from the early part of the last post-glacial period. In north-central Norway Norwegian archaeologists made a rare discovery: bone fragments from a child who must have lived in the area around 6,000 years ago.

Ancient settlements in the region have been excavated, and several thousand items have been recorded. In Finnmark, a county where many of the Sami live, the foundations of an ancient longhouse, believed to be 4,000 years old, could have housed 10 to 12 people. The longhouse had two

fireplaces and other artifacts, including flint knives, axes, and daggers.

The seafarers who emerged from these ancient groups, popularly known as Vikings, also resided in Denmark and Sweden, and were the first Europeans known to have crossed the Atlantic Ocean, and the period from 800–1050 C.E. has been romanticized as the “Viking Age” since the 18th century. However, a majority of Scandinavians were farmers, not pirates. Harald Fairhair, or Finehair (c. 850–c. 933), is credited with unifying Norway during this period.

Oslo, the capital of Norway, flourished as a power hub in the first half of the 14th century, but the Black Death and other plagues in the latter half of the 14th century resulted in the loss of many lives and economic deterioration. As a result the country went through a severe economic depression. To improve its situation Norway entered into a union with Denmark in 1397. Danish governors ruled Norway for the next four centuries.

During the Napoleonic wars in 1814 Denmark-Norway was defeated and lost to Sweden, which then took control of

Fjords

Fjords are glacial valleys, usually narrow and steep sided, extending below sea level and filled with saltwater. A fjord is formed when a glacier retreats, forming a U-shaped valley. The sea fills in the resulting valley floor. Fjords are excellent natural harbors and benefit Norway's fishing and shipbuilding industries. They also provide breathtaking scenery with deep canyons covered in greenery.

Some of the world's largest coral reefs are also found among Norway's fjords. The marine life there is spectacular and memorable. There are thousands of types of plankton, coral, fish, and sharks. Most life forms found there are equipped to live under the great water pressure and total darkness of the deep sea. Researchers are still studying this area for new forms of marine biology. The Sognefjorden (Sogne Fjord) is Norway's longest and deepest fjord; it extends 120 miles inland and reaches 4,291 feet below sea level.

Norway under the Treaty of Kiel, signed on January 14. Throughout the 19th century, nationalism grew in Norway, and relations between Sweden and Norway became increasingly strained. Eventually in 1905, Norway declared its independence and was free of Swedish rule.

Norway tried to remain neutral during both world wars, but the government yielded to pressure from Britain during World War I, and the Norwegian fleet assisted Britain by delivering essential supplies. In return Britain supplied coal to Norway, which became known as the "Neutral Ally." During World War II, despite Norway's neutral position, Germany launched a surprise attack on Oslo and some major Norwegian ports on April 9, 1940, and nearly the entire country was soon under German control. The naval fleet of Norway continued to assist the Allies throughout the war. German troops

Aurora Borealis

The aurora borealis is an optical phenomenon seen in the northern polar region at night. Auroras, also called northern lights, are celestial displays of streaks of light sometimes accompanied by light sparkling sounds. They occur due to the effects of the solar wind (streams of ions flowing out from the Sun) on the Earth's atmosphere. Sometimes the intensity of the light produced is so high that one can read a book at night without additional lighting. This phenomenon, first noted by Galileo (1564–1642), has been listed as one of the seven wonders of the natural world.

stayed in Norway until the war ended in May 1945. By the end of the war nearly half of the Norwegian fleet had been destroyed. Norway was counted as one of the victorious nations in World War II and was one of the founding members of the United Nations (UN), and the UN's first secretary-general was a Norwegian Trygve Halvdan Lie (1896–1968).

In 1949 Norway became a member of NATO. In 1960 Norway joined the European Free Trade Association. Norway has not joined the European Union (EU), though the country enjoys a concession according to which it has been granted some trading privileges.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Norway is one of the three countries that occupy the Scandinavian Peninsula, along with Sweden and Finland. Norway shares international borders with Russia, Sweden, and Finland, and it is a close neighbor of Denmark, situated across the straits that connect the North Sea and the Baltic Sea. The country has one of the world's longest coastlines with maritime borders with the North Sea, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Norwegian Sea.

Norway has a generally rugged terrain, with Galdhopiggen (8,100 feet) in the Jotenheimen Mountains being the highest point in the country. The landscape is punctuated with rivers and lakes, the River Glama being Norway's longest. Most of northern Norway lies above the Arctic Circle and is covered in ice for the greater part of the year. The rough coastlines are often glaciated, and there are 5,000 islands away from the mainland of Norway. The most outstanding feature of the Norwegian coastlines is its beautiful fjords.

Most of the Norwegian land is forested, and only 3 percent is arable. These forests are home to reindeer, wolves, musk oxen, and lemmings. A wide variety of fish and whales are also found in the surrounding seas. Commercial fishing and whaling provide substantial contributions to the Norwegian economy. The southern areas of Norway are low-lying lands with warm summers and cold winters, where daytime temperatures can reach 72°F. The farther north one goes, the colder it gets, and the far northern regions of Norway experience subarctic temperatures. Winters are harsh, and summers are not uncomfortably warm. Norway, like other Scandinavian countries, experiences the unique phenomenon of the midnight Sun. During summer months the Sun does not dip very far below the horizon, and it is still sunny at 11 p.m.

ECONOMY

Norway enjoys a prosperous free-market economy. The people are known to have a high quality of life, and the crime rate is among the lowest in the world. Crude oil and fisheries are the major contributors to the Norwegian economy. The country ranks third in

worldwide oil production, behind only Saudi Arabia and Russia. Norway enjoys good trade relations with neighboring European nations including the EU members, in spite of its not being a member of the organization. The country is rich in natural resources, such as petroleum, hydropower, fish, forests, and minerals. The major industries here comprise oil, natural gas, computers, high technology, fishing, forestry, shipping and shipbuilding, and paper production.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Norway adheres staunchly to its many cultural traditions. This is evident in the many festivals and cultural events. Traditional folk dance forms and songs, along with storytelling, are always popular. Both men and women wear a traditional outfit called a *bunad*, a typically rural costume worn for special occasions and weddings. The men's *bunad* consists of a white silk shirt, short pants, stockings, a vest, and topcoat, and is covered with colorful designs. The women's *bunads* are more varied, and the embroidered designs are typically elaborate, with scarves, shawls, and handmade silver or gold jewelry accessories. Sunglasses or common jewelry are never worn with the *bunad*. The designs on *bunads* are unique and distinctive to different districts of Norway, and it is thought there may be as many as 200 different *bunads*. Even the jewelry should be related to the district, unless inherited from family in another district.

The country has been home to talented artists, such as the painter Edvard Munch (1863–1944), composer Edvard Grieg (1843–1907), sculptor Gustav Vigeland (1869–1943), author Knut Hamsun (1859–1952), and playwright Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906).

The Sami are the indigenous people of Norway. They were traditionally nomadic and lived in the northern mountainous region of Norway, herding reindeer, hunting, and fishing. Today the Sami live in the county of Finnmark and have their own parliament.

The people of Norway are predominantly Christian. Before the advent of Christianity, Norse mythology formed the basis of the country's belief system.

CUISINE

Norwegian cuisine is known for its wide variety of fish dishes. Salmon, trout, cod, monkfish, and halibut are just a few kinds of fish consumed available. Herring, shrimp, and shellfish are also very popular. Norwegians also eat meat of reindeer, moose, and red deer. A special variety of goat's milk cheese known as *brunost* is unique to this country and is served with almost every meal.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, and is celebrated as New Year's Day, called *Nyttårsdag* in Norway, all over the world. In Norway, on *Nyttårsbukk* (New Year's Eve), children dress up in amusing costumes and go door-to-door, singing. They are given sweets and candies in return. This ritual is called *Nyttårsbukk*. Traditionally Norwegians make personal New Year's resolutions and enjoy meals with family and friends on this day. It is a national holiday, and schools and workplaces are closed.

Fun Fact
Actress Marilyn Monroe was of Norwegian descent.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers. The earliest origins of May Day celebration are ascribed to the pagan festivals that were held by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages, but its modern political observance owes to a history of worker indignation over the abuses of capital in the Industrial Age and early-20th century.

In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

Fun Fact

When Gyda, the daughter of a neighboring king, refused to marry Harald until he was king of all Norway, he vowed not to comb or cut his hair until he ruled all of Norway. Only 10 years later, he felt justified in trimming it, changing his name from "Shockhead" or "Tanglehair" to "Fairhair."

Fun Fact

Vidkun Quisling (1887–1945) was a Norwegian Fascist politician. From February 1942 to the end of World War II, he collaborated with the Nazis when they occupied Norway, serving as the minister president. When the war ended, Quisling was tried for high treason and executed by firing squad. His name is now used to mean "traitor."



Children parade in front of the Royal Palace during a celebration of the Constitution Day in Oslo. (AP Photo/ Bjoern Sigurdsoen)

In Norway workers march through the streets of cities and towns to mark this day. Norwegians also use the occasion to celebrate the advent of spring and clean their homes and gardens on this day. Because it is a national holiday, government offices, schools, and businesses are closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 17

On this day Norway's constitution became a reality in 1814 at Eidsvoll. Norwegians celebrate Constitution Day by wearing traditional costumes known as *bunad*. They decorate their houses and streets with red, blue, and white balloons and ribbons. The people greet their king and the royal family on this day, which is marked by parades and patriotic songs. Schools, government offices, and workplaces remain closed on this day.

Fun Fact

An official institution was established in 1947 to act in an advisory capacity on all questions dealing with Norwegian *bunads*.

❁ MIDSUMMER'S EVE

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 21

Midsummer's Eve, Jonsok in Norwegian, is a celebration of the summer solstice, the longest day of the year. Celebrating the solstice is a pagan tradition. It was a fertility festival, and special rituals were conducted to ensure a good harvest in August. As part of its program to convert pagans to Christianity, the

Roman Catholic Church renamed this day the Feast Day of St. John the Baptist.

Religious Holidays

❁ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, commemorating the last week of Jesus' mortal life. Jesus was the prophet of Christianity, and Christians believe him to be the second person of the Holy Trinity: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The day is as much about the beginning of Jesus' journey to the Cross as it is about his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. His arrival in Jerusalem was indeed the way to the Cross.

After two of his disciples had fetched a donkey for him to ride, they placed their clothes on it to make a comfortable seat. The disciples then cut branches and covered the path, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the prediction of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. People welcomed him by waving palm and olive branches, and strewing garments and branches on the road. There were different perceptions at work: Jesus rode in on a donkey, the humble entry of a peaceful nature for a spiritual king; the people of Jerusalem welcomed him with palm and olive branches and the laying of garments in his path because they wanted a worldly king to defeat the Romans.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Catholics

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

The rituals observed on Maundy Thursday are based on a sequence of events supposed to have occurred during Jesus' last meal with his Apostles. First Jesus washed their feet; then he announced that he had been betrayed by one of them. The traitor Judas left the table. Finally Jesus instituted the Eucharist: a ritual of consuming bread and wine as symbols of his body and blood, also referred to as Communion in Christian churches. Maundy Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist, the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week, and gives priests an opportunity to prepare for the many rituals associated with Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter.

In Norway churches conduct special prayer services. The priest, while celebrating Mass, washes the feet of 12 chosen parishioners just as Jesus did. The mood is somber and the faithful pray on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, also known as Mourning Friday, Black Friday, and Holy Friday, falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent. It is observed in most parts of the world to remember the Crucifixion of Jesus. Some Norwegians observe a fast from Ash Wednesday (first day of Lent), for 40 days up to Good Friday and a partial fast from then until Easter. Some fast only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. In Norway Christians perform a ritual called the Stations of the Cross, a reenactment of Jesus' final journey to Calvary. This is a day of fasting and abstinence in Norway.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Saturday before Easter

Holy Saturday is the day Jesus lay in the tomb and the day before he rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. This was the Sabbath (the Jewish day of rest is Saturday). Christians also regard it as the second Sabbath after Creation. The final day of Holy Week, which begins with Palm Sunday and includes Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, it marks the threshold between death and resurrection, and is a day of silence and contemplation for devout Christians.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection. For this reason, it is sometimes known as Resurrection Day. This day is of utmost importance because the fundamental teaching of Christianity is that Jesus, through his death, freed all his believers from the penalty of sin. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over.

On Easter in Norway, the entire family gathers to celebrate Jesus' Resurrection. Norwegians often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to offer prayers. Children decorate eggs with colorful strips of paper and candies. (Easter eggs have become associated with the festival because they are symbols of rebirth and regeneration taken from the ancient pagan spring festivals.) Many Norwegians go for ski-

ing holidays during the Easter holidays. Feasting and exchanging greetings and Easter eggs continue even on the next day Easter Monday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Forty days after Lent

Ascension Day is a day of special celebration for Lutherans in Norway because it celebrates Jesus' Ascension to heaven 40 days after his Resurrection on Easter. Norwegians celebrate this day with special prayer services in churches, and singing contests are held in many villages.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY

PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fifty days after Lent

Both Pentecost Sunday and Monday, also called Whitsunday and Whitmonday, are a celebration of Pentecost, which in Greek means the "fiftieth day." Pentecost takes place 50 days after Easter and celebrates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus' Apostles. Whitsunday is so called from the white garments worn by those who were baptized during the Easter vigil service. On these days Norwegians attend special church services.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; PENTECOST

ST. OLAV'S DAY

Observed by: Lutherans

Observed on: July 29

Olav Haraldson was a Viking pagan prince who converted to Christianity. During his rule he led the people of Norway into the Christian faith. He died on July 29, 1030. He is venerated as the country's patron saint. To honor him, the people of Norway commemorate the date of his death and special church services are held all over the country. In open-air pageants chapters out of the saint's life are also performed.

Fun Fact

Daffodils are called Påskeliljer (Easter lilies) in Norway, because they bloom during the Easter season.

Fun Fact

The name *Maundy Thursday* may be linked to the Latin word *mandatum*, "command," because Jesus commanded his Apostles to observe the ritual now called the Eucharist. It is the first word spoken by Jesus before he began washing the feet of his disciples, saying: "*Mandatum novum do vobis*" which means "a new commandment I give to you."

Fun Fact

In some places of Norway, women bake 14 types of cakes, one for each of the 14 days before Christmas.

Fun Fact

Newlyweds are often escorted out of the church to the music of an accordion.

 **CHRISTMAS**

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of celebration for Christians all over the world because it marks the birth of Jesus, believed by Christians to be their messiah. In Norway, celebrations begin weeks before Christmas. As early as November pigs and calves are slaughtered, and the preparation of the meat begins because no animals can be killed during the Christmas Peace in December. A special dish of lutefisk, or Christmas cod, is a specialty of this season. Sweets, gingerbread, and fancy animal-shaped cookies are made for Christmas. These items are often used to decorate the Christmas tree.

In Norway Christmas celebrations officially begin when the church bells ring at four in the evening on Christmas Eve (December 24). The entire family gathers to prepare the *molje*, a broth of Christmas meats. This broth is served with wafer-thin Norwegian bread. The people wear colorful traditional costumes on this day, and wish each other “Christmas peace.”

Norwegians attend church services and prepare an elaborate feast for their Christmas Eve supper. A special rice porridge, *risengrynsgrøt*, is prepared with a single almond in it. This porridge is served during the feast. It is said that the person who finds the almond will be lucky and the first one to marry. After dinner the Christmas tree, normally decorated away from the sight of children, is revealed to the entire family. The head of the family reads portions of the New Testament, and all of them join hands and circle the tree singing carols. Children open gifts that they have received from Julenisse, the Norwegian equivalent of Santa Claus.

The second day of Christmas is traditionally known as St. Stephen’s Day (called Boxing Day in some English-speaking countries) in Norway. In the olden days contests of horse racing on icy roads were held on this day. Nowadays workplaces host Christmas parties for their employees on St. Stephen’s

Julenisse the Gnome

Julenisse the Gnome wears a pointy red cap and has a flowing beard. Norwegian children believe that he lives in their families’ barns, watching over them, and brings gifts for them at Christmas. Norwegians believe that they should keep the gnome in good humor, because he has the power to make their livestock sick. In order to please the little man, children keep an extra bowl of sweet *risengrynsgrøt* (rice porridge) for him outside the house.

Day, and churches commemorate the martyrdom of St. Stephen on December 26.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays
 **NORTHERN LIGHTS FESTIVAL**

Observed in: Tromsø

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 21–25

The Northern Lights Festival is held every year in the northern city of Tromsø. This festival signifies the end of the long polar night in Norway. A wide variety of cultural programs attract a large number of visitors to the country. The Sun’s reappearance in Norway is celebrated with concerts of classical and contemporary music, art and craft exhibitions, dance performances, and theatrical presentations.

Rites of Passage
 **MARRIAGE**

The Norwegian groom dresses in a splendid traditional costume called a *bunad*. The bride is normally dressed in white or silver, and also wears a crown with special spoon-shaped danglers hanging from it. These danglers are believed to keep away evil spirits. Often the bridesmaids and the bride dress in similar, but not identical, costumes. This is done so as to confuse any evil spirits who may try to harm the bride.

The wedding ceremony normally takes place in a church, and vows and rings are exchanged. The prayer service is followed by a lavish reception, and the guests and family members offer their good wishes and blessings on this occasion. Music and dancing are integral parts of Norwegian wedding parties. A special wedding cake, known as *brudlaupskling*, made of bread and topped with cheese and cream, is cut by the couple. At the end of the function, the couple plant two fir trees in front of their house to symbolize their future children.

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Oman

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Middle East, between Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and the United Arab Emirates; bordered by the Arabian Sea, Gulf of Oman, and Persian Gulf
Size	82,031 sq. mi.
Capital City	Muscat
Flag Description	Oman's flag has three horizontal bands of white, red, and green of equal width with a broad vertical red band on the hoist side and the national emblem in white centered in the vertical band.
Independence	1650 (from Portugal)
Population	3,001,583 (2005 est.)
Government	Monarchy
Nationality	Omani
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Arab, Baluchi, South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi); Black
Major Language(s)	Arabic (official); English; Baluchi; Urdu; Indian dialects
Major Religion(s)	Ibadhi Muslim (75%); Sunni Muslim; Shia Muslim; Hindu
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; National Day, November 18; Birthday of HM Sultan Qaboos, November 19

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Located on the Arabian Peninsula, Oman has always been a strategic trade center in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean because of its location. Archaeological evidence suggests that civilization existed in Oman as early as the third millennium B.C.E. The Sumerians referred to the region of Oman as Magan, and it was known for its copper resources. Migrants from Yemen and northern Arabia came and settled in the region.

Around 563 B.C.E. northern Oman became integrated with the Achaemenid Persian Empire and Southern Oman flourished because of its gum trees. The country prospered until the sixth century C.E. In the seventh century Oman adopted Islam, and a form of that religion called Ibadhism became the country's dominant religion. In the middle of the eighth century tribes from northern Oman entered Arabia and conquered Medina. However, they were suppressed and

overthrown by the Abbasid Dynasty. Nevertheless Oman managed to remain relatively free of Abbasid control, and the Ibadhi imamate (a country ruled by an imam) survived until well into the 20th century.

In 1507 the Portuguese invaded Oman and conquered the coastal regions, including the city of Muscat, from which they eventually were driven in 1650. By the dawn of the 18th century, Oman had established naval control of the Indian Ocean. In 1741, when the present line of sultans began with Ahmed ibn Said of Yemen. The present royal family is descended from bin Said.

By the end of the 18th century Oman was a large empire under Sultan Said bin Sultan (1790–1856). It controlled African Zanzibar, the southern coast of Iran, and the area between Pakistan and Iran. It was the most powerful country of Arabia. However, when the sultan's sons split the empire, Oman's prosperity began to stagnate, and a succession of sultans came to power; but they did little to change the country's feudal structure or the country's isolation from other parts of the world.

Ibadhism

Ibadhism is a form of Islam quite distinct from the Shia or the Sunni sects. It was founded by Jabir bin Zaid Al-Azdi from Nizwa in Oman. Ibadhism is practiced in Oman, East Africa, the Mzab valley of Algeria, the Nafus mountains of Libya, and the island of Jerba in Tunisia. Ibadhi Muslims are regarded as moderately conservative. Unlike other sects of Islam, they do not believe in the *qunut*, in which enemies are cursed while praying.

In 1970 Sultan Qaboos bin Said (b. 1940) ousted his father Said Bin Taimur (1910–72) and seized power. One of the first things he did was to rescind many of his father's harsher laws. Since then Oman's economy has entered a new phase of modernization and an era of prosperity. Roads, hospitals, and schools have been built and the tourism industry is being promoted.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The Sultanate of Oman is situated in the eastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula and shares borders with the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen to the southwest. The geographical features of this country include coastlines, beaches, mountains, salt marshes, oases, and deserts. The northern coastal area lies along the Gulf of Oman. This region is separated from the rest of the country by the Hajar Mountains. The highest peak of Oman, Jebel Akhdar (9,775 feet), is situated in these mountains. There are two regions in Oman that are covered with salt marshes. The largest desert in Oman is in the west, extending into Saudi Arabia. It is called the Rub Al Khali (Empty Quarter). This desert is one of the least explored regions in the world.

The Sultanate of Oman has made concerted efforts to increase the greenery in this region. The Omani government spends huge sums of money for this purpose. Grasses, shrubs, and trees like acacia

Umm al Samim

The Umm al Samim (which means “mother of poisons” or “mother of worries”) is a famous salt marsh area in Oman. A salt marsh is a coastal grassland that is frequently covered by rising tides. These marshes are found in places where rivers flow into the ocean. Because the water flow is very slow, sedimentation builds up a muddy environment where plants and small animals thrive.

The Al Samim looks solid and crusty but can break easily, so it is considered dangerous. Sir Wilfred Thesiger, the explorer, was the first European to see Umm al Samim in the 1940s.

grow naturally in Oman. Grapes, apricots, and coconut palms are cultivated in the mountainous regions. The north of Oman is well known for its frankincense trees.

The animal life of Oman consists of a fascinating variety of species. The Arabian oryx (a white antelope found in Arabian deserts), giant sea turtles, Arabian tahr (a wild goat), Arabian wolf, leopard, striped hyena, and the sooty falcon are some of the animals found in this region. Oman boasts rich fishing grounds where tuna and sardines are the main varieties found. Goats, sheep, camels, and cattle are reared in Oman. Several species of birds, lizards, snakes, and scorpions are also found in this country.

The coastal areas of Oman are hot and humid in the summer, whereas the interior regions are hot and dry. Rainfall is scanty, although the southern region is known to experience heavy monsoons from June to September. The temperature is slightly lower in the higher altitudes of Oman.

ECONOMY

The Sultanate of Oman boasts a flourishing economy due to the crude oil reserves found in its deserts. The oil industry mushroomed in this region over the past 25 years, generating large-scale employment and improving the general quality of life. Petroleum and petroleum products account for 90 percent of export revenues and are also major contributors to the gross domestic product (GDP). Agricultural activities are carried out at a subsistence level throughout the country.

Oman may not be as rich as the other Middle Eastern nations, but the country enjoys a substantial trade surplus and low inflation rates. The Omani government aims to increase employment for the local population and to decrease its dependence on foreign nationals. The government encourages the replacement of expatriate workers with local people, a process known as “omanization.” Training in specialized skills, business management, and the English language has been undertaken to support these objectives.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The people of Oman lead a conservative and traditional lifestyle, even though the nation exudes a cosmopolitan air. Day-to-day life has not changed significantly for centuries. Most Omanis still wear their traditional dresses on a daily basis. The men wear loose shirt-dresses known as *dishdashas*, while the women wear bright, colorful loose dresses and shawls. The black veil is not compulsory for women in Oman.

The use of perfumes and jewelry is common among Omani men and women, to demonstrate a good quality of life. Heavy gold rings and bangles almost always adorn the henna-dyed hands of Omani women. They enjoy comparatively more freedom than their other Arab counterparts. Most women in the cities are educated and are employed.

Oman is noted for its traditional craftsmanship in shipbuilding and metalworking. Omani craftspeople produce fine silver jewelry and beautiful ornamental daggers called *khanjars*. These curved knives are a part of the well-dressed Omani male's wardrobe. Omani architecture reflects Persian and Indian influences. This is evident in the mosques built in the region.

Omani literature, music, and dance are well known. Even though the conservative Ibadhi sect of Islam has limited musical expression, the music of this region puts a strong emphasis on rhythm and relies heavily on stringed instruments. Traditional Arab stringed instruments, such as the *tanbura* and *oud* are indispensable to the country's music.

❁ CUISINE

Omani cuisine is a blend of flavors from different parts of the Middle East, Africa, and the Far East. The cuisine stands out for its liberal use of a variety of spices, such as cinnamon, cardamom, cloves, black pepper, onion, ginger, garlic, and lime. Dishes made of meat and fish may be preferred over completely vegetarian dishes. Indian-style curry is a favorite among Omanis. Smoked kebabs, barbecued, grilled, or curried meats, chicken, fish, and rice are the mainstays of Omani cuisine. At the same time green leafy vegetables and lentils are not totally avoided. Omanis love to eat salads made of fresh vegetables, eggplant, tuna, dried fish, and watercress. A variety of soups are also consumed on a daily basis.

Omanis prepare special dishes for festivals such as Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. Some of the mouth-watering foods prepared for such observances are *ruz al mudbroub*, a dish of rice served with fried fish and *maqdeed* (specially dried meat), *sharqiya muqalab* (a dish made of tripe and duck-flavored spices), and *arisia* (lamb cooked with rice). During the holy month of Ramadan, Omanis break their fast (*iftar*) with *sakbanka*, a thick sweet soup made of wheat, date molasses, and milk, and *fatta* (a meat and vegetable dish), along with *kbubz rakbal* (Omani unleavened bread).

Omani coffee (*kabwa*) is world renowned. The rich and aromatic *kabwa* is normally prepared by brewing roasted and ground coffee beans with water and spices. This concoction is served in tiny cups without sugar, along with halvah, a dessert made with sesame seeds or almonds, tahini, and honey.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar and is celebrated as New Year's Day all over the world. In Oman, which is not as

Frankincense

Frankincense plays an indispensable role in Omani culture and lifestyle. It is the gum of a tree. No special event is complete without the burning of frankincense. Ancient Oman was one of the main centers for producing frankincense. Legend has it that the Queen of Sheba acquired great wealth by trading in frankincense with the Romans and the Greeks.

There are *souks* (markets) in Oman that sell nothing but frankincense, whereas others stock incense, perfumes, and other traditional Omani goods to cater to local, as well as overseas, needs. The method of preparation of incense and perfumes is kept secret from outsiders. These exotic scents are sought by people throughout the world.

conservative as some other Arab nations, this day is a national holiday. There are no festivities, but schools and offices remain closed.

❁ NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 18

Although the National Day ceremony is usually simple, November 18 marks a special day for the people of Oman: In 1970, Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the builder of modern Oman, initiated the nation's "renaissance."

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, presides over a military parade to mark Oman's National Day. The celebrations of 2005 were especially significant because Oman had entered a new era of parliamentary elections that year. Sultan Qaboos was pleased with the elections' progress and overwhelming participation by his subjects.

National Day is an official holiday, and all schools and offices remain closed.

❁ BIRTHDAY OF HM SULTAN QUABOOS

Tanbura and Oud

The *tanbura* and *oud* are perhaps the most important stringed instruments in Arab music. The *tanbura* first appeared in Sumeria in 2,700 B.C.E., It does not have a neck, and its strings are let free. The *oud* is normally not featured in Omani folk music, except in some vocal genres.

Fun Fact

Oman is the only oil-producing country in the Middle East that is not a member of OPEC.

Shuwa

The main dish served during festivals is called *shuwa*. The preparation of *shuwa* is a complicated affair in which the entire village may sometimes take part. The first step is to marinate an entire cow or a goat with a variety of dried spices. This meat is then wrapped in leaves and placed inside an underground clay oven. The oven is covered from the top. The meat may be roasted for over 48 hours at a low temperature. Omanis make use of this time to dance, sing, and have a good time.

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 19

Oman celebrates the birthday of the present sultan, born on this day in 1940, and the country wears a festive look. Buildings and streets throughout the country are decorated with lights and ribbons, and special postage stamps are issued. The sultan's birthday is an official holiday, and all schools and offices remain closed.

Religious Holidays

EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

In the Islamic calendar, El am Hejir marks the first day of the first month, called Muharram. It is believed that in 622 C.E. the prophet Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina on this day with his family and followers and formed the first Islamic state in Medina. This day is celebrated as Islamic New Year's Day.

In Oman, special prayer observances are held in mosques all over the country. Also a special meal is prepared and relished by Omani families on this day.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

MOULoud

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

Mouloud, the birthday of Muhammad, the holy prophet of the Muslims, falls in the third month of the Islamic year. It is also called Mawlid an-Nabi. For Muslims all over the world, this is a day of great joy and celebration since Muhammad is their most revered prophet. Only conservative sects of Islam do not celebrate Muhammad's birthday, because they believe that celebrating anyone's birthday, even Muhammad's, distracts the faithful from the proper focus of revering Allah.

In the Sultanate of Oman this event is a two-day celebration. Special prayers are held in mosques all over the country. A special meal is prepared and relished by Omani families on this day.

See also: Volume III: ISLAM; MOULoud

LAILAT AL-MEIRAJ

Observed by: Muslims

Observed in: September

Lailat al-Meiraj (or Lailat-ul-Miraj) commemorates the ascension of the prophet Muhammad to heaven. Muslims believe that he was visited by two archangels while he was asleep and was taken from Mecca to Jerusalem, where he met God and ascended into heaven. In Oman special prayers are offered on this day in all the mosques of the country.

See also Volume III: ISLAM

EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, the ninth month in the Islamic calendar, during which devout Muslims observe a daily dawn-to-dusk fast. Because it is the day when Muslims break their month-long fast, it is also called the Feast of Fast-Breaking, and the Koran forbids fasting on this day.

Eid al-Fitr occurs on the first day of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar, but the celebration lasts four days in Oman. Special prayers and feasting mark this occasion.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th and pilgrimage month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha is celebrated on the 10th day of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar; it is also called the Feast of Sacrifice. Like Eid al-Fitr, it is a very important festival for Muslims all over the world because it was on this day that the prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) agreed to sacrifice his young son in order to obey God's command. Muslims believe that God appeared to Ibrahim in a dream and commanded him to sacrifice his son, but just as Ibrahim was about to kill his son, God substituted a ram for the sacrifice.

In Oman this festival is celebrated for four days. A lamb, sheep, or goat is slaughtered, and an elaborate dinner is prepared to be shared with friends, family, and the poor. Special prayer services are conducted in mosques all across the sultanate.



The Omani free fall parachute show is part of festivities during the Muscat Festival 2005 in Muscat, Oman on January 30. (AP Photos/Hamid alQasbi)

This is also the month when many Muslims undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca, the hajj. This is the fifth pillar of Islam's Five Pillars of the faith, and every Muslim must make a pilgrimage to the sacred city at least once in his or her lifetime if it is physically and financially possible to do so.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

Regional Holidays

❁ MUSCAT FESTIVAL

Observed in: Muscat

Observed by: General Public

Observed in: December–January

The annual Muscat Festival is an important event promoting tourism to Oman. The Muscat Festival is held at various venues in the capital city of Muscat, where all the streets and buildings are decorated with elaborate lighting. Laser shows, fireworks, dance performances, concerts, culinary exhibits, children's shows, games, contests, and circuses are some of the highlights of the festival.

The festival enjoys wide media coverage and attracts tourists from all over the world. The royal family, ambassadors, and other dignitaries also make appearances during this event.

❁ KHAREEF FESTIVAL

Observed in: Salalah

Observed by: General Public

Observed in: July

The Khareef Festival is named for the monsoon winds that cool Dhofar between June and September. The festival is a promotional event held annually in the city of Salalah to showcase Oman's cultural heritage. Over a million visitors from the gulf region and the rest of the world participate in various events that encourage tourism, art, sports, and Oman's culture. Extensive shopping is a major part of this festival.

Concerts featuring famous vocalists from the gulf region and other Arab countries are also featured during the Khareef Festival.

Fun Fact

At Shisr archaeologists are still excavating what they think is the lost city of Ubar of the Arabian Nights. A small museum displays various artifacts found at the site.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

After childbirth, Omani women rest and recover for the next 40 days. During this period female relatives and friends tend to the new mother and assist her with her daily chores. Fresh bread, butter, honey, and porridges made of fenugreek are given to the mother. Visitors who have come to see the new baby often present the child with money and gifts.

❁ MARRIAGE

Once a girl agrees to an alliance, the prospective groom presents her with *mabr* (gifts, especially money) due to her upon marriage. The marriage is normally announced to the public after the Thursday evening prayers. The couple signs a marriage contract, in Oman called a *milka*. After the contract is signed, the couple is legally married even though they may not consummate the marriage until the night of the wedding.

Wedding preparations can become tedious for the groom because, apart from the *mabr*, he also has

Salalah

The city of Salalah is known for its markets (*souks*) where fruits, vegetables, incense burners, and frankincense are the main commodities for sale. Gold and silver shops are also a common feature of these local markets. Other features found in Salalah include historic and archaeological sites, coastal scenery, and lagoons. In addition it is the site of the annual Khareef Festival.

Fun Fact

An Omani bride never wears jewelry on her wedding day that has been worn previously.

to give the bride gold jewelry, new clothes, shoes, and perfumes. Thus the engagement period may continue for several months.

On the wedding day, the bride dyes her hair and paints her hands and feet with henna. She wears a white wedding gown. All the women who have come for the wedding gather inside the bride's house or a tent erected outside the house. Coffee, fruit, halvah, and a dinner of meat with rice are served.

Next the bride is brought inside the wedding tent and seated on a large chair. A traditional dance, accompanied by singing and clapping, will be performed for her. In earlier times this dance was performed by slave women. In the meantime the groom, along with his relatives, gathers inside a tent erected near the groom's house. They leave from here in a procession to the bride's tent, pick her up, and then return to the groom's home. The night is spent at the groom's house.

The day after the wedding a thick porridge of boiled wheat and meat, called *hareese*, is prepared and served to neighbors and guests. The celebrations continue throughout the following week, when guests keep pouring in to congratulate the newlyweds.

❁ DEATH

On the occasion of a death in an Omani family, the deceased is washed, shrouded in white cloth, and buried immediately. The following three days are meant for mourning. The menfolk sit in the village hall, while friends come over to pay their condolences. The women of the family remain at home to receive women visitors.

Snacks are prepared by neighbors and served to visitors. If the deceased was a married man, his widow must grieve for four months and 10 days, during which time her family and friends visit her often.

Further Reading

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~ Pakistan ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Southern Asia, bordering the Arabian Sea, between India on the east, Iran and Afghanistan on the west, and China in the north
Size	310,403 sq. mi.
Capital City	Islamabad
Flag Description	The flag of Pakistan has a vertical white band (symbolizing the role of religious minorities) on the hoist side. There is a large white crescent and a star in the remaining green portion of the flag; the crescent, star, and green color are traditional symbols of Islam.
Independence	August 14, 1947 (from United Kingdom)
Population	162,419,946 (2005 est.)
Government	Federal republic
Nationality	Pakistani
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Asian (Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashtun [Pathan], Baloch, Muhajir [immigrants from India at the time of partition and their descendants])
Major Language(s)	Punjabi (48%); Sindhi (12%); Siraiki, a Punjabi variant (10%); Pashtu (8%); Urdu (official; 8%); Balochi (3%); Hindko (2%); English (official and lingua franca of Pakistani elite and most government ministries)
Major Religion(s)	Muslim (97%: Sunni [77%]; Shiite [20%])
National Holiday(s)	Pakistan Day, March 23; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day, August 14; Defense Day, September 6; Death Anniversary of Quaid-e-Azam, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, September 11

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The part of the Indian subcontinent that is now Pakistan was first inhabited by people during the Stone Age. Around 6500 B.C.E. the first farming cultures appeared in south Asia, in the hills of what is now called Balochistan, west of the Indus Valley. The early farmers had domesticated wheat and animals, including cattle. By around 5500 pottery was in use. From this culture's technological base, the Indus Valley civilization developed.

By 4000 B.C.E., a distinctive regional culture, called pre-Harappan, had emerged in this area. Evidence that this culture was involved in far-reaching trade networks is found in

artifacts such as beads made of lapis lazuli and other materials that were not available locally. These people had domesticated numerous crops, including peas, sesame seeds, dates, and cotton, and a variety of domestic animals, including the water buffalo, which remain an important element in the region's agriculture.

Several towns of the pre-Indus period (c. 3300–2800 B.C.E.) have been found in Pakistan, one of which is located at Kot Diji in Khairpur, in the country's northern region. Six cultural periods for Kot Diji have been identified, and some scholars have concluded that the Kot-Diji cultural artifacts belong to an early phase of the culture that followed it, the Harappan, or Indus Valley, civilization that flourished from the 25th to the 18th centuries B.C.E. Some linguists believe that the Harappans may have spoken Dravidian because there is a Dravidian substratum to Indo-Aryan dialects.

The Indus Valley Civilization

One of the oldest civilizations in the world was once established in the Indus Valley, and Pakistani history is incomplete without mentioning some of the wonders of those times. The civilization was at its zenith from the third until the second millennium B.C.E., represented most spectacularly by three great city-states: Mohenjodaro (discovered in 1922), Harappa (discovered in 1923), and Kot Diji (discovered recently in Baluchistan).

In 3500 B.C.E. Harappa was only a village, but archaeologists have discovered what is, so far, the earliest known writing, various symbols etched onto jars. No one has been able to decipher the script, so their meaning is unknown, but the symbols resem-

ble what developed into Indus script. The symbols may have indicated the contents of the jar or be signs associated with a deity. In 1998 clay tablets with primitive words inscribed on them were found at the tomb of an Egyptian king, and they have been carbon-dated to 3300–3200, slightly earlier than the primitive writing developed by the Sumerians around 3100.

Mohenjodaro, which means “mound of the dead,” was one of the world’s first urban centers and boasted some of the most spectacular urban features of the ancient world, including a palace, a citadel, a college for priests, brick-walled houses, a sophisticated drainage system, and a state granary.

In 2000 the first wave of Indo-Aryans had arrived in the region and by 1800 the Indus Valley civilization had fragmented, and Mohenjodaro had been abandoned. About 1400 the second wave of Indo-Aryans, who would become dominant, arrived and their language, Sanskrit, spread across northern India and what is now Pakistan. (The language of the first wave, called Dardic, remained in Pakistan’s Pamir Mountains.)

The Indo-Aryans brought with them Sanskrit, the caste system still observed in India (hierarchical social divisions determined by the type of labor performed), and their religion, which became Hinduism. Sanskrit remained in use as the language of the elite until the conquest by the Umayyad Dynasty of Arab Muslims in 712 C.E. The Prakrits, the dialects spoken by the lower classes, were regarded with contempt by those who spoke Sanskrit, but the Prakrits live on in the dialects of modern-day Pakistan, and the elite’s language is dead.

Pakistan marks the farthest region conquered by Alexander the Great in 327. He did not remain long, and soon this area was to become the famous Silk Road that carried trade goods back and forth between India, China, and the Roman Empire. Following Alexander’s death, the Seleucids briefly controlled the region until Chandragupta Maurya (r. 322–298) came to power. Ashoka (r. 273–32) was one of the great proselytizers of Buddhism.

After the overthrow of the last ruler of the Mauryan Dynasty in 185 (thought by some historians to be the greatest empire to control the territory), Demetrius of Bactria (r. c. 200–180) seized the opportunity and established an Indo-Greek kingdom in 184 that lasted nearly two centuries, until around 10 B.C.E. Menander (342–292), one of the most famous of the Greco-Bactrian kings, may have

converted to Buddhism. Petty Greek kings ruled into the beginning of the first century. At this time Central Asian tribes conquered the region. The most significant of these was the Kushan tribe of China, thought by some to be related to the Tocharians, another of the Indo-European groups that had migrated east.

The Kushans were merchants (silk traders), practiced Buddhism, and had constructed hundreds of stupas (dome-shaped worship structures) and monasteries by the second century C.E. The capital of their Gandhara Kingdom was Peshawar, and this soon became the holy land of Buddhists as well as an important trading center. The Kushans were followed, over centuries, by the Sassanians, the Gupta Dynasty, the Hephthalites (or White Huns from Central Asia), Turkic, and Hindu Shahi Dynasties. Eventually in 1526 the Mughals invaded the territory and introduced wonderful art forms, sweeping reforms, and their religion, Islam, setting the stage for what would become modern-day Pakistan.

The Mughal rulers increasingly suppressed the Sikhs (an indigenous religious sect), and the Sikhs began to rise up against their oppressors. The late 18th century produced one of the greatest leaders of Punjab, Ranjit Singh (1780–1839; also called the Lion of Punjab/Lahore), who created a unified Sikh kingdom in northern Pakistan-India for the first time. Ranjit Singh’s power threatened the colonial British, however, who were also expanding their territories in Asia. A treaty called the Amritsar Treaty (1809) was put into place, limiting the areas of occupation by both. This was a measure to ensure peace in the area as both were consolidating their positions in Asia. But when Ranjit Singh died in 1839, his successors were no match for the British onslaught. Eventually the Sikh army was defeated in the Anglo-Sikh War in 1845–46, and they lost Kashmir, Baltistan, Ladakh, and Gilgit. The British renamed them the State of Jammu and Kashmir. The Sikh Empire crumbled under British pressure. Soon the

Fun Fact

At its peak around 2500 B.C.E., Mohenjodaro may have been home to as many as five million residents.

British controlled the entire subcontinent, and it was only in the late 19th century that resistance to the British gained any momentum.

The All-India Muslim League was created in 1906 to ensure a Muslim voice in the independence struggle against the British. A group of Muslim exiles based in England coined the term Pakistan, the “Land of the Pure,” which would soon become a demand for a totally Muslim nation. After the British ceded to the pressure for independence from within the Indian colony, the new viceroy Lord Louis Mountbatten (1900–79) declared that independence would become official by June 1948, but only after dividing British India into West Pakistan (now called Pakistan), India, and East Pakistan (which broke off in 1971 to become the Republic of Bangladesh). Although Lord Mountbatten’s role was to facilitate the smooth transfer of power by June 1948, his announcement that the country was to be partitioned was met with mass outrage and violent incidents. The British bungled the partitioning of India so badly that it resulted in the worst riots ever witnessed in the region, perhaps in modern history. Somewhere between one and five million Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and others lost their lives as a result, and millions more became refugees in the new Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

The United Nations (UN) tried to declare a ceasefire after Pakistan invaded and occupied a large part of Kashmir (which had voluntarily joined the Indian Union) in 1949. However, it was and remains a bone of contention between India and Pakistan. Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876–1948) became the first governor-general of Pakistan and was known as their Quaid-e-Azam, or “Great Leader.” Liaquat Ali Khan (1896–1951) became Pakistan’s first prime minister. When Jinnah died in 1948 his friend and associate Liaquat Ali Khan succeeded him. After only three years in office, however, he was assassinated, and numerous military coups followed.

In 1956 a formal official constitution gave Pakistan the status of an Islamic republic. In 1958 President Iskandar Mirza (1899–1969) declared martial law, annulled the constitution, and banned all political parties. The next two decades brought two wars with India (over control of Kashmir) and a third civil war that led to the formation of the Republic of Bangladesh in 1971.

In 1973 a new constitution was enacted, whereby the country adopted a federal parliamentary system of governance. Under the new government the presidency became merely ceremonial, with real power in the hands of the prime minister. The popular prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1928–79) was overthrown by Gen. Muhammad Zia ul-Haq (1924–88; Bhutto’s chief of staff) in a bloodless coup in 1977. It became more bloody when Bhutto was hanged in 1979. Zia ul-Haq allied Pakistan with the United States and brought about major developments. He died in an air crash in 1988 and was followed by Benazir Bhutto (b. 1953), Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s daughter, who was elected as the

first woman leader of this Muslim country.

Nawaz Sharif (b. 1949) won the elections in 1997. Two years later military chief Pervez Musharraf (b. 1943) overthrew Nawaz Sharif, citing the devastated economy of Pakistan as his justification for interference. Then Musharraf declared himself president in June 2001 and in the 21st century maintains a tenuous hold on power. Pakistan plays a pivotal role in an unstable and dangerous region of the world, particularly because, like its neighbor and rival India, it possesses nuclear weapons.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

With Iran to the southwest, Afghanistan to the northwest, China to the northeast, and India to the east, the Pakistani mainland touches the sea only on its southern side. The southwestern part of the country is mostly mountainous or barren and therefore unfit for agricultural purposes. The remaining parts form an alluvial plain (about one-third of the land) that is the heart of the country. The Indus River descends from the mountains of Tibet (a country toward its east) and flows through Pakistan to empty through a magnificent delta into the Arabian Sea. The climate in Pakistan depends on the altitude and the proximity to the sea. The area close to the Arabian Sea remains warm most of the year, whereas the temperatures atop the northern mountain ranges are extremely low. Broadly the seasons are of three kinds: the hot season (March–June), the wet season (July–September), and the cool season (October–February). The temperatures can range from an average of 36°F in January to 104°F in June in the capital city of Islamabad, while the country receives an annual average of 10 inches of rainfall. Hailstorms are a common occurrence during late summers in Islamabad.

Vegetation in the lowlands is patchy and restricted to stunted woodlands and scattered clumps of grass. On higher altitudes, especially of the north, the mountainsides are covered with coniferous trees and a wide variety of multicolored flowers. The area also abounds in jackals, deer, snow leopards, and bears. Marsh crocodiles are also found in a good number in the marshy areas of the Indus River delta, while the Pakistani coastline is home to a variety of shellfish, turtles, fish, and sharks.

❁ ECONOMY

Pakistan is a poor, underdeveloped country with roughly a third of its population living in poverty. Yet overcoming decades of war and political unrest, Pakistan has managed to register substantial growth

Fun Fact

Between 1200 and 1000 the Rigveda was composed in the plains of the Punjab.

Fun Fact

Ashoka, or Asoka, means “without sorrow” in Sanskrit.

Fun Fact

Most festivals in Pakistan are religious or related to the birth of the country, as it was originally conceived to be the homeland of Muslims.

since winning its independence in the late 1940s. Due to the policies approved by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and enacted by the government, foreign assistance, and an improved access to global markets since 2001, Pakistan has established a stronger economic base, increased its gross domestic product (GDP), and shown promise in its ability to create new jobs and reduce poverty.

The country's exports have steadily increased in the last few years, along with improved worker compensation. The industrial sector has successfully expanded into the textile, vegetable oil, sugar, carpet, and steel industries. Pakistan trades most heavily with the United States, Japan, European countries (Germany, the United Kingdom), Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Pakistan is a Muslim nation, and Islam is its official state religion. Christians form the biggest minority group, followed by Hindus and Parsis (descendants of Persian Zoroastrians). Pakistanis, both men and women, typically wear a *shalwar kameez* (a nonrevealing long and loose two-piece outfit). Though a Muslim state, Pakistan's culture is mixed with strong Indian Hindu influences in festivals and ceremonies, which can be seen clearly in the Basant Festival (celebrating the arrival of spring) and marriage rites. The family of the bride incurs huge expenses (including a dowry and trousseau) in Hindu weddings, and this has become the practice in Pakistani Muslim weddings as well.

English is one of Pakistan's official languages, although Urdu (also an official language) is the language of the people. Pakistani society is run by and for the benefit of men. The head of the family is the oldest male, who guides other family members in all matters. The country is rich with craftsmen: potters, woodworkers, glassblowers, ceramicists, and jewelers. There is a rich tradition of Sufi, ulema, and *mushaikh* poetry in Pakistani culture. (Sufism is a religion derived from Hinduism, Judaism, and Christianity; *mushaikhs* are Sufi spiritual leaders; Ulemas are the orthodox Muslim scholars of the Sunni sect.) Cricket is an obsession with Pakistanis, especially when the opponent is India.

CUISINE

Pakistani food, rich in spices and curry-based, is strongly influenced by the Middle East and northern India. The main components of a typical Pak-

istani meal are flat bread (roti), vegetables (*sabzi*), rice (*chawal*), and meat (*gosht*). People commonly consume snacks such as *samosas* (cone-shaped pastries filled with stuffing), and *tikkas* (spicy, barbecued marinated mutton, beef, or chicken pieces on skewers). The most common sweet is *barfi*, which is made from milk solids and is available in many flavors. *Gulab jamuns* (cottage cheese dumplings in sugar syrup) are everyone who has a sweet tooth. *Chai* (tea) and *lassi* (a yogurt drink) are favorite beverages. Officially Pakistan is a "dry" country, but imported beer and spirits can be bought in special bars.

Public/Legal Holidays

PAKISTAN DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 23

Pakistan Day commemorates the Pakistan Resolution passed by the Muslims of South Asia in Lahore on March 23, 1940. Minto Park (Lahore) was the venue for the annual session of the All India Muslim League, which met from March 22–24, 1940. At this time a resolution was passed under the guidance of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah (the founder of Pakistan), who urged people to seek a separate state for Muslims instead of seeking an alliance with the Hindus of India. The 1946 demand for a separate Muslim nation, now divided into Pakistan and Bangladesh, was based on this resolution. Also on this date in 1956, Pakistan officially became an Islamic republic. The day is marked by military parades in Lahore, Peshawar, Karachi, Quetta, and in the capital city of Islamabad.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, May Day, or Workers' Day in many parts of the world to recognize the important role played by workers in the economic stability of their nation. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

The PTUDC (Pakistan Trade Union Defense Campaign) regards May Day as a day to emphasize

the ongoing struggle between the working classes of Pakistan and the rich capitalist classes. In Lahore the celebration features seminars on labor-related issues.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 14

Pakistan has the distinction of being one of the largest Muslim nations in the world. It was initially a part of India, but due to irreconcilable conflicts between Muslims and Hindus, two separate nations were formed in 1947, the year that India achieved independence from British colonial rule. To celebrate this occasion, there are meetings, rallies, and demonstrations celebrating the formation of Pakistan.

❁ DEFENSE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 6

Defense Day, or National Defense Day, commemorates the Indo-Pakistan War of 1965 that was fought over the province of Kashmir. Both Pakistan and India claim to have won the war. To arouse the memory of Pakistan's glory, exhibitions of military equipment are held in the towns of Lahore, Rawalpindi, Peshawar, Karachi, and Quetta. Parades are held, and people visit the war memorials to mark National Defense Day.

❁ DEATH ANNIVERSARY OF QUAID-E-AZAM, MUHAMMAD ALI JINNAH

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 11

This day commemorates the death of the father of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who died in 1948. Called Quaid-e-Azam ("the Great Leader") by the people, Jinnah was the most revered leader of Pakistan. It was Jinnah who first expressed the idea of forming a separate Muslim state of Pakistan in the 1940s. According to him the Hindus and the Muslims had distinct irreconcilable identities. So that these distinct sects of people could live harmoniously, the Two-Nation Theory was developed to segregate Indian Hindus and Indian Muslims following independence.

On this day special prayers are held in mosques, with people from all walks of life visiting the great leader's mausoleum, offering wreaths in his memory. His birthday is celebrated on December 25.



Members of the Presidential guards stand before the portrait of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, founder of Pakistan, during Independence Day celebrations at the Presidential palace in Islamabad. Pakistan gained its independence on August 14, 1947 from British rule. (AP Photo/B.K. Bangash)

Religious Holidays

❁ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

The Islamic New Year, called El am Hejir, is celebrated on the first day of Muharram, the first month in the Islamic calendar. (The Islamic calendar is based on the phases of the Moon and has fewer days than the Western, solar calendar. As a result Islamic holidays gradually migrate through the seasons.) In mosques Muslims celebrate in a subdued manner with special prayers and readings. An important part of the day is devoted to telling the story of the prophet Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina with his family and followers in 622 C.E.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

❁ ASHURA

Observed by: Shia Muslims

Observed on: Ninth and 10th days of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

Ashura means the "tenth day" in Arabic. In the Islamic calendar Ashura falls on the 10th day of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar. This day commemorates the martyrdom of the grandson of Muhammad Hussein bin Ali, the third Imam of the Shia, who was killed in the Battle of Karbala in 680 C.E. in Iraq.

In Pakistan there is mourning for two days to mark Imam Hussein's death. There are processions and prayer meetings on this day but they are very solemn and there is no music. The death scene of Hussein is enacted as boys and men indulge in self-flagellation by striking themselves repeatedly with whips, chains, and other sharp objects to share Hussein's agony before his death. This is done in order to demonstrate their religious commitment.

See also Volume III: ASHURA; ISLAM

MOULoud

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, third month of the Islamic calendar

Mouloud, the birth anniversary of Muhammad, the prophet of the Muslims, falls in the third month of the Islamic year. For Muslims all over the world this is a day of great joy and celebrations as he is the most revered prophet among them. It is also called Mawlid an-Nabi.

In Pakistan most government and nongovernment buildings are illuminated (especially with green lights) and decorated, along with major marketplaces, buildings, shopping centers, and residential complexes. Elaborate processions and functions are held on this day.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULoud

EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

The Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr, also called the Feast of Fast-Breaking, marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan. Muslims all over the world observe a month-long fast from dawn to dusk during Ramadan. The fast ends after the sighting of the new Moon, and Eid al-Fitr is celebrated on the very next day. Fasting on Eid al-Fitr is strictly forbidden in the Koran. Muslims dress in new clothes, or their best clothes, on this day. Children receive sweets or money and women receive special gifts from their loved ones. In Pakistan special prayer services are held after sunrise. People visit each other and exchange sweets.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th or pilgrimage month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, the Feast of Sacrifice, commemorates the unwavering faith of Ibrahim (Abraham) in Allah and his willingness to sacrifice his son to obey Allah's command. Muslims believe that God visited Ibrahim in a dream and instructed him to sacrifice his most

valued possession, his son. When Ibrahim told his son about the dream, the boy asked his father to follow God's command. However, just as Ibrahim was about to make the sacrifice, God replaced his son with a ram on the altar.

Pakistani Muslims reenact this scene by sacrificing a goat, sheep, or camel on this day. One-third of this meat is given to the poor, another third to neighbors and relatives, and one-third is consumed by the family. This act signifies a willingness to give up cherished things. Special collective prayers are said after sunset. Also the holy pilgrimage, or hajj, is undertaken in this month. The hajj is the fifth pillar of Islam's Five Pillars of the faith, and each able-bodied Muslim is directed by the Koran to undertake this journey at least once in his or her lifetime.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

Regional Holidays

PAKISTAN'S BASANT FESTIVAL

Observed in: Lahore

Observed by: General Public

Observed in: Mid-February

It is believed that this festival was inspired by Indian customs. A tradition of kite flying is associated with this day. People from all over Pakistan through the city of Lahore to fly paper kites. These kites are symbolic of joy and excitement as the pleasant spring season hovers around the corner. The kite flying becomes all the more challenging when people compete to cut the strings of each other's kites. Thousands of people come out on their rooftops each year to fly kites on this day. Accidents due to excessive and careless kite flying are frequent.

LOK MELA

Observed in: Islamabad

Observed by: General Public

Observed in: First week of October

Lok Mela takes place in the capital city of Islamabad. It is marked by musical concerts, singing, and folk dancing. Working craftsmen hold an exhibition and sale of their works. The festival gives everyone an opportunity to admire the craft and culture of the country.

NATIONAL HORSE AND CATTLE SHOW

Observed in: Lahore

Observed by: General Public

Observed in: Third week of November

This cattle show is held annually at the Fortress Stadium in Lahore where cattle races, cattle dances,

tattoo shows, tent pegging, folk music, games, and folk dances mark the occasion.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

Azan is the first ritual conducted after a baby is born. It is the traditional Islamic prayer whispered into the right ear of the infant by the grandfather or other senior male family member because Muslims believe that the first word a baby should hear is the name of Allah. This ritual is followed by the distribution of sweets among those present for the occasion. *Kajal* or *surma* (kohl) is used to line the eyes of the newborn in addition to making a black mark on his or her face to ward off the evil eye. There is another ritual of tying a black string on the arm or wrist of the child so that evil spirits will leave the child alone. A child is usually given a nickname before it is officially named by the grandparents at a ceremony called *Aqeeqa*, usually held within 40 days of its birth. A barber shaves the newborn's hair to ensure a thick growth later. Sacrifices are made on this day, and the meat is distributed among the family and the poor. The first garment a child wears is made from an old shirt that belonged to its grandfather. Some of the special things owned by the grandfather are passed on to the child after he or she grows a little older.

When the baby is six or seven months old, there is a ceremony celebrating the first eating of solid food called *kbeer chattai*. Family members gather around the child and put small quantities of rice pudding, or *kbeer*, in its mouth; later they feast on *kbeer* and other food.

The next occasion in the infant's life is when it is four years, four months, and four days old. Considered fit to read and write, male children are made to wear an *achkan* (a long-sleeved coat-like garment buttoned in the front and reaching down to the knees or lower) and to sit on a stool in front of the priest (*maulvi*). The boy is made to write and read out *bismillah* (the first word of the Koran) loudly; this is followed by feasting and distribution of alms by the family. When the boy is about 10 years old and has finished his first reading of the Koran, then comes the Amin ceremony. The *maulvi*, who has taken pains to make the child learn Arabic script while guiding him through the verses of the Koran, is given a robe (called a *poshak*) and a turban while the boy is given sweets and gifts. The child celebrates his birthday, or *saalgirah*, with friends each year. The occasion of *roza kushai* celebrates his breaking of the first fast during the holy month of Ramadan. This occurs by the age of 12, when fasting becomes an obligation.

Apparently not much ceremony is spent on girl children.

❁ COMING OF AGE

In Pakistan a girl is considered eligible for marriage once she reaches puberty, since people believe that her sexual urge should not be ignored. Boys are circumcised at birth and are considered fit to get married when they can work and hair begins to grow on their upper lips. Both sexes are segregated once they have matured physically. According to the Muslim Family Law Ordinance, young people are obliged to get married shortly after puberty (16 and 18 years for girls and boys, respectively) and enter the next stage of life.

❁ MARRIAGE

Shaadi, which means "weddings" in Hindi, are long affairs in Pakistan, consisting of at least six major ceremonies, which require elaborate planning. The first ceremony is the *mehendi* ceremony. *Mehendi* (henna) is an herb that leaves an orange-brown color when applied to skin. The married women of a family usually apply *mehendi* to a bride's hands and feet in elaborate designs the night before the marriage ceremony. Henna designs are also painted on the groom's hands. *Nikah*, the actual wedding, is the next ritual. On this day the couple solemnizes their marriage by signing papers in the presence of their religious leader, usually the imam or *maulvi*. *Valima* is a reception thrown by the groom's family the next day, celebrating the wedding. Family members and friends are invited for merrymaking and feasting.

DEATH

People in Pakistan do not discuss death openly because of the belief that it might become a reality. Even when a doctor speaks about illness, the elders fear that he must be evoking the ailing person's death. Therefore a great deal of tact and sensitivity is used while talking about such matters. When a loved one passes away, the body is washed with holy water. The fakir (a Muslim mendicant monk who is regarded as a holy man) reads out the Koran into the ears of the person who is dying. His or her body is made to face Qibla, in the direction of Mecca. *Qibla* is an Arabic word referring to the direction that should be faced when a Muslim prays. The family members also recite the verses from the Koran. This is their way of reassuring the person of their love and

Fun Fact

Originally the *Qibla* was toward the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem (and it is therefore called the First of the Two Qiblas). In 624, during Muhammad's exile in Medina, the *Qibla* was changed to point to the Kaaba, where it has remained ever since. The Kaaba (meaning "cube" in Arabic) is the central stone structure, covered by a black cloth, within the Great Mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

support during the process of transition into another world.

Further Reading

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Palau

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Oceania, in the north Pacific Ocean, southeast of the Philippines
Size	177 sq. mi.
Capital City	Koror
Flag Description	The flag of the Republic of Palau is light blue with a large yellow disk (representing the Moon) shifted slightly to the hoist side.
Independence	October 1, 1994 (from the UN Trusteeship administered by the United States)
Population	20,303 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional government in free association with the United States
Nationality	Palauan
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Palauan (Micronesian with Malayan and Melanesian admixtures, 70%); Asian (mainly Filipinos, followed by Chinese, Taiwanese, and Vietnamese, 28%)
Major Language(s)	English and Palauan are official in all islands except Sonsoral, where Sonsoralese and English are official; Tobi, where Tobi and English are official; and Angaur, where Angaur, Japanese, and English are official.
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (42%); Protestant (23%); Modekngai (9%; indigenous)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Youth Day, March 15; Earth Day, April 22; Senior Citizens Day, May 5; Constitution Day, July 9; Labor Day, September; Independence Day, October 1; United Nations Day, October 24; Flag Day, November 4; Thanksgiving, November

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The Republic of Palau, or Belau, comprises over 300 islands divided into six groups, and more than 1,000 cultural sites have been found in the archipelago. Archaeological evidence indicates that Babeldaob (or Babelthuap), the largest island of Palau, was settled more than 3,000 years ago, and radio-carbon dating reveals cultural activities at several terraced locations around 1439–1110 B.C.E. at Ngiwal; 1131–811 at Ngatpang; and at the village of Ngerdubech around 1414–998.

Of particular archaeological interest are the stone megaliths found at Badrulchau, which means “the rocks of Ngerulchau,” where 37 standing basalt stones are scattered over a field. Dated to be about 2,000 years old, archaeologists think they may have been the foundation posts for a large structure. Six of the stones bear carved faces.

The former name of this site was Bai er a Ngerulchau. According to legend several gods decided to build a *bai*, or a meetinghouse, for themselves located at Ngerulchau, but they could only work at night gathering rocks to serve as supporting posts for the *bai*. One night one of the gods decided to play a practical joke on his friends. He took a piece of coconut husk and set it afire, then threw the flaming husk to the ground, where it turned into a rooster and crowed. When the other gods heard the rooster's crow, they thought it was daybreak, and they left without finishing the *bai*.

The strategic location of the Palau islands on the western border of Oceania, coupled with their proximity to Southeast Asia, have given rise to a mixed population derived primarily from Malay, Melanesian, Filipino, and Polynesian groups. These islands were explored by the Spanish navigator Ruy Lopez de Villalobos (c. 1500–44) in 1543 and remained under nominal Spanish ownership for more than 300 years. In 1899 Spain sold them to Germany.

Chuab

Chuab was one of two daughters of Latmikaik's three children; she had a sister named Tellebuu and a brother Ucherrarak. (Latmikaik is a Micronesian creation goddess.) Ucherrarak went to dwell in heaven, but Chuab and Tellebuu were blown to Ngebeanged and went to the house of Ngetelkou, where they lived and were fed. Soon, however, Chuab began to grow taller and taller, and she kept growing. The people kept feeding her anyway, and she grew so tall that they were unable to reach her mouth. So the people built ladders and climbed up to feed her until even the ladders could no longer reach her mouth.

Finally, Chuab reached the clouds, and no one could care for her. The people finally decided to buy soil from Uchelianged (the god of heaven) and pile it up until they could feed Chuab. Even this measure proved useless, however, so they decided to end the situation by burning her and began to gather firewood. When she saw the people collecting firewood, Chuab asked why they

were doing it. The people replied that the firewood was for cooking more food to feed her. When they had enough firewood, they arranged it around her feet and set it on fire. As the fire burned Chuab fell down, and parts of her body parts became Belau (Palau).

When Chuab fell into the sea, her body formed the islands, and her head became Ngarchelong, hence geographically and historically Ngarchelong is the head of Babeldaob. The expression, *melengmes era Ngarchelong*, reminds everyone to respect the people from Ngarchelong because they live in a place formed by an important part of the body.

The people believe that Chuab knew all along what they were planning to do and sacrificed herself for their welfare. Local gods created the forest and reefs to protect Chuab's body, and people came out of her flesh. As time passed, other gods appeared out of the sea and brought to Belau special knowledge of agriculture, the proper way of family life and childbirth, and political practice.

During World War I Japan occupied Palau and received a mandate over them from the League of Nations in 1920. These islands remained under Japanese control and served as an important naval base until the United States seized them during World War II. After the war they became a UN trusteeship (1947) administered by the United States. When the United States began to rule over Palau after the war, it hoped to merge Palau with the rest of Micronesia into a single political entity. Palauans preferred complete freedom and in 1978 voted against becoming a part of the Federated States of Micronesia, opting instead for a separate identity. In 1979–80 Palau adopted its own constitution, and the country's first president Haruo

Remeliik took office in 1981. Koror was named the provisional capital.

The transition to self-governance, however, was not easy: In 1985 Remeliik was assassinated, and his successor Lazarus Salii committed suicide in 1988. (Apparently his suicide resulted from an investigation into alleged political payoffs.)

The next president Ngiratkel Etpison a successful businessman and part-owner of the Palau Pacific Resort, was the first president to complete his term in office.

On October 1, 1994, Palau officially became an independent nation, ending 47 years as a UN Trust Territory (administered by the United States) and also joined the United Nations. The post-independence period has been rather difficult, affected adversely by political power struggles, the Asian eco-

nomics crisis, and the lack of basic infrastructure within the country.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The most important islands in the Palau republic are Angaur, Babeldaob, Koror, and Peleliu, which lie together near the same barrier reef. About two-thirds of the population lives on Koror. North of these islands lies the coral atoll of Kayangel, while the uninhabited Rock Islands are situated to the west of the main island group. A remote group of six islands, known as the Southwest Islands and located some 373 miles from the main islands, is also a part of Palau.

Palau enjoys a tropical climate all year with an average temperature of about 81°F. Rainfall occurs throughout the year; the annual average is a little less than 150 inches. The average humidity is 82 percent; though maximum rain falls between July and October, there is no dearth of sunshine. Typhoons are rare as Palau lies outside the typhoon zone. Tropical forests cover much of the islands, the commonest trees being ironwood (a very hard wood used for furniture rather than buildings), banyan, breadfruit, coconut, and pandanus. Mangrove forests and grassy savannahs also form a part of the vegetation. Palau's highest point is Mt. Ngerchelchuus on Babeldaob Island with a height of just under 705 feet above sea level.

The islands' underwater biodiversity comprises 1,500 species of fish and 700 species of coral and anemone, besides giant tridacna clams, sea turtles, manta rays, gray reef sharks, sea snakes, chambered

Fun Fact

The name *Belau* comes from the *aibebelau* ("indirect replies") the people gave Chuab about the activity to burn her down.

Chambered Nautilus

The chambered nautilus is a living fossil. It has remained unchanged for over 400 million years. During prehistoric times there were about 10,000 different species of nautilus, but only two are known to have survived into the modern era. It is a mollusk and a member of the cephalopod family. Like most cephalopods it can use jet propulsion to attain speeds of over two knots. A small tube near the animal's tentacles, known as a siphon, expels water under pressure. This propels the nautilus away from potential threats at high speeds.

The shell of the nautilus comprises many chambers. Each chamber is sealed and contains a certain amount of gas that provides buoyancy. The nautilus

can regulate the density of its body by injecting fluid or removing fluid from these chambers through a system of tubes. The hard shell protects the animal's soft body. When a young nautilus first hatches from the egg, it is about an inch in diameter and has a shell with seven chambers. As the nautilus grows bigger, it adds new chambers to its shell. Each new chamber will be a little larger than the last, allowing the opening of the shell to enlarge. A unique feature of the nautilus is the fact that its eye is merely a tiny hole that operates like a pinhole camera. Nautili are found throughout the Pacific and Indian Oceans, at depths of about 1,800 feet. At night these creatures swim to the coral reefs in search of food.

nautilus, fruit bats, and dugongs (manatees); crocodiles and monitor lizards occupy the estuarine areas. Numerous species of birds, fruit bats, monkeys, and nonpoisonous snakes also inhabit the islands.

ECONOMY

Palau ranks among the wealthiest of the Pacific Island states, and tourism drives its economy. Tourist activity focuses on scuba diving and snorkeling in the islands' rich marine environment, including the Floating Garden Islands located to the west of Koror, the capital city. The bulk of the tourists come from Japan, Taiwan, and the United States. The service sector is important in the Palauan economy, contributing more than 80 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) and employing three-quarters of the workforce. The governmental sector employs nearly 26 percent of the working population. Agriculture is mainly at a subsistence level, the principal crops being coconuts, root crops, and bananas. Fishing is a potential source of revenue, but the islands' tuna output dropped by over one-third during the 1990s. Under the terms of the Compact of Free Association with the United States, Palau has been receiving a substantial amount of financial aid from the United States since 1994.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The people of Belau (the local name for Palau) may appear to be a highly westernized and cosmopolitan community (compared to the other Micronesians), clad in American shoes and baseball caps and attaining a fairly high standard of education. Nevertheless they have retained their traditions and customs. An important aspect of the culture is the friendly and gregarious disposition of the local population. At the same time Palau's social organization is highly com-

plex and competitive. The race for money, prestige, and power has always been the focus of most events, such as sports competitions and even wars.

Palau is a matriarchal society, and Palauan villages have always been organized around 10 matrilineal clans. A council of chiefs from the 10 ranking clans governs each village, and a parallel council of their female counterparts holds a significant advisory role in the control and division of land and money. In earlier times men and women had strictly defined roles to play in the day-to-day life of the village. The men's duties included harvesting from the ocean waters, administering the villages, and waging wars. Women ruled the homes, grew vegetables, and harvested shellfish and sea cucumbers from the shallow reefs.

Until the late 1800s Palauans tattooed their bodies; women of higher clans wore more ornate and intricate designs. Men wore their hair in tight buns, while the chieftains (*rubak*) wore bracelets carved out of the bones of large sea mammals called dugongs. Most Palauans are Christians; the Catholic and Protestant churches are well established. Palauan is spoken at home, while English is more common in business and government operations. Schools teach both languages, so most Palauans become bilingual at a very early age. The Southwest islanders speak Sonsorolese and Tobian dialects. The Palauan islanders have borrowed the Hawaiian term *haole*, which refers to people who are not descended from the indigenous people, to refer to foreigners. A majority of Palauans chew betel nut, which, when mixed with lime powder, produces huge quantities of bright red spit. It is still a common practice to remove one's footwear before entering private residences and public buildings, and visitors must ask villagers to identify sacred sites for them so they do not accidentally break a taboo.

Fun Fact
Palau is a dialect of the language Brao, spoken in parts of Vietnam.

Bai

In ancient times, every village in Palau had a meetinghouse called a *bai*. At the beginning of the 20th century more than 100 *bai* remained in Palau, but most of them were completely destroyed in the fierce fighting that took place on Palau during World War II. There were several basic types of *bais*, constructed of various materials depending on what the *bai* was to be used for, and the primary tools available were adzes made from clam shells. The dimensions for a *bai* are very specific: It must be 80 feet long, 20 feet wide, and 40 feet high.

In the village square was the meeting hall for governing elders (*rubak*). Called the *bai er a rubak*, it was also used as the community center or *bai er*

beluu. Fine hardwoods were used to build this style of *bai*, and it was elaborately decorated with traditional designs and colors. The *bai er a cbeldebechel*, or men's club—used by the men's organization to protect the village from enemies—was usually located near the entrance of each village. The quality of the building materials and design were usually inferior to those used for the elders' meeting hall.

The seating arrangements along the walls of the *bai* for the governing elders were determined by their rank and title. The *bai* was not divided by walls or furnishings, and the expanse of naturally polished hardwood floor was broken up only by two fireplaces, making the great hall worthy of the dignified group that met there.

❁ CUISINE

The staple, traditional diet of the Palauans includes coconut milk and its meat (copra), tapioca (cassava), sweet potatoes, and all sorts of fish and seafood (including shellfish and sea cucumbers). Japanese and U.S. influences are quite prominent in the local cuisine.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 is the first day of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar and is widely celebrated as New Year's Day. Celebrations take place all over the world, starting on the evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve). The residents of Palau say goodbye to the old year and joyously welcome the new one, because it is the harbinger of new hopes and aspirations. In Palau, as in most parts of the world, New Year's Day is celebrated in the company of one's family, friends, and acquaintances. The day is marked by dance and musical programs, as well as partying and get-togethers. On this day all educational and public institutions remain closed.

❁ YOUTH DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 15

This particular holiday is set aside to honor the youth of Palau. The activities concerned with the observance of this day are mainly sponsored by the Palau

National Youth Congress (a body comprising youth that takes an active part in all the major national events and happenings). Festivities enjoyed by youth, such as concerts and sports competitions, are held on this day.

❁ EARTH DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 22

This holiday is of fairly recent origin. The first Earth Day was observed in the United States in 1970 and is now celebrated by many countries around the world. On this special occasion numerous educational organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) declare that they are part of a worldwide movement to protect the planet, children, and the future. Many promises are made, and many schemes are launched to protect the natural resources and biodiversity of the planet and thus ensure a secure future for posterity.

❁ SENIOR CITIZENS DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 5

This is a special occasion on the Palau islands, when the residents pay tribute to all the senior citizens inhabiting the islands and recall with gratitude their significant contributions to the society and the nation. Public activities and events on this occasion are sponsored by the Ministry of Community and Cultural Affairs and the State Unit Agency/Area Agency on Aging and include dance competitions (for the aged) and the exhibition and sale of handicrafts.

❁ CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 9

On this day in 1979 the constitution of an independent Palau was implemented, so this is a significant event in the history of Palau. This day is marked by civic ceremonies.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: First Monday in September

Palau celebrates Labor Day on the same date as the United States instead of May 1 as is the case in most countries of the world. This may be ascribed to the fact that Palau was under U.S. administration for a considerable period of time. The holiday is observed with public speeches.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 1

In Palau this happens to be the most celebrated holiday of the year. It commemorates the historic occasion when Palau won complete independence from the UN trusteeship administered by the United States in 1994. On this day public events include flag raising, cultural feasts, and numerous symposiums. All educational and public institutions remain closed.

❁ UNITED NATIONS DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 24

This date marks one of the epoch-making events in the history of the modern world, the ratification, in 1945, of the charter that created the United Nations (UN). Emerging from the ashes of world War II, the centralized world organization, in which all major nations were represented, was founded to control, monitor, and supervise the maintenance of peace and harmony around the world. In Palau on this day people recall the significant contributions of the UN to maintaining global peace. This day is observed by raising the UN flag, parades, floats, music played by the navy band, and sports events. Educational and public institutions are closed.

❁ FLAG DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 4

This official holiday is of great significance for the people of Palau because on this day the country's national flag was legally adopted.

❁ THANKSGIVING

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Fourth Thursday in November

This is a holiday that originated in the United States. It commemorates the first harvest of a group of English immigrants in the Plymouth Colony on the east coast of the United States. The celebrations in Palau may be attributed to the fact that Palau was under U.S. administration for a considerable period of time. As in the United States the festival is observed with church services, family reunions, and the customary turkey dinner.

Religious Holidays

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 26

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world because it is the day chosen by the Roman Catholic Church to celebrate the birth of Jesus, whom they believe to be the son of God.

Since a majority of Palauans profess Christianity, Christmas is celebrated there with great enthusiasm, but it is celebrated on December 26 instead of December 25 (as is done in the rest of the world).

This festival is observed with a Mass or prayer service in the local churches, an exchange of greetings and gifts with friends and family, and enjoying delicacies specially prepared for the occasion.

One of the highlights of Christmas in Palau is the traditional parade. As early as 9 A.M. children and their parents eagerly await the parade and the shower of sweet treats from the float riders. The dazzling spectacle of decorated floats starts from the Palau International Airport and takes about two hours to reach Meyuns, the end of the parade route. Blowing horns signal the arrival of the parade, and float riders greet the crowds with "Merry Christmas!" More than 100 people, including enthusiastic children, line the streets to watch. The children bring plastic bags to the parade and scramble for sweet treats thrown to them by the float riders.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Fun Fact

No one knows when Jesus was actually born, and the Catholic Church says that every month and various dates have been suggested as possibilities. They chose late December for the celebration because it was the time of year when pagans celebrated winter solstice and the return of the light, festivals that have provided many of the symbols and ceremonies now cherished by Christians.

Rites of Passage

✿ MARRIAGE

According to Palauan custom, it is mandatory for a young man to discuss his plans with the woman he wants to marry. If she agrees, then he approaches his relatives to help him obtain the formal permission of her parents. If either set of parents opposes the alliance, then the talks will fizzle out. If the talks are to continue, the groom-to-be visits the woman's home accompanied by a male relative. When the relative and the young man enter the house, they seat themselves close to the doorway. The prospective groom sits on the left. If the discussion is concluded successfully, the relative departs, leaving the groom-to-be at the home of his future bride.

After a couple of months the woman's parents prepare foodstuffs that are then sent to the groom's house. Prior to this the parents of the young man are notified so that they can inform the other members of their family. With the acceptance of the food, the marriage alliance is agreed on, and a date will be set.

For the wedding ceremony friends and relatives on both sides come together. Unlike other communities, there is no singing or dancing. People merely sit and chat, while the groom's parents and sisters give (Palauan) money to the bride's parents. This action signifies that the couple is married.

For the marriage feast, the bride's relatives cook a huge feast and even slaughter a pig for the occasion. For this ceremony the relatives of the groom collect money and present it to the bride's relatives. The food from the bride's relatives and the money from the groom's relatives must necessarily be of equal value. After the marriage the young woman is no longer considered a part of her own family; she has to live with her husband at his home or with his parents.

In Palauan society the husband is expected to take on certain financial responsibilities for his wife. He has to contribute money on his wife's behalf if and when her male relatives buy property. He also has to provide money for his father-in-law if and when he engages in business ventures. The wife needs to contribute food when a relative of hers dies. The husband has to provide some money as a dowry in the event his wife's relatives get married.

✿ DEATH

When an individual dies on Palau, the head of the clan to which he or she belonged informs all relatives and kinsfolk who, along with other members of the community, undertake the task of building a coffin. Meanwhile the deceased's sister(s) prepare the body for burial. The body is then taken away from the family dwelling and placed in the center of the community house (*bai*).

The sister-in-law of the deceased is in charge of the food that has to be prepared and served to all the visitors. In this task she is assisted by female relatives

from both sides of the dead person's family. The female visitors contribute gifts of cloth, soap, fine woven mats, and Palauan money to the deceased's sister-in-law.

The burial ceremony takes place a couple of days later. While the body is at the community house, the sister of the deceased sits at a spot especially designated for her, while the other relatives sit opposite each other. The sister(s) sits at the head of the coffin, placing her face close to the deceased's face and wails loudly. In sharp contrast the wife has to mourn and grieve silently. Food is served to mourners at this time. According to protocol the chief is served first. Then the women who sit around the coffin are served, followed by everyone else present at the venue as well as the individuals who did the cooking.

The burial site is usually selected by the chief of the clan, the father of the deceased, and his or her closest relatives. There are different cemeteries for people belonging to different levels of the society. After the grave has been dug, the time of burial is decided by the elders. The dead are generally buried between 3 and 5 p.m. All the children of the deceased catch the very last glimpse of the body before the coffin is closed.

The coffin is carried from the community center head first, cradled in a rope sling between bamboo poles, to the burial ground. The bier will be followed by the sisters, who carry two woven mats with them. The other mourners follow the sisters. Upon arrival at the cemetery, one mat is placed in the grave. The coffin is placed on this mat, and the other mat covers the top of the coffin. After the coffin is lowered into the grave, the mourners walk by, each dropping a handful of soil onto it.

After the burial, everybody returns to the community house, and more food is served to all those who are present. After the meal, they are free to return to their homes. One week after the burial, the relatives visit the grave and have it paved with cement. When this is done, the official mourning period is over.

Further Reading

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❧ Panama ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Central America, bordering both the Caribbean Sea and the North Pacific Ocean, between Colombia and Costa Rica
Size	30,193 sq. mi.
Capital City	Panama City
Flag Description	Panama's flag is divided into four equal rectangles; the top quadrants are white (hoist side) with a blue five-pointed star in the center and plain red; the bottom quadrants are blue (hoist side) and white with a red five-pointed star in the center.
Independence	November 3, 1903 (from Colombia; became independent from Spain, November 28, 1821)
Population	3,039,150 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional democracy
Nationality	Panamanian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Mestizo—mixed Amerindian and European, 70%; Amerindian and mixed (West Indian, 14%); European (10%); Amerindian (6%)
Major Language(s)	Spanish (official); English (14%); many Panamanians are bilingual
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (85%); Protestant (15%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Martyrs' Day, January 9; Constitution Day, March 1; Labor Day, May 1; Revolution Day, October 11; National Anthem Day, November 1; Independence from Colombia, November 3; Flag Day, November 4; First Cry for Independence, November 10; Independence Day, November 28; Day of Mourning, December 20

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

Rock carvings five thousand years old have been found in Panama. Possibly, they were left by Panama's original inhabitants, the Coclé and Cuevas. The Spanish first settled in Panama along the Caribbean coast, near the mouth of Río Chagres. From there, the Spaniards plundered the Caribbean basin, spawning pirate raids throughout region by those who sought to loot the ill-begat gains.

With Spain divesting of its New World interests, Panama became a province of Colombia in 1821. A generation later, in 1846, it signed a treaty with the United States allowing for the construction of a railway across the Panamanian isthmus—the narrowing between North and South America that separates

the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. A canal had long been the dream of Western interests (the French had earlier tried and failed to construct a canal), but the conditions would prove costly in dollars and lives for those who tried.

In 1903, with U.S. support, Panama secured its status as an independent nation and the United States obtained Panama's approval of the Panama Canal Treaty. In 1914, the first ship traveled the canal. Colombia's grievance over the history of U.S. involvement in the affairs of Colombia's former province was partly assuaged by its North American neighbor's paying Colombia \$25 million in 1921—at which time Colombia extended official recognition to Panama. Nevertheless, U.S. administration of the canal continued to stir regional and national resentments. Emblematic of the tensions was the January 1964 incident in which several high school students were killed after a scuffle ensued over their raising Panama's flag at the site of

the canal. The day is remembered as Martyrs' Day in Panama.

U.S. President Jimmy Carter (b. 1924), who later won the Nobel peace prize, in 1977 negotiated the handover of the canal, which occurred in 1999.

Panamanian internal politics have not always run smoothly. Perhaps the political face most associated with Panama at the end of the 20th century is that of Manuel Noriega (b. 1934). A violent leader with training by the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States and a background in Panama's own secret police, Noriega came to power in 1984. His tenure was marked by cronyism and political assassinations. He also kept a hand in the regional drug trade, principally coca.

In the aftermath of a presidential campaign in Panama in which the winner was popularly considered to be Guillermo Endara (b. 1936) and whose results Noriega disputed, the United States invaded Panama. Afterward, in the U.S., Noriega was convicted of money laundering and sentenced to a 40-year prison term.

Endara was sworn in to office and served until 1994 when Ernesto Pérez Balladares (b. 1946) won the decision of the people. Balladares' leadership saw the advancement of privatization initiatives as well as improvements to critical infrastructure. Balladares' successor, Mireya Moscoso (b. 1940), was elected under the mantle of the conservative Arnulfista Party (PA), named for her late husband, Arnulfo Arias (1901-1988), who was president of Panama. She pushed the government to investigate past abuses and current issues of corruption. She was followed in office by a man 23 years her junior, Martín Torrijos, whose pro-business, anti-corruption platform found resonance with Panamanians and whose military father is well remembered as the man who negotiated Panamanian control of the canal with Carter.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Panama's two coastlines are referred to as the Caribbean (or Atlantic) and Pacific. To the east and west lie Colombia and Costa Rica, respectively. The country has two international boundaries, one with Colombia and the other with Costa Rica. The Caribbean coastline is marked by several good natural harbors. The major port on the Pacific coastline is Balboa. The dominant feature of the topography is the central spine of mountains and hills that forms the continental divide. The mountain range of the divide is called the Cordillera de Talamanca near the Costa Rican border. Farther east it becomes the Serranía de Tabasará, and the portion of it closer to the lower saddle of the isthmus, where the canal is located, is often called the Sierra de Veraguas.

The highest point in the country is the Volcán Barú (formerly known as the Volcán de Chiriquí), which rises to a height of almost 12,000 feet. Nearly 500 rivers flow through Panama's rugged landscape.

Mostly unnavigable, many originate as swift highland streams, meander in valleys, and form coastal deltas. Of these the Río Chepo and the Río Chagres are sources of hydroelectric power.

In Panama rainfall is much heavier on the Caribbean than on the Pacific side of the continental divide. Although thunderstorms are common during the rainy season, the country is outside the hurricane track. Panama's tropical environment supports an abundance of plants. Dense forests are interrupted in places by grasslands, scrub, and crops. Mangrove swamps occur along both coasts, with banana plantations occupying deltas near Costa Rica.

In Panama the days are rather hot, the nights relatively cooler; temperatures range from 90°F during the day to 70°F in the evening, almost throughout the year, with high humidity. The rainy season occurs between October and November. The climate is less tropical at higher altitudes. In mountainous regions the average annual temperature ranges from 50°F to 66°F.

❁ ECONOMY

Panama's economy is based primarily on a well-developed service sector that accounts for three-fourths of its gross domestic product (GDP). Services include the Panama Canal, banking, the Colon Free Zone (the largest free-trade zone in the Americas), insurance, container ports, flagship registry, and tourism. A slump in the Colon Free Zone and agricultural exports, the global slowdown, and the withdrawal of U.S. military forces held back economic growth between 2000 and 2001. In order to stimulate growth, the government plans public works programs, tax reforms, and new regional trade agreements.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

There are six different Indian cultures in Panama, and each of them practices its own ancestral customs. Each province of Panama has its own unique folklore reflected in its dances, music, and cuisine. In the deeply Catholic provinces of Coclé, Herrera, and Los Santos, churches are found on the main town square (plaza), as was the Spanish tradition. Nata, one of the oldest colonial cities, boasts the oldest church on the American continent. One of the highlights of the festival calendar is Carnival, which is celebrated throughout the country every February.

❁ CUISINE

Traditional Panamanian food is hot and spicy. There are many dishes prepared with fish, the most popular among them being *seviche* (fish marinated in onions, peppers, and lime juice). A typical Panamanian dinner often includes *sancocho*, a stew made with chicken, meat, and vegetables.

ETHNIC GROUPS IN PANAMA

Broadly speaking, Panamanian society is composed of three principal groups: the Spanish-speaking, Roman Catholic Mestizo majority; the English-speaking, Protestant Antillean blacks, and tribal Amerindians. Small numbers of those of foreign extraction—Chinese, Jews, Arabs, Greeks, South Asians, Lebanese, West Europeans, and North Americans—are also present. There is a smattering of Hispanic blacks, blacks (*playeros*), and Hispanic Indians (*cholos*) along the Caribbean coast lowlands and in the Darién. Their settlements, dating from the end of the colonial era, were concentrated along coasts and rivers.

The Antillean blacks were laborers from the British West Indies who came to Panama in large numbers during the first half of the 20th century to work on the country's banana plantations and the construction of the Panama Canal. They formed the nucleus of a community separated from the larger society by race, language, religion, and culture. The Amerindians, according to the 1980 census, Panama's indigenous population, numbered

slightly over 93,000, or 5 percent of the country's total population. Censuses showed Amerindians to be a declining proportion of the total population; they had accounted for nearly 6 percent of all Panamanians in 1960. However, the figures are only a rough estimate of the numbers of Amerindians in Panama.

The Guaymí Amerindians are concentrated in the more remote regions of Bocas del Toro, Chiriquí, and Veraguas, while a majority of the Cuna inhabits the San Blas Islands, with an estimated 3,000 additional Cuna living in small scattered settlements in Darién and in Colombia. Mestizo Amerindians, also called American Indians, First Peoples, or Native Americans, are the indigenous peoples who were living in the Americas before European colonization, and who have managed to survive. (Canadians use the term First Nations to refer to Native Americans.) Native Americans officially make up the majority of the population in Bolivia and Guatemala and have significant presence in most other Latin American countries, including Panama.

For snacks, Panamanians enjoy *placones de plátano* (fried plantains) and tamales, a dish popular in many Central American countries. However, while in most countries tamales are prepared by wrapping corn husks around seasoned pies, in Panama banana skins are used as wrappings. Rice is included in most meals. The national dish is *arroz con pollo* (rice with chicken)

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

New Year's Day is celebrated on January 1 of the Gregorian, or Western, calendar. This day marks the end of one year and the start of another. On the first day of the new year in Panama, most businesses and schools are closed. The euphoric New Year's celebrations begin on December 31, the last day of the departing year. Panamanians celebrate New Year's Day with family dinners, music, dancing, bonfires, and parties.

❁ MARTYRS' DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 9

Martyrs' Day, or Day of Mourning, commemorates the student martyrs of Panama who were killed in the 1964 violence over the question of sovereignty for the former Canal Zone. On this day Panamanians pay homage to and remember the martyrs. All offices and commercial organizations are closed. This is a somber day on which political personalities address the public in meetings and on TV. In addition various labor unions and leftist organizations hold marches. There is a ban on the sale of alcohol, and nightclubs are closed.

❁ CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 1

Panamanian citizens celebrate this day with great pride and enthusiasm. On this day in 1946, an independent constitution for Panama was adopted that would eventually make Panama a sovereign nation. This is an important public holiday in Panama, which is observed by civic ceremonies and public speeches.



✿ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Labor Day, Día del Trabajo (also called May Day and Workers' Day), is an occasion to pay tribute to the contributions and accomplishments of workers throughout the world. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

It is celebrated in Panama with large union gatherings in the morning followed by a parade of workers and schoolchildren.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

✿ REVOLUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 11

This day is of great significance for the people of Panama. On this day the National Guard of Panama overthrew the elitist government in 1968. This day is observed in Panama with parades and public speeches.

✿ NATIONAL ANTHEM DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 1

The National Anthem of Panama was composed by Jeronimo de la Ossa (1847–1907), and its musical scoring was done by Santos Jorge. This anthem was sung during the historic occasion of the final, complete separation of Panama from Colombia. This day is of great significance for the people of Panama as the anthem is one of the symbols of their country's hard-earned freedom. This day is marked by civic ceremonies, parades, and public speeches.

✿ INDEPENDENCE FROM COLOMBIA

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 3

On November 3, 1903, Panamanians declared their independence from Colombia. The anniversary of this event is a national holiday in Panama. The celebrations start the day before Independence Day on November 2, at midnight, when church bells are rung, and the national anthem is sung. Later there are fireworks and musical events.

On November 3, at 8:00 a.m. the bells of the churches across the whole country begin to ring. Religious services are held, and the president of



A woman wearing a traditional dress dances during a Flag Day parade in Panama City, Panama. (AP Photo/Guillermo Arias)

Panama addresses the people. Afterward the Panamanian National Police and firefighters march in a parade. The rest of the day is taken up with various cultural events, dances, and concerts.

❁ FLAG DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 4

November 4 was the day when the Panamanian flag was created. It is a national holiday in Panama that is celebrated with patriotic parades, folk dramas, and ethnic events. In Colon on Flag Day, or Day of the Panamanian Flag, some schools have their own parades. In addition Panamanians attend parties and display the flag on their homes and persons.

❁ FIRST CRY FOR INDEPENDENCE

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 10

The first call for independence from Spain took place in La Villa de Los Santos, Los Santos province in 1821. This event, which is also known as *Primer Grito de Independencia de La Villa de Los Santos* or *Uprising of Los Santos*, is commemorated with a parade, as well as music, dance, and cultural events.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 28

On this day, which is also known as Anniversary of Independence from Spain, Panama gained independence from Spain in 1821. Celebrations are held in each city and the capital territory of Panama City. Events include a large parade of school bands.

❁ DAY OF MOURNING

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 20

National Mourning Day is a solemn occasion when the people of Panama remember the victims of the December 20, 1989, U.S. invasion of Panama. A religious ceremony honoring the victims is held at the Jardín de Paz Cemetery in eastern Panama City. Participants place flowers on the tombstones of their relatives, as well as on a monument dedicated to all the unidentified victims. Moreover, hundreds of people organize marches in the capital. The sale of alcohol is prohibited nationwide since the populace is supposed to remain quiet and keep their parties and music subdued.

Religious Holidays

❁ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: January 6

Epiphany celebrates the arrival of the Magi (the Three Kings, named Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar) at the site of Jesus' birth, so it is also called *El Día de los Reyes Magos* ("Three Kings' Day") in Spanish-speaking countries such as Panama. The day also commemorates his divinity as manifested to the Magi, who brought him gifts. On this day Panamanian families awake to open the gifts left by the Three Kings, and families and friends gather for the celebrations. While the children play with their new toys, the adults busy themselves preparing a grand dinner including a special dessert, known as *La Rosca de Reyes* or "Three Kings Bread." This crown-shaped, glazed bread is traditionally made with walnuts, grated orange peel, raisins, and candied cherries. A tiny doll representing Jesus and a coin are also put inside the bread. Whoever gets either the coin or the doll in their portion of the bread is supposed to have good luck during the new year.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EPIPHANY

❁ CARNIVAL

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Four days preceding Ash Wednesday

The underlying idea of Carnival is to enjoy one last round of exuberant partying before the onset of the somber 40-day period of Lent, during which all faithful Christians spend their days in austerity, abstinence, prayers, and penance. For Panamanians Carnival, which begins four days before Ash Wednesday, is an eagerly anticipated event. The main streets of Panama City are filled with parades, floats, masked people, and confetti. Women and girls dress in *polleras*, Panama's national costume. The *pollera* is a beautiful costume that originated in the rural homes of Panama's interior. This typical dress of the Panamanian woman is composed of two pieces: a shirt, called a *camisilla*, and a full skirt, gathered, with two or three ruffles, called *el polleron*. The dress is usually white and embellished with lace, edging, embroidery, and appliqué. Panamanian parades include *comparsas* (Cuban music and dance style) and *tunas* (cheerful groups of musicians and dancers).

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; LENT

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics and some Protestants
Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, which is also called Mourning Friday, Holy Friday, or Great Friday (in the Eastern Ortho-

dox Churches) marks the sorrowful remembrance of the Crucifixion of Jesus. In Panama special church services are held on Good Friday. People participate in processions, carrying the cross (symbolizing Jesus) through the streets. The more devout observe fasts and offer special prayers on this occasion. This solemn observance is spent listening to readings of the Psalms and Gospels.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ HOLY SATURDAY

Observant: Roman Catholics
Observed on: Saturday before Easter

The three days preceding Easter—Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday—all have important religious significance for Catholic Panamanians. Holy Saturday, also called Grand Saturday, the Angelic Night, or the Vigil of Easter, is a day of intermingled joy and sadness since it is the end of the season of Lent and penance and the beginning of paschal time, which is one of rejoicing. Some churches in Panama still use Holy Saturday as a traditional time for baptisms. Many rural Panamanians celebrate Holy Saturday night by attending a midnight vigil or going to dances. In many cases Holy Saturday is a day when families get together and have day-long feasts. It is also common for commercially organized events such as beach gatherings, bullfights, cockfights, concerts, and rodeo-like competitions to take place on Holy Saturday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter celebration begins with morning Mass for Roman Catholics followed by a special procession celebrating Jesus' Resurrection. Once the religious observances are over, Easter is a time of fun, festivities, and color. Decorating eggs, playing games with eggs, and Easter Egg Hunts are part of Easter celebrations throughout Panama. Both the rabbit and the eggs associated with Easter were originally symbols of pagan origin; both symbolize rebirth. The Easter bunny is a very popular figure among the children in Panama, where this celebration is also called Pascha.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ ALL SOULS' DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: November 2

All Souls' Day, also called Defuncts' Day, is important to Panamanians. People visit their local cemeteries to

clean up and paint the graves of their loved ones and decorate them with flowers. This is a way of paying one's respects to the deceased.

See also Volume III: ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

✿ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 25

In Panama Christmas festivities begin with Mothers' Day on December 8. On Christmas Eve the people of Panama busy themselves preparing food and cleaning their houses. The Panamanians listen to music as they wait for midnight to eat; afterward they visit family and friends and exchange gifts. The traditional Panamanian food at Christmas is ham and tamales. After finishing their family meals, it is common practice for people to dance and celebrate in the streets.

On December 25, most Catholics attend Mass in the morning. The rest of the day is spent visiting family and friends. Traditional Panamanian Christmas music includes songs called *gaitas* or *villancicos*. Christmas celebrations in Panama inevitably include lots of singing, eating, and drinking.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

✿ BOQUETE FLOWER AND COFFEE FAIR

Observed in: Boquete
Observed by: General Public
Observed in: January

A weeklong festival, the Boquete Flower and Coffee Fair (or in Spanish, FERIA de las Flores y del Café) is famous for its flowers and coffee. This is an internationally famous flower show, which includes flowers imported from Europe. It also hosts yearly coffee-cupping (similar to wine tasting) competitions featuring prestigious cuppers from all over the world.

✿ FAIR OF THE ORCHIDS

Observed in: Boquete
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 8–11

The Orchid Fair is held in Boquete each year, so it is also known as the Boquete Orchid Fair or, in Spanish, FERIA de la Orquídea. The town is famous for the variety of orchids and other flowers grown there. Thousands of visitors come to Boquete to have a look at the orchids cultivated in the region. Visitors come to see and buy the plants and flowers on display. Children enjoy carnival rides at this fair.

ORIGIN OF THE MAYPOLE

In various parts of Europe, May Day was traditionally greeted with joyous dancing around a garlanded pole, called a maypole, from which streamers hung. Each dancer would hold the end of a streamer, and the dancers wound the streamers into a pattern as they moved around the maypole, singing and danc-

ing. The English have observed May Day since medieval times. Flowers, fruits, and other sweets, and a maypole with streamers constituted important components of the festival. All classes of people would rise at dawn to go “a-maying.” They would return laden with flowers and branches of trees to decorate their homes. A May queen was crowned to reign over the games, dancing, and festivities.

❁ PALO DE MAYO

Observed in: Bocas del Toro
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

Palo de Mayo, or Wood of May, is a joyous festival that marks the advent of summer. It is a combination of Creole and English customs with local music, dancing, and general merrymaking. The young girls in Bocas town and Bastimentos perform the maypole dance.

❁ FOUNDATION DAY

Observed in: Panama City
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 15

Foundation Day, or Anniversary of the Founding of Old Panama, commemorates the establishment of Panama la Vieja (Old Panama) by Pedrarias Dávila (c. 1440–1531), a Spanish colonial administrator, in 1519. On this day people gather in the streets to have fun and dance to live music.

❁ FESTIVAL OF THE BLACK CHRIST

Observed in: Portobello
Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: October 21

Every year on October 21, a religious ceremony is held at dusk in the town of Portobello in honor of a life-size black wooden statue of Jesus, the town's holy patron. The statue is decorated with flowers and candles, and it is carried through the city in a procession. The statue is returned to the church by midnight, after which there is dancing, music, and celebrating until dawn.

Pilgrims from all over Panama flock to the town of Portobello for this festival. People dress in purple robes with some of the devout crawling the half mile to the San Felipe Cathedral on their hands and knees as a form of penance, while others perform self-mortification by having hot wax dripped on their bodies.

❁ COLÓN DAY

Observed in: Province of Colón
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 5

Colón celebrates the surrender of the Colombian garrison in 1903 on this day as well as that event's contribution to the separation of Panama from Colombia later in 1903. In Colón some schools organize parades and cultural programs to commemorate this day.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

The birth of a child is celebrated as an important event. The sacrament of baptism, which symbolizes the baby's entry into society and incorporates him or her into the church community, is a major family event. The selection of *padrinos* (godparents) is an important decision that has a pronounced influence on the child's welfare and future. It results in a quasi-kinship relationship that carries with it moral, ceremonial, and religious significance and broadens family ties of trust, loyalty, and support.

In the cities church facilities are readily available, but in rural areas families often have to travel some distance to the nearest parish center for the

Black Christ

The Christo Negro is a black statue of Jesus. There are several versions of the story of how the Christo Negro statue arrived in Portobello in 1658. One popular version tells of a ship that, while attempting to leave during severe weather conditions, dumped the statue overboard. When the statue washed up in Portobello, the people brought it to the San Felipe Cathedral where it has remained ever since.

ceremony. The trip is considered of great importance and is willingly undertaken. In fact baptism is generally considered the most important religious rite. Blessings are recited, and the family hosts a private dinner to celebrate the occasion. Grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins faithfully gather to join in the celebration.

❁ MARRIAGE

A formal marriage ceremony often represents the culmination of a life together for many Mestizo and Antillean couples. It serves as a mark of economic success. A formal marriage is usually conducted by a priest in church. There is probably some expense involved, which is why it is more common to postpone the actual ceremony. Marriages factor importantly in a family's wealth and status.

Further Reading

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❧ Papua New Guinea ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Oceania; a group of islands including the eastern half of the island of New Guinea between the Coral Sea and the South Pacific Ocean, east of Indonesia
Size	178,704 sq. mi.
Capital City	Port Moresby
Flag Description	The flag of Papua New Guinea is divided diagonally from the upper hoist-side corner; the upper triangle is red with a soaring yellow bird of paradise centered; the lower triangle is black with five white five-pointed stars of the Southern Cross constellation centered.
Independence	September 16, 1975 (from the Australian-administered UN trusteeship)
Population	5,545,268 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional monarchy with parliamentary democracy
Nationality	Papua New Guinean
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Melanesian; Papuan; Negrito; Micronesian; Polynesian
Major Language(s)	Melanesian Pidgin serves as the lingua franca; English is spoken by 1–2%; Motu is spoken in Papua region; some 715 indigenous languages, many unrelated
Major Religion(s)	Protestant (43%); Roman Catholic (22%); Indigenous beliefs (34%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Queen's Birthday, June 12; Remembrance Day, July 23; Independence Day, September 16; Boxing Day, December 26

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

From the human remains that have been found on New Guinea, it has been established that human beings first inhabited the area some 60,000 years ago. Historians opine that these ancient inhabitants, probably from Southeast Asia, were apparently a simple agrarian civilization. Once regarded by western archaeologists as a Neolithic “backwater,” Papua New Guinea is one of the few places where agriculture developed independently. About 10,000 years ago (c. 8000 B.C.E.) the people were definitely growing plants, especially taro (still central to the islanders’ diet) at Kuk Swamp in the Wahgi Valley, and they knew how to cultivate bananas around 4950 to 4440. These dates predate the earliest Southeast Asian contact by 3,000 years.

Although European navigators had discovered the island in the 16th century, little was known about it until the 19th century, when the country was named. *Papua* is derived from a Malay word that describes the frizzy Melanesian hair, and a Spanish sailor called it New Guinea because he thought the people resembled those living in Guinea, in Africa.

The northern section of the island was part of German New Guinea from 1884 to 1914, when it was called Kaiser-Wilhelmsland. Papua, the southern section, was annexed by Queensland, Australia, in 1883, and the following year it became a British protectorate called British New Guinea. In 1905 it became part of Australia as the Territory of Papua. During World War I the German territories were occupied by Australian forces, and these were passed on to Australia by the League of Nations in 1920. The region then became known as the Territory of New Guinea.

During World War II the northern islands fell to the Japanese, who advanced south until they were stalled by the

Fun Fact

Papua New Guinea does not conform to models in which agriculture, the beginning of civilization, and the development of social and political classes are linked in cause-and-effect relationships. New Guinean societies have remained more or less egalitarian, although men lead communities, or parts of communities, through skillful persuasion and their superior ability in particular activities such as talking, fighting, and maintaining exchange relationships.

Allied forces. By 1945 the mainland (New Guinea) and the island of Bougainville had been recaptured by the Allies, but the Japanese were virtually invincible on the islands of New Ireland and New Britain, where they dug over 300 miles of tunnels. They were not compelled to surrender these strongholds until the end of the World War II.

Australian rule in these islands was reconfirmed by the United Nations in 1947. In 1949 the territories of Papua and New Guinea were merged administratively, but they remained constitutionally distinct.

They were combined in 1973 as the self-governing country of Papua New Guinea. Full independence came in 1975.

In 1988 the island of Bougainville was rocked by a violent nine-year secessionist movement. In 1989 guerrillas of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) shut down the island's Australian-owned copper mine, a major revenue-earner for the country. In 1990 the BRA declared Bougainville's independence, as a sequel to which the government blockaded the island until January 1991, when a peace treaty was signed. In 1997 Papua New Guinea's government hired South African mercenaries to fight on Bougainville in a bid to terminate the long drawn-out crisis, but this step caused mass demonstrations, following which the mercenary contract was withdrawn. In April 1998 a cease-fire was declared.

On July 17, 1998, a tsunami off the northern coast of Papua New Guinea killed at least 1,500 people, leaving thousands more injured and homeless. In July 1999 Prime Minister Bill Skate (1953–2006) resigned, owning responsibility for having created diplomatic trouble by recognizing Taiwan as a separate political entity distinct from mainland China. Sir Mekere Morauta (b. 1946) became prime minister that same month and tried, without results, to bring about reforms in the military. In 2002 following an election marked by violence and massive fraud, Sir Michael Somare (b. 1936), a professional journalist, took over the reigns of power.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Papua New Guinea lies south of the equator and north of Australia. It comprises the eastern half of the island of New Guinea and a collection of surrounding islands. The country is dominated by a central spine of mountains, the Owen Stanley

Range, with many peaks over 13,000 feet.

The highest point on the islands is Mt. Wilhelm (14,793 feet). Three-fourths of the territory of Papua New Guinea is covered by tropical rain forests, and the remainder is made up of delta plains, flat grassland, and mangrove swamps. The principal rivers include the Fly, the Sepik, and the Ramu. Beautiful coral formations abound near the islands of New Ireland, Bougainville, and New Britain. There are nearly 9,000 species of plants in Papua New Guinea, most of which occur in the lowland areas. Around 250 species of mammals inhabit the islands including bats, rats, the tree kangaroo (a heavy-bodied marsupial that lives mainly in trees), and echidnas (spiny anteaters). The island's bird species include parrots, pigeons, and kingfishers, giant cassowaries (flightless birds related to the emu), *kokomos* (hornbills), and cockatoos.

The climate of Papua New Guinea is hot, humid, and wet year-round. The wet season occurs between December and March, while the dry season lasts from May to October, with some regional variations. Rainfall varies tremendously: Port Moresby may experience an annual rainfall of 39 inches, while Lae gets around 177 inches. The temperatures on the coast are reasonably stable all year (hovering between 77°F and 86°F), but humidity and winds are variable. At higher altitudes the temperatures tend to be cooler, sometimes making it rather chilly in the highlands.

❁ ECONOMY

Papua New Guinea produces and exports agricultural, timber, and fish products. Agriculture currently accounts for 30 percent of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP) and supports more than 85 percent of the population. The major cash crops are coffee, oil, cocoa, copra, tea, rubber, and sugar. About 40 percent of the country is covered by trees that are being felled to obtain good quality timber, and a domestic woodworking industry is developing slowly. A number of Southeast Asian companies are active in the local timber industry. The World Bank, along with other donors, has withdrawn support because of the issue of unregulated deforestation and environmental damage.

The economy of Papua New Guinea is heavily dependent on imports of manufactured goods. Small-scale industries produce beer, soap, concrete products, clothing, paper products, matches, ice cream, canned meat, fruit juices, furniture, plywood, and paint. The small domestic market, relatively high wages, and high transport costs are among the constraints inhibiting industrial development.

Australia, Singapore, Japan, the United States, and the European Union are the principal trading partners of Papua New Guinea. Petroleum, mining machinery, and aircraft are imported from the United States, and Papua New Guinea exports gold, copper ore, cocoa, coffee, and some agricultural products to the United States.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

In Papua New Guinea there are four regional, cultural, and political groups: Papuans (from the south), Highlanders, New Guineans (from the north), and Islanders. There are over 700 languages spoken in Papua New Guinea (about one-third of the world's indigenous languages). This has led to the development of a pidgin lingua franca (or Neo-Melanesian). It is primarily based on English and German, but only has a vocabulary of about 1,300 words. Another popular language is Motu (or Police Motu), which is widely spoken in the Port Moresby coastal area.

The Christian churches have remained highly influential. The largest denominations are Catholic, Lutheran, and Presbyterian. Pantheistic beliefs as well as traditional rites and rituals are widespread. Placating the spirits of ancestors is an important activity, while sorcery and witchcraft are widely feared. The extended family is the center of social and family life. Members of the extended family generally prefer to live in the same locality or in nearby areas, forming minuscule community groups; they share food and other resources, work and live together, and help each other in times of need. People place great emphasis on obligations and duties toward their families. In Papua New Guinea the average nuclear family has six children. In sharp contrast to Western societies Papuan children regard their aunts, uncles, and cousins as parents and siblings. As an act of compassion, sterile or childless couples are often given a child to be raised as their own. The sons and daughters generally care for their aging parents.

Food for small families is cooked in pots or hollow pieces of bamboo over an open fire. Food for larger groups is cooked in a *mumu*, a fire pit dug in the ground and lined with rocks that have been heated over a fire. Food is placed on leaves in the hole and covered with a mound of mud or leaves; water is then poured in to steam the food.

By and large, the local people eat only two main meals with several snacks thrown in throughout the day. Some people also eat lunch (*kaikai bilong belo*). Spoons, tin plates, bowls, cups, and spoons are commonplace. Large leaves are often used as plates in rural areas. Food is carefully divided by a senior and prominent member among those present. The guests may not eat everything, but it is important to eat a part of what is on the menu; the rest can be carried home or distributed among those present. A second helping is suspect because it can be interpreted to mean that one's hosts have not provided enough. Though tables are used in urban areas, most people sit on the ground or floor during meals.

The majority of family structures are patriarchal; men usually handle construction activities (building houses or boats or clearing land). They are responsible for defending tribal honor and possessions; women take care of cooking and look after the children, domestic animals, and the garden. Boys and men hunt birds and wild game with slingshots

and bows and arrows. Traditional musical instruments include the *kundu* (an hour-glass-shaped drum covered with lizard skin) and the *garamut*, a log with a small, hollowed-out portion, struck with one or two wooden beaters. In the cities both men and women may work outside the home.

❁ CUISINE

The cuisine of Papua New Guinea is rich and varied, ranging from fresh *barramundi* cod cooked in a wrapping of banana leaves to roasted chestnuts and mouthwatering fresh fruits to *Unu bona boroma*, a dish made of boiled, sliced breadfruit in a sauce of fried bacon, onions, and chicken stock. *Unu* means "breadfruit," an extremely popular item throughout the South Pacific.

In the highlands of Papua New Guinea the staple food is *kaukau*, a kind of sweet potato. On the coast and in the lowlands *saksak*, a starchy extract from the sago palm, is the staple. The other major food items include taro, fruits, and vegetables (from bananas to yams). In the coastal areas seafood and coconuts feature prominently in the cuisine. Throughout the country, pigs are raised and eaten at feasts. Small marsupials, wild pigs, birds, and eggs are additional sources of protein. Bats, eels, and tree kangaroos are eaten in some areas. Packaged foods such as rice and canned fish are popular among more affluent people.

Fun Fact

The islanders of Papua New Guinea who still live a hunter-gatherer lifestyle rarely suffer from heart disease.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

In most parts of the globe, the New Year's Day of the Gregorian, or Western, calendar is enthusiastically celebrated by people of many nationalities. In a largely Christian country like Papua New Guinea, this day assumes greater importance.

The people of Papua New Guinea welcome the new year with the ringing of church bells. All educational and commercial organizations remain closed.

❁ QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 12

H.M. Queen Elizabeth II (b. 1926) is the British sovereign, and those countries that owe allegiance to Britain

Fun Fact

Like ancient Pompeii, pre-historic Papua New Guinea was buried and well preserved by several layers of volcanic ash. During the past 6,000 years there have been six eruptions on the island.

celebrate her birthday, including all the former and present colonies and dependencies of Britain. This is a movable festival, celebrated on different dates in different countries.

Papua New Guinea was under British rule for a considerable period of time and is still an associate member of the British Commonwealth. Thus its citizens celebrate the Queen's Birthday as a public holiday.

❁ REMEMBRANCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 23

This official holiday commemorates an epoch-making event in the political history of both Papua New Guinea and Australia. This day proved to be the turning point in the long drawn-out battle between the Japanese and the Australian troops that were defending the country. The venue of the battle was the Kokoda Trail in the vicinity of the Owen Stanley mountain ranges. A large number of teenaged Australian soldiers lost their lives in this encounter. On this day Papua New Guineans pay homage to those soldiers who died in the Australo-Japanese engagements. People offer floral wreaths at the Bomana War Cemetery (on the outskirts of Port Moresby), where these soldiers lie buried.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 16

This day commemorates a significant and historic event in the history of the islands. It was on this day that Papua New Guinea won complete independence from UN trusteeship under Australian administration, an administration that had lasted decades. This day is marked by flag-hoisting, public speeches, and parades.

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26

The origins of Boxing Day are found in an old English practice of giving cash or durable goods to those of the lower classes. Gifts among equals were exchanged on or before Christmas Day, but the less fortunate were given their gifts on the day after. Since Papua New Guinea was at one time under the influence of Britain as well as Christianity, British customs and practices were incorporated into local traditions. Papua New Guineans generally prefer to take part in outdoor activities and sports to enjoy the day.

Christians also celebrate the Feast of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, on this day.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Religious Holidays

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

This festival recalls Jesus' agony and death on the Cross. As in most other countries of the world, in Papua New Guinea this solemn occasion is marked by readings from the Psalms and the Gospel, the singing of hymns, and church services.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Saturday before Easter

Holy Saturday is also called the "day of the entombed Christ" for on that day Jesus' body lay in the tomb. It may well be considered a period of suspense between two realms: Between darkness, sin, and death, and resurrection, rejuvenation, and divine illumination. For this reason no services are held until the Easter Vigil that Saturday night. This day between Good Friday and Easter Day symbolizes the end of darkness and gloom and the dawn of a new era of salvation and the promise of a new life.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a Christian feast that celebrates the belief in Jesus' Resurrection from the dead. It is sometimes known as Resurrection Day. This day is central to the Christian liturgical calendar because so many related observances cannot be scheduled until the date on which Easter will fall in the year is known.

The usual account, that Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday after the full Moon that occurs next after the vernal equinox, is not completely accurate. The ecclesiastical calculations hold that Easter falls on the first Sunday following the first ecclesiastical full Moon that occurs on or after the day of the vernal equinox; this particular ecclesiastical full Moon is the 14th day of a new Moon; and the vernal equinox is fixed as March 21. As a result Easter can never occur before March 22 or later than April 25.

Easter is celebrated by Christians the world over. They often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to offer prayers and attend special Easter

services. The name *Easter* belonged to a Germanic goddess called Eostre or Eastre, the revered mother goddess of the Saxon people in northern Europe. Eggs, long a symbol of rebirth and fertility among pagans, have become associated with the festival.

Since Papua New Guinea is a Christian country this holiday has great significance. Early in the morning, devout Catholics attend Mass and prayer services in their local churches. The rest of the day is spent in outdoor activities and sports. The spirit of joyfulness and festivity spills over to the following day, sometimes referred to as Easter Monday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PESACH; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world because it is the date established by the Catholic Church to celebrate the birth of Jesus, whom they believe to be their Messiah. Since the majority of the Papua New Guinea population professes Christianity, Christmas is celebrated there with great enthusiasm and fervor. This festival is marked by Masses and prayer services in local churches and, later, the exchange of greetings and gifts with family and friends.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ GOROKA SHOW

Observed in: Goroka, Papua New Guinea

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Every other year in mid-September

The Goroka Show was started in the mid-1950s by the first missionaries who came to Papua New Guinea. In order to stop the fighting among the many tribal groups, they thought that regular public displays and competitions might diffuse hostile tribal relations. The highland town of Goroka is the venue for the show that brings the indigenous tribes together to celebrate their shared culture. In even-numbered years only, the Goroka Show usually takes place on the weekend nearest Independence Day (September 16).

The Goroka Show is now partly a tourist event, providing a rare opportunity for travelers to experience first-hand the customs of more than 100 tribes that populate the Papua New Guinea highlands. During the course of the weekend, the tribes gather for music, dancing, parading, and extraordinary displays of tribal ceremonies.

Rites of Passage

❁ COMING OF AGE

In Papua New Guinea, the rites of initiation for boys are known as *kovave*. The word *kovave* refers to the spirits believed to dwell in the trees. Traditionally they were (and still are) summoned into the center of a particular village to initiate the boys. *Kovave* is also used to describe the traditional headdress worn by the local shaman. The conical *kovave* bark masks (made out of bark sheets) were prepared in the boys' houses. The first part of the ceremony involves dressing up in a conical hat with long strands of leaves hanging off the edge that reach down below the boy's waist. The effect is both humorous and frightening.

These *kovave* masks are put on young initiates in an ambush. Next they are taken to a clearing where their maternal uncles trim the bark fibers to a suitable length. They then take part in athletic and sports contests (held on the beaches) against rival unmasked men from neighboring villages.

These boys patrol the beach for about a month during this period, looking both fearsome and comical; they are allowed to kill pigs with their bows and arrows. At the end of the ceremonies the *kovave* spirits are believed to vanish into their forest dwellings, after which the masks are burned, and the boys are allowed to return home.

❁ MARRIAGE

On the islands of Papua New Guinea, a marriage ceremony may last for days or weeks and involve a great deal of feasting, all-night singing, and the exchange of gifts and food. In some communities the members of the groom's extended family contribute to a bride-price that must be paid to her family. This may include several pigs, money, and food, which are then shared and enjoyed by the extended family of the bride.

❁ DEATH

Funeral customs and rites vary from one island to another in the Papua New Guinean cluster. To consider an example, the funeral ceremonies on the island of New Ireland involve a lot of communal effort because great preparation and expense are involved, including feasting and gift-giving. (This implies that the ceremony can occur several months or even years after a death has occurred.) The ceremony remembers the dead individual and is supposed to help his or her soul move safely into the afterlife.

The Malanggan ceremony has a dual purpose: It bids farewell to the dead and also demonstrates the strength and vitality of the community because it is capable of organizing such an ostentatious display.

Fun Fact

The people of New Ireland believe each person has three souls.

During the Malanggan ceremony a special dance called the *tatanua* is performed. There is a song that accompanies the dance, but it is imperative that once the dancers don the *tatanua* (helmetlike) masks they remain totally silent. Malanggans fear that, if there is too much noise, a mishap or calamity might befall them or their families. The people believe that if the ceremony is performed in a proper manner, then the ancestral spirits will be pleased, and no harm will befall anyone in the community.

Further Reading

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Paraguay

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Central part of South America, northeast of Argentina
Size	157,048 sq. mi.
Capital City	Asunción
Flag Description	Paraguay's flag has three equal horizontal bands of red (top), white, and blue with an emblem centered in the white band; the emblem is different on each side; the obverse (hoist side at the left) bears the national coat of arms (a yellow five-pointed star within a green wreath capped by the words <i>República del Paraguay</i> , all within two circles); the reverse (hoist side at the right) bears the seal of the treasury (a yellow lion below a red cap of liberty and the words <i>Paz y Justicia</i> (Peace and Justice) capped by the words <i>República del Paraguay</i> , all within two circles).
Independence	May 15, 1811 (from Spain)
Population	6,347,884 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional republic
Nationality	Paraguayan
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Mestizo (mixed Spanish and Amerindian, 95%)
Major Language(s)	Spanish; Guaraní (both official)
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (90%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Battle of Cerro Cora Day, March 1; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day, May 15; Chaco Armistice Day, June 12; Foundation of Asunción Day, August 15; Battle of Boquerón Day, September 29

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Not much is known about Paraguay's prehistory, but many think that the Tupi-Guaraní, who made their way into the region from the right bank of the Amazon River, are the original indigenous people of Paraguay. One hypothesis holds that they are of Mongolian ancestry and reached the Americas from Asia by crossing a temporary bridge across the Bering Strait. The other hypothesis postulates that they were originally Polynesian, Oceanic, or Pacific Islanders who arrived in South America in boats made of rush. A Guaraní legend supports the second hypothesis: According to the legend, in the far distant past the Guaraní's ancestors crossed a great and spacious ocean from a far land to settle in the Americas.

Paraguay is geographically divided into two regions by the Río Paraguay: eastern Paraguay, settled by the seminomadic Guaraní tribes, and western Paraguay, known as the Chaco. There were four Guaraní tribes, and all of them spoke a dialect of Guaraní: the Guaraní Pai Tavytera Fluke, Cario, Guayaní, and Tupis.

The Guaraní lived in the forest and believed in a supreme being. They were animists, with strong beliefs in nature, and a constructed mythology of supernatural goblins alongside natural manifestations. They were organized in egalitarian communities of multilineage clans with tribal chiefs and shamans, united by the principles of cooperation and mutual help.

In western Paraguay several hunter-gatherer groups, known as the Guaycuru, lived in the Chaco. There were approximately 13 tribes representing five language families. The tribes of the Chaco were more warlike and better able to

Guaraní

An ancient Guaraní legend tells the story of the Guaraní and how they came to live in the forests of Paraguay: At some time in the very distant past the ancestors of the Guaraní crossed a great and spacious ocean from a far land to settle in the Americas. They found the land wonderful but full of dangers. Even so, through diligence and effort they subdued the land and started a new civilization.

They worked the land and became excellent craftsmen. They looked forward to the coming of a tall, fair-skinned, blue eyed, bearded god Pa i Shume (perhaps derived from Pachacamac, an ancient creator deity of Peru), who descended from the skies and expressed his pleasure with the Guaraní. This god gave them religious knowledge and taught them agricultural practices that would help them to survive times of drought and pestilence as well as on a day-to-day basis. Significantly he unlocked the secrets of health and medicine and revealed the healing qualities of native plants. One of the most important of these secrets was how to harvest the leaves of the yerba maté tree and prepare a beverage that would ensure health, vitality, and longevity.

The Guaraní were seminomadic peoples who practiced slash-and-burn agriculture. They would clear part of the forest and plant manioc and corn. But four or five years later the soil would be worn out, and the tribe would have to find another place to live where the soil was still fertile. Tired of such moving, an old man refused to go on and stayed where he was. The youngest of his daughters the beautiful Jary had her heart split: to go on with the tribe's youths,

or remain isolated, helping the old man until death took him to Ivy-Marae's peace.

Despite her friends' pleas, she ended up staying with her father. Jary's devoted gesture deserved a reward, and one day an unknown shaman arrived and asked her what would make her happy. She asked for nothing, but the old man said: "I want new energy so I can proceed and take Jary to the tribe that went away." So the shaman gave him a very green plant, perfumed with kindness, and told him to plant it, pick the leaves, dry them with heat from a fire, grind them, put the pieces in a gourd, add cold or hot water, and sip the infusion. "In this new beverage, you will find healthy company, even in the sad hours of the cruelest solitude." After that the shaman departed.

The old man did as the shaman had instructed him, and sipping the green sap, he recovered, gained new strength, and was able to resume the long journey to reunite with their people, who received them with great joy. The whole tribe adopted the habit of drinking the green herb, bitter and sweet, that gave strength, courage, and comfort during their sad hours of utmost solitude.

Maté became the most common ingredient in household cures of the Guaraní and remains so to this day. In Argentina and Paraguay maté tea is made from the leaves steeped in hot water. Actually a large quantity of ground leaf is first soaked in cold water, then the hot water is added, over and over again, until all the essence has been extracted. Between each addition of hot water the tea is ingested through a special wood or metal straw, called a *bombilla*, that filters out the leafy material. Maté is also used as a cold beverage.

resist the efforts of the European colonizers at conversion and pacification.

From the time the Iberian invaders set foot in Paraguay, the indigenous culture was diluted. Inevitably cultural contact drastically altered the lifestyle, customs, and beliefs of the indigenous peoples. The Spaniards took concubines, whose offspring came to be known as mestizos, and an Hispanic-Guaraní culture was born. In the Chaco the Amerindians adopted the horse, and after sheep were introduced, they learned to weave and make textiles.

In 1526 and then again in 1529, Sebastian Cabot (? 1476–1557), an accomplished mapmaker, navigator, and son of John Cabot (c. 1450–? 99), (the Italian explorer who discovered Canada) sailed up the Paraguay River and explored the region, but he did not establish any settlements in the area. Five years later in 1534, Pedro de Mendoza (1487–1537),

a Spanish conquistador, led an expedition to Paraguay and brought settlers with him. The Amerindians accepted the Spaniards, and the region flourished as a result of Spanish colonization. Jesuit missionaries were sent to Paraguay in 1610 to "civilize" the indigenous peoples. They educated the Amerindians and helped them learn how to build churches, paint, and sculpt. All of the artwork that decorates Paraguay's Catholic churches was done by the Amerindians.

Compared to the way Amerindians were treated in other parts of South America the groups in Paraguay were treated very well. The Jesuits even taught the Indians how to defend themselves from the slave hunters, who were called *bandeirantes*. The *bandeirantes* detested this and encouraged the Spanish authorities to expel the Jesuits in 1767.

In 1811 Paraguay revolted against the Spanish



and declared its independence. For 60 years after independence, three dictators governed the country. José Gaspar Rodríguez Francia (1766–1840) was followed by Carlos Antonio López (1790–1862). During López's rule Paraguay moved toward becoming a modern state. López was succeeded by his son Francisco Solano López (1826–70), who triggered the War of the Triple Alliance in 1864. The war—against Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil—lasted six years, during which time more than half the male population of Paraguay was killed.

From 1870 to 1932 numerous political groups fought for control of the country. During this period more than 30 presidents held office as the government changed hands on a regular basis.

In 1932 Bolivian troops invaded Paraguay to gain control of the Chaco Boreal region. This area was considered strategic because it provided easy access to the Atlantic Ocean through the Paraguay River (Río Paraguay). The Chaco War lasted until 1935, when Bolivia was defeated. A ceasefire was signed on June 12, 1935.

Although political infighting still erupts in Paraguay from time to time, regular presidential elections are held in the country. Corruption, however, is widespread.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in South America, the landlocked country of Paraguay is surrounded by Brazil, Argentina, and Bolivia, although the Paraguay River provides access to the Atlantic Ocean. The country is divided into two parts by the Paraguay River. Topographically Paraguay's terrain is characterized by low, marshy plains in the Gran Chaco region to the west of Río Paraguay; wooded hills and grassy plains to the east of Río Paraguay, while thorny scrubs and dry forests are found scattered in some parts of the country. The highest point of the region is Cerro San Rafael at almost 2,789 feet in height.

Paraguay enjoys a subtropical to temperate climate and humidity lingers on throughout the year. During summer the temperature can get as high as 95°F, while during winter it can fall as low as 41°F.

Paraguay is home to palms, water hyacinths, *palo borracho* (also known as bottle tree or drunken tree due to its ability to store water in its bulbous trunk), ferns, hardwood trees, spiny bushes, and pink lapa-cho trees (*Tabebuia impetiginosa*).

Paraguay has a wide variety of fauna that includes the anaconda, boa constrictors (both large snakes), caimans (crocodiles that resemble alligators), Chacoan peccaries (large, furry piglike animals), the hyacinth macaw (large birds with cobalt blue feathers), parakeets, wood storks, wolves, Brazilian tapirs (heavy-bodied nocturnal animals related to the horse and the rhinoceros), jaguars, and giant anteaters.

ECONOMY

Paraguay has a stable export-oriented market economy dependent on the export of products such as cotton, grains, soybeans, sugar, cattle, timber, and power. Brazil is Paraguay's primary trading partner and meets all the country's import needs.

Since 1995, Paraguay has been a member of the MERCOSUR, or Mercado Común del Sur, a free-trading zone shared among Uruguay, Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay. Also the region of Ciudad del Este in Paraguay is the third largest tax-free commercial zone in the world (after Hong Kong and Miami).

The Itaipu Dam, built jointly by Brazil and Paraguay, meets around 20 percent of the energy requirements of Brazil and also serves as a major revenue generator for Paraguay. Agriculture is the primary occupation in Paraguay, employing more than 45 percent of the population. The most important agricultural exports include sugarcane, cotton, maize, wheat, tapioca, soybeans, and tobacco.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Paraguay is a predominantly Christian country with more than 90 percent of its population adhering either to the Roman Catholic or the Protestant faith. In terms of ethnicity mestizos (people of mixed Spanish and Amerindian heritage) are the dominant ethnic group in the region. Spanish and Guaraní (the language of the Guaraní tribes) are the official languages of Paraguay, and almost half of Paraguay's population is bilingual.

Paraguayans love European music, and the harp and the guitar are extremely popular instruments. Other forms of music such as classical, rock, rap, and reggae are also popular. Paraguayans enjoy

Fun Fact

In addition to providing a means of gaining access to the Atlantic, the Chaco Boreal was mistakenly thought to be rich with oil resources.

War of the Triple Alliance

Paraguay was involved in boundary disputes with Argentina and Brazil for a long time. At the same time, Uruguay also felt threatened by these countries, particularly Argentina. In 1864 Brazil helped Uruguay solve its internal political issues by enabling the leader of the Colorado Party to defeat his opponent from the Blanco Party. Feeling threatened with this meddling in the internal affairs of a smaller country by a larger one, the then-dictator of Paraguay Francisco Solano López began a war with Brazil. To counter this attack Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay formed an alliance and declared war on Paraguay.

Fun Fact

For centuries Spanish was the only official language of Paraguay, but in the 1992 Constitution Guaraní was finally recognized as an official language of the country, at the same level as Spanish, and elementary and secondary education is now bilingual.

a particular style of dancing known as the bottle dance in which performers dance vigorously while balancing one or two water-filled bottles on their head.

Paraguay is also known for its traditional handicrafts, especially a lace known as *nanduti*—a traditional spiderweb lace. Designers draw inspiration from nature and from their observations create designs of flora and fauna in the lace. Another traditional handicraft is homespun, hand-embroidered cotton cloth.

Dueling is legal in Paraguay as long as both parties are registered blood donors.

CUISINE

Paraguay's cuisine offers meat delicacies complemented by tropical and subtropical fruits and vegetables. Manioc (cassava) is a staple of the Paraguayan diet. Some traditional dishes include *sooyosopy* (a soup made from ground beef and cornmeal), *chipas* (maize bread with cheese and eggs), *boribori* (soup made from diced meat, maize dumplings, cheese, and vegetables), *albondiga* (meatball soup), and *sopa paraguaya* (soup made from mashed corn, milk, cheese, and onions). Also dishes made from *surubi* (fish found in the Paraná region of Paraguay) are extremely popular.

An alcoholic drink made from distilled sugarcane juice and honey, known as *cana*, is the national drink of Paraguay. *Mosto* (sugarcane juice) and red wine are also popular, along with other alcoholic beverages.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar and is celebrated as New Year's Day (in Spanish, Año Nuevo) all over the world. Celebrations and revelries begin the evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve) when special parties are held throughout Paraguay. Everyone participates enthusiastically as music fills every corner of the country, and they dance their way into the new year.

On New Year's Day Paraguayans start referring to the infant Jesus as *niño del año nuevo* (baby of the new year), and families rearrange the figures depicting scenes from the Nativity that they keep in their

homes. (Until then Jesus is referred to as *niño del navidad* [baby of the nativity]).

BATTLE OF CERRO CORA DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 1

Battle of Cerro Cora Day, also known as Heroes' Day (in Spanish, Día de Heroes) and National Defense Day, memorializes the death of the former president of Paraguay Francisco Solano López, who died valiantly while defending his country. He was the president of Paraguay from 1862 until his death on March 1, 1870, in the Battle of Cerro Cora. This was an important battle in the War of the Triple Alliance between Paraguay and the Triple Alliance (Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina), which began in 1864. Paraguayans consider López their national hero, and his fight against the Triple Alliance is viewed as symbolic of the heroic struggle of smaller sovereign nations against the aggression of powerful neighboring countries.

On this day Paraguayans remember the valor of their great leader. They also pay homage to the less celebrated heroes who died to safeguard Paraguay's liberty, integrity, and sovereignty.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day (in Spanish, Día del Trabajador), in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

In Paraguay trade unions organize rallies and demonstrations throughout the country. The country's politicians participate in these rallies and acknowledge the contributions made by workers. In a show of solidarity and to voice their demands, workers in Paraguay turn out in large numbers to make these rallies and demonstrations successful.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 15

This day commemorates the proclamation of the independence of Paraguay after the people of



Paraguayan Indians march in the Independence Day parade on Carlos Antonio Lopez Street in Asunción. (AP Photo/Jorge Saenz)

Paraguay overthrew the local Spanish authorities on May 15, 1811. Ever since the founding of the city of Asunción in Paraguay by Spanish explorer Juan de Salazar in 1537, the region had been under Spanish control and was administered as a Spanish colonial province. Under a number of the governors, Spanish rule became oppressive. Finally, the local populace revolted and rid themselves of their colonial masters.

On this day, the president presides over Independence Day celebrations in the capital of Asunción. The major highlights of these events include a presidential speech, a parade of the armed forces, and cultural exhibitions such as folk dances and folk music concerts. The festivities generate a high level of patriotic fervor throughout the country.

❁ CHACO ARMISTICE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 12

The Chaco War, which Paraguay fought against Bolivia between 1932 and 1935, ended with a ceasefire agreement on June 12, 1935. The Chaco War was fought between the two countries over control of the Chaco Boreal region, which was strategically important since it provided easy access to the Atlantic Ocean via the Paraguay River that ran through it. This access was deemed essential by the leaders of both the landlocked countries. In addition

the territory was erroneously thought to be rich in petroleum resources; speculation about the discovery of oil promised great future riches to whoever controlled the region. This sparked off a war between the two nations. Italian and French forces provided tactical support to Paraguay, and that ensured the defeat of the Bolivian forces.

On this day, Paraguayans celebrate their victory and pay homage to all those who lost their lives during the war.

❁ FOUNDATION OF ASUNCIÓN DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 15

This day commemorates the founding of Asunción by Spanish explorer Juan de Salazar on August 15,

Fun Fact

The inner bark of the lapacho tree is used in making herbal medicines as well as tea, and the Aztecs may have used it to treat a wide range of diseases including arthritis, ulcers, diabetes, and cancer. In spite of aggressive marketing by people active in alternative medicine, lapacho has failed to demonstrate its efficacy as a remedy and may, in fact, be extremely dangerous because of its toxicity.

Fun Fact

The Guaraní were known as the searchers of the “Earth without evil.”

1537. It is also the day in 1967 when the revised constitution of Paraguay was adopted.

❁ BATTLE OF BOQUERÓN DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: September 29

This holiday commemorates the historic Battle of Boquerón. On September 29, 1932, at Boquerón, Paraguayan aircraft took off from airfields at Taguato Island and Poi Island and destroyed Bolivian forces considered superior to, and stronger than, the Paraguayan forces. This victory at Boquerón inspired Paraguayan forces eventually to win the Chaco War against Bolivia.

Religious Holidays

❁ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Last Sunday before Easter

Paraguayans, having enjoyed the festivities of Carnival until the previous day, begin a fast on the first day of Lent (Ash Wednesday) for 40 days. Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, commemorating the last week of Jesus’ mortal life. Jesus was the prophet of Christianity, and Christians believe him to be the second person of the Holy Trinity (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). The day is as much about the beginning of Jesus’ journey to the Cross as it is about his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. His arrival in Jerusalem was indeed the way to the Cross.

After two of his disciples had fetched a donkey for him to ride, they placed their clothes on it to make a comfortable seat. The disciples then cut branches and covered the path, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the words of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. People welcomed him by waving palm and olive branches, and strewing garments and branches on the road. There were different perceptions at work: Jesus rode in on a donkey, the humble entry of a peaceful nature by a spiritual king; the people of Jerusalem welcomed him with palm and olive branches and the laying of garments in his path because they wanted a worldly king to defeat the Romans.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Thursday before Easter

The rituals observed on Maundy Thursday are based on a sequence of events supposed to have

occurred during Jesus’ last meal with his Apostles. First Jesus washed their feet; then he announced that he had been betrayed by one of them. The traitor Judas left the table. Finally Jesus instituted the Eucharist—a ritual of consuming bread and wine as symbols of his body and blood, also referred to as Communion in Christian churches. In the Roman Catholic Church Maundy Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist, the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week, and gives priests an opportunity to prepare for the many rituals associated with Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter.

On Maundy Thursday, Paraguayans who are devout Catholics attend prayer services in their local churches in the morning and evening.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, alternatively known as Mourning Friday, Sorrowful Friday, or Holy Friday, is a somber day for Roman Catholics and other Christians all over the world and is observed on the Friday before Easter. It commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus more than 2,000 years ago. Some Paraguayan Catholics observe a fast from Ash Wednesday (first day of Lent) for 40 days up to Good Friday and a partial fast from then until Easter. Some fast only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

Paraguayans attend a prayer service in local churches on this day and remember the sacrifice Jesus made for the salvation of humanity. In many parts of the country, huge processions take place in which people reenact his final journey before Crucifixion. Many also carry wooden crosses on their backs in order to experience Jesus’ agony.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Saturday before Easter

Holy Saturday is the day Jesus lay in the tomb and the day before he rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. This was the Jewish Sabbath (the Jewish day of rest is Saturday). It is also regarded as the second Sabbath after Creation. The final day of Holy Week, which begins with Palm Sunday and includes Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, it marks the threshold between death and resurrection, and is a day of silence and contemplation for devout Catholics.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection. For this reason, it is sometimes known as Resurrection Day. This day is of utmost importance because the fundamental teaching of Christianity is that Jesus, through his death, freed all his believers from the penalty of sin. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. On Easter entire families gather to celebrate. They often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to offer prayers. Easter eggs have become associated with the festival because they are symbols of rebirth and regeneration taken from the ancient pagan spring festivals.

In Paraguay, devout Christians attend a midnight vigil on Holy Saturday and participate in a candlelight procession. As the priest announces Jesus' Resurrection, all the candles are lit, and people exchange greetings on this festive occasion.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: December 8

Since the earliest times of Christianity, Roman Catholic theologians have maintained that the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus, was born with a soul free from original sin. Finally in 1854, the pope issued a solemn decree declaring the Immaculate Conception to be a dogma essential to the belief of the universal church. Under the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, the Virgin Mary was invoked as the patron saint of Portugal, Brazil, and the United States.

On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Paraguayans go to the Basilica of Our Lady of the Miracles of Caacupé, the capital of the department of Cordillera, to offer prayers in Mary's honor.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world because it the day chosen by the Catholic Church to celebrate the birth of Jesus. In Paraguay Christmas is the most important religious festival. Since in Paraguay it falls during summer because the country is located in the Southern Hemisphere, homes are decorated with flowers that bloom in the region at that time of year.

An integral part of Christmas celebrations are the figures depicting the nativity scenes found every-

where, in homes as well as in churches during Christmas. The manger holding these figures is decorated beautifully with tropical fruits such as mangoes, pineapples, papaya, and the flowers from the evergreen cacao tree. Between Christmas and New Year's Eve, Paraguayans address Jesus as *niño de la navidad* (baby of the Nativity).

On Christmas Eve (December 24), Catholics attend Midnight Mass, known as the La Misa del Gallo (the Mass of the Rooster). Choirs sing carols in honor of this auspicious day. On Christmas Day people visit friends and family members and exchange gifts and greetings. A traditional Christmas meal consists of roast pork, potatoes, salads, and apples.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ FESTIVAL DE SAN JUAN

Observed in: Paraguay

Observed by: General Public

Observed in: June

The Festival of San Juan is an annual midsummer festival that takes place in the month of June throughout Paraguay. It commemorates the birth of St. John of the Cross, a Spanish saint who was born on June 24, 1542. (San Juan is the Spanish name of St. John.)

Fire walking and fortunetelling are two important events of the Fiesta de San Juan in Paraguay. Some fortunes are predicted on the basis of the shapes formed by melting wax in a pan filled with water. On the eve of the fiesta, young girls perform a number of rituals that include placing a cross-shaped laurel leaf under their pillows because they believe they will eventually marry the men they see in their dreams on this night. Also, they plant beans and corn since they believe doing so will help them determine whether their husband will be Paraguayan (if the bean grows first) or a foreigner (when the corn grows first). Another Paraguayan tradition is to throw a shoe over the house. If it lands on the heel, then unwed women will get married in the coming year.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

In an earlier era, the tribal women of Paraguay gave birth in the forests. Elderly women helped them in the process of delivery. However, contemporary women prefer giving birth in local hospitals.

Infants are baptized in the local church. Parents carefully select their closest relatives as godparents, or *compadrazgos*, because they will share equal

responsibility for the child with the birth parents. Also *compadrazgos* are considered an integral part of the family. In the event of the death of the birth parents, responsibility for the child's upbringing passes to his or her godparents. Ideally *compadrazgos* are a married couple since people believe that such a union will provide more stability in the life of the child, especially if the responsibility to raise it falls on them. The ritual of baptism is performed in accordance with Roman Catholic beliefs and takes place in the presence of *compadrazgos*, parents, close family members, and friends. The priest makes a cross on the child's forehead, pouring water on the child's head (to cleanse it of all sins), anointing its forehead with the holy oil and thus, formally welcoming the child into the Catholic community. The cost of baptism is borne by the godparents. Also like parents, they are expected to give gifts to the child on birthdays and other special occasions.

❁ COMING OF AGE

In Paraguay the ritual of confirmation usually takes place when people are old enough to make their own decisions. Through this ritual a baptized child confirms its belief in Christianity and is welcomed as a full member in the Catholic community. Before people are confirmed, they attend confirmation classes where they are taught about the important beliefs of Roman Catholicism. Confirmation is always performed by a bishop, who represents the wider church and confirms people by laying hands on their heads and praying for them. The actual ritual or sacrament of confirmation takes place during the Mass, after the bishop completes the sermon. The bishop reads aloud the names of all those who will be confirmed. Those being confirmed will say that they believe in God, the Father, Son, and Holy

Spirit and ask for strength and courage to live as Jesus would want them to and to actively proselytize their faith.

❁ MARRIAGE

In Paraguay it is mandatory for a grand feast to follow both civil and church marriages. Therefore in earlier times, Paraguayan peasants opted for consensual unions because the festivities surrounding civil and church marriages were too expensive. In modern Paraguay most people choose between civil and church marriages. Even though church weddings continue to be expensive affairs, many Paraguayans opt for them. In the presence of God the priest, family members, and friends, the bride and the groom exchange marital vows and rings and promise to love each other for the rest of their lives. The church ceremony is followed by a lavish reception with singing, dancing, and feasting.

Often, the church wedding is preceded by a civil ceremony to give legal status to the marriage.

Some Paraguayans prefer to have only a civil marriage and enter into matrimony by signing a legal document in front of state authorities and two witnesses. Parents usually accompany the couple, and after the ceremony a small party is held with close family members and friends to celebrate the occasion.

Further Reading

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Peru

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Western South America, between Chile and Ecuador, bordered by the south Pacific Ocean
Size	496,226 sq. mi.
Capital City	Lima
Flag Description	Peru's flag has three equal vertical bands of red (hoist side), white, and red with the country's coat of arms centered in the white band, featuring a shield bearing a vicuna, cinchona tree (the source of quinine), and a yellow cornucopia spilling out gold coins, all framed by a green wreath.
Independence	July 28, 1821 (from Spain)
Population	27,925,628 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional republic
Nationality	Peruvian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Amerindian (45%); Mestizo (mixed Amerindian and European, 37%)
Major Language(s)	Spanish (official); Quechua (official); Aymara; numerous minor Amazonian languages
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (81%); Unspecified or none (16%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day, July 28; Battle of Angamos Day, October 8

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Of all the countries in South America, Peru may be the most excavated and, therefore, the best understood (although much remains unknown). Peru's total prehistoric sequence spans 15,000 years, beginning about 13,000 B.C.E. when the first hunter-gatherer peoples left their traces in highland caves. Thereafter, according to archaeologists, a succession of cultures evolved, starting in 9500 B.C.E. and ending with the arrival of the invading Europeans in 1534. The sequence is roughly divided into two "eras," the Pre-ceramic (9500–1800/1500) and the Ceramic (1800/1500 B.C.E.–1534 C.E.) There were times when indigenous cultures coexisted, and archaeologists postulate that the decline of these societies was connected with extended periods of severe drought or flooding, perhaps as a result of large-scale Los Niños.

The earliest pre-Incan people so far identified were the Oquendo, who lived in the region around 9500 (Period I). They were followed by the Lauricocha, who inhabited Peru for close to 5,000 years. Coexistent with them were the Chivateros I (9500–8000), the Chivateros II, Playa, Arenal, and Puyenca (8000–6000), succeeded by the Lauricocha II, Luz, Ambo, and Canario (6000–4200). Between 4200 and 2500 yet a third period of the Lauricocha has been identified, contemporaneous with the Honda and Viscachani. The last Pre-ceramic societies were the Casavilca, Culebras, Viscachani, and Huaca Prieta (Period VI, 2500–1800/1500).

The Initial Period of the Ceramic era (1800/1500–900) saw the rise of the Early Chiripa, Kotosh, and Toril cultures and the construction of the Cumbe Mayo Aqueduct, which survives at an elevation of 11,000 feet and stretches for about five miles. Constructed between 1500 and 1000, it may be the oldest structure made by human hands in all of South America. There are also petroglyphs on the aqueduct and in surrounding caverns.

Between 900 and 200 C.E. alongside the Late Chiripa and Paracas, the Chavín culture, known for its metallurgy, textiles,

Fun Fact

The name *Cumbe Mayo* may be derived from Quechua *kunpi mayu*, which means “well-made water channel,” or *hunpi mayo*, “thin river.”

and ceramics, developed and flourished along the Pacific coast. By 900, the Chavín had developed agriculture, a trade network, and religious observances (perhaps shamanistic), and laid the foundation for the highly sophisticated Andean societies that would follow. Abstract designs on their pottery indicate the possibility of an Olmec influence.

In the hills of Peru’s southern coastal desert near Palpa, archaeologists have found approximately 50 giant figures scraped into the Earth. The figures are thought to have been made by the Paracas people between 600 and 100, predating the world-famous Nazca lines by about 500 years. One figure may represent a deity commonly found on textiles and pottery of the same period, suggesting a religious purpose for the figures.

In the next period the Early Intermediate (200–600), the Moche, Nazca, and Tiwanaku cultures developed and would survive into the Middle Horizon period, until about 700. Another civilization known for its warriors was the Sechins. Around the fifth century the Chevín and Sechins gradually declined, and several other cultures emerged. Both the Nazca (or Ica-Nazca) and the Moche built extensive irrigation systems.

The Moche, who settled in northern Peru, are known for their exquisite ceramics. They used molds to produce their designs in large quantities, although the colors are limited, primarily red and white. Several Moche ruins can still be seen near Trujillo, Peru. Huaca del Sol, a pyramidal structure, was used for religious ceremonies and burials for the social elite, and was probably the largest pre-Columbian structure in Peru until it was destroyed by Europeans looking for gold. The nearby Huaca de la Luna is smaller and contains colorful murals. In 2004 it was being excavated.

The Tiwanaku may have been the builders responsible for the megalithic structures at Tiahuanaco, including the Akapana pyramid and the Kalasasaya compound.

The next period, the Late Intermediate (1000–1476), saw the rise of the Huari, Chimú, and Chíncha cultures. The Kingdom of Chimor—the political grouping of the Chimú culture—ruled the northern coast of Peru, from about 850 to 1470. The Chimú developed from what remained of the Moche culture but were also strongly influenced by both the Cajamarca and the Huari cultures. According to Chimú legend their capital at Chan Chan had been founded by Taycanamo, who came to the coastline from the sea.

The Chimú were the last culture that might have stopped the invasion of the Inca. The Inca conquest began in the 1470s by Túpac Inca (r. 1471–93) and was nearly complete when his son Huayna Capac (r. 1493–1527) assumed the throne in 1493, becoming Sapa Inca, or ruler of the empire. By the

early 15th century, the most prominent civilization was that of the Incas. At their peak from 1438 to 1533 they controlled a territory of almost 621,371 square miles, centered in what is now Peru. During that period the Inca used conquest and peaceful assimilation to incorporate a large portion of western South America, centered around the Andean mountain ranges. Huayna Capac, the sixth Sapa of the Hanan Dynasty, extended the empire as far south as Argentina and Chile and was fighting to add northern territories in what is now Ecuador and Colombia when he and his successor Ninan were stricken by what may have been smallpox in 1527. Atahualpa, one of Ninan’s several brothers, was already consolidating his position when he heard that both Huayna and Ninan were dead.

In the early 16th century Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro (1475–1541) came to Peru and explored the coastal areas. The capital of the Inca Empire Cuzco was the richest city in the Americas when the Spanish conquistadors arrived. After seeing the wealth and power of the Inca Empire, Pizarro went back to Spain to raise money and prepare a team for another expedition to Peru.

The Inca Empire was short lived. On Pizarro’s second trip to Peru, his men were well armed and easily overpowered the Incas. In 1533 Atahualpa, the last Incan emperor, was killed on Pizarro’s orders, marking the beginning of Spanish rule. Cuzco was conquered, and many Indians were forced to adopt Christianity.

Pizarro founded the city of Lima in 1535. Over the next 200 years Lima became an important social and political center. Although the Spaniards’ exploitation of Amerindians led to an uprising in 1780, it was short lived, and most of the Incas were executed. In 1821 Peru declared its independence from Spain, but independence was only formally achieved in 1824. Chile invaded Peru in 1879, and this resulted in the War of the Pacific, as a result of which Chile acquired part of Peru’s territory.

The 20th century saw an upheaval of the Peruvian economy. Peru gradually moved from a rural to an urban society. The population increased from about 7 million in 1950 to about 20 million in 1985. At the same time an open economic system was adopted with few restrictions on either imports or foreign investment. Because the government did not intervene in the economy much, it was not equipped to absorb the rapid population increase, and the result was mass unemployment. Since 2001 the government has taken more action to create new jobs in the industrial sector, and there has been steady economic growth of approximately 4 percent a year for the past four years. Nevertheless the problem of unemployment persists.

Fun Fact

The Chavín loved pickles and probably used a hallucinogenic snuff called *vilca* in their religious ceremonies.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Peru is situated in western South America and shares borders with Chile, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, and

Machu Picchu

This legendary place, known as the Lost City of Machu Picchu, is undoubtedly the most important tourist attraction in Peru and one of the world's most impressive archaeological sites. This city was built by the Incas on the summit of Machu Picchu (Old Peak), a mountain overlooking the deep canyon of the Urubamba River, 75 miles from the city of Cuzco.

Sitting on a mountain site of extraordinary beauty, in the middle of a tropical mountain forest, Machu Picchu was probably the most amazing urban creation of the Inca Empire. Its architecture includes giant walls, terraces, and ramps, which appear as though they have been cut naturally in the continuous

rock escarpments. The building style is late imperial Inca, and the city is thought to have been a sanctuary inhabited by high priests and the Virgins of the Sun (chosen women). Out of the 135 skeletons that were found, 109 were of women.

The mysterious Machu Picchu is also one of the Incas' best-kept secrets, since they did not leave any written records about it, and Spanish chronicles make no mention of the citadel. It was discovered only in 1911 by the U.S. professor Hiram Bingham of Yale. There are many causes attributed to the fall of the city, but the truth is still a mystery.

The site has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Ecuador. Even though Peru is a diverse country—with hot deserts, dry forests, humid savannahs, plain rain forests, cold plateaus, cool steppes, and icy mountains—the topography can be divided into three distinct zones: the coastal region, the Andes Mountains, and the Amazon Basin. The Amazonian plains are drained by the Marañon and Ucayali Rivers. The highest peak in Peru is located in the western Andes. This peak, called Huascarán, is 22,211 feet high.

The Andes, which run longitudinally, break the country in two parts: the desert coast and the Amazon jungle. The mountain range acts as a natural barrier between the two and creates a new region by itself. Winds from the jungle are unable to reach the coast, keeping it dry. On the border with Bolivia lies Lake Titicaca, the world's highest navigable lake at 12,536 feet.

The Humboldt is a cold current that comes from the southern seas. In the north of Peru it mixes with the warm current called El Niño, creating temperature and climatic variation. The weather on the coast is generally temperate and dry.

With three distinctive topographical zones, Peru is rich in flora and fauna; of the 104 life zones identified in the world, 84 of them are found in Peru. It is home to the *Polylepis* forests, an ever-green member of the rose family, which provide habitat for three of South America's endangered birds: great colored parrots, toucans, and the Royal Cinclodes. Bird and marine life is also abundant in the Peruvian coastal deserts, where sea lions, the Humboldt penguin, the Chilean flamingo, the Peruvian pelican, the Inca tern, the brown booby, the Andean condor, the puna ibis, and the hummingbird are found. Peru is also home to the llama, alpaca, guanaco, vicuña (all these animals are wild or domesticated mammals found only in the South American continent), jaguar, bear, and tapir

ECONOMY

Peru is blessed with abundant mineral wealth and excellent fishing grounds. Natural resources such as copper, silver, gold, petroleum, iron ore, coal, phosphate, potash, hydropower, and natural gas are found in this region. The major industries of Peru are pulp, paper, coca leaves, fishmeal, steel, chemicals, oil, minerals, cement, auto assembly, steel, and shipbuilding. Even though only 3 percent of the total land area is arable, the country cultivates coffee, cotton, sugarcane, rice, wheat, potatoes, corn, plantains, and cocoa. Poultry, beef, dairy products, wool, and fish are other contributors to the economy. Peru shares good trade relations with the United States, China, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Japan, Chile, Spain, Colombia, Brazil, Venezuela, and Argentina.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Peru is famous for the variety of its musical genres. Spanish and African influences are evident in the folk music produced in this region and the instruments used. Andean music is popularly known as *música folklórica*.

Modern music is also popular in Peru. Various genres of music such as rock, pop, blues, reggae, hip-hop, and punk are all produced and enjoyed. Latin American dance forms, such as salsa, *cumbia*, and the cha-cha are popular in Peru.

Peruvian literature is rich and full of inspirational prose and poetry. One of the most renowned Peruvian authors is Mario Vargas Llosa (b. 1936). His novels deal with various aspects of Peruvian

Fun Fact

The Nazca Lines are large geoglyphs, drawings on the Earth's surface that are only identifiable from the air. These geoglyphs include fish, birds, monkeys, a whale, spiders, and plants. Some figures are 12 miles long.

society including politics and culture. Other noted Peruvian writers are José María Arguedas (1911–69), Ciro Alegría (1909–67), Julio Ramón Ribeyro (1929–94), and Alfredo Bryce Echenique (b. 1939).

Fun Fact

The Incas' imperial city of Cuzco (which means "navel of the Earth") was laid out in the form of a puma, the Inca Empire's symbolic animal. The puma's belly formed the main plaza, the river Tulumayo formed its spine, and the hill of Sacsayhuaman, one of the most imposing architectural works of the Incas its head.

Before the Spaniards occupied Peru, the art of this region was expressed in pottery, metalwork, stone craft, and textiles. Since the conquest Peruvian art and architecture have become a mixture of Spanish culture and Amerindian styles, called *mestizo*. The best examples of *mestizo* architecture can be found in the churches around Puno and Arequipa.

CUISINE

Peruvian cuisine is known as one of the best in South America. The national dish of Peru is *seviche*, a delicacy made of indigenous lime and fish. The fish is marinated and cooked in lime juice. A variation is *seviche de corvina* (made with white sea bass and served with potato).

Seafood and the Incan delicacy of roast guinea pig are some of the more popular dishes found in Peru. Other dishes include *lomo saltado* (chopped steak with onions) and *sopa a la criolla* (noodle soup with beef, egg, milk, and vegetables). The national drink of Peru is called *pisco*. It is a strong alcoholic beverage made of grapes and is served alone or mixed with lime juice, egg white, and sugar. The word *pisco* is Incan in origin and means "bird."

Fun Fact

On the coast of Peru archaeologists found kernels of popcorn more than 1,000 years old. The Peruvian Indians' methods of preservation were so advanced that the corn still pops after a thousand years.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day in most countries. Each year a festive spirit reigns over the whole world as people hold parties and celebrations beginning on New Year's Eve. In Peru many cities have fireworks displays on New Year's Eve. Lively celebrations with Latin music are held across the country.

On New Year's Day it is traditional for Peruvians to make personal New Year's resolutions and enjoy a feast. New Year's Day is a national holiday, and schools and offices remain closed.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. The tradition began in 1889, when the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

In Peru, workers hold marches all over the country.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 28

This day commemorates the liberation of Peru from Spanish control in 1821. Independence Day is celebrated on a large scale across the nation. The president addresses the nation, while other important figures conduct military parades. All schools and offices remain closed. People go out to watch parades and enjoy the holiday with their families.

BATTLE OF ANGAMOS DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 8

This holiday commemorates a naval battle fought between Chile and Peru in 1879 during the War of the Pacific. A Peruvian armored naval vessel, or ironclad, named the *Huáscar* was surrounded and captured by the Chilean Navy in October 8, 1879. The captain of the ironclad, Adm. Miguel Grau, was killed in combat. After this battle Peru was unable to prevent the invasion of its territory, and the seas were cleared for the invasion of both Peru and Bolivia. It was a decisive Chilean victory, and the people of Peru remember with sadness the people who died in this battle.

Although the Peruvian sailors tried to scuttle the *Huáscar*, the Chileans were able to save it and added it to their navy. (Chile celebrates this battle annually as the *Glorias Navales*, when Chile won dominion of the seas.)

Religious Holidays

✿ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Last Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, commemorating the last week of Jesus' mortal life. Jesus was the prophet of Christianity, and Christians believe him to be the second person of the Holy Trinity (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). The day is as much about the beginning of Jesus' journey to the Cross as it is about his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. His arrival in Jerusalem was indeed the way to the Cross.

After two of his disciples had fetched a donkey for him to ride, they placed their clothes on it to make a comfortable seat. The disciples then cut branches and covered the path, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the words of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. People welcomed him by waving palm and olive branches, and strewing garments and branches on the road. There were different perceptions at work: Jesus rode in on a donkey, the humble entry of a peaceful nature by a spiritual king; the people of Jerusalem welcomed him with palm and olive branches and the laying of garments in his path because they wanted a worldly king to defeat the Romans. Devout Catholics who attend church services on Palm Sunday receive a cross made from a piece of dried palm frond.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

✿ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

The rituals observed on Maundy Thursday are based on a sequence of events supposed to have occurred during Jesus' last meal with his Apostles. First Jesus washed their feet; then he announced that he had been betrayed by one of them. The traitor Judas left the table. Finally Jesus instituted the Eucharist—a ritual of consuming bread and wine as symbols of his body and blood, also referred to as communion in Christian churches. In the Roman Catholic Church Maundy Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist, the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week, and gives priests an opportunity to prepare for the many rituals associated with Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

✿ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, alternatively known as Mourning Friday, Sorrowful Friday, or Holy Friday, is a somber day for Roman Catholics and other Christians all over the world and is observed on the Friday before Easter. It commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus more than 2,000 years ago. Some Peruvians observe a fast from Ash Wednesday (first day of Lent) for 40 days up to Good Friday and a partial fast from then until Easter. Some fast only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Special prayer services are held on this day with readings from the Gospel narrating the events leading up to the Crucifixion. In Peru on Good Friday, people visit their local churches and pray to Jesus, taking inspiration from his life and teachings.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Saturday before Easter

Holy Saturday is the day Jesus lay in the tomb and the day before he rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. This was the Jewish Sabbath (the Jewish day of rest is Saturday). It is also regarded as the second Sabbath after Creation. The final day of Holy Week, which begins with Palm Sunday and includes Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, it marks the threshold between death and resurrection, and is a day of silence and contemplation for devout Christians.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection. For this reason it is sometimes known as Resurrection Day. This day is of utmost importance because the fundamental teaching of Christianity is that Jesus, through his death, freed all his believers from the penalty of sin. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over.

Fun Fact

The Inca used a "computer," called a *quipu*, made of colored knotted cotton cords to keep numerical records. The colors of the cords, the way the cords are connected, the relative placement of the cords, the spaces between the cords, the types of knots on the individual cords, and the relative placement of the knots all record specific numerical information. The complexity and number of knots on a *quipu* could indicate the contents of a warehouse, the number of taxpayers in a province, and census figures.

Fun Fact

St. Rose and St. Martín of Porres, both born in Lima, Peru, were good friends.

On Easter the entire family gathers to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus. On Easter Sunday in Peru church bells are rung to announce the Resurrection of Jesus. They start the day by attending special prayer services. It is important for them to carry a huge image of Jesus in a procession traveling all over their neighborhoods.

For most Peruvians this is a day of relaxation to be spent with their families, and they usually prepare special dinners on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ INTI RAYMI

Observed in: Cuzco

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 24

Inti Raymi, the Sun Festival, was one of the most important Incan festivals. After the conquest of the Inca Empire it was suppressed by the Spanish and was not revived until 1944. Today it is the second biggest festival in Latin America, after Carnival in Rio.

Originally three days in length, this festival was observed by the Incas to honor their most important deity, the Sun god. It celebrated the marriage between the Sun god and his human sons, the Incas. On the day of the summer solstice the Incas began chanting at sunrise. Their voices would grow steadily louder until the Sun was high in the midday sky, then taper off as dusk approached.

Now the festival lasts for a week around the time of the Southern Hemisphere's winter solstice, culminating the last week of June. On this day men and women wear excessive amounts of gold and silver as a sign of respect for the ancient Incan Empire. Parades, dancing, singing, exhibits, and other activities take place on this day.

Tourists throng to Cuzco in June to observe the procession, led by ceremonial virgins carrying sacred offerings through the city's winding streets. The procession arrives at the ruins of Sacsayhuaman overlooking the city, where rituals are performed and the entrails of a slaughtered llama are examined to divine what the coming year will bring.

Fun Fact

Sacsayhuaman was the site of the final battle, a very bloody encounter, between the Spanish and the Incas. In the end the Spanish cavalry overcame Manco Inca's men.

❁ ST. PETER'S AND ST. PAUL'S DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: June 29

This is the feast day of St. Peter and St. Paul. St. Peter was the first pope of the Catholic Church,

while St. Paul was a devout Christian who was martyred for believing in Jesus. On this day in Peru, worshippers go to the chapel of St. Paul to pray. They believe that many ailments have been cured there. All churches in Peru conduct special prayer services on this day.

❁ ST. ROSE OF LIMA DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: August 30

St. Rose (1586–1617) is the patron saint of South America and the Philippines. St. Rose of Lima was born in Peru and was the first saint to be born in the Americas. During the time she lived, Peru was known for the mineral riches available in the region. The natives of Peru often suffered great cruelties at the hands of the greedy Spaniards. Rose helped the people in many ways and alleviated their sufferings. After her death many people claimed to have witnessed miracles.

On this day the people of Lima carry a silver statue of St. Rose, covered with roses, from the local church to the city cathedral. Children in white robes sing hymns, and the elders wearing purple robes carry lit candles during the procession.

❁ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day, in Spanish, Fiesta de Todos los Santos, is a Christian feast that honors all the saints (known and unknown) of Catholicism. In Peru this feast day is one of exuberant celebration. The people gather at the cathedral for a special Mass to honor all saints. They carry *huabuas* (biscuits in the shape of newborns) and *suspiros* (meringue cookies made with sugar and slivered almonds) to the church. The following day Peruvians lay flowers on the tombs of their deceased relatives. Remembering the dead and honoring all Catholic saints is an important event in Peru. This holiday is also observed as Day of the Dead, an occasion when departed spirits are thought to draw close.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ FESTIVITY OF SAN MARTÍN DE PORRES

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: November 3

St. Martín of Porres (1579–1639) was born in Lima to a black mother and a white father. He was very religious and wanted to become a priest, but he was ostracized by the local people because of his skin color. Martín remained a layman and lived in a monastery. During a plague Martín was known to

have cured some afflicted people. Many other miracles were also credited to him, and he was beatified as a saint years after his death.

On the feast day of San Martín de Porres, the people of Peru attend special prayer services. They also conduct colorful processions and enjoy other festivities on this day.

❁ IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: December 8

Since the time of the early church, Roman Catholic theologians have maintained that the Virgin Mary (the mother of Jesus) was born with a soul free from original sin. Finally in 1854, the pope issued a solemn decree declaring the Immaculate Conception to be a dogma essential to the belief of the universal church. Under the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, the Virgin Mary was invoked as the patron saint of Portugal, Brazil, and the United States.

In Peru people go to church to attend special prayer services conducted in Mary's name.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world because it is the day chosen by the Catholic Church to celebrate the birth of Jesus, whom they believe was the Messiah. In Peru Christmas celebrations begin on December 24 (Christmas Eve) and last until December 26. On December 24, families attend church and Catholics offer prayers in a special Midnight Mass. They return home to a special feast during which they slice a cake specially made for the occasion. Christmas dinner traditionally includes turkey or chicken, baked potatoes, salad, and hot chocolate with *paneton*, an Italian-style fruitcake.

On Christmas Day the festivities continue with church services and meals composed of Christmas delicacies. Friends and relatives visit each other and exchange gifts. The nativity scenes of Peru are famous all over the world. In earlier times priests would travel extensively to preach their faith and they often carried an altar with them. These altars were modified into small boxes with pictures of saints above the altar and scenes from everyday life beneath it. These painted boxes were called *retablos*. For Christmas the *retablos* depicted Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus, with local people crowding around.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS



An Andean dancer, right, dances near the grave of his grandfather as musicians perform at Nueva Esperanza cemetery in Lima on November 1 during the Day of the Dead (All Saints' Day) festivities. (AP Photo/Silvia Izquierdo)

Regional Holidays

❁ CARNIVAL

Observed in: Peru
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: February

Carnivals are the celebrations held in different Catholic countries before the Lenten season begins. Celebrations in Peru normally take place during the first two weeks of February. Most of the time festivities continue for almost a month. The Peruvian city of Cajamarca celebrates this event with more enthusiasm than any other city in the country.

The main highlights of Carnival in Peru are

History of Carnival

Carnival is a time to celebrate life and rejuvenation. Parties, music, and dances, along with wild, boisterous, colorful parades of people in costume fill the streets. This event, held in most predominantly Catholic countries, is a celebration that precedes the Lenten season of fasting and abstinence.

Carnival traces its roots to pre-Christian Roman times. It is derived from the ancient festival of Saturnalia, when the Romans burned the effigy of the ugly king of ancient Saturnalia. This celebration also marked the end of the battle between summer and winter. The traditional masks worn during Carnival represent the dead or spirits from the netherworld that come in close contact with humans during this period of seasonal change. The colorful costumes represent the coming spring.

Fun Fact

The word *carnival* is derived from the Latin phrase *carne vale*, which means “farewell meat.”

water fights and various contests held on different days. A queen of the Carnival is also elected on this occasion. There are singing contests and colorful parades in which people wear magnificent masks. A lot of dancing, feasting, drinking, and night-long parties mark this event, and Peru's cities are crowded with visitors during this season.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL

WINE FESTIVAL

Observed in: Ica

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March

Fun Fact

One of the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda's best-known works, “The Heights of Machu Picchu,” was inspired by the city.

The city of Ica has many vineyards and wine cellars. This is the center of wine-making in the country. The Wine Festival, or Festival de la Vendimia, is a celebration of the grape harvest. During this festival various events such as beauty contests, parades, competitions, and exhibits are held. The queen of the Wine Festival beauty pageant, accompanied by her maidens, treads grapes in a vat to extract the juice that will be fermented to make wine. This is a traditional ritual in Ica. Visitors get to taste a variety of

wines and different food items during this occasion. Cockfights, parties, and musical concerts are some of the other highlights of the Wine Festival. Everybody dances to the tune of Afro-Peruvian beats.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

PUNO JUBILEE WEEK

Observed in: Puno

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November

Fun Fact

The hit song by Simon and Garfunkel, “If I Could (El Cóndor Pasa),” was adapted from an Andean song.

Puno is the folkloric center of Peru. This city was founded in 1868 by the Spaniards and gained popularity because of the silver and gold mines located in its vicinity.

The city of Puno celebrates its founding during the first week of November.

Even though there are celebrations held in this city throughout the year, the Puno Jubilee Week, also called Puno Days, is the most well known event in the city. During this 10-day celebration, processions and masked dancers celebrate the beginning

of the Inca Empire by enacting scenes from the Incan legends.

A handicrafts fair, instrumental and vocal musical shows, sports competitions, various special exhibits, lectures, dancing, and feasting are all part of the fair, and the people of Peru party throughout Puno Days. The city enjoys media coverage.

Rites of Passage

BIRTH

When a child is born in Peru, the mother takes special care to cover the baby's head with a hat. Peruvians believe that the baby's head is very fragile and can split open easily. The baby wears this hat, made of lamb wool or cotton, for a month. It is said that the child is out of danger after this time period.

Like many other Latin Americans, Peruvians also believe in evil spirits and the evil eye. Mothers tie a tiny piece of wood, a bean, or a string of garlic around the child's wrist or they hang one of these around the child's neck. In case the evil eye has already been cast on the baby, Peruvians tie the child up in tight cloths, and the mother wears a loose blouse. The child is then passed through the blouse three times to represent the process of childbirth as well as the Christian symbol of the cross.

MARRIAGE

Peruvian wedding traditions are predominantly Catholic. However, there are some rituals unique to the country. For instance, some interesting rituals precede the cutting of the wedding cake. The Peruvian wedding cake is unique: There are colored ribbons attached to each layer of the cake. One of the ribbons has a ring attached to it, hidden in the cake. Single women attending the wedding party are made to pull one string each. The one who pulls the ribbon with the ring is believed to be the next person to be married.

Smashing an earthen jar is another tradition. After the church ceremony, while the newlyweds walk out of the church, the priest smashes an earthen jar to confirm their marriage.

DEATH

Most Peruvians are given a Catholic burial after death. It is customary to bury the dead person's most prized possessions along with his or her body. (In earlier days, a dead man's best-loved women were also buried along with him!)

Further Reading

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Philippines

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Southeastern Asia, an archipelago, east of Vietnam, between the Philippine Sea and the South China Sea
Size	115,831 sq. mi.
Capital City	Manila
Flag Description	The flag of the Philippines has a white equilateral triangle (hoist side), with an eight-rayed sun and three stars, all in gold; the remaining area is divided into two sections, one blue (top), the other red.
Independence	June 12, 1898 (from Spain)
Population	87,857,473 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Filipino(s)
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Tagalog (28%); Cebuano (13%); Ilocano (9%); Bisaya/Binisaya (8%); Hiligaynon Ilonggo (8%); Bikol (6%); Other (25%)
Major Language(s)	Two official languages: Filipino (based on Tagalog) and English; also eight major dialects: Tagalog, Cebuano, Ilocan, Hiligaynon or Ilonggo, Bicol, Waray, Pangasinense
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (83%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Bataan and Corregidor Day, April 9; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day, June 12; Manila Day, June 24; Day of the Heroes, August; Bonifacio Day, November 30; José Rizal Day, December 30

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

There are several theories about the prehistoric period in the Philippines. But because archaeologists depend heavily on artifacts and other finds, with less than 10 percent of artifacts excavated, it is difficult to find a single theory that accounts for what is known. Regardless of the theories, the facts do not change: The earliest traces of human habitation in the Philippines have been found in Palawan, at the mouth of the South China Sea. The Tabon Caves, where some of the oldest artifacts have been found, may be what every archaeologist hopes for—tools from different periods in prehistory in several different well-defined levels.

At one time the Philippine Islands and Borneo were connected by the Palawan bridge. Looking at Palawan's

geographical location and physical appearance, it is not difficult to visualize it as a bridge to nearby islands. Located on the southwest coast of Palawan, Tabon Caves revealed a habitation level dated to 30,000 years ago, predating the arrival of people in the Americas.

The first people to cross the land bridge were hunter-gatherers who arrived in the Philippine archipelago during the Middle Paleolithic era (300,000–30,000 years ago). Among the tools found in the Tabon Caves are chert (a rock resembling flint) and river pebbles broken off at one end and used as hammers and choppers that date back to between 50,000 and 9,000 years ago.

When the ice melted and the land bridges sank, the Neolithic era began, bringing dramatic changes to how people traveled and the tools they made and used. These were superior to the simple pebbles of the Paleolithic hunter-gatherers. Axes and gouges made by flaking were now capable of

Fun Fact

Ferdinand Marcos's wife, Imelda, also known as the Steel Butterfly of the Philippines, is notorious for her extravagant lifestyle and the illegal wealth she amassed during her husband's 21-year tenure. She owned large walk-in closets with huge collections of designer clothes, jewelry, and over 1,200 pairs of shoes. She even opened a museum to display her shoe collection.

falling trees and clearing land for cultivation. Shell adzes, made from giant clams, were also in use in Palawan, just as they were in Micronesia at the same time. Charcoal samples estimate the artifacts to be 5,000 years old, coinciding with the period when people first sailed into the Pacific. Neolithic people were mobile, and those who arrived in the Philippines probably traveled by sea, finding the Philippines in the Late Neolithic.

In 500–400, people in the islands started to use gold, silver, and bronze.

Along with the development of bronze, which was not made locally (the islands have no source of tin), was the arrival of glass and jade ornaments. Similar artifacts found in South China and Northern Indochina prompt investigators to suggest major movements from the south of China toward the south of mainland Asia, eventually reaching the Philippines by boat, indicating that the Philippines have close cultural ties with South China. Agriculture, introduced during the Neolithic period, improved and settlements were established along coasts, bays, or rivers.

Extensive trade apparently began in the 11th century. The earliest traders to find their way to the Philippines may have been Arabs. The Chinese came during the 13th century and traded porcelain for stoneware and local pottery. Trade potteries represented formal trade relations between the two countries. Altogether, 40,000 pieces of porcelain have been recovered in the Philippines, 80 percent of it from South China. The earthenware vessels and jars produced locally were gradually being replaced by jars with dragon designs.

The first of the Europeans to arrive in the Philippines was Ferdinand Magellan (c. 1480–1521), a Portuguese navigator who set sail from Spain in search of new territories in the 15th century. He attempted to stake Spain's claim to the Philippines but was put to death by local chiefs.

Ruy López de Villalobos (c. 1500–44), another Spanish navigator, followed him in 1543. He named the islands "Las Islas Filipinas" in honor of King Philip II of Spain (1527–98). The Spanish occupied the islands in 1565, and most of the country was under Spanish rule by 1571. Christian missionaries arrived

with the Spanish soldiers, and Roman Catholicism was immediately introduced. The majority of Filipinos were converted.

While Spain was occupied in the Seven Years' War (1756–63), the forces of the British East India Company captured the Philippines in 1762 and introduced the English language to the islands. However, the 1763 Treaty of Paris forced Britain to return control of the islands to Spain, and the British left the Philippines in 1764. Britain's brief occupation, however, considerably weakened Spain's grip on the Philippines.

The Filipino independence movement gained momentum in the 19th century. The Filipinos fought on the side of the United States in the Spanish-American War in 1898. With the defeat of the Spanish the Filipinos hoped that they would be given their freedom. Instead the United States decided to buy the islands, along with Cuba, Guam, and Puerto Rico, from the Spanish for US\$20 million.

Over a period of time the United States acknowledged the Filipino right to independence, and in 1935 Manuel L. Quezon (1878–1944) became the interim president of the Philippine Commonwealth while the transfer of power was taking place. In 1942 the Japanese invaded and ruled over the Philippines for two years during World War II, and the United States invaded the country for the second time. However, this time the Philippines were granted full independence in 1946.

In 1965 Ferdinand Marcos (1917–89) was elected president of the Philippines. He announced martial law and ruled with an iron fist until 1986. In 1986 Corazón Aquino (b. 1933), the wife of slain opposition leader "Ninoy" Aquino (1932–83), started a movement against Marcos's rule that forced him to leave the country. She set up a democratic form of government and was able to survive numerous coups during her tenure. In 1992 she was succeeded by her defense minister Fidel Ramos (b. 1928). Subsequently in 2004 she was elected to a second term in office.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The Philippines is an archipelago of 7,107 islands located between Taiwan and Borneo. The country lies in the Pacific Ocean's so-called Ring of Fire, a zone that is prone to earthquakes and volcanic activity. Being volcanic in origin, the terrain of the islands is mountainous. Almost 10 percent of the total land area is covered with tropical forests.

The highest point of the country is Mont Apo, standing tall at 9,692 feet.

The Philippines has a hot and humid tropical climate and the annual average temperature is close to 80°F. There are three main seasons: *tag-ulan*, the rainy season (June to November), *taglamig*, or winter (December to February), and summer, or *tag-init* or *tag-araw* (March to May).

In terms of flora and fauna, the Philippine Islands are home to the palm and bamboo as well as over

Fun Fact

The deepest spot in the world is in the Philippines.

This spot, 37,782 feet below sea level, is known as the Philippine Deep or the Mindanao Trench and is in the floor of the Philippine Sea.

10,000 species of ferns, trees, and shrubs and more than 1,000 species of fauna including mouse deer, dwarf buffalo, pythons, crocodiles, the Philippine eagle (the largest eagle in the world), and the Philippine tarsier (the smallest mammal in the world).

❁ ECONOMY

The Philippines economy is dependent on agriculture, light manufacturing, and the services industries. Agriculture employs 45 percent of the nation's population, while the services sector employs 40 percent. In 1998 poor weather conditions and the Asian financial crisis affected the economy greatly. However, the government has introduced a number of fiscal and economic reforms to undo the damage done by the crisis. These include increasing investment in infrastructure development, overhauling the tax system, finding a means of improving government revenue, and the deregulation and privatization of various industries.

Major export items of the Philippines include coconut products (the Philippines is the largest producer of coconuts in the world), machinery and equipment, garments, electronic and transportation equipment, and chemicals.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The Philippines is a predominantly Christian country with 83 percent of the people practicing the Roman Catholic faith and 9 percent belonging to Protestant sects. The country is also home to Muslims, Buddhists, and people of other faiths.

In terms of ethnicity the Philippines is composed primarily of Malay and Chinese. English and Filipino are the official languages of the country, but eight dialects are also widely spoken in the country including Tagalog, Cebuano, Ilocan, Hiligaynon or Ilonggo, Bicol, Waray, Pampango, and Pangasinense.

The Philippines has a rich literary culture and some of the prominent literary figures include José Rizal (1861–96), Pedro Paterno (1858–1911), and Claro M. Recto (1890–1960).

Filipino music is known for its diversity. Some of the popular musical styles include *barana*, which is part of a courtship ritual performed by men singing underneath a woman's window; *kundiman*, which is lyrical music that speaks about love; and American folk, blues, rock and roll, and pinoy rock (a genre of rock music with Filipino lyrics).

❁ CUISINE

Filipino cuisine has been greatly influenced by Chinese, Spanish, and Malay cooking. Some traditional Filipino foods include barbecued meat, *lechon* (roasted pig), *balat* (crispy pig skins) chicken, meat stew, seafood, fermented fish, rice, vegetables cooked in garlic and vinegar, noodles, papaya, liver soup, and a wide variety of other soups.

Halo-halo is a traditional dessert made from sweet preserved beans (red beans, chick peas), coconut meat (*macapuno*), jackfruit (*langka*), pounded dried rice (*pinipig*), sweet yam (*ube*), cream flan (*leche flan*), shreds of sweetened plantain (*saba*) filled with crushed ice, milk (or coconut milk), and topped with ice cream. The *halo-halo* basically is a sweet, creamy, and filling dessert.

Some of the favorite beverages of the Philippines include *tuba* (the fermented sap of palms), tea, coffee, beer, and wine.

Fun Fact

The Philippines is the world's third largest English-speaking nation, next to the United States and the United Kingdom.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, widely celebrated as New Year's Day. Celebrations take place all over the evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve).

The Filipino Chinese believe that, on New Year's Eve, firecrackers should be set off in order to ward off evil and ominous spirits, since the noise produced will scare away the evil forces and keep them at

Fun Fact

Of the 500 known coral species in the world, 488 are found in the waters of the Philippines.



A boy blows a paper horn, which he sells, to attract passerbys as Filipinos prepare to usher in the New Year with fireworks and revelry in Manila. (AP Photo/Aaron Favila)

Fun Fact

José Rizal mastered 22 languages including Catalan, Chinese, English, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Japanese, Latin, Malay, Sanskrit, Spanish, Tagalog, and other native dialects.

bay. At the stroke of midnight families gather for the *sabulong* (welcoming the New Year) and light firecrackers or beat pans and drums to make loud noises.

Many people attend a traditional Midnight Mass in local churches and pray for a prosperous new year. Then they dine on a traditional meal, referred to as the *Media Noche* (family midnight meal) and during which it is customary to serve 12 types of round fruits representing each month of the year.

People wear new clothes, preferably red and gold, since these colors are associated with prosperity. These should also have deep pockets, which should be filled with coins and new bills. At the stroke of midnight everyone shakes their pockets vigorously to produce noise by clanking the coins for good luck.

Also Filipinos believe that on New Year's Eve all the lights in the house should be kept lit throughout the night, and coins should be scattered around doorsteps and even on windowsills to invite prosperity into one's home.

BATAAN AND CORREGIDOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 9

Bataan and Corregidor Day is commemorated in honor of the American and Filipino troops who defended the Bataan Peninsula against invading Japanese forces during World War II. It is also celebrated as the Day of Valor, when Filipinos pay homage to those brave soldiers who lost their lives while defending the Philippines. On this day a reenactment of the battle is staged in different parts of the country.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. The tradition started in 1889, when the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, designated May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor, demanding an eight-hour workday. On this day trade unions in the Philippines organize

huge gatherings and rallies throughout the country, and workers march in processions through the streets.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 12

On June 12, 1898, the Philippines obtained its independence after 333 years of Spanish domination. Celebrations are held throughout the country in honor of Independence Day. The major highlights of the celebrations include flag-raising ceremonies, concerts, the ringing of church bells, and spectacular displays of fireworks. In the capital city of Manila, a civilian and military parade is held at Rizal Park, and the president presides over the Independence Day celebrations.

MANILA DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 24

On June 24, 1871, Spanish conqueror Miguel López de Legazpi declared Manila the capital city of the Spanish colony. Filipinos celebrate this event in a unique manner. In Manila they stand on either side of the streets with pails of water and throw it on passersby. This is because Filipinos also celebrate the Feast of San Juan (St. John the Baptist) on this day. Throwing water on people baptizes them whether or not they want it.

DAY OF THE HEROES

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Last Sunday in August

Day of the Heroes commemorates the beginning of the Philippine Revolution against the oppressive Spanish colonial powers. In August 1896 at Pugadawlin, in the Kalookan region of the Philippines, Filipino Revolutionary Andres Bonifacio gathered his men and pledged to initiate a war of independence by fighting the occupying Spanish forces in the Philippines.

Filipinos pay homage to these brave soldiers who fought the Spanish and died for the independence of their country. People assemble at the Bonifacio Monument in Kalookan (Calookan) City and offer floral tributes in honor of their heroes.

BONIFACIO DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 30

Bonifacio Day commemorates the birth of the great revolutionary leader of the Philippines Andres Bonifacio, who was born on this day in 1863. He led the

Filipino revolution against the occupying Spanish forces. This became the first revolution against European colonial powers in Asia. On this day Filipinos remember this self-taught hero who symbolizes the spirit of the country's patriotism.

❁ JOSÉ RIZAL DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 30

The nation recalls the death of the multifaceted and great revolutionary leader of the Philippines, José Rizal, who was executed on December 30, 1896, by the Spanish colonialists.

Religious Holidays

❁ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Last Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, commemorating the last week of Jesus' mortal life. Jesus was the prophet of Christianity, and Christians believe him to be the second person of the Holy Trinity (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). The day is as much about the beginning of Jesus' journey to the Cross as it is about his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. His arrival in Jerusalem was indeed the way to the Cross.

After two of his disciples had fetched a donkey for him to ride, they placed their clothes on it to make a comfortable seat. The disciples then cut branches and covered the path, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the words of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. People welcomed him by waving palm and olive branches, and strewing garments and branches on the road. There were different perceptions at work: Jesus rode in on a donkey, the humble entry of a peaceful nature by a spiritual king; the people of Jerusalem welcomed him with palm and olive branches and the laying of garments in his path because they wanted a worldly king to defeat the Romans.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Thursday before Easter

The rituals observed on Maundy Thursday are based on a sequence of events supposed to have occurred during Jesus' last meal with his Apostles. First Jesus washed their feet; then he announced that he had been betrayed by one of them. The traitor Judas left the table. Finally Jesus instituted the Eucharist—a ritual of consuming bread and wine as

symbols of his body and blood, also referred to as Communion in Christian churches. In the Roman Catholic Church Maundy Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist, the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week, and gives priests an opportunity to prepare for the many rituals associated with Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter.

On Maundy Thursday, Filipinos visit as many churches as possible and seek God's blessings. This practice is known as *visita iglesia*. Also they attend church services where passion plays are staged throughout the country.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, alternatively known as Mourning Friday, Sorrowful Friday, or Holy Friday, is a somber day for Roman Catholics and other Christians all over the world and is observed on the Friday before Easter. It commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus more than 2,000 years ago. Many Filipinos observe a fast from Ash Wednesday (first day of Lent) for 40 days up to Good Friday and a partial fast from then until Easter. Some fast only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Special prayer services are held on this day with readings from the Gospel narrating the events leading up to the Crucifixion.

In the Philippines, on Good Friday, people visit their local churches and pray to Jesus, taking inspiration from his life and teachings. Jesus' Crucifixion is a much more important event here than his Resurrection. In many parts of the Philippines including Manila, San Fernando, and Antipolo, many worshippers try to feel Jesus' pain by crucifying themselves on a Cross in the same manner as he was. For the Crucifixion two-inch stainless steel nails dipped in alcohol are used. Also many indulge in self-flagellation with whips that have sharp objects attached to them.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Saturday before Easter

Holy Saturday is the day Jesus lay in the tomb and the day before he rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. This was the Jewish Sabbath (the Jewish day of rest is Saturday). It is also regarded as the second Sabbath after Creation. The final day of Holy Week, which begins with Palm Sunday and includes

Fun Fact

The Philippines is the only predominantly Christian country in Asia.

Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, it marks the threshold between death and resurrection, and is a day of silence and contemplation for devout Catholics.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection. For this reason, it is sometimes known as Resurrection Day. This day is of utmost importance because the fundamental teaching of Christianity is that Jesus, through his death, freed all his believers from the penalty of sin. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. On Easter entire families gather to celebrate. They often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to offer prayers. Easter eggs have become associated with the festival because they are symbols of rebirth and regeneration taken from the ancient pagan spring festivals.

In the Philippines people attend midnight prayer services for Easter and celebrate Jesus' Resurrection by lighting candles. A festive spirit envelops churches as people sing devotional hymns. On Easter in different parts of the Philippines, statues of the resurrected Jesus and his grieving mother, Mary, are taken through the streets in long processions.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day is a Catholic feast that honors all the saints (known and unknown) of the Roman Catholic Church. On this day Filipinos visit the graves of their deceased relatives, offer flowers and prayers, and remember their loved ones. The objective is to celebrate the life of their loved ones, so people even carry some food along with them and eat their lunch near the grave.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world because it is the day chosen by the Roman Catholic Church to celebrate Jesus' birth. In the Philippines Christmas is not just a one-day event but a month-long fiesta that begins with the Misa de

Gallo (Mass of the Rooster) on December 16 and ends with the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6.

Throughout the season, people attend services and sing Christmas carols in their local churches. However, on Christmas Eve (December 24), all Catholic Filipinos attend a special Midnight Mass and celebrate the birth of Jesus with great joy and elation. They also decorate their homes with *parols* (star-shaped lanterns), electric lights, and other adornments. People celebrate this festival with friends and family members. They exchange gifts and greetings and share in a lavish meal.

A number of other festivals take place during the Christmas season including the Great Lantern Festival, the Laoag City Lantern Parade, the Maytinis Nativity Parade, and a number of folk festivals.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

DINAGYANG

Observed in: Iloilo

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January

In the month of January the annual religious festival of Dinagyang, which honors the baby Jesus, takes place in the city of Iloilo. Residents adorn themselves in colorful costumes and participate in religious chanting day and night throughout the festivities. During the celebrations special processions of dancers pass through the streets. They whip themselves into a frenzy to the rhythm of beating drums. However, the most awaited event of the festival is the Parawa Regatta during which an exciting boat race takes place between the people of Iloilo and Gumaira Island.

CUTUD LENTEN RITES

Observed in: Pampanga

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Good Friday

The Cutud Lenten Rites take place as part of the Good Friday observances in the region of Pampanga. During this religious ritual, enactment of the Vin Crucis (Crucifixion) takes place, with many people dressed in the attire of Roman soldiers and peasants of the biblical era. Early in the morning there is a procession, and many people flog themselves with whips that have glass-spiked leather thongs attached to them. They follow a penitent, who represents Jesus and carries a wooden cross throughout the trek. On reaching their destination, women kneel in front of the procession and wail a version of the Gospel of the Seville Passion. Every year three or more penitents are nailed to makeshift crosses.

Rites of Passage

* BIRTH

In the Philippines in order to ward off the evil eye after the birth of a child, the placenta is placed in a bamboo tube and tied on a tree beside the house or on rafters.

* COMING OF AGE

In ancient times the initiation ceremony for boys involved a circumcision ritual, which was known as *pagtutuli*, and an expert *manunuli* (traditional surgeon) performed the surgery. Circumcision was considered an important ritual that helped a child in completing his transition from boyhood to manhood.

* MARRIAGE

Filipino marriage customs include a mix of Spanish influences, Roman Catholic traditions, and local customs. One of their beliefs is that it is unlucky for a bride to be closely involved in the final planning and preparations of her wedding, or *kasalan*.

It is up to the groom to convince not just the woman, but her family and her entire village (*barangay*) that he is the appropriate choice. After the proposal is accepted, a ring or a treasured family heirloom is given to the bride. This officially engages the couple. Then follows the *pamanbikan*—a formal occasion when the bride's parents invite the groom and his family to a meeting where they formalize the wedding date. The groom's family generally brings a gift for the bride's family on this occasion. After this *panimilbihan*—an age-old tradition that requires the groom to run errands for the bride's family in order to prove his worth—takes place. Nowadays the groom's ritual performance can be satisfied by shopping for the bride's family and replacing lightbulbs!

A send-off party is held close to the wedding date in honor of the bride-to-be. This celebrates her family's consent to the marriage and the bestowal of their blessings. The groom, his family, close friends, relatives from both sides, and the wedding entourage are invited to meet and get to know one another before the ceremony. Then a few days prior to their wedding, the couple confesses their sins to a priest since they will eat the bread and drink the wine (the ritual of the Eucharist) during the wedding ceremony.

Finally on the wedding day, a Mass is held that everyone involved attends. This is followed by a church wedding. A common and honored tradition is for the bride to hold a family heirloom rosary dur-

ing the nuptial Mass. The bride and the groom cup their hands together, and the priest drops 13 silver coins into the groom's open palms, which pass from his palms to the bride's and into a plate held by an acolyte. The trickling of the coins, or *arrhae*, is a sign of fidelity and completes the marriage contract.

After the wedding the couple often releases a pair of white doves to signify a peaceful and harmonious marital relationship. Then a money dance is held during which guests pin paper money on the bride or groom in exchange for a chance to dance with them.

* DEATH

In the Filipino culture death is a spiritual event. Filipinos believe that illness is due to a punishment from God or from an angry spirit. Religious medallions, rosary beads, scapula, and religious figures are kept at the bedside of the dying. Among the Filipinos children often take care of the sick and elderly, since a sense of kinship is felt strongly in their culture.

Filipinos do not believe in cremation. In the period after death and before the burial (between three and seven days) the family stops all personal business. During funerals it is customary for Filipino women to grieve openly. This involves sobbing publicly, swooning, fainting, and/or hugging the casket of the dead person. Men, however, are typically more reserved. As a rule the casket is open, and it is normal for people to touch the body of the dead person. The deceased also has to be blessed by the priest so the soul can go to heaven.

Filipinos hold rosary sessions for 30 days to help the passage of the soul to heaven. The grieving period can last up to a year and often beyond. Male relatives of the deceased wear a black ribbon, and women dress in black to indicate they are in mourning.

Further Reading

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Fun Fact

A Filipino groom walks down the aisle alone or with his parents.

Poland

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Central Europe, East of Germany
Size	120,728 sq. mi.
Capital City	Warsaw
Flag Description	Two equal horizontal bands of white (top) and red.
Independence	November 11, 1918
Population	38,635,144 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Polish
Major Ethnic Group(s)	White (Polish, 97%)
Major Language(s)	Polish (98%)
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (90%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; International Women's Day, March 8; Labor Day, May 1; Constitution Day, May 3; Independence Day, November 11

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

During the first half of the Neolithic period there were at least three archaeological cultures in this region of Poland: the Linear Pottery culture (c. 4400–4000 B.C.E.), the Lengyel culture (c. 3500–3200), and the Funnel Beaker culture (c. 3200–2600). (Little is known about the period between the Linear Pottery culture and the Lengyel.)

The Linear Pottery people settled along the stream channels created by meltwater as the glaciers retreated at the end of the last Ice Age. They usually lived in small settlements, food-producing communities that identified what might be likely locations for settlements and performed the work of initiating forest clearance to make space for agriculture.

The contemporary settlements at Brzesc Kujawski and Oslonki were quite large during the Lengyel period, because more land was cleared and its uses were more diversified. There are also more diverse species' bones found at the sites, including birds, sheep, and goats. As more species were incorporated into the survival system, land use gradually became more sophisticated, and exploitation was more intensive. Around the longhouses, for example, methods of disposing of

waste and rubbish had to be developed, and more forest was cut to supply timber for building the longhouses as well as for fuel, the manufacture of tools, and maintenance of the houses. Because Brzesc Kujawski and Oslonki were quite close to each other, there was doubtless a lot of contact between the two groups, creating more disturbance of wildlife habitat.

Following the end of the Lengyel settlements at Oslonki, then at Brzesc Kujawski, the Funnel Beaker people in this area used quite different sites, settling farther away from the stream channels, and their system of land use was quite distinct from that of the Lengyel culture. Nevertheless, although the evidence of the Linear Pottery and Lengyel settlements may not have been apparent, the networks of use between Brzesc Kujawski and Oslonki must have remained in use to some extent.

There is another gap in the historical record between the later Funnel Beaker people and the migration of Slavic tribes into the region following the collapse of the Western region of the Roman Empire in 476 C.E.

A Polish legend ascribes the origins of the Slavic nations to three brothers: Lech, Czech, and Rus. In the forests of Eastern Europe they parted company, each going in a different direction. Lech founded Gniezno, the first capital of Poland; Czech founded Bohemia; and Rus founded Russia. While the story of Lech, Czech, and Rus is probably a folktale without historical

basis, it accurately describes what is known about the westward movement and gradual dispersal of the West Slavic tribes after the Roman Empire's collapse. Most of the Slavs were agrarian, and they may have wandered west looking for more fertile soil. This would have pitted them against the Germanic tribes already inhabiting the region. They may also have moved west in order to avoid the constant attacks on Eastern Europe by successive waves of people and armies of the Huns, Avars, Magyars, and later the Mongols, Tatars, and Turks.

Perhaps as many as 20 distinct tribal groups established small states between 800 and 960: Vistulans, Obodrites, Lendians, Lekhites, Goplans, and others as well. The most prominent turned out to be Polanes (also Polans or Polanie, "people of the plain"). These people settled in the plains that would eventually become the central region of Poland and gave their name to the country.

The beginnings of Poland as an identifiable nation-state can only be traced back to the 10th century. Prior to this time Poles had been a part of the Czech people. Great (north) Poland was founded in 966 by Mieszko I (c. 932–92), who belonged to the Piast Dynasty. Later the tribes of southern Poland united and formed Little Poland. In 1047 Great Poland and Little Poland united under the rule of Casimir I (1015–58), the Restorer. Poland was split into several smaller states in the 12th century, which were later ravaged by the Mongol armies of the Golden Horde in 1241. In 1386 Poland was merged with Lithuania by way of a royal marriage. The grand duke of Lithuania Ladilaus Jagiello and the monarch of Poland Jadwiga married on February 2, 1386, and Ladilaus Jagiello was crowned Ladilaus II, King of Poland. Thus began the "golden age" of the Polish-Lithuanian Union (Lublin Union). This union withstood the ravages of war and foreign invasions for 400 years. Between the 14th and 16th centuries this Polish-Lithuanian alliance reached the zenith of its power, scoring victories over the (Germanic) knights of the Teutonic order, the Russians, and the Ottoman Turks.

However, in the mid-17th century, Bohdan Chmielnicki (c. 1595–1657) led a rebellion of Ukrainian Cossacks that ushered in turbulent times for the Polish-Lithuanian state. It was called the Potop, or the Deluge, for the magnitude of the hardships it entailed. Subsequent wars with the Ottoman Empire, Russia, Sweden, Transylvania, and Brandenburg-Prussia destroyed the fabric of the union and weakened the nation, leading to its dependency on Russia. Between 1772 and 1795 Poland was fragmented, and portions were divided among Russia, Prussia, and Austria. For more than a century thereafter, the Poles continued their rebellions against Russian, Prussian, and Austrian dominance in their efforts to regain their independence.

During World War I U.S. president Woodrow Wilson called for the restitution of an independent Poland endorsed by the Allied coalition. In November 1918 Poland regained its independence after 123

Holocaust

The Nazi extermination of the Jews took its most vicious form in Poland. Hitler considered Poland an integral part of his concept of German domination of Europe and reduced the Poles to a life of slavery, imposing severe restrictions on them. The Holocaust wiped out nearly the entire population of the three million Jews living in Poland. The most lethal death camps including Auschwitz, Majdanek, and Treblinka, with their infamous gas chambers, were all operated on Polish soil. Six million Poles perished under the German occupation.

years. However, this independence was short-lived. Despite a 10-year nonaggression pact signed in 1934, Hitler attacked Poland on September 1, 1939. Soviet troops invaded from the east on September 17, taking Poland by surprise. On September 28 a German-Soviet agreement divided Poland between the Soviet Union and Germany. Both occupiers conducted large-scale subjugation of the Polish population, Nazi Germany's primary focus being the annihilation of Polish Jews.

The German and Soviet invasions created a diminishing Poland as its borders were pushed westward. Following the migration of millions of Poles, Germans Jews, and Ukrainians, Poland emerged an ethnically unified country. Soviet rule established a Communist government in Poland, and a new constitution in 1952 made Poland a "people's democracy," the People's Republic of Poland. Poland saw a lot of liberalization in 1956 under the leadership of Wladyslaw Gomulka (1905–82) of the United Worker's (Communist) Party. People were freed from prison, personal freedoms were expanded, and the press became freer.

Over the years a dwindling economy and public resentment over increasing prices led to labor turmoil. Solidarity, an independent trade union formed by Lech Walesa (b. 1943), launched a drive for liberty and improved conditions. Over a period of time, Solidarity, under its founder-leader, became a political force, and in 1989 it swept the elections, taking almost all the seats in the senate. Efforts to uplift the Polish economy led to economic difficulties, however, and widespread discontent. In the second democratic parliamentary election of September 1993, voters returned power to ex-Communists and their allies.

In 1999 Poland became part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and it joined the European Union (EU) on May 1, 2004.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Poland is situated in the center of Europe covering an area of 120,728 square miles, including 328

square miles of coastline along the Baltic Sea. The country is largely a plain with no natural boundaries except the Carpathian Mountains in the south and the Oder and Neisse Rivers in the west. Poland shares its borders with seven countries. To the north Poland is bordered by Russia, to the east by Lithuania, Belarus, and the Ukraine. The Czech Republic, Slovakia, and the Sudeten and Carpathian Mountains lie to the south of Poland. Apart from the Oder and Neisse Rivers, the rivers Vistula, Warta, and Bug are important for trade and commerce. The highest point in Poland is at Rysy, at 8,199 feet in height. The capital city, Warsaw, is the country's largest city; other major cities of Poland are Lodz, Kraków, Wrocław, Poznan, Gdańsk, and Szczecin.

The climate in Poland is temperate, characterized by cold and cloudy winters and moderately severe summers with frequent showers and thunderstorms. Ocean air currents from the west, cold polar air from Scandinavia and Russia, and warmer, subtropical air from the south largely influence Poland's climate. Winter may last one to three months and brings frequent snowstorms but relatively low total precipitation.

In Poland a wide variety of flora is found including trees such as pine, oak, beech, fir, and rowan. As far as fauna is concerned, Poland is home to wild boar, beavers, lynx, roe deer, cranes, eagle owls, spotted and golden eagles, black woodpeckers, and whooper swans.

ECONOMY

Through the 1990s Poland steadfastly pursued a policy of economic liberalization and epitomizes a successful transition economy. However, the unemployment issue remains unresolved. While privatization of small and medium-sized state-owned companies and liberalization of laws have encouraged entrepreneurs, facilitating the development of the private business sector, legal and bureaucratic obstacles and incurable corruption are hampering its further progress. Poland's agricultural sector remains handicapped by surplus labor, inefficient small farms, and lack of investment. Reforms in health care, edu-

cation, the pension system, and state administration have resulted in unprecedented fiscal pressures.

Poland joined the EU in May 2004, and surging exports to the EU contributed to Poland's strong growth in 2004. Farmers have already begun to reap the rewards of membership via higher food prices and EU agricultural subsidies. The natural resources found in Poland are coal, sulfur, copper, natural gas, silver, lead, salt, and amber. The country's primary industries are machine building, iron and steel, coal mining, chemicals, shipbuilding, food processing, glass, beverages, and textiles. The land is arable.

Poland exports mostly machinery and transport equipment, intermediate manufactured goods, and miscellaneous manufactured goods. Food and live animals make up a small portion of its exports. Its major imports are intermediate manufactured goods and chemicals. Germany, Italy, France, the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Russia, and the Netherlands are its major trade partners.

The monetary unit of Poland is the zloty. It is estimated that between 2009 and 2010, Poland will introduce the Euro (the common European currency for many member nations of the EU).

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Ethnic Poles constitute 97 percent of Poland's population, although a small percentage of Germans, Belarusians, and Ukrainians also live in the country. Polish is the country's national language. Poland's official name in Polish is Rzeczpospolita Polska. It has, for centuries, been a bridge between the East and West.

Poland is an overwhelmingly Roman Catholic country with more than 90 percent of the population adhering to that faith. It is also home to a small number of Protestants, Eastern Orthodox Christians, and people of other faiths.

Poles enjoy many kinds of music including classical, folk, rock, hip-hop, and rap. Poland even has one musical genre that sets poetry to music, as well as disco polo, a musical genre that is a perfect blend of folk tunes and *italo* disco (electronic dance music). Disco polo was previously known as *piosenka chodnikowa*.

The polka is a popular genre of dance music as well as a style of dance. The mazurka and the polonaise are the favorite traditional folk dances of Poland. The mazurka is generally performed by four or eight couples and includes stamping feet and the tapping of heels; the polonaise is a slow Polish dance. The violin and cello are the musical instruments traditionally used to play folk songs. Most folk songs center on the Polish hero Juraj Jánošík (1688–1713).

CUISINE

Polish cuisine has been greatly influenced by neighboring countries including Russia, Austria, Germany, and Hungary. The Polish like meat dishes,

Origin of the Name Poland

Poland is officially called Rzeczpospolita Polska in the Polish language. The name of the country and its people are of Slavic origin. It is commonly believed that the name Polska has its origins in the Slavic Polanie tribe who established the Polish state in the 10th century. Their name may have been derived from the Slavic word *pole* (field) or it may have come from the tribal name Goplanie—people living around Lake Goplo. Conventionally the ethnic name of the Poles relates it more widely to the Polish word *polanie*, or “dwellers of the field.”

with ham, pork, and kielbasa (sausage) among their favorites. These are served with dumplings, noodles, rye bread, and vegetables. *Bigos* (hunter's stew) is the national dish of Poland. It is made from five or six kinds of wild game. Soups, stews, and salads are also favorites and are generally made from beetroot and cabbage. *Barszcz* (beetroot soup) is an integral part of the typical Polish meal.

Lemon tea and vodka are preferred beverages in Poland. Other beverages include coffee, wine, and beer.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day in many countries. Each year, a festive spirit reigns over the whole world as people plan parties and celebrations beginning on December 31 (New Year's Eve). In Poland New Year's Eve is also known as *Sylwesterabend* (St. Sylvester's Day), and a carnival atmosphere infects the entire nation. According to folklore an evil dragon named Leviathan was killed by St. Sylvester in 1000.

Many Poles celebrate New Year's Eve with *kulig* (sleigh rides). In ancient times people would go in a big cavalcade of horse-pulled sledges and sleighs from one place to another, where they celebrated the New Year with dancing, singing, feasting, and drinking. In the 21st century New Year's Eve parties and balls are the most awaited events of the year, and the Polish start preparing for the celebrations months in advance. People buy new clothes and aspire to be a part of the most talked-about parties in Poland. Prices of tickets for balls and parties increase as New Year's Day approaches. The carnival atmosphere climaxes with a huge ceremonial bonfire, and the new year is brought in amid loud cheers.

New Year's Day is a holiday, allowing people to recover from the previous night's excesses.

❁ INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 8

International Women's Day is celebrated on March 8. It commemorates the social, economical, political, and cultural achievements of women throughout the world.

Poland began celebrating International Women's Day in 1948 after an arbitrary imposition of the holiday by the occupying Soviet forces. During Soviet rule (1948–56), working women were encouraged to improve their work efficiency, and

Juraj Jánošík

Jánošík was an 18th-century Slovak bandit, who was also referred to as the "Slovak Robin Hood." According to legend Jánošík (which means "son of John") was a former soldier of the imperial army, who became a bandit in 1711 in reaction to the atrocities of the nobility. He would rob the nobles and distribute the money among the poor and needy. He was eventually captured and hanged in December 1713. But his legend lives on, and he continues to be one of the most celebrated heroes of Poland.

portraits of exceptional women workers were hung on the walls of the factories. Later on, Polish men and children honored women in society (including homemakers, coworkers, teachers, and doctors) by presenting flowers as a token of appreciation for their contribution to the greater society.

In the 21st century many Polish women's organizations as well as the government continue to celebrate International Women's Day on March 8. Since it is a public holiday, both women and men enjoy a holiday on Women's Day. However, in the early 1970s, in an attempt to remove all signs of the Communist regime and a desire to adopt Western culture, Women's Day celebrations lost their popularity, and Valentine's Day became the preferred holiday because it has no feminist political content and merely upholds women's traditional domestic roles.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. This tradition began in 1889, when the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) demanding an eight-hour workday.

The leftist parties in Poland hold workers' rallies throughout the country, and political and trade union leaders give commemorative speeches emphasizing the contributions made by Polish workers to shaping the Polish economy. Because it is a public holiday, all public and private institutions in Poland remain closed on May 1.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 3

Constitution Day, also known as *Święto Trzeciego Maja*, commemorates the adoption of the democratic constitution by the Sejm (the parliament of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth), on May 3, 1791. It was the first democratic constitution in Europe and the second democratic constitution in the world (the U.S. Constitution was the first). On May 3, 1919, the Polish government declared May 3 a national holiday in honor of the first constitution of the nation since it was the symbol of Poland's integrity and sovereignty.

On Constitution Day celebrations are held in different parts of Poland to commemorate this historic day. In the capital of Warsaw the holiday is marked with military parades and a procession of people wearing colorful costumes and holding the national flag of Poland aloft.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 11

On November 11, 1918, at the end of World War I, Poland declared itself an independent republic. Austria, Russia, and Prussia had established their dominance in different parts of Poland, and the country was divided between these three powerful kingdoms until the late 1800s. As a result, Poland was erased from the map of the world. But Poles wanted to establish an independent state of Poland, and many brave Poles lost their lives trying to liberate their country.

During World War I, the forces occupying Poland were all at war, and most of their battles were fought on Polish territories. After the war, the October Revolution of 1918 resulted in the disintegration of the Russian Empire and the victorious Allies voted in favor of the independence of Poland. Eventually,

on November 11, 1918, the Republic of Poland came into existence. Józef Piłsudski (1867–1935), a prominent Polish freedom fighter, was sworn in as the first president of Poland.

On Independence Day many schools in Poland present plays in which children act out famous events from the country's history. Also the president of Poland presides over the Independence Day celebrations in the capital city of Warsaw. Military parades and patriotic songs are part of the Independence Day celebrations.

Fun Fact

An ancient tradition of sprinkling water on women, Earth, and cows is still followed. The origin of this custom is not known, but many consider this part of a rite of purification that was performed to ensure fertility.

Religious Holidays

❁ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Last Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, commemorating the last week of Jesus' mortal life. Jesus was the prophet of Christianity, and Christians believe him to be the second person of the Holy Trinity (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). The day is as much about the beginning of Jesus' journey to the Cross as it is about his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. His arrival in Jerusalem was indeed the way to the Cross.

After two of his disciples had fetched a donkey for him to ride, they placed their clothes on it to make a comfortable seat. The disciples then cut branches and covered the path, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the words of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. People welcomed him by waving palm and olive branches, and strewing garments and branches on the road. There were different perceptions at work: Jesus rode in on a donkey, the humble entry of a peaceful nature by a spiritual king; the people of Jerusalem welcomed him with palm and olive branches and the laying of garments in his path because they wanted a worldly king to defeat the Romans.

On Palm Sunday, devout Polish Catholics attend a special Mass and receive small crosses made of dried palm fronds.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

The rituals observed on Maundy Thursday are based on a sequence of events supposed to have occurred during Jesus' last meal with his Apostles. First Jesus washed their feet; then he announced that he had been betrayed by one of them. The traitor Judas left the table. Finally Jesus instituted the Eucharist—a ritual of consuming bread and wine as symbols of his body and blood, also referred to as Communion in Christian churches. In the Roman Catholic Church Maundy Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist, the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week, and gives priests an opportunity to prepare for the many rituals associated with Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, alternatively known as Mourning Friday, Sorrowful Friday, or Holy Friday, is a somber day for Roman Catholics and other Christians all over the world and is observed on the Friday before Easter. It commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus more than 2,000 years ago. Polish Catholics observe a fast from Ash Wednesday (first day of Lent) for 40 days up to Good Friday and a partial fast from then until Easter. Some fast only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. In Poland on Good Friday people visit their local churches and pray to Jesus, taking inspiration from his life and teachings.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection. For this reason, it is sometimes known as Resurrection Day. This day is of utmost importance because the fundamental teaching of Christianity is that Jesus, through his death, freed all his believers from the penalty of sin. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. On Easter entire families gather to celebrate. They often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to offer prayers. Easter eggs have become associated with the festival because they are symbols of rebirth and regeneration taken from the ancient pagan spring festivals. In Poland devout Catholics attend a Resurrection Mass on Easter in their local churches and celebrate the victory of life over death.

A special Easter dinner is prepared that includes the food (bread, salt, eggs, baked lamb, smoked meat, and so on) blessed on Holy Saturday (the day before Easter) by the priest. Christians believe that bread is a symbol of Jesus' body, and the Polish people also consider it to be a symbol of good fortune. On the other hand the egg is a symbol of rebirth, while smoked meat ensures good health as well as fertility. Favorite Easter dishes include ham, white sausage, smoked bacon, and cheesecake, as well as a lamb-shaped cake, and a wide variety of poultry dishes.

Decorating Easter eggs is an ancient Polish tradition, and on Easter dyed eggs are presented to family members, godchildren, and guests. Easter eggs have become associated with the festival because they are symbols of rebirth and regeneration taken from the ancient pagan spring festivals. If a boy gives an Easter egg to a girl, it is looked on as a token of affection.

Easter Monday is the first day of Easter Week and is generally regarded as a continuation of Easter Sunday. The day was once part of a weeklong celebration but was later made a one-day holiday. In Poland it is known as Smigus Dyngus.

In Kraków the ancient festival of Emmaus is celebrated with great enthusiasm. It commemorates the meeting of the risen Christ with two of his disciples while they were on their way to Emmaus. In ancient times young men fought each other with sticks, trying to show off their strength to young women. Many men also courted women by gently hitting them with willow twigs. A religious procession is held, and holy pictures are carried throughout the city. This procession is accompanied by music played by a band and the songs of the church choir. Children are given sweets and toys on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

CORPUS CHRISTI

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Sixty days after Easter

The Feast of Corpus Christi commemorates the institution of the Eucharist, a Christian ritual of taking sacred bread and wine. It is celebrated by Catholics all over the world on the eighth Sunday



A schoolgirl in folk dress carries a portrait of a saint during a Corpus Christi procession in Warsaw. (AP Photo/Alik Keplicz)

after Easter. In local churches in Poland a commemorative Mass is held on Corpus Christi. The small provincial town of Lowicz is well known for its solemn folk processions. It is one of the few places in the world where the Feast of Corpus Christi is celebrated with genuine religious fervor. A Mass is also held in the town's church on this day, which draws tourists from all over the world.

❁ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: August 15

The Feast of the Assumption commemorates the Christian belief that Mary, the mother of Jesus, ascended directly to heaven after her death. On the Assumption, also called Virgin Mary's Day, a special prayer service is held in churches all over Poland to honor Mary.

More than 150,000 pilgrims flock to the religious city of Jasna Gora in southern Poland to take part in a special prayer service to commemorate the Feast of the Assumption. People seek blessings of the Virgin Mary. Devotional hymns and songs are also part of the ceremony. Jasna Gora is home to the painting of Our Lady of Czestochowa (Mary with the infant Jesus in her arms), which is believed to have been painted by the Apostle Luke the Evangelist, making this town one of the sites of pilgrimage for worshippers of Mary. Every August tens of thousands of people journey to Jasna Gora, some walking hundreds of miles. The painting is also referred to as "The Black Madonna" because of the skin tones of Jesus and Mary in the painting. The painting was made on a wooden panel around 2,000 years ago, and since crude oil was used for making the image, the color darkened over a period of time and became dull. The painting has hung on the same spot since 1384, and evidence of the Modonna's healing powers are attested by the offerings lining the walls of the chapel, gifts from grateful pilgrims she has cured.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

❁ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day is a Catholic feast that honors all the saints (known and unknown) of the Roman Catholic Church. It is an annual religious celebration that takes place on November 1. All Saints' Day is a holiday in Poland. Even during the Communist era the tradition continued to be observed as the Day of the Deceased. In Polish towns and cities this day is notorious for roads clogged with traffic as people head toward cemeteries to pay

tribute to their deceased loved ones. In Poland people visit the graves of their deceased relatives to decorate them with flowers (especially chrysanthemums) and colorful lanterns. All graves have a lantern burning throughout the night on All Saints' Day. If a grave does not have one, other people voluntarily buy a lantern and place it on the grave. Sweets, flowers, and lanterns are available at the entrance of the cemetery for the convenience of the mourners.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world because it is the day chosen by the Catholic Church to celebrate the birth of Jesus, whom they believe was their Messiah. The Polish believe that events on Christmas Eve will determine the course of the coming year. Hence on this day, people are kind to each other, and they avoid getting into arguments with anyone.

They adorn their Christmas trees with ribbons, stars, and candles. They place gifts around the trees that are meant to be opened only on Christmas Day. Also a small bunch of hay is placed on the tablecloth to remind people that Jesus was born in a manger. Many people include money and even fish along with the hay to ensure a prosperous new year. When it is time for dinner, an extra set of plates is set for unexpected guests as well as for loved ones who passed away during the year.

Christmas Eve dinner begins only after the appearance of the first star in the evening sky. The entire family sits at the dinner table and says a short prayer. Often verses from the Bible that describe Jesus' birth are also read before dinner. Then family members wish each other a happy Christmas and share a special Christmas wafer known as *oplatek*, which symbolizes the holy bread. Orthodox Christians eat unleavened bread known as *proskura* or *proskofera* on Christmas Eve.

Dinner consists of 12 courses, symbolizing the 12 months of the year and the 12 disciples of Jesus. However, it is a Polish belief that the more numerous the food items on the table on Christmas Eve are, the more prosperous and auspicious the coming year will be. (Meatless dishes are featured.) After dinner, Catholic families sing traditional carols and then attend a Midnight Mass known as the Shepherd's Mass or Pasterka.

During Christmas many groups stage the *jaselka*, or the Nativity play, while many carolers, dressed in colorful costumes, go door to door singing Christmas carols, receiving small amounts of money as tokens of appreciation. Many carolers

dress themselves as biblical characters like angels, devils, death, and so on.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

INTERNATIONAL SACRED MUSIC FESTIVAL

Observed in: Warsaw
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1–6

The International Sacred Music Festival, also called *Gaude Mater*, is a musical celebration that takes place in Warsaw between May 1 and 6. The Episcopate of Poland and the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage organize this annual event. It began in 1991 and today is one of the most popular festivals in Europe.

The festival is a treat for music lovers as they get an opportunity to listen to the religious music and songs of different religions from around the world. The aim of the festival is to create awareness about cultural diversity and the religious beliefs of people, which are aptly reflected in the traditional religious songs. Thousands of music lovers come to Warsaw to listen to religious music including Buddhist, Orthodox Christians, Protestants, Jewish, and Islamic faiths.

LAJKONIK FESTIVAL

Observed in: Krakow
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: First Thursday after Corpus Christi feast

Lajkonik is an annual festival that takes place in Old Town Street in the city of Krakow. On the first Thursday after the feast of Corpus Christi every year, the inhabitants of the city of Krakow celebrate the brief victory of Polish forces over the Tatars (Mongols) in a battle fought in 1241. On this day, a Lajkonik, a man disguised as a Tatar warrior, with a beautifully decorated hobbyhorse fastened around his waist, tries to chase away people on the street to symbolize the manner in which Tatar forces tried to scare away the Poles.

Dancing and partying are part of the celebrations. A grand procession starts from the Convent of St. Norbet, passes through the streets of Krakow, and ends at the Main Market Square. The procession lasts for three hours, and people sing and dance their way through the procession and celebrate the victory over the Tatars. Most participants wear folk costumes or eastern dresses.

Rites of Passage

BIRTH

In ancient times Polish children were named after saints whose feast was near the date of their birth or baptism (within three weeks). After the birth of a child parents consulted the local priest or the Roman calendar to help determine the name of their child. Instead of birthdays children celebrated the anniversary of their baptism or the feast day of the saint after whom they were named. Many children were also named after one of their godparents.

MARRIAGE

A formal engagement is the first step in getting married in Poland. It is a small ceremony that takes place in the home of the parents of either the bride or the groom and is attended by very close family members and friends.

Polish weddings are generally held in churches. Traditionally single women in Poland wear a single braid. On the night before the wedding, the bride's mother and her friends, while singing wedding songs, redo her single-braid hairstyle and change it to the traditional wedding hairstyle of two braids.

The wedding ceremony is solemnized by a pastor in the presence of family members and friends. After the traditional exchange of vows, the priest pronounces the couple husband and wife. Later, a lavish reception awaits the newlyweds.

The traditional veil-removing ceremony takes place at the beginning of the reception and is referred to as *oczepiny*. During the ceremony as the bride enters the reception hall, her bridal veil is removed to symbolize the end of her maidenhood and the beginning of her married life. At the same time, a funny cap is placed on the groom's head, which makes everyone laugh, communicating the wishes of all the wedding guests that the life of the newlyweds be filled with untold happiness and good health.

Singing, dancing, music, feasting, and drinking wine are part of the celebrations. If during the reception, the bride drinks wine from her cup without spilling a single drop, tradition states then she is considered to be very lucky. The money dance is another part of the reception after many Polish weddings. Generally each guest desirous of dancing with the bride buys the dance by pinning money on her wedding gown and asking her to dance with him. After the wedding guests have danced with the bride, they form a circle around her, and the groom has to break through the circle to reach his bride. Guests give him a hard time and form a tight lock. Eventually once the groom has broken through the circle, he carries his bride away from the reception.

Fun Fact

A godfather was called *kmotr* or *kumoter*, while a godmother was referred to as *kumoszka*.

In another variation, while the father of the bride is enjoying the first dance with his daughter, her bridesmaid holds an apron and collects money from guests who want to dance with the bride. After a while the groom throws his wallet (which according to belief has more money than has been offered by other guests for a dance with the bride) and takes his wife away from the reception.

Another important tradition of a Polish wedding involves the sharing of wine, bread, and salt. The newlyweds are offered rye bread sprinkled with salt and wine by their parents. The bread is symbolic of the wish that the couple never go hungry, while the salt symbolizes the ability to cope with difficulties in life. With wine, the parents wish that the newlyweds never go thirsty and also wish them happiness and health for all eternity.

Further Reading

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Portugal

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Southwestern Europe, west of Spain, bordering the north Atlantic Ocean
Size	35,672 sq. mi.
Capital City	Lisbon
Flag Description	Portugal's flag has two unequal vertical bands of green (hoist side) and red, twice as wide as the green band, with the Portuguese coat of arms centered between them.
Independence	1640
Population	10,566,212 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary democracy
Nationality	Portuguese
Major Ethnic Group(s)	White
Major Language(s)	Portuguese (official); Mirandese (official; also used locally)
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (95%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Carnival, February; Liberation Day, April 25; Labor Day, May 1; National Day, June 10; Republic Day, October 5; Independence Day, December 1

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

The known history of Portugal dates back to the first millennium B.C.E., when waves of Celts began moving down from central Europe into the Iberian Peninsula, intermarried with the indigenous people, and settled there. The Celts were followed by the Greeks, who called the area Ophiussa, which means "land of serpents," because the people they encountered worshipped serpents. The Greeks were followed by the Carthaginians in 238, who remained primarily along the coasts. The first Romans to invade the Iberian Peninsula arrived in 219. Beginning in the south, they expelled the Carthaginians and gradually moved north, expanding their sphere of influence.

In 194 a group called the Lusitanians, who may also have been Celts, rebelled, recaptured some of the territory held by Rome, and sacked Conistorgis, the Conii capital, because they had allied themselves with the Romans. In the eighth century the Islamic Moors invaded Portugal and took control of the

territory. Portugal's struggle for independence gradually started in the ninth century and became stronger over the years. Finally in the 13th century, the Portuguese were able to drive out the Moors.

The Portuguese Empire started expanding in the 15th century, led by Prince Henry (1394–1460), a navigator whose interest was in exploring routes to other countries. The Ceuta region of North Africa was the first to be conquered. Consequently new trade routes were discovered, and Portugal invaded India, some regions in the Far East, Brazil, and Africa. By the 16th century Portuguese expansion was at its peak.

In 1578 the Portuguese king Sebastian (1554–78) died at a very young age, without leaving an heir to the throne. Since Prince Philip II (1527–98) of Spain was the son of a Portuguese princess, the Spanish ruler became Prince Philip I of Portugal in 1580. The first two Spanish kings were popular, and the country thrived under their rule. But Prince Philip III (1605–65) wanted to make Portugal a Spanish province. A war followed, and Portugal lost many of the regions that it had conquered over the centuries.

Toward the end of the 18th century the French Emperor Napoleon (1769–1821) sent his army to conquer Portugal, but

Vasco da Gama

Vasco da Gama was a famous Portuguese navigator. In the 15th century he became the first European ever to set foot in India. He was responsible for transforming Portugal into one of the earliest colonial powers in Europe. He was also instrumental in acquiring land in the African continent and in South India. The Portuguese epic, the *Lusíadas* of Luíz Vaz de Camões, is largely about Vasco da Gama and his voyages.

Portugal and its Anglo alliances forced the troops to retreat. In the 19th century, Portugal's economy declined. The monarchy was abolished in 1910, and a democratic republic was founded called the First Republic. However, it came to an end in 1926 when a military coup resulted in the start of the Second Republic, which lasted for a period of almost 50 years. Although Portugal flourished and became economically stronger, the Portuguese Empire and its annexed lands began to diminish. Independence movements in India, Angola, Mozambique, and Portuguese Guinea led to the end of Portuguese control of those regions.

By 1975 all the colonies under Portugal had become independent, and the Portuguese Empire was effectively ended. In 1986 Portugal joined the European Community (EC), which evolved into the European Union (EU).

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Portugal is located to the west of Spain on the Iberian Peninsula with a coastline on the Atlantic Ocean.

The Portuguese islands of the Azores and Madeira are situated in the Atlantic. The mainland of Portugal is mountainous and rocky in the north, becoming flatter and plainer toward the south. The physical features of Portugal are diverse and characterized by rivers, forests, mountains, plateaus, and valleys.

Portugal is one of the warmest and sunniest countries in Europe. Southern parts of the country are warmer and drier than the cooler and wetter north. Portugal's climate is classified as Atlantic-Mediterranean. The temperatures dip to below 41°F during winters, and there is

snowfall in the high altitudes. Portuguese summers can be uncomfortably hot, with the mercury reaching 113°F.

Fun Fact

The Portuguese introduced Far East spices, such as coriander, pepper, ginger, curry powder, saffron, and paprika to the European palate. They also introduced rice, tea, coffee, peanuts, and pineapples from their colonies in Asia, South America, and Africa.

ECONOMY

Portugal has a service-based economy. The Portuguese enjoy a comfortable standard of living and are known for being technologically advanced. The main industries in the country are textiles, footwear, wood products, metalworking, oil refining, chemicals, fish canning, wine, tourism, and agriculture. The weather is conducive to the cultivation of wine grapes, corn, potatoes, and rye. Olive groves, vineyards, orchards, fig trees, and almond blossoms are regular sights in Portugal.

Portugal enjoys good trade relations with other members of the EU, but Spain is its main trading partner, apart from the United States. Portugal imports manufactured goods such as machinery, transportation equipment, and chemicals. The country also imports food, beverages, and petroleum. The major exports from Portugal are textiles, clothing, footwear, machinery and transport equipment, and forest and agricultural products.

In spite of having a sound economy, Portugal is struggling with an inefficient educational system that hinders growth in productivity levels.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Portuguese culture has rich influences from African, Brazilian, Latin, and Asian cultures. This is evident in Portuguese cuisine, music, dance, architecture, and traditional customs. At the same time, a strong Catholic influence and a history of political repression have encouraged Portugal to remain traditional and conservative.

Portugal has given the world famous personalities such as the great 15th-century navigator Vasco da Gama (c. 1460–1524). The literary tradition of this country is profound and goes back to the 16th century. Dramatist Gil Vicente (c. 1465–c. 1536), poet Luíz de Camões (c. 1524–80), and Fernando Pessoa (1888–1935) are some renowned names.

Portuguese dance forms are unique, and performances are frequently part of the festivities of weddings and carnivals. The nation's best-known musical form is the melancholic *fado*, believed to have originated among 16th-century sailors.

The Portuguese are fanatics about all outdoor games, but soccer undoubtedly ranks above all other sports. The Euro Cup tournament was held in Portugal in 2004 and provided a major boost to the nation's tourism revenue.

CUISINE

Portuguese food is delicious and often served in huge portions compared to other European cultures. Classic Portuguese meals often include *sardinhas assadas* (charcoal-grilled sardines) or *pastéis de bacalhau* (codfish balls) and cannot be complete without *caldo verde* (a soup of cabbage and potatoes). Seafood occupies a central place in Portuguese cuisine. A

variety of fish and other marine food items are consumed in different parts of the country.

Meats, prepared in various flavorful recipes, are also popular in Portugal. Apart from beef, veal, and mutton, pork is a favorite among the Portuguese. Smoked ham and roasted piglets are also considered delicacies here. *Tripas à moda* do Porto (tripe with beans) is a popular Portuguese dish.

Portugal is also famous for its cheeses. *Queijo da Serra*, for example, is made from sheep milk and is renowned for its smooth consistency and delicate flavor. Portuguese wines—among which port wine may be the most famous—are the preferred alcoholic beverages among the people. Wines are also exported to neighboring countries.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western (or Gregorian) calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day throughout the world. Each year, a festive spirit reigns as people organize parties and celebrations to welcome the new year (December 31). On New Year's Eve, as the clock strikes midnight, the Portuguese pick 12 grapes from a bunch and eat them. This, they believe, will ensure happiness for them in all the 12 months of the coming year. Traditionally the Portuguese make personal New Year's resolutions and have a feast on this day. Children go from door to door singing traditional songs and collecting treats. It is a national holiday, and schools and offices remain closed.

❁ CARNIVAL

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Day before Ash Wednesday (usually February)

Carnival, called Shrove Tuesday in English-speaking countries and Mardi Gras (Fat Tuesday) in French-speaking countries, marks the beginning of the Lenten season in Portugal. This day is celebrated on the day before Ash Wednesday, usually with colorful carnivals and parades featuring beautiful floats. It is an important holiday in all nations that are predominantly Catholic. On this day people consume meat and other nonvegetarian items. Traditionally they also try to use up all the butter, eggs, and other fatty items in the house because these cannot be consumed during Lent.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY



A young girl wearing a Spanish Sevillana costume in a Lisbon downtown square on Carnival day. For Carnival, parents usually dress up their young children in costumes and spend the holiday outdoors enjoying the early Spring weather. (AP Photo/Armando Franca)

❁ LIBERATION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 25

Liberation Day commemorates the Revolution of the Carnations that took place on the same day in 1974. On that day the Portuguese revolted against an oppressive government and succeeded, with the help of a bloodless revolution, in establishing a liberal government. The people held carnations in their hands and convinced the soldiers not to resist them. The soldiers, in turn, placed the carnations in their guns and did not use force against the demonstrators. In this way they helped topple the dictatorship.

Vinho do Porto

Port wine is probably the thing Portugal is most famous for after soccer. This alcoholic beverage is named after the city of Porto in Portugal. Port is a fortified wine that has grape brandy (20 percent) added to it after it has fermented for a few days.

There are several types of port wine, priced according to their color, sweetness, and quality. Tinto, Tawny, and Branco are a few varieties of port wines produced in Portugal.



 LABOR DAY**Observed by:** General Public**Observed on:** May 1

Fun Fact

A church in Évora has walls made of the bones removed from the graves of people who were buried in the cemetery. It is called the Chapel of the Bones.

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. This tradition began in 1889, when the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, designated May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. In Portugal workers hold marches in the streets on this day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

 NATIONAL DAY**Observed by:** General Public**Observed on:** June 10

National Day, also called Portugal Day and Camões Day, memorializes the death of a very important figure in Portugal Luís de Camões. His epic poem *Os Lusíadas* celebrates the Portuguese people and their achievements all over the world. Camões died in 1580. On this anniversary the Portuguese visit their friends and relatives and take time out to celebrate their cultural traditions. The nation pauses to consider its many achievements over the centuries.

 REPUBLIC DAY**Observed by:** General Public**Observed on:** October 5

On this day the Portuguese people commemorate the proclamation of the Republic of Portugal. This

Fado

Fado is one of the most famous Portuguese musical genres. The origins of this musical form can be traced back to the early 19th century. Live fado performances are complex events in which performers narrate and express ideas and emotions with a mix of words, melodies, vocal quality, gestures, facial expressions, and instrumental dialogue. The soloist is normally accompanied by stringed instruments.

event took place on this day in 1910. All government offices, schools, and institutions remain closed on this day.

 INDEPENDENCE DAY**Observed by:** General Public**Observed on:** December 1

Portugal was under Spanish rule after Prince Philip I of Spain inherited the Portuguese throne in 1580. In 1640 Portugal took advantage when Prince Philip III, who was then the ruler, was occupied in suppressing a rebellion in Catalonia. This allowed the Portuguese to revolt and gain independence from the Spanish.

December 1 has been celebrated as independence day since then, and all government bodies, schools, and other institutions remain closed on this day. Official speeches by political leaders are made to emphasize the importance of Independence Day.

Religious Holidays

 PALM SUNDAY**Observed by:** Christians**Observed on:** Last Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, commemorating the last week of Jesus' mortal life. Jesus was the prophet of Christianity, and Christians believe him to be the second person of the Holy Trinity (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). The day is as much about the beginning of Jesus' journey to the Cross as it is about his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. His arrival in Jerusalem was indeed the way to the Cross.

After two of his disciples had fetched a donkey for him to ride, they placed their clothes on it to make a comfortable seat. The disciples then cut branches and covered the path, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the words of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. People welcomed him by waving palm and olive branches, and strewing garments and branches on the road. There were different perceptions at work: Jesus rode in on a donkey, the humble entry of a peaceful nature by a spiritual king; the people of Jerusalem welcomed him with palm and olive branches and the laying of garments in his path because they wanted a worldly king to defeat the Romans.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

The rituals observed on Maundy Thursday are based on a sequence of events supposed to have occurred during Jesus' last meal with his Apostles. First Jesus washed their feet; then he announced that he had been betrayed by one of them. The traitor Judas left the table. Finally Jesus instituted the Eucharist—a ritual of consuming bread and wine as symbols of his body and blood, also referred to as Communion in Christian churches. In the Roman Catholic Church Maundy Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist, the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week, and gives priests an opportunity to prepare for the many rituals associated with Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter.

In Portugal all Catholic churches conduct special prayer services on this day. The priest, while conducting the Mass, reenacts the scenes from the Last Supper. He washes the feet of 12 chosen parishioners just as Jesus did. The mood is somber, and all the faithful pray earnestly on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, alternatively known as Mourning Friday, Sorrowful Friday, or Holy Friday, is a somber day for Roman Catholics and other Christians all over the world and is observed on the Friday before Easter. It commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus more than 2,000 years ago. Some Portuguese Catholics observe a fast from Ash Wednesday (first day of Lent) for 40 days up to Good Friday and a partial fast from then until Easter. Some fast only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Special prayer services are held on this day with readings from the Gospel narrating the events leading up to the Crucifixion. In Portugal, a ritual called the Stations of the Cross is performed, a reenactment of Jesus' final journey to Calvary when he carried the Cross on which he would be crucified. This is a day of fasting and abstinence in Portugal.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Saturday before Easter

Holy Saturday is the day Jesus lay in the tomb and the day before he rose from the dead on Easter Sunday.

This was the Jewish Sabbath (the Jewish day of rest is Saturday). It is also regarded as the second Sabbath after Creation. The final day of Holy Week, which begins with Palm Sunday and includes Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, it marks the threshold between death and resurrection, and is a day of silence and contemplation for devout Catholics.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection. For this reason, it is sometimes known as Resurrection Day. This day is of utmost importance because the fundamental teaching of Christianity is that Jesus, through his death, freed all his believers from the penalty of sin. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. On Easter entire families gather to celebrate. They often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to offer prayers. Easter eggs have become associated with the festival because they are symbols of rebirth and regeneration taken from the ancient pagan spring festivals.

The Portuguese have a feast on this day and invite relatives and friends to share the meal with them. In Portugal the celebrations continue on the next day, Easter Monday, which is the first Monday after Lent.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ CORPUS CHRISTI

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Sixty days after Easter

The Feast of Corpus Christi commemorates the institution of the Christian ritual of offering sacred bread and wine called the Eucharist. It is celebrated by Catholics all over the world on the eighth Sunday after Easter. On this day in Portugal worshippers attend Mass and take part in a colorful procession in the streets afterward.

❁ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: August 15

The Feast of the Assumption commemorates the Christian belief that Mary, mother of Jesus, was

Fun Fact

In Fontão, Ponte de Lima (in northern Portugal), every year one man is chosen to be the *mordomo*. He has to pay for the Easter lunch of the entire village. Sometimes as many as 500 people gather to enjoy the free meal.

raised up to heaven at the time of her death. It is a very important festival for Portuguese Catholics because it reaffirms their belief in Jesus' words when he promised that all devout Christians would find a place in the glory of heaven.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day, or Toussaint, is an annual Catholic observance that honors all the saints (known and unknown) of the Roman Catholic Church. In Portugal on All Saints' Day worshippers lay flowers on the tombs of their deceased relatives and pray for all the saints.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: December 8

The Immaculate Conception celebrates the Roman Catholic dogma that Jesus' mother, Mary, was born free from all sin and filled with God's grace.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world because it is the day chosen to celebrate the birth of Jesus, whom they believe was their Messiah. In Portugal Christmas celebrations begin on Christmas Eve (December 24) and continue until December 26. Christmas decorations are often prepared well in advance. A manger with figures of Joseph, Mary, and the baby Jesus, along with shepherds and the Three Wise Men are set up in all churches.

On December 24 Catholic families attend church and offer prayers in a special Mass. Then they return home and gather around their Christmas trees and light candles. Children often go from door to door singing carols (called *janeiras*) and are rewarded with small sums of money. Most Portuguese children write letters to the baby Jesus asking for presents, rather than to Santa. The dinner table is filled with special dishes for their Christmas Eve supper, and a special fruitcake—known as *bolo*

rei—is eaten on this occasion. This ring-shaped cake (symbolizing the Magis' crowns) has a charm hidden in it—a bean. The person who finds the bean is expected to buy the fruitcake for the next Christmas celebration.

On Christmas Day the festivities continue with church services and social visits. Friends and relatives visit each other and exchange gifts. Families gather at lunch or dinner to celebrate Christmas with a special feast where stuffed turkey and special Christmas delicacies are served.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

ST. JOHN'S DAY

Observed in: Porto

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: June 24

This day is the Feast of St. John the Baptist. The celebrations in Porto held on this day are the most famous in the country. People crowd around the fountain in the town square and sing and dance through the night.

ESTORIL INTERNATIONAL HANDICRAFTS FAIR

Observed in: Estoril

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July–August

The International Handicrafts Fair is an annual event held in Estoril. A spectacular display of handicraft items is put up during this fair. There are many performances of Portuguese folk music and different dance forms. Hundreds of people attend workshops where they can learn clay modeling, tile painting, wood carving, and weaving. Gourmets also get to enjoy different types of food items during this fair.

FESTIVAL DO SUDOESTE

Observed in: Zambujeira do Mar

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August

The Festival do Sudoeste is celebrated in Zambujeira do Mar for four days in August. During this musical festival bands that specialize in different musical genres perform and entertain the visitors. This is one of the biggest music festivals in Portugal during the summer.

Fun Fact

The islands of the Azores and Madeira are of volcanic origin, and in the Azores nine volcanoes are known to be active.

Rites of Passage

✿ BIRTH

Prenatal care is crucial for Portuguese women. In earlier days expectant mothers were not allowed to reach up for objects or wear necklaces because people believed that this would cause the umbilical cord to tighten around the neck of the unborn child, thereby risking strangulation. Some women ate certain food items because they thought that would guarantee their child would be of a particular gender. Old women say that round fruits, such as apples and grapes, produce girls, while long vegetables such as carrots and cucumbers produce boys. Mothers were not allowed to touch furry animals lest the child become hairy. Most of these superstitions are not believed anymore.

Portuguese babies are baptized in churches and the ceremony is followed by a lavish banquet. Godparenting is prevalent in Portugal as in most other Catholic countries.

✿ MARRIAGE

August is the month when most Portuguese weddings take place because this is the time when those who were away on vacation return. Most Portuguese are over 30 by the time they get married. Portuguese weddings take place in church. The bride usually follows tradition and wears a white tunic decorated with jewels while the groom wears a dark suit. Once the couple has exchanged wedding bands, the priest covers them with his stole. Family and friends throw

candies and flowers at the newlywed couple as they leave the church after the ceremony.

The wedding reception is fun filled and lavish. Music, traditional dances, food, and plenty of drinks are the highlights of the party. In Portugal the wedding party has what is called a money dance: Men attending the reception dance with the bride. At the same time the bride's shoe is passed around and filled with money to help the couple start their new life together.

✿ DEATH

When a person dies, the body is placed in a casket. The mourners place the casket on a hearse and walk through the streets. This procession is led by a priest. A prayer service is held at a chapel, and the body is taken to the cemetery, where it is placed either in a vault or in the family grave.

Further Reading

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Qatar

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Middle East, peninsula bordering the Persian Gulf and Saudi Arabia
Size	4,247 sq. mi.
Capital City	Doha
Flag Description	The flag of Qatar is maroon with a vertical broad white serrated band hoist side.
Independence	September 3, 1971 (from United Kingdom)
Population	863,051 (2005 est.)
Government	Traditional monarchy
Nationality	Qatari
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Arab (40%); Pakistani (18%); Indian (18%)
Major Language(s)	Arabic (official); Urdu; English (commonly used as a second language)
Major Religion(s)	Muslim (95%)
National Holiday(s)	Anniversary of the Emir's Succession, June 27; National Day, September 3–5

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Historically the peninsula of Qatar has figured importantly in civilizations from the Neolithic (Stone Age) on. Finds at a sixth millennium site at Shagra in southeastern Qatar suggest the central role of the sea in the lives of Shagra's inhabitants; and the presence of ceramics and flint tools in excavations in northeastern Qatar indicates the country's relationship with the Al-Ubaid culture located in the region of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers between the fifth and fourth millennia.

For most of its history the arid climate allowed only short-term settlements by nomadic tribes. But Qatar appears on ancient maps, so travelers and explorers must have known of settlements there. Some historical texts claim that the first inhabitants of Qatar were the ancient Canaanites, a group known for their trade and navigation skills.

The peninsula of Qatar emerged as one of the richest places for trade in the Persian Gulf during the third and second millennia, helping to spread Bronze Age cultures from Mesopotamia to the Indus Valley of India. Fragments of Berber pottery found in excavations at Ras Abaruk suggest something of the extent of this commercial network. Qatar also attracted seasonal migrants during the Bronze Age.

The Kassites, who may have originated in the Zagros Mountains of southeastern Iran, spoke a non-Indo-European, non-Semitic language. They conquered Mesopotamia, assuming power in Babylon in the middle of the second millennium and spreading their influence throughout the gulf region. Ceramics of Kassite manufacture found in Al-Khore north of Doha indicate the close links between Qatar and Babylon during this period.

Qatar's strategic location on the Arabian Gulf was also convenient for the seasonal migration of Arab tribes from the Arabian Peninsula, particularly from the Nejd desert. Clans such as the al Khalifa and the al Saud (which would later control the thrones of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, respectively) swept through the Arabian Peninsula and camped on the coasts in small fishing and pearling villages.

These clans battled each other for the region's lucrative oyster beds and lands, frequently forming and breaking coalitions with one another as they tried to establish territorial supremacy. At a time when the ancient Mediterranean had several thriving civilizations, the Arabian Gulf area enjoyed commercial prosperity. Many fishing centers that encouraged pearl trading, like Al Bida, Al-Khore, Al Wakra, and Al Zubara, appeared.

Around 140 the Arabian Gulf figured prominently in Greco-Roman trade between Europe and India. Archaeologi-

cal evidence of Greek and Roman influences in the peninsula, particularly at Ras Abaruk, consists of several stone structures, including a dwelling, a cairn (a stone landmark), and a hearth. Excavations at Ras Abaruk suggest that the site was a temporary fishing station where seafarers stopped briefly to dry fish during this period. In fact pearls and dried fish were major trade items from Qatar during the Greco-Roman period.

All of the Arabian Gulf functioned as the vital commercial link between the West and the East during the time of the Persian Sassanid Empire in the third century C.E., and Qatar played a prominent role in that commercial activity. Cargoes of copper, spices, sandalwood, and teak from the East were exchanged for shipments of purple dye, clothing, pearls, dates, gold, and silver. Qatar merchants contributed at least two of these commodities to the Sassanid trade: purple dye and pearls.

In the seventh century Islam swept through the Middle East, crushing any who opposed them. With the spread of Islam in Qatar, Muhammad (c. 570–632) sent an envoy to the ruler of Bahrain in 628, inviting him to accept Islam. He accepted the invitation and announced his conversion to Islam, whereupon all the Arab inhabitants and some Persians of Qatar also became Muslim. During this early phase of Islam Qatar was famous for the robes it exported, and Muhammad is said to have worn a Qatari robe.

In 1515 the Portuguese conquered Qatar and established themselves at the Strait of Hormuz, the most strategic point in the Gulf. The Portuguese commercial empire used Qatar and other Gulf ports to move gold, silver, silks, musk, cloves, pearls and seed pearls, amber, and horses. In 1538 the Ottomans overthrew the Portuguese and gained control of Qatar. They maintained control of the region for four centuries. The Ottoman sovereignty, however, was mostly a formality, and the real power stayed with local sheikhs.

In the middle of the 18th century the Al-Khalifa family ruled Al-Zubara, until the Al-Thani family arrived and established their capital at Doha in the early 19th century, becoming the ruling dynasty of Qatar. Their leader Sheikh Mohammed bin Thani (r. 1850–78) signed an agreement with Britain to protect his people from the Al-Khalifas. (The Al Khalifa family again rules in the 21st century, and tension between the two families continues.)

For most of the 19th century and at the start of the 20th century, Qatar was a poor country. To avoid direct British rule—which existed in the other Gulf States—the Al-Thani family very tactfully played the British against the other formidable force, the Turks. In 1872 Qatar's emir signed a treaty with the Turks and allowed them to place a garrison in Doha. But this move seemed more destabilizing than protective when the Turks went on a spree of opening garrisons. After Turkey entered World War I on the German side, the emir thought it wiser to side with

the British, since they ruled most of the Gulf region. This also protected them from Saudi Arabia's expansionist designs. When the war ended and the Turks had been expelled, Qatar's emir entered into an agreement with the British, in which Britain agreed to protect Qatar in exchange for a promise that the Qatari ruler would not have any dealings with other foreign powers without British permission.

In 1971 the British decided they would leave the region. In the hopes of forming other alliances, Qatar initiated dialogues with Bahrain and the Trucial states (now the United Arab Emirates). But when Bahrain withdrew from the talks, Qatar followed, declaring its independence on September 1, 1971. Even so, Qatar still has close ties to Britain.

The discovery of oil in the 1940s quickly boosted Qatar's economy and significantly raised the living standards of its citizens. In 1995 Sheikh Hamid bin Khalifa Al-Thani came to power. His reforms further improved the economy of Qatar, and the country entered a new era of modernization.

Fun Fact

The land of Qatar has risen almost seven feet relative to sea level in the past 400 years. Qatar and Bahrain were once joined, but over the centuries the two landmasses drifted apart.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The state of Qatar is a thumb-shaped peninsula that projects into the Persian Gulf. The country shares a border with Saudi Arabia. Qatar also includes Halul, an island about 50 miles off its east coast. The Hawar Islands off the west coast are territory that is disputed with Bahrain. Most of the terrain of Qatar is flat and rocky. However, in the deserts there are sand dunes as high as 131 feet above sea level. The highest point, Qurayn Aba al Bawl, situated in the western part of Qatar, in the Jebel Dukhan region, is only 272 feet high.

The Qatari climate is marked with hot summers and mild winters. Summer extends from May to September, when the temperature can soar to 113°F, even 122°F. Qatar, because it is a peninsula, is extremely humid, which makes the summer heat harder to bear. The months of December to February are milder. There is also some rainfall in winter, and sudden storms are common in December and January. As in the other countries in this region, sandstorms are frequent.

The low amount of rainfall does not favor natural vegetation in Qatar, and there is almost no land suited to agriculture. Efforts have been made to make the country greener by irrigating. Even a brief shower transforms the dry and bare deserts of this region into a light green carpet of grassland with desert flowers. This shows that the land is fertile but suffers from an inadequate water supply.

Natural wildlife is sparse in Qatar. Grasshoppers, crickets, scorpions, lizards, geckos, bats, sand

cats, camels, Arabian oryx (a species of antelope), and birds such as the houbara are found in this country.

❁ ECONOMY

The State of Qatar boasts a flourishing economy due to the crude oil reserves found in its deserts. The oil industry in this region generates large-scale employment and has improved the general quality of life of the people. Petroleum and petroleum products account for 80 percent of export revenues and are also a major contributor to gross domestic product (GDP). Qatar generates one of the highest per-capita incomes of any nation in the world. Its major industries are oil production and refining, fertilizers, petrochemicals, steel, and cement. Qatar has good trade relations with Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and the members of the European Union (EU).

An important government objective is to increase employment for the local population and to decrease Qatar's dependence on foreign nationals. It encourages the replacement of expatriate workers with local residents—a process known as “Qatarization.” Training in specialized skills, business management, and the English language have been undertaken to implement this objective.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The original Qatar lifestyle was Bedouin (nomadic) and that influence is still evident in Qatari culture. Poetry, song, dance, and storytelling take precedence over art and architecture in Qatar as in most other countries of the Gulf region. The traditional Qatari *ardab* dance is a form of stylized martial art. It is performed by two rows of male dancers facing each other, waving sticks and swords in a mock battle and singing challenges to the tune of drumbeats, cymbals, and the rhythmic clapping of hands.

Qatar was once well known for its weaving. This craft involves dyeing and weaving the hair of goats, sheep, and camels to produce items such as

tents, rugs, cushions, carpets, and saddlebags. Elaborate Qatari embroidery with gold thread is also renowned. Qatari jewelry is famed for its intricate metalwork and designs. Gold jewelry is favored over silver and other metals.

Qatari architecture incorporates elements of traditional Arabic style and decoration. City mosques, the national museum, and the royal palace are examples of Qatari architecture. Qatari culture is influenced by the major religion of the country Islam. Most people belong to the conservative Wahhabi sect, so Mouloud (or Mawlid an-Nabi), the birthday of the prophet Muhammad, is not celebrated because the sect holds that celebrating birthdays, even Muhammad's, distracts one from absolute devotion to Allah.

However, the people are not as strict and conservative as the Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia, and the women enjoy more freedom compared to their sisters in Saudi Arabia. They are educated and are not prohibited from driving vehicles. While most women wear the traditional Islamic veil and the long black loose dress, many of the younger women wear stylish Western clothes beneath their black robes. They are conscious of the clothing trends of the rest of the world and give importance to makeup, perfume, and accessories. Qatari men wear a *thobe* (a long shirtlike dress) over loose pants. They also wear a loose white headdress called a *gutra*.

The people of Qatar are sports enthusiasts. They enjoy sailing, auto racing, horse and camel races, and soccer. Qatar hosts a variety of international sporting events including tennis, golf, and squash championships, as well as the Qatar International Desert Marathon.

❁ CUISINE

Qatari cuisine still carries the strong influence of the nomadic life that its nomadic people enjoyed in earlier times. The traditional cuisine consists of rice, dates, and the meat of sheep and camels. These were foodstuffs that could be carried easily by the nomads while they wandered in the desert.

Qatari cooking also reflects the influence of Indian, Pakistani, Iranian, and Lebanese cuisines. Various fish and seafood—including lobster, crab, shrimp, tuna, kingfish, and red snapper—are a part of daily cooking in Qatar. Milk is usually consumed in the form of *laban* (yogurt) or *labneh* (a Lebanese cream cheese made with yogurt). Specialties include hummus (a paste of chickpeas and sesame oil), tabouleh (a Lebanese salad made with cracked wheat, tomatoes, parsley, mint, onions, lemon juice, and olive oil), *ghuzi* (roast lamb with rice mixed with pine nuts), *wara enab* (vine leaves stuffed with rice), *koussa mahshi* (zucchini stuffed with mince), and *shawarma* (a sandwich made with grilled shavings of lamb or chicken, mixed with salad, and rolled inside bread, often pita).

Falconry in Qatar

Qatar is one of the few places in the world where falconry is still an important sporting activity, and it is a popular sport among the wealthy Qataris. Traditional nomads appreciated the stamina and hunting instincts of the falcon and enjoyed training these birds to hunt the houbara. This fast-flying desert bustard, the size of a heron, is the falcon's chief prey. Falcons enjoy tracking down a bustard and may cover a distance of 2 to 3 miles before finally capturing the prey. An experienced falconer normally follows the falcon in a jeep or on horseback to witness the moment it captures the houbara.

Some favorite desserts of Qatar are *umm Ali* (a type of bread pudding), *esh asaraya* (sweet cheesecake with cream topping), and *mebalabiya* (pudding sprinkled with rosewater and pistachios). Qatari Muslims do not eat pork or drink alcohol. They consume *balal* meat (animals that are slaughtered according to Islamic law).

Public/Legal Holidays

ANNIVERSARY OF THE EMIR'S SUCCESSION

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 27

On this day in 1995 His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani was crowned emir of Qatar. To celebrate this anniversary all government buildings and streets are elaborately illuminated. Local dignitaries visit the royal palace in Qatar and congratulate the emir.

NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: September 3–5

National Day, or Independence Day, celebrates Qatar's independence from British control in 1971. To celebrate this anniversary, the people of Qatar enjoy a three-day holiday. All government buildings and streets are elaborately decorated with lights. The youngsters celebrate by going out in the streets and dance the traditional *ardab* dance. Dignitaries visit the royal palace in Qatar to congratulate the emir. Special military and air force shows are held on this occasion. For most Qataris these three days are seen as a time to relax and spend time with family.

Religious Holidays

EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

El Am Hejir marks the first day of the Islamic calendar and the first month is known as Muharram. It is believed that on this day in 622 C.E. Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina with his family and followers and formed the first Islamic state in Medina. This day is celebrated as the Islamic New Year's Day.

In Qatar special prayers are held in mosques all over the country, and a special meal is prepared and enjoyed by Qatari families on this day.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr, or the Feast of Fast-Breaking, marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, the ninth month in the Islamic calendar, a period when devout Muslims must observe a daily dawn-to-dusk fast.

The celebration and feasting begin on the first day of the 10th month in the Islamic calendar when they break their month-long fast. The fast is the fourth of Islam's Five Pillars of the faith, and Eid al-Fitr is one of Islam's most important holidays. The Koran forbids fasting on this day.

Qataris wear new clothes, visit family members, and enjoy special meals together. Children receive gifts from their relatives and enjoy amusement rides that are set up in the streets for them. There are also displays of fireworks at night. Officially the celebration lasts for three days, but if it falls in the middle of the week, shops and schools may stay closed for the entire week.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

Fun Fact

It is the custom in Qatar on the 14th day of Ramadan for children to wear traditional outfits and go from house to house collecting sweets, nuts, and other goodies.



A Qatar man hands out sweets to children in traditional dress in a Doha neighborhood. It is customary in Qatar on the 14th day of the holy month of Ramadan for children to wear traditional outfits and roam from house to house to collect sweets, nuts, and other goodies. (AP Photo)

Fun Fact

It is said that even prophet Muhammad preferred clothes made in Qatar.

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha is celebrated on the 10th day of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar. It is a very important festival for Muslims all over the world because on this day the prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) agreed to sacrifice his young son in order to obey God's command. Muslims honor Ibrahim for his willingness to do God's will. The month this holiday is celebrated is also when many Muslims undertake their pilgrimage, or hajj, to Mecca. The pilgrimage is the fifth pillar of Islam's Five Pillars of the faith, and every Muslim must undertake the hajj at least once in his or her lifetime if it is physically and financially possible.

In Qatar Muslim families slaughter a fattened sheep and prepare an elaborate meal for friends and family members. The family consumes one-third of the food prepared; another third is given to relatives, and the rest is shared with the poor. Special prayer services are conducted in mosques all across the country. All businesses in Qatar close for this celebration, which usually lasts three days.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; HAJJ; ISLAM

Regional Holidays

❁ DOHA CULTURAL FESTIVAL

Observed in: Doha

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March–April

The Doha Cultural Festival is one of Qatar's most important promotional events. It aims to familiarize Qataris, as well as foreigners, with the rich cultural traditions of this region. Dance shows, musical concerts, exhibits of local and world cuisines, children's shows, games, contests, lectures, poetry evenings, art exhibits, and circus shows are some of the highlights of this event.

The Doha Cultural Festival is held in the capital city of Doha. During the festival, the city's streets and buildings are decorated with elaborate lighting arrangements. The event enjoys wide media coverage and is attended by tourists from all over the world. The royal family, ambassadors, and other dignitaries also make appearances during this event.

❁ QATAR ATHLETIC GRAND PRIX

Observed in: Khalifa Sports City

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May

Khalifa Sports City in Qatar hosts the Qatar International Grand Prix Championship annually. This event is held to encourage sports activities such as auto racing in the country. The Qatar Grand Prix enjoys the patronage and support of the Qatari royal family and is a popular event for all Qataris.

❁ QATAR SUMMER WONDERS FESTIVAL

Observed in: Doha

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July

The Qatar Summer Wonders Festival is a month-long annual celebration to promote tourism and shopping in the country. Shows by world-renowned performers, jugglers, clowns, balloon artists, stilt walkers, and magicians give this festival a carnival-like atmosphere. Laser shows, fireworks displays, dance shows, concerts, demonstrations of world cuisines, children's shows, games, contests, and circus shows are some of the highlights. Folkloric groups that perform during the weekends showcase Qatari heritage.

The Qatar Summer Wonders Festival is held in Doha during the month of July. It receives wide media coverage and is attended by thousands of tourists as well as members of the royal family, ambassadors, and other dignitaries. The streets and buildings of the city are brightly illuminated for the event.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

After childbirth Qatari women must rest and recover for the next 40 days. During this period other women relatives and friends tend to the new mother and assist her with her daily chores. Fresh bread, butter, honey, and porridges made with fenugreek (an Asian herb) are fed to the mother. Visitors who have come to see the new baby often present the child with money and gifts.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Male circumcision is a part of Qatar's tradition and is carried out at puberty. The Muslims in Qatar believe that by undergoing this ritual a boy becomes

a man. Trained elders use knives, razors, and other sharp instruments to perform the circumcision without administering any anesthetic. This practice enjoys social backing and families take great pride in it. Huge celebrations also follow this coming-of-age ritual.

❁ MARRIAGE

Virtually all marriages in Qatar are arranged, and Qatari weddings are elaborate affairs that last for several days. Before the wedding the groom provides plenty of silver and gold jewelry to the bride's family, as well as cash as part of an agreed-upon bride-price (*mehr*). The couple also signs a marriage contract called a *milka*. After the signing of the contract, the couple is legally married even though they may not consummate the marriage until the night of the wedding party.

On the wedding day the bride dyes her hair with henna and wears a white wedding gown. All the women who have come for the wedding are dressed in finery and gather inside the bride's house or a tent erected outside it. The bride is brought inside the tent and is seated on a large chair. A traditional dance accompanied with singing and clapping is performed for her.

The groom and his relatives gather inside another tent erected near his house. From there they make a procession to the bride's tent to pick her up.

The bride and groom spend the night at the groom's house. The celebrations continue throughout the following week.

❁ DEATH

When there is a death in a Qatari family, the deceased is washed, shrouded in white cloth, and buried immediately. The following three days are spent in mourning. Friends, family, and well-wishers come, offer their condolences, and help the family accept the death.

Snacks are prepared by neighbors and served to visitors. The mourning period for the widow is four months and 10 days, during which time her family and friends visit her often.

Further Reading

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❧ Réunion ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Southern Africa; an island in the Indian Ocean lying to the east of Madagascar
Size	972 sq. mi.
Capital City	St.-Denis
Flag Description	The national flag of France is also Réunion's flag. It has three vertical bands of equal size displaying the French tricolors: blue (hoist side), white, and red.
Independence	N.A.
Population	776,948 (2005 est.)
Government	Overseas Department of France
Nationality	Réunionese
Major Ethnic Group(s)	French; African; Indian; Chinese; Malagasy; Pakistani
Major Language(s)	French (official); Creole is widely spoken in many parts of the island
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (86%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Victory Day, May 8; Fête de la Musique, June 21; Bastille Day, July 14; Armistice Day, November 11; Celebration of the Abolition of Slavery, December 20

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

For a long time the island of Réunion was largely uninhabited. Although Arab, Malay, and European sailors stopped there, they never settled there. The Arabs called it Dina Morgabin, which means "western Island." The archipelago comprising the islands of Réunion, Mauritius, and Rodrigues was discovered by Portuguese navigator Pedro Mascarenhas (1470–1555) in 1513 and was later named the Mascarenes after its discoverer.

Réunion's location was in the path of the trade route to the East Indies, and the island became an important stopover for ships. Realizing the potential of the island and the fact that it was uninhabited, in 1642 the French East India Company (La Compagnie des Indes Orientales) entered Réunion and began establishing settlements on the island. King Louis XIII (1601–43) named it Île Bourbon.

Around 1685 the region became a base for pirates operating in the Indian Ocean. Prior to 1715, the French East

India Company had only catered to its own trading needs and those of passing ships. However, with the introduction of coffee cultivation on the island, the economy boomed, and by 1730 coffee had become the main cash crop. Due to the intensive labor required for coffee cultivation, the French East India Company brought African, Indian, and Indo-Chinese slaves to work on the plantations. Grains, spices, and cotton were also introduced and soon became secondary cash crops.

In 1764, the French government led by King Louis XV officially took control over the region, and the French East India Company was abolished in 1769.

After the French Revolution, the island was renamed Réunion and fell under the jurisdiction of the Colonial Assembly of France. In the late 18th century the region witnessed a number of slave revolts and, taking advantage of the turmoil in mainland France resulting from the French Revolution and lack of governance on the island, many slaves escaped to the interior parts of the island. There they organized themselves into small villages and elected their chiefs democratically.

In the early 19th century the coffee plantations of Réunion were completely destroyed by a series of cyclones. In

French East India Company

The French East India Company was founded in 1664 to compete with the Dutch and British East India Companies and to protect French commercial interests in the Eastern Hemisphere. The company was chartered by King Louis XIV (1638–1715) and was planned by Jean Baptiste Colbert (1619–83), the king's finance minister. The French East India Company managed to establish colonies on Île Bourbon (Réunion) and Île-de-France (now Mauritius). By 1719 it had established itself in India, although due to the mismanagement of funds and ineffective policies, it was near bankruptcy. After the decline of the Mogul Empire in India, the company began inter-

fering in the domestic politics of the region like the British, who were gaining a strong foothold in India about the same time. To counter the British presence in the region, the French began establishing ties with rulers in the south of India and offered them protection against the British and other Indian rulers. Beginning in 1741 the French East India Company started adopting aggressive policies against the British and Indians, and this led to a series of Anglo-French wars in India in which the French forces suffered immensely at the hands of the British.

Financially weakened and defeated, the French East India Company was abolished by the French Government in 1769.

1810 during the Napoleonic Wars, fought from 1804 to 1815 between the French and the British, the reigning emperor of France, Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821), lost the island to British forces. The British ruled the region from 1810 to 1815. They introduced sugarcane to the islands, and it became the primary cash crop. Small farmers were forced to sell their lands to those who had enough capital to invest in the sugarcane crops. These small farmers began resettling in the interior parts of the island and carried on their agricultural activities.

After the defeat of Napoleon in the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, a treaty was signed between the French and the British, which came to be known as the Treaty of Paris. According to the treaty, France had to relinquish all its rights in all territories captured by the armies of the French Revolution between 1790 and 1792. The island of Réunion, which was captured by the British forces, was returned to France. However, the French islands of Rodrigues, Mauritius, and Seychelles remained under British control.

In 1819 the French introduced vanilla orchids, which boosted the economic prosperity of the region. The golden age of trade and economic development lasted until 1870, when Réunion faced severe competition from sugarcane and sugar beet production in Cuba and European countries. Moreover the island of Réunion lost its importance as an important stopover along the East Indies sea route after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, which helped traders to travel from Europe to Asia without circumnavigating Africa.

During World War I, however, due to a global increase in demand for sugarcane, the economy of Réunion boomed once again. On March 19, 1946, Réunion was proclaimed an overseas department of France, called a Département d'Outre-Mer (DOM).

Since World War II there has been a low-key but persistent demand in Réunion for independence

from French rule. In February 1991 antigovernment riots took place in St.-Denis, the capital city, and more than 10 people lost their lives.

In 2004 Réunion became a member of COMESA, or Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, and is trying to build better ties with the African mainland.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The island of Réunion is located in the Indian Ocean and lies to the east of Madagascar. The most striking geographical feature of the island is the Piton de la Fournaise (Peak of Furnace), which is a shield volcano (a wide volcano that has shallowly sloping sides). It is located on the eastern part of Réunion and erupted as recently as August 13, 2004.

The highest point of the island is Piton des Neiges (Snow Peak), an extinct volcano that lies to the west of Piton de la Fournaise and is 10,069 feet above sea level. It is surrounded by three huge *cirques* (amphitheater-like valleys formed by erosion at the head of a glacier): Cirque of Cialos, Cirque of Mafate, and Cirque of Salazie. The Cirque of Salazie is famous for its beautiful waterfalls, prominent among them being Le Voile de la Mariée (The Bride's Veil). The high plains, valleys, and central and coastal plains lie between Piton de la Fournaise and Piton des Neiges. The slopes of both volcanic mountains are covered with thick forests, while most of the population and cultivated land lies along the surrounding coastal lowlands. The aroma of nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves, and vanilla envelops most parts of Réunion, and banana and sugarcane plantations are a regular feature in most villages.

The country has a tropical climate, and the temperature varies with altitude. The climate is characterized by dry and cool months (May–November) and hot and wet months (November–April). Besides the volcano Réunion also faces the destructive fury

of cyclones. On February 13, 1987 (known as Black Friday because of the devastation and because it was Friday, the 13th), the island of Réunion was hit by Cyclone Clotilde. It caused widespread destruction of crops, roads, and buildings.

ECONOMY

Agriculture is the driving force of Réunion's economy. Sugarcane is the primary cash crop and contributes 85 percent of the country's exports. The major industries of Réunion include rum, cigarettes, sugar, flower oil, and handicraft items. Its main trading partners are Libya, Comoros, Bahrain, Japan, and France.

It is estimated that almost one-third of the island's population is unemployed. For this reason the government is trying to develop the tourism industry to help create more employment opportunities. In the meantime Réunion is dependent on financial assistance from the French government.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Réunion is a mix of many cultures. It is home to people of French, Malagasy, Indian, Chinese, Pakistani, and African descent. Although French is the official language, Creole is widely spoken in many parts of the island. Eighty-six percent of the population is Roman Catholic, while the rest adhere to Hinduism, Islam, or Buddhism. There are many Catholic shrines throughout the island, and Christian holidays are celebrated extensively.

Freedom of religion on the island allows non-Catholics to celebrate their respective festivals and to build mosques and Hindu temples. Hindus perform their religious rites such as *pandiale* or *teemeedee* (which involves walking on hot coals) and *cavadee* (which involves piercing one's cheeks using silver needles in order to demonstrate one's unwavering faith in God).

The traditional dance is *sega*, which is accompa-

nied by an evolved combination of music from Mauritius, Réunion, and Europe. It was performed by slaves in ancient times. African slaves adapted dances such as the polka (a genre of music and style of Czech folk dance) and quadrille (a dance that involves four couples who stand in a square in such a manner that each couple faces the center of the square) to African rhythms and created interesting variations of the original dances. *Maloya* is a fusion of strong African rhythms with European instrumentation that incorporates work songs and slave chants.

CUISINE

The cultural diversity of Réunion is reflected in its cuisine. People can satisfy their adventurous taste buds with French, Indian, Chinese, and Creole delicacies. *Graines* (red or white beans, lentils, and peas) are the chief ingredients of many Creole dishes and are generally served as a creamy side dish. *Rougail* (spicy and hot chutney made from tomato and vegetables) and *bredes* (a leafy spinachlike vegetable) are also part of Creole cuisines. *Piments* (chillies) are often served along with the main course.

Curried goat, crayfish curry, stuffed crab, fritters, cod, pork, and chicken are some of the main course delicacies that combine traditional French, Indian, and Creole recipes. Mauritian rum is the favorite beverage of the island of Réunion.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western (or Gregorian) calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day throughout the world. In Réunion celebrations begin on New Year's Eve (December 31) as people attend private parties and take part in mass celebrations to usher in the new year. Dancing, singing, and feasting are part of New Year's Eve celebrations. As the clock strikes midnight, people bid adieu to the previous year and greet the new one. Because New Year's is a national holiday, all public and private institutions are closed on January 1.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Labor Day, also called May Day and Workers' Day, is a day that honors workers in Réunion. The earliest origins of celebrations on May Day have been ascribed to pagan rites of spring that were practiced by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages. While those spring obser-

Maloya Music

Maloya music reflects Réunion's African heritage. The origin of *maloya* can be traced to the chants of enslaved African laborers who sang them mainly while they worked on plantations in Réunion. The chants spoke of their hard labor, their sorrows, and their desire to revolt. Songs of *maloya* are sung in the Creole language and, until recently, this music was mainly reserved for men because these chants were originally composed by male African slaves. However, the performance of *maloya* by women, such as Christine Salem, is gaining acceptance among the natives of Réunion.



vances may have made May Day an attractive choice, the observance of Labor Day on May 1 originated with the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, that designated it as a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

Since this is a national holiday in Réunion all public and private institutions remain closed on Labor Day

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ VICTORY DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 8

Victory Day commemorates the victory of French and Allied forces in Europe after Germany signed an unconditional treaty of surrender on May 8, 1945, bringing an end to World War II. The day is also known as V-E Day, which stands for “victory in Europe.” As an overseas department of France, Réunion celebrates the occasion.

❁ FÊTE DE LA MUSIQUE

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 21

June 21 marks the beginning of the summer solstice in the Northern Hemisphere and is the longest day of the year. The Fête de la Musique is an annual musical festival held in France and Réunion on this date.

People all over the island of Réunion participate in the celebrations, although it is actually the winter solstice there because the island is located in the Southern Hemisphere. The festival features traditional music and dance performances. Most traditional dances are performed to the beat of drums as people sing and dance all day and all night during this musical celebration.

❁ BASTILLE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 14

Bastille Day commemorates the beginning of the French Revolution on July 14, 1789. On this day, the people of Paris stormed the Bastille prison to raid the armory and free the political prisoners who were imprisoned there for rebelling against the rule of King Louis XVI. The Bastille was a symbol of the absolute authority of the king. Thus Bastille Day is a celebration of liberty and the victory of democracy over oppressive rule.

This day is celebrated as the National Day of Réunion and is commemorated with all-day celebra-

tions throughout the country, featuring parades by the armed forces and the unfurling of the French national flag, as well as cultural and dance programs. A patriotic fervor grips the island, and the night skies are lit with fireworks.

See also Volume III:
BASTILLE DAY

❁ ARMISTICE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 11

Armistice Day commemorates the end of World War I on November 11, 1918, after an armistice treaty was signed between the Allies and Germany in a railway carriage at Compiègne in France, at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month.

In France and on the island of Réunion, people observe a minute-long silence at 11 A.M. as a mark of respect for those soldiers who lost their lives in World War I and World War II. In more recent times, this has become an occasion to honor the dead of other wars as well.

❁ CELEBRATION OF THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 20

In 1845 France passed legislation abolishing slavery. However, on the island of Réunion, the actual abolition did not take place until December 20, 1848. At that time the island of Réunion had a large number of Indo-Chinese, Indian, and African slaves working on coffee, vanilla, and sugar plantations. After the abolition of slavery, the French began resettlement programs for the slaves, and while many were sent back to their native countries, most of the former slaves chose to stay in Réunion.

On this day, the descendants of the former slaves celebrate their liberation. The day's festivities include art exhibits and other cultural activities, including performances of traditional dances and music.

Fun Fact

The devotion of Catholics on the island of Réunion is reflected even in the names of the cities and towns; most of them are named after Christian saints. Some examples include: St.-Denis (the capital of Réunion), St.-Paul, St.-Joseph, and St.-Expedit.

Religious Holidays

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

This Christian holiday commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. A somber, solemn occasion, it falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of

Lent (an austere season of fasting and penitence). Many Catholics in Réunion fast on Good Friday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a Christian feast that celebrates Jesus' Resurrection from the dead three days after his Crucifixion. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. On Easter Sunday Christians in Réunion attend church services.

Easter Monday is observed in Réunion as a continuation of Easter Sunday. The day was once part of a weeklong Easter celebration for Christians, but Easter was later changed to a one-day holiday. Easter Monday is a national holiday in Réunion with schools, businesses, and government offices closed for the day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT

ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Forty days after Easter

Ascension Day is a day of celebration for devout Catholics all over the world. It commemorates their belief that Jesus rose up to heaven 40 days after he was resurrected from the dead on Easter.

On Ascension Day devout Christians in Réunion attend a special Ascension service in their local churches.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY

PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fifty days after Easter

Pentecost is celebrated 50 days after Easter, the day when Christians believe Jesus was resurrected from the dead. Pentecost is a day of joy and celebrations and feasting for Catholics all over the world because it commemorates the appearance of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles on this day.

Pentecost is a Greek word that means "fiftieth;" the alternate name for the holiday, Whitsunday and Whitmonday, refers to the white robes worn by those who are baptized on this day. On Pentecost, prayer services are held on the island of Réunion, and it is customary to blow trumpets, which symbolize the sound produced by the wind when the Holy Spirit descended.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; PENTECOST

VESAK

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: May–June

Vesak is the most important festival in the Buddhist calendar. Buddhists celebrate Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and death on this day. Its name derives from the second month of the Hindu calendar (which is also the Buddhist calendar) called Vesak or Vaisakh. It is held on the first full Moon day in the month of May. However, in a leap year the festival is in June.

Buddhists on the island of Réunion observe a day-long fast on this day.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM; VESAK

ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: August 15

The Feast of the Assumption commemorates the Virgin Mary's assumption into heaven after her death. On August 15 devout Catholics on the island of Réunion attend a special Mass commemorating the life of Mary and her devotion to God and Jesus.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION DAY; CHRISTIANITY

ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day is a Christian feast. On this day, Catholics honor all the saints (known and unknown) of the church. On the island of Réunion devout Catholics attend a special Mass in memory of the saints.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world because it is the day chosen by the Catholic Church to celebrate the birth of Jesus, whom they believe was the Messiah. On Christmas Eve (December 24) devout Catholics on the island of Réunion attend Christmas Eve Mass in their local churches. Church choirs sing Christmas carols and devotional hymns.

On Christmas Day, people visit their friends and family and greet each other. Some people dress up as Santa Claus and pay visits to children and give them gifts and candies. Then families sit down to a traditional Christmas meal that features such dishes as Creole *patés*, *cari* of *camarons* (big prawns with saf-

fron), *bouchons* (small balls of chicken or pork wrapped in a rice paste and steamed), and red pepper and mashed white bean patties.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ FIRE-WALKING

Observed in: Hindu temples all over Réunion

Observed by: Tamils (Indian ethnic group)

Observed in: January

The Fire-Walking ritual, also called *Pandiale* or *Teemeedee*, is a sacred, ancient Hindu ritual performed by the Tamil population living in Réunion. The Tamil are an ethnic group from India.

For this sacred ritual, the participating devotees take a ritual bath in a nearby lake or pond. Then in a procession they pull a cart to a nearby temple. The cart carries several Hindu religious icons on it. The worshippers carry the religious icons from the cart and place them on a temporary altar, which has been set up near a huge fire pit. Three of the devotees carry *carlons* on their heads. The *carlons* are tall, colorful flower cones. They symbolize three Hindu goddesses: Kali (goddess of death and destruction), Mariyamma (goddess of rain), and Draupadi (wife of Hindu mythological warriors, collectively known as the Pandavas). Mariyamma, the goddess of rain, is the most popular goddess of farmers of Indian origin in Réunion.

After the icons are placed on the altar, the priest blesses the pit by sprinkling holy water on it, and the devout start walking on the red-hot coals laid in the pit. Those who participate in the ritual are sur-

rounded by their family and members of the community, who continuously chant religious prayers during the ritual. While walking on the burning coal, they cannot show any sign of pain or suffering. After the fire walk is over, they put their feet in a small pit filled with milk, which was dug earlier near the pit of burning coals. Hindus believe that a person walking over burning coals feels no pain because Draupadi saves them from pain by laying her long hair over the burning coals.

❁ FÊTE DE LA VANILLE

Observed in: Bras Panon

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Mid-May

The Fête de la Vanille is an annual event held in the Bras Panon region of Réunion. It is celebrated at the end of the harvest season by local farmers and vanilla orchid breeders during a 10-day-long period completely dedicated to vanilla orchids. Visitors and residents alike relish the taste of vanilla in varied forms (including ice creams, vanilla-flavored chocolates, sauces, vanilla tea, cakes, and puddings). Information is provided on processing of vanilla and its varied uses. Dancing, musical performances, and cooking competitions are featured during this 10-day festival. Special exhibits that showcase a wide variety of vanilla orchids are also organized as part of the festivities.

Further Reading

R. B. Trombley, *Island Born of Fire: Volcano Piton de la Fournaise* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996); Firmin Viry, *Île de la Réunion: Maloya* [sound recording] (Paris: Ocora, 1999).

❧ Romania ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Southeastern Europe, bordering the Black Sea, between Bulgaria and Ukraine
Size	91,699 sq. mi.
Capital City	Bucharest
Flag Description	Romania's flag has three vertical bands of equal size of the following colors: blue (hoist side), yellow, and red.
Independence	May 9, 1877 (independence proclaimed from the Ottoman Empire; independence recognized July 13, 1878, by the Treaty of Berlin; kingdom proclaimed March 26, 1881); December 30, 1947 (republic proclaimed)
Population	22,329,977 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Romanian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	White (Romanian, 90%)
Major Language(s)	Romanian (official); Hungarian; German
Major Religion(s)	Eastern Orthodox (87%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's, December 31–January 2; International Women's Day, March 8; Labor Day, May 1; Union Day (of Romania and Transylvania), December 1

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

The early history of present-day Romania saw the Greeks, Dacians, and Romans settle in the region. The earliest people to dwell in what is now Romania were the Getae, or Dacians; they had already developed a complex culture when the Romans first encountered them. According to Strabo (63/63 B.C.E.–after 23 C.E.), the Greek geographer, the original name of the Dacians was *daoi*, possibly cognate with Phrygian *daos*, which means “wolf.” This hypothesis is supported by the fact that the standard carried by the Dacian military had a wolf head.

In 513 Darius (550–486) defeated the tribal confederation of the Getae during his campaign against the Scythians. Over 500 years later the Getae were defeated by the Roman emperor Trajan (53–117 C.E.) in two campaigns between 101 and 106, and their kingdom became the Roman province of Dacia. (Some Romanian historians claim that the Dacians are

the ancestors of modern Romanians.) In 271 Dacia became the Kingdom of the Goths until the end of the fourth century, when the Hunnic Empire subsumed it. The Gepids, a Germanic tribe, and the Avars, a proto-Mongolian Turkic group of nomads from Eurasia, ruled Transylvania until the eighth century, when the Bulgars (possibly originally a Turkic, Iranian, or Ugrian culture of Central Asia) claimed Romania as part of their empire until 1000. The Pechenegs (a semi-nomadic group from the Central Asian steppes) and the Cumans (a west Turkic tribe that lived north of the Black Sea), also inhabited parts of Romania until the founding of the Vlachian principalities of Wallachia by Basarab I (c. 1310–52), and Moldavia by Dragoș (r. 1351–53) during the 13th and 14th centuries, respectively.

In the 14th and 15th centuries, the Ottoman Empire tried to gain control over Wallachia and Moldavia, but its efforts were thwarted. Although the Ottoman Empire succeeded in taking over Transylvania in the 16th century, Wallachia and Moldavia continued to remain autonomous. In 1600 the three states were reunited under the prince of

Wallachia and tried to expel the Turks but failed. The Habsburgs eventually took over Transylvania.

Austria-Hungary annexed Bucovina, the northern part of Moldavia in 1775, and the Russians occupied Bessarabia, the eastern part of Moldavia, in 1812.

At the end of the 18th century the Austrian Habsburgs incorporated Transylvania into the Austrian Empire, and under Austria-Hungary between 1867 and 1918, Romanians in Transylvania experienced terrible oppression when the Hungarian government attempted to impose a Hungarian identity on them. Ottoman rule in the region ended after the Russo-Turkish War of 1828–29. In 1862 Moldavia and Wallachia were reunited and given the name Romania. Romania was declared a kingdom in 1881, and Carol I (1813–1914) became king. His nephew Ferdinand I (1865–1927) succeeded him. He entered World War I on the side of the alliance of the United Kingdom, France, and Russia, resulting in a much-enlarged Romania when Bessarabia, Bucovina, and Transylvania were added to the country in 1918.

At the beginning of World War II, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) occupied northern Bucovina, and Bessarabia and Hungary occupied Northern Transylvania. This was followed by widespread agitation and in 1940, Carol II (1893–1953), then king of Romania, was forced to abdicate by General Marshall Ion Antonescu (1882–1946), who made Carol II's 19-year-old son Michael (b. 1921) the king (Michael I) but then set up a Fascist dictatorship with himself at the head. In 1941 the General Marshall joined Hitler's anti-Soviet war.

The Antonescu regime actively participated in the Holocaust and followed Hitler's policy of genocide of the Jews and, to a lesser extent, the Roma. According to a report released by the Romanian government in 2004, the Romanian authorities were the main perpetrators in the planning and implementation of the killing of at least 280,000 to 380,000 Jews, and some say the figures may be higher. But with the Soviet Union approaching its border, Romania switched sides and joined the Allies. Consequently, in 1947 Romania became a Communist state under the USSR until 1958.

In the late 1950s Romania started following its own independent foreign policy. Despite political unrest in the 1980s and a period of economic stagnation, Romania strove for economic and political reforms. After 1990 the democracy was reformed, and the parliamentary system was reinstated in Romania. In 1991 the new Constitution of Romania was adopted. Romania joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 2004 and expects to join the European Union (EU) in 2007.

Fun Fact

Basarab I's name, "Father King," is thought to be derived from Cuman *basar*, which means "to rule," and *aba*, which means "father."

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in southeastern Europe, Romania is flanked by Bulgaria, Ukraine, Moldova, Serbia and Montenegro, Hungary, and the Black Sea. It is the third largest country in Eastern Europe. Topographically, hills, mountains, and plains characterize the Romanian terrain. Almost one-third of the country is covered by the Carpathian Mountains, while tablelands and small hills cover another one-third and are covered with vineyards and orchards. Highly fertile plains, known as the Baragan Plains, cover the remaining one-third and crops such as grains, fruits, and vegetables are grown there in abundance.

The highest point of Romania is the Moldoveanu, which stands 8,346 feet high. Besides the Danube River, which is the country's lifeline, a large number of rivers like the Prut, Barcau, Barlad, Almas, and Jiu, to name only a few, flow across Romania.

Romania enjoys a temperate climate that is characterized by sunny summers with thunderstorms and frequent showers, while winters are cold and cloudy with frequent snow and fog. The annual average temperature is 36°F in the mountains and 86°F along the coast and in the south.

Romania is home to a wide variety of flora including trees like beech, birch, maple, poplar, and sycamore, and more than 1,350 species of flowers such as the Transylvanian columbine, yellow poppy, edelweiss, and saxifrage.

The Dacian Draco

The Dacian Draco was a standard made up of a bronze wolf's head, with its mouth open, and a snake's body. It was originated by the ancient Dacian military. They carried it secured on top of a rod, and when they held it aloft while galloping, it made a whistling sound as the air passed through the wolf's mouth. It was thought that the noise must have terrified enemy soldiers.

The Sarmatians and Alans, a warlike nomadic Iranian confederacy, developed the Draco. The earliest evidence of the Draco in Dacia was found on fourth century B.C.E. pottery in Romania. The only copy of the Draco was found in Germany, which was probably kept as a trophy when the Romans defeated the Dacians. Following the Dacian wars the Roman cavalry adopted the Draco as their standard.

Lynx, bears, wolves, wild boars, stags, foxes, deer, badgers, green woodpeckers, gray owls, jays, white-tailed eagles, red-breasted geese, and pygmy cormorants represent the fauna in Romania.

❁ ECONOMY

Following King Michael I's forced abdication in 1947, Romania was part of the USSR until 1958. What little of Romania's scarce resources remained after World War II were drained by sham "SovRom" agreements, mixed Soviet-Romanian companies, set up to disguise the looting of Romania by the USSR. To this systematic pillaging were added excessive war reparations paid to the USSR. During this oppressive period, hundreds of thousands of people were imprisoned for political reasons, as well as thousands of deaths and incidents of torture against political dissidents. After the fall of the Communist regime in 1989, Romania was left with an obsolete industrial infrastructure. Due to the introduction of new economic reforms by the new government, backed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the economy is heading toward stability. Privatization of industries, growing direct foreign investments, and the adoption of a policy of liberalization has benefited the economy and helped reduce inflation and unemployment. At present Romania enjoys one of the lowest rates of unemployment among European nations.

Agriculture is the primary occupation of Romanians with more than 41 percent of the workforce engaged in some agricultural activity. Crops such as maize, wheat, barley, potatoes, oilseeds, sugar beets, and fruits and vegetables are grown extensively throughout the country.

Romania is expected to join the European Union (EU) by January 2007.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Romania is a predominantly Christian country with more than 87 percent of the nation's population

adhering to Eastern Orthodox beliefs. Romania is an ethnically diverse country, and, although ethnic Romanians enjoy a dominant presence, the nation is also home to Hungarians, Ukrainians, Roma (gypsies—a label with negative connotations), Russians, Germans, Turks, and other nationalities. Romanian is the official language of Romania, although German and Hungarian languages are also spoken among the ethnic minorities.

Although Romanians residing in urban areas prefer Western attire, the traditional dress of Romania is worn extensively in rural areas. The attire for boys and men consists of loose shirts, wide white pants, jackets (or a white long-haired cloak), leather belts, boots, and tall hats (made from curly wool in either black or gray). Girls and women wear white flowered skirts, stiff white embroidered blouses with puffy sleeves, headscarves, beautifully embroidered black woolen vests, knee-high socks, and *opinci* (shoes).

Romania has a rich folk culture that is aptly reflected in its handicrafts, folk songs, and dances. Romanians are known for their mastery of weaving, woodcarving, ceramics, artistic decorations for homes, and embroidery. Professional Roma musicians play the traditional folk music of Romania. The folk dances of Romania generally involve couples dancing in a circle, semicircle, or a line. Folk poems and theater are also an integral part of Romanian society, and the most popular poem in Romania is the "Miorita." This is an old Romanian ballad based on the most important aspects of their folklore.

❁ CUISINE

Some of the traditional dishes include *mamaliga* (maize porridge), *sarmale* (minced pork with vine leaves or cabbage), *ciorba* (Romanian sour soup), pork sausages, *poale-n-brau* (a dish made from eggs, salt, and cheese), minced meat cooked with beef, onions, salt, and pepper, *toba* and *coltabos* (made from a variety of pig parts) as well as desserts such as *clarite* (crepes), *saraille* (almond cake), and *placinta* (turnovers).

"Miorita" ("The Little Ewe Lamb")

"Miorita" ("The Little Ewe Lamb") is one of the oldest and the most popular of Romanian poems. "Miorita" narrates the story of a magical black sheep named Miorita and a young shepherd. According to the poem, Miorita warns the Moldovan shepherd about an alleged plot to murder him and snatch his flock of sheep. This plot was hatched by his fellow shepherds namely, a Vrancean from Tara Romaneasca (Romanian country) and an Ungurean (Hungarian) from Transylvania. However, instead of trying to escape his fate, the shepherd accepts it and

instructs Miorita to bury him near the sheep's pen. Also, he asks Miorita to communicate to the two shepherds that he has, in fact, married a princess, and the entire universe was in attendance to witness their marriage. Finally, he requests the magical ewe that if she ever meets his mother again, she should tell his mother that he has married a princess in a far-away land.

The message expressed through the poem is that death is not the end of life, but the beginning of a long and beautiful journey, thus reinforcing Romanians' belief in an afterlife.

Wine and *tucia* (plum brandy) are the traditional drinks of Romania.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 2

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western (or Gregorian) calendar and is celebrated as New Year's Day all over the world; revelries begin on the evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve). In Romania New Year's Day (January 1), called *Anul nou* in Romania, and the second day of the new year (January 2) are public holidays.

In Romania New Year's Eve is usually spent with family and friends because it symbolizes the birth of a child, the new year, and the departure of an old person, the old year. In the countryside on New Year's Eve, villagers carry a plow from door to door and wish everyone happiness and prosperity in the year to come.

On New Year's Day people celebrate with traditional songs and dances. The songs express the desire for good weather, harvest, health, and happiness. Children go from door to door, throwing grains of rice and wheat over every threshold. Romanians believe that this custom will ensure prosperity and a good sowing season in the coming year. Singing and dancing continue on January 2, the second day of the new year, which is also a public holiday in Romania. All public and private institutions are closed on this day.

❁ INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 8

International Women's Day (IWD), observed annually on 8 March, is a major day of global celebration for the economic, political, and social achievements of women. The proposal to have a special day on which to recognize women and their many achievements was first suggested at the turn of the 20th century, when rapid industrialization and economic expansion led to workers' protests over dangerous working conditions. Women who worked in clothing and textile factories held one such demonstration on March 8, 1857, in New York City, protesting what they saw as very poor working conditions and low wages.

The first IWD was observed on February 28, 1909, in the United States following a declaration by the Socialist Party of America. International Women's Day was declared the following year at the first international women's conference in Copenhagen, organized by the Socialist International. On

March 25, 1911, the infamous Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York City killed over 140 women. A lack of safety measures was blamed for the high death toll. In the West, International Women's Day was commemorated during the 1910s and 1920s, then lapsed into obscurity until the second wave of feminism revived it in the 1960s. In 1975 the United Nations (UN) began to sponsor International Women's Day.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. While the earliest May 1 celebrations are often ascribed to the pagan rites that were practiced by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages, the political significance of the day has changed substantially. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world, and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

In Romania, which is a Communist state, May 1 continues to be a public holiday, called *Ziua muncii*, and all public and private institutions are closed on this day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ UNION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 1

Union Day, called *Ziua națională* or *Ziua unirii* in Romania, commemorates the historic Proclamation of Union of the Alba Lulia that resulted in the unification of Transylvania, Basarabia, Bucovina, and Cadrilater with the Old Romanian Kingdom, which also included the principalities of Moldavia (modern day Moldova) and Wallachia, on December 1, 1918. The country was named Greater Romania after all Romanians were united under a single state.

On this day Romanians from other parts of the country, including the president of the Republic, assemble in the town of Alba Lulia where the proclamation took place and a special liturgy is held in the Orthodox cathedral. A carnival atmosphere envelops the town, and the streets are crowded with numerous stalls selling Romanian flags, badges, T-shirts, toys, and traditional handicrafts.

Fun Fact

Romania's Danube Delta, a World Heritage site, is the second largest delta in Europe.

Fun Fact

Bram Stoker (1847–1912) based his novel *Dracula* on Vlad Dracul, the 15th-century prince of the Wallachia province of Romania.

Performances of folk dances and songs are an integral part of the celebrations. In the evening people eagerly await the parade of the armed forces, and after the presidential speech the day ends with a spectacular display of fireworks.

Religious Holidays

❁ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: January 6

The Feast of the Epiphany, called Boboteaza in Romania, is a Christian feast that celebrates the birth of Jesus, the arrival of the Magi (the Three Wise Men—Caspar, Balthazar, and Melchior) in Bethlehem to see the infant Jesus, and Jesus' life until his baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. The word *epiphany* means “to reveal” or “to make known,” and this celebration is called Epiphany because the Magi revealed Jesus to the world. Devout Romanian Christians celebrate this day by offering prayers in their local churches and singing carols.

In ancient times girls stole basil from the priest's garden and slept with it under their pillows so they would dream about their future husbands on Epiphany. Another ritual performed during Epiphany involved carrying a cross to the Danube River or any other body of running water. The entire village attended a special service at the church and then headed toward the bank of a river, where the water was blessed. If there was no river nearby, the ceremony took place in the church courtyard where a huge pot was filled with water. Then the priest threw the cross in the river and young boys would jump in the river to recover it. Later the boys would strut around the village to be rewarded with meat, sausages, wine, and money.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EPIPHANY

❁ HOLY WEEK

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Saturday of Lazarus–Easter

In the Eastern Orthodox Church, as in other Christian sects, Easter is the central observance of the liturgical year, and the date of most church holidays is determined by the date on which Easter falls. Every Sunday is dedicated in the Eastern Orthodox Church to Jesus' Resurrection, and 100 days are dedicated to Easter—50 before it in preparation, and 50 after it for glorifying him. Easter is the feast of feasts. The 50 days prior to Easter are a part of the period of Triodion, the

period for strengthening one's faith. The means are well known: repentance, prayer, and self-control. The 50 days following Easter are the Pentecostarion (from the Greek *pentikonta*, meaning “fifty”).

Holy Week begins with the phrase: “Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany.” His arrival coincided with the Jewish Passover (Pesach). The church relates preparation and redemption to the events of this week.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY; PESACH

❁ SATURDAY OF LAZARUS

Observed by: Eastern Orthodox

Observed on: Day before Palm Sunday

The ceremonies of Holy Week begin with the Saturday Morning of St. Lazarus, the day before Palm Sunday. On this day the rising from the dead of St. Lazarus, the friend of Jesus, is celebrated.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

❁ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Last Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday celebrates the glorious and brilliant feast of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Zechariah had prophesied the entrance of the Messiah into Jerusalem. The multitudes, with palm branches in their hands, spread their cloaks on the road as a show of respect. The custom of distributing branches of palms to the people in the church prevails to this day, commemorating the victory of Jesus over the evil powers.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

❁ HOLY MONDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Monday before Easter

On Holy Monday, the faithful remember how Jesus cursed a fig tree that had leaves and no fruit—a reminder of the hollowness of outward piety.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ HOLY TUESDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Tuesday before Easter

Tuesday of Holy Week commemorates the parable of the Ten Virgins.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ HOLY WEDNESDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Wednesday before Easter

Holy Wednesday commemorates the anointing of Jesus with myrrh at the house of Simon the leper.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

Maundy Thursday celebrates the washing of the disciples' feet, the institution of the Holy Eucharist, the marvelous prayer, and Judas's betrayal.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday celebrates Jesus' Passion on the Cross. To take away our sins he willingly endured the Cross and death. On this day Romanians attend a special service in their local churches, offer prayers to God and remember the suffering and death of Christ. The confession from the Cross of the penitent thief, crucified with Christ, is celebrated. During the procession, the faithful kneel and pray for their spiritual welfare, then reverently kiss the crucifix.

The Vespers of Friday afternoon are a continuation of the royal hours. During this service the removal of Jesus' body from the Cross is commemorated with a sense of mourning for the terrible events that occurred. As the priest reads the Gospel, he removes Jesus' body from the cross, wraps it in a white cloth, and takes it to the altar. The priest then carries the cloth on which the body of Jesus is painted or embroidered around the church before placing it inside the sepulcher, a carved bier that symbolizes the tomb, reminding the faithful that during Jesus' entombment he descended into Hades to free the dead of the ages. After several hymns are sung, the priest sprinkles the sepulcher and the whole congregation with fragrant water.

Christians observe Good Friday with fasting, prayer, cleanliness, self-examination, confession, and good works, in humility and repentance. Psalms are read and resurrection hymns are sung that tell of Jesus' descent into Hades. Most of the readings of this day are from the Old Testament prophecies promising the conquest of death. On this day the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil is officiated.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT



Traditional Romanian Easter eggs, depicting Jesus and other religious themes, are displayed in a basket in Bucharest. The majority of Romanians are Orthodox Christians. (AP Photo/Vadim Ghirda)

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

In Eastern Orthodox Churches what is called Easter in English-speaking countries is called Paștele in Romania, after the Hebrew observance Pesach (Passover). On Easter Sunday (Saturday midnight) Jesus' Resurrection is celebrated. Before midnight the Odes of Lamentation of the previous day are repeated. The Orthros of the Resurrection begins in complete darkness. The priest takes light from the vigil light and gives it to the faithful, who are holding candles. In many churches the priest leads the people outside the church, where he reads the Gospel that refers to the angel's statement: "He is risen; he is not

Fun Fact

Half of the bear population in Europe (about 5,400), a third of its wolves (thought to number around 3,500), and a third of its lynx (perhaps as many as 2,000), all roam freely in Romania.

Fun Fact

A Romanian legend attributes Dragoș's founding of Moldavia to an aurochs (an extinct long-haired wild ox) hunt, during which Molda, his hound bitch, was killed. In remembrance of his beloved dog, Dragoș named the river "Moldova," which was later extended to the country.

here." Then the people wait breathlessly for the priest to start the hymn of Resurrection. From this moment the entire service takes on a joyous Easter atmosphere.

Orthodox Easter is one of the most important religious celebrations in Romania. It is looked upon as a day of new beginnings and involves cleaning the house, taking a ritual bath, and dressing oneself in new clothes before attending Easter midnight services in local churches. During the service candles are lit for every person in the community, and they remain

lit throughout the night. Romanians believe that the light of the candle protects people against being struck by thunder and lightning on their way home.

After reaching home, people dine on traditional Easter dishes such as *cozonacul* (lamb roast), *pasca* (spicy minced lamb), sponge cake, and cheese. Dyed eggs are also an integral part of Easter celebrations in Romania, since they are considered symbols of revival and rebirth. Traditionally eggs are dyed red with elaborate designs.

Easter Sunday afternoon the faithful gather once more for prayer with lighted candles and greet one another joyously, saying: "Christ is risen." The fruit of faith in the Resurrection is love, so this day is called Sunday of Agape ("love feast"), a day dedicated to Christian principles, especially forgiveness and charity. At this time Christians seek to end misunderstanding and arguments among those with whom they may be at odds.

Easter is an official holiday in Romania, and schools, businesses, and government agencies are closed. Bright Week follows Easter, during which there is no fasting, even on Wednesday and Friday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PESACH

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of celebration for Christians all over the world and is celebrated on December 25 every year, the date selected by the early church for Jesus' birthday. In Romania Christmas celebrations begin on Christmas Eve (December 24) and last until St. Stephen's Day on December 26. In Romania where this holiday is called Crăciunul, devout Christians attend midnight services on Christmas Eve and celebrate the birth of Jesus by singing Christmas carols.

In many parts of Romania children carry a wooden star through the streets or carry pictures of important scenes from the Bible. The leader among the children holds a stout pole with a beautifully decorated wooden star, known as *steua*, which is covered with shiny paper, adorned with bells and ribbons and has a portrait of the Nativity in the center of the star. Young children also go from door to door singing Christmas carols and reciting poems about the joy of Christmas. People exchange greetings and visit their friends and families on this auspicious occasion.

The Feast of St. Stephen is observed on December 26, the day after Christmas. St. Stephen, who was stoned to death by Roman rulers for speaking in favor of Jesus and his disciples is considered to be the first martyr of Christianity. In some English-speaking countries this day is called Boxing Day.

Christmas is an official holiday in Romania, and schools, businesses, and government agencies are closed.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ MĂRȚIȘORUL

Observed in: Romania

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 1

The spring festival celebrated in Romania, called Mărțișorul, is celebrated on March 1. More than 8,000 years old, the modern shape of this pagan festival probably originated with the Romans, who celebrated their New Year's Eve on the first day of March, because that month (Martius) was the month of the war god Mars, who was also the god of agriculture. This duality remains in the colors traditionally associated with Mărțișorul white and red. (Bulgarians have an almost identical festival celebrated on March 1 called Martenitsa.) In ancient Romania Marsyas-Silen was the god of vegetation and the land, and all nature celebrations were consecrated to him.

In early times people painted small river rocks in white and red and wore them round their neck. Red was associated with blood, Sun, and fire and symbolized women and the principle of fertility. White symbolized clear water, the sky, and men. On this day people held huge feasts and drank lots of wine.

In some ways Mărțișorul resembles the Western holiday Valentine's Day. In Romania men offer women a small decorative object, also called Mărțișorul, tied to a red and white string. This gift symbolizes the arrival of spring, and women may wear it pinned to their blouses for as long as two weeks. Sometimes women also give such gifts to men.

See also Volume III: SPRING FESTIVALS

INTERNATIONAL JAZZ FESTIVAL

Observed in: Brasov
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May

The International Jazz Festival is an annual musical fiesta that takes place in Brasov during the month of May. The Consiliul Judetean Brasov and Fundatia Transilvania Expres organize the event. The festival takes place over a period of three days and is attended by thousands of jazz fans from all over the world. During the festival audiences are treated to live performances by Romanian as well as international jazz musicians who entrance the audience with their music. The festival also provides a platform for young and upcoming Romanian jazz aspirants to showcase their talents.

SFANTU GHEORGHE

Observed in: Sighetu Marmatiei (northwestern part of Romania)
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December

Sfantu Gheorghe is an annual winter customs festival that takes place in the town of Sighetu Marmatiei during the month of December. Thousands of Romanians and tourists flock to this small town to participate in the festivities. During the festival the streets of the small town are crowded with people and masks hang on lampposts throughout the town. Young men wearing masks (featuring demons, monsters, and animals), with cowbells tied around their waists, run through the streets with great enthusiasm. Amid music and carols (known as *colinde*), a grand parade passes down the main street with representatives of every village in the Maramures region wearing their traditional dresses and carrying a large black-and-white bag filled with rice or grain. As they walk through the streets, they throw the rice or grain on the crowd. Rice (or grain) is a symbol of prosperity and happiness, so the gesture means that the villagers wish the onlookers happiness and protection from any misfortune.

Rites of Passage

BIRTH

Romanians believe birth is a transition from blackness (an unknown world) to whiteness (the known world). In Romania a number of rituals are observed after the birth of a child. The “first bath” ceremony of the child takes place under the guidance of the eldest female relative of the child’s father. A ritual performed only by women, clean water mixed with milk, honey, money, and flowers is used to bathe the

child. Then the child is handed to its mother along with wishes that the child grow up to be an adult with moral and spiritual integrity and blessed with a happy, healthy, and long life. The elder expresses her wish that the child be respectful toward its parents, have patience in abundance, as well as grow up to be a hardworking person. She also wishes the child a happy married life.

Another important ritual involves christening the child in a solemn ceremony in the local church. Godparents play a vital role in the ceremony, and the child is named after one of the godparents or a close and respected relative. After the priest performs the baptism ritual, the godparents have to bathe the child immediately. They place money, rice, and basil leaves in the water used for the ritual bath, which symbolize their wishes for the child: prosperity, abundance of food, and a “sweet” life.

Seven months after the birth of a child, a fortune-telling ritual takes place. An egg, a pencil, and a book are placed in front of the child, and the object he or she chooses helps determine his or her future. Thus if the child takes the book, it implies he or she will grow up to be an intellectual; a pencil symbolizes his or her artistic inclinations, and the one who chooses the egg will desire materialistic things.

MARRIAGE

A Romanian wedding ceremony is marked by colorful costumes, poetry, songs, and dancing. On the day of the wedding a representative of the bridegroom arrives at the home of the bride’s parents to pick her up. Around the same time the groom’s best men go around the village distributing invitations among the men. Then everyone joins the representative of the bridegroom who narrates the story of a young emperor (used metaphorically to describe the bridegroom) who went hunting in the forest along with his warriors (the best men) and caught a glimpse of a fairy. The emperor instructed the warriors to find the whereabouts of the fairy and, in this process, following the trail of the fairy, they have arrived at the bride’s house. He also tells them that they have a flower (in this case, the bride) in the garden that will not bear fruit due to the soil. In the story, the flower, once transplanted in the emperor’s garden, blossomed and bore fruit. Then the representative asks that the bride be handed over to them, and they promise to escort her to the emperor’s garden.

In Bhior, Transylvania, in order to win the bride and demonstrate his readiness to marry, the bridegroom has to pass a test of his cleverness. Generally the bridegroom has to solve a number of riddles to prove his worthiness.

For her wedding the bride wears a ceremonial dress and flowers. She is expected to change her hairstyle, and a group of married women cover her head with a scarf in a special musical ceremony dur-

Fun Fact

The Romanian language is closer to its classical Latin roots than any other Romance language.

Fun Fact

At the Merry Cemetery in the Sapinta region of Romania, gravestones contain humorous epitaphs and depict special moments in the life of the deceased.

ing the wedding. This signals her acceptance into the community of married women.

Singing, dancing and feasting are part of the wedding reception, and the ceremony ends with a traditional dance of masks.

✿ DEATH

Romanians believe that three stars and a fir tree represent every person. When the person dies, the stars fall from the sky. Young men go to the woods to bring the branches of a fir tree. A group of women receive them at the entrance of the village and sing about the link between the life of the deceased and the fir tree. They also express the grief of the fir tree as it is destined to be laid near the head of the deceased person (considered to be related to the fir tree since their lives are linked) and rot.

Between the two days that separate the person's death and the funeral ceremony, at dawn, a group of elderly women sing the "Song of the Dawn," also known as "Bocetul" ("Great Song"). It is supposed to guide the soul of the deceased on the path that he or she must take to reach the land of the ancestors in the afterlife. It also announces the death of the person to the villagers.

After the singing the women pray to the Sun asking it to rise later so that the grieving family can prepare for the funeral.

The body of the deceased is never left alone, and people share their memories of the individual

during a special get-together organized in memory of the deceased. A lavish feast is also part of the wake, known as a deathwatch in Romania. Romanians believe that even after death the life of the deceased should be celebrated.

For the funeral the family of the deceased makes arrangements for the coffin, for the shroud, for the bull carriage or truck to take the body to the cemetery, and for the food that will be served at the feast held in memory of the deceased. The body is carried in an open casket placed on a truck or bull carriage, and family members and villagers accompany the deceased to the cemetery.

Further Reading

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❧ Russia ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Northern Asia, bordering Arctic Ocean, between Europe and North Pacific Ocean
Size	6,592,772 sq. mi.
Capital City	Moscow
Flag Description	Russia's flag has three equal horizontal bands of white (top), blue, and red (bottom).
Independence	August 24, 1991 (from Soviet Union)
Population	143,420,309 (2005 est.)
Government	Federation
Nationality	Russian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Caucasian (Russian, 80%)
Major Language(s)	Russian; many minority languages
Major Religion(s)	Russian Orthodox; Muslim
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Old New Year's Day, January 13; Defender of the Motherland Day, February 23; International Women's Day, March 8; Labor Day, May 1-2; Victory Day, May 9; Independence Day, June 12; Accord and Reconciliation Day, November 7; Constitution Day, December 12

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

If Western Siberia was the jumping-off point for the migrations across the Bering Strait (Beringia) that brought at least some of the Amerindians to the Americas about 15,000 years ago, and given what is known at the present about human populations in Europe 200,000 years ago, then it is reasonable to expect to find evidence of human habitation in the region now called the Russian Federation. So far, however, the territory to be covered is immense, and the archaeological evidence is piecemeal. For example, archaeologists working in a region south of Moscow found an object of prehistoric art carved from mammoth's tusk about 17,000 years ago. Discovered at what is thought to have been a Stone Age campsite, one of the ends resembles the torso of a horse with a well-detailed mane.

Near a burial mound in the basin of the Aksai River, several gigantic stones have been found. The construction, a long alley stretching from east to west, is made up of vertically

erected massive rocks (menhirs). These megaliths are apparently much older than other European megaliths. The site has been dated to approximately 9,000 B.C.E. Although Russia is so far known to have about 3,000 megalithic structures, including menhirs and dolmens, this is the first discovery of megaliths in the European part of Russia. Previously similar stone monuments had been discovered only in the Caucasus and Siberia.

At an early Neolithic burial place in the Ulyanovsk region on the Volga, southeast of European Russia, archaeologists found a skeleton, which was apparently that of a young woman who lived in the eighth millennium. The skeleton lacks the skull. This suggests that it may have been the practice to bury heads separately from bodies.

A 4,000-year-old megalithic structure was uncovered at a site in the central Russian region of Ryazan. This structure, which archaeologists believe was built as a sanctuary, sits on a hill overlooking the confluence of the Oka and the Pron Rivers. The site is a circle 23 feet in diameter, marked with standing stones 1.5 feet thick and evenly spaced one from each other. There is a large rectangular hole and a standing stone

in the center of the circle. Along the edges of the site there are two more holes. Originally there may have been four of them, but the bank there is being destroyed by a ravine, so the temple has caved in partially. It has been suggested that this megalithic site may have served an astronomical purpose similar to that of Stonehenge.

A group of children, led by a local geologist, found evidence of a 4,000-year-old culture that occupied three islands in the Vuoksa River region near Leningrad: a series of paintings that resemble a fish, a dog, and a prehistoric symbol of the Sun. The Leningrad region, Karelia, and Scandinavia were all densely settled by tribes who built sculptures and painted petroglyphs throughout the region. The Vuoksa region resembles Onega Lake in Karelia, where many petroglyphs as old as 4,000 years have been found.

Beginning in the second millennium B.C.E., various groups occupied Russian territory (Indo-Europeans, Ural-Altai), but they left no written records, so not much is known about their cultures or activities. To the south, Greeks and Iranians, also Indo-Europeans, established settlements, but again little is known about these groups. Between the fourth and ninth centuries C.E. Huns, Goths, Magyars, and Avars passed through the region but with no lasting (or discernible) effect on the East Slavs, who had begun to spread south and east. From the late eighth century to the mid-ninth century merchants from the Middle East and Germanic commercial groups began to move into the regions inhabited by Finns and Slavic tribes, but these latter groups seem to have offered scant resistance to these activities.

In the ninth century Scandinavian traders set up a center near what is now Ryazan, and mention of the first ruler of Rus is found in Western and Islamic writings. This ruler, called a *khagan*, controlled what can be regarded as the beginning of the Kievan state. With other Scandinavian raiders, the Varangians, the Rus moved down the major rivers toward Baghdad and Constantinople. Rurik of Jutland, the head of one of the Scandinavian tribes, founded the dynasty that would rule various regions of East Slavic territory until 1598. Written sources describe Rus raids on Constantinople and the northern Caucasus in the early 10th century.

From 930 to 1000 the Varangians gained control

of the trade route from the Baltic to the Black Sea, creating what became the basis of Kiev's economy and set the pattern for its political and cultural evolution. While the Varangian Rus could not have thought of themselves as "Scandinavians," they were not East Slavs either; yet they played a central role in organizing the land that would come to be named for them.

From its beginning with Prince Svyatoslav (d. 972), the new East Slavic political power was torn between the impulse to centralization and the impossibility of controlling the sprawling territories. In spite of his victories against other Varangian rulers, the Khazars, and the Bulgars, Svyatoslav was not a unifier. That task was left to his son, Vladimir (c. 980–1015), who would establish the political system that would rule the widespread state, and he invited the patriarch of Constantinople to create an Episcopal see in Rus. Vladimir successfully increased his territories, destroyed or assimilated the remaining Varangian clans, and endeavored to establish peaceful relationships with nearby dynasties.

The inherent contradictions between the desire for autonomy, on the one hand, and the need for centralized control and unity on the other, set the stage for what would become the political history of Rus. By the middle of the 12th century, the major territories, because of the prosperity of Kiev, had become autonomous political and economic units. The strands of continuity were everywhere strained, if not broken, in the period following the decline of Kiev. The distinctiveness of the character and historical events of the major East Slavic regions was clear during the Kiev period and persisted into the 20th century.

Following the longest civil war in Russian history, Vasili II (the Blind; 1415–62) became the Grand Prince of Moscow (Muscovy). His son Ivan III (1440–1505), also known as Ivan the Great and the first to call himself "grand duke of all the Russias," succeeded his father after serving with him as co-regent. Sometimes also referred to as the "gatherer of the Russian lands," he sought to unify the various territories and established what would become the Russian autocracy. His son Vasili III continued the effort to unify the vast territory, but it would be his son Ivan IV the Terrible (1530–84), who would succeed. By incorporating all the surrounding areas, including the Kazan and Astrakhan Khanates to the east and parts of Siberia, he created the Russian Empire. He was called Ivan the Terrible because he was considered the most ruthless tyrant of his times. When the last tsar of that dynasty died without leaving an heir, Sweden and Poland claimed the throne. Finally in 1613, 16-year-old Michael Romanov (1596–1645) of the Romanov Dynasty was elected, and the Romanovs ruled Russia for the next four hundred years. During this time, Russia became a major European power. A member of the same dynasty, Peter the Great (1672–1725), who ruled from 1689 until his death, transformed Russia. He wanted to make Russia more modern militarily, economically, and socially. He traveled a lot



Tsar

The word *tsar* (or *czar*) is derived from the Latin *caesar*, which means "emperor." It was the title used for the autocratic rulers of the First and Second Bulgarian Empires starting in 913, for the rulers of Serbia in the middle of the 14th century, and for Russia's rulers from 1547 to 1917.

and learned about European trade, culture, and warfare. Soon Russia was every bit the equal of England, France, and Germany.

When World War I began and Austria declared war on Serbia, Russia went to war to defend the Serbs but was ill prepared for the battle. The ruler Tsar Nicholas II (1868–1918) was not very strong, and the Russian army was defeated. Riots broke out and the Romanovs were overthrown in 1917. Consequently the Bolshevik wing of the Communist Party came to power and formed the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Joseph Stalin (1879–1953) came to power and the Russian Empire strengthened. Under his reign, the USSR fought against Germany in World War II and won. After the war the USSR, United States, Great Britain, and France divided Germany into four zones to be governed by each of the four countries. The USSR's dominance increased, and hostilities between the world's two superpowers, the United States and USSR, continued for the next 45 years. While there was no actual fighting, both sides spent enormous amounts of money “fighting” what is known as the “Cold War.”

On March 11, 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev (b. 1931), a member of the Soviet Communist Party, was elected as the General Secretary of the party. From 1985–88 Gorbachev radically changed the course of the USSR's foreign policy when he introduced the policies of *glasnost* (“political openness”), *perestroika* (“economic restructuring”), and *uskorenie* (“quicken economic development”). In 1990 he was elected president.

However, Gorbachev's policies to create more political openness reawakened long-suppressed nationalist and anti-Russian feelings in the USSR's constituent republics. Toward the end of the 1980s, the process of openness and democratization was beyond control. One by one the Soviet republics declared their sovereignty. In September 1991 the USSR recognized the independence of the three Baltic states—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Ukraine declared its independence from the USSR in December 1991. In the same month the leaders of the Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian Republics issued a declaration that the USSR was dissolved and was to be replaced by the Commonwealth of Independent States.

On December 25, 1991, Mikhail Gorbachev resigned as president of the USSR, and Boris Yeltsin (b. 1931) succeeded him. After the dissolution of the USSR, Russia faced a multitude of problems. The gross domestic product (GDP) of the country fell, and poverty increased. In the early years of the 21st century, however, Russia's economy was stabilizing and the country's GDP is now about one-third of that of the United Kingdom.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Russia, even after the disintegration of the USSR, remains the largest country in the world in terms of

area. The country spans both Europe and Asia, stretching from the Baltic Sea in the west to the Pacific Ocean in the east, and the Arctic Ocean in the north to the Black Sea in the south. Russia shares land boundaries with Norway, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Belarus, Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, China, and North Korea.

The Russian landscape is mostly flat and low lying and consists of plains—a region called Siberia. Most of Siberia lies within Russian territory, but some parts belong to Mongolia. These plains are heavily forested toward the north and remain grassy in the southern parts. The relatively low Ural mountain ranges (the highest point is 6,234 feet) are centrally located, acting as a divide between Europe and Asia. The three main rivers of Russia are the Dnieper, Don, and Volga. To the south Russia has the Caucasus mountain range where Mount Elbrus (18,510 feet), Europe's highest peak, is located. Eastern Russia also has the Verkhoyansk range, and the peninsula of Kamchatka has 160 volcanoes, 29 of which are still active.

The vast expanse of Russia accommodates a great variety of landscapes and climates. Most parts of Russia remain under snow at least six months of the year. The average temperature found across the country is 32°F, and the average is even lower in Siberia. However, the coastal regions are much warmer during the summer months. The climate in Russia can be classified as temperate to Arctic continental.

Forests of pine, spruce, deciduous trees, coniferous forests, steppe grasslands, and even deserts are to be found in Russia. Animals, such as snow leopards, cheetahs, porcupines, gazelles, wild goats, chamois, reindeer, wolves, brown bears, deer, lynx, and the Siberian tiger are also found here. Currently the flora and fauna of Russia are endangered due to poaching, pollution, and fur hunters, but efforts are under way to preserve the remaining wildlife. There are over 140 state nature reserves and several breeding programs to ensure the continued welfare of animal species in Russia.

❁ ECONOMY

Even though Russians cultivate food grains, sugar beets, sunflower seeds, vegetables, fruits, and obtain beef and milk from livestock, agriculture is not a major contributor to the economy. Russian soil is unsuitable for extensive agriculture (only 10 percent of the land is arable) and, as a result, the major GDP contributors are industries and services. Tourism has emerged as an important source of foreign exchange.

Fun Fact

Three weeks after being crowned Russia's first tsar at the age of 17, Ivan IV—known in history as Ivan the Terrible—married, having chosen his bride from among virgins over the age of 12 paraded before him in the Kremlin.

Fun Fact

Leo Tolstoy's novels *War and Peace* (1865–69) and *Anna Karenina* (1877) have both been made into successful films.

The major industries of Russia include mining and coal production, oil, gas, chemicals, metals, machine building, aircraft, space vehicles, shipbuilding, road and rail transportation equipment, communications equipment, agricultural machinery, electric power generating and transmitting equipment, medical and scientific instruments, consumer durables, textiles, foodstuffs, and handicrafts.

Russia is rich in minerals and natural resources. Deposits of oil, natural gas, coal, minerals, and stands of timber are abundant. The country also enjoys good trade relations with Germany, Italy, Netherlands, China, United States, Ukraine, Belarus, Switzerland, Kazakhstan, and France. Russia exports petroleum and petroleum products, natural gas, wood, metals, chemicals, and civilian and military goods. The major imports are machinery and equipment, consumer goods, medicines, meat, sugar, and metal products.

The Russian economy suffered major setbacks after the disintegration of the USSR in 1991. The country is now working to reduce the unemployment rate and the economic disparity seen among various regions in Russia itself. Moscow is the hub of economic activity, while there are some regions in Asian Russia that are very backward and underdeveloped.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Russia's different ethnic groups together form a rich cultural background for the country. The Orthodox Church, along with the Soviet regime, influenced Russian art forms in many ways. Russia has enjoyed rich cultural growth and development for a major part of its turbulent history. The Soviet regime undoubtedly stifled freedom in various fields such as literature, music, religion, and other media of expression. In spite of that, there emerged a new Soviet-characterized style in all these fields.

Russian literature has produced famous writers (some of whom won Nobel prizes for literature)

including Alexander Pushkin (1779–1837), Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–81), Ivan Turgenev (1818–83), Anton Chekhov (1860–1904), Nikolay Gogol (1809–52), and Maxim Gorky (1868–1936) during different periods in Russian history. Apart from these contributions, some world-famous fairy tales, like *The Frog Princess*, are of Russian origin.

Russian music was tightly monitored during the Soviet era. However, Russian folk, rock, and pop music survived the regime and have now become the most popular musical forms. The 200-year-old Moscow State Circus and the unique Russian Bolshoi Ballet have all contributed to Russian culture.

When one thinks of Russian architecture, the onion-shaped domes familiar from the Kremlin come to mind. The architecture found in this country has been predominantly religious in nature, with churches having Greek crosses and huge domes. After the dissolution of the USSR there has been a renewed interest in restoring ancient and traditional Russian art forms that are visible in these buildings. The traditional art form of iconography originated here during the medieval period. These were paintings of religious images, often with favored saints shown in the presence of God. This practice, frowned upon by Catholics as a form of idolatry, is very popular in the Russian Orthodox Church.

Russians are known for their technological prowess, especially in the field of aeronautics and space research. The Russians launched *Sputnik*, the first artificial satellite. The first human to go into space was the Russian Yuri Gagarin (1934–68) and the first woman to go into space was Valentina Tereshkova (b. 1937).

CUISINE

Russian cuisine consists of a wide variety of soups, fish, cereal, and drinks. Vegetables, meats, fruits, mushrooms, berries, and herbs are used in Russian cooking. Russia is a country with very cold winters so the foods consumed there are rich in carbohydrates and fat rather than proteins. Fresh fruits and vegetables are rarely used in cooking. Russian products, such as caviar, buckwheat, and rye flour are widely used in international cuisine.

The main meal is normally eaten at dinnertime and may include beef, chicken, fish, or vegetables. Russians also enjoy a variety of soups during different meals. They have some national soups like *shchi* (cabbage soup), *oocha* (fish soup), *rassolnik* (kidney and pickle soup), *botvinya* (cold soup made from beetroot leaves and spinach), and *okrosbka* (cold vegetable soup).

Russian beverages such as vodka or *mors* (a berry drink) are popular even among non-Russians. The beer found in Russian areas is relatively stronger than in most of the European countries. Russians also consume large amounts of coffee and tea.

Caviar

Caviar is the processed, salted roe (eggs) of various species of fish, but primarily sturgeon. This delicacy is marketed all over the world as a favorite garnish on hors d'oeuvres. Caviar is often highly priced and is associated with haute cuisine. The world's best caviar comes from the Russian coastal regions. The word caviar comes from the Persian word *khag-avar*, which means "roe-generator," to denote the fish as well as its roe. Vegetarian caviar, a soy-based delicacy, is marketed for the vegetarian gourmet market.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 2

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar and is celebrated as New Year's Day all over the world. Celebrations begin on December 31 (New Year's Eve) and continue through January 2. In Russia the New Year's celebrations have largely replaced Christmas as the major holiday of the season. On New Year's Eve people decorate fir trees, called *yolka*, and place gifts for family and friends under them. It is a time spent rejoicing with family members. Russian children receive presents from Grandfather Frost (Dyed Moroz, the Russian equivalent of Santa Claus) and the Snow Maiden (Snyegurochka), and take part in special functions in their schools.

Russians also cook a special meal to celebrate the New Year; it includes smoked fish, caviar, roasted meats, and other goodies. Many cakes and other sweets are served, but two of the very special cakes are *babka*, a round yeast cake, and *kulich*, a fancy three-tiered fruit bread. (The three layers symbolize the Christian Trinity.) A lot of liquid refreshment is served as well.

Muscovites listen to the bells chime in Red Square and wait for the country's main clock in the Kremlin to strike midnight. Then they drink champagne, greet each other, and make personal resolutions. The second day after New Year's is also a public holiday, and schools and workplaces are closed.

❁ OLD NEW YEAR'S DAY

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: January 13

Even though the term "Old New Year" sounds like an oxymoron, the Russians are only too glad to celebrate New Year's twice a year. This day was the beginning of the new year according to the Julian calendar, which was followed in Russia until February 1918. This is not an official holiday in Russia anymore, but festivities are held all across the country. It is a day set aside for family, and most Russians stay at home.

❁ DEFENDER OF THE MOTHERLAND DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 23

This day was declared a public holiday only in 2001. During the Soviet era, February 23 was known as the Day of the Soviet Army and Navy.

Now it is called the Defender of the Motherland Day. This is usually a day off from work. It is treated as the male equivalent of International Women's Day in Russia, and women present men with flowers and gifts.

❁ INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 8

International Women's Day (IWD), observed annually on March 8, is an important day of global celebration for the economic, political, and social achievements of women. The proposal to have a special day on which to recognize women and their many achievements was first suggested at the turn of the 20th century, when rapid industrialization and economic expansion led to workers' protests over dangerous working conditions. Women who worked in clothing and textile factories had held a demonstration on March 8, 1857, in New York City, protesting what they saw as very poor working conditions and low wages.

The first IWD was observed on February 28, 1909, in the United States, following a declaration by the Socialist Party of America.

International Women's Day was declared the following year at the first international women's conference in Copenhagen, organized by the Socialist International. On March 25, 1911, the infamous Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York City killed over 140 women. A lack of safety measures was blamed for the high death toll. In the West, International Women's Day was observed during the 1910s and 1920s and then lapsed into obscurity until the second wave of feminism revived it in the 1960s. In 1975 the United Nations began sponsoring International Women's Day.

On this day in Russia, men present women with gifts and flowers. Traditionally the men take over all domestic tasks and give the women a day off from chores. This day is also considered and celebrated as the advent of spring in Russia.

See also Volume III: SPRING FESTIVALS

Fun Fact

Santa Claus was the name given to St. Nicholas (c. 270–345/352), a real person born in Asia Minor at the Greco-Roman city of Myra in the province of Lycia (now in Turkey), when the entire culture of the region was Greek. St. Nicholas was the patron saint of Russia. When the Soviet government suppressed religious observances, St. Nicholas was replaced by Dyed Moroz, or Grandfather Frost, the Russian spirit of winter who brought gifts on New Year's.

✿ LABOR DAY

Celebrated by: General Public
Observed on: May 1–2

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. The earliest origins of May Day celebrations are ascribed to pagan rituals that were practiced by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages, and this is one of the reasons the day is also called Spring and Labor Holiday in Russia. The radical politics underlying the observance, however, go back to 1889, when the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, designated May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

In Russia Labor Day celebrations last for two days, when the traditions of "making *subbotnik*" are observed; people wash, clean, and place everything in order. This activity is often done in small groups at the workplace or in schools and back yards. On these days there are festive parades through Moscow's Red Square and St. Petersburg's Palace Square. May 1 was known as Day of the International Solidarity of Workers during the Soviet regime, and Communist demonstrations were held on Russian streets on this day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

✿ VICTORY DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 9

Victory Day commemorates the defeat of German Fascists by the Soviet allies during World War II, which ended in 1945. This is one of the most celebrated national holidays in Russia. People go to see military parades and other demonstrations. War veterans visit the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and honor their fallen comrades. The national media broadcast patriotic programs and songs. War memorial services are held in places such as the Piskaryovskoye Cemetery in St. Petersburg. There are numerous concerts, fireworks displays, and other entertainments in city parks. Russia wears a patriotic look with banners everywhere that salute the soldiers. On this day all Russian schools and offices are closed.

Fun Fact

Orthodox Christians call the pre-Christmas fast "Lesser Lent" to distinguish it from the more important fast that precedes Easter, called "Great Lent."

✿ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 12

Independence Day marks the anniversary of the end of the Soviet era in Russia. On this day in 1993 the first president of the new Russia was elected, subsequently ending the "Iron Curtain" policy of Soviet Russia. This is a recently declared national holiday, and not all Russians have welcomed the move. This holiday also commemorates the adoption of the Declaration of Sovereignty of the Russian Federation in 1991.

People may get to see a few demonstrations on this day in Russia, but generally this public holiday is a quiet affair.

✿ ACCORD AND RECONCILIATION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 7

This day is celebrated in memory of the October Revolution that took place in 1917. The October Revolution was the second phase in the Russian Revolution that occurred the same year. It is also known as the Bolshevik Revolution. According to the Gregorian calendar, this revolution took place on October 25. This holiday has been renamed and celebrated as the Day of Accord and Reconciliation. Russians conduct parades on this day.

✿ CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 12

Constitution Day commemorates the day in 1993 when Russians chose to be a democratic state.

Religious Holidays

✿ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: January 7

Christmas, called Sochelnik in Russia, is a day of celebration for Christians all over the world and marks the birth of Jesus. As in most other Orthodox Christian countries Christmas in Russia is celebrated on January 7 to conform to the Julian calendar and not December 25, the official holiday of the Gregorian, or Western, calendar. Following the 1917 revolution, Christmas was banned in Russia, along with other religious celebrations. It was not until 75 years later in 1992 that the holiday was openly observed again. It is once again celebrated, with the faithful attending an all-night liturgy. However, Christmas is a quiet

affair, unlike the Russian New Year, which is a much bigger event and is celebrated all across the country.

In Russia Christmas celebrations begin on Christmas Eve (January 6), when Orthodox Christians break a 39-day-long fast with a 12-course dinner, each course in honor of an Apostle of Jesus. The fast for Christmas continues until someone spots the first evening star on Christmas Eve. The 12 courses include: mushroom soup (or sauerkraut soup) with *zaprashka* (a brown sauce); a Lenten bread (*pagach*); grated garlic; a bowl of honey; baked cod; fresh apricots, oranges, figs, and dates; nuts; kidney beans with shredded potatoes seasoned with lots of garlic; peas; parsley potatoes; *bobalki* (small biscuits combined with sauerkraut or poppy seed with honey); and a lot of red wine. Russians make a traditional dish called *kutya* on this day; it is a porridge of various grains, honey, and poppy seeds.

One of the many ceremonies associated with the Christmas Eve is called Kolyadki. During this ceremony people wish each other wealth and happiness. Like many other Russian celebrations, this is a pagan ritual that has been assimilated and continued as a Christmas activity. People used to pray to the ancient solar goddess Kolyada to make the days grow longer.

As a part of the ceremony people make a snow lady, called Lady Kolyada, with a carrot nose, prunes for eyes, and green beans for teeth. It is believed that Lady Kolyada joins groups of people carrying decorated stars, to visit and greet people during this season. People sing and dance around the snow lady with torches of fire and push a festive wheel. Children also dress up as animals usually shown as part of Christmas nativity scenes (sheep, cattle, and donkeys), sing Christmas carols, and pray to Baby Jesus.

Families also attend church and offer prayers in a special liturgy before Christmas.

On Christmas Day the festivities continue with church services, followed by dining on special Christmas delicacies, such as fish, borscht, cabbage stuffed with millet, and cooked dried fruit. People sing carols and gather around the Christmas tree to exchange gifts on this day. Children open gifts that they have received from St. Nicholas. Russian families gather at lunch or dinner to celebrate Christmas with a special meal that usually features a roasted goose and pork dishes.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS; LENT

❁ ST. TATIANA DAY

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: January 25

St. Tatiana Day, also called Students' Day or Tatiana's Fête, commemorates the feast of St. Tatiana, who lived in Rome from 223–35. She practiced Christianity at a time when the Romans were persecuting Christians. As a result, she and her fam-

Babushka

Babushka is a traditional Russian Christmas figure who distributes presents to children. The word *babushka* means "grandmother" in Russian. According to legend Babushka refused to accompany the Three Wise Men to see the baby Jesus because the weather was too cold. However, she soon changed her mind, filled her basket with gifts for the baby, and tried to catch up with the Three Wise Men. But Babushka never found her way to the baby and so, to this day, she visits Russian homes, leaving toys for good children.

ily were tortured and put to death by the Roman emperor Alexander Severus. The Russians honor and pray for St. Tatiana on this day. This is also seen as the beginning of the winter holidays in Russia. The students of Russia have another special reason to celebrate this day. In 1775 on this day, the Empress Elizabeth signed a decree to establish Moscow University. Russian students rarely get to celebrate New Year's Day because they are busy preparing for exams. On Students' Day they make up for that loss by partying and having fun.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ BLINI DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: One day before the beginning of Lent

Blini Day, or Maslyanitsa (Butter Festival), is the eve of Lent, and Russians celebrate this day by eating special pancakes served with honey, fresh cream, and caviar. Some people celebrate the occasion by breaking holes in frozen lakes and rivers and swimming in the icy water. There is a traditional Russian carnival held on this day and the week preceding it. This day is celebrated by wearing masks and costumes, dances, songs, children's events, as well as by consuming hot tea and pancakes, generally served outdoors.

Blini Day has a pagan origin. Long ago, Russians celebrated the arrival of spring on this day. They burned a scarecrow to signify the end of a harsh winter. People made round yellow pancakes that resemble the Sun, in the Sun's honor. When Russians embraced Christianity, they modified this festival and began celebrating both the beginning of Lent and the end of winter simultaneously. On this day all food items that are to be avoided during Lent (namely butter, cheese, cream, and meat) are eaten. These practices have given the celebration other names—Pancake Week and Cheese Week; in French-speaking countries the day is known as Mardi Gras, and in English-speaking countries it is known as Fat Tuesday or Shrove Tuesday.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

HOLY WEEK

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: March

In the Eastern Orthodox Church, as in other Christian sects, Easter is the central observance of the liturgical year, and the date of most church holidays is determined by the date on which Easter falls. Easter is the feast of feasts. Although every Sunday in the Eastern Orthodox Church is dedicated to Jesus' Resurrection, 100 more days are dedicated specifically to the events of Easter—50 before it in preparation, and 50 after it for glorifying Christ. The 50 days prior to Easter are a part of the period of Triodion, the period for strengthening one's faith. The means are well known: repentance, prayer, and self-control. The 50 days following Easter are the Pentecostarion (from the Greek *pentikonta*, meaning fifty).

Holy Week begins with the phrase: "Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany." His arrival coincided with the Jewish Passover (Pesach). The church relates preparation and redemption to the events of this week.

In Russia the observances of Holy Week begin on the Saturday Morning of St. Lazarus, the day before Palm Sunday. On this day the raising from the dead of St. Lazarus, the friend of Jesus, is celebrated.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY; PESACH

PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Last Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday remembers Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, amid throngs of palm-bearing devotees.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

HOLY MONDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Monday before Easter

On Holy Monday, the faithful remember how Jesus cursed a fig tree that had leaves and no fruit—a reminder of the holiness of outward piety.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

HOLY TUESDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Tuesday before Easter

Tuesday of Holy Week (often observed in advance on Monday evening) commemorates the parable of

the Ten Virgins. Ethical preparation and wakefulness are the foundations of vivid faith.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

HOLY WEDNESDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Wednesday before Easter

Holy Wednesday commemorates the anointing of Jesus with myrrh at the house of Simon the leper.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Thursday before Easter

Maundy Thursday celebrates: the washing of the disciples' feet; the institution of the Holy Eucharist; the marvelous prayer; and Judas's betrayal of Jesus.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday celebrates Jesus' Passion on the Cross. According to Christian belief, to take away sins he willingly endured the Cross and death. The confession from the cross of the penitent thief, crucified with Jesus, is celebrated. During the procession, the faithful kneel and pray for their spiritual welfare, then reverently kiss the crucifix.

During Good Friday services the removal of Jesus' body from the Cross is commemorated with a sense of mourning for the terrible events that occurred. As the priest reads the Gospel, he removes Jesus' body from the cross, wraps it in a white cloth, and takes it to the altar. The priest then carries the cloth on which the body of Jesus is painted or embroidered around the church before placing it inside the sepulcher, a carved bier that symbolizes the tomb, reminding the faithful that during Jesus' entombment he descended into Hades to free the dead of the ages.

After several hymns are sung, the priest sprinkles the sepulcher and the whole congregation with fragrant water.

Christians observe Good Friday with fasting, prayer, cleanliness, self-examination, confession, and good works, in humility and repentance. Psalms are read and Resurrection hymns are sung that tell of Jesus' descent into Hades. Most of the readings of this day are from the Old Testament. On this day the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil is officiated.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

Fun Fact

The western Siberian plain is the largest plain on earth.

Easter Eggs

Russian Easter eggs are red because this was the color of the blood Jesus shed for his people. It is also believed that when Mary Magdalene visited Emperor Tiberius, she handed him a red egg and proclaimed, "Christ has risen!"

Russian Easter eggs are dyed red by boiling eggs with onion skins. Onion peels are gathered for this purpose in the weeks that precede Easter. Depending on the color of the peels, Easter eggs can be bright red or dark brown. These eggs are used for different Easter games. In one such game, one per-

son holds an Easter egg firmly in his or her hand, while others try to crack it by hitting it with their Easter eggs. Whoever eventually has an unbroken Easter egg emerges as the winner.

There are special Easter eggs known as *pysanky* in Russia. These masterpieces are impressively painted and decorated with jewels and stones and are often kept for public display. Some of the most famous Easter eggs were made by court jeweler and artist Peter Karl Fabergé (1846–1920), who was commissioned in 1884 by Tsar Alexander III (1845–94) to make a special Easter present for the tsar's wife.

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Called Pashka in Russia, Easter celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Christian savior. The Russian Easter tradition includes baking a cake the night before and giving children red-painted eggs, symbolizing the blood of the Jesus and eternal life.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

RED HILL DAY

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Easter

Red Hill Day, known in Russian as Krasnaya Gorka, is celebrated on the first Sunday after Easter to welcome the advent of spring. Russians consider this day to be ideal for weddings. On this day, people gather at St. Petersburg to sing Easter songs, play Easter games, and take part in other traditional Russian festivities. In the past people welcomed spring during this holiday, as if "inviting" it to their lands. The appearance of the first green leaves on the trees after winter was usually celebrated by singing and dancing around the trees.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; SPRING FESTIVALS

FEAST OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: July 7

In Russia this day is known as the Day of Ivan Kupala. Ivan Kupala is the Russian name for John the Baptist. It is associated with St. Andrew as well. It is a holiday that has its roots in pagan times with the celebration of the summer solstice, the longest

day of the year. (The winter solstice, when the longest night of the year is celebrated, is called Korochun.) Originally a time when pagan fertility rites were observed, it has been adopted into the Orthodox Christian calendar.

It was believed that on this day the Sun was forced to sink, and a young girl helped the Sun rise again by washing it with the dew collected from



The Russian Orthodox Patriarch holds a candle during a Russian Orthodox Easter service in Moscow Cathedral. (AP Photo/Alexander Zemlianichenko)

Fun Fact

St. John's Night on the Bald Mountain, Modest Mussorgsky's (1839–81) first orchestral work, was inspired by Gogol's (1809–52) short story about a peasant who sees a witches' sabbath on the Bald Mountain near Kiev on St. John's Eve. In Russian, *Ivanova noch' na Lisoy gore*, this work is commonly known as *Night on Bald Mountain*.

grass. This water was believed to have cleansing powers. For this reason, this festival is connected with water and herbs in many ways.

On this day, youngsters collect plants and herbs that are believed to have curative powers, such as *medvezhye ushko* ("bear's ear"), *bogatenka* ("rich people's grass"), and *razryv-trava* ("love-break-grass"). These herbs are then put under the pillows of people who are ill. During earlier times young boys and girls would swim in the river late at night and jump over bonfires in pairs. If after the jump

they were still holding hands, it was considered a good sign, indicating the couple would marry soon.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fifty days after Easter

The Russian celebration of Pentecost is known as Troitsa (the Holy Trinity) and is widely celebrated. On this day people decorate their houses with green branches. In the past they clothed birch trees like maidens and sang and danced around them. They also made garlands of birch branches and flowers that had been immersed in water and used them for fortune-telling.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; PENTECOST

Regional Holidays

MOSCOW'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed in: Moscow

Observed on: September 19

Moscow, the Russian capital, is more than 850 years old. It is the administrative hub of the country as well as the center of the Orthodox Church. On Moscow's Day, or Day of the City, the city celebrates its birthday with a series of patriotic events and other official ceremonies. The Russian president and other administrative officials take part in the festivities. The national television and radio channels broadcast special programs on this day. The streets are colorfully decorated, and there are parades held on the streets of Moscow. Music, street performances, and dances are the highlights of this day.

FESTIVAL OF THE NORTH

Observed in: Kola Peninsula

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Late March or early April

The Festival of the North is an annual event that has been held in the Kola Peninsular region of Russia since 1934. The largest celebrations take place in the city of Murmansk, the capital of the beautiful but isolated Kola region. (Murmansk is the largest city in the world north of the Arctic Circle!) This event, which lasts 10 days, celebrates the end of "polar nights," the time when the Sun does not shine at all, which is most of December and January.

Sporting events such as ice hockey, skiing, and reindeer racing take place during this time. Some people go for a swim in the icy waters of Lake Semyonovskaya. During this festival the ethnic Sami people hold reindeer contests, celebrate with singing, dancing, drinking, and feasting. They celebrate their culture because it has survived adverse conditions for thousands of years.

DAY OF MEMORY AND GRIEF

Observed in: Khabarovsk

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 22

This day is marked to commemorate the events that occurred in Khabarovsk in 1941 during World War II. The Japanese Imperial Army invaded Khabarovsk but soon met with resistance from the Russians. Some claim that the Japanese army used biological weapons in Khabarovsk during this war. In any event, the severe weather conditions made fighting difficult anyway, and many soldiers from both sides perished in the war.

On this day the administrators of the territory of Khabarovsk and war veterans lay garlands at the Eternal Flame in Slava (Glory) Square. The guards of honor salute the dead, while everyone observes a moment of silence. Meetings of veterans are held with the youth at the city's schools.

Rites of Passage

BIRTH

Even though Russians may not follow this ritual today, the *bania* (sauna) birth is worth mentioning. Russians, like the inhabitants of the frigid Scandinavian countries, considered sweat baths to be a cleansing ritual, and elaborate arrangements for steam saunas were made in Russian households. Since these places were considered the most hygienic place in the house, women often gave birth inside *banias*. The midwife assisted the mother during the process, while also trying to protect her from evil spirits.

After the birth occurred, both the mother and child were lightly beaten with birch twigs to purify them.

❁ MARRIAGE

Russian couples have two wedding ceremonies: civil and religious. The church wedding is not considered legal or official even today. However, if a couple lives together for two consecutive years, they are considered legally married. The civil wedding is barely attended by any relatives or friends, but the church wedding is a big affair. The Russian Orthodox Church has its own set of unique rituals and traditions. The rings and the couple are blessed by the priest. They couple then walk around a table on which the Bible and a crucifix have been placed. Next the couple are crowned as king and queen of their domestic kingdom. They drink wine from a common cup during the ceremony to symbolize unity and the sharing of joys and sorrows.

After the ceremony the guests throw coins on the couple to wish them unbounded wealth and fortune in their life together. The couple then takes a small tour around the city visiting historic sites and laying flowers at the Grave of the Unknown Soldier. When they return to the banquet hall, a feast is held in their honor. Food, drinks, dancing, singing, and toasting are a part of all Russian wedding parties. Some feasts are known to go on for two days.

❁ DEATH

When a Russian dies, the body is placed in an open casket and kept in a funeral home for the mourners to grieve. The mourners wear dark clothes and bring an even number of flowers for the dead. No one in Russia gives an even number of flowers to their loved ones, unless that person is dead. After the funeral service, the family members have a memorial dinner or a “mercy meal” in the honor of the deceased. If the deceased leaves behind a widow, she wears black for two years.

Further Reading

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~ Rwanda ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Central Africa, bordered by Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire), Burundi, and Tanzania
Size	10,169 sq. mi.
Capital City	Kigali
Flag Description	Rwanda's flag has three horizontal bands: sky blue (top, double width), yellow, and green. There is a golden sun with 24 rays drawn on the fly end of the blue band.
Independence	July 1, 1962 (from Belgium-administered UN trusteeship)
Population	8,440,820 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic (presidential, multiparty system)
Nationality	Rwandese
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Hutu (84%); Tutsi (15%)
Major Language(s)	Kinyarwanda (universal Bantu vernacular; official), French (official); English (official); Kiswahili (Swahili, used in commercial centers)
Major Religion(s)	Christian (65%); tribal religions (25%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; National Mourning Day, April 7; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day, July 1; Liberation Day, July 4; Kamarampaka Day, September 25

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The Twa forest people inhabited the area called Rwanda starting in the 11th century; they were followed by the Hutu and then by the Tutsi, who came to rule over the majority Hutu in the 16th century. The Tutsi rule was authoritarian and feudalistic. The *mwami*, or king, dominated the Hutus totally, even deciding their land rights—an important source of power in those days.

Living conditions in Rwanda remained fairly constant until the arrival of European colonizers in the 19th century. First the Germans took over Rwanda and Burundi. Following Germany's defeat in World War I, the Rwandan state came under the control of Belgium and was called Ruanda-Urundi, an area that included Burundi. The new colonial rulers supported the Tutsi desire for power until the Hutu began rebelling against their exploitation at the hands of the Tutsi in the 1950s. In 1959 Tutsi massacred Hutu leaders, and the

Hutu retaliated with an uprising, killing about 100,000 Tutsi. Rwanda's official independence from Belgium was recognized under the majority Hutu leadership on July 1, 1962.

In 1972 the Hutu began the wholesale slaughter of the Tutsi ruling minority in the neighboring state of Burundi. In the aftermath of the uprising in neighboring Burundi, the Rwandan prime minister was ousted by his army chief Maj. Gen. Juvenal Habyarimana (1937–94). There were more massacres of Tutsi in the 1970s, but nothing like what the country would experience beginning in 1990, when the country was ripped apart by a new wave of ethnic violence. The immediate cause was a slump in the economy due to prolonged bad weather conditions and acute food shortages. The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a rebel group of exiled Rwandan Tutsi, who had been driven out of the country after earlier ethnic conflicts and were led by now-President Paul Kagame (b. 1957), came out in open warfare against the Hutu of Rwanda in October 1990.

The RPF was an organized group made up largely of Tutsi, many of whom had been exiled for more than 30 years. The Hutu retaliated, and what followed was the worst human

rights situation since 1945 (when World War II ended). More than one million Tutsi and a smaller number of Hutu were killed. This tragedy is said to have been the brainchild of Hutu extremists in the government and the army, with the killings carried out by Rwandan soldiers and Hutu gangs. The killing subsided only when the UN Security Council sent international troops into Rwanda. By 1994 the RPF had taken control of the country by force and nearly two million Rwandan Hutu, fearing reprisals, fled the country. In 1994 a National Unity government was installed by the RPF to deal with the problems of ethnic violence and the millions of refugees in the border camps.

Rwanda has been called the “land of a thousand graves” because of the innumerable deaths caused by ethnic conflict. As of the early 21st century, the International Criminal Tribunal (based in Tanzania) was still bringing the perpetrators of the violence to justice while trying to relocate refugees and reestablish the Rwandan economy. Parliamentary elections were held in 2003, with Paul Kagame of the RPF winning a 95 percent majority. Meanwhile extremist Hutu insurgents across the border in the Democratic Republic of Congo, who are committed to retaking Rwanda, continue to destabilize the entire region.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Rwanda is also known as the “land of a thousand hills.” It is a landlocked country surrounded by Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire), Burundi, and Tanzania. The Rwandan terrain is essentially hilly and mountainous, with the altitude decreasing from west to east. The country is situated at the western edge of the upheaval-prone Great Rift Valley, and the volcanic Virunga range is situated in its northwest. The highest peak is the snowcapped Mt. Karisimbi (14,869 feet).

Most of the population inhabits the grassland areas of the central highlands, the riversides, and swamps on the eastern side of Rwanda. The population density in Rwanda is one of the highest in Africa; deforestation and excessive farming are significant problems. Lake Kivu, 4,700 feet above sea level, provides half of the country’s water resources; the river systems of the Nile and the Congo pass through the country.

Due to its altitude, Rwanda has a temperate climate despite its proximity to the equator. The average temperature ranges between 64 and 84°F, with intensive rainfall from mid-March to mid-May. The rain forests around the mountains of the northeast get more rainfall than the rest of Rwanda. Snowfall is found on the mountain peaks.

❁ ECONOMY

Rwanda is a war-torn country with ongoing internal ethnic conflict. The economy is supported by agriculture, which accounts for 40 to 50 percent of gross

domestic product (GDP). The industrial sector is small, contributing 17 percent of GDP. It is based on the processing of agricultural products. Tea and coffee account for nearly 90 percent of Rwanda’s exports.

Food shortages became acute during the ethnic violence of the 1990s, since most people got uprooted from their homes. Farming, primarily of the subsistence kind, became impossible in the perpetual warring conditions. As a result food items now constitute Rwanda’s main imports, and residents are almost entirely dependent on foreign aid. The main problems facing the economy include: the absence of an effective infrastructure; the lack of necessary cash crops; wide-scale looting; and poor health conditions. In 1990 the World Bank initiated a structural adjustment program for Rwanda, and the government is trying hard to rehabilitate and stabilize the economy.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Rwanda is populated by three tribes: the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa. The Tutsi, who are nomadic herders, became Rwanda’s rulers in the 16th century. Since then, and with the support of the Belgian colonial authorities in the 20th century, they have practiced ongoing discrimination against the majority Hutus. What has resulted is continual ethnic strife between the two groups.

Kinyarwanda, only spoken in this part of Africa, is their common language. French and English vie for second place. Swahili is also spoken in parts of the countryside. Due to the influx of colonists and missionaries in the 1900s, Christianity became the

Fun Fact

Before becoming known to the outside world for the 1994 Rwandan genocide, when up to one million people died, Rwanda was best known to the outside world as the home of mountain gorillas.

1994 Genocide

It was on April 6, 1994, that the Hutu Rwandan president Juvenal Habyarimana was killed when his plane was shot down at Kigali airport. This sparked a rampage of indiscriminate killings of Tutsi and moderate Hutu by the extremist Hutu militias. The United Nations, France, and the United States were criticized internationally for not being able to prevent or stop the genocide in spite of having substantial information regarding the horrors being committed. The Tutsi Rwandese Patriotic Army ended the genocide by seizing power while hundreds of thousands of people fled Rwanda to escape death and destruction. A National Day of Mourning is observed each year in Rwanda on April 7.

Comparing the Hutu and the Tutsi

Both the Hutu and the Tutsi belong to a common Bantu-speaking group. Hutu tend to be bigger in size, both in height and build, than the Twa, but smaller than the Tutsi. Around 80 percent of the people of Rwanda are Hutu. The Hutu are responsible for converting the Virunga forests into farms and pastures. Work gets equally divided between men and women among Hutu, and the hardworking ones are prized within the group.

The Tutsi account for between 9 and 14 percent of the Rwandan population. They tend to be physically bigger than both the Hutu and the Twa of Rwanda. They are also generally fairer and thinner in

build compared to the Hutu. These physical stereotypes, however, proved deadly during the 1994 genocide and other occasions of ethnic violence when hundreds of people perished because of mistaken ethnic identity.

The Tutsi herd cattle and emphasize power and control, which stems from their traditional monarchical order. As soon as they arrived in the Virunga forest region, they subjugated the Hutu and formed small kingdoms. In fact their influence has been so strong that the tradition of owning cattle remains a status symbol, even though the Hutu overthrew their Tutsi rulers some time ago.

religion of a majority of Rwandans. About 25 percent, however, still follow their traditional religious beliefs, and 10 percent are followers of Islam.

The traditional local festivals and celebrations are enriched by music and art with seven- to nine-drum bands a ubiquitous presence. Ikinimba is the most distinctive dance form of Rwanda. It is a courtship dance ritual in which men (unmarried or married) and women (unmarried) participate. Another dance for men only is the *intore* (which means “chosen”). This dance is performed with warlike movements to the accompaniment of drums. In earlier days Rwanda’s best dancers were selected to perform this dance for the kings in the royal courts. The dance movements tell the stories of kings and Rwandan heroes. They are accompanied by drums and instruments such as the *inanga*, a stringed instrument similar to a violin.

Rwandans have different songs for different occasions: hunting songs, humorous songs, and songs touching various other aspects of life. Despite the intense ethnic violence of the 1900s, Rwanda has produced a number of musicians known nationally and internationally. It also has several famous rock bands.

There are many traditional arts and handicrafts made in Rwanda; these include ceramic baskets, sculptures, and paintings.

Rwanda is a source country for children trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. In addition, some children of Rwandan background have been trafficked over the past decade for forced labor and child soldiering within Democratic Republic of the Congo (D.R.C.). In the mid-1990s, many Rwandan children living in refugee camps in D.R.C. became separated from their

families after these camps were destroyed. Some of these children, surviving on their own in conflict-prone, militia-controlled territories, fell prey to recruitment, both forcible and voluntary, by various armed rebel groups. Over 200 former child soldiers have been returned to Rwanda from D.R.C. and demobilized; the government expects more to be repatriated in the future.

❁ CUISINE

The diet of the Rwandans is composed of locally grown grains, vegetables, and fruits, though with farming interrupted by the ethnic violence many Rwandans must rely on foreign aid. Beans, corn, sweet potatoes, peas, millet, and fruits are favorite foods. Whereas urban Rwandans enjoy tea (with lots of milk and sugar) and bread for breakfast, rural Rwandans eat porridge (made of corn, sorghum, or millet mixed with milk) with sweet potatoes for breakfast. The bigger meals of the day are served with bananas, sweet potatoes, beans, and cassava. Dishes such as *umutsima* (corn and cassava), *isombeo* (eggplant and spinach with cassava leaves), and *mizuzu* (fried plantains) are commonly prepared. Dinner is the largest meal.

Snacks are common between meals. These include fruits such as bananas, mangoes, avocados, and papayas. Street vendors sell barbecued meat and roasted corn. Urban residents consume more beef and chicken. In the rural communities, possessing cattle is a status symbol; so slaughtering them for food is uncommon. As a result, rural children tend to suffer protein deficiencies.

Although there is a big commercial brewery in Rwanda, Rwandan men drink homemade brew. They prepare *ikigage*, a beer made from dry sorghum and *urwarwa* (plantains). It is traditionally sipped from a single large container using a straw. Among some Rwandans, flavored beers such as *primus* and *mulzig* are also popular.

Fun Fact

Cassava can survive droughts and poor soil. It has big tuberous roots and can be left in the ground for four years before being harvested. Once it comes out of the soil, however, it should be consumed immediately.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 1

The first day of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day all over the world. The new year is symbolic of hope for a better and prosperous future. On New Year's Eve, Rwandans enjoy singing, dancing, and feasting to welcome in the new year.

❁ NATIONAL MOURNING DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 7

On National Mourning Day, also known as Democracy Day and Genocide Remembrance Day, thousands of Rwandans gather in the national stadium in the capital of Kigali to remember the 800,000 Rwandans who died in the genocide of 1994. The ceremony begins by singing the national anthem and then observing three minutes of silence. The president lights a torch and places garlands on 20 coffins that contain the remains of the victims of genocide (obtained from digging up mass graves). Most offices and shops are closed on this day.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

The May 1 observance of Labor Day, also called May Day or Workers' Day, was created in 1889 by the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, which designated May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor, demanding an eight-hour workday.

In Rwanda all government offices and educational institutions are closed on Labor Day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 1

On this date in 1962 Rwanda won its freedom from Belgian control. Prior to independence there had been widespread ethnic tensions between the Tutsi Union Nationale Rwandaise (UNAR) and the Hutu Party for the Emancipation of the Hutu People (PARMEHUTU). The Belgians had helped nurture

the PARMEHUTU as an alternative to the Tutsi elite, who were increasingly demanding freedom from Belgium. By late 1961, however, the Hutu had turned against Belgium, declared Rwanda a republic, and destroyed the Tutsi monarchy. There was widespread rejoicing in Rwanda, especially among the Hutu, when on July 1, 1962, Belgium bowed to the mounting popular calls for freedom and granted the country its independence. This day is also called National Day.

❁ LIBERATION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 4

On July 4, 1973, a Hutu army officer named Juvenal Habyarimana came to power in a bloodless coup and founded the Second Republic. He ruled the nation single-handedly for the next 20 years through his party the National Revolutionary Movement for Development (MRND). Tutsi were systematically excluded from powerful positions and jobs. Under Habyarimana the army and bands of thugs wantonly massacred Tutsi with unspeakable brutality.

In April 1994, Habyarimana died in a plane crash, leaving in control the genocidal former Rwandan Army, which Habyarimana had reorganized as the Forces Armées Rwandaises, or FAR. On July 4, 1994, the Rwandese Patriotic Army (RPA) overthrew FAR, liberating the capital city of Kigali, and ultimately all of Rwanda from ethnic hatred and conflict. The day was first officially celebrated at the Amahoro Stadium in Kigali in 2000. Many official dignitaries from neighboring countries and Britain joined the Rwandan leaders. A football match was played between Uganda and Rwanda to commemorate the occasion.

In the 21st century the day is celebrated with an address to the nation by the president. In most parts of the country, bands, parades, dancing, singing, and music concerts also mark the occasion. In Kigali the celebrations include an official state reception.

❁ KAMARAMPAKA DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: September 25

On September 25, 1961, the Rwandans (dominated by the Hutu) passed a referendum in which they abolished the ruling minority Tutsi monarchy. Kamarampaka Day, or Republic Day, marks the day in 1961 when Rwanda voted to become a republic.

Fun Fact

Some traditional Rwandan artists use dried cow dung to create spiral paintings and to decorate the interiors of houses.

Fun Fact

Despite the history of ethnic conflict in Rwanda, intertribal marriages between Hutu and Tutsi have been common.

Fun Fact

In Rwanda when people wish each other a merry Christmas, they say, "Noheli Nziza."

The holiday is not widely celebrated because of its anti-Tutsi associations.

Religious Holidays

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

The Christian festival of Easter celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus three days after his Crucifixion. In Rwanda Christians attend church and share special family meals to mark the day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT

✿ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: August 15

The Christian Feast of the Assumption commemorates the Virgin Mary's elevation to heaven. It is an important festival because it reaffirms Jesus' teaching that all believers will find a place in the glory of heaven. In Rwanda this is a day for prayer and quiet reflection.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION DAY; CHRISTIANITY

✿ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: November 1

The Feast of All Saints is marked by attending services and visiting family graves to honor one's ancestors.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

✿ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 25

The Christian holiday of Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus. In Rwanda Christmas is a time for sharing and for exchanging gifts. In Kigali people gather at 9:00 A.M. at the baptistery site in Batsinda on December 24. The baptism of newborns or those wishing to convert to Christianity continues all through the day, along with singing and praying. Food is shared with everyone who joins

the festivities. Prayers continue through the night until noon on Christmas Day.

Sermons are given and special communions are held for those baptized the day before. Families then gather at home for a special Christmas meal.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Rites of Passage

✿ BIRTH

In Rwanda the child and the mother are kept in seclusion for eight days after the birth. At the end of that time, the baby is presented to the family, and the parents receive gifts from family and friends. A naming ceremony takes place within three or four months of birth.

✿ MARRIAGE

To be allowed to marry, Rwandan males have to pay a bride-price. The marriage can later be dissolved if both partners wish, but then the bride-price must be returned. Recently men have been getting married at an older age since they need to save up for the bride-price.

A sad perversion of traditional practices arising from the war involves kidnapping the bride (when she is between 16 and 22 years of age) and marrying her later. According to this custom the chosen woman is stolen from a street or marketplace by the interested boy and his friends and sometimes beaten and raped on the way to the boy's home to break her resistance. Later the boy asks for her hand and offers a cow as a gesture of apology. The deal is sealed with some sorghum or banana beer. The man has complete power in such relationships. Most men do not make the marriages legal, and their children do not have a legitimate status. One out of every three of these couples breaks up, and the wife is abandoned. Such women do not marry again.

This practice is illegal in Rwanda and punishable with prison sentences up to 20 years. The youth, however, prefer this way of marrying since it is cheaper than a legitimate marriage would be.

✿ DEATH

Traditionally Rwandans believe in a life force called *imana* that leaves the body at the time of death to become the *abazimu*. Troubled *abazimus*, which might cause sickness or crop failure, need treatment from traditional healers, who are called *umufumu*. Over time these spirits become honored spirits and are worshipped. In parts of Rwanda the belief is that special round stones have the powers of the good *imana* spirits, and they also bring good luck. Therefore these stones are collected and kept outside family compounds in huts (called *ndaro*), and given offerings everyday. When a family member dies, his

Fun Fact

A law was passed in 1998 that made marriage after kidnapping illegal and punishable with a jail term of up to 20 years. The law, however, has yet to be tested because no woman has pressed charges against any man on this account.

or her body is buried close to the *ndaro*.

Funeral rituals are very important to Rwandans. Women shave their heads as a sign of grief, and neighbors help by doing their household chores. No life-giving activities such as planting crops are done during the mourning period. Families stop eating meat too. Mourning continues for several months in Rwanda. Since death is considered to be “hot,” *umufumus* (traditional doctors) are usually called to “cool” the house where death has taken place.

Further Reading

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Samoa

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Group of islands in Oceania, about halfway between Hawaii and New Zealand in the south Pacific Ocean
Size	1,137 sq. mi.
Capital City	Apia
Flag Description	The flag of Samoa is red with a blue rectangle in the upper hoist-side quadrant bearing five white five-pointed stars representing the Southern Cross constellation.
Independence	January 1, 1962 (from UN trusteeship administered by New Zealand)
Population	177,287 (2005 est.)
Government	Mix of parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy
Nationality	Samoaan
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Samoaan (93%); Euronians (people of Polynesian and European descent; 7%)
Major Language(s)	Samoaan (Polynesian); English
Major Religion(s)	Protestant (80%); Roman Catholic (20%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1-2; National Waste Awareness Day, February 4; Flag Day, April 17; ANZAC Day, April 25; Mothers of Samoa Day, May; Independence Day, June 1-3; Children's Festival, October; Arbor Day, November

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The awe-inspiring Tia Seu Ancient Mound in Savai'i, a step-pyramid, is believed to be the largest prehistoric monument (at 39 feet high) made by humans in all of Polynesia. The history of Samoa is believed to have begun more than 4,000 years ago with a migration of people from the west (the East Indies, the Malay Peninsula or the Philippines) who then settled the rest of Polynesia farther to the east. The oldest known site of human occupation in Samoa is Mulifanua on Upolu, dating back to about 1000 B.C.E. Samoa attracted a gradual migration from Southeast Asia (the East Indies, the Malay Peninsula, or the Philippines). Although many early structures have been lost over the centuries, historical remains can still be found throughout the islands of Samoa.

Yet another theory claims they came from the Malay Peninsula. But the indigenous Samoans think they originated from Samoa itself. They believe their land to be the cradle of

Polynesian culture, and its people, a race created by the deity Tagaloa while he was shaping the world.

The earliest contact between Samoans and Europeans in the mid-17th century took place in the islands that now comprise American Samoa. Ships frequently anchored here for a while before sailing away along the spice route to explore the seas in their search for the Great Southern Land, then called Terra Australis (which means "southern land" in Latin). These early encounters were often violent. On the islands now part of Independent Samoa, the European sailors, mostly whalers, pirates, and escaped convicts unleashed fatal diseases in addition to violence. The first recorded contact with Europeans came in 1722 when Jacob Roggeveen, in charge of the Dutch Three Ship Expedition, reported sighting the Samoan islands. The next European to visit the area was Louis-Antoine de Bougainville (1729-1811), the French navigator, in 1768, who named Samoa the Navigators Islands. In 1787 a French party—from the La Pérouse Expedition—went ashore on Tutuila to get water, only to be attacked by natives. When Captain de Langle, the commander of the

Tagaloa

Because of separation by time and distance, the mythologies of Polynesia, Oceania, and Micronesia contain different, sometimes conflicting or contradictory legends about the same deity. Tagaloa is the Samoan ocean god and the supreme god of Tahiti, Taaroa.

In Polynesian mythology Tangaroa (Tagaloa) is the deity who created the world and was the son of Rangi and Papa. According to legend Tagaloa separated Rangi and Papa by force, whereupon Papa's water-filled body burst and became the seas. Tagaroa is not only the ocean deity, but the creator of all sea creatures, including the mermaids, from whom human beings were born. His shadows are the whale and the blue shark. His breathing causes the tides.

In another story Tangaroa is the first of all beings, and created Atea and Atanua. In the stories of the Marquesas, a variation says that Atea was born from primeval chaos, Tanoa (also Tangaroa/Tagaloa). Tanoa made room for the dawn goddess Atanua to appear, and the son of Atanua and Atea was the first man, called Tu-Mea. Ta'aroa gestated inside the cosmic egg and developed himself in solitude, without father or mother. He cracked the egg, emerged, and stood on the broken pieces. Realizing that he was alone, he created the world from the pieces of the egg. In Polynesian myth Atea is the oldest god, who split and became Rangi and Papa. Tane is the god of trees and light, and the first son of Rangi and Papa.

Astrolabe, ordered his men to fire over the heads of the natives, the natives responded with a shower of stones that fell on the Frenchmen's boats and all around them. When the confrontation ended, Captain de Langle, M. de Lemanon, a geologist, and ten of his men were dead.

By the time the British attempted to settle there, the Samoans had become hostile; consequently many violent skirmishes took place between the British and the Samoans, resulting in a large loss of life. When missionaries began arriving in the 1830s, however, few hostilities arose; on the contrary there were mass conversions to Christianity. This may well be ascribed to the fact that Samoan beliefs were rather similar to Christianity and that the Samoan deity Nafanua, the goddess of war, had informed the people that a new faith would come to the islands, one more powerful than their ancestral animistic faith.

In 1836 John Williams (1796–1839) and Charles Barff became the first two men to take up missionary posts in Samoa. Williams converted a large number of Samoans before being consumed by native cannibals. The demise of the Reverend Williams did not deter other missionaries, and their influence proved to be permanent.

By the late 19th century Britain, Germany, and the United States became engaged in a tug-of-war over Samoa. Motivated primarily by commercial considerations, not the possibility of some benefit to Samoans, ships of the three countries competed for space in the small harbor of Apia, the capital. However, all their plans went awry when a terrible cyclone hit Samoa and caused extensive damage, forcing the rivals to negotiate. The outcome was disastrous for Samoa. The foreigners carved up the country: Western Samoa went to the Germans, and Eastern Samoa to the United States, which annexed

Eastern Samoa in 1900. That region, although having achieved limited autonomy, remains under U.S. control to this day.

While under German control, the Western Samoans formed a resistance force called the Mau Movement, which was aimed at preserving the Samoan culture and obtaining independence. World War I diverted Germany's attention from Samoa, giving the British an opportunity to reestablish their dominance in the islands. As part of the war effort Britain asked New Zealand to take charge of the radio station in Western Samoa. By means of a clever machination, New Zealand took complete control of Samoa and succeeded in pushing the Germans out. However, the Mau Movement followers and the majority of Western Samoans continued to clamor for independence. Finally in 1961 a proposal was put before the United Nations, and independence was granted in January 1962.

Unfortunately, Samoans faced other challenges: Labor disputes, increasing dependence on foreign aid, and yet another cyclonic attack added to their woes. The country changed its name to the Independent State of Samoa in 1995. It is still grappling with a major economic crisis from which it has yet to recover. A new tourism policy and financial laws designed to attract offshore capital have been put in place to decrease the pressure.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Independent Samoa comprises nine volcanic islands located halfway between Hawaii and New Zealand, 373 miles east of Fiji. The two major islands Upolu and Savai'i make up an area slightly smaller than Rhode Island and constitute most of the dry land. Upolu is cigar-shaped with the capital Apia situated on its northern coast. Savai'i (which is a few miles



west of Upolu) is shaped like a squashed cigar. Some tiny uninhabited islands and a few lonely atolls make up the remainder of the country.

Samoa faces a major environmental threat from deforestation. Fortunately concerted efforts have recently been made to develop eco-friendly industries and conserve the beauty and biological diversity of the rain forests that abound in the area. These rain forests are a major source of food as well as medicinal compounds. The flora also includes montane scrub, pandanus scrub, littoral scrub, montane swamp forests, and summit scrub. The local fauna include flying fox, Polynesian rats, geckos, skinks (both lizard species), and the Pacific keel-scaled boa. The tallest mountain is on Savai'i (6,096 feet), and the second tallest is on Upolu (3,661 feet).

Samoa's climate is tropical, with an average temperature of 73°–86°F. The islands receive about 79 inches of rain annually. Though hot and humid during the major part of the year, the region is cooled by the easterly trade winds blowing from April to October. The wet summer season occurs between November and April, while the dry winter season comes between May and October. Independent Samoa lies in the cyclone belt and is hit period-

ically by cyclones, especially between November and April. The soil, formed from eroded basalt and ash deposits, is of poor quality.

✿ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The people of Independent Samoa are steeped in culture and traditions that emphasize social hierarchies, courtesies, and customs. These govern their social, religious, and political lives. The country's system of government is called *faamatai*. It relies on a network of extended families (or *aigas*), each of which is governed by a chief (*matai*). Wealth and food are distributed on the basis of need; honor and social standing are shared equally by all members of the *aiga*. The *matai* represents the family on the village council, delivers justice, and ensures that all customs are properly observed. The *matai* is also responsible for remembering the ancient folklore, family genealogies, and the stories of the old gods and passing them onto posterity.

Thousands of years of Samoan culture are still passed down through poems, genealogies, and mythologies. Dancing and singing also play a very important part in Samoan culture. The *fiafia* is a vil-

The Art of Tattooing

According to one legend, the art of tattooing was brought to Samoa by two sisters Tilafaiga and Taema. While visiting the daughter of King Tuimanua of Fiji, the sisters were given a tattooing instrument as a gift from the royal family. While they were swimming home, they held onto the precious gift and sang the chant the Fijians had taught them: "Women are tattooed, and men are not."

But the sisters were tired after their long swim and stopped at Savai'i, where they were taken into the high chief's guesthouse and treated like royalty until they had recovered from their exhaustion. Before continuing their swim home to Manua, they gave the tattooing instruments to the chiefs and the people of Savai'i. But when they taught the chant to the people of Savai'i they reversed the chant, and its meaning, and sang the first part last, so the Savai'ians learned the chant backward: "Men are tattooed, and women are not."

The people of Savai'i began to tattoo the young men in accordance with the erroneous chant the sisters had taught them, and tattooing became a mark of distinction among the young men of Samoa, except on Manua, where the king banned the practice. In Samoa tattooing is called *pea*.

Unlike the rest of Polynesia, Samoa retained traditional tattooing, and the practice is an integral part of initiation into Samoan culture primarily for men, but also for women. Some motifs used in Samoan tat-

toos are for women while others are used only on men's bodies.

Only Samoans born into a family with ancestors who belonged to a tattoo guild are allowed to become tattoo artists. It is a privilege that can only be inherited, and apprentice tattooists must work under the supervision of an experienced artist before they can work independently. Wives of tattoo artists are called *meanai* (which means "artist's helper") and are also honored because they wipe the blood off the person being tattooed. While someone is undergoing the process, relatives and friends of the family come from far and near and bring food, robes, and *tapa* cloths to help pay the artist and his wife for their labor.

The process of *pea* is undergone when children reach adolescence. It is highly ritualized with songs to be sung and taboos for those who undergo the ordeal. There are numerous tools used to make the tattoos including several combs for making lines of different widths, a pot that holds the combs, and a mallet made from the central rib of a palm leaf that is used to strike the combs. There are five stages in the tattooing process, which can take up to several months to finish because of the pain and inflammation of the skin. Young women sometimes hold down a man being tattooed to keep him from moving around too much and damaging the tattoo. They also sing a song to distract him and keep his mind from focusing on the pain. It is considered disgraceful for a man to complain about the pain involved.

lage play or musical presentation performed by a number of villagers. Both the *siva* (a dance performed by women acting out impromptu stories with their hands) and the *sa sa* (a dance performed to the beating of a wooden mallet) are performed.

Tattooing is another significant rite in Independent Samoa. When they are about 12 or 13 years of age, Samoan males visit the tattooist (*tufuga*) and get tattooed from their waists to their knees. The tattoos represent the strength of a man's heart and his spirituality.

Samoan, a language related to Tongan and other Polynesian languages, is the language of Samoa. English is also spoken by many people. Most Samoans are devout Christians, and the Sunday church service is the most important event of the week.

Because of its long relationship with the United States, American Samoa continues to observe many U.S. holidays including Martin Luther King's Birthday (January 17), Presidents' Day (February), St. Patrick's Day (March 17), Mother's Day (second Sunday of May), Memorial Day (last weekend in May), Father's Day, Independence Day (July 4), Labor Day (first weekend of September), Halloween (October 31), and Thanksgiving (fourth Thursday of November). Some of these observances are public holidays in Samoa.

❁ CUISINE

In Samoa the basic food is derived mainly from tropical crops, root vegetables, coconut products, fresh fruit, pork, chicken and, above all, seafood. The traditional Polynesian meal involves cooking in a raised earthen oven (*umu*). The traditional Sunday meal is nearly always cooked in the *umu*.

At ceremonial gatherings and village meetings the juice of the *ava* plant is consumed in a ritual called the *ava* ceremony. The drink serves as a mild tranquilizer, an analgesic, an antibacterial and antifungal agent, a painkiller, and a diuretic; it is high in fiber and low in calories.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

As in many other countries around the globe, New Year's Day in Samoa is celebrated enthusiastically by people of all communities. Festivities start on the last day of the departing year (New Year's Eve). This occasion is celebrated with parties, get-togethers, and banquets. Everyone usually spends the next day with their loved ones in a lingering spirit of festivity. They look forward with great hopes to a pleasant year.

❁ NATIONAL WASTE AWARENESS DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 4

This is a holiday of fairly recent origin that is celebrated under the aegis of the United Nations. Its underlying purpose is to create awareness in the minds of the public about the significant amount of waste that is being created around them in the course of their day-to-day activities. Reducing future waste and recycling existing waste (if feasible) is extremely important here. These themes are emphasized in speeches and talks organized by the government and environmental organizations.

Related public holidays and special observances organized to emphasize the ongoing degradation of the environment, and its consequences, are Chemical Awareness Day (March), Biological Diversity Day (May), Climate Change Day (July), Ozone Day (September), and Arbor Day (November), the culmination of Environment Week.

❁ FLAG DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 17

Flag Day in American Samoa is one of the year's biggest island events. The Independent State of Samoa now commemorates more than a century under the U.S. flag with Samoan dances and singing, colorful parades, and the famous Fautasi Long Boat Race festivities.

❁ ANZAC DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 25

ANZAC is an acronym for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. The name was created in 1914 (during World War I) to represent the grouping of the Australian Imperial Force and New Zealand Expeditionary Force stationed in Egypt. On April 25, 1915, the ANZACs began their combat at Gallipoli, located off the Aegean Sea in Turkey, where hundreds of ANZAC soldiers were killed or mortally wounded.

Because of their long association with New Zealand, Samoans observe ANZAC Day as a legal holiday.

Fun Fact

Sailors keep a piece of brain coral in their ships because they believe its power will protect them at sea.

Fun Fact

In the past only women of rank were entitled to have their bodies tattooed. The association between high rank and being tattooed made the practice popular among Samoan young men, who interpreted tattoos to be a sign of their manliness.

Fun Fact

Samoa is called the Bible Belt of the Pacific.

The highlights of this day in Samoa are homage to and remembrances of all those who laid down their lives at Gallipoli as well as in other major battles.

❁ MOTHERS OF SAMOA DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: First Monday in May

The origin of Mother's Day can be traced back to the spring celebrations of ancient Greece in honor of Rhea, the Mother of the Gods. During the 17th century people in England celebrated a day called Mothering Sunday on the fourth Sunday of Lent (the 40-day period leading up to Easter) to honor all the mothers of England.

In Samoa Mother's Day is celebrated to honor all mothers, young and old, for their invaluable gifts of life and love. The governor of Samoa delivers a special address that pays tribute to motherhood. There are special religious services, and mothers everywhere on the islands are showered with flowers, candies, hugs, kisses, and greeting cards galore.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 1–3

Though Samoa actually became independent from the rule of New Zealand on January 1, 1962, the people decided to postpone the main celebration of their freedom until a later date because New Year's Day was already a public holiday. The result was three days of widespread celebration with singing, dancing, and feasting. There are also canoe races and many other competitions.

❁ CHILDREN'S FESTIVAL

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Second Monday in October

The Children's Festival, or White Monday, formerly called Lotu a Tamaiti, is celebrated the day after White Sunday, which is a very special day for all Samoan children and young people. The children dress all in white and wear crowns of white frangipanis in their hair. While their parents wait inside the church for them, the children line up and walk to church as they sing hymns. Instead of listening to

Fun Fact

Although only a few Polynesian words have been borrowed into English, the most widely used is *tattoo*. *Tattoo* is a corruption of the Polynesian word *tatau*, learned from the indigenous peoples by the European sailors who first visited the islands of the south Pacific.

a sermon, the assembled adults listen as the children recite verses from the Bible and perform skits based on biblical stories. (Visitors are welcome as long as the proper attire is worn.) After the church service families return home to a feast of roast pig, coconut, taro, bananas, and cakes. On this one day the parents do not sit down to eat first, and children are allowed to eat as much as they like.

❁ ARBOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Second Friday in November

For more than a decade Samoans have observed Environment Week during the last week of October and the first week of November. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE) organizes public activities to focus attention on the environment, to improve community awareness, and to foster public participation in natural resource management and sustainable development.

Environment Week has a different theme each year that reflects global environmental issues such as the sustainable management of natural resources, climate change issues, biodiversity, and projects managed and implemented by MNRE. The week culminates by celebrating Arbor Day, a world event that focuses attention on the importance of reforestation at the global, national, and community levels. Because of Samoa's rapid loss of its rain forest, Arbor Day is a public holiday and schools, government offices, and some businesses are closed.

Religious Holidays

❁ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Last Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, commemorating the last week of Jesus' mortal life. Jesus was the prophet of Christianity, and Christians believe him to be the second person of the Holy Trinity (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). The day is as much about the beginning of Jesus' journey to the Cross as it is about his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. His arrival in Jerusalem was indeed the way to the Cross.

After two of his disciples had fetched a donkey for him to ride, they placed their clothes on it to make a comfortable seat. The disciples then cut branches and covered the path, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the words of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. People welcomed him by waving palm and olive branches, and strewing garments and branches on the road. There were different perceptions at work: Jesus rode in on a donkey, the humble entry of a peaceful nature by a spiritual king; the

people of Jerusalem welcomed him with palm and olive branches and the laying of garments in his path because they wanted a worldly king to defeat the Romans.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

The rituals observed on Maundy Thursday are based on a sequence of events supposed to have occurred during Jesus' last meal with his Apostles. First Jesus washed their feet; then he announced that he had been betrayed by one of them. The traitor Judas left the table. Finally Jesus instituted the Eucharist—a ritual of consuming bread and wine as symbols of his body and blood, also referred to as Communion in Christian churches. In the Roman Catholic Church Maundy Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist, the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week, and gives priests an opportunity to prepare for the many rituals associated with Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, alternatively known as Mourning Friday, Sorrowful Friday, or Holy Friday, is a somber day for Roman Catholics and other Christians all over the world and is observed on the Friday before Easter. It commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus more than 2,000 years ago. Some Samoans observe a fast only on Ash Wednesday (first day of Lent) for 40 days up to Good Friday and a partial fast from then until Easter. Some fast only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Public gatherings where special prayers, readings from the Gospels and Psalms, and singing hymns are features of Good Friday in Samoa. By its nature, this is a somber day for Samoan Christians.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Saturday before Easter

Holy Saturday is the day Jesus lay in the tomb and the day before he rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. This was the Jewish Sabbath (the Jewish day of rest is

Saturday). It is also regarded as the second Sabbath after Creation. The final day of Holy Week, which begins with Palm Sunday and includes Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, it marks the threshold between death and resurrection, and is a day of silence and contemplation for devout Catholics.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection. For this reason, it is sometimes known as Resurrection Day. This day is of utmost importance because the fundamental teaching of Christianity is that Jesus, through his death, freed all his believers from the penalty of sin. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. On Easter entire families gather to celebrate. They often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to offer prayers.

In Samoa Christians often buy new clothes for this special day and go to early church services to pray. Easter eggs have become associated with the festival because they are symbols of rebirth and regeneration, like the name *Easter* itself, taken from the ancient pagan spring festivals. The gaiety and festivities of Easter spill over to Easter Monday, which is mainly devoted to sports and outdoor activities.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fifty days after Easter

This is a religious event that commemorates the visitation of the Holy Spirit (or Holy Ghost) to about 120 of the first Christians, including Jesus' disciples as well as other followers, 50 days after his crucifixion and resurrection. *Pentecost* is derived from the Greek word *pentekoste*, which means "fiftieth" and originally referred to the Jewish festival of Shavuot, observed on the 50th day after Passover (Pesach). Modern scholars believe that many of the traditions and celebrations were borrowed from pagan celebrations of spring. This holiday is spread over two days, alternatively known as Whitsunday and Whitmonday. On Whitsunday everyone puts on their best white suits and dresses and attends church services. Most businesses and government offices remain closed.

Fun Fact

The name *Maundy Thursday* may be linked to the Latin word *mandatum*, "command," because Jesus commanded his Apostles to observe the ritual now called the Eucharist.

Fun Fact

In other Polynesian languages the deity Tagaloa has different names; he is Tangaroa in Maori, Tanaoa and Takaoa on the Marquesas Islands, and Taarua, Tangaloa, and Kanaloa in Hawaiian legends.

In Samoa this holiday honors children, and the entire holiday weekend is usually spent in leisure activities.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; PENTECOST; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world. It celebrates the birth of Jesus, whom Christians believe to have been the Son of God. On

Christmas Day Samoans attend church services early in the morning. Everyone dresses in new clothes and exchanges gifts and greetings. The holiday is also celebrated with family get-togethers and special dinners prepared for the occasion.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26

Since Samoa was under the influence of New Zealand (a part of the British Empire) for a considerable period, some British customs and practices were incorporated into the local traditions. The British celebrate Boxing Day the day after Christmas. The name Boxing Day may be derived from the

practice of opening church alms boxes used for collecting money for charitable purposes on this day. The origins of this holiday are also attributed to a former British tradition of giving cash or durable goods to servants for Christmas. In Britain gifts among equals were exchanged on or before Christmas Day, but the less fortunate were given gifts the day after. Samoans generally prefer to take part in outdoor activities

Fun Fact

In 2005 scientists announced the discovery of a submarine volcano growing in the crater of a larger underwater volcano, called Vailuluu. They named the new volcano Nafanua after the ferocious Samoan goddess of war. In 2002, the last time this hot spot was monitored, Nafanua did not exist. Growing at least eight inches a day, the volcanic cone has rapidly emerged since 2001, and Nafanua is now nearly 1,000 feet high. Researchers also described a unique biological community surrounding the eruption site, hundreds of eels in motion.

and sports to enjoy this day. This holiday is also known as Christmas Bank Holiday.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ RISING OF THE PALOLO

Observed in: Savai'i Island

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October–November

Palolo are blue-green worms that resemble vermicelli, a thin type of pasta. They emerge from the coral reefs surrounding the Samoan islands to mate during the months of October and November sometime after midnight on the seventh day after a full Moon. This happens once in October and again in November. People from nearby areas flock to the reefs to witness this unique natural phenomenon. They also gather the palolo worm's egg and sperm packets, which are considered delicacies on Samoa.

Rites of Passage

❁ MARRIAGE

On Samoa, the marriage customs of the nobility are quite different from those practiced by ordinary people. In either case, however, a marriage contract is not formalized until the boy and girl have reached puberty. For the nobility courtship rituals start with the selection of a number of girls from each village to live together in the high chief's guesthouse as members of a group of women attendants known as the *aualumua*. The *aualumua* personally assist the village virgin (*taupou*), who is the daughter of the highest-ranking family, in receiving guests from the village. It is customary for elderly women of the village chief's house to guard and chaperone these young women of rank. This practice is intended to preserve the maidens' chastity.

Most of the guests in the high chief's guesthouse are young men who try to gain the favor of the *taupou's* attendants. These guests bring food and gifts with them. After the evening prayers are over, the *taupou* and her attendants dine together with their guests, after which they spend the rest of the night dancing and singing popular love songs. It is expected that they will exhibit their best of manners at such times.

A young woman of high rank is hardly ever consulted about her future husband. She considers it a great honor to marry the man who has been chosen for her by the village council. Any instance of marriage among relatives or between a commoner and a

member of the nobility is frowned on. In this way the purity of the lineage is kept intact.

The *taupou* is seldom formally courted by her chieftain-fiancé. However, he gives her presents of food and other goods over a period of time. During a final visit the suitor, together with other chiefs of his village, meets the *taupou* in her village to obtain the formal consent of her parents and village council. Immediately after receiving this assurance in the chief's guesthouse, the chiefs and other visitors shout the formal marriage shouts (*tigi*) at the tops of their voices. *Tigis* are the traditional means used for pronouncing a chief and his bride man and wife. They are shouted only for nobility and are not heard during the marriage of commoners. In reality the *tigis* are an exclamation of tribute to the bride and bridegroom.

The bride usually wears the royal robe that was made especially for her by her family on this occasion. This wedding robe is called the *ie avaga*. The last nights the *taupou* spends in her village are devoted to feasting and riotous dancing. If the guests plan to return with the newly married couple to the groom's home on foot, it is customary for them to keep shouting the *tigis* as they pass through the adjacent villages.

The climax of the marriage ceremonies is the performance of the *nunu* (dowry exchange), which is usually held after the birth of the couple's first child. Relatives and villages of the bride and bridegroom come together from all over the islands, bringing food, merchandise, money, and labor. This ceremony is held in the open air at the public ground (*malae*) in front of the chief's guesthouse. The bridegroom's side displays, for exchange and to match the bride's collection, money, merchandise, yardage, goods, and roasted pigs. These huge quantities of goods include contributions from friends, relatives, and acquaintances that it will take several days to distribute and exchange.

For many generations it was customary for a chief's wife not to live with her husband for more

than a few months. She was honorably released and returned home to clear the way for another marriage. The village chiefs would take the matter in their own hands and look for another match in a well-to-do family. At one time custom sanctioned a dozen or more wives and concubines for a chief.

Elopement of the *taupou* with a suitor often happens when the village council disapproves of her desire to marry a man they regard as undesirable. Such a marriage is considered illegal. The eloping couple is liable to pay for their action with their lives if they happen to get caught. They are on dangerous ground until they reach the boy's village.

Marriages of common people are quiet and regarded as insignificant. Usually the boy proposes to the girl's parents. When the parents give their consent, the girl and boy are united as man and wife and live in the home of either the bride or bridegroom's parents. After the couple receives a legal marriage certificate from the government, they exchange their vows in a church before a minister.

Polygamy has now been outlawed in Samoa by both the church and the government. As in other countries many practice common-law marriage illegally. However, Samoan women as a whole prefer legal marriage for the sake of their children.

Further Reading

Lesley Barclay et al., *Midwives' Tales: Stories of Traditional and Professional Birthing in Samoa* (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005); Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop, ed., *Samoa Women: Widening Choices* (Apia, Samoa: Samoa Association of Women Graduates, 2003); Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001); Evelyn Wareham, *Race and Realpolitik: The Politics of Colonisation in German Samoa* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).

San Marino

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Southern Europe, an enclave in central Italy
Size	24 sq. mi.
Capital City	San Marino
Flag Description	San Marino's flag has two equal horizontal bands of white and light blue with the national coat of arms superimposed in the center.
Independence	September 3, 301 (founded)
Population	28,880 (2005 est.)
Government	Independent republic
Nationality	Sammarinese
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Sammarinese; Italian
Major Language(s)	Italian
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Liberation of the Republic, February 5; Anniversary of the Arengo, March 25; Regents Investiture Day, April 1 and October 1; Labor Day, May 1; Fall of Fascism Day, July 28; St. Marinus Day, September 3; St. Stephen's Day, December 26

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

San Marino is believed to be the world's oldest republic. It was founded in 301 C.E. by a Christian stonemason named Marinus, who had moved to the region to avoid Roman persecution. By the 12th century San Marino was an independent state ruled by its own statutes and consuls. This small country had to defend itself constantly from being overrun by its neighbors for over 200 years until its sovereignty was acknowledged by the pope in 1631. Later popes upheld this decision. By the end of the 15th century the country was governed and ruled by a grand council of 60 members. This system, or base on an assembly of the heads of families and known as the Arengo, is still in existence.

Over the centuries the country has been able to retain its independent status. In 1797 Napoleon (1769–1821) recognized

its sovereignty and even offered to extend its territory, but the Arengo refused his offer. After the Napoleonic Wars, the Congress of Vienna recognized San Marino's independent status in 1815.

During World War II, San Marino allied with Italy but declared itself neutral after Italy surrendered to the Allies. Although San Marino is not a member of the European Union (EU), it has always been an active part of the European communities. It joined the United Nations in 1992.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

A country in the Apennines near the Adriatic Sea, San Marino is the world's third smallest republic. It is rectangular in shape and is surrounded by Italy, with a maximum length of eight miles, northeast to southwest. The rugged and mountainous landscape of San Marino consists of the huge central limestone mass of Mt. Titano (2,385 feet) with its three peaks and a castle on each peak.

San Marino enjoys a Mediterranean climate with mild cool winters and warm summers. Vegetation is typical of the Mediterranean zone, and olive, pine, oak, ash, poplar, fir, elm, many kinds of grasses and flowers thrive there. Animals such as moles, hedgehogs, foxes, badgers, martens, weasels, and hares, and many species of birds also inhabit the country.

❁ ECONOMY

The economy of San Marino is mainly based on agriculture and the service sector. The country is not rich in mineral resources and relies on imports for needed raw materials. The main industries include wine, tourism, commerce, agriculture, and crafts. Items such as building materials, paints and varnishes, paper, metalwork, textiles, clothing, furniture, rubber and leather footwear, ceramics, china, food and confectionery products, liqueurs, cosmetics, and sanitary articles are also produced. The agricultural products San Marino produces include wheat, corn, barley, dairy products, and livestock. Fine printing, particularly of postage stamps, is a useful source of revenue in San Marino. The country is listed as the fourth richest country in the world based on gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, just behind the United States and ahead of Switzerland.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The tiny country of San Marino is a cultural and tourist center. It is known especially for its musical heritage. Some of the finest musical compositions were produced here by 17th-century composers like Francesco Maria Marini di Pesaro.

The people of San Marino are sports fanatics. They love to play football (soccer) and to watch Formula One races. The San Marino national football team has participated in the World Cup even though the country has yet to make its mark in football history.

❁ CUISINE

San Marino is essentially Italian in lifestyle. Everything Italian typifies the indigenous cuisine. Courses of homemade pasta (*tortellini*, *passatelli*, *tagliatelle*), oven-baked lasagna, ravioli, cannelloni, *strozzapreti*, and *cappelletti* in broth are as integral to San Marino's cuisine as much as they are to Italy's.

Dishes of meat, rabbit, chicken, and quail are popular here. The San Marino cake, *cacciatello* (made with milk, sugar, and eggs), and *bustrengo* (the traditional Christmas cake) are some of the popular desserts relished in this country.

San Marino is famous for its wines and cheese products. Among the better known wines are Moscato San Marino, Biancale, and the local Sangiovese.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, and is celebrated as New Year's Day all over the world. Celebrations usually begin on the evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve). In San Marino there are elaborate displays of fireworks on New Year's Eve.

Boys and girls are given money and gifts on New Year's Day. People go to Mass in the morning and spend the rest of the day with relatives and close friends. Lunch is sometimes a special occasion on New Year's Day.

Traditionally the people of San Marino make personal New Year resolutions and share elaborate meals with family and friends on this day. It is a national holiday, and schools and offices are closed.

❁ LIBERATION OF THE REPUBLIC

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 5

On this day the people of San Marino commemorate the anniversary of the end of Cardinal Giulio Alberoni's (1664–1752) oppressive occupation in 1740. He incurred the pope's displeasure by the harsh measures he adopted in his efforts to force San Marino to be ruled by Rome. The pope recalled him and Alberoni was replaced by another legate.

❁ ANNIVERSARY OF THE ARENGO

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 25

San Marino is governed by an Arengo, a self-governed assembly that consists of the head of each family in the region. This day commemorates the anniversary of the Arengo's establishment in 1243.

❁ REGENTS INVESTITURE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 1 and October 1

San Marino conducts the investiture ceremony of two regent captains of the republic on each of these days. Regent Captains are elected by the 60 members

Fun Fact

The San Marino national anthem has no lyrics: It is a wordless composition by Federico Consolo adopted in 1894.

Fun Fact

There is a belief that animals can talk on the Feast of Epiphany, so they are fed especially well on this day.

of the grand council from among themselves. They rule for six months, after which the next investiture ceremony for two new regent captains is held.

This event is celebrated in the republic with traditional ceremonies that have remained unchanged for centuries. The investiture of the new captains occurs on the first day of April and October every year.

LABOR DAY

Celebrated by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Worker's Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. While the earliest origins of May Day celebration can be ascribed to the spring pagan rituals that were practiced by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages, conflicting opinions exist about the origins of the occasion, depending on the country and its labor policies.

In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

In San Marino workers celebrate Labor Day by holding marches in the streets.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

FALL OF FASCISM DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 28

On this day San Marino commemorates the fall of Italian Fascism in 1943.

ST. MARINUS DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 3

St. Marinus Day, also called Foundation of the Republic Day or National Day of the Republic, commemorates the founding of the Republic of San Marino in 301 C.E. According to legend a Christian deacon and stonemason, while working on an aqueduct in Rome, was erroneously accused by a woman of being the husband who had abandoned her. He fled into the mountains but she followed him, so he hid in a cave until she gave up. Marino lived the rest of his life as a recluse on Monte Titano, and it is

believed that San Marino was built on the exact location where his hermitage was.

The day is marked with festivals, cultural events, and theatrical productions all across San Marino. These events attract large crowds and enjoy extensive media coverage. This is a public holiday in San Marino and all schools, government offices, and many businesses are closed.

ST. STEPHEN'S DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: December 26

St. Stephen's Day, which falls on the day following Christmas, is celebrated to honor St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr. The people of San Marino look forward to this extended vacation as a time to celebrate and relax.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Religious Holidays

EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: January 6

The Feast of Epiphany is a Christian feast that celebrates the birth of Jesus, the arrival of the Magi (the Three Wise Men of ancient Persia: Caspar, Balthazar, and Melchior) in Bethlehem to see the infant Jesus, as well as his life until John the Baptist baptized him in the Jordan River. There are street fairs in San Marino on this day, and families spend time together.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS; EPIPHANY

FESTIVAL DAY OF ST. AGATHA

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: February 5

This day is celebrated as the Feast of St. Agatha, a third-century Christian martyr. It is believed that Agatha wanted to dedicate her life to Jesus and remain celibate. However, a cruel nobleman fancied the pretty young Agatha. When she refused his advances, he tortured her in the most unimaginable method possible: He cut her breasts off. She is therefore often portrayed carrying her excised breasts on a platter. In the memory of her suffering, special pastries or nougats, shaped like breasts and called St. Agatha's breasts, are eaten on her feast day.

St. Agatha is the patron saint of nurses and is invoked for protection from diseases of the breasts. Her feast day is celebrated with poetry contests, fireworks, music, confetti, and processions.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

Fun Fact

San Marino is the third smallest country in Europe; only Vatican City and Monaco are smaller.

❁ ST. JOSEPH'S DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: March 19

This is the feast day of St. Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus. On this day in San Marino, a meatless feast with at least 13 different dishes is prepared. Three people are chosen to represent Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Before starting the meal the family says special prayers to St. Joseph. The special dishes that are prepared for the feast are then served to each of the three “representatives” who take a small bite of each dish. Leftovers from this feast are then given away to the poor in the village.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Last Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, commemorating the last week of Jesus' mortal life. Jesus was the prophet of Christianity, and Christians believe him to be the second person of the Holy Trinity (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). The day is as much about the beginning of Jesus' journey to the Cross as it is about his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. His arrival in Jerusalem was indeed the way to the Cross.

After two of his disciples had fetched a donkey for him to ride, they placed their clothes on it to make a comfortable seat. The disciples then cut branches and covered the path, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the words of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. People welcomed him by waving palm and olive branches, and strewing garments and branches on the road. There were different perceptions at work: Jesus rode in on a donkey, the humble entry of a peaceful nature by a spiritual king; the people of Jerusalem welcomed him with palm and olive branches and the laying of garments in his path because they wanted a worldly king to defeat the Romans. Devout Catholics who attend Mass on this day receive small crosses made of dried palm fronds that they take home and save.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

The rituals observed on Maundy Thursday are based on a sequence of events supposed to have occurred during Jesus' last meal with his Apostles. First Jesus washed their feet; then he announced that he had been betrayed by one of them. The traitor Judas left the table. Finally Jesus instituted the Eucharist—a ritual of consuming bread and wine as

symbols of his body and blood, also referred to as Communion in Christian churches. In the Roman Catholic Church Maundy Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist, the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week, and gives priests an opportunity to prepare for the many rituals associated with Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, alternatively known as Mourning Friday, Sorrowful Friday, or Holy Friday, is a somber day for Roman Catholics and other Christians all over the world and is observed on the Friday before Easter. It commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus more than 2,000 years ago. Some Sammarinese observe a fast from Ash Wednesday (first day of Lent) for 40 days up to Good Friday and a partial fast from then until Easter. Others fast only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

In San Marino on Good Friday, people visit their local churches and pray to Jesus, taking inspiration from his life and teachings and a ritual called the Stations of the Cross is performed. This is a reenactment of Jesus' final journey as he carried the cross to Calgary. This is a day of fast and abstinence in San Marino.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Saturday before Easter

Holy Saturday is the day Jesus lay in the tomb and the day before he rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. This was the Jewish Sabbath (the Jewish day of rest is Saturday). It is also regarded as the second Sabbath after Creation. The final day of Holy Week, which begins with Palm Sunday and includes Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, it marks the threshold between death and resurrection, and is a day of silence and contemplation for devout Christians.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection. For this reason, it is sometimes known as Resurrection Day. This day is of utmost importance because the

fundamental teaching of Christianity is that Jesus, through his death, freed all his believers from the penalty of sin. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. On Easter the entire family gathers to celebrate. They often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to offer prayers. Easter eggs have become associated with the festival because they are symbols of rebirth and regeneration taken from the ancient pagan spring festivals.

Fun Fact

The San Marino Grand Prix is named after the state, although it does not actually take place there. It takes place in the Italian town of Imola.

In San Marino people attend midnight prayer services for Easter and celebrate Jesus' Resurrection by lighting candles. A festive spirit envelops churches as people sing devotional hymns. Then on Easter the Catholics of San Marino attend Mass attired in their best clothing, visit the cemetery, and participate in the traditional day-long banquets. Children receive specially decorated Easter eggs made of chocolate from their parents and grandparents. Feasting and exchanging greetings and Easter eggs continue even on the next day. Easter Monday, the first Monday after Lent is a day is

set aside for time with the family, enjoying picnics, and relaxing.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: 40 days after Lent

Ascension Day is a day of special celebration for Christians all over the world because it celebrates Jesus' Ascension to heaven, 40 days after his Resurrection on Easter. The Catholic Church has designated Ascension Day as a holy day of obligation, and the people of San Marino celebrate this day with special prayer services in churches.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

CORPUS CHRISTI

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Sixty days after Easter

The Feast of Corpus Christi is a solemn religious observance celebrated by Catholics all over the world to commemorate the institution of the Holy Eucharist. It is celebrated 60 days after Easter and falls on a Thursday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; CORPUS CHRISTI

ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: August 15

Assumption Day commemorates the death of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and her assumption into heaven. According to one legend, when Mary was on her deathbed, all the Apostles visited her, except St. Thomas, who was delayed. By the time he arrived, Mary's body was nowhere to be found because she had been taken into heaven. It is believed that her soul and body were united at Jehoshaphat (her tomb), and St. Gabriel took her to heaven.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day is a Christian feast day that honors all the saints (known and unknown) of the church. It is believed that All Saints' Day celebrations began after the consecration of the Pantheon at Rome to the Blessed Virgin by Pope Boniface IV (r. 608–15).

The word *Halloween* is a contracted version of the phrase "All Hallows Eve," which refers to the night before All Saints' Day. The Catholic Church established both November 1 and November 2 (All Souls' Day) in an effort to convert Irish pagans to Christianity. In the fifth century B.C.E., in Celtic Ireland, summer officially ended on October 31. The holiday was called Samhain (pronounced sow-en) and was the Celtic New Year's celebration.

According to legend, on Samhain the disembodied spirits of all those who had died during the preceding year would come back in search of living bodies to possess for the coming year because it was their only hope for the afterlife. The Celts believed all laws of space and time were suspended during this time, allowing the spirit world to intermingle with the living.

In San Marino on All Saints' Day, the devout place flowers on the tombs of their deceased relatives and also offer prayers to all the saints.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

ALL SOULS' DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: November 2

Roman Catholics observe All Souls' Day to remember the dead. On this day, all saints, martyrs, and the dead are remembered and honored. The faithful decorate the graves of loved ones and light candles.

In many places in San Marino, processions accompanied by bands playing funeral music go to the cemeteries. Sammarinese believe that the dead return

to mingle with the living on this day, which is why the living do everything to make the deceased feel content. During the family meal food is offered to the deceased to appease them, and prayers are said for the souls to rest in peace. The Sammarinese also offer special prayers for souls that may still be in purgatory.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: December 8

The Immaculate Conception is a Roman Catholic dogma which holds that at the time of the birth of Mary, Jesus' mother, God had protected her from all the sins of humanity and filled her with his grace. It is believed that since God wanted Mary to be the mother of Jesus, she had to be totally free of any kind of sin.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of celebration for Christians all over the world. It is observed on December 25 every year because that is the date selected by the Catholic Church to mark the birth of Jesus.

In San Marino Christmas decorations are often prepared well in advance. A manger with figures of Joseph, Mary, and the Baby Jesus, along with shepherds and the Three Wise Men, are placed in all of the churches. Christmas celebrations begin on Christmas Eve (December 24) and last until St. Stephen's Day (December 26). On December 24 families attend church and offer prayers in a special service before Christmas. Then they gather around their Christmas tree and light candles. Neighborhood children sing carols and are rewarded with small sums of money. They return home to have a special meal during which they slice a cake specially made for the occasion.

On Christmas Day the festivities continue with church services and special Christmas delicacies. Friends and relatives visit each other and exchange gifts on this day. Children open gifts that they receive from Santa Claus. Families gather at lunch or dinner to celebrate Christmas with a special feast.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ SAN MARINO ETNOFESTIVAL

Observed in: San Marino
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July

San Marino Etnofestival is a special cultural festival to showcase the rich cultural traditions of the region. The event features a lot of singing and dancing. Various musical genres are highlighted during this festival. There are numerous performances and workshops that are attended by a large number of visitors, most of whom are tourists.

In 2004, for example, the focus was on percussion instruments of Francophone countries including Guinea (the *djembe* drum), Algeria, France, Martinique, and Madagascar.

Fun Fact

No one knows the actual date of Jesus' birth, and at least one date in every month has been suggested as a possibility. The Church fathers chose the end of December for the observance because it is close to the winter solstice, an important pagan festival that welcomed the return of the light. Many of the symbols and traditions now associated with Christmas can be traced back to their pagan origins, such as the Yule log, the Christmas tree with all its lights, and the customs associated with mistletoe.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

When a child is born in San Marino, it is baptized according to Roman Catholic traditions. Close friends or relatives are chosen as the baby's godparents. It is their responsibility to give the child spiritual guidance during the course of its life. The family throws a lavish party after the christening ceremony in the church attended by friends and relatives. The baby is given a single name derived from a saint's name, such as Maria or Giovanna. A boy is usually named after his grandfather.

❁ MARRIAGE

Traditionally the family arranges weddings in San Marino. The groom's (or bride's) family contacts the father or uncle of the bride (or prospective bridegroom) with a proposal of marriage. After both families agree, the couple gets officially engaged. Sometimes a matchmaker is sent to the prospective bride's house to arrange a marriage. In preparation for the wedding, the bride puts together a trousseau that includes new clothes,

household items, and sometimes clothes for the future husband. Friends and family give money and gifts to the newlywed couple. These days the groom's family also helps to pay for the wedding. The actual wedding is presided over by a person from the civil authorities or a priest. Weddings on Sunday are considered the luckiest.

Men are supposed to carry pieces of iron in their pockets to ward off evil on this day because the ill will of some people might cause supernatural harm to the newlyweds. Sometimes a vase or a glass is broken at the end of the ceremony, and the number of pieces it breaks into is considered the number of years the couple will live happily together.

❁ DEATH

When a death occurs in San Marino, care is taken to give the person a proper burial according to the Catholic faith. People often bury the deceased's favorite items along with the body. If some things

are forgotten, then they are sent in the casket of another deceased villager, because it is assumed that both souls will meet after death. In order to prevent the soul of the deceased from finding its way back into the house, his or her body is taken with the feet exiting first so that the door used for the exit cannot be seen. Lamenting and wailing are forbidden to prevent confusing the soul about reaching its destination. To prevent the soul from coming back, frequent turns are made on the way to the cemetery, and different roads are traveled to return home following the burial.

Further Reading

J. Theodore Bent, *A Freak of Freedom; or, the Republic of San Marino* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1970); Adrian Edwards and Chris Michaelides, *San Marino* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 1996); Oliver Knox, *From Rome to San Marino: A Walk in the Steps of Garibaldi* (New York: HarperCollins, 1982).

~ São Tomé and Príncipe ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Islands in the Gulf of Guinea, off the coast of West Africa, straddling the equator, west of Gabon
Size	387 sq. mi.
Capital City	São Tomé
Flag Description	The flag has three horizontal bands: green (top), yellow (double width), and green. There are two black five-pointed stars placed beside each other in the center of the yellow band. A red isosceles triangle occupies the hoist side.
Independence	July 12, 1975 (from Portugal)
Population	187,410 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	São Toméan
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Mestizo: or mixed; black; white
Major Language(s)	Portuguese (official)
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (70%); none (19%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day, July 12; Transitional Government Day, November 21

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Uninhabited when the Portuguese discovered them in 1485, these islands were initially settled in 1493, and the islands soon became the biggest exporters of sugar to the world. The Portuguese forced Africans from Cape Verde, Mozambique, and Angola to work on the plantations here. Even though slavery became illegal in 1875, the Portuguese continued using forced labor on large-scale tea and coffee plantations (called *rocas*) they developed and ended up dominating the cocoa industry of the world. Eventually coffee exports began declining as the dissatisfaction of the international community reached a new high due to the forced labor conditions in São Tomé and Príncipe. All through the 20th century, there were revolts and protests by the slaves that were violently crushed. The worst case was

in 1953, when 1,000 *forros* (descendants of freed slaves) were massacred by the Portuguese because they refused to continue to work on the plantations as forced laborers.

The national liberation movement gained momentum. By December 1974 a transitional government was formed, and in July of the following year independence was declared. This upheaval in the islands can be linked with the Communist takeover of Portugal and Communist governments taking over many African nations as well. Most of the Portuguese had fled São Tomé and Príncipe by then, leaving behind illiteracy levels as high as 90 percent, a shattered infrastructure, barren plantations, and only one doctor on the islands. There was political instability on the islands until democratically elected President Miguel Trovada (b. 1936) and Prime Minister Guilherme Posser (b. 1953) came to lead the country toward stability in 1992. There were coup attempts in both 1995 and 2003, but the country has largely stabilized now. President Fradique de

Fun Fact

The entire island of Príncipe is visible from the peak of Pico de São Tomé. It takes two days of arduous trekking to climb this mountain, the tallest on the islands.

Menezes (b. 1952) has been leading the country since 2001, along with Prime Minister Damião Vaz d'Almeida (b. 1951), who has been in power since 2004.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located at the equator, São Tomé and Príncipe (STP) is made up of two islands, São Tomé in the south and Príncipe to the north, off the coast of Gabon in the Gulf of Guinea. Together, São Tomé and Príncipe make up the smallest

country in Africa.

São Tomé Island is 31 miles long and 20 miles wide, while Príncipe is smaller, only 19 miles by 4 miles. Both islands are a part of an extinct volcanic mountain chain. São Tomé is more mountainous, with the highest peak, Pico de São Tomé, at 6,640 feet.

The areas at sea level have average yearly temperatures of 81°F, whereas toward the interior (higher altitudes) the average annual temperature is 68°F. There is one rainy season, from October to May. The southwestern slopes record 197 inches of annual rainfall, and the northern lowlands record 39 inches of rainfall per year. Swift streams smooth the mountainsides, glisten in the Sun, and disappear quickly into the thick foliage below. Both islands have abundant natural beauty with crystal clear waters and white sandy beaches. Any kind of sea or seaside activity (swimming, scuba diving, water sports, deep-sea fishing, and the like) is most suitable in such environs. There are big sea turtles to be seen on the beachside with whales (sometimes the humpback whales migrating from Antarctica to the Gulf of Guinea at the end of summer) and dolphins pass-

ing the coast. Some endangered species of turtles (five out of seven in the world) are found in São Tomé and Príncipe.

❁ ECONOMY

Cocoa comprises 95 percent of total exports, though droughts and post-independence mismanagement have adversely affected cocoa exports. Copra, coffee, and palm kernels are the other important export items. The country has to import most food products, manufactured goods, consumer goods, and all fuel. It has had to depend on external aid and debt rescheduling. Under the HIPC program (Highly Indebted Poor Countries program), São Tomé and Príncipe received aid amounting to \$200 million in debt relief in 2000. The government is trying to stabilize the economy through privatization of its industrial sector. It is also attempting to develop the tourism industry and to explore the potential of oil production in the Gulf of Guinea. Some plantation houses are being maintained to assist the tourist industry as places of colonial legacy. São Tomé and Príncipe's major trading partner is Portugal.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The culture and lifestyle of São Tomé and Príncipe were greatly influenced by the Portuguese colonial presence. Portuguese is the main language spoken on the islands along with Creole (a mix of Portuguese and a local language). Each island is rich in culture, a blend of both African and European. The islanders are mainly Roman Catholics. Sãotomese music, like other forms of art in São Tomé and Príncipe, is not completely African. It sounds similar to the music of Cape Verde and Brazil, which were also occupied by the Portuguese.

Gilberto Gil Umbelina (b. 1916) is an artist of repute from this country. São Tomé has highly regarded theater activities such as the Tchiloli performances, which are especially popular famous in Príncipe. The traveling European comedians of the 16th century left their mark in the drama *Tchiloli* in Príncipe. Enacting *Tchiloli, or the Tragedy of the Marquis of Mantua* has become an integral part of São Toméan culture since then. Fathers pass on the roles to their sons; women are merely spectators.

The dance forms in STP are the popular *bulaué* dance (influenced by Angola), the *Danço Congo* (inspired by the Congo), the *puíta*, taken from Cape Verde, the samba, brought in from Brazil, and *socopé*, formerly a dance of the Portuguese colonial elite. There are other acoustic traditional bands such as Sangazuza, whose song lyrics are written in the local Creole, the lingua franca of the islands. The architecture is vividly Portuguese with high ceilings and typical wooden houses on stilts, especially in the countryside. São João dos Angolares, a town in the island of São Tomé, as well as a gallery called Teia

Flora and Fauna

There are many endangered species of plants and animals found on the islands of STP. The commonly found turtles include the *tatô* (*Lapidochelys olivacea*), *sada* (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), *ambó* (*Chelonia mydas*), *bobô* (*Caretta caretta*, or Loggerhead Sea Turtle), and *ambulância* (*Dermochelys coreacea*). Of these turtle species the most common are the *ambó* and *sada*. The unusually big birds of these islands are the São Tomé olive pigeon (*Columba thomensis*), and the São Tomé giant sunbird (*Nectarinia thomensis*). Among its plantlife is found the giant begonias (*Begonia crateris* and *B. baccata*). The unusual dwarf olive ibis (*Bostrychia bocagei*) is a species much smaller than other members of its genus.

d'Arte, both promote wooden sculpture and paintings in São Tomé and Príncipe.

❁ CUISINE

The people of São Tomé and Príncipe would love to eat turtle meat, but the local turtle species have been declared endangered. So, while the turtles are being preserved in incubators on the beach, the popular diet on the islands includes smoked fish (smoldered on a low flame for a day or two) and vegetable stew. The country's diet is rich in fish (salted, fresh, sun-dried, or smoked), meat, pork, or chicken. These main courses can be accompanied by beans, bananas (green, ripe, grilled, mashed, fried, or boiled), rice, breadfruit, and manioc flour (derived from the roots of tropical cassava). Usually palm wine is served with the food. Preparation of the local dishes usually takes a long time. *Molho de fogo* (a vegetable stew with smoked fish) and *calulu* (fish or chicken in a vegetable stew with herbs and breadfruit) are among the famous dishes of São Tomé and Príncipe. The staple breadfruit grows on trees, and its pulp can be eaten after being cooked. In each family traditional cooking styles are passed on from mother to daughter.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, and is celebrated as New Year's Day all over the world. In STP it is called Ano Novo. Celebrations take place all over the world and revelries typically begin the evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve).

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Labor Day is an international holiday that honors workers locally and worldwide. It is also known as May Day or Workers' Day in some countries. In STP, where Portuguese is the official language, it is called Dia do Trabalhador. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, designated May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

Tchiloli, or the Tragedy of the Marquis of Mantua

Best friends Dom Carloto (the only son of the Emperor Charlemagne) and Prince Valdevino (the nephew of the Marquis of Mantua) were out hunting one day. Dom Carloto asked the prince to leave his horse behind and join him on foot, which the prince did unsuspectingly. It is said that the prince was killed by Carloto, and this story of deceit and the following judgment is enacted in *Tchiloli*. This European tale has come to be enacted by African dancers, blending both cultures.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 12

On July 12, 1975, São Tomé and Príncipe obtained their independence from the Portuguese. Manuel Pinto da Costa (b. 1937), secretary-general of the MLSTP (Movimento de Libertação de São Tomé e Príncipe, or Movement for the Liberation of São Tomé and Príncipe), was sworn in as the first president of independent São Tomé and Príncipe.

Since the early 1950s the demand for independence from colonial rule had been voiced all over Africa. In São Tomé and Príncipe there was growing unrest among the people against the oppressive rule of the Portuguese. A group of São Toméans came together and formed MLSTP, thereby initiating the country's struggle for independence. They organized demonstrations and protests all over São Tomé and Príncipe. After a change of regime in Portugal in 1974, Portugal began heeding the requests for independence from its colonies. Portuguese officials met representatives of MLSTP in Algiers and signed an agreement to ensure a smooth transfer of sovereignty to the people of São Tomé and Príncipe. On July 12, 1975, the independent nation of São Tomé and Príncipe came into being.

Since this is a national holiday, all public and private institutions are closed on July 12 in the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe.

❁ TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 21

On November 21, 1974, representatives of the Movement of Liberation of São Tomé and Príncipe (MLSTP; Movimento de Libertação de São Tomé e Príncipe) met with Portuguese officials in Algiers to work on an agreement for the smooth transfer of sov-

Fun Fact
São Tomé and Príncipe is said to have the best coffee in the world.

Popular Fish Dishes

Apart from *izaquente* (a stew of ground seeds) and *calulu* (a vegetable stew with herbs and breadfruit usually served with fish or chicken), the people of São Tomé and Príncipe emphasize fish dishes in their cuisine. Their fish delicacies include *peixe salgado*, salted fish, cooked in palm oil; *molho de fogo*, vegetable stew eaten with smoked fish; *gandu cozido*, boiled shark meat, *barriga assada*, grilled swordfish, *feijoada à moda da terra*, bean stew on smoked fish, *voador frito*, fried flying fish, and *con-con assado*, a small ugly fish that should be eaten grilled with hot palm oil, chili, lime, and plenty of baked breadfruit. A popular appetizer is *buzios* (snails) in *pala-pala*, a spicy sauce, or crisps made from *matabala* (a root similar to manioc) or bananas. An omelet of dried fish and herbs is also very popular.

reignty to the people of São Tomé and Príncipe. The Portuguese agreed to grant independence to the islands, and a transitional government was appointed to look after the administration of the islands. Since then November 21 has been celebrated as Transitional Government Day.

Religious Holidays

☼ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Last Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, commemorating the last week of Jesus' mortal life. Jesus was the prophet of Christianity, and Christians believe him to be the second person of the Holy Trinity (the Father, Son, and

Holy Spirit). The day is as much about the beginning of Jesus' journey to the Cross as it is about his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. His arrival in Jerusalem was indeed the way to the Cross.

After two of his disciples had fetched a donkey for him to ride, they placed their clothes on it to make a comfortable seat. The disciples then cut branches and covered the path, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the words of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. People welcomed him by waving

palm and olive branches, and strewing garments and branches on the road. There were different perceptions at work: Jesus rode in on a donkey, the humble entry of a peaceful nature by a spiritual king; the people of Jerusalem welcomed him with palm and olive branches and the laying of garments in his path because they wanted a worldly king to defeat the Romans. Devout Catholics in STP receive a small cross made from a dried palm leaf, which they take home with them after Mass.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

☼ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Thursday before Easter

The rituals observed on Maundy Thursday are based on a sequence of events supposed to have occurred during Jesus' last meal with his Apostles. First Jesus washed their feet; then he announced that he had been betrayed by one of them. The traitor Judas left the table. Finally Jesus instituted the Eucharist—a ritual of consuming bread and wine as symbols of his body and blood, also referred to as Communion in Christian churches. In the Roman Catholic Church Maundy Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist, the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week, and gives priests an opportunity to prepare for the many rituals associated with Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

☼ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, called *Sexta-Feira Santa* in STP, falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent. Alternatively known as Mourning Friday, Sorrowful Friday, or Holy Friday, it is a somber day for Roman Catholics and other Christians all over the world and is observed on the Friday before Easter. It commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus more than 2,000 years ago. São Toméans observe a fast from Ash Wednesday (first day of Lent) for 40 days up to Good Friday and a partial fast from then until Easter. Some fast only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Special prayer services are held on this day with readings from the Gospel narrating the events leading up to the Crucifixion. In STP, on Good Friday, people visit their local churches and pray to Jesus, taking inspiration from his life and teachings.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

Fun Fact

One can step on the equatorial line in Ilhéu das Rolas, a small Atlantic island to the south of the São Tomé and Príncipe archipelago. Ilhéu das Rolas is known as the breeding ground of the much-sought-after humpback whales, killer whales, pilot whales, bottlenose, and pantropical spotted dolphins.

❁ HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Saturday before Easter

Holy Saturday is the day Jesus lay in the tomb and the day before he rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. This was the Jewish Sabbath (the Jewish day of rest is Saturday). It is also regarded as the second Sabbath after Creation. The final day of Holy Week, which begins with Palm Sunday and includes Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, it marks the threshold between death and resurrection, and is a day of silence and contemplation for devout Catholics.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter, called Páscoa in STP, is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection. For this reason, it is sometimes known as Resurrection Day. This day is of utmost importance because the fundamental teaching of Christianity is that Jesus, through his death, freed all his believers from the penalty of sin. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. On Easter the entire family gathers to celebrate. São Toméans often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to offer prayers.

In STP Catholics attend midnight Masses for Easter and celebrate Jesus' Resurrection by lighting candles. A festive spirit envelops churches as people sing devotional hymns. Easter eggs have become associated with the festival because they are symbols of rebirth and regeneration taken from the ancient pagan spring festivals. São Toméans exchange beautifully decorated Easter eggs and visit friends and family members.

The first Monday after Lent is celebrated as Easter Monday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ SÃO TOMÉ DAY/ST. THOMAS'S DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: December 21

The Feast of St. Thomas (in Portuguese, São Tomé) falls on December 21 and celebrates the life of St. Thomas, one of the Apostles of Jesus. He is known

as "doubting Thomas" because he was one of the last Apostles to express belief in Jesus' Resurrection and was not convinced until he saw Jesus with his own eyes. December 21 is also the day of winter solstice (shortest day and longest night of the year).

The Portuguese discovered the island of São Tomé on St. Thomas Day in 1470 and named the island after this saint. This Roman Catholic feast simultaneously celebrates the island country of São Tomé.

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas, called Natal in STP, is a day of celebration for Christians all over the world. It falls on December 25, the date chosen by the Roman Catholic Church to mark the birth of Jesus. In São Tomé and Príncipe, it is also celebrated as Family Day since the entire family celebrates Christmas together.

Devout Catholics in São Tomé and Príncipe attend Christmas Eve (December 24) Mass in their local church. Christmas carols and devotional hymns are sung during the Mass by the church choir. On Christmas family members gather for a traditional dinner of salted codfish and potatoes, washed down with Port wine. Then they exchange gifts and greetings, which are followed by singing, dancing, and feasting.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Further Reading

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Fun Fact

According to the locals, living on the islands is *leve leve* (which means "easy easy"), thanks to the soothing natural beauty of the place. A storytelling session on the island could take as long as six hours on any given day. Just as people take a lot of time to tell a story, they also take their time cooking "slow food." For instance, smoking fish requires about two days.

~ Saudi Arabia ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Middle East, bordering the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, located north of Yemen
Size	756,985 sq. mi.
Capital City	Riyadh
Flag Description	Saudi Arabia's flag is green, a traditional color in Islamic flags, with the Shahada (the Muslim creed) in large white Arabic script (It can be translated as: "There is no god but God; Muhammad is the Messenger of God.") above a white horizontal saber (the tip points to the hoist side); the design dates to the early 20th century and is closely associated with the al-Saud family that established the kingdom in 1932.
Independence	September 23, 1932 (unification of the kingdom)
Population	26,417,599 (2005 est.)
Government	Monarchy
Nationality	Saudi Arabian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Arab (90%)
Major Language(s)	Arabic
Major Religion(s)	Muslim
National Holiday(s)	Saudi National Day, September 23

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Nomadic Semitic tribes occupied Arabia for thousands of years. The Nabataeans ruled over a vast, but loosely connected, trade network that had spread to Damascus by the first century B.C.E. Saudi Arabia is home to Islam's two most important sites, Mecca and Medina.

In 1932, King Ibn Saud (1876–1953), follower of the Wahhabi sect of Islam, created modern-day Arabia by uniting it under Wahhabism.

Starting in 1902 he set out to defeat local rulers and annex different areas of the region such as the Nejd, Al Hasa, and the Hejaz. In 1932 he declared himself the king of a unified area called Saudi Arabia. His eldest son Saud (1902–69) succeeded him in 1953. Faisal (1905–75; Saud's younger

brother) deposed him in 1964, because of what he perceived as his elder brother's spendthrift nature and ineffective rule.

King Faisal proved to be an effective leader who initiated reform policies to modernize the nation. From programs for educating girls to improving defense and the economic situation of the country, King Faisal accomplished a lot for his country. For example in the Arab–Israeli War of 1973, he suggested and supported the threefold price hike in oil prices, enabling his country (which owns one quarter of known world oil reserves) to earn a lot of foreign exchange. In 1975 his deranged nephew, Prince Faisal Ibn Musad Abdel Aziz (1944–75) assassinated Faisal. Abdel Aziz was later beheaded.

The next to assume power was Crown Prince Khalid (1913–82) as de facto prime minister with his two brothers, Aziz al-Saud (b. 1924) and Abd al-Aziz al-Saud (b. 1928). These brothers implemented several programs for social welfare and industrialization. Throughout his tenure Khalid was a

moderating force. He initiated the stabilization oil price policies of the OPEC (Oil Producing and Exporting Countries) among whom Saudi Arabia clearly had the decision-making monopoly; and he maintained friendly relations with Israel, as well as the United States, so that Saudi Arabia's interests were protected. King Khalid died in 1982 and was succeeded by King Fahd.

By 1989 Saudi Arabia had to sever diplomatic ties with Iran due to differences on oil policies, military issues, and rioting Iranian Muslim pilgrims in the holy city of Mecca. Iran, which had the largest single national group of pilgrims, considered it a religious right and obligation to engage in political demonstrations during the hajj. These demonstrations led to the massacre of 400 Iranian pilgrims in Mecca in 1987.

King Fahd (1923–2005) joined the coalition forces that rallied against Iraq's annexation of Kuwait in 1990. In 1992 he installed a new constitution that made provisions for the establishment of a national council with the power to question (not overrule) government decisions. Due to Fahd's ill health, his half-brother Abdullah ascended the throne in 2005. He signed a treaty with Yemen, ending a border dispute that had dragged on since the 1930s. Under his rule people could openly demonstrate against the United States for its support of Israel. The Saudi Arabian government also restricted the number of U.S. army bases in the country while it attacked Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003). By September of 2003 all U.S. forces had to be withdrawn from Saudi Arabia. The king authorized the Shura (a consultative council nominated by the king himself) to propose new laws without his prior permission. This decision came after the public began pressuring the government for reforms in its structure.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

With the Indian Ocean to its south, the Arabian Sea to the east, the Red Sea to the west, and the Persian Gulf to the northeast, Saudi Arabia covers four-fifths of the landmass of the Arabian Peninsula. Kuwait, Iraq, and Jordan surround the kingdom in the north while its eastern side is flanked by the Persian Gulf, Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Yemen and the Sultanate of Oman surround the kingdom on the southern front. Saudi Arabia has two neutral zones, one with Kuwait and the other with Iraq. An arrangement has been reached whereby all three have divided the areas they wish to rule.

A long mountainous chain marks western Saudi Arabia while the remaining area is mostly plains. The highest mountain is the Jebel Abha, at 10,278 feet. Out on the plains a large area is occupied by the biggest desert of the Arabian Peninsula, called the Rub al-Khali, or Empty Quarter, in English. Measuring 225,000 square miles, it is also the largest sand desert in the world. This desert may be the most forbidding place on Earth. Some sand dunes can be over

The Great al-Hasa Oasis

Nearly a hundred varieties of world-famous dates are grown in this region of eastern Saudi Arabia, which was under Turkish rule until 1914. These include *khlās*, *gharr*, *bukayyirah*, *khunaizi*, *shaishi*, and *ruzaiz*. If somebody visits Saudi Arabia and does not eat these dates from al-Hasa (Hajar of the past), the trip is said to be futile.

1,000 feet high. Summer temperatures can reach 140°F by noon, yet plunge to below freezing at night.

The Nafud (or Nefud) is the second largest sandy desert and spreads toward the northwest of the country. It is connected to the Rub al Khali, by a corridor called the Dahna, a region of gravel plains and sand dunes.

Salt flats, or *sabkhas*, cover the eastern area, in which the great al-Hasa Oasis (a place in the desert with enough water for agriculture) is located. Salt flats are regions in which the soil is hypersaline and, as a result, mostly devoid of vegetation.

The climate of Saudi Arabia is hot, reaching 113° F in many areas in summers, though the coastal regions tend to have accentuated humidity as well. Winter peaks in December and January with average temperatures of 59°F. Apart from the regular rains in the mountainous regions of Saudi Arabia, most of the country gets less than 8 inches of rainfall per year.

Some shrubs and tamarind plants grow well. There are also a large number of camels, the “ships of the desert.” There are some varieties of baboons in the forested area of mountainous Asir. Overall the climate is not well suited to animal and plant life.

❁ ECONOMY

The Saudi Arabian economy is an oil-based economy. Saudi Arabia is said to have one-fourth of the world's known oil reserves. Around three-quarters of the budget revenue, about half the gross domestic product (GDP) and 90 percent of the nation's export earnings, come from the petroleum sector. Other exports include steel, cement, and wheat. The nation's strategic location surrounded by sea and land gives it an edge in trading and shipping activities. The government controls major economic activities, though it has tried priva-

Fun Fact

Despite thousands of graffiti and inscriptions testifying to widespread literacy, as far as anyone knows the Nabataeans left no written records.

Fun Fact

The Wahhabist sect of Islam was founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab (1703–92). It is the dominant form of Islam in Qatar as well as Saudi Arabia.

Fun Fact

Even though the Rub al-Khali is one of the driest places in the world, it supports several hardy plants! These include the saltbush and the *abal*, which produces a scarlet fruit.

tizing bit by bit since 1999 to increase employment opportunities and reduce the nation's dependence on income from oil. It has been trying to allocate funds toward increasing educational standards in the country and improving the water (a scarce resource) and sewage system. Almost any reform in the country gets slowed down because Saudi Arabian society is very conservative, socially and politically.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Considering that it is the birthplace of Islam, it is not a surprise that Saudi Arabia features a culture that is centered around religion. Islam is the basic element of the constitution and the legal system of Saudi Arabia. The *sharia* (Islamic law) is based on the Koran.

About 95 percent of the population follows the Sunni Wahhabism form of Islam (instituted by the Ibn Saud family of rulers) and a patriarchal (male-dominated) system of society. According to their holy book, the Koran, people are required to pray five times a day. Mosques and minarets dot the landscape. Friday is considered to be the day for peace, tranquility, and rest.

The garments of Saudi Arabians are loose, long, and free flowing, in keeping with the desert climate and the Islamic requirement of covering up the whole body. Men wear a long ankle-length shirt (called a *thawb*) with a square cotton cloth tied to the head (called a *ghutra*). When it gets cold (which is rarely), they wear the *bisht* (a cloak made of camel hair) while the women are obliged to wear the *niqab* (veil) and *burka* or *abaya* (black coat) throughout the year.

The national dance of Saudi Arabia is called the *ardha*. A drummer lays down a beat, while a poet sings to its rhythm. The male dancers move to the music and carry swords. It is also sometimes referred to as the warrior dance. There is *al-sibba* folk music

Ardha Dance: Saudi Arabia's National Dance

This is a sword dance performed by men. It originated in the plateau region of Najd, located in northern Saudi Arabia.

The dance involves men dancing to the songs of a poet/narrator and a drummer. In the *ardha* dance, the poet begins singing, the drummer beats the drum, and the men begin dancing with their shoulders touching.

(derived from Spain) besides dance and music accompanied by the *mizmar*, an oboelike woodwind instrument.

CUISINE

It is forbidden by law to eat pork-based products or consume alcohol in Saudi Arabia. *Khobz*, an Arabic variety of unleavened bread, is eaten with nearly everything. Grilled chicken is quite popular, as is *shwarma* (sliced and cooked lamb), *felafel* (deep-fried chickpea balls), and *fuul* (a paste of beans, lemon, and garlic). *Al kabza* is a very famous Saudi Arabian preparation. It is made in a pot with meat (sometimes chicken), spices, and rice. Women do most of the cooking in Saudi homes.

The treatment meted out to guests is a direct indication of the host's social standing in Saudi Arabia. Being able to retain the guest for another meal is considered to be an honor in Saudi Arabia.

It is considered impolite if a large portion of food is left after a guest has finished a meal. This implies that the guest has not eaten enough. In fact an extra portion is supposed to be cooked to feed an unexpected guest.

Public/Legal Holidays

SAUDI NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 23

On this day in 1932 King Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman a-Saud unified the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia under the banner of Islam. For this reason it is also called Kingdom Unification Day. Saudi Arabia was created for peace and stability, which remains its mission. In the words of His Excellency Dr. Fouad bin Abdulsalam al-Farsy, Minister of Culture and Information, this day marks the greatest regional and social change that the region has ever witnessed. The Saudi Islamic Cultural Center (ICC), headed by Director General Dr. Ahmad al-Dubayan, officially celebrates the occasion by organizing their national dance, the *ardha* ("sword dance") functions.

Religious Holidays

EL AM HEJIR

Observed by : Muslims

Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

El am Hejir, the Islamic New Year, is celebrated on the first day of Muharram, the first month in the Islamic year. This day is observed in a somber mood

with special prayers and readings in mosques. An important part of the day is devoted to telling the story of the prophet Muhammad's flight to Medina. It is also accompanied with reflecting upon the mortality of human beings. In Saudi Arabia schools and businesses are closed to mark the occasion while families and friends get together for dinners. It is not a very extravagant occasion in this country.

❁ MOULOU

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

The birth anniversary of the prophet Muhammad, the founder of Islam, falls in the third month of the Islamic year. For Muslims all over the world, this is a day of great joy and celebration as Muhammad is the most revered prophet among the Muslims. In Saudi Arabia, however, Mouloud, also called Mawlid al-Nabi is not celebrated, because the Wahhabi sect, which predominates there, considers the celebration of birthdays, including the prophet's, as a distraction from devotion to Allah.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOU

❁ SHAB-E-MIRAJ

Observed by: Muslims

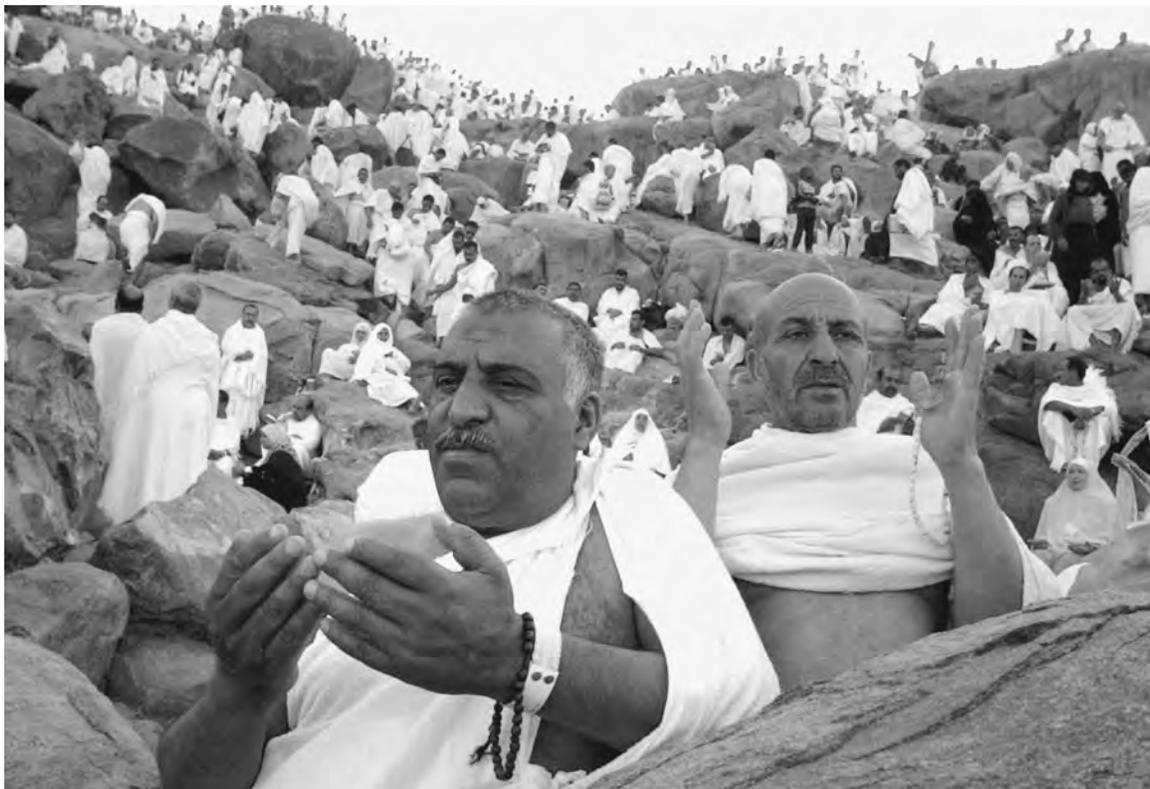
Observed on:

Twenty-seventh of Rajab, the seventh month of the Islamic calendar

Shab-e-Miraj, or Leilat al-Meiraj, commemorates the night the prophet Muhammad, along with the Angel Gabriel (*Jibrail* in Arabic), journeyed from Mecca to Jerusalem and ascended into heaven using gold and silver stairs. There they met Jesus, Adam, Moses, and other prophets. Though it is not obligatory for all Muslims to celebrate this day, Muslims in Saudi Arabia gather dur-

Fun Fact

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia uses the Islamic calendar, which began with the migration (*hegira*) of Muhammad and his companions from Mecca to Medina on Monday, the first of Rabbi al-Awwal, corresponding to September 13, 622 C.E. The *hegira* year has 12 lunar months and consists of 354 days. Thus, there is a difference of 11 days on the Western (Gregorian) calendar for each date on the Islamic calendar. For example 1 Muharram 1417 H. corresponds to May 18, 1996. However, 1 Muharram 1418 H corresponds to May 7, 1997.



Muslim pilgrims gather to pray on a rocky hill called the Mountain of Mercy, near the holy city Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Two million pilgrims gather annually at the sight of the Prophet Muhammad's last sermon 14 centuries ago in a ritual that marks the climax of the annual Muslim pilgrimage known as Hajj. (AP Photo/Hasan Sarbakhshian)

Fun Fact

The Nafud Desert, famous for its gigantic sand dunes, has orange sand. For this reason it is also known as the Great Red Desert.

Fun Fact

There is a ritual of serving coffee to the guest (called *gawha*) in Saudi Arabia. It calls for the host to roast and grind coffee beans along with pods of cardamom in the presence of the guest. After the coffee has brewed, it is poured out for the men (traditionally). Fresh dates (a staple food item) are also served.

Fun Fact

Saudi Arabia has no rivers or permanent bodies of water!

ing the day and recite verses from the Koran.

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar, the month after the month of Ramadan

Eid al-Fitr marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan. Muslims all over the world observe a month-long dawn-to-dusk fast during the holy month of Ramadan. It is believed that Allah himself revealed the Koran to Muhammad during this month. Hence Ramadan is the holiest month for devout Muslims, and the month-long period of abstinence is the fourth of Islam's Five Pillars of the faith. If someone is caught smoking, drinking, or eating in public during Ramadan in Saudi Arabia, he can be sent to prison until Ramadan is over.

The fast ends after the sighting of the new Moon, and Eid al-Fitr is celebrated on the very next day. For this reason it is also called the Feast of Fast-Breaking.

Fasting on Eid al-Fitr is strictly forbidden in the Koran. Muslims dress in their best clothes on this day and also pay *zakat*, or alms, to the poor and needy on this day. Festivities often continue on the following days; in this country, Eid al-Fitr is celebrated for 10 more days.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th or pilgrimage month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, or the Feast of Sacrifice, is the second of two celebrations in the Islamic calendar. It commemorates the unwavering faith of Ibrahim (Abraham) in Allah and his willingness to sacrifice his son to obey God's command. God visited Ibrahim in a dream and instructed him to sacrifice his most valued possession, his son. When Ibrahim told his son

about the dream, the boy asked his father to follow God's command. However, as the blindfolded Ibrahim was about to make the sacrifice, he was instructed by a divine voice to remove his blindfold. To his surprise, instead of his son, a ram lay on the altar.

The holy pilgrimage or hajj is undertaken during this month. Each able-bodied Muslim is directed by the Koran to undertake this journey at least once in his or her lifetime. In Saudi Arabia the occasion is marked with tremendous fervor and rejoicing. Muslims feast, exchange sweets, and give gifts to children. Eid al-Adha is celebrated for 10 days in Saudi Arabia.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

Regional Holidays

❁ JENADRIYAH NATIONAL FESTIVAL OF FOLKLORE AND CULTURE

Observed in: Jenadriyah

Observed by: General Public

Observed on : February

The first Saudi National Heritage and Cultural Festival was held in 1985 at Jenadriyah, near Riyadh. A permanent heritage village has now been set up in Jenadriyah.

The annual festival includes every aspect of the culture and tradition of Saudi Arabia. The National Guard, under the patronage of the king of Saudi Arabia, organizes this festival in February each year. Nearly a million Saudi Arabians attend this nonreligious festival that begins with a traditional camel race. Artisans such as weavers and potters display their handicrafts in small shops with typical palm-frond-roofed verandas. Traditional music and dances (such as the *ardba*, "sword dance") are performed during the festival.

❁ SAUDI INTERNATIONAL TRADE FAIR

Observed in: Jeddah

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May

Saudi Arabia's International Trade Fair (SAITF) has been held annually for many years in the kingdom's commercial center Jeddah. During the fair many products, goods, and services are displayed and sold. It is through fairs like these that Saudi Arabia gets an opportunity to promote itself at the global level in addition to gauging the market potential of its products.

❁ JEDDAH'S INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR

Observed in: Jeddah

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October–November

Jeddah's International Exhibition and Convention Center becomes a beehive of activity during the days of Jeddah's International Book Fair. Authors, intellectuals, publishers, and bibliophiles throng the place to explore books on various aspects of life. Culture and folklore are also promoted.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

The birth of a child in Saudi Arabia has to be reported to the local authorities within 30 days of his or her birth. In case the family lives 31 miles away from the city, they have a grace period of 30 more days to report the birth. The parents are supposed to carry their *iqama* (residence permit), passport originals, and their marriage certificates when they go. In case the parents want a divorce, the mother is entitled to the physical custody of the child until it becomes independent.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Although it is not required by the Koran, boys are circumcised at the age of six or seven. This ceremony is accompanied with celebration and feasting. Circumcising girls (also called female genital mutilation or FGM) is a pre-Islamic custom and is still practiced in some parts of the country.

❁ MARRIAGE

The foremost requirement for a girl to get married in Saudi Arabia is that she should be a virgin. There

is no concept of dating or falling in love since the two people usually meet on the day of their wedding. Polygamy is not uncommon in Saudi Arabia. Parents arrange the wedding when their children are very young. Girls are married off between the ages of 10 and 15 while men tend to be older. For instance, for a fourth wife, her husband might be 30 to 35 years older than the bride. The groom gives *mahr* (the bride-price) along with a dowry (containing money, gifts, and jewelry) to the bride's family. The girls have a henna party before the wedding night, and henna (a plant dye) is applied to their hands and feet giving them an orange-brown color. Girls leave their parents and stay with their husbands immediately after marriage. A typical Islamic wedding party involves separate celebrations for the men and women.

Fun Fact

A woman does not change her name after marriage in Saudi Arabia.

❁ DEATH

In preparation for burial, the deceased's body is washed to make it pure before burial. The face is turned toward the holy city of Mecca while prayers are recited for bringing peace to the person's soul. The bereaved carry the body on their shoulders for burial. Women, however, are not allowed to attend funeral ceremonies in Saudi Arabia.

Further Reading

Asad Abukhalil, *The Battle for Saudi Arabia: Royalty, Fundamentalism, and Global Power* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2004); Thomas W. Lippman, *Inside the Mirage: America's Fragile Partnership with Saudi Arabia* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2004); Madawi al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Fun Fact

Riyadh (the capital city) is part of this region and Ibn Saud, after establishing himself in Najd, declared Riyadh the center of his kingdom in 1932.

Senegal

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Western Africa, bordering the North Atlantic Ocean, between Guinea-Bissau and Mauritania
Size	75,749 sq. mi.
Capital City	Dakar
Flag Description	Senegal's flag has three equal vertical bands of green (hoist side), yellow, and red with a small green five-pointed star centered in the yellow band.
Independence	April 4, 1960 (from France)
Population	11,126,832 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic under multiparty democratic rule
Nationality	Senegalese
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Wolof (43%); Pular (24%)
Major Language(s)	French (official); Wolof; Pulaar; Jola; Mandinka
Major Religion(s)	Muslim (94%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Independence Day, April 4; Labor Day, May 1

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Present-day Senegal was a part of the kingdom of Ghana in the eighth century. In the 11th century the Takrur (or Tekrur) people of the Fulani tribe occupied the lower Senegal Valley.

Takrur was followed by the rise of the Jolof Empire between the 12th and 14th centuries. The 15th century saw the arrival of Portuguese traders on the Senegal River estuary; in the 16th century, the Dutch established a slave port on the island of Gorée, a small 45-acre island located off the coast. French entry into Senegal in 1659 for slave trade did not, however, transform the country into a French colony, since there was resistance from both the Dutch and British. While the year 1677 saw the French take over the island of Gorée from the Dutch, it was only after a long series of battles between the French and the British (such as the Seven Years' War between 1756 and 1763) that Britain ceded its holdings in Senegal to the French in 1816. By the late 19th century France had control over the whole of Senegal.

Senegal became part of French West Africa in 1895 and sent its first African deputy, Blaise Diagne (1872–1934), to the French Parliament in 1914. In 1946 it became a part of the French Union. Senegal formed its first National Assembly in 1956, and by 1960 it had become an autonomous republic within the French Community. This process took place in two phases. In the first phase, Senegal attained independence in June 1960 as part of the Mali Federation, which was a short-lived union between the autonomous territories of the Sudanese Republic and Senegal in West Africa. On August 20, 1960, Senegal pulled out of the Mali Federation to become a separate republic with Léopold Senghor (1906–2001) as its first president.

Léopold Senghor's Socialist Party ruled the country for 40 years, until March 2000. Senegal enacted its first constitution in 1963 and introduced a three-party political system in 1978. When Senghor voluntarily stepped down in 1981, his prime minister of 10 years, Abdou Diouf (b. 1935), became Senegal's next president. The period between 1982 and 1989 may be seen as the era of the Senegambian Confederation experiment. During this time Senegal and Gambia tried combining their military and security forces. The

idea did not work out, however, and the confederation had to be dissolved. Diouf won both the 1988 and 1993 elections. In March 2000 opposition leader Abdoulaye Wade (b. 1926; of the Senegalese Democratic Party) won the presidential elections and also the April 2001 parliamentary elections. The one significant political event after 2000 was the adoption of a new constitution on January 7, 2001.

In the 21st century Senegal is a republic under multiparty democratic rule and perhaps the only country in Africa that has not been afflicted with military coups. (The only one this country has experienced was in 1962, when the then-prime minister Mamadou Dia [b. 1910] attempted a coup against Léopold Senghor but ended up being imprisoned.) Administratively Senegal is divided into 11 regions: Dakar, Diourbel, Fatick, Kaolack, Kolda, Louga, Matam, Saint-Louis, Tambacounda, Thies, and Ziguinchor.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Situated on the western bulge of Africa, the Republic of Senegal shares its borders with Mauritania in the north and northeast, Mali in the east, and Guinea and Guinea-Bissau toward the south. Senegal surrounds Gambia on three sides. It is, however, not landlocked. On its western coast lies the Atlantic Ocean. Senegal's landscape is primarily a mixture of semi-desert and savannah (grasslands). The semi-desert portion lies to the northwest. Savannah grasslands cover the central and most of the southern portion. Casamance, a forest region, is also in the southern portion.

The lowest point in Senegal is its Atlantic coast, and the highest point is an unnamed feature near Nepen Diakha at 1,906 feet. The Futa Jallon foothills (maximum altitude 1,601 feet) lie toward the southeast while the major rivers flow from east to west. The Senegal River flows through the north, the Gambia River flows through the center, and the Casamance makes the southern soils fertile and the forest rich.

Senegal has two main seasons. The rainy season between May and November is characterized by a hot, humid tropical climate and strong eastward winds. The Casamance forest region may receive rainfall as high as 80 inches, while northern Senegal might receive only 20 inches of rainfall in a season. The dry season lasts for five months, from December to April. Harmattan winds blow frequently during this dry season. These are dry, dusty winds blowing off the Sahara desert region, capable of reducing visibility to only 150 feet. During the dry season, water is often scarce, especially in eastern and central Senegal. In fact the scarcity is often so severe that the country suffers from occasional droughts. Temperatures correspond to the seasons and vary accordingly. The average range is approximately 75°F to 100°F.

❁ ECONOMY

Senegal is primarily an agricultural country, but agriculture contributes only 17 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP). The main agricultural products are peanuts, millet, corn, sorghum, cassava (manioc), rice, cotton, pulses, tomatoes, and green vegetables. Of these, peanuts are the chief cash crop. They are grown primarily on small farms in the region between the Siné and Saloum rivers near Kaolack and Diourbel and are an important export. Animal husbandry, including cattle, sheep, and goats, is quite common, even though intermittent drought conditions often reduce their population. The coastal areas boast a sizable fishing industry, and fish processing is a major industry that contributes to the export earnings of Senegal. Petroleum products, the result of offshore operations in the coastal areas, are also exported, and the oil industry is an important contributor to the GDP of the country. Other natural resources that support the economy are phosphate rock, limestone, high-grade iron ore, and gold. The service industries, of which tourism is the most important, are responsible for approximately 57 percent of GDP. Full Internet connectivity in Senegal was realized in 1996.

Fun Fact

Takrur was a minor Iron Age state in West Africa; located in the Senegal Valley, it flourished roughly parallel to the Kingdom of Ghana. It was primarily a trading center specializing in gold, salt, Sahel grain, and slaves from the south. As early adherents of Islam, Takrur was significant in the introduction of that religion into West Africa. Later Islamic Takrur kingdoms are often sometimes referred to as Toucouleur, a French corruption of *Takrur*.

Islamic Brotherhoods in Senegal

In Senegal the Islamic brotherhood consists of three main branches: the Tidjanés, the Mourides, and the Khadirs. The Khadir brotherhood was founded in Mauritania and is one of the smallest but oldest brotherhoods in Senegal. The Tidjane brotherhood, which is rooted throughout West Africa, originated in Algeria. One of the most influential brotherhoods the Mouride was founded in Senegal by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacke, a Senegalese saint. Each brotherhood follows the decrees of its religious heads (*marabouts*), who are expected to teach the principles of Islam as well as counsel their followers. In Senegal the Tidjanés and the Mourides are the most prominent brotherhoods and enjoy large followings.

Senegalese Drums

In traditional Wolof life music, especially drumming and dance, plays an important role in every major event. The central feature of Wolof music is rhythm, and not surprisingly the most common Wolof instrument is the drum. The performance of music is the realm of specialists, the griot caste (*gewel*). Apart from the griots, the blacksmith caste (*tegg*) is master of the drums, especially the talking drum. But, as in any oral culture, the performance of music demands a response and participation from the audience. So the Wolof respond with their own type of frenetic dancing, clapping, chanting, and, sometimes, singing.

Through songs the Wolof store their history, teach adolescents the secrets of adulthood, and praise important figures. Religious chanting frequently goes on all night and is often heard blasting from loudspeakers on public transportation. Modern popular singers have combined the traditional Wolof rhythmic base with various contemporary modes of music to produce something that is distinctively Senegalese.

Tabala Wolof is the ritual drum music of an African Sufi order, the Qadiriya of Senegal. Led by a massive bass drum during nighttime worship, the drummers inspire ecstatic singing by playing interlocking rhythms on tuned drums.

And then there are the unique instruments of West Africa. The truly Wolof instruments are *xalam*, a five-stringed lute; the *tama*, an hourglass-shaped talking drum with an iguana skin at both ends laced together by strings along the length of the drum; and the *sabar* drum ensemble, a set of seven different drums, made from Dimba wood. Senegalese music has also been influenced by other instruments of the region: the *kora*, the West African harp; the single-string viola, called a *riiti*, of the Fulani; the flute of the Fula, the *balafon*. The Senegalese have also adopted the *tabala* drums of the Maures, hand-carved tympani-type drums used by the Qadiriyya Sufi brotherhood in their religious music.

The *tabla* is a Wolof Sufi ceremonial drum, played mainly at nighttime religious services by groups of five or more players in various pitches. They are closed at the bottom and played with two thick wooden sticks. A large *tabla* can weigh almost 50 pounds.

The *tama* is also called the talking drum because it can imitate the inflections of the human voice by regulating the pitch. The *tama* used to be a court instrument, used by kings and chiefs to call people together. Tightening the drumhead raises the pitch. Some rhythmic patterns have actual verbal meanings, but most Senegalese regard the *tama* as simply an instrument, now used primarily to accompany dancing or griots' chants.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The Senegalese have maintained their traditional ethnic tribal culture despite the colonial experience with France. Although French is the official language, languages such as Wolof, Pulaar, Jola, and Mandinka are among those commonly spoken. The Wolof group is the biggest indigenous group in Senegal. People of this group are divided into strata by birth. The upper class is made up of the warrior and noble families, followed by farmers, traders, and craftspeople, such as blacksmiths, weavers, woodworkers, and leather workers, with the griots and the slaves at the lowest level. The griots are respected since they constitute a class of people who preserve oral traditions and literature through the ages by reciting family and village histories through music or public speaking. In earlier eras the griots entertained the royal courts. They recite their histories to drumbeats.

Traditionally Senegalese women wear colorful beads in their hair.

Apart from beads, metallic jewelry is an important part of Senegalese dress. Senegalese people wear the *bubu*, a long Muslim gown, with trousers for men and cloth wrappers (called *sar*) for women worn under it.

Senegalese music is traditional with modern influences. The father of modern Senegalese music was Ibra Kassé, who founded the Star Band de Dakar in the early 1960s. Youssou N'Dour represents the latest art form. He plays traditional Senegalese *mbalax* or *sabar* music with some Western influences. The traditional music known as *mbalax* uses musical instruments such as the *tama* (a drum placed under the arm), the *djembe* (another drum variety), and the *kessing kessing* (metal shakers mounted on top of the *djembe forto* that provide a better rhythm sense for the drummer). These days, modern instruments such as the guitar, the trumpet, and the flute have also been incorporated. Touré Kunda and singer Baaba Maal are two traditional Senegalese artists of international repute.

Mbalax or *sabar* drumming is native to Senegal and is practiced commonly at births, marriages, funerals, and on holidays. *Sabar* drumming (with its

Fun Fact

All traditional gatherings, whether marriages, naming ceremonies for children, or any other family affair, are considered incomplete if the griots do not perform.

unique beat) is also popular and is even played at wrestling matches.

The Senegalese are also gifted at glass painting and woodcarving, and they are famous for their sand paintings. Animal skins (of crocodiles, snakes, and iguana) are used to make handbags, shoes, belts, and other accessories.

Approximately 92–94 percent of the population in Senegal are practicing Muslims, primarily Sufi, and only 2–5 percent are Christian (mostly Roman Catholic). The rest of the population practices indigenous beliefs. Out of the three forms of Senegalese Islamic brotherhood—the Tidjanes, the Mourides, and the Khadirs—the first two are the more important ones.

The Sufi Muslims of Senegal have their own holy men who are believed to connect them to Allah. They are called marabouts (dervishes), and most big decisions require their advice. A Moroccan marabout named El Hadj Umar Tall (1797–1864) who came to Senegal in the 19th century initiated many Wolofs into the Tidianism Muslim brotherhood. Originally they joined him as a cultural protest against the French colonialists. El Hadj Malick Sy, another great proponent of Tidianism, established the headquarters of this Islamic brotherhood in Tivaouane, a town in Thies near the capital city Dakar.

❁ CUISINE

Despite the influence of French culture, Senegalese food has an identity of its own. Seafood is an important element in the diet, followed by beef, lamb, and chicken. Since Senegal is predominantly Muslim, pork is not sold there. Rice is the main starch. Peanuts are used in Senegalese dishes. *Mafé*, a peanut-based stew, is common. Another local delicacy is peanut-based ice cream. Dishes from other parts of Africa and the world are often adapted to suit local tastes. The couscous of northern Africa (grainlike pasta mixed with meat or some vegetable) is one example. Senegalese beer is of good quality; the most popular brands are Gazelle and Flag.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Western (Gregorian) calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day throughout the world. Although the new year used to be celebrated with religious feasts, people in Senegal now treat the occasion as a secular celebration. In Senegal, at the coastal town of St. Louis, locals have fireworks displays at night to celebrate the occasion.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 4

It was on this day in 1960 that Senegal became an independent republic and withdrew from the French Community. Famous poet and politician Léopold Sédar Senghor became Senegal's elected president in September 1960. People celebrate Independence Day, or National Day, with public functions that include flag-raising ceremonies and patriotic speeches. Traditional dance and music accompany the celebration.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

The May 1 observance of Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, originated with the International Socialist consortium, which established the day in 1889 to coincide with a general strike in the United States called by the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in 1890 to demand the eight-hour workday. In Senegal banks remain closed to commemorate the holiday, though observances tend to be low key.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

Fun Fact

Griots' praise singing is often actually rhythmic chanting to a percussive accompaniment, much like rapping.

Religious Holidays

❁ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: The first of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

This holiday marks the start of the Islamic New Year in Senegal. It occurs on the first day of Muharram, the

A Typical Senegalese Meal

When guests enter the dining area of a Senegalese home, they are expected to follow the custom of pouring water over their hands and then wiping them on a common cloth. The first course usually served is a special chicken stew with rice, known as *thiou au poulet*. The alternatives are *mate aux arachid*, a meat stew with groundnuts, or a fish dish called the *bouidiennne*. Food is served in deep enamel bowls, and diners are expected to dip in the first three fingers of their right hands while eating. (Using one's left hand is worse than rude; it is regarded as unhygienic.) Fruits may be served as dessert, followed by coffee or tea. The famous *cinq centimes*, or five-cent cookie, may also be served after dinner.

Fun Fact

Muslim women do not wear a veil in Senegal. Those women who have been to Mecca wear a white scarf, while the men who have made the holy pilgrimage wear a white turban and a scarf.

first month of the Islamic calendar. It is believed that on this day Muhammad fled Mecca for Medina with his family and followers.

In Senegal the celebrations start at sunset the night before, with a special meal of couscous with chicken, beef, or lamb, along with grapes and tomato sauce. Toward the end of the meal, when only grains are left in the dish, some milk is poured on it before it is finished.

People eat as much as they can and then invite the poor to share their food. This is done to ensure one's own prosperity.

The underlying feeling in Muslim households on this occasion is that nobody should be left hungry on this festive day. This feeling is supposed to bring a prosperous new year ahead. A wish is made at the end of the meal when the couscous bowl is broken. A verse from the Koran is recited 1,111 times seeking forgiveness for sins.

For the youngsters of Senegal, the Islamic New Year is a time for "trick or treat." Boys dress up as girls and vice versa, and go from house to house dancing and singing for gifts and sweets.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

MOULOU

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

The Prophet Muhammad's birthday is celebrated on the 12th day of the third Muslim month. In Senegal, where the holiday is known as Gamou in Wolof, prayers continue throughout the previous night as thousands of pilgrims pour into the town of Tivaouane. The Tidjanes celebrate the prophet's birthday with a pilgrimage to their holy town of Tivaouane.

On Mouloud, also known as Mawlid al-Nabi, the Islamic brotherhoods all over Senegal organize prayer vigils that continue throughout the night.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOU

EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

The Muslims of Senegal, where Eid al-Fitr, or the Feast of Fast-Breaking, is called Corritay (or Korite), celebrate the end of Ramadan, the holy month of fasting, on this day. During Ramadan, devout Muslims must fast daily between dawn and dusk, as required by the Koran.

The celebration starts in the morning after the sighting of the new Moon. Men from every family go to the mosque in the morning for prayers. When they return, they eat *laax*, a dish made of curdled milk and millet. After a huge midday meal people visit friends and relatives. Gifts and wishes of *dewenati* (a wish meaning "may God grant us life for the next year") are exchanged. The women and girls dress up in their best attire, and the children frequently go asking for gifts (usually money) from their neighbors.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th or pilgrimage month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, also called Tabaski, Eid al-Kebir, or the Feast of Sacrifice, is celebrated in honor of Ibrahim's (Abraham) readiness to sacrifice his own son at God's command. On this day sheep (or goats) are offered as sacrifices in Senegal by all those who can afford to. The animals are slaughtered and left to stand until all their blood drains into a hole dug in the earth. The meat is then grilled and divided among family members and neighbors as well as shared with the poor. Islam emphasizes that it is important for every Muslim to be honest, fair, and generous. The women of the house prepare a grand feast with the remaining meat. People try to buy new clothes to wear on this day.

Also the holy pilgrimage, the hajj, to Mecca may be undertaken around this time. Each Muslim is directed by the Koran to make the journey at least once in his or her lifetime. It is the fifth pillar of Islam's Five Pillars of the faith. In Senegal Muslims try to arrange their hajj so that the end will coincide with Tabaski. Families save as much money as possible for the trip as well as for buying the goats or rams that will have to be slaughtered for the holiday.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; HAJJ; ISLAM

Regional Holidays

KAA Y FECC

Observed in: Dakar

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First week in June

During Kaay Fecc, also called the International Dance Festival and the Come and Dance Festival, Senegal's capital Dakar becomes the gathering place for numerous international dancers and choreographers. For about a week the city is consumed by the traditional and modern performances performed by local and international dance artists.

People come from far and wide to train in traditional and modern Senegalese dance workshops. This festival is eagerly awaited by dancers from all over the world each year.

❁ MAGAL OF TOUBA

Observed in: Touba
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March–April

The Magal of Touba is a very important Mouride (an Islamic Sufi Brotherhood) festival. It is celebrated annually during the lunar month of Safar, the second month of the Islamic calendar. This festival commemorates the return of the Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké (1853–1927) from exile and is marked by a mass assembly of the faithful (approximately one million) at his tomb. This is an occasion for the caliph general (grand marabout, the head of the brotherhood) to exhort the faithful, and for the faithful to touch the ground where Bamba walked. Most of the transport in Senegal is requisitioned for this immense prayer gathering, leaving the streets of Dakar virtually deserted. Even brotherhood members from Europe and the United States come to Touba for the Magal.

❁ SAGONI FESTIVAL

Observed in: Tambacounda
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January or February

The Sagoni Festival is a traditional festival of the Bamana, a tribe located in neighboring Mali. It is also celebrated in the Tambacounda region of Senegal, which is situated near the border of Senegal and Mali and is known for its rich *djembe* (dance and drumming) culture and tradition. This festival features dancers who wear masks of various animals that a hunter might encounter in the bush while hunting, and a drummer provides the rhythm for these dance performances. It represents one of the fading art forms of Senegal and is held to educate youngsters about ancient Senegalese traditions.

Fun Fact

Ramadan's month-long dawn-to-dusk fast is the fourth pillar of Islam's Five Pillars of the faith.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

The Wolofs have many customs concerning motherhood and childbirth. For instance they consider it



Pilgrims wait to enter a mausoleum containing former leaders of Senegal's largest Islamic brotherhood, the Mourides in Touba, Senegal. Squatting atop rainbow-hued minibuses and chanting religious verses, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims crowded one of Senegal's most sacred cities to celebrate the Magal of Touba. (AP Photo/Nafi Diouf)

impolite to ask a woman when her baby is due, how many children she has, or what their ages are. There is also a taboo against women going to the fields to work when pregnant for the first time. When a baby is born, an elderly Wolof woman blesses the child by

Fun Fact

Senegal uses the Islamic calendar, which began with the migration (hegira) of Muhammad and his companions from Mecca to Medina on Monday, the first of Rabbi al-Awwal, corresponding to September 13, 622 C.E. The hijrah year has 12 lunar months and consists of 354 days. As a result, Islamic holidays are celebrated on different dates of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar every year. For example, 1 Muharram 1417 H. corresponds to May 18, 1996, but 1 Muharram 1418 H. corresponds to May 7, 1997.

spitting on its face and kissing it. According to this tribe saliva has the power to retain words of blessing. The male elders convey their blessings by spitting in the baby's ear and rubbing some saliva on its head. Sometimes a knife is placed near the baby's head to protect it from evil. Also the baby's nails are not cut while it is being breast-fed because it might grow up to be a thief if its nails are cut. Wolofs choose the baby's name a week after birth.

COMING OF AGE

The Bassarri ethnic group of Senegal initiates young boys into adulthood over a period of one month by leaving them in peer groups to travel and fend for themselves in the wilderness. That way, it is thought, they face so many challenges and hardships that they will return as mature adults. The elders of the village decide the day when the boys are to be brought back. After their return they are declared reborn as adults whose responsibilities are now clearly defined.

MARRIAGE

A Senegalese bridegroom must give 22 pounds of nuts (with additional kola nuts) to the bride's father before seeking a woman's hand in marriage. *Marabouts* (dervishes, the spiritual leaders of the Muslims of Senegal) are consulted about potential marriages, usually by both families.

The day before the wedding, there is dancing and singing in the bride's house. On the day of the wedding, the groom's family comes with gifts for the bride's family. The hands of the bride are dyed with henna, while her hair is tied in braids ornamented with beads or coins. She wears a white dress for her wedding, which is complete with a *pagne* (cloth) or white veil. On the day of the wedding, a holy woman (griot) performs for the women celebrating the wedding.

Drumming, singing, and feasting go on until the early hours of the next morning. Then the bride leaves with her husband to go to their new home. Here, a sheep or a cow is sacrificed and a lavish feast is prepared. Festivities continue until late the next night at the groom's home. Over the next few days the bride is officially welcomed in the house and slowly apprised of her duties and responsibilities in the groom's family. A week after the wedding (which is considered the honeymoon period for the couple), the bride and her friends participate in a ritual called the *jour de linge*, or laundry day. Following tradition the bride and her friends collect the family's laundry for the entire week and go to a nearby well to wash it. The clothes are purposely soiled by the groom's family members and friends to tease the bride. The day is celebrated with feasting and dancing, because it marks the end of the honeymoon period for the couple.

DEATH

The Senegalese believe in the existence of heaven and hell. They bury their dead under their huts and cover them with sand. Wolof widows carry knives during the mourning period to ward off evil.

Further Reading

Mattie Sue Athan and Dianalee Deter, *A Guide to the Senegal Parrot and Its Family* (Hauppauge, N.Y.: Barron's Educational Series, 1998); David Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation: Muslim Societies and French Colonial Authorities in Senegal and Mauritania 1880–1920* (Athens, Oh.: Ohio University Press, 2000); Tijan M. Sallah, *The Wolof* (New York: Rosen Publishing Group, 1996); Bea Sandler and Diane Dillon, *The African Cookbook* (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1993).

~ Serbia and ~ Montenegro

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Southeastern Europe, bordering the Adriatic Sea, between Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina
Size	39,518 sq. mi.
Capital City	Belgrade (Serbia); Podgorica (Montenegro)
Flag Description	The flag of Serbia and Montenegro has three horizontal bands of blue (top), white, and red.
Independence	April 27, 1992
Population	10,829,175 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Serbian; Montenegrin
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Serb (63%); Albanian (17%)
Major Language(s)	Serbian (95%); Albanian (5%)
Major Religion(s)	Eastern Orthodox Christian (65%); Muslim (19%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; New Year's Day (Orthodox), January 14; National Day, April 27; Labor Day, May 1; Victory Day, May 9; Republic Day, November 29

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The Illyrians inhabited the region followed by the Scordiscs, a Celtic tribe, in the fourth century B.C.E. Little is known about the origin of the Illyrians but they are generally accepted to be the ancestors of modern Albanians. The Romans annexed the region 100 years later. In the sixth century, the Slavs occupied large areas of the Balkan Peninsula, which included present-day Serbia and Montenegro. Slavicization of the territory was a long and erratic process.

In 1389 the Ottoman Turks invaded Serbia and remained there for the next 500 years. The Serbs finally overthrew the Ottoman Empire in 1878 and became independent.

In 1912 Serbia took part in the First Balkan War and joined with Greece, Bulgaria, and Montenegro to liberate Macedonia from the Turks. After Macedonia was freed, Bulgaria initiated the Second Balkan War in 1913 against Greece and Serbia to gain control over Macedonia. It lost, and Serbia took over control of some parts of northern and central Macedonia.

Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria (1863–1914) was assassinated in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914, by a Serb, Gavrilo Princip (1894–1918), a member of the Serbian nationalist group known as the Black Hand. As a consequence Austria and Hungary tried to invade Serbia, and their action was the catalyst for World War I. After the war Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes joined with Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and some parts of Macedonia to form Yugoslavia in 1929.

In 1941 the Nazis invaded Yugoslavia, and thousands of Serbs lost their lives. Yugoslavia retained its independence

even after the war, and Josip Broz Tito (1892–1980), a member of the Communist Party, came to power in 1945. The monarchy was abolished, and Yugoslavia was declared a federal republic. In 1953 Tito became the president of Yugoslavia. In 1963 a clause was introduced in the constitution that stated that the president of the country would be elected for life.

After Tito's death in 1980, the presidency became rotational. In 1987 Slobodan Milošević (b. 1941), a member of the Serbian Nationalist Party, became president. The Slovenes and the Croats demanded their independence, and to avoid a civil war the European Community imposed sanctions. The deteriorating condition of the country forced the European Community to grant independence to the Croats and the Slovenes. Following this, Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina also demanded independence. Eventually, after a bloody war, the Security Council of the United Nations intervened, and Bosnia-Herzegovina got their independence. After that, only Serbia and Montenegro remained part of Yugoslavia.

In 1998 in the autonomous province of Kosovo, ethnic Albanians demanded their independence, and the federal army of Yugoslavia tried to suppress the agitation. Hundreds were killed, and thousands fled from the region in the struggle that followed.

Fun Fact

This scenic coastline in Montenegro has the only fjord in southern Europe. A fjord is a narrow and steep-sided glacial valley, formed when a glacier retreats, forming a U-shaped valley. The sea fills in, resulting in a deep valley floor that makes an excellent natural harbor and provides breathtaking views of deep canyons covered in greenery.

Although the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) did not intervene at first because Kosovo was a part of Yugoslavia, that organization launched air strikes and started bombing Belgrade when no compromise was in sight.

In 2000 the people of the country demanded Milošević's resignation, and Vojislav Kostunica (b. 1944) was elected president. In February 2003 the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was dissolved, and the state of Serbia and Montenegro was established.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The state of Serbia and Montenegro consists of Serbia, Montenegro, and the autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo. Serbia and Montenegro is made up of most of the territory formerly known as Yugoslavia; it was named Serbia and Montenegro in 2003. The country's neighbors are Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Albania. The Serbian territory is landlocked, while Montenegro has a coastline that is roughly 125 miles long with no islands off the coast.

Most of the land in Serbia is flat and low lying with some hilly terrain in the Kosovo region. The southern Montenegrin regions of the country are mountainous. The highest point is Daravica at 8,714 feet. The major rivers are the Danube, Drina, Lim, Morava, Sava, and Tara. Climatic conditions vary in the country according to the physical features of the different regions. The northern region of Serbia experiences continental climatic conditions with harsh, dry winters and hot, wet summers. Some areas there also experience heavy snowfall. The southern regions have a Mediterranean climate with wet and humid summers and mild winters.

ECONOMY

Agriculture and industry contribute to Serbia and Montenegro's economy. The Serbs cultivate crops such as grains, fruits, vegetables, tobacco, and olives. They also raise cattle, sheep, and goats. The major industries include machine building, metallurgy, mining, and consumer goods like textiles, footwear, foodstuffs, and appliances. Electronics, petroleum products, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals are other industries. The country is also rich in natural resources such as oil, gas, coal, antimony, copper, lead, zinc, nickel, gold, pyrite, chrome, and hydropower. The major trading partners of the country are Italy, Germany, Greece, Austria, France, Slovenia, Bulgaria, and Romania. The people here import machinery and transport equipment, fuels and lubricants, manufactured goods, chemicals, food and live animals, and raw materials.

The economy of Serbia and Montenegro has suffered severe blows as a result of the recent wars in the region. The country's economic condition remains volatile, in spite of efforts at reparation. The smaller republic of Montenegro has severed economic ties with Serbia. Both the republics now have separate central banks, different currencies (Montenegro uses the Euro, while Serbia uses the Serbian dinar), different customs tariffs, state budgets, police forces, and governments.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Serbia and Montenegro are known for the folk motifs and the modern surrealist art forms found in the country. The literary scene is also rich in tradition and has been deeply influenced by the political turmoil in this region. The country has come a long way from reciting folk songs and epics by rote and has produced talented authors such as Ivo Andrić (1892–1975), who won a Nobel Prize for his book *Na Drini Cuprija* (*The Bridge on the Drina*, 1945), about Bosnian history from the 16th century (when the bridge was built) to World War I. Modern Serbian literature came into being when Serbia gained independence from the Ottoman Empire.

Serbian music and dance forms are based on strong folk traditions and share similarities with

Vampires and Serbia

The word *vampire* entered the English language in 1732 through an English translation of a German report of a vampire -staking in Serbia. In East European countries, such as Serbia, people feared vampires so much that even government officials went out hunting and staking vampires. The myths about vampires go back thousands of years and are found in most of the important cultures of the world.

The Serbs believed that vampires were most

active during a full Moon, on the eves of St. George's Day (May 4) and St. Andrew's Day (November 30). Vampires are said to be immortal. If bitten by a vampire, the victim is believed to become a vampire as well.

Bats are often associated with vampires due to the similarity between the feeding habits of bats and vampires. Over the centuries this association became stronger and was made famous by many authors of vampire books, such as Bram Stoker.

those of Bulgaria. The Turkish influence is also evident. Indigenous folk music (*narodna muzika*) is a popular musical genre throughout Serbia and Montenegro. Rock, jazz, pop, and other musical genres are also prevalent here. Brass bands, a tradition passed down from gypsy musicians, are extremely popular, especially in southern and central Serbia.

Serbs and Montenegrins are big fans of outdoor sports such as soccer. They avidly follow every tournament played by the country's national soccer team, both within the country and abroad.

The official language spoken in Serbia and Montenegro is Serbian. This language was developed by the philologist and language reformer, Vuk Stefanovich Karadzich (1787–1864).

❁ CUISINE

Serbs have three meals a day—breakfast, lunch, and dinner. They consume large amounts of wheat bread made with or without yeast. Special bread without yeast, *pogaca*, is made for special occasions. Cheese, cream cheese (*kajmak*), boiled eggs, and ham (smoked or dry) are served as hors d'oeuvres. Serbs also love soups (such as *backa* soup made with four kinds of meat). Vegetable dishes made of string beans, potatoes, and cabbages are also popular. Meat is used in many forms in dishes of pork, beef, mutton, or chicken. Fish is also popular.

On feast days Serbs cook different dishes, at least 12 types of small cakes, and several large cakes. These are often accompanied by brandy *slivovica* (plum brandy), local wines, homemade fruit juices, and coffee.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, and is celebrated as New Year's

Day all over the world, starting with the many festivities planned for the evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve).

Traditionally the Serbs make personal New Year's resolutions and have a big dinner on this day. It is a national holiday, and schools and offices are closed. Most Serbian families exchange gifts on New Year's Day.

❁ NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 27

On National Day, or Constitution Day, the federation of Serbia and Montenegro, the successor of the erstwhile Republic of Yugoslavia, was proclaimed in 1992. On this day the people organize various national-level events to celebrate the occasion. Delegates and guests from other nations attend and address the people of Serbia and Montenegro. Demonstrations to show solidarity with the cause of the people are held even in foreign countries where there may be some Serbs and Montenegrins.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day and Workers' Day, depending on the country, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. While the earliest celebrations of May Day are ascribed to the pagan rituals that were practiced by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages, conflicting opinions exist about the origins of the occasion. Although Labor Day in some countries, such as Australia, has local origins, the most plausible source for the international observance is the Second International.

In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and



celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. In Serbia and Montenegro workers hold marches and demonstrations on the streets.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

VICTORY DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 9

Victory Day commemorates the defeat of German Fascists by the Allies during World War II in 1945. This is one of the most celebrated national holidays in Europe. People witness military parades and other festive demonstrations. War veterans and major administrators of the country visit the Tomb of the Unknown Hero on Mount Abala in Belgrade to honor the dead. The national media broadcast patriotic programs and songs. War memorial services are held in different places across the country. This day is also the anniversary of the establishment of a 40-year-long Communist regime in the region.

REPUBLIC DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 29

On this day in 1945 the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia was declared and established as a Communist state, under the leadership of President Josip Broz Tito. Serbia was a part of the republic at that time.

Religious Holidays

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: January 6–7

Christmas is a day of celebration for Christians all over the world; in Serbia and Montenegro, Christmas is celebrated on January 6 and 7 according to the Julian calendar (named for Julius Caesar), as in other Orthodox Christian countries.

On the morning of Christmas Eve, the head of the family goes into the forest and cuts a young oak tree. This is then blessed by the local priest and, after stripping off the branches, is burned in the fireplace. This ritual is called the burning of the *badnjak* (oak tree) and has pagan origins. Pagans used to burn the tree as a sacrifice to appease their gods and to ensure an abundance of food, happiness, and wealth in the coming year. Modern Serbs do not go to the forest to cut an oak tree. They only take tiny parcels made of oak wood to church, have them blessed, and burn them. Serbs cover the floors of their homes with hay, reminiscent of the manger in which Jesus was born. Families eat a meal of meat-

less foods, such as a Christmas Eve cake, baked beans, and walnuts at dinnertime.

On Christmas Day the Serbs celebrate with an elaborate dinner that features roasted piglet, sweet cakes known as *koljivo*, and *česnica*, a special kind of bread. *Česnica* is baked with a coin inside it; during the meal, whoever finds the coin is considered lucky and is said to have a happy year ahead.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

NEW YEAR'S DAY

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: January 14

This day is the beginning of a new year according to the Julian calendar, which preceded the Gregorian calendar commonly used in the West. Festivities are seen all across the country. This is a day set aside for family, and Serbians usually stay at home and relax.

FEAST OF ST. SAVA

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 27

St. Sava (1176–1235) is the patron saint of Serbia. This day is the feast day of this national saint, who is the patron of education. For this reason, schools, universities, academies, and artisan guilds celebrate this day on a large scale.

St. Sava became the first Archbishop of Serbia at age 70 and was the founder of the Serbian Orthodox Church. His father was a king of Serbia but relinquished everything to set up a monastery along with his son Sava. St. Sava was instrumental in spreading Christianity in Serbia. He opened many educational academies and promoted peace in the region.

HOLY WEEK

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Saturday of Lazarus–Easter

In the Eastern Orthodox Church, as in other Christian sects, Easter is the central observance of the liturgical year, and the date of most church holidays is determined by the date on which Easter falls. Every Sunday is dedicated in the Eastern Orthodox Church to Jesus' Resurrection, and 100 days are dedicated to Easter—50 before it in preparation, and 50 after it for glorifying him. Easter is the feast of feasts. The 50 days prior to Easter are a part of the period of Triodion, the period for strengthening one's faith. The means are well known: repentance, prayer, and self-control. The 50 days following Easter are the Pentecostarion (from the Greek *pentikonta*, meaning "fifty").

Holy Week begins with the phrase: "Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany." His arrival coincided with the Jewish Passover (Pesach). The church relates preparation and redemption to the events of this week.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY; PESACH

❁ SATURDAY OF LAZARUS

Observed by: Eastern Orthodox

Observed on: Day before Palm Sunday

The ceremonies of Holy Week begin with the Saturday Morning of St. Lazarus, the day before Palm Sunday. On this day the rising from the dead of St. Lazarus, the friend of Jesus, is celebrated.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

❁ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Last Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday remembers Jesus' entry into Jerusalem amid throngs of palm-bearing devotees.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

❁ HOLY MONDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Monday before Easter

On Holy Monday, the faithful remember how Jesus cursed a fig tree that had leaves and no fruit—a reminder of the hallowness of outward piety.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ HOLY TUESDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Tuesday before Easter

Tuesday of Holy Week commemorates the parable of the Ten Virgins.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ HOLY WEDNESDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Wednesday before Easter

Holy Wednesday commemorates the anointing of Jesus with myrrh at the house of Simon the leper.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

Maundy Thursday celebrates four events: the washing of the disciples' feet, the institution of the Holy Eucharist, the marvelous prayer, and Judas's betrayal.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday celebrates Jesus' Passion on the Cross. To take away our sins he willingly endured the Cross and death. On this day the faithful attend a special service in their local churches, offer prayers to God and remember the suffering and death of Christ. The confession from the cross of the penitent thief, crucified with Christ, is celebrated. During the procession, the faithful kneel and pray for their spiritual welfare, then reverently kiss the crucifix.

The Vespers of Friday afternoon are a continuation of the royal hours. During this service the removal of Jesus' body from the Cross is commemorated with a sense of mourning for the terrible events that occurred. As the priest reads the Gospel, he removes Jesus' body from the cross, wraps it in a white cloth, and takes it to the altar. The priest then carries the cloth on which the body of Jesus is painted or embroidered around the church before placing it inside the sepulcher, a carved bier that symbolizes the tomb, reminding the faithful that during Jesus' entombment he descended into Hades to free the dead of the ages. After several hymns are sung, the priest sprinkles the sepulcher and the whole congregation with fragrant water. On this day the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil is officiated.

In Serbia and Montenegro, a ritual called the Stations of the Cross is performed. This is a reenactment of Christ's final journey when he carried the cross before his crucifixion. Orthodox families observe a strict fast and attend church, where they kiss the Grave of Christ (Plastanica). Fish and oil are not used on Good Friday, and only nuts, fruits, and vegetables are eaten.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

In Eastern Orthodox Churches what is called Easter in English-speaking countries is called Paștele in Romania, after the Hebrew observance Pesach (Passover). On Easter Sunday (Saturday midnight) Jesus' Resurrection is celebrated. Before midnight the Odes of Lamentation of the previous day are repeated. The Orthros of the Resurrection begins in complete darkness. The priest takes light from the vigil light and gives it to the faithful, who are holding candles. In many churches the priest leads the people outside the church, where he reads the Gospel that refers to the angel's statement: "He is risen; he is not here." Then the people wait breath-



People light candles before the solemn liturgy in a monastery in Belgrade on Orthodox Easter. Traditionally Orthodox, Serbs observe Easter according to the Julian calendar (AP Photo/Srdjan Llic)

lessly for the priest to start the hymn of Resurrection. From this moment the entire service takes on a joyous Easter atmosphere.

On Easter in Serbia and Montenegro families gather together to celebrate Jesus' Resurrection, and color Easter eggs and paint beautiful designs on them. These intricate designs are unique to Serbia. Some eggs are dyed red to symbolize Jesus' Resurrection. It is a tradition here that the very first egg that is colored is kept aside for the head of the family. This egg is called *cvarkuca* (protector of the house).

Easter Sunday afternoon the faithful gather once more for prayer with lighted candles and greet one another joyously, saying: "Christ is Risen." The fruit of faith in the Resurrection is love so this day is called Sunday of Agape (brotherly love), a day dedicated to Christian principles, especially forgiveness and charity. At this time Christians seek to end mis-

understanding and arguments among those with whom they may be at odds.

A traditional Serbian Easter meal consists of lamb soup, roast lamb, salad, and delicious cakes. Feasting and exchanging greetings and Easter eggs continue even on the next day Easter Monday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PESACH

❁ VIDOVDAN

Observed by: Serbian Christians

Observed on: June 28

The festival of Vidovdan is of national importance and symbolizes death and resurrection, despair and hope, to the people of Serbia. It originated with the peasant community who used to practice many customs and rituals that have pagan origins related to the pagan god Svevid or Vid. Young girls soaked an herb called *vidovica*, in water and washed their faces with it.

The day has been also celebrated as St. Vitus's Day or the Feast of the Holy Prince Lazarus by the Serbians ever since Christianity was introduced in the region. Saint Vitus was an Italian Christian saint.

In addition Vidovdan is the anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo. Prince Lazarus (Lazar Hrebeljanovic, fl. 14th century) was a virtuous ruler who led the Serbs in many wars. He raised a multinational force on this day in 1389 to engage the Turks in the Battle of Kosovo Polje on St. Vitus Day. During the battle Prince Lazarus was killed, and the Serbs were badly defeated while defending their homeland. On this day special prayer services are held in all churches of Serbia. Memorial services are also held for the Serbian heroes. It is believed that on this day the rivers turn red, colored by the blood of Kosovan heroes. In Montenegro women used to wear black scarves on their heads, and the men's caps were embroidered with black to mourn the loss in the Kosovo Battle.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

Regional Holidays

❁ INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL FAIR

Observed in: Novi Sad

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May

The International Agricultural Fair is held annually in Novi Sad. Thousands of exhibitors come from all parts of Serbia and Montenegro and neighboring countries to participate. Exhibitions of food, beverages, agricultural products and tools, livestock, and packaging techniques, are held during this event.

Towels

Apart from being valuable gifts, towels are part of the Serbian dress code. Women and girls wear towels tied to belts as a part of their clothing. Girls wear them on their right while women wear them on their left side. Towels have a very old association with the people of Serbia and are used on numerous occasions like births, weddings, and funerals. They are used to decorate the house, and the way a towel is used is said to reflect the artistic ability of the women.

The Agricultural Fair is one of the most popular events held in the country, and also provides a sound platform for the cultivators to showcase their skills as well as their products.

Rites of Passage

✿ MARRIAGE

In a traditional Serbian wedding, the bride is escorted into the church by the groom's brother. Other people who are important to the couple, like their parents and the godparents, will be present throughout the ceremony. During the wedding service, the priest binds the couple symbolically with a cloth. This white binding cloth is called the *pesbkir*, and this tradition signifies that the couple is now bound together for life.

A traditional towel is an important wedding gift

presented to the Serb couple by close friends and relatives. It symbolizes the closeness they share with the couple. Towels are also given to the friends and relatives of the couple. The size, quality, and patterns on the towels vary. For instance, the groom's brother and the best man are given specially decorated towels that are more luxurious compared to the towels others receive.

Further Reading

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Fun Fact

A special delicacy, known as the wedding feast cabbage is made of large chunks of cabbage mixed with different meats and spices, and boiled for at least 12 hours.

Seychelles

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	African archipelago in the Indian Ocean, east of Kenya
Size	176 sq. mi.
Capital City	Victoria
Flag Description	The flag of the Republic of Seychelles has five bands of blue (first), yellow, red, white, and green radiating from the bottom of the hoist side.
Independence	June 29, 1976 (from United Kingdom)
Population	81,188 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Seychellois
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Mixed French; African; Indian; Chinese; Arab
Major Language(s)	Creole (or Seselwa, official, 92%); English (official, 5%); French (official)
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (82%)
National Holiday(s)	Labor Day, May 1; National Day, June 18 ; Independence Day, June 29

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

The Seychelles (pronounced say-shelz or say-shel) were apparently uninhabited islands when Arab and Indonesian traders first stopped there, but a Portuguese sighting of them was the first documentation of their existence in 1505. They were ideally located for sailors and became an important transit point for traders between Asia and Africa. But this made them a convenient spot for pirates as well.

In 1742 the French governor of Mauritius, Le Visconte Bertrand-François Mahé de La Bourdonnais (1699–1753), in the service of the French East India Company, sent Lazare Picault on expedition to the Seychelles for a second time with the *Elizabeth*. Picault landed on Mahé in November 1742 and was so impressed that he christened the island Ile d' Abondance. He stayed only four days, and when he left he took 300 giant tortoises and 600 coconuts. In 1756 this territory was formally annexed by France. In 1756 the French began to take control of the islands and named them for the French finance minister Jean Moreau de Sechelles (1690–1760).

Great Britain and France vied for control of the Seychelles from 1794 to 1811, but the French finally yielded, and the British gained complete control of the territory in 1814. In 1903 the Seychelles were separated from Mauritius and became a crown colony. In 1974 Britain annexed Seychelles and placed it under the administration of Mauritius. Internal government was recognized in 1975, and independence followed a year later, although the Seychelles joined the British Commonwealth.

James Mancham (b. 1939) was the first prime minister of independent Seychelles. He concentrated on tourism and off-shore financial services to boost the country's economy but faced strong opposition from the Seychelles People's United Party. While he was attending the Commonwealth conference in 1977, armed men of the opposition staged a coup. Albert René (b. 1935), the party leader, took power and controlled Seychelles throughout the 1980s.

Facing criticism from England and France, René was forced to form a real political party, the People's Progressive Party and hold elections. He created the office of president who is the chief executive while legislative power is in the hands of the National Assembly. Elections are conducted every five years. The 1979 constitution declared a Socialist one-party state, which lasted until 1992. The 1993 elections were a complete victory for René over Mancham

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Situated in the Indian Ocean, the Republic of Seychelles is about 1,000 miles east of Kenya. The Seychelles are an archipelago consisting of about 115 islands, but only 33 are inhabited. Mahé, the largest island, is surrounded by 42 granite islands and is home to the country's capital city Victoria and about 80 percent of the population. The Seychelles' highest point, the Morne Seychellois (2,969 feet), is also on Mahé. The outer group of islands is mostly small coralline atolls that are flat with elevated coral reefs. Habitation on these islands is very difficult because there is no fresh water.

The country has a tropical-marine climate with steady temperatures throughout the year. The hottest months are March and April. July and August are the coolest months in Seychelles. From May to September, when the southeast trade winds blow continuously, is considered the best time of year. From November to April humidity is relatively high, though the northwest wind blows lightly. The wettest months are December and January.

❁ ECONOMY

Since its independence in 1976, development in this Indian Ocean archipelago has been led by the tourist sector. Employment, banking, and commerce are dominated by tourism-related industries. Tourism employs 30 percent of the country's labor force. It was only after the collapse of its economy due to the 1991 Gulf War that Seychelles began seriously to diversify its economy. The tuna fishing industry is another factor in the country's economy. The significant imports are petroleum products, machinery, and foodstuffs; the main exports are canned tuna, copra, frozen fish, and cinnamon.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Most Seychellois are descendants of French settlers and African slaves. In the 19th century the British freed Africans from slave ships along the East African coasts and took them to Seychelles. Other permanent groups include Chinese and Indians. The Seychelles culture is a mix of English, French, and African influences. Ninety-two percent of the people speak Creole. It was made the first official language of the Seychellois in 1981 followed by English and French, but English dominates as the language of the government and commerce and is also the language of the National Assembly. The René regime had discouraged French because it was the language of the colonists. The Roman Catholic Church, however, uses French, and many older people still communicate in French. In Seychelles nearly half of the television programs are in French, and most people can read and write French. In order to restore the culture and tradition of the Seychellois, the government has provided the National School of

The Double Coconut

The *coco de mer* is unique to Seychelles. Native to Praslin, it is also called the double coconut. It bears one of the largest fruits in the plant kingdom, which weighs up to 49 pounds. According to local folklore, the male palm mates with the female palm at night, and anybody who sees them moving during the night will die.

Music and the National Cultural Troupe for nurturing the country's identity.

Seychellois society is essentially matriarchal in the sense that mothers tend to control the household, overseeing most expenditures, and providing for the interests of the children. Men are important for their earning ability, but their domestic role is relatively peripheral. Older women can usually count on financial support from family members living at home or contributions from the earnings of grown children.

Social class is very much a factor in Seychelles, and wealth and material acquisition are considered marks of "success." The relative lightness or darkness of one's skin is also a consideration, the lighter the better. This bias is doubtless a leftover from the plantation era when the "bosses" were white men.

❁ CUISINE

Of all the islands in the Indian Ocean, Seychelles is reputed to offer the best Creole cuisine. The staple food of the people is rice and fish. The varieties of fish include shark, barracuda, kingfish, octopus, squid, jack fish, red snapper, parrotfish, and grouper. *Daube* (a sweet sauce or stew), *rougaille* (a tomato-based sauce used with fish), *carii coco* (a mild meat or fish curry with coconut cream), and fish marinated in lemon are other classic Creole dishes. The use of spices, coconut milk, and breadfruit has been borrowed from Indian, African, Chinese, English, and French traditions.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Labor Day, also known as Workers' Day and May Day, is a legal holiday that dates back more than 100 years. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, designated May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations



and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. The May 1 observance of Labor Day has always been more radical than the U.S. observance in September. Most countries observe Labor Day on May 1 and sometimes make a long weekend of it.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 18

National Day celebrates the implementation of a multiparty democracy by the René administration in 1993. The new flag was also introduced at this time. The five colors of the flag represent Seychelles and its people. The color blue is for the sky and sea, which surround the country. The yellow represents the Sun, giver of light and life. Red represents the people and their unity in working toward a bright future. The white band stands for social justice and harmony, and green signifies nature and the land. Festivities on this day include flower shows, music, parades, and the presidential speech.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 29

In Seychelles, Independence Day, which marks the country's independence from the United Kingdom in 1976, is celebrated with various sports activities. Interschool athletics, the highlight of the day, attract big sports crowds to the stadium of Stade Linite in the capital Victoria.

Religious Holidays

PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Last Sunday before Easter

Origin of the Creole Festival

The Creole Festival dates back to the 1980s when academics of Creole societies from the Indian Ocean as well as the Caribbean proposed that October 28 be celebrated as International Creole Day. The idea was to raise awareness of Creole languages and cultures. It helps to bring together the Creole communities scattered around the world. All the events are open to the public, and the community welcomes all participants.

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, commemorating the last week of Jesus' mortal life. Jesus was the prophet of Christianity, and Christians believe him to be the second person of the Holy Trinity (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). The day is as much about the beginning of Jesus' journey to the Cross as it is about his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. His arrival in Jerusalem was indeed the way to the Cross.

After two of his disciples had fetched a donkey for him to ride, they placed their clothes on it to make a comfortable seat. The disciples then cut branches and covered the path, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the words of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. People welcomed him by waving palm and olive branches, and strewing garments and branches on the road. There were different perceptions at work: Jesus rode in on a donkey, the humble entry of a peaceful nature by a spiritual king; the people of Jerusalem welcomed him with palm and olive branches and the laying of garments in his path because they wanted a worldly king to defeat the Romans.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

The rituals observed on Maundy Thursday are based on a sequence of events supposed to have occurred during Jesus' last meal with his Apostles. First Jesus washed their feet; then he announced that he had been betrayed by one of them. The traitor Judas left the table. Finally Jesus instituted the Eucharist—a ritual of consuming bread and wine as symbols of his body and blood, also referred to as Communion in Christian churches. In the Roman Catholic Church Maundy Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist, the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week, and gives priests an opportunity to prepare for the many rituals associated with Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, alternatively known as Mourning Friday, Sorrowful Friday, or Holy Friday, is a somber day for Roman Catholics and other Christians all over the world and is observed on the Friday before Easter. It commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus more than 2,000 years ago. Some Seychellois observe a fast from Ash Wednesday (first day of

Lent) for 40 days up to Good Friday and a partial fast from then until Easter. Some fast only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Special prayer services are held on this day with readings from the Gospel narrating the events leading up to the Crucifixion. In Seychelles, on Good Friday, people visit their local churches and pray to Jesus, taking inspiration from his life and teachings.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Saturday before Easter

Holy Saturday is the day Jesus lay in the tomb and the day before he rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. This was the Jewish Sabbath (the Jewish day of rest is Saturday). It is also regarded as the second Sabbath after Creation. The final day of Holy Week, which begins with Palm Sunday and includes Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, it marks the threshold between death and resurrection, and is a day of silence and contemplation for devout Catholics.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection. For this reason, it is sometimes known as Resurrection Day. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. On Easter entire families gather to celebrate. They often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to offer prayers. Easter eggs have become associated with the festival because they are symbols of rebirth and regeneration taken from the ancient pagan spring festivals.

On Easter in Seychelles, the entire family gathers to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus. This day is of utmost importance because the fundamental teaching of Christianity is that Jesus, through his death, freed all his believers from the penalty of sin. They often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to offer prayers. In Seychelles people attend midnight prayer services for Easter and celebrate Jesus' Resurrection by lighting candles. A festive spirit envelops churches as people sing devotional hymns.

The first Monday after Lent is celebrated as Easter Monday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: August 15

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary is a Christian feast commemorating Mary's death, and assumption into heaven. On November 1, 1950, Pope Pius XII (r. 1939–58) declared Mary's assumption a fundamental dogma of Catholicism.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day serves as a holy day of obligation for Roman Catholics, commemorating all Christian saints, known and unknown. This day was first mentioned in the fourth century to honor Christian martyrs.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ ALL SOULS' DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: November 2

This is a Roman Catholic festival commemorating the dead. It is usually celebrated on November 2 unless it falls on a Sunday, in which case All Souls' Day, also known as Day of the Dead, is celebrated on Monday. It follows All Saints' Day and shifts the focus from those in heaven to those whom Christians believe are waiting in purgatory. Three Masses are conducted on this day: one for the celebrant, one for the departed, and one for the pope.

Seychellois believe that the soul of the dead return on this day to have a meal with their family members. Candles are kept on the windowsills to help them find their way home, and an extra place is set at the table for their return.

See also Volume III: ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: December 8

December 8 is celebrated as a holy day of obligation for devout Catholics, honoring the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Catholics attend Mass even if this day falls on a weekday or Saturday. The solemnity honors the fact that Mary, in view of her first calling—to be the mother of Jesus—was saved from original sin.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Fun Fact

There are two UNESCO World Heritage Sites run by the Seychelles Islands Foundation including the Vallée de Mai (May Valley) on Praslin Island, which is believed to be the original site of the Garden of Eden.

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 25

Christmas falls on December 25 and marks the birth of Jesus. In Seychelles homes are decorated with multicolored lights and a Christmas tree. It is believed that Santa Claus brings gifts to good children on Christmas Eve (December 24). Catholic seychellois attend Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve and then go outside to drink hot wine and cocoa and eat sausages, baked ham, roast fowl, salads, fruit, and pastries.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

FETAARIK

Observed in: Seychelles
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: End of May

FetArik is an occasion for the Seychellois to celebrate their cultural and historical ties to the African mainland. The weeklong activities include dance, music, fashion shows, fine art, cuisine, and literature.

JAZZ FESTIVAL

Observed in: Seychelles
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July–August

Seychellois enjoy this festival from late July to early August. It is billed as the premier event of its kind in the region. Jazz artists from the Indian Ocean islands of Madagascar, Mauritius, Réunion, and Comoros as well as from mainland Africa come together to perform in this popular festival. The event draws talent from the field of music, art, dance, fashion, cuisine, and literature.

CREOLE FESTIVAL

Observed in: Seychelles
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Last week of October

A yearly event, the Creole Festival falls in the last week of October and is the biggest festival of the year. Artists from all over the region display their work. Performances of Creole music, dance, and theater celebrate the rich heritage of the islands' culture. Street theater, literature, photography, and puppetry are celebrated along with Creole handicrafts, which are sold during the festivities.

Rites of Passage

MARRIAGE

A distinguishing feature of Seychelles society is the acceptance of sexual relationships without the institution of marriage. Nearly three-quarters of the children are born out of wedlock, though the fathers do legally recognize most of these children. Many people choose to live en ménage, as it is known in the Seychelles, because it is cheaper. The unpopularity of legal marriages is related to the cost of weddings, trousseaus, household furnishings during and after marriage, the unwillingness of mothers to part with their sons' earnings, previous marriage by one partner, expenses related to divorce, and the expectation of sexual fidelity in marriage. Women from the more socially prominent families often get married because it is expected of them, and it ensures a conventional transfer of wealth of one generation to the next.

Fidelity in men is not an important concern in Seychelles's society.

Further Reading

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Sierra Leone

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	West Africa; bordering the North Atlantic Ocean, between Guinea and Liberia
Size	260, 885 sq. mi.
Capital City	Freetown
Flag Description	The flag of the Republic of Sierra Leone has three equal horizontal bands of light green (top), white, and light blue.
Independence	April 27, 1961 (from United Kingdom)
Population	6,017,643 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional democracy
Nationality	Sierra Leonean
Major Ethnic Group(s)	20 native African tribes (90%—Temme, 30%; Mende, 30%; other 30%), Creole, (10%)
Major Language(s)	English (official); Mende; Temne; Krio
Major Religion(s)	Muslim (60%); indigenous beliefs (30%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Republic Day, April 19; Independence Day, April 27; Labor Day, May 1; Boxing Day, December 26

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The area on the west coast of Africa, now known as Sierra Leone, was first inhabited by unknown tribes from the interior of Africa more than 600 years ago. They are believed to be the ancestors of the oldest ethnic group of modern-day Sierra Leone, the Limbas. When Europeans arrived in the region, it consisted primarily of several distinct kingdoms ruled by chieftains.

Portuguese sailor Pedro da Cintra discovered Sierra Leone in 1462 while he was exploring a new sea route in the Atlantic Ocean. He named the region Serra Lyoa, which means "Lion Mountains," after the mountain ranges in the country.

By the end of the 15th century (1495), the Portuguese had built a fort as a trading post for gold, spices, ivory, and slaves. Following the Portuguese, the British and the French also set up bases in Sierra Leone. In the 17th century the British negotiated with tribal chiefs to set up warehouses for their merchandise. Thousands of West African slaves were

transported to the Americas from Sierra Leone beginning in the 1650s. In 1672 the Royal African Company was founded, and trading posts were established on Bunce and York Islands.

The slaves transported to North America from Sierra Leone and other parts of West Africa were particularly valuable to white colonists because of their skills as farmers, especially their experience in cultivating rice, which became an important cash crop in South Carolina and Georgia.

Beginning in 1787, following the American Revolution, British officials established in Sierra Leone a Province of Freedom, a colony of free, expatriated former slaves at Freetown, near the site of the original Portuguese fort. The colony consisted of slaves who had escaped white masters in America during the turmoil of the revolution and who had been resettled in Nova Scotia and Britain. Periodically the British settled other Africans liberated from slaving ships or who were otherwise displaced in the Freetown colony. Still British colonization in Sierra Leone, even when it included freed slaves, provoked resistance among indigenous Africans.

Britain and France signed a treaty in 1812 that assigned each specific zones of influence in the area. In the 1890s Britain sought to thwart French ambitions in the territory by

Freetown

Freetown is the capital, chief port, and the largest city of Sierra Leone. It lies on the rocky Sierra Leone Peninsula at the seaward tip of a range of wooded hills. By the mid-17th century, the increased activity of British, French, Dutch, and Danish trading companies ended Portuguese control over trade on the west coast of Africa. In 1787 an English abolitionist named

Granville Sharp (1735–1813) selected this site south of the mouth of the Sierra Leone River as a haven for African slaves, freed and destitute in England.

In 1792 the Sierra Leone Company took over responsibility and helped settle slaves from Nova Scotia who had fought for the British in the American Revolutionary War, the Maroons (runaway slaves of Jamaica), and others from captured slave ships.

declaring all of Sierra Leone a British Protectorate. During World War I (1914–1918), Sierra Leonean soldiers fought in Cameroon against the Germans.

Sierra Leone became known as the West African white empire because key administrative posts were held by the light-skinned Europeans and the authority of the Krios (Creoles) declined. These developments sparked opposition from the native population. After the British levied taxes on tribal huts, the tribes in the north and south of Sierra Leone revolted, though they were unable to match the might of British forces at that time.

Following World War I the British began to exploit the mineral wealth of Sierra Leone (including diamonds, bauxite, gold, and iron ore), and by 1926 more than 16,000 people worked in the mines, toiling long hours in unhealthy working conditions. The workers protested, but dissent was quelled.

During World War II (1939–45), Freetown was a significant base for the Allies, and as many as 17,000 Sierra Leoneans fought alongside the British. When the war ended, new colonial policies ensured that a majority of natives occupied positions of power. In 1951 elections for the legislative council were held in Sierra Leone, and the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), formed in 1949 by Sir Milton Margai (1895–1964), was declared victorious. The constitution of 1951 provided the framework for decolonization, and elections were the first step in this direction. In 1953 ministerial powers were handed to the elected representatives, and a group of elected representatives ran the affairs of the country.

Finally on April 27, 1961, Sierra Leone became an independent nation within the British Commonwealth. Sir Milton Margai was sworn in as the first prime minister of independent Sierra Leone, and he remained the prime minister until his death on April 28, 1964. On his death his brother Sir Albert Margai (1910–90) was sworn in as the new prime minister. Around this time the opposition party, the All People's Congress (APC), gained ground and fiercely opposed Albert's claim to the position. In the elections held in March 1967, APC won a decisive majority in Sierra Leone, and Siaka Stevens (1905–88), the leader of the party, was appointed the new prime minister of the country. However, the nation was thrown into turmoil after Brig. David Lansana (1922–75), the Commander of Republic of

Sierra Leone Military Forces (RSLMF), a Mende related by marriage to Margai, ousted Stevens a few minutes after he took the oath of office. Lansana's rule lasted a mere two weeks, ended by a group of senior military officers who arrested him on March 23 and took control of the government. They formed the National Revolutionary Council (NRC) and made Brig. Andrew Juxon-Smith their chairman. After the "sergeant's revolt" led by the Anti-Corruption Reformation Movement (ACRM) in April 1969, Stevens finally resumed power as the prime minister of Sierra Leone. The sergeant's revolt was led by a group of rebel soldiers who wanted to restore multiparty democracy in the country. Stevens's first act when he resumed office was to convict Lansana of treason and have him hanged.

In 1985 APC leader Maj. Gen. Joseph Saidu Momoh (1937–2003) was elected to succeed Stevens as the prime minister of Sierra Leone. In 1991 the government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), a rebel group, became engaged in a civil war. The war, which lasted from 1991 to 2002, killed thousands of people, maimed and crippled thousands more, and displaced more than two million (over one-third of the population). Many of them are now refugees in neighboring countries.

Finally the RUF and Civil Defense Forces (CDF) combatants were demobilized and disarmed. This was achieved with the support of a UN peacekeeping force (UN Mission in Sierra Leone, UNAMSIL) and contributions from the World Bank and international community.

National elections took place in May 2002, and Alhaji Ahmad Tejan Kabbah (b. 1932) was elected president of Sierra Leone. Through 2004 and early 2005, most UNAMSIL peacekeepers were withdrawing from the country. Slowly and steadily Sierra Leone was moving toward peace and stability, but the wounds of the civil war will take a long time to heal.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Sierra Leone is located on the western coast of Africa, on the North Atlantic Ocean between Guinea and Liberia. The terrain ranges from a coastal belt of mangrove swamps in the west, wooded hills, upland plateau, to mountains in the

east. The highest mountain is Loma Mansa (also known as Mt. Bintumani) at 6,391 feet.

The main rivers of Sierra Leone include the Little Scarcies, Jong, Moa, Rokel, and Sumbuya. The northern parts of Sierra Leone are home to shrubs and savannah (grasslands dotted with trees), while in the southeastern parts of the country varied species of trees such as mahogany, teak, and palms are found. Porcupines, hippopotamus, crocodiles, chimpanzees, and a wide variety of monkeys live in Sierra Leone. In fact the Kilmi National Park, located in the northern part of Sierra Leone, has the largest concentration of chimpanzees in West Africa.

The climate is tropical. A hot and humid rainy season lasts from May to December. Sierra Leone is one of the wettest countries on the west coast of Africa. The winter season, which lasts from December to April, is dry. From December to February, dry, sand-laden harmattan winds from the Sahara blow across the region. This land of diverse natural environments has experienced pressure due to rapid population growth, overgrazing, deforestation as a result of slash-and-burn cultivation, overharvesting of timber, and overfishing. A decade-long civil war has also taken its toll on the ecological resources of the land.

❁ ECONOMY

Sierra Leone is a poor country. Lack of social infrastructure, not lack of natural resources, has hampered economic development, and the long civil war reduced the economy to shambles. About two-thirds of the population is involved in subsistence agriculture, and rice, coffee, cocoa, palm kernels, palm oil, and peanuts are the main agricultural products. Animal husbandry in Sierra Leone includes poultry, cattle, sheep, and pigs as well as fish. Natural resources include diamonds, titanium ore, bauxite, iron ore, gold, and chromite. Diamonds are the major source of income. Plans are in place to reopen bauxite and rutile (titanium dioxides) mines.

Manufacturing mainly involves processing of raw materials, as well as petroleum refining and light manufacturing for the domestic market. The main products of the manufacturing sector include beverages, textiles, cigarettes, and footwear. The country's export partners include Belgium, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Sierra Leone imports food and machinery from Germany, the United Kingdom, Côte d'Ivoire, France, the United States, the Netherlands, and Ukraine.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The national symbol of Sierra Leone is a giant cotton tree that grows in the capital city, Freetown. According to popular belief, the tree was a young sapling when settlers came to Freetown in 1787.

Although English is the official language of Sierra Leone, the native people prefer to speak their own languages, which bear the same names as the

tribes that speak them. These include Mende, Kono, Sousou, Limba, and Temne. The everyday language of the people is a mix of French, English, Portuguese, and some of the African languages. Krio is a mix of Pidgin English with French influences from neighboring Guinea.

While 60 percent of the nation's population is Muslim, almost 10 percent are followers of Christianity. Christianity reached Sierra Leone from America and the West Indies at the end of the 18th century. The city has many mosques and more than 70 churches, notably the Anglican St. George's Cathedral, which was built in 1852. The majority of Christians are either Anglicans or Catholics.

Islam was established long before Christianity by the Fulahs (an ethnic group) and Mandikas (an ethnic group) from Muslim countries to the north. It is the predominant religion in the interior parts of Sierra Leone, but more than 30 percent of the population still adheres to animism and ancestor worship. In villages people live in square or round earth and bamboo huts, depending on their traditions, and an entire family lives under one roof. A village chief, who also acts as a judge and healer for the entire village, governs each village. Since the civil war, houses with tin roof and modern brick walls are replacing the traditional huts.

In the capital, the Sierra Leone National Ballet holds performances accompanied by different types of drums, such as *sangbori*, *poro*, or *bundu*, along with instruments such as the *balangi* (a type of xylophone). Carving ivory, bone, and wood has been a tradition for craftsmen for more than 500 years.

❁ CUISINE

The Sierra Leonean diet relies on rice, meat, fish, roots such as cassava (tapioca), and local lentils, greens, and fruits. Ginger beer (made from ginger and lemon juice) is a favorite nonalcoholic beverage of Sierra Leone.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/ DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–
January 1

The first day of the Western (Gregorian) calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day. A festive spirit reigns all over the world as people attend parties and celebrations that begin on New Year's Eve (December 31). New Year's is a public holiday in Sierra Leone; government offices, schools, and businesses are closed.

Fun Fact

Scholars cannot agree on what it was about the mountains that caused da Cintra to associate them with lions: their shape or the thunderous rainstorms.

De Ruyter Stone

Among the most interesting exhibits in Sierra Leone's National Museum is a copy of the De Ruyter Stone, which was proclaimed one of Freetown's oldest monuments in 1948. It is inscribed with the names of famous sailors of the African west coast. It is buried six inches underground, above the high water level at King Jimmy's Watering Place (now known as Jimmy's Market Place). This was the spring known to all mariners as one of the best watering places on the west coast of Africa.

REPUBLIC DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 19

This day commemorates the founding of the new Republic of Sierra Leone on April 19, 1971. Siaka Stevens was the first president of the Republic. After elections in March 1967 in which Siaka Stevens was declared victorious, two consecutive coups kept him out of power until 1968. Brig. David Lansana led the first coup in March 1967; he was quickly ousted by the National Reformation Council (NRC) on March 23, 1967, which placed Brig. Andrew Juxon-Smith in charge of the country. In April 1968 the Anti-Corruption Revolutionary Movement ousted the NRC, and Siaka Stevens once again assumed power. Political unrest continued in the region until 1971. On April 19, 1971, Sierra Leone adopted a constitution and officially assumed the status of a republic. Siaka Stevens was sworn in as the first president of the Republic of Sierra Leone. It is a national holiday, and all public and private institutions are closed on April 19.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 27

On April 27, 1961, Sierra Leone became an independent nation within the British Commonwealth. Sierra Leone had been under British domination since the early 19th century and even fought alongside Britain during World War II. Post-World War II Britain began relaxing its control in the region and allowed greater autonomy and democracy. A constitution was adopted in 1951 with British approval, which paved the way for decolonization. In 1953 more internal political powers were given to local political parties and Sir Milton Margai was sworn in as the first chief minister of Sierra Leone. He conducted talks with British authorities about granting complete independence to Sierra Leone, and on April 27, 1961, Sierra Leone became an independent country within the British Commonwealth. Sir Milton was sworn in as the first prime minister of an independent Sierra Leone. Unfurling of the national

flag by the president, official speeches, and a military parade are highlights of the Independence Day celebrations.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Sierra Leoneans join workers worldwide in celebrating May 1 as Labor Day. In other countries it is also called May Day or Workers' Day. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, designated May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

Trade unions, which have been in existence since the British started a mining industry in the region, organize demonstrations and other pro-union activities on this day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26

Boxing Day originated with a medieval British custom by which servants and peasants were given Christmas gifts the day after Christmas, that is, on December 26. On this day, boxes used for collecting money for the poor in churches are opened, thus the name, Boxing Day, and gifts are given to those who render useful service to the community throughout the year. December 26 is also the feast day of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr.

The Commonwealth of Nations is an association of independent nations, most of which are former colonies of the British Empire. They share some common cultural links, which were influenced by the British, and Boxing Day is among them. As a former British colony, Sierra Leone is a part of the Commonwealth group of nations and celebrates Boxing Day. Traditionally business owners present gifts in the form of money to their employees on this day.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY: CHRISTMAS

Religious Holidays

EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

The first month of the Islamic year is called Muharram. The Muslim festival of El am Hejir marks the

first day of the Islamic calendar, so it is also considered Islam's New Year's. It is believed that on this day in 622 C.E., Muhammad fled from the city of Mecca to Medina with his family and a few followers. Sierra Leone's Muslims attend their local mosques on this day.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

❁ MOULOUD

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

The birth anniversary of Prophet Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, falls in the third month of the Islamic year. For Muslims all over the world, this is a day of joy and celebration since Muhammad is the most revered prophet among the Muslims. On this day Sierra Leonean Muslims offer prayers in his honor and discuss his life and teachings. A festive spirit permeates the community, and in the evening the skies come alive with fireworks.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOUD

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr, or the Feast of Fast-Breaking, marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, during which Muslims are required to observe a month-long dawn-to-dusk fast in order to build a stronger spirit. After an entire month of prayer and fasting, people don new clothes, offer prayers, and give alms to the poor. A special meal and sweets are prepared to celebrate this day. The Koran forbids fasting on this day. This fast is the fourth pillar of Islam's Five Pillars of the faith.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th or pilgrimage month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, the Feast of Sacrifice, also called Tabaski, commemorates the unwavering faith of Ibrahim (Abraham) in Allah and his willingness to sacrifice his son to obey his command. God's intervention, however, at just the right moment, allowed the substitution of a sacrificial ram for Ibrahim's son.

A festive spirit rules the day as Muslims in Sierra Leone begin the day by offering special *namaz* (prayers), thanking God for his benevolence. Then they greet each other, and the festivities begin. Goats and sheep are sacrificed, and the meat is distributed among family, friends, and poor people. This celebration often marks the end of the hajj, the

annual pilgrimage to Mecca that every Muslim must make at least once in his or her lifetime. The hajj is the fifth pillar of Islam's Five Pillars of the faith, and it is required by the Koran.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; HAJJ; ISLAM

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of celebration for Christians all over the world as it is the date selected by the Catholic Church for celebrating the birth of Jesus.

Carol singing begins two weeks before Christmas, and the singers send letters to individuals stating the time at which they will arrive at their house to sing. The homeowners in turn give these singers gifts of money, which is donated to local churches. Celebrations in Sierra Leone begin a week before Christmas. People clean their homes and hang new curtains with blue and white lace.

The blue and white colors are symbols of peace and love. On Christmas Eve people wear new clothes and attend Christmas Eve services. Devotional hymns and Christmas carols are sung.

On Christmas day people exchange gifts, greetings, and fruit with friends and family. Food and fruit sharing is an important Christmas tradition in Sierra Leone. The traditional meal prepared during Christmas usually includes pepper soup made from cow foot, oxtail and trotters, and yam and cassava (tapioca). Cakes, rice bread, and ginger beer are also on the list of Christmas favorites.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS EVE/DAY

Fun Fact

No one knows when Jesus was born and dates in every month of the year have been put forward as possibilities. The late December date was chosen because it overlaps with pagan celebrations of the winter solstice in the Northern Hemisphere.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

When a woman becomes pregnant, a ritual of purification is performed. It includes praying to God and making an offering of rice flour and kola nuts (a native fruit of Africa used in making of cola drinks) to the ancestors. This is done to seek the blessings of God and the ancestors, who it is hoped will grant prenatal and postnatal protection to the mother and child.

In Sierra Leone a pregnant woman is expected to abstain from sexual intercourse during pregnancy, since Sierra Leoneans believe it will harm the development of the fetus. Assistance of trained and experienced midwives is sought at the time of childbirth.

After the birth of the child, the placenta is buried under a banyan tree by the female relatives of the woman. The end of the placenta, which connected the child to the mother, is placed in an upright position before it is buried. This is done to safeguard a woman's fertility; if it is buried in a downward position, it is believed the mother will become sterile.

Until the day of the naming ceremony, the child and the mother lead a life of seclusion inside their house. The naming ceremony takes place on the eighth day after the birth of the child, when its umbilical cord has completely fallen off. Until this happens, the child is considered to be attached to its mother and not considered an individual. For the naming ceremony relatives from both sides of the family are invited and the child's head is shaved. Prayers—Christian or Muslim—are offered to God, and kola nuts and rice flour are offered by an elderly member of the family to the ancestors.

Then elderly women chew and spit kola nuts in the mouth of the newborn child as a sign of longevity and prosperity. Next they chew and spit alligator pepper (a pod with hot and spicy seeds) into the child's mouth to help it face life with courage and bravery. Then the name of the child is publicly announced, and feasting and celebrations follow. It is also customary for relatives to shower gifts on the newborn child.

COMING OF AGE

Male and female circumcision rites are an integral part of Sierra Leone's society, essential to complete the transformation from childhood to adulthood. Traditional practitioners perform male circumcision without the use of anesthesia. The initiates are encouraged to endure the pain silently during the ceremony, and shouting and shrieking are considered signs of weakness.

The tribes in Sierra Leone follow female circumcision rites. This practice is highly controversial in the Western world, where it is referred to as female genital mutilation (FGM). It has been banned in many countries.

UNAMSIL

On October 22, 1999, the UN's Security Council established the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) to cooperate with the government of Sierra Leone and the other parties in implementing the Lome Peace Agreement and to assist in implementing disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration in the country. UNAMSIL's mandate was revised on February 7, 2000, and expanded further in May of 2000 and March of 2001.

MARRIAGE

The Krio in Sierra Leone have a ceremony before the wedding wherein the intended bride is kept hidden when her fiancé comes to see her. As he calls for her, her family presents a much older woman to him. The prospective groom keeps calling out for her, however, and the bride is eventually brought forward amid much excitement. A bride-price, or *lobola*, is paid in many parts of Sierra Leone. The entire family of the groom contributes to pay the bride-price in addition to the cost of the wedding.

DEATH

Although Muslims and Christians in Sierra Leone believe that death occurs according to God's will, many native people never attribute death to natural causes. Instead the death of a person is associated with a curse placed on the person's life by another person. After the death of a person, the older women of the family take care of the body. They cleanse it and drape it in a shroud. If the family of the deceased has adequate funds, they place the body in a coffin; otherwise the body is wrapped in a mat. No embalming takes place, as dead bodies are buried as soon as possible after death.

In Sierra Leone each village has a number of clubs or societies to which the people belong. Each group is provided a designated area for burial. Accordingly the body of the deceased is carried to the appropriate burial ground, and a grave is dug. If a coffin is provided, then it is buried; otherwise the body is buried wrapped in a mat. Members of the community, in a show of support for the family of deceased, offer them food and money. Widows have to observe a 40-day mourning period during which they are not allowed to change their clothes. At the end of the mourning period elderly women accompany the widow to a nearby river for a ritual purification bath. Her mourning clothes are discarded, and she is now considered free to marry another man.

Further Reading

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Singapore

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Southeastern Asia, islands between Malaysia and Indonesia, at the tip of the Malaysian peninsula
Size	267 sq. mi.
Capital City	Singapore
Flag Description	Singapore's flag has horizontal bands of red (top) and white with a white crescent and five white five-pointed stars arranged in a circle on the hoist side of the red band.
Independence	August 9, 1965 (from Malaysian Federation)
Population	4,425,720 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary republic
Nationality	Singaporean
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Chinese (77%); Malay (14%); Indian (8%)
Major Language(s)	Mandarin Chinese (35%); English (23%); Malay (14%)
Major Religion(s)	Buddhist (43%); Muslim (15%); Christian (15%); Hindu (9%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; National Day, August 9

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The early history of the area now known as Singapore is rather hazy, though it is believed to have been inhabited for the last 2,000 years at least. It was earlier called Sea Town or Temasek, and the Chinese referred to it as Pu luo zhong, which means "island at the end (of the peninsula)." The name *Singapore* is a corruption of the Sanskrit word *singapura*, which means "lion city." It is supposed to have been given to the city by Sang Nila Utama (or Sri Tri Buana, as he was more popularly known), a ruler of Palembang (in present-day Indonesia), who was forced to land at Temasek during a storm. There he caught sight of an animal he thought was a lion. Taking this to be a good omen he decided to establish a settlement with this name. This story is contained in the *Sejarah Melayu*, or *Malay Annals*. By the end of the 14th century the island was commonly known as Singapura.

In the 14th century Siam (now Thailand) and the Mahajapit Empire of Java (in present-day Indonesia) fought for control over this area as well as over the Malay Peninsula.

Later Singapore became an important outpost of the Malacca Sultanate that was centered in Muar on the Malay Peninsula; by the beginning of the 19th century it came under the Sultan of Johor, who ruled from the Riau-Lingga archipelago.

Sir Stamford Raffles (1781–1826), who was an employee of the British East India Company, is credited with founding Singapore in 1819. The British established a port in Singapore, and soon Singapore became a strategic port for free trade and immigration, and Indians, Arabs, Europeans, Chinese, and Thai traders used it. Over the next 50 years the city-state prospered and flourished as a major seaport. In 1826 the British grouped Singapore, Penang, and Malacca into a single administrative unit called the Strait Settlements Division controlled by the British East India Company.

After the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, Singapore's position as an important trade center grew stronger. In the beginning of the 20th century, Singapore developed as an industrial center. However, the divide between the working classes and the ruling classes widened. Despite the flourishing trade, Singapore was essentially a lawless country, and the population was still largely uneducated in the late 19th century.

Singapore was not affected by World War I, but during World War II the Chinese population of Singapore sup-

ported China against the Japanese. The Japanese defeated the British in 1942 and took over control of Malaya and Singapore. They ruled the region until 1945, when the Allies defeated them, and the British regained control of the Strait Settlements and the British military took over administration of them. Like people in the rest of the world at this time, the residents of Singapore yearned for freedom and protested British authority with strikes and demonstrations.

In 1946 the period of military administration came to an end, and the Straits Settlements were dissolved. Penang and Malacca became part of the Malayan Union (and in 1948, the Federation of Malaya). Singapore was declared a Crown Colony.

Elections were held in Singapore for the first time in 1948. However, barely three months after the elections, groups of Communist Malays revolted against British occupation demanding self-government. The British took strong measures and suppressed the Communists. In 1953 limited autonomy was attained, which stipulated that the British would be responsible only for matters pertaining to foreign affairs and security.

In 1954 Singapore agitated for independence, and the People's Action Party (PAP) was formed under Lee Kuan Yew (b. 1923). In 1959 Singapore became self-governing. However, foreign affairs and defense were still handled by the British. Lee became the prime minister of Singapore. In 1963 Singapore merged with Malaya to form Malaysia, but after two years of strife and political tensions, it separated from Malaysia and became an independent nation in August 1965.

The government made efforts to strengthen the industrial sector of Singapore, and reforms were passed to attract foreign investment. By the 1980s Singapore was world renowned for shipping, air transport, and oil refining. Although the economic depression in the Southeast Asian countries in the late 1990s affected the economy of Singapore as well, the economy is bouncing back and is well on its way to regaining stability.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Singapore is a diamond-shaped country situated in the narrow point of the Strait of Malacca. It consists of a group of islands, one large one and 50 small ones. The country is connected to the mainland of Malaysia by causeways. Most of the terrain of Singapore is low lying. At 538 feet Bukit Timah, located in the central region, is the highest point in Singapore.

Singapore enjoys a tropical climate year-round. The temperatures range from 74°F to 93°F; the lowest temperature ever recorded was 69°F. The mostly pleasant temperatures are offset by the typically high humidity, around 90 percent. Rainfall is common all year round but is heaviest from November to January.

❁ ECONOMY

Singapore boasts a highly developed free-market economy. The nation depends heavily on exports, especially electronics and manufacturing. Major industries include electronics, petroleum refining and petrochemicals, machinery, shipbuilding, and ship repair. Singapore imports machinery and electronic components, chemicals, fuels, and foodstuffs. The nation shares cordial trade relations with the United States, Japan, Malaysia, and the members of the European Union (EU).

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The population of Singapore is a mix of Malay, Chinese, Indian, and Arab immigrants. There also exists a community called Peranakan, a mix of people of Chinese and Malay descent. With such a diversity of inhabitants, the culture of Singapore is very rich and cosmopolitan.

Officially Singaporean English is based on British English, and the local dialect is commonly called Singlish. It is quite similar to Manglish, the English dialect of Malaysia. In addition to their mother tongue, children learn English in school.

Due to its diverse population, Singapore has many ethnic localities like Little India and Chinatown. Although the population is not uniformly distributed in such neighborhoods, these areas do adhere to the culture of their forebears. In Little India one can enjoy Indian cuisine, and the atmosphere on the streets will make one feel as if one is in India.

The settlements along the Singapore River are the most modern part of Singapore and are full of commercial buildings. Theaters on the Bay, a center for the performing arts, is the cultural hub of Singapore.

Singaporeans celebrate a variety of festivals related to their respective religions. The Chinese are largely followers of Buddhism and Shenism, while the Malays are mostly Muslims.

❁ CUISINE

Singapore is often called the food capital of Asia. The country draws on a wide variety of cuisines—Chinese, Indian, Malay, Indonesian, and Western. A popular type of cooking is called *nonya*, which uses a blend of Chinese and Malay food.

Coconut milk, used extensively in the preparation of Malay and Indonesian dishes, is the basis of most dishes containing vegetables, fish, beef, or prawns. These are served with white rice.

Of the Asian delicacies, Korean *bulgog*, thinly sliced beef marinated in soy sauce, garlic, and sesame, then grilled, is very popular. Chinese dim sum (steamed or fried dumplings stuffed with meat, seafood, or vegetables) are widely eaten for lunch. Indian cuisine is also quite popular in Singapore, due to its spicy flavors.

At home Singaporeans usually place dishes in the center of the table so that everyone around the table can help themselves. While Chinese families eat together, in Muslim Malay families the women eat after the men.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 is the first day of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar and is widely celebrated as New Year's Day. Celebrations take place all over the world starting on the evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve).

Elaborate fireworks displays mark New Year's Eve in Singapore. On New Year's Day Singapore's Chinatown conducts a colorful dragon dance accompanied by drums and gongs. The dragon, supported by 20 boys with sticks, dances by whirling and jumping. The dragon then opens its mouth and breathes out fire. It is believed that the dragon drives away evil spirits. Traditionally Singaporeans spend the day at family get-togethers. It is a national holiday, and schools and offices remain closed.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by



Participants in Singapore's National Day parade wave the flag in the air. Singapore won its independence from the Malaysian Federation on August 9, 1965. (AP Photo/Wong Maye-E)

workers in building nations and societies. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, designated May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

In Singapore, workers hold marches and demonstrations.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 9

Singapore attained independence from Malaysia on August 9, 1965. To commemorate this event, the country hosts a number of parades, cultural dance shows, concerts, and fireworks. Singaporeans celebrate National Day, or Independence Day, with pomp and pageantry. It is a national holiday, and schools and offices remain closed.

Religious Holidays

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, also called the Feast of Sacrifice, Hari Raya Haji, and Hari Raya Adil Adha, is celebrated on the 10th day of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar (January of the Gregorian calendar). This festival is celebrated in honor of Ibrahim (Abraham's) willingness to sacrifice his own son, on God's command. At the last moment, a ram was substituted for Ibrahim's son.

In Singapore Muslim families slaughter a fattened sheep and prepare an elaborate feast for friends and family members. The family consumes one-third of the food prepared, another third is given to relatives, and the rest is used to feed the poor. Special prayer services are conducted in mosques all across the country.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

❁ CHINESE NEW YEAR

Observed by: Chinese

Observed on: January or February

The Chinese community in Singapore celebrates the lunar New Year. They see this holiday, also known as the Spring Festival, as a time to be spent relaxing with family and friends. It is marked by special family

dinners and a variety of holiday activities. The festivities include dragon dances, parades, fireworks, and nighttime markets. Some Chinese businesses remain closed for almost two weeks to celebrate this event.

Traditionally on this day Chinese farmers offer thanks to God for a good harvest and pray for a good new year.

See also Volume III: CHINESE NEW YEAR; SPRING FESTIVALS

✿ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Last Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, commemorating the last week of Jesus' mortal life. Jesus was the prophet of Christianity, and Christians believe him to be the second person of the Holy Trinity (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). The day is as much about the beginning of Jesus' journey to the Cross as it is about his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. His arrival in Jerusalem was indeed the way to the Cross.

After two of his disciples had fetched a donkey for him to ride, they placed their clothes on it to make a comfortable seat. The disciples then cut branches and covered the path, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the words of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. People welcomed him by waving palm and olive branches, and strewing garments and branches on the road. There were different perceptions at work: Jesus rode in on a donkey, the humble entry of a peaceful nature by a spiritual king; the people of Jerusalem welcomed him with palm and olive branches and the laying of garments in his path because they wanted a worldly king to defeat the Romans.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

✿ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

The rituals observed on Maundy Thursday are based on a sequence of events supposed to have occurred during Jesus' last meal with his Apostles. First Jesus washed their feet; then he announced that he had been betrayed by one of them. The traitor Judas left the table. Finally Jesus instituted the Eucharist—a ritual of consuming bread and wine as symbols of his body and blood, also referred to as Communion in Christian churches. In the Roman Catholic Church Maundy Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist, the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week, and gives priests an opportunity to prepare for the many rituals associated with Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER;

GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

✿ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, alternatively known as Mourning Friday, Sorrowful Friday, or Holy Friday, is a somber day for Roman Catholics and other Christians all over the world and is observed on the Friday before Easter. It commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus more than 2,000 years ago. Some Singaporeans observe a fast from Ash Wednesday (first day of Lent) for 40 days up to Good Friday and a partial fast from then until Easter. Some fast only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Special prayer services are held on this day with readings from the Gospel narrating the events leading up to the Crucifixion.

In Singapore, Catholics fast on Good Friday and perform a ritual called the Stations of the Cross, a reenactment of Jesus' final journey carrying his Cross to Calvary.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Saturday before Easter

Holy Saturday is the day Jesus lay in the tomb and the day before he rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. This was the Jewish Sabbath (the Jewish day of rest is Saturday). It is also regarded as the second Sabbath after Creation. The final day of Holy Week, which begins with Palm Sunday and includes Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, it marks the threshold between death and resurrection, and is a day of silence and contemplation for devout Catholics.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection. For this reason, it is sometimes known as Resurrection Day. This day is of utmost importance because the fundamental teaching of Christianity is that Jesus, through his death, freed all his believers from the penalty of sin. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. On Easter entire families gather to celebrate. They often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to offer prayers. Easter eggs have become

associated with the festival because they are symbols of rebirth and regeneration taken from the ancient pagan spring festivals.

Among Singaporean Christians the entire family gathers together to celebrate Easter, which is marked by feasting and exchanging greetings and Easter eggs. Children receive specially decorated chocolate Easter eggs from their parents and grandparents.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ VESAK

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: First full Moon day in Vesak, the second month in the Hindu lunar calendar

Vesak is the birthday of Buddha and a major public holiday in Singapore. This day also marks Buddha's enlightenment and attainment of nirvana. The Buddhists of Singapore celebrate this day by releasing caged birds that symbolize the liberation of captive souls. Buddhist monks chant special prayers and light candles to represent the enlightenment of Buddha. Temples are also decorated with flags, lights, and flowers, and vegetarian meals are served to the poor. Singaporean Buddhists conduct mass blood donation camps and visit old age homes on this day. Candlelight processions held in public places are a wonderful sight on this day in Singapore.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM; VESAK

❁ DIWALI

Observed by: Hindus

Observed on: October or November

Diwali, also called Deepavali or Divali, is the Hindu Festival of Lights. It starts on the night of the new Moon in October or November and lasts for five days. On the Hindu calendar, it occurs from the 13th day of the waning half (Krishna Paksha) of the seventh lunar month Asvina to the second day of the waxing half (Shukla Paksha) of Karttika, the eighth month. It celebrates the victory of light over darkness and of good over evil. In northern India the first Diwali was celebrated to commemorate the triumphant return of King Rama of Ayodhya (the seventh manifestation of Vishnu, the Protector), Sita (his wife), and his brother Lakshmana to the capital city Ayodhya, after 14 years of exile. During the exile Lord Rama had vanquished the demon Ravana, the king of Sri Lanka. As night had already fallen before the arrival of the royal trio, the people, delighted to have their king back in their midst, lit clay lamps along the way to dispel the darkness and light up their path. It also signifies the commencement of the Hindu New Year.

Singaporeans believe that departed souls come to visit their relatives during this time of year. Rows

of tiny earthen oil lamps are lit to guide these souls on their return journey to the next world. Diwali is one of the main festivals of Singapore and is celebrated on a large scale.

Traditionally, oil lamps are also lit to decorate Singaporean Hindu homes. Temples and streets are also lit up with elaborate lighting arrangements during this festival. Special delicacies and sweets are prepared in Hindu homes to celebrate this occasion.

See also Volume III: DIWALI; HINDUISM

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr, the Muslim Feast of Fast-Breaking, also known as Hari Raya Puasa or Hari Raya Aidil Fitri in Singapore, marks the end of the month of Ramadan, a month when devout Muslims all over the world observe a daily dawn-to-dusk fast. This fast is required by the Koran and is the fourth pillar of Islam's Five Pillars of the faith.

Eid al-Fitr is a joyous festival observed on the first day of Shawwal, the 10th month in the Islamic lunar calendar. In Singapore Muslims visit family members, enjoy special meals together, and wear new clothes. Children receive gifts from their relatives and enjoy amusement rides that are set up in the streets for them. There are displays of fireworks at night. The celebrations in Singapore last for three days, and the Koran forbids fasting during Eid al-Fitr.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world because it is the day chosen by the Catholic Church to celebrate the birth of Jesus. In Singapore Christmas decorations are often prepared well in advance. A manger with figures of Joseph, Mary, and the baby Jesus, along with shepherds and the Three Wise Men, are placed in all churches in Singapore.

Christmas celebrations begin on Christmas Eve (December 24). On this night Catholic families attend church and offer prayers in a special Mass. Then they return home to gather around a Christmas tree and light candles. Children sing carols and are rewarded with small sums of money. They enjoy a special dinner during which they cut a cake specially made for the occasion.

On Christmas Day the festivities continue with church services and special Christmas delicacies. Friends and relatives visit each other and exchange

gifts on this day. Children open gifts brought to them by Santa Claus. Families gather at lunch or dinner to celebrate Christmas with a special meal.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ SINGAPORE DRAGON BOAT RACES FESTIVAL

Observed in: Marina Bay

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Fifth day of the fifth lunar month of the Chinese calendar

The Singapore Dragon Boat Festival is held in May or June of the Gregorian calendar every year. This event commemorates the death of a Chinese poet Qu Yuan, who drowned himself to protest the government's corruption 2,300 years ago in ancient China. The boat race is held in Singapore's Marina Bay, where different racing teams compete against each other for the Prime Minister's Challenge Trophy. When the race is over, the boats (with the dragon head and tail) are stored either in the temple or in another place agreed upon by the community. While this event has been celebrated in China for thousands of years, it was embraced by Singaporeans beginning only toward the end of the 20th century.

❁ ZOUKOUT

Observed in: Singapore

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April

ZoukOut is an annual event that features a nonstop dance festival and foot-stomping music for 12 continuous hours. This is one of the most notable festivals of Southeast Asia. Youthful and entertaining events are major attractions, and a large number of tourists flock to Singapore during ZoukOut.

The festival features various styles and music from all over the world. Food stalls, flea markets, and carnivals are also an integral part of the festival.

❁ SINGAPORE FASHION FESTIVAL

Observed in: Lion City

Observed by: General Public

Observed in: March or April

The Singapore Fashion Festival is one of the most glamorous events in the country. All the major malls, along with the renowned designers of Singa-

pore, wait for this annual event. This festival also provides a platform for the latest fashion-related products and trends.

Singapore teems with international glitterati, fashion shows, parties, and fashion exhibits during this two-week long fashion festival.

Rites of Passage

❁ MARRIAGE

In Singapore many couples opt to have two ceremonies: a civil ceremony as well as a traditional wedding. Arranged marriages are very common and so are interracial marriages since Singaporeans are of many different races.

Malay weddings in Singapore are elaborate. Prior to the wedding, the parents of the boy and the girl meet to decide the amount of the dowry that will be given to the bride. Before the wedding, the bride's hands and feet are decorated with henna. On the day of the marriage a religious official from the court, called a *kadhi*, presides over the ceremony. The bride's father gives a small amount of money to the groom to symbolize the sealing the marriage. There must be at least three witnesses present at the time the vows are solemnized. After the wedding, the guests are invited to a large meal, and a lively and informal party.

❁ DEATH

Among the Chinese population of Singapore, burying the dead is taken very seriously. It is believed that, if the funeral arrangements are not properly made, ill fortune will befall the family of the deceased.

In the Christian community a church service is usually held. Biblical verses are read and prayers said. The head of the church presides over the ceremony. After the ceremony, many Christians in Singapore are cremated these days since there is an acute shortage of land for burial. However, in case of burial, the family members go to the graveyard and pay their final respects before the burial takes place.

Further Reading

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~ Slovakia ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Central Europe, south of Poland
Size	18,859 sq. mi.
Capital City	Bratislava
Flag Description	Slovakia's flag has three horizontal bands of equal size: white (top), blue, and red with the Slovak cross in a shield centered on the hoist side; the cross is white, centered on a background of red and blue.
Independence	January 1, 1993 (Czechoslovakia split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia)
Population	5,431,363 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary democracy
Nationality	Slovak
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Slovak (86%); Hungarian (10%)
Major Language(s)	Slovak (official; 84%); Hungarian (11%)
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (69%); Protestant (11%); Greek Catholic (4%)
National Holiday(s)	Slovak Republic Establishment Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Liberation of the Republic, May 8; Slovak National Uprising Day, August 29; Freedom and Democracy Day, November 17

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

In the fifth century B.C.E., ethnic Slavic tribes occupied the present-day state of Slovakia. King Samo (d. 658) was the first known Slavic ruler. He was the founder of what came to be known as King Samo's Empire (623–58), which ruled over the region around the seventh century C.E. King Samo was a merchant, a Frank born in the Senonian country (Senonago) of France. His empire, while the first known organized community of the Slavs, was more a kind of supra-tribal union, not a true nation-state.

His descendants increased their territory and controlled Slovakia, Moravia, and major parts of modern-day Austria, known then as Great Moravia. They ruled the region between the eighth and tenth centuries. King Svatopluk I (c. 830–94) was the most powerful king of the empire, and it was he who brought Saints Cyril and Methodius to Great Moravia to preach Christianity in the Slavic language.

After Svatopluk's death the empire was divided among his sons, and in 907 Hungary attacked Great Moravia and established its domination in the region. Between the 11th and 14th centuries, Slovakia remained an integral part of the Kingdom of Hungary. In the early 16th century, the onslaught of the Ottoman Turks against the Kingdom of Hungary shook the entire realm, and the Hungarian forces fought a series of battles. Hungary was forced to shift its capital from Budapest to Bratislava in Slovakia. In the end Hungary successfully defeated the Ottoman Turks and had expelled them from the Hungarian region by 1686.

After the establishment of the dual monarchy and the formation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire by the Ausgleich (compromise) during the period of 1867–1918, Slovakia underwent brutal oppression as Hungary imposed its way of life on the Slovaks, and the entire region was under its sway. Only the Hungarian language was taught in schools and used in businesses, and the use of the Slovak language was totally banned. During this period Slovaks developed close ties with the Czechs, who were facing a similar fate under Austrian domination.

After the defeat of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in World War I, in October 1918 Slovakia declared its independence, and with Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia, joined the independent Republic of Czechoslovakia (formed on May 1, 1918), and Prague was declared its capital city. However, there were growing disparities related to religion, government policies, and style of governance between the Czechs, who were a majority, and the Slovaks, who were clearly outnumbered.

Eventually on March 14, 1939, Slovakia declared its independence from Czechoslovakia, but the government formed in Slovakia became a puppet controlled by Nazi Germany, and Slovakia declared its alliance with Germany in World War II. In 1944 after its government allowed the willful occupation of Slovakia by Nazi forces, more than 60,000 Slovaks fought against the government and Nazi forces in August 1944, and this came to be known as the Slovak National Uprising. The uprising was brutally crushed by German forces, but it failed to dampen the people's desire to be completely independent.

After the defeat of German forces in World War II and the liberation of Prague in 1945, Slovakia once again decided to be part of Czechoslovakia but enjoyed an autonomous status. Elections held in 1946 brought a Communist regime to power. However, in 1968 when the government decided to introduce some liberal political reforms in the country, the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia in August of that year and appointed a staunch Soviet-supporting Slovak, Gustav Husak (1913–91), to lead the nation.

There was growing discontent among people in the Czech Republic and Slovakia against the Communist government because of widespread human rights violations. On November 17, 1989, students protested against the Soviet Union and the Communist government in the country, which marked the beginning of the Velvet Revolution and the end of Czechoslovakia.

In 1990 the first free and fair elections were held in Czechoslovakia, and the issue of Slovakian autonomy became a major hurdle. However, in 1992, the Czechs and Slovaks peacefully agreed to the division of Czechoslovakia and on January 1, 1993, the independent state of Slovakia was established. Vladimír Mečiar (b. 1942), a prominent Slovakian politician, was sworn in as the first prime minister of Slovakia.

Due to sound economic and fiscal policies, Slovakia has become a stable economy and one of the most preferred foreign investment destinations among international investors. Slovakia is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and European Union (EU).

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in Central Europe, Slovakia is a landlocked country flanked by Poland, Austria, Ukraine, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. The country has a

rugged and mountainous terrain. While the Carpathian Mountains run through its northern regions, the High Tatra alpine ranges pass through the northeastern parts. The highest point is Gerlachovský štít (Gerlachov Peak), at 8,711 feet high. Lowlands are found in the southern and southwestern parts of Slovakia. The three most important rivers of Slovakia are the Danube, Hron, and Vah.

Slovakia enjoys a temperate climate characterized by cold and cloudy winters and cool summers. During the summer the maximum temperature is 90°F, while in winter the temperature dips as low as 5°F.

In terms of fauna Slovakia is home to minks, wolves, otters, bears, lynxes, marmots, geese, storks, pheasants, ducks, eagles, and vultures. Extensive forests of mainly beech and spruce trees represent the major flora.

ECONOMY

Slovakia has a stable economy. Foreign investors, especially Germans, consider Slovakia to be one of the safest places to make investments. Due to good economic policies and sound fiscal reforms introduced by the government, Slovakia has completed its transformation from a centrally planned economy to a modern and liberal economy. Privatization of banking and other sectors, business-friendly policies, development of the infrastructure, and increased foreign investment have all provided a boost to the economy.

On May 1, 2004, Slovakia became a member of the EU.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Slovakia is an ethnically diverse nation. Although ethnic Slovaks are the dominant group, the country

Velvet Revolution

The days after the November 17, 1989, demonstration have come to be known as the Velvet Revolution because there were no casualties or major bloodshed. It ended almost 42 years of Communist rule peacefully, and once again there was a call to reform politics and return to a democratic form of government. The Slovak nationalist movement arose toward the end of 1991, demanding independence for Slovakia. When it became clear that the general elections of June 1992 could not solve the problems of the two republics, Czech and Slovak leaders decided to split their states into two fully independent nations. On January 1, 1993, the Czechoslovakian Federation was dissolved, and two separate independent countries were born: the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The phrase *velvet divorce* was widely used in the media to describe the separation of Czechoslovakia into two independent countries.



Fun Fact

Slovakians are so fond of meat that even the apparently meatless or vegetarian dishes are cooked in animal fat or stock.

is also home to Czechs, Moravians, Hungarians, and Roma (Gypsies), Silesian, Ukrainian, Ruthenian, German, and Polish ethnic groups as well. Slovak is the national language of Slovakia although the Hungarian language is also spoken in different areas. A predominantly Christian society, approximately 60 percent of the nation's population is Roman Catholic. Slovakia is also home to Protestants, Orthodox Christians, and atheists.

Traditional musical instruments include *gajdy* (bagpipes), *konkavka* (shepherd's flute), and *fujara* (flute). Although folk music is popular in Slovakia, the younger generation prefers Western pop, reggae, jazz, punk, rock, and rap. Also Slovakian music is immensely influenced by Hungarian music, and a Hungarian folk dance music known as *czardas* is extremely popular. In the countryside this dance is performed by the Roma men and women, wearing wide red skirts; as they whirl to the tune of this fast tempo music, their skirts take distinctive shapes.

CUISINE

Some of the traditional Slovakian dishes are *polievka* (bean soup), *kapustinica* (cabbage soup), smoked pork, potatoes or rice with a thick sauce, cheese, which is often fried, goulash (meat stew), fried bacon, fried (grilled or skewered) chicken, *halusky* (potato dumplings with sheep cheese on top), fried turkey stuffed with ham, salad, omelets, and bread. Caraway seed, bacon, and lots of salt are the preferred flavorings.

Slovakians have a sweet tooth, and some of their desserts are *palacinky* (crepes), with the most popular being chocolate crepes and sweetened noodles sprinkled with poppy seeds and melted butter.

Wine is the preferred beverage of Slovakia, with wine from the Tojak region near the Hungarian border being a favorite.

Public/Legal Holidays

SLOVAK REPUBLIC ESTABLISHMENT DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the year on the Gregorian calendar marks a double celebration in Slovakia since it is both the anniversary of the establishment of the Slovak Republic and New Year's. For this reason the day is celebrated as Slovak Republic Establishment Day. It was on January 1, 1993, that the independent Slovak Republic (or Slovakia—both are correct) came into existence after the former state of Czechoslovakia was dissolved and divided into the Czech Repub-

lic and the Slovak Republic.

On this day elaborate celebrations are organized all across the country, and a patriotic fervor grips the nation. Presidential and official speeches, military parades, and cultural programs are the main highlights of the celebrations. People greet each other on this historic occasion and also share New Year's Day greetings.

Parties are also held on New Year's Eve in different parts of the country and people usher in the new year with great joy and enthusiasm. On New Year's Day, people eat pork and lentils for good luck and prosperity in the coming year. It is considered bad luck to consume fish or poultry on this day because it is believed that one's good luck will swim away if one eats fish and fly away if one eats poultry.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. While the earliest celebrations of May Day are ascribed to the pagan rituals that were practiced by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages, conflicting opinions exist about the origins of the occasion. The most plausible origin is 1889, when the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

In Slovakia, rallies and demonstrations are organized by trade unions in the country, and workers turn out in large numbers, expressing solidarity with the unions. Many Slovaks spend the May Day holiday at their weekend homes.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

LIBERATION OF THE REPUBLIC

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 8

This day commemorates the victory of the Allies over Nazi Germany and the end of World War II on May 8, 1945. Earlier, like the Soviet Union, Slovakia too celebrated Victory Day on May 9, but after the establishment of the Slovakia Republic in 1992, the date of the holiday was changed to May 8 to conform to the celebrations in most of the Western countries.

It was on May 8, 1945, that Soviet troops entered Prague (part of former Czechoslovakia and

the capital of the Czech Republic) and liberated the city from Nazi occupation. On this day special memorial services are held throughout Slovakia in memory of all those soldiers and victims who lost their lives during World War II. Also the president and other dignitaries lay floral wreaths at the war memorials and participate in grand celebrations to commemorate this historic victory. Slovakia has also declared Liberation of the Republic or Victory Day as the country's national day to honor those Slovaks who fought alongside Soviet forces against Germany and helped liberate the country.

❁ SLOVAK NATIONAL UPRISING DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 29

This day commemorates the historic uprising launched by the Slovaks in Czechoslovakia against the government that favored Germany and had allowed the occupation of Slovakia by Nazi forces in 1944. After the occupation was announced, the Slovaks formed a rebel Czechoslovak armed force and fought against the occupying German forces. Although Germany crushed the uprising, the valiant effort of the Slovaks to defend their country against foreign occupation inspired other Slovaks to continue their struggle against injustice and also inspired them to fight for their liberty and sovereignty.

On this day special prayer services are held in different parts of Slovakia, and people pay homage to those valiant heroes who laid down their lives for the freedom of Slovakia.

❁ FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 17

This day commemorates the anti-Nazi demonstrations held on November 17, 1939, in which nine Czechoslovaks were killed by occupying German forces as well as the anti-Communist demonstrations held on November 17, 1989, in the capital city of Prague.

On November 17, 1989, the peaceful demonstrators protesting against the corrupt Communist government in Czechoslovakia were brutally injured by the police who wanted to silence the voices of democracy and dissent against Communism. This historic event paved the way for widespread demonstrations in the country against the oppressive Communist regime and also marked the beginning of the end of Communist Czechoslovakia. The days after November 17 came to be known as the Velvet Revolution.

On this day, people participate in special prayer services in local churches that are organized in mem-

ory of all those brave students who lost their lives at the hands of Nazi forces (1939) and Communist forces (1989).

Religious Holidays

❁ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: January 6

The Feast of the Epiphany is a Christian feast that celebrates the birth of Jesus, the arrival of the Three Wise Men (or Magi, members of the priestly caste of ancient Persia: Caspar, Balthazar, and Melchior) in Bethlehem to see the infant, as well as the life of Jesus until his baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. The word *epiphany* means “to reveal” or “to make known” and is used to name this day because it was the Magi who revealed Jesus’ birth to the world.

On this day in many towns and villages throughout Slovakia, three young children, dressed as the Magi, visit every home in the village and, with chalk blessed by the local priest, they write C+B+M (the initials for Caspar, Balthazar, and Melchior) on the doors. Slovaks believe that writing the initials of the Magi will protect the home and its inhabitants from any evil throughout the year. It is the custom to leave the letters in chalk until they are replaced by fresh writing on the next Epiphany. The Christmas tree is also taken down on Epiphany.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EPIPHANY

❁ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Last Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, commemorating the last week of Jesus’ mortal life. Jesus was the prophet of Christianity, and Christians believe him to be the second person of the Holy Trinity (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). The day is as much about the beginning of Jesus’ journey to the Cross as it is about his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. His arrival in Jerusalem was indeed the way to the Cross.

After two of his disciples had fetched a donkey for him to ride, they placed their clothes on it to make a comfortable seat. The disciples then cut branches and covered the path, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the words of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. People welcomed him by waving palm and olive branches, and strewing garments and branches on the road. There were different perceptions at work: Jesus rode in on a donkey, the humble entry of a peaceful nature by a spiritual king; the people of Jerusalem welcomed him with palm and

Fun Fact

The Frankish ruler Samo had 12 Wendish wives, from a Slavic group living in what is now Germany.

olive branches and the laying of garments in his path because they wanted a worldly king to defeat the Romans.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

The rituals observed on Maundy Thursday are based on a sequence of events supposed to have occurred during Jesus' last meal with his Apostles. First Jesus washed their feet; then he announced that he had been betrayed by one of them. The traitor Judas left the table. Finally Jesus instituted the Eucharist—a ritual of consuming bread and wine as symbols of his body and blood, also referred to as Communion in Christian churches. In the Roman Catholic Church Maundy Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist, the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week, and gives priests an opportunity to prepare for the many rituals associated with Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, alternatively known as Mourning Friday, Sorrowful Friday, or Holy Friday, is a somber day for Roman Catholics and other Christians all over the world and is observed on the Friday before Easter. It commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus more than 2,000 years ago. Some Slovaks observe a fast from Ash Wednesday (first day of Lent) for 40 days up to Good Friday and a partial fast from then until Easter. Some fast only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Special prayer services are held on this day with readings from the Gospel narrating the events leading up to the Crucifixion. In Slovakia on Good Friday people visit their local churches and pray to Jesus, taking inspiration from his life and teachings.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Saturday before Easter

Holy Saturday is the day Jesus lay in the tomb and the day before he rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. This was the Jewish Sabbath (the Jewish day of rest is Saturday). It is also regarded as the second

Sabbath after Creation. The final day of Holy Week, which begins with Palm Sunday and includes Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, it marks the threshold between death and resurrection, and is a day of silence and contemplation for devout Catholics.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection. For this reason, it is sometimes known as Resurrection Day. This day is of utmost importance because the fundamental teaching of Christianity is that Jesus, through his death, freed all his believers from the penalty of sin. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. On Easter the entire family gathers to celebrate. They often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to offer prayers. Easter eggs have become associated with the festival because they are symbols of rebirth and regeneration taken from the ancient pagan spring festivals.

Slovaks attend the Easter Midnight Service on Holy Saturday, which continues until the early morning of Easter. In accordance with tradition the entire community walks three times around the church tree with the cross bearer, the priest, and the choir leading the way. This is done in honor of the three women who are believed to have been the first ones to come in search of Christ's tomb. Readings from the Bible follow, and the priest announces Christ's Resurrection.

After Easter Mass a blessing of Catholic Easter baskets takes place in which the priest blesses the food to be eaten during the holiday. People go to the graves of their deceased relatives and symbolically share the Easter food with them. Celebrations in the form of singing, dancing, exchanging Easter eggs, and feasting on the Easter meal that consists of *mazanec* (a sweet loaf of bread with almonds and raisins) and roasted lamb takes place. Decorating *kraslice* (Easter eggs) is an ancient Slovakian tradition and is still observed today.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

EASTER MONDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Monday after Easter

Easter Monday falls on the first Monday after Lent. Easter Monday is also known as Sprinkling Day in Slovakia, because young men and boys are welcomed on this day, and they are free to pour water on young maidens and married women alike.

Easter Monday is also celebrated as the day of *pomlázka*, or willow branch whip (withies), a ritual that goes back to the pagan era and involved the whipping of women, girls, and livestock by men with bundles of eight, twelve, or even twenty-four withies. The purpose was to chase away evil and bad spirits and ensure a healthy, prosperous, and fertile year ahead. The whipped girl gives a colored egg to the boy or man as a sign of her thanks and forgiveness.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ ST. CYRIL AND ST. METHDIUS DAY

Observed by: Greek Orthodox

Observed on: July 5

This day marks the arrival of the brothers Saints Cyril and Methodius to Great Moravia on July 5, 863. Saints Cyril and Methodius were brothers and devout Christians who belonged to a renowned family in Thessalonica. As instructed by St. Ignatius, they began spreading Christianity and the Slavonic language in the Slavic countries, including Bulgaria and Greater Moravia. Prince Borivoj I (852/853–88/89) of the Premysl Dynasty was introduced to Christianity by St. Methodius, who was the bishop of Great Moravia (Moravia) in 874 C.E.

It is believed that St. Cyril invented the Glagolitic alphabet, which had 38 letters (24 letters resemble those used in the Greek language). Both the brothers began teaching the Slavonic language in the region. Many believe that St. Cyril's disciple St. Clement of Ohrid (ca. 840–916) simplified the Glagolitic alphabet and created the Cyrillic alphabet, naming it so in honor of his teacher. Disciples of these saints spread the use of Slavonic languages in other Slavic countries too.

The late Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005) declared brothers St. Cyril and St. Methodius copatrons of Europe on December 31, 1980. On this day special prayer services take place in churches throughout Slovakia, and people offer prayers in honor of these patron saints.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ OUR LADY OF SORROWS

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: September 15

The feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, *Stabat Mater Dolorosa*, is observed on September 15, set there in 1913 by Pope Pius X (r. 1903–14). Earlier this feast (which began in 1239) was observed on the last Friday before Palm Sunday, the date Pope Benedict XIII (r. 1724–30) had specified when adding it to Roman calendar in 1727.

Our Lady Mary of Sorrows is the patron saint of Slovakia, and big celebrations take place on this day. Churches throughout the country hold wakes to pay

homage to Mary, and people attend special services organized in her honor. They pray to their patron saint to protect them against evil and reiterate their commitment to lead lives without sin.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day is a Christian feast that honors all the saints (known and unknown). It is an annual religious celebration that takes place on November 1. It is believed that All Saints' Day celebrations began after the consecration of the Pantheon at Rome to the Blessed Virgin by Pope Boniface IV (r. 608–15). The Feast of All Saints' Day has been celebrated on November 1 since the time of Charlemagne (742–814).

On All Saints' Day Slovaks visit the graves of their deceased relatives in cemeteries and offer flowers and candles at the grave. They also symbolically share a meal with them and relive memories of their loved ones.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of celebration for Christians all over the world and falls on December 25 every year, the date selected by the Roman Catholic Church to mark the birth of Jesus. In Slovakia Christmas celebrations begin on Christmas Eve (December 24), and last until St. Stephen's Day, December 26.

Many Slovaks fast until 6 or 7 P.M. on Christmas Eve, and the day is mainly reserved for decorating the Christmas tree with ribbons, balls, and other adornments. Presents are neatly laid under the tree along with figurines that portray the Nativity (birth of Jesus). According to custom, the Christmas tree is not to be seen by other family members until after dinner, so generally one of the parents decorates the tree, while the other takes the children skating or to enjoy some other activity. The Christmas meal mainly consists of carp (for good luck), potato salad, cabbage soup, garlic (to ward off evil), and *opekance* (dough with poppy seeds and almonds).

After dinner children are told that infant Jesus, known as *Ježisek* in Slovakia, has arrived at their homes. Then they are led to the Christmas tree, where they are allowed to open their gifts and feast on Christmas cookies, fruits, and candies. Christmas carolers also visit homes and sing carols. Later Catholic families attend Midnight Mass in their local churches.

On Christmas day Slovaks invite friends and family members over to share Christmas dinner and spend the day singing Christmas carols.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ FOLKLORE FESTIVAL

Observed in: Detva

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Second week of July

The Folklore Festival is an annual cultural event that takes place in the second week of July in the town of Detva in Slovakia. It is one of the most prestigious events of the year. Slovaks attend this festival to enjoy their ethnic culture. A wide variety of programs take place during the festival that includes folk dances, folk songs, presentation of folk costumes, folk theater, and folk art. A special hand-crafts exhibit and workshop are also part of the celebrations.

❁ HONTIANSKA PARADA

Observed in: Hrusov

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August

Hontianska Parada is an annual agro-cultural festival that takes place in the month of August in Hrusov. The major highlights of the festival include performances of cultural programs such as folk dances, folk songs, folk theater, and folklore. Also this festival aims to be a window to traditional chores, work at farmlands, and Slovakian customs and traditions as well as traditional hand-crafts exhibits. Tourists enjoy a glimpse of the daily life of rural Slovaks through demonstrations of events such as the traditional bread baking, preparing traditional dishes, harvesting, and woodworking.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

During her pregnancy and for six weeks after childbirth, a Slovak woman is considered *marime* (unclean), so a child should not be born at home, lest it become impure. All children are born in hospitals.

Immediately after the birth of a child, the mother performs certain rituals. This involves wrapping the child in a piece of cloth and putting some paternal blood on it. Some Slovaks wrap the child in a piece of clothing that belongs to the father. In

another interesting ritual, the mother places the child on the floor, and the father picks it up (thereby acknowledging that the child is his) and ties a red string around its neck.

❁ MARRIAGE

In Slovakian weddings, before the couple exchanges wedding vows, an infant is placed on their bed to bless them with children in the future. Also the bride is given three covered dishes: the first one contains wheat, a symbol of fertility; millet mixed with ash is in the second dish, so the bride has to sift through the mixture in order to display her patience; and the third dish contains a sparrow hidden under the lid for good luck.

The wedding ceremony takes place in a local chapel in the presence of friends and family members. After the wedding the bride changes her wedding veil and puts on a matron's bonnet, thus completing her transformation from a single woman to a married one. Traditional Slovakian songs are sung, and this ritual is followed by a big reception. Singing, dancing, dining, and rituals are an integral part of the reception.

As is customary the bride has to cover her head with a handkerchief and, taking up a broom, has to sweep the area near the reception hall to the tune of a polka, a lively dance that originated in Bohemia and spread to many countries in the region.

❁ DEATH

In Slovakia after a death has occurred, the body of the deceased is kept in his or her house, then taken to the house of grief, where the body is preserved until the funeral service. Among the Roma, the deceased are dressed in new clothes, placed in expensive coffins, and buried along with wine bottles inside the coffin.

Further Reading

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~ Slovenia ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Central Europe, in the eastern Alps bordering the Adriatic Sea, between Austria and Croatia
Size	7,827 sq. mi.
Capital City	Ljubljana
Flag Description	Slovenia's flag has three equal horizontal bands of white (top), blue, and red, with the Slovenian coat of arms (a shield with the image of Slovenia's highest peak, Triglav; two wavy blue lines depicting seas and rivers below it, and three six-pointed stars arranged in an inverted triangle above it) located in the upper hoist side of the flag.
Independence	June 25, 1991 (from Yugoslavia)
Population	2,011,070 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary democratic republic
Nationality	Slovenian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	White (Slovene, 83%)
Major Language(s)	Slovenian (91%)
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (58%); other or unspecified (23%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1–2; Slovene Culture Day, February 8; Celebration of the Uprising Day, April 27; Labor Day, May 1–2; Proclamation Day, June 25; Independence Day, December 26

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

The earliest inhabitants of present-day Slovenia are believed to have been Illyrians and Celtic tribes. In the sixth century C.E., ancestors of the Slovenians settled in the area. The region became a part of the Holy Roman Empire in the ninth century, with the Habsburgs of Austria gaining control of the region in the 14th century. Eventually when the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed after World War I, Slovenia declared its independence. On December 4, 1918, it joined the kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, which was renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929.

During World War II Germany annexed Yugoslavia and subsequently Slovenia was divided among Germany, Italy, and

Hungary. The Slovenians resisted and fought against the invaders. Finally Slovenia joined the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1945.

Since 1945 Slovenia had been a constituent republic of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia led by Josip Broz Tito (1943–80). While Yugoslavia remained Communist after Tito's death, Slovenia decided to embrace democracy and pressed for autonomy. In September 1989 it expressed its desire to separate, and by making an amendment to the constitution of Slovenia the General Assembly of the Yugoslav Republic of Slovenia declared the country's right to secede from Yugoslavia. In December 1990 a referendum was held in which people voted overwhelmingly in favor of independence, and on June 25, 1991, Slovenia declared its independence. A 10-day bloodless war between the Slovenian armed forces and the Yugoslav People's Army followed. Eventually after the Slovenians made their intentions clear by stiff resistance to

threats and coercion, the Yugoslav forces peacefully withdrew to Belgrade.

The European community recognized Slovenia's independence in 1992, and Slovenia joined the European Union (EU) as well as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 2004.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in Central Europe, Slovenia shares its boundaries with Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, and the Gulf of Venice. Within Slovenia four major European geographical regions converge, namely: the Dinaric area (also known as the Dinaric Alps or Dinarides; a chain of mountains), the Alps, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Pannonian Plains. Triglav is the highest peak in Slovenia at 9,396 feet. Some of the prominent rivers in Slovenia include the Krka, the Mura, the Sava, the Drava, the Soca, and the Kolpa.

Climatic conditions in Slovenia vary from region to region. The coastal region enjoys a Mediterranean climate characterized by warm summers and cold winters. The mountains enjoy Alpine weather, moderately warm summers and cold winters. The eastern parts of the country enjoy continental weather—hot summers and cold winters. The average temperature during winter is 28°F and during summer the average temperature is only 70°F.

Almost half the Slovenian territory is covered with forest, and it is the third most forested European country after Finland and Sweden. Slovenia is home to more than 2,900 species of plants.

The Slovenian region of Kras (Karst in English) on the Kras plateau refers to a limestone region with sinks, underground streams, and caverns. The Karst

Olm: The Human Fish

Olm or *Proteus (Proteus anguinus)*, or the human fish, is an endemic amphibian creature found in the Kras region of Slovenia. It is referred to as the “human” fish due to its light coloring. It is between 10 and 12 inches long, is pink or white in color, has external gills, three toes on the forelegs, and two toes on the hind legs. Its eyes are covered by skin, a degenerative effect of its subterranean lifestyle.

One of the common myths associated with the olm is that, when placed in daylight or in water where the temperature is 50°F above that of its natural habitat, the olm dies. However, in reality the olm can live in water with temperatures up to 86° F. When exposed to light, the olm changes its color to black or brown; when placed in darkness its color changes back to pale white or pink.

caves are home to one of the most mysterious creatures in the world the olm (*Proteus anguinus*), also known as the “human fish.” Boar, deer, bear, chamois (an extremely agile goat antelope, rupicapra), hedgehog, lynx, moor tortoise, and scarab beetle are among the more common fauna.

ECONOMY

Slovenia enjoys a stable economy with a high standard of living. Among all the former Communist European nations of the world, Slovenia enjoys the highest gross domestic product (GDP).

Growth-centered economic and fiscal policies of the government have succeeded in privatizing banking, telecommunications, and public utility systems and encouraged direct foreign investments.

Some of the major export items of Slovenia include machinery and transport equipment, food, chemicals, and manufactured goods. Its important trading partners include Croatia, Austria, Italy, Bosnia and Herzegovina, France, and Germany.

Slovenia became a member of the European Union on May 1, 2004 and is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Council of Europe, an international organization of 46 European nations.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Slovenia is a predominantly Christian society, and about 58 percent of the nation's population is Roman Catholic. However, religious tolerance is a major highlight of Slovenia, and people of different faiths are all free to practice their religion. In terms of ethnicity, Slovenes are the dominant ethnic group but Slovenia is also home to minorities of Hungarians, Croats, Serbs, Bosniaks, and other ethnic groups. Slovenian is the official language of Slovenia although Serbo-Croatian languages are also spoken in some regions.

In Slovenian literature the most renowned personality is France Preseren (1800–49), a renowned Slovenian poet whose work was acclaimed all over Europe. (His name is sometimes germanized as “Franz Prescheren,” especially in older documents from the time Slovenia was ruled by Austria.) His poetry spoke of Slovenian culture, and his poems aroused national consciousness among the Slovenians. His work, “Zdravljica” (“A Toast”), is the national anthem of Slovenia.

Slovenia is home to the most renowned Slovene architect Joze Plecnik (1872–1957), who is considered to be the pioneer of modern European and Slovene architecture.

Folk music is an integral part of Slovenian culture and includes rural harmonic singing, a type of jazz orchestra music known as *velike goslarije*, and music played with traditional panpipes. The younger generation in Slovenia prefers punk and pop music.

❁ CUISINE

Slovenian cuisine is heavily influenced by its neighboring countries. Also Slovenia offers a wide variety of traditional dishes based on venison (edible flesh of a game animal, especially deer), fish, and dumplings. Some of the most popular dishes include: *potica* (pastries), *krofci* (marmalade doughnuts), *rizota* (risotto), *paprikas* (beef or chicken stew), *golaz* (goulash), *njoki* (potato dumplings), *klobasa* (sausage), and *struklji* (cheese dumplings). Vegetables, cheese, buttermilk, yogurt, and butter are also part of the Slovenian diet.

Slovenia is known for its “slow food culture,” and a traditional Slovenian meal spans eight to twelve courses, often with a different wine served as an accompaniment to each course. Wine and beer are the preferred beverages in Slovenia.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR’S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 2

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, and is celebrated as New Year’s Day all over the world. Celebrations and revelries begin on the evening of December 31 (New Year’s Eve) and continue until January 2, which is also a public holiday.

On New Year’s Eve Slovenians from different parts of the country assemble at Preseren Square (named after the renowned Slovenian poet France Preseren) in the capital city of Ljubljana to participate in festive New Year’s Day celebrations. At the stroke of midnight the night sky lights up with fireworks, and people wish each other happy New Year. They also drink champagne and light their own firecrackers and usher in the new year with great enthusiasm. Many people spend New Year’s Eve at home with friends, while the children enjoy playing in the snow. People send greeting cards and wish each other joy and happiness, and children receive special gifts on New Year’s Day.

Slovenians enjoy a two-day holiday on January 1 and January 2; most of them go out on short trips to make the most of the leisure time.

❁ SLOVENE CULTURE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 8

Slovene Culture Day, or Preseren’s Day, is observed to mark the death of renowned Slovenian poet France Preseren, who died on February 8, 1849. He is regarded as the first poet of Slovenia whose work was acclaimed all over Europe. As

Ancient Music

With the discovery of several broken Neolithic instruments in Divje Babe, a cave in Slovenia, the music of a prehistoric flute has been heard after lying in silence for 50,000 years. These flutes, made with only two holes, are believed to be the world’s oldest musical instruments. Carved from the leg bones of bears, they were unearthed along with Neanderthal tools and an ancient fireplace. A musician–archaeologist reconstructed the flute using a genuine 50,000-year-old bear bone. Some have suggested that Neanderthal males used music to charm women, but the flutes might also have been used to hunt birds or to accompany dancing.

long ago as 1945 Slovenia designated the poet’s death anniversary as Slovene Culture Day in recognition of his invaluable contribution to Slovenian culture. In 1991 the government of Slovenia adopted his poem “Zdravljica” (“A Toast”) as the national anthem. The government has also instituted scholarships in honor of the great poet.

On this day art and cultural activities are organized all over the country, and special readings of Preseren’s poems take place. Even in small towns and villages, a wide variety of cultural programs take place that include folk dances, folk songs, and folk theater. Also artists and literary figures who have made outstanding contributions to Slovenian culture receive the prestigious Preseren Award. It is the highest award in the cultural field in Slovenia.

❁ CELEBRATION OF THE UPRISING DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 27

Celebration of the Uprising Day, also called Resistance Day, commemorates the historic uprising of the Slovenian people on April 27, 1941, against the occupying German forces. Although the uprising was brutally crushed by the Nazis, the act of a few brave men and women who dared to fight against unjust forces and knowingly risked their lives inspired millions of Slovenians to fight for the nation’s liberation.

On this day people pay homage to those brave Slovenians who lost their lives fighting against oppression, and prayer services are held in honor of those freedom fighters. State officials observe this day by delivering commemorative speeches emphasizing its importance and acknowledging the determination and valor of all Slovenians.

✿ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1–2

Fun Fact

When Slovenia was a part of Yugoslavia, although Slovenes represented only 8 percent of Yugoslavia's population, Slovenian exports constituted one-third of its total exports.

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day (depending on the country), in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. Although the earliest celebrations of May Day are ascribed to the pagan rituals practiced by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages, the political character of the day began in 1889. The Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, designated

May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

In Slovenia May Day celebrations last for two days, May 1 and May 2. During May Day celebrations, the president of Slovenia presides over rallies in the capital city of Ljubljana. In his speech he emphasizes the important role of workers in modern society and recognizes their role in shaping the Slovenian and world economy. Military parades are an integral part of these celebrations. Politicians also participate in the rallies and demonstrations organized by trade unions.

In the evening traditional bonfire parties, known as *kresovanje*, are held throughout the country. Drinking beer and feasting are the major highlights of the celebrations. Musical concerts are also organized on both days.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

✿ PROCLAMATION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 25

Proclamation Day commemorates the declaration of independence of Slovenia from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on June 25, 1991. On this day celebrations take place throughout the country, and the president of Slovenia presides over the elaborate Independence Day events in the capital city of Ljubljana. Celebrations begin at Republic Square (Trg Republike) in Ljubljana, where the official declaration of independence was made in 1991. Two of the symbols of that historic day include the first flagpole to bear the Slovenian national flag and the national tree of Slovenia, the linden, which was planted there on June 25, 1991.

A guard-of-honor ceremony takes place, and the president pays tribute to the armed forces and police as they march by, followed by his or her speech. A wide variety of cultural and theatrical performances as well as art exhibitions, reflective of the rich cultural heritage of Slovenia, also take place later in the day.

✿ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 26

This day commemorates the publication of the results of the referendum that was held on December 23, 1990, when the Slovenian people overwhelmingly voted in favor of independence from Yugoslavia. The Slovenian government decided to celebrate this historic day as Slovenia's Independence Day. On this day a special session is held in the Slovenian parliament, followed by a ceremonial speech by the prime minister. A host of cultural programs are held at the Cankarjev Dom Arts and Conference Center. Celebrations are also organized throughout the country, and people enthusiastically sing patriotic songs.

Religious Holidays

✿ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Last Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, commemorating the last week of Jesus' mortal life. Jesus was the prophet of Christianity, and Christians believe him to be the second person of the Holy Trinity (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). The day is as much about the beginning of Jesus' journey to the Cross as it is about his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. His arrival in Jerusalem was indeed the way to the Cross.

After two of his disciples had fetched a donkey for him to ride, they placed their clothes on it to make a comfortable seat. The disciples then cut branches and covered the path, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the words of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. People welcomed him by waving palm and olive branches, and strewing garments and branches on the road. There were different perceptions at work: Jesus rode in on a donkey, the humble entry of a peaceful nature by a spiritual king; the people of Jerusalem welcomed him with palm and olive branches and the laying of garments in his path because they wanted a worldly king to defeat the Romans.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

The rituals observed on Maundy Thursday are based on a sequence of events supposed to have occurred during Jesus' last meal with his Apostles. First Jesus washed their feet; then he announced that he had been betrayed by one of them. The traitor Judas left the table. Finally Jesus instituted the Eucharist—a ritual of consuming bread and wine as symbols of his body and blood, also referred to as Communion in Christian churches. In the Roman Catholic Church Maundy Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist, the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week, and gives priests an opportunity to prepare for the many rituals associated with Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, alternatively known as Mourning Friday, Sorrowful Friday, or Holy Friday, is a somber day for Roman Catholics and other Christians all over the world and is observed on the Friday before Easter. It commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus more than 2,000 years ago. Some devout Slovenian Catholics observe a fast from Ash Wednesday (first day of Lent), for 40 days up to Good Friday and a partial fast from then until Easter. Others, however, fast only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. On Good Friday, people visit their local churches and pray to Jesus, taking inspiration from his life and teachings. There is no Communion on this somber day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Saturday before Easter

Holy Saturday is the day Jesus lay in the tomb and the day before he rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. This was the Jewish Sabbath (the Jewish day of rest is Saturday). It is also regarded as the second Sabbath after Creation. The final day of Holy Week, which begins with Palm Sunday and includes Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, it marks the threshold between death and resurrection, and is a day of silence and contemplation for devout Catholics.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection. For this reason, it is sometimes known as Resurrection Day. This day is of utmost importance because the fundamental teaching of Christianity is that Jesus, through his death, freed all his believers from the penalty of sin. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. On Easter the entire family gathers to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus in Slovenia.

Slovenians often buy new clothes for this special day and Catholics attend a special celebratory Easter Mass. On Easter the entire family gathers for a traditional Easter meal that includes ham, *potica* (nut cake), Easter eggs, horseradish, bread, and other regional specialties.

Pirhi, decorated Easter eggs, an ancient pagan symbol of rebirth and spring's promise of fertility and renewal, are an integral part of Easter celebrations in Slovenia. A week before Easter young girls and women decorate the Easter eggs with beautiful designs and adornments.

On both Easter Sunday and Easter Monday, Slovenians play a wide variety of games with Easter eggs. The most popular game involves an egg-fight between two people in which each one has to break the opponent's egg in order to win.

Some Christian fundamentalists reject the Western customs associated with Easter, believing them to be irretrievably tainted with paganism and idolatry. Others, like the Church of God, say they follow a more primitive form of Christianity, and keep a Christian Passover that lacks many of the practices or symbols associated with Easter and is closer to the Jewish observance of Passover (Pesach).

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PESACH; SPRING FESTIVALS

Fun Fact

The name *Maundy Thursday* may be linked to the Latin word *mandatum*, "command," because Jesus commanded his Apostles to observe the ritual now called the Eucharist

Easter Eggs and Slovenian Beliefs

A number of superstitious beliefs are associated with Easter eggs. In the southern and northeastern parts of Slovenia peasants make a circle with decorated Easter eggs because they believe it will bring good luck. In many parts of the country Easter eggs are fed to hens because people believe that this will cause them to lay more eggs. While some Slovenians stick eggshells on the ceilings to drive cockroaches away, Styrian (from Styria Province in Austria) Slovenians scatter Easter eggshells around their homes to keep snakes away.

Fun Fact

In Anglo-Saxon, *Eostre* (Easter) was the goddess of the dawn, whose festival was observed at the vernal equinox. Her festival is believed to be the source of the tradition of including bunnies, chicks, and Easter eggs in the celebration of this holiday.

✿ PENTECOST

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: Fifty days after Lent

Pentecost Sunday, also called Whitsunday, takes its name from the Greek word *pentékosté*, which means “the fiftieth.” Pentecost takes place 50 days after Easter and celebrates the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles. Some scholars believe that many of the traditions and celebrations associated with this holiday were borrowed

from pagan celebrations of spring.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; PENTECOST; SPRING FESTIVALS; WHITSUNDAY

✿ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: August 15

The Feast of the Assumption commemorates the assumption into heaven of Mary, the mother of Jesus. According to one legend, when Mary was on her deathbed, all the Apostles visited her, except St. Thomas, who was delayed. When he did arrive, Mary’s body was nowhere to be found because she had been taken up to heaven. It is believed that her soul and body were united at Jehoshaphat (her tomb) and St. Gabriel took Mary’s them to heaven.

In Slovenia devout Catholics attend their local churches to take part in prayer services and a Mass held in honor of the Virgin Mary.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

✿ REFORMATION DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: October 31

This day commemorates the posting of the 95 Theses (written by German theologian Martin Luther, 1483–1546) on the doors of Castle Church at Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. Luther challenged the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church headed by the pope and asked Christians to return to the teachings of the Bible. He led the Protestant Reformation, which aimed to reform the beliefs and practices of the Roman Catholic Church.

Protestants all over the world celebrate this holiday, and red is considered to be the liturgical color of the day. It is symbolic of the Holy Spirit who descended on the Apostles of Christ on Pentecost Sunday. Protestants believe that the same Holy Spirit inspired Luther to nail his theses on the church door and start the Reformation movement.

On this day Protestants in Slovenia attend a memorial service in honor of Martin Luther.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

✿ ALL SAINTS’ DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: November 1

All Saints’ Day is a Christian feast that honors all the saints (known and unknown). It is an annual religious celebration that has taken place on November 1 since the time of Charlemagne (742–814). According to some historians All Saints’ Day celebrations began after the consecration of the Pantheon in Rome to the Blessed Virgin by Pope Boniface IV.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS’ DAY; ALL SOULS’ DAY; CHRISTIANITY

✿ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of celebration for Christians all over the world because it is the day chosen to celebrate the birth of Jesus, whom Christians believe was the son of God. No one knows the actual birth date of Jesus, and dates in all 12 months have been suggested as possibilities.

In ancient times the Slovene tribes (Indo-Europeans who spoke a Slavic dialect) celebrated the birth of a Sun God around December 25 with great festivity (probably on or near December 21, the winter solstice). According to old Slovene beliefs, *Dies natalis Solis invicti* (the invincible Sun God), dies around winter solstice and is then reborn, an event celebrated as the new year, or the start of a new seasonal crop cycle. But after the advent of Christianity, people began celebrating the birth of Jesus on December 25, as the Catholic Church dictated.

Christmas celebrations in Slovenia include sending greeting cards to loved ones, singing Christmas carols, decorating fir trees, fortune-telling, baking, preparing a loaf with rye, buckwheat, or wheat, and exchanging presents. Slovenians believe the Christmas loaf assumes magical powers and brings strength, health, and energy to those who partake of it. Slovenians believe that carol singers bring good luck in the coming year.

Santa Claus is known as Miklavž in Slovenia, and children believe he gives presents to those children who have been good throughout the year.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

✿ CARNIVAL

Observed in: Ptuj and nearby towns
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: February or March

Carnival, or Shrove Tuesday in English-speaking countries, and Pust in Slovenia, falls on the Tuesday



People wearing the traditional Slovenian masks of Kurent walk through the village Hajdina near Ptuj during a Carnival celebration. The masks are thought to have supernatural powers. The demonic figures jumping and ringing of bells are meant to chase winter away and call spring to the country. (AP Photo/Filip Horvat)

before Ash Wednesday (the first day of Lent). The word *shrove* is the past tense of an archaic English verb, “to shrive,” which means “to absolve someone of his or her sins.” A priest used to be known as the “shriner” (absolver of sins). This holiday also marks the beginning of spring and the end of the winter season.

In Slovenia a riotous atmosphere grips the entire nation as people dress in colorful costumes to celebrate the day before the beginning of the Lent. *Krof* (a marmalade doughnut) is an integral part of Pust celebrations and is popular among children. In the Cerknica region people dress as witches or monstrous characters and participate in daylong parades.

Children feast on candies, sweets, and sausages and enjoy the fun-filled atmosphere. An integral part of the carnival is *kurent*—a Pust figure with a long red nose, dressed in a hedgehog skin with a staff in his hand—who, according to Slovenian belief, brings a good harvest and abundant crops in the coming year. It is also believed that *kurent* drives away the winter and ushers in the beautiful spring weather.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

Regional Holidays

✿ LJUBLJANA SUMMER FESTIVAL

Observed in: Ljubljana
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July–August

The Ljubljana Summer Festival is an annual cultural event that takes place in the Slovenian capital city of Ljubljana in the months of July and August. The first summer festival was organized in 1953 and since

then, for six weeks of the year, the Slovenians have been treated to a pure cultural and music event.

With the aim of attracting international tourists to Slovenia, the government has added a wide variety of events such as folklore, folk theater, and business events as well as sports competitions. Some of the traditional events include theatrical performances, displays of traditional costumes, and the sale of authentic Slovenian dishes.

Several musical concerts are also organized throughout the city, and many renowned international artists perform during this festival. People are treated to folk dancing, folk singing, operas, ballets, and symphonic orchestras. This event not only acts as a window to Slovenian culture, it also presents an opportunity for Slovenians with exceptional musical ability to showcase their talent to the world at large.

Rites of Passage

✿ DEATH

In ancient times, before the advent of Christianity, after the death of a person the doors and windows of the house were kept open to enable the soul to leave the house. After the family had cremated the body of the deceased, the ashes were kept in an urn, and then the urn was buried. Much later they began burying their dead (with the head facing eastward) along with items of daily use such as food, clothing, drinks, and even some coins. This is because the Slovene tribes believed in the afterlife and transmigration of souls (a kind of reincarnation). Among certain Slovene tribes, there existed a belief that the soul has to cross the “wise sea” (a mythical sea in the afterlife) to reach the underworld. Thus, many tribes either cremated their deceased in boats or buried them in boat-shaped coffins to enable them to undertake the journey successfully in their afterlife.

Further Reading

Jill Benderly and Evan Kraft, eds., *Independent Slovenia: Origins, Movements, and Prospects* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996); John K. Cox, *Slovenia: Evolving Loyalties* (Oxford, U.K.: Routledge, 2005); Irene Portis-Winner, *Semiotics of Peasants in Transition: Slovene Villagers and Their Ethnic Relations in America* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002); Sanimir Resic and Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, eds., *The Balkans in Focus: Cultural Boundaries in Europe* (Lund, Sweden: Nordic Academic Press, 2002).

Fun Fact

According to Slovenian beliefs there are three Christmases: one big Christmas (December 25) and two little ones (New Year’s Day and Epiphany). On all three Christmases, Slovenians light incense sticks because they believe the smoke drives away evil spirits and demons.

❧ Solomon Islands ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	A group of islands in Oceania in the South Pacific Ocean, lying east of Papua New Guinea
Size	10,985 sq. mi.
Capital City	Honiara
Flag Description	The flag of the Solomon Islands has a diagonal yellow stripe from left lower corner to upper right corner that separates two triangles, the upper one is light blue and the lower triangle is green. Within the blue triangle, hoist side, are five five-pointed white stars.
Independence	July 7, 1978 (from United Kingdom)
Population	538,032 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary democracy
Nationality	Solomon Islanders
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Melanesian (95%); Polynesian (3%)
Major Language(s)	English (official, but spoken by only 1–2% of the population); 120 indigenous languages; Melanesian pidgin is the lingua franca in much of the country.
Major Religion(s)	Church of Melanesia (33%); Roman Catholic (19%); South Seas Evangelical (17%); Seventh-Day Adventist (11%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Queen's Birthday, June; Independence Day, July 7

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

According to historians and archaeologists, the earliest inhabitants of the Solomon Islands arrived there from the northwest nearly 30,000 years ago, although an organized society based on agriculture commenced only around 4000 B.C.E. Gradually these people mastered the skill of sailing, as well as crop cultivation and animal husbandry. From that period until 1600 C.E., the ongoing westward migration by Polynesians and the arrival of the Lapita people from the east resulted in the creation of an amalgamation of cultural influences in the region.

Since the main islands were already occupied by Melanesians, the newcomers settled on the smaller isolated islands. For the next 400 years, these outlying areas became the focus

of aggression on the part of Tongans and Tokelauans (inhabitants of a group of three atolls in the South Pacific Ocean, about halfway between Hawaii and New Zealand), resulting in a natural fear of intruders and trespassers and making the settlers rather hostile and formidable.

Around this time Spanish explorers based in Peru were scouting around for new lands to conquer. In 1568 Don Alvaro de Mendaña y Neyra (1541–95) led an expedition and chanced upon a large island he called Santa Isabel; he explored other landmasses as well, giving them all Spanish names that remain to this day. Neyra called these islands the Western Islands. By 1570 they were being referred to as Yslas de Salomon (Islands of Solomon). A few years later Neyra and one of his captains made futile attempts to come back to these islands, and their efforts marked the end of Spanish interest in the Pacific.

Due to flawed mapping no other Europeans found these islands for the next 150 years or so. In 1767 British captain

RAMSI

The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) is a partnership between the government, the people of the Solomon Islands, and contributing countries of the Pacific region. Eleven countries have contributed manpower and funding for RAMSI: Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

RAMSI has been operating in the Solomon Islands since July 2003. Much of RAMSI's early work focused on restoring security and law and order, and stabilizing government finances. Now the focus

is on restoring the work of government and promoting economic recovery.

RAMSI is helping the government and the people to help themselves. RAMSI's mission is to help the Solomon Islands to grow and develop. RAMSI is creating the conditions for Solomon Islanders to resume control of their country, their lives, and their future. It does not control the government or make decisions on behalf of the Solomon Islands. The parliament, the government, constitutional officeholders, and the public service all remain responsible for exercising their respective functions and are ultimately answerable to the people of the Solomon Islands.

Philip Carteret (1733–96) was the one who rediscovered the Solomon Islands. An influx of British, French, and U.S. explorers, whalers, and traders followed. The indigenous people became hostile and killed any white person they encountered. Gradually, the Solomon Islands became notorious as probably the most inhospitable place in the Pacific, so much so that even the most zealous and eager missionaries preferred to stay away.

During the late 19th century Britain signed land deals with Germany and gained control of the island group, renaming it the British Solomon Islands Protectorate. The first resident commissioner Charles Morris Woodford remained in charge from 1896 to 1915.

In April 1942 the Japanese captured the Shortland Islands (which were part of the protectorate) before moving on to Tulagi (another island of the group). This island soon turned into a battleground for fierce fighting between the Allies and the Axis powers—the United States and Japan, specifically. Throughout the conflict, the islanders remained loyal to the Allies. Eventually the United States gained the upper hand and slowly retook the islands for the Allies.

After the war, a nationalist, pro-American movement sprang up in the island of Malaita, vehemently opposing British rule. In 1947 and 1948 mass arrests weakened the movement. It finally died out with the withdrawal of the United States in 1950. To quell dissent and unrest further, Britain introduced local government, regional assemblies, and an elected governing council in 1970. In July 1978 the Solomon Islands were granted independence. However, racial unrest led to a state of emergency in June 1999, partly caused by the mass relocation of residents from the island of Malaita to nearby Guadalcanal. It ended in street violence and, finally, a coup in June 2000.

The situation became extremely chaotic, and the islands came close to a state of anarchy: civil servants went unpaid for months and cabinet meetings were held in secret so that local warlords could not inter-

fere with governmental processes. Attempts to use security forces failed, largely because many police and security personnel were associated with one of the rival gangs. In June 2003, the governor general of the Solomon Islands officially requested international help, and an international security contingent of 2,200 police and troops (primarily from Australia and New Zealand, but with representatives from about 20 other Pacific nations) arrived the next month. Civil order was much improved thereafter.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The Solomon Islands, a scattered archipelago comprising mountainous islands and low-lying coral atolls, stretches about 900 miles in a southeasterly direction from the Shortland Islands to the Santa Cruz Islands in the South Pacific Ocean. There are six major and 992 smaller islands, atolls, and reefs. The archipelago covers an area of about 249,000 square nautical miles; the land area is 10,985 square miles. The six biggest islands are Choiseul, New Georgia, Santa Isabel, Guadalcanal, Malaita, and Makira. Their common geographical features include thickly forested mountain ranges intersected by deep, narrow valleys. The Marovo Lagoon in the Western Province is the Earth's largest tropical coastal lagoon. The highest point on the islands is Mt. Makarakomburu at a height of 8,028 feet.

The climate of the islands is tropical; the temperatures are never extreme due to cooling winds blowing from the surrounding seas. Daytime temperatures are normally between 77° and 90°F, going down to between 37° and 41°F at night. From April to October, the southeast trade winds blow. The wet season is between November and March.

Some of the birds and animals found here cannot be found anywhere else in the world. Lake Tengganu on Rennell Island supports an exotic freshwater ecosystem, surrounded by the sea, with a

Fun Fact

Charles Morris Woodford issued the first stamps of the British Solomon Islands, called the "Large Canoe Issue."

The Lapita People

The Lapita people were the first to discover the Polynesian Pacific, and there is a single unbroken cultural sequence from their first settlement to modern times. The Lapita were therefore the ancestors of the present Polynesian population of the Solomon Islands. In addition, the chronology of the Lapita sites between the Bismarck Archipelago in the west and Tonga and Samoa in the east shows that the Lapita people expanded into the Pacific from west to east. This means that the ancestors of the Polynesians originally came from somewhere on the Asian coast, setting out on colonizing voyages from Indonesia about between 3,000 and 4,000 years ago.

plethora of bird life, including some unique parrot species and jungle fowl. Other fauna include wild pigs, huge rats, lizards, snakes, turtles, and crocodiles, many kinds of fish, sharks, dugongs (large gray sea mammals), and whales. Also, there are more than 4,500 plant species (which includes 230 varieties of orchids) on the islands. A good number of these plants and trees are used by residents for building, food, medicine, and clothing.

❁ ECONOMY

The bulk of the population of these islands depends on agriculture, fishing, and forestry for their livelihood. Most manufactured goods and petroleum products are imported. The islands are rich in mineral resources such as lead, zinc, nickel, and gold. Prior to the arrival of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) from nearby countries, severe ethnic violence, the bankruptcy of key businesses, and a nearly empty treasury culminated in economic collapse. RAMSI has restored law and order and introduced a new period of economic stability and moderate growth.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Papuans, Melanesians, and Polynesians live together on the Solomon Islands. Though their languages and customs differ, their music shares many similarities. The islanders are fond of music especially that played on a variety of bamboo pipes. These pipes are played either in sets or singly as wind instruments. Hitting lengths of bamboo with a rubber thong produces sounds ranging from the twang of a ukulele to a double-

bass boom. Solo and group vocal music are both popular; these reflect the indelible impact the European missionaries left on the country's choral tradition before abandoning the country due to threats of violence.

Despite the predominance of Christianity, traditional practices are still followed to a great extent, especially by the people living in villages. The traditional decorative crafts and woodcarvings of the Solomon Islands are famous throughout the world. Dances, songs, and stories depicting the past are also highly popular. These are the most common ways to celebrate wars, hunts, and harvests, among other things.

On these islands the term "custom" (*kastom*) refers to traditional beliefs and land ownership. Some of the islanders believe in various forms of magic. In some parts of Melanesia the people believe that everyone has two souls: One goes to an afterworld located on an island or underground; the other takes various forms and passes into sharks, fish, birds, animals, men, stones and trees. As people age their companions watch for animals or objects that reveal themselves as possible future incarnations. These creatures thus become temporarily sacred, and it is forbidden (taboo) to eat them. Should it happen that nothing presents itself as a possible vehicle for an individual's next incarnation, upon death the person's head is placed in a hollow carved wooden shark and floated out to sea. Then the soul is believed to pass into the first sea creature that approaches it.

In many areas, it is deemed inappropriate for a woman to stand higher than a man, and men must not deliberately place themselves below women. For example a man must not swim under a woman's canoe, or else it may have to be destroyed and a fine paid. Each sex also has its own bathing area in most villages.

Each of the nine provinces of the Solomons has its own Province Day. In the event that the date should fall on a Sunday, the holiday is celebrated on the following Monday.

❁ CUISINE

The island cuisine is tropical, including fresh vegetables, fruit, fish, and limited meats. The latter are mostly imported from Vanuatu since the local meat is not of a very good quality. The best local delicacy is the mud crab. The water from green coconuts, fresh from the tree, is the most popular drink. Some notable dishes include tapioca pudding, a starchy substance extracted from the root of the cassava plant. It is available in several forms including granules, flakes, pellets, flour, or starch. The flour is used as a thickening agent in soups, fruit fillings, glazes, and the like.

Poi is another native dish. It is made from cooked taro root. Taro is grown in tropical areas, and its roots are an important starchy food on the

Fun Fact

So many ships were sunk in the strait that separates the Florida Island group and Guadalcanal between August 1942 and March, 1943 that it is now called Iron Bottom Sound.

island. Taro roots range in length from about five inches to a foot or more. The root has a nutlike flavor when cooked. It is also extremely easy to digest. It should be noted, however, that some varieties are highly toxic unless thoroughly cooked. The taro plant has large edible leaves that islanders prepare and eat like mustard or turnip greens. The roots are eaten following boiling, frying, or baking.

Poi is made by pounding the taro root into a smooth paste and mixing it with water, the amount of which depends on how the poi is to be served. Since poi is eaten with the fingers, its consistency is measured accordingly and ranges from “one-finger” (the thickest) to “three-finger” (the thinnest). Poi is generally fermented for several days, which gives it a sour, acidic taste. It can be eaten by itself, mixed with milk, or as a condiment for meat and fish.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 is the first day of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar and is widely celebrated as New Year's Day. Celebrations take place all over the world, starting on the evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve). On the Solomon Islands people generally spend this day with their loved ones and celebrate the occasion with get-togethers and dinners. All educational and public establishments remain closed.

❁ QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Second Monday in June

This day celebrates the birthday of Queen Elizabeth II (b. 1926), who is not only Queen of Great Britain and Ireland but also considered the head of state in many nations that are, or were once, part of the British Empire. Most of them are now members of the British Commonwealth.

This holiday is celebrated on different dates by different countries. Generally it is celebrated on the second Monday of June. In the Solomon Islands the day is marked by a police parade, followed by sporting events and traditional dancing. All educational and public establishments remain closed.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 7

Independence Day is the most important holiday of the local calendar. On this day the Solomon Islands

obtained its independence from British colonial rule. This momentous event is celebrated with military parades and dancing.

Religious Holidays

❁ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Last Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, commemorating the last week of Jesus' mortal life. Jesus was the prophet of Christianity, and Christians believe him to be the second person of the Holy Trinity (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). The day is as much about the beginning of Jesus' journey to the Cross as it is about his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. His arrival in Jerusalem was indeed the way to the Cross.

After two of his disciples had fetched a donkey for him to ride, they placed their clothes on it to make a comfortable seat. The disciples then cut branches and covered the path, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the words of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. People welcomed him by waving palm and olive branches, and strewing garments and branches on the road. There were different perceptions at work: Jesus rode in on a donkey, the humble entry of a peaceful nature by a spiritual king; the people of Jerusalem welcomed him with palm and olive branches and the laying of garments in his path because they wanted a worldly king to defeat the Romans.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

The rituals observed on Maundy Thursday are based on a sequence of events supposed to have occurred during Jesus' last meal with his Apostles. First Jesus washed their feet; then he announced that he had been betrayed by one of them. The traitor Judas left the table. Finally Jesus instituted the Eucharist—a ritual of consuming bread and wine as symbols of his body and blood, also referred to as Communion in Christian churches. In the Roman Catholic Church Maundy Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist, the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week, and gives priests an opportunity to prepare for the many rituals associated with Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

☼ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, alternatively known as Mourning Friday, Sorrowful Friday, or Holy Friday, is a somber day for Roman Catholics and other Christians all over the world and is observed on the Friday before Easter. It commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus more than 2,000 years ago.

Some Solomon Islanders fast from Ash Wednesday (the first day of Lent) for 40 days up to Good Friday, and a partial fast from then until Easter. Some fast only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. On Good Friday, people visit their local churches and pray to Jesus, taking inspiration from his life and teachings. There is no Holy Communion on this somber occasion.

Good Friday is a public holiday, and all schools, government offices, and banks are closed on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

☼ HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Saturday before Easter

Holy Saturday is the day Jesus lay in the tomb and the day before he rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. This was the Jewish Sabbath (the Jewish day of rest is Saturday). It is also regarded as the second Sabbath after Creation. The final day of Holy Week, which begins with Palm Sunday and includes Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, it marks the threshold between death and resurrection, and is a day of silence and contemplation for devout Catholics.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

☼ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection. For this reason it is sometimes known as Resurrection Day. This day is of utmost importance because the fundamental teaching of Christianity is that Jesus, through his death, freed all his believers from the penalty of sin. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. On Easter the entire family gathers to celebrate. Solomon Islanders often buy new clothes for this special day and go to a special Easter service to celebrate Jesus' rising from the dead.

In the Solomon Islands people attend midnight prayer services for Easter and celebrate Jesus' resurrection by lighting candles. A festive spirit envelops churches as people sing devotional hymns. Easter

eggs have become associated with this observance because they are symbols of rebirth and regeneration taken from the ancient pagan spring festivals. Solomon Islanders exchange beautifully decorated Easter eggs and visit friends and family members.

The first Monday after Lent is celebrated as Easter Monday. Easter Monday is a public holiday, and all schools, government offices, and banks are closed on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

☼ PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fifty days after Easter

Pentecost, also called Whitsunday and Whitmonday, is observed on the seventh Sunday after Easter. It commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit in the shape of tongues of flame on the 12 disciples and the early Christians (as recorded in the New Testament), and is called Pentecost because the word *pentekosté* means "fiftieth" in Greek. This festival continues on the Monday that immediately follows it. On the Solomon Islands the activities on this day include a parade of war veterans along with general festivities.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; PENTECOST

☼ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world because it is the day chosen by the Catholic Church on which to celebrate the birth of Jesus. On the Solomon Islands this festival is celebrated in a traditional manner. Celebrations start with a Christmas Eve service, followed by family meals that invariably include fruitcake served together with wine. Many families exchange gifts after dinner, though some do not engage in this practice at all. On the next day friends and families go visiting carrying souvenirs and gifts.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

☼ PROVINCE DAYS

Observed in: Choiseul, Isable, Temotu, Central Island, Rennell, Guadalcanal, Makira/Ulawa, Malaita, Western Province

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February, June, July, August, December

Each part of the Solomon Islands has its own Province Day. These are listed below. If a Province

Day falls on a Sunday, the following Monday is observed as a public holiday.

February 25: Choiseul

June 2: Isable

June 8: Temotu

June 29: Central Island

July 20: Rennell

August 1: Guadalcanal

August 3: Makira/Ulawa

August 15: Malaita

December 7: Western Province

Rites of Passage

❁ COMING OF AGE

There was a time when circumcision was fashionable among adolescent boys on the Solomon Islands “because the white man (Araikwao) did it,” regardless of whether the churches complained or not. Nowadays most of the men on the Solomon Islands do not undergo circumcision at all.

A variety of methods are used in the regions where it is still practiced. One is called *fō-kona*, which means “four corner.” Four fore-to-aft cuts are made, on the top, bottom, and sides of the penis. If the procedure is performed before puberty, the outcome looks similar to conventional circumcision.

The most bizarre method is that practiced on the western Solomon Islands. In this ritual a cut is made across the top of the foreskin at the back, and the glans is threaded up through it. As the penis grows, unthreading it becomes impossible. The foreskin then forms a little wrinkled bunch under the glans, about the size of a pea. This is, of course, done with the idea of improving heterosexual intercourse.

❁ MARRIAGE

A conventional marriage is not, and cannot be, kept secret among Solomon Islanders. Everyone in the

respective villages, in addition to friends and relatives, are informed. Immediate and extended families and even neighbors are told. Nowadays the boy and girl are probably seeing each other and later ask and receive the sanction of their parents.

Common features of a traditional marriage include an exchange of bride-price, food, and other items. In the past and even now, the marriage contract is negotiated by the father or a male relative of the boy. Acceptance or refusal on the part of the girl’s family is done by the girl’s father or male relative. In practice the girl’s consent is sought by her father, except in cases where the girl may have to be persuaded if she refuses to accept. Often the girl accepts the proposal out of respect for her father and elders. In some church communities, the girl can marry without the payment of bride-price, although the exchange of food will still take place. In some cases the exchange of food may be scaled down to the point that it merely involves both sides eating together to signify the union. There are even instances when the token bride-price has been paid by the boy’s parents without the customary exchange of food.

The only point is that the parties have decided to live together as husband and wife, with the agreement of their families and relatives. All the ceremonies and rituals can be done away with if the circumstances so demand. However, under the Islanders Marriage Act the parties do have to marry in a church.

Further Reading

Sam Alasia, *Ples Blong Iumi: Solomon Islands, the Past Four Thousand Years* (Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1989); Michael Kwaioloa and Ben Burt, *Living Tradition: A Changing Life in Solomon Islands* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001).

∞ Somalia ∞

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Eastern Africa, bordering the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, east of Ethiopia
Size	246,201 sq. mi.
Capital City	Mogadishu
Flag Description	Somalia's flag is light blue with a large white five-pointed star in the center.
Independence	June 26, 1960 (from United Kingdom); July 1, 1960 (from Italy)
Population	8,591,629 (2005 est.)
Government	No permanent national government; transitional, parliamentary national government
Nationality	Somali
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Somali (85%); Bantu and other non-Somali (15%)
Major Language(s)	Somali (official); Arabic; Italian; English
Major Religion(s)	Sunni Muslim
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day (British Somaliland), June 26; Independence Day (Italian Somaliland) and Foundation of Somali Republic, July 1; Revolution Day, October 21

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Somalia differs from other African nations in that it is made up of a single ethnic group. Somalis have the same language, religion, and culture and are descendants of a common ancestor, though there may be small differences among them in their day-to-day lives. It is believed that the original inhabitants of the region were ethnic Cushites, who had migrated to Somalia from the lake regions of southern Ethiopia.

Archaeological evidence also suggests that coastal regions of Somalia were explored before 100 C.E. by Arab traders who traveled extensively on the Indian Ocean and Red Sea, and came into contact with Somalia and its inhabitants in the ensuing centuries. Then during the Middle Ages, persecuted Muslims from all over Arabia fled to Somalia. They introduced Islam in Somalia, and many of them married native inhabitants.

In the 14th century there were friendly relations between Christian Ethiopia and Muslim Somalia. And although jihad (a holy Islamic war) was being fought in different parts of the

Muslim world, Somalia promised it would never attack its neighbor Ethiopia. However, in 1414 an Ethiopian king Yeshaq I (r. 1414–29), who wanted to expand his empire, disregarded the friendly relations shared by Somalia and Ethiopia and launched a religious war against Somalia and Djibouti. After his successful conquest Ethiopians ruled Somalia for almost a century.

In 1530 under the leadership of a Muslim Somali Ahmad Gragn (c. 1503–43), the Somalis launched an attack on the Ethiopians. He assembled an army of Somali Muslims and entered Ethiopia. Employing scorched earth tactics, they destroyed anything that could be useful to the enemy and killed every Ethiopian they came across. The total annihilation of Ethiopians was stopped only by the timely intervention of Portuguese explorer Pedro da Gama, the son of the famed explorer Vasco da Gama (1460–1524). The Portuguese, who needed help to carry on their trading and exploration activities in the Indian Ocean region, struck an alliance with the Christians of Ethiopia and fought against the armies of Ahmad Gragn. In the final battle, known as the Battle of Wayna Daga, Ahmad Gragn was killed, and his army, defeated. Then, the Portuguese established an economic colony in Somalia that was primarily engaged in textile manufacturing.

Cushites

The Cushites belong to the Cush civilization, which inhabited the Nubia region in the southern part of ancient Egypt. They are also looked upon as the first civilization to develop in sub-Saharan Africa but not much is known about this early civilization. The Egyptians reported that the first Cushite state was called the Kingdom of Kerma (a state in Nubia) and was established around 2600 B.C.E.; it ruled some parts of

Egypt and all of Nubia. However, around 2500, for some unknown reason, they began migrating south.

Some historians state that they ruled over the Kingdom of Napata (a place in Egypt) around the 11th century and even successfully invaded Egypt. However, the Assyrian (indigenous people of Iraq) invasion of 671 forced the Cushites to withdraw from Egypt. They began migrating south of Napata and eventually spread to different parts of Africa.

In 1728 the Ottoman Turks, who exercised control in some parts of Somalia through local governors, following a series of wars, successfully drove the Portuguese away and established total control over the Horn of Africa (which includes the present-day countries of Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, and Djibouti). However, by 1850 Turkish power was on the decline, paving the way for Europeans to establish their colonies in the region.

The European colonization of Somalia started in the 19th century. Djibouti was colonized by the French, northern Somalia was colonized by the British (who called it British Somaliland), and southern Somalia was controlled by the Italians (whose territory was referred to as Italian Somaliland). Ethiopia ruled over the inland area known as Ogaden, and Kenya governed the region along Somalia's northern border known as the National Frontier District (NFD).

Among all the colonial powers, Italy took best care of its colonies in the southern part of Somalia. Through various economic initiatives, they brought prosperity to the region and won the hearts of the native inhabitants who showed little resistance to the occupying forces. In comparison to the developments in the south, the territories under the French, British, Ethiopians, and Kenyans lagged far behind in terms of development. By 1936 Italian forces dominated the entire southern part of Somalia.

During World War II Italy wanted to put all its might against the Allied forces and began withdrawing its troops from the region. Taking advantage of this opportunity, British forces captured the Italian-controlled region of Somalia in 1941. A large number of Italians, however, were allowed to stay in the region after the unification of Italian Somaliland and British Somaliland.

In 1945 after World War II, Britain relaxed its military control in Somalia and for the first time tried to pave the way for democracy in the region. Political parties sprang up in different parts of Somalia eagerly welcoming democracy, self-determination, and ultimately independence. The Somalia Youth League (SYL) was the first and most powerful party in Somalia. The region remained a British Protectorate until 1949 when the United Nations (UN), after assessing the economic devel-

opments made by the region during Italian rule, decided to grant Italy a nominal trusteeship in Italian Somaliland for a period of 10 years. It also decided that Somalia would be granted total independence in 1960.

Somalia enjoyed prosperity during the decade-long Italian rule with development initiatives in its infrastructure as well as education sectors. In 1960 as promised by the UN, total independence was granted to Somalia. The civilian government that came to power at this time allied itself with the Soviet Union. In 1969 after a successful coup, Gen. Mahammed Siad Barre established himself as the president and set up a socialist military type of government. Initially Barre's government was popular with the people, but over a period of time they began to rebel against his oppressive rule. Also during the Ogaden War (1977–78) between Somalia and Ethiopia, the economy of Somalia was reduced to shambles, and the country became dependent on foreign aid to meet its requirements.

Militias representing various clans arose in a bid to seize power from Barre. This resistance to Barre's rule continued through the 1970s and 1980s. Full-scale civil war broke out between 1988 and 1991, and Barre was forced to go into exile in January 1991. From 1991 into the early years of the 21st century there was continuous unrest and turmoil in the country as the various militias fought among themselves. Without a government in place, the people endured great hardship and suffering as a result of violence and famine. Food supplies were manipulated for political gain. In 1992 the United States and the UN interceded in a bid to end the crisis. However, after suffering major casualties in the region, the UN withdrew from Somalia on March 3, 1995. Somalis fled in large numbers to neighboring countries and other countries overseas such as the United States, Germany, Switzerland, Finland, and England. About one million Somalis live in Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti, Yemen, and Burundi.

In the early years of the 21st century, fighting continued among warring factions for control of the capital city and southern parts of the country. How-

Fun Fact

The future capital city Mogadishu was well known as a popular party town for Arab sailors during the 1300s.

The Ogaden War (1977–78)

The Ogaden War was fought between Ethiopia and Somalia over the issue of dominance in the Ogaden region. Siad Barre had propagated an ideology of Greater Somalia, a vision of bringing all the regions of the former Horn of Africa under the unified governance of Somalia. According to this vision, all regions of Djibouti, eastern Ethiopia, northeastern Kenya, and Somalia were to be part of Greater Somalia. The Ogaden War took place in 1977–78

after Ethiopia resisted the Somali demand to allow Somali-dominated regions of Ethiopia to join Greater Somalia. In a classic example of Cold War alliances, Somalia—formerly a Soviet ally—began receiving aid from the United States while Ethiopia—a former American ally—began receiving support from the former Soviet Union. The war ended with a resounding Somali defeat, and a truce was reached between the two warring nations.

ever, ongoing discussions between Kenya and former government officials resulted in the election of Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmad (b. 1934), the president of Puntland (a region in northeastern Somalia that declared its autonomy from Somalia amid fighting in 1998), as the next president of Somalia. In September 2004, after many delays, a 275-member parliament was convened in Kenya under the new charter. The president and the parliament were to serve for five years.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Somalia is located on the Horn of Africa and borders the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. Its neighbors are Djibouti to the north, Ethiopia to the north and northwest, and Kenya to the southwest. It has the longest stretch of coastline among all the countries in Africa but has no natural harbors because of coral reefs. The northern part of the country has mountains, while the inland areas consist of dry plateaus that range from 2,251 to 2,486 feet in height. The Juba and Shebeli Rivers originate in Ethiopia and flow toward the Indian Ocean. However, the Shebeli generally dries up before it reaches the sea.

The country has two rainy seasons (*gu* and *day*) and two dry seasons (*jiilaal* and *hagaa*). The *gu* rains that last from April to June transform the arid landscape of the plateaus into fertile grazing land. This season of plenty is followed by the *hagaa* drought from July to September and then by the *day* rains in October and November. *Jiilaal* from December to March is looked upon as the worst season for grazing. Rainfall varies from light showers to heavy downpours. The maximum temperatures range from 86° to

104°F, while the mean daily temperatures vary from 67° to 86°F.

The landscape of Somalia comprises coarse grass, thorn, and acacia trees. On the mountain slopes sweet-smelling plants producing frankincense and myrrh can be found. Eucalyptus, euphorbia, and mahogany trees grow in profusion in southern Somalia. Somalia is home to a variety of wildlife including crocodiles, elephants, giraffes, leopards, lions, zebras, and several species of venomous snakes.

❁ ECONOMY

Somalia is one of the poorest and most underdeveloped countries in the world. The country has few natural resources, and its civil war has further damaged the economy. The main occupation of the Somalis is livestock-rearing, followed by agriculture. A large portion of the population is nomadic or seminomadic. The Somali people are dependent on animals to make a living. Agriculture is confined to the southern part of the country.

Livestock, hides, fish, charcoal, and bananas are the main exports of Somalia. The products for the domestic market are sugar, sorghum, corn, fish, and *khat* (or *qat*, a shrubby plant whose leaves are dried and used to make tea). Industry accounts for only 10 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP), and it is based on the processing of agricultural products. The civil war has also affected its growth adversely and the country depends heavily on foreign aid.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Though the Somalis trace their roots to a common ancestor (the Cushites), they are divided into a number of clans and subclans that form clan families. The clan families living in southern Somalia are the Rahanwayn and the Digil; together, they are referred to as *sab*. Other clans include the Ogaden, the Hawiye, the Isaaq, Dir, Tunni, and the Bagunis. Population counting in Somalia is complicated by

Fun Fact

The distinction between unmarried and married Somali women can be made easily. Traditionally a single woman braids her hair and does not apply incense. Unlike a married woman she does not wear any kind of makeup or apply any kind of perfume.

the large number of nomads and by refugee movements in response to famine and clan warfare.

Somalis enjoy poetry, folk dancing, plays, and singing, especially in the rural parts of the country. They enjoy these activities on family and religious occasions as well as on state occasions. Traditional Somali culture still occupies pride of place in the rural areas, and traditional costumes are usually worn on special occasions. While men wear two lengths of cloth wrapped around them as a skirt and shawl; they also wear *macaawis*, a bright-colored cloth worn like an Indonesian sarong. They cover their heads either with Western hats and caps or by wearing a Somali cap called *benadirya kufia*. Women wear *guntiino*, a full-length cloth wrapped around the body, usually red and white in color.

In the cities, modern entertainment and pastimes in the form of television and videotapes, cinema, and bars and restaurants are popular, and the Western influence can be seen in the choice of dress worn by urban Somalis. Belief in the supernatural is a part of traditional Somali society, particularly in the rural areas.

The main themes in Somali music are love, life before the civil war, and uniting and rebuilding Somalia. One of the native instruments is the *batar* drum. The center of Somali music is in Toronto, Canada, due to the presence of a sizable Somali population there and the *ongoing civil war* in Somalia. London, Minneapolis, Minn., and Columbus, Oh., are other places where the Somali music industry has a strong presence. Waaberi is a band that has found an audience outside the country. Another band, known as Maryam Mursal, combines traditional Somali music with rock, bossa nova, hip hop, and jazz. The Skyhigh Family is a band from Somalia that produces hip hop music.

❁ CUISINE

Somalis eat flat bread called *canjero* or *laxoo*, goat liver, and either cereal or porridge made of millet or cornmeal for breakfast. At midday rice or noodles with sauce and perhaps meat is the norm. Pasta became a popular dish during Italian rule. The midday meal is the heaviest meal of the day. At the end of the day Somalis partake of a light meal that consists of beans, *muffo* (patties made of oats or corn), or a salad with more *canjero*. Spiced tea is a favorite, but Somalis are also fond of drinking the milk of sheep, goats, and camels.

In the countryside the nomads favor milk and may drink almost three gallons a day. The milk is kept in a pitcher called a *haan* or a wooden bucket. Fermented camel milk, or *jino*, resembles yogurt. The diet of rural Somalis includes corn, millet, sorghum, beans, and some fruit and vegetables. Millet is made into porridge or mixed with milk to form cakes. Beans are usually served with butter or mixed with corn, while sorghum, a type of grain, is ground to make flour and bread.

Somalis also enjoy a kind of homemade bread called *anjara* that resembles a large, spongy pancake. Black tea with milk and sugar, and *sambusas*, deep-fried triangular-shaped dumplings with a filling of meat or vegetables, are also popular.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Gregorian, or Western, calendar, January 1 is celebrated as New Year's. While there are celebrations all over the world, beginning on the evening of December 31, in Somalia no celebrations take place on New Year's Eve in accordance with a resolution passed by the sharia courts (ultra conservative Islamic judiciaries) that declared participation in these celebrations a punishable offense. In some parts of the country, this threat has taken a serious turn as masked men execute people who dare to challenge the sharia laws. Since New Year's Day is considered a Western festival, extremists who are opposed to Western influences look upon the celebrations as an unacceptable corruption. For most Somalis it is simply a day when all offices and institutions are closed.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers. The May 1 observance of Labor Day was declared by the international Socialist party in 1889 to coincide with a general strike in the United States called for 1890 by the American Federation of Labor (AFL) to win the eight-hour workday. This is a national holiday in Somalia with most businesses, schools, and government offices closed for the day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY (BRITISH SOMALILAND)

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 26

Fun Fact

The notion of the "evil eye" is a popular belief in Somali society. A person can either deliberately or unknowingly cause another person misfortune by directing praise at them. Most Somalis tend to avoid compliments to keep the "evil eye" at bay.

Fun Fact

After his victory over Somalia, Ethiopian King Yeshaq, or Isaac, asked his minstrels to compose a song in honor of his victory.

The very first mention of the word *somali* in written history has been found in one of these poems composed to commemorate Yeshaq's victory over that country.

On June 26, 1960, in accordance with the UN mandate of 1949, total independence was granted to British Somaliland. The northern part of modern-day Somalia had been a British Protectorate since 1886. During World War II Italian Somaliland was also captured by the British with the help of its forces in British Somaliland. However, it was only after World War II in 1945 that Britain began relaxing its military presence in the region. It encouraged democracy and the formation of political parties. The United Kingdom granted total independence to the northern part of Somalia on June 26, 1960. And on July 1, 1960, British and Italian Somaliland merged to form the independent state of Somalia.

INDEPENDENCE DAY (ITALIAN SOMALILAND)/FOUNDATION OF SOMALI REPUBLIC

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 1

On July 1, 1960, in accordance with a 1949 UN mandate, the southern part of Somalia, which was also known as Italian Somaliland, was granted independence by Italy. The region had been an Italian colony since the 1880s and had prospered under Italian rule. Economic initiatives by Italians ensured that money kept flowing in the region, and the people of southern Somalia were generally happy with the colonial presence. However, in 1941 during World War II, after Italy decided to withdraw its troops from their colonies to strengthen their attacks on Allied forces, Britain invaded Italian Somaliland and established its control over the region.

In accordance with the UN mandate of 1949, Italy was made a nominal trustee of Italian Somaliland and assigned the task of granting total independence to the region by 1960. Thus on July 1, 1960, Italian Somaliland was granted complete independence, and it merged with British Somaliland to form the independent state of Somalia. This day, also celebrated as the day of the Foundation of the Somali Republic, is marked with grand celebrations, singing, and fireworks. People gather in the capital city of Mogadishu and witness the unveiling of the national flag by the president of Somalia. Celebrations continue throughout the night, and in many places electric signboards proclaim "Long Live Independence."

Fun Fact

The UN declared Somalia to be a country without a government between 1992 and 2000.

REVOLUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 21

Revolution Day commemorates the military coup led by Major General Mahammad Siad Barre that led to the ouster of prime minister Igaal on October 21, 1969. On October 15, 1969, President Shermake of Somalia was assassinated by one of his bodyguards. Prime Minister Igaal had to choose the next president, and his choice was based on ethnic grounds. Dissatisfied with the state of affairs, Siad Barre led a coup against the Igaal government and captured Mogadishu on October 21, 1969. He formed the Supreme Revolutionary Council and assumed power as the president of Somalia.

Religious Holidays

EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

The first month of the Islamic calendar is called Muharram, and the first day of this month is celebrated as El am Hejir, or the Islamic New Year. It is believed that on this day in 622 c.e., the prophet Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina (Medina is about 200 miles to the north of Mecca) and established the first Islamic state in Medina.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

ASHURA

Observed by: Sunni Muslims
Observed on: Tenth of Muharram, the first month in the Islamic calendar

Ashura (an Arabic word that means "ten") falls on the 10th day of Muharram, the first month in the Islamic calendar. The day commemorates the martyrdom of the grandson of Muhammad, Hussein bin Ali, the third imam of the Shiites, who was killed in the battle of Karbala in 680 c.e. For Sunni Muslims in many parts of the world, including Somalia, religious fasting marks Ashura. Public display of emotion is discouraged by Sunni beliefs, so they observe this day by grieving in silence. Somali Muslims also fast on Ashura.

See also Volume III: ASHURA; ISLAM

MOULOD

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

The birth anniversary of the prophet Muhammad, the holy prophet of Islam, falls in the third month of

the Islamic year. For Muslims all over the world, this is a day of great joy since Muhammad is their most revered prophet. On Mouloud, which is locally called Menlroud, Somali Muslims offer special prayers in honor of Muhammad and renew their commitment to follow the path established by him.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOUUD

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr, the Feast of Fast-Breaking, marks the end of the month of Ramadan during which Muslims all over the world observe a daily dawn-to-dusk fast. It is believed that Allah revealed the Koran, the sacred book of Muslims, to Muhammad during this month; thus, it is the holiest month of the Islamic calendar. During the month of Ramadan Somali Muslims break their fast at sunset by eating a light meal called *afur*, which consists of dates and barley soup. Then they visit the mosque to offer a special prayer called Tawarih on each night of the holy month. Before sunrise, they take another light meal called *suburs*, again consisting of dates and soup. Drummers are assigned the special task of waking local people before the fast begins at sunrise to take *subur*.

Eid al-Fitr is an important and joyous festival for Somali Muslims and is marked by huge family celebrations. Gifts are given to children, and people also visit their friends and family on this day. Depending on the economic status of the family, sacrificial offerings are made. Goats, cows, and camels are killed, and special dishes are made with their meat. Other dishes like cake, rice, juice, *hawud* (a dessert made from ginger and sugar), and *sampus* (beef) are also prepared. Donating money is also part of the Eid al-Fitr celebrations.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twentieth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th or pilgrimage month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, also called the Feast of Sacrifice, Eid al-Kebir, or Tabaski, commemorates the unwavering faith of Ibrahim (Abraham) in Allah and his willingness to sacrifice his son to obey Allah's command. Instructed to sacrifice his most valued possession his young son, Ibrahim was about to do so when, to his surprise, he found that a ram lay on the altar instead of his son.

After the customary prayers in the local mosques, Somali Muslims greet each other and exchange gifts. It is a day of enjoyment for the children because, apart from getting monetary gifts, they get a chance to enjoy rides in the amusement

parks and fairs that are set up in different parts of the country during Eid al-Adha celebrations. These fairs also have stalls that sell toys, clothes, and sweets. Those Somalis who can afford it sacrifice a sheep or goat on this day.

This is also the month during which Muslims undertake the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, between the sixth and thirteenth, required by the Koran and the fifth pillar of Islam's Five Pillars of the faith.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; HAJJ; ISLAM

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

In Somalia a marriage is only considered complete after the birth of a child. Somalis do not attempt to limit family size, and it is considered normal for families to have seven to eight children. On the other hand, in Somalia infant mortality is extremely high, and average life expectancy at birth is a mere 48 years. A pregnant woman is taken care of not only by her immediate family but the entire community. Other women in the community hold a special party (like a baby shower) for the pregnant woman and extend their support and care.

Midwives play a vital role during birth because Somali women trust them more than doctors and consider the home to be an ideal place for childbirth rather than hospitals. The newborn is treated with extra care, including warm water baths and special oil massages (using sesame oil), and for seven days after birth a special herb called *malmal* (a traditional African medicinal plant) is used to massage the umbilicus. In accordance with traditional beliefs, the mother and the newborn infant should remain indoors for 40 days after birth to protect them from the evil eye. It is customary for the mother to wear earrings made out of string and a number of garlic cloves, while the baby wears a string with *malmal* attached to it in order to ward off evil. This period is known as *afantabb*, and family members take care of the mother and child with special teas, soup, and porridge. Incense (myrrh) is kept burning in the house during this period in order to protect the child from the ordinary smell of the world that may cause sickness. At the end of the 40-day period, a big celebration is organized and the naming ceremony takes place in the presence of friends and relatives. A lavish feast is prepared, and after a small ritual prayer, a goat is sacrificed to mark the occasion.

Fun Fact

Somalis do not have surnames. Thus the full name of a Somali man or woman consists of a nickname given at birth, the father's name, and the grandfather's name. Also after marriage, women do not surrender their maiden names.

Fun Fact

Birthdays are not celebrated in Somalia. Instead death anniversaries are celebrated in a grand manner in honor of the deceased.

✿ COMING OF AGE

Male and female circumcision is performed either at birth or between birth and five years of age. The circumcision ceremony is performed either by trained elders or by a trained doctor (for boys) or nurse (for girls) affiliated with a hospital. In some areas the female relatives of the girl's family perform the circumcision.

✿ MARRIAGE

In Somalia both arranged and love marriages have social acceptance. In arranged marriages the prospective groom offers a suitable bride-price as well as a small token to the girl's parents to finalize the engagement. If the token is accepted, then the couple is considered engaged.

Before the actual date of marriage, the prospective groom is expected to give some property to the girl's parents as the *yarad* (bride-price). In case the girl dies before marriage, the *yarad* is returned to the suitor. In case the suitor dies before marriage, then one of the brothers or male relatives of the groom should offer a marriage proposal along with a small payment to the girl's parents. In case the girl refuses to marry this new man, a suitable groom is found for her or the *yarad* is returned to the deceased suitor's family. In case of acceptance of the proposal, the bride's family will pay a substantial amount known as *dibad*, or dowry, to the groom's family.

The wedding ceremony is presided over by the sheikh or *kathi* (priest). *Mebr*, a second kind of bride-price, is promised by the groom's family in the form of gold, gift, cash, or property and is noted on the marriage certificate. It is payable to the bride in case of divorce or dissolution of the marriage. Dancing and celebrations follow the ritual marriage, although customs and traditions vary from region to region.

✿ DEATH

When people are dying, their family members read aloud a special part of the Koran, called *yasin*. After they die a sheikh is called to clean the corpse and to ready it for burial. A male sheikh looks after the men, while a female sheikh looks after the women. The sheikh cleanses the body, applies a perfumed herb, drapes it in a white shroud, and recites the appropriate prayers. Then the family members of the deceased take the body for burial to the local cemetery and dig a grave for the body. After offering prayers to Allah and thanking him for the life of the deceased, the body is buried.

Further Reading

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South Africa

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Southernmost tip of the African continent
Size	471,011 sq. mi.
Capital City	Pretoria
Flag Description	The flag of the Republic of South Africa has two horizontal bands of equal width with red on the top and blue at the bottom, separated from each other by a horizontal Y-split green band. The arms of the Y-band extend to the hoist. It embraces a black isosceles triangle and from here the arms are separated by narrow yellow bands. Narrow white bands separate the green band and its arms from the red and blue bands.
Independence	May 31, 1910 (United Kingdom)
Population	44,344,136 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	South African
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Black (79%); White (Europeans, 10%)
Major Language(s)	IsiZulu (24%); IsiXhosa (18%); Afrikaans (13%); Sepedi (9%); English (8%); Setswana (8%); Sesotho (8%); Xitsonga (4.4%),
Major Religion(s)	Various Protestant sects (80%); none (15%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Human Rights Day, March 21; Freedom Day, April 27; Labor Day, May 1; National Women's Day, August 9

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

The origins of humanity may have to be rewritten again after the discovery of fossil remains at Makapansgat, Kromdraai, and Sterkfontein caves in South Africa, one a near-complete skeleton of an *Australopithecus*, thought to be three million years old on the basis of the age of the limestone in which it was buried. If this tentative date is confirmed, the remains at Sterkfontein are 500,000 years older than anything previously found south of Tanzania. The sex of the hominid could not be determined, but the ankle joint confirmed that it was already bipedal, and a divergent big toe showed that it was still capable of climbing trees.

In the Walker Bay Nature Reserve southeast of Cape Town, a region known for its many archaeological sites, there

are caves in the Pliocene limestone cliffs including Die Kelders Cave 1 (Klipgat) used and lived in by people for at least 70,000 years. The stone technology and dating suggest that the cave was occupied during the Middle Stone Age, about 60,000 to 85,000 years ago. In addition to thousands of stone artifacts and animal bones, remains of hearths, ash dumps, and burned marine shells were recovered. Later explorations found additional human teeth, a phalange, and a small fragment of the jaw of a five-year-old child, all typical of early-modern or near-modern people.

The Later Stone Age cultural material is rich in bone artifacts and ornaments made from marine shell, ostrich egg shell, and bone, primarily beads and pendants. Many grindstones and red and black pigment have also been found. The occurrence of ochre staining on many of the ornaments indicates its use in body ornamentation. Ochre was stored or used in shells of tortoises, mussels, limpets, and abalone.

In 2004 archaeologists in KwaZulu-Natal have found human bones in what may have been a shallow grave, bones that may provide evidence of South Africa's first permanent agricultural community. The two arm bones, a leg bone, and a shoulder blade were discovered at a site in Salt Rock, one of the richest Iron Age coastal sites to be excavated in KwaZulu-Natal. They obviously used the site to cook, because the rocks had been shattered by fire. The first discovery of ancient human remains—about 100,000 years old—in South Africa was at Border Cave in the Lebombo Mountains, north of KwaZulu-Natal near Swaziland.

KwaZulu-Natal is also the site of the largest and most concentrated collection of rock paintings—40,000 paintings in 500 caves and rock shelters—in sub-Saharan Africa. Created by the San people about 3,000 years ago, many of the paintings show the use of sophisticated red, orange, white, and black pigments to portray animal and human scenes including hunts in progress and close-ups of various animals. One of the most fascinating portrayals is a procession of half-human, half-animal figures: Although they have human bodies, their hooves, faces and hair are animals'.

The San and the Khoikhoi tribes have inhabited this area for many thousands of years. It is believed that the nomadic San tribe have lived in Southern Africa since 100,000 B.C.E. but came to the Cape of Good Hope only 3,000 years ago. Marriage between these tribes was common, and they came to be called Khoisan. The San were gradually wiped out by the steady expansion of European settlers across South Africa during the 1800s through a combination of disease, war, and starvation. During the 15th century C.E. the pastoral Bantu tribe settled in the region, and most of the arable land was under their possession.

In the history of South Africa, the Cape of Good Hope is of prime importance. It was the favorite stop for European navigators and traders alike. In 1498 the famous Portuguese adventurer, Vasco da Gama (1460–1524), was exploring a sea route to India, whose highly valued spices promised great wealth for the European traders if they could find a way to avoid the Muslims who controlled the Silk Route. His journey took him to the Cape of Good Hope, and subsequently he traveled eastward and discovered the sea-route to India.

Among the Europeans Dutch settlers had a

Shaka (1787–1828)

A Zulu chief Shaka, or Chaka, was a brilliant commander and tactician who embarked on an ambitious mission to unite all the Zulu clans to form a unified Zulu kingdom. He transformed the Zulu tribe from a small clan into a nation, but his ambition plunged the region into a full-fledged war. He was assassinated in 1828 by two of his half-brothers.

dominant presence in the Cape colony. They initiated a number of wars, termed Cape Frontiers Wars or Kaffir Wars against the Xhosa tribe. They even indulged in the slave trade and employed slaves from India, Madagascar, and Indonesia. Many descendants of these slaves intermarried with the Dutch and were referred to as “Cape Malay” or “Cape Colored.” The region also witnessed tribal conflicts during the Zulu War (1818–28). The era is referred to as *mfeqane*, a Zulu word that means “crushing,” or *difaqane*, a Sotho word that means “forced migration.” It was a period of terror unleashed by Shaka, the Zulu chief.

The war caused a violent upheaval as many tribes were completely wiped out of existence, and many others were forced into slavery. The British too fought the Zulu, and one of their showdowns included the famous Battle of Rorke's Drift, January 22–23, 1879. The British had acquired the Cape of Good Hope in 1814 and over time increased their territorial holdings to include Swaziland, Rhodesia, Natal, Bechuanaland, and other Bantu tribal lands. The Dutch farmers had already settled much of the land, however, and took great exception to British rule.

At around this time the Boers (Dutch farmers who had settled in Africa) undertook The Great Trek, or Groot Trek. *Trek* is an Afrikaans term that originally meant “a journey by ox wagon.” The Boers, fleeing from British rule, finally settled in the north and east sections of what would become South Africa. Fierce battles between the British and the Boers were known as the Boer Wars (1899–1902).

By 1900 most of the region was under British rule. In 1910 the British created the Union of South Africa. The racist attitudes of South Africa's white supremacists became codified in a system of laws designed to separate European and black people and to keep the white minority in economic and political control of the country. These laws were known collectively as apartheid. Essentially blacks were made prisoners in their own land, and any kind of resistance to the rule of the white minority regime was quickly and often brutally suppressed.

During the late 20th century the struggle against apartheid intensified and received international support when the South African police killed more than 69 people in Sharpeville on March 21, 1960. Nelson Mandela (b. 1918), along with many leaders of the African National Congress (ANC), was imprisoned. The international community condemned the South African government and imposed economic sanctions.

The struggle continued, and in 1989 a white reformer F. W. de Klerk (b. 1936) was elected to power and ended the apartheid system. Nelson Mandela and other leaders of the opposition were released from prison and fresh multiracial elections took place in a truly independent South Africa.

A year later in 1994, the African National Congress (ANC) came to power, and Nelson Mandela

Apartheid

White supremacists, who assumed power after the Union of South Africa came into existence in 1910, laid the foundation of apartheid. The word means “separation” or “apartness.” Apartheid encouraged racial discrimination because people were classified based on their race and the color of their skin. People’s race decided their fate, and they had little say in the matter. The place of work, the location of

one’s home, and even the play-area and school were dependent on one’s race. The black community suffered the most as they were haphazardly segregated into 10 tribal groups, regardless of their places of birth. The government forcibly took their property and condemned them to live in the “homelands,” isolated areas in rural backwoods with no infrastructure. Indiscriminate killing of blacks was also the norm. Apartheid finally ended in 1994.

became the first black president of the Republic of South Africa.

The Republic of South Africa prides itself in being the most stable democracy on the African continent. Leading by example, modern South Africa is the face of peace in war-stricken Africa. After suffering immensely during the period of apartheid that ended in 1990, the people of South Africa embarked on a mission to make their country a peaceful and prosperous nation.

South Africa is a proud nation. The development of a robust infrastructure in South Africa has laid the groundwork for progress, and the country has some of the most advanced transportation and communication systems on the continent. The economy is booming, with resulting improvement in people’s lives. Peace prevails in South Africa, and South Africans, regardless of their color or race, are working together to build a better and brighter future for their country. South Africa has the largest military force in Africa and actively participates in regional peacekeeping missions.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located at the southernmost tip of the African continent, South Africa shares its northern border with Swaziland, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Namibia. Topographically the country is divided into three distinct parts: a narrow coastal plain, the Kalahari basin, and the vast interior plateau. The Orange and the Limpopo are the two main rivers of South Africa.

ECONOMY

The abundance of natural resources (gold, diamonds, platinum, and copper) is the driving force behind South Africa’s economy. The country has a robust infrastructure with well-developed transportation, communication, financial, legal, and energy sectors. South Africa is a fast emerging market with immense potential and one of the largest stock exchanges in the world. Despite all the good intentions behind pro-people economic policies, the rate of unemployment remains high. The country is also facing a health crisis with increasing numbers of HIV/AIDS cases.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

South Africa is home to a multiethnic and tolerant society. From the indigenous Xhosa to Afrikaners, British, and Indians, South Africa is a mix of cultures. “Afrikaners” is a term used to refer to the descendants of the first Dutch settlers of South Africa. As one might deduce, South Africa is also a multilingual nation. Languages spoken include English and Afrikaans as well as native languages such as Xhosa, Zulu, Swazi, and Sindebele. There are eight major and 11 official languages in the country.

Apartheid destroyed much of the traditional customs of blacks in the urban areas. Rural South Africa, however, still maintains many traditional beliefs. The old rituals related to marriage and taboos differ from region to region and are based on beliefs in the power of ancestral spirits, masculine deity, and supernatural forces. Cattle are an integral part of society. In some cultures cattle symbolize wealth; in others they are primarily sacrificial offerings. White South Africans lead a lifestyle similar to that of many Western countries.

Stories, songs, and poetry have always been a part of South African culture. South African indigenous art has been in existence for centuries. Cave and rock paintings, dating back at least 3,000 years, reflect the artistic talents of the San tribe. The famous “coded” beadwork of the Zulus continues to this day.

CUISINE

South African cuisine reflects the diversity of its culture. While Indians introduced South Asian delicacies, the Dutch brought in baked dishes. Boerewors (*boere* means “farmer” and *wors* means “sausages”),

Fun Fact

Coded beadwork is an ancient Zulu art. By arranging the beads in a particular manner, special messages (coded love messages, the wearer’s age, status, area of residence, etc.) are expressed in symbolic language. Beads of different colors are used to symbolize particular emotions. For example, white stands for purity, while blue signifies loneliness.

Fun Fact

The largest diamond in the world, the Cullinan diamond, weighing 3,106 carats, was discovered in South Africa in 1905. It was broken into several pieces and the Star of Africa, weighing 530 carats, is a piece of the original diamond. It adorns the British Crown Jewels.

droewors (salted dried meat), and *biltong* were special dishes prepared by farmers or Boers to serve as provisions during the Great Trek. The indigenous South African diet consists of African salads, baked corn, and maize porridge. Favorite beverages include wine and local beer.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Gregorian (Western) calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day. Celebrations are held all over the world, and revelries typically begin the evening of December 31. People party all night long to welcome the new year.

New Year's Day is celebrated with great enthusiasm in South Africa. The air is filled with sounds of ringing church bells and fireworks. The Cape Province area has a carnival atmosphere on New Year's Day and into the following day. Dressed in colorful costumes, and with their faces painted, people dance to the sound of drums and greet the new year.

❁ HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 21

Human Rights Day commemorates the brutal killing of 69 protestors in Sharpeville on March 21, 1960. They were protesting the unjust laws being passed against blacks, primarily the Native Laws Amendment Act of 1952. According to this law the passbook, which was a document issued to blacks in order to serve as a proof of entitlement to enter European areas, was abolished. The law made it mandatory for all black Africans to carry a reference book instead. The law was seen as more restrictive, in that the passbook only had to be carried if a black African was entering or was in a European-only area, but under the new system the reference book had to be carried all the time. The police were authorized to arrest those black Africans who failed to produce it. During the demonstrations at Sharpeville a section of wire fence was trampled, enabling the crowd to surge forward. The police

Fun Fact

In 1993 Nelson Mandela and F. W. de Klerk won the Nobel Peace Prize.

opened fire on the protestors, apparently without orders, killing 69 people and wounding more than 180. In the aftermath of Sharpeville, many political leaders including Nelson Mandela, were imprisoned, and black political parties were banned. This day was referred to as Sharpeville Day during the apartheid era.

The South African Human Rights Commission organizes weeklong public awareness and education programs (Human Rights Week) throughout South Africa to inform and educate South Africans about their basic human rights.

❁ FREEDOM DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 27

Freedom Day commemorates the first nonracial and nondiscriminatory democratic elections that were held on April 27, 1994. After years of colonial rule and suffering under racial discrimination, South Africans, regardless of their color and race, got their first taste of freedom in the true sense of the word. This day celebrates the sacrifices made by thousands of South Africans to help realize their dream of a truly free South Africa. It honors the tireless efforts of leaders like Nelson Mandela who continued to protest the oppressive regime despite being subjected to atrocities in jail. It remembers those South Africans who laid down their lives for the cause of freedom.

The African National Congress observes this day as a day of liberation from racial discrimination, hatred, and inequality. On this day South Africans embrace patriotism. Military parades, traditional music and dance, and marching bands mark celebrations all over South Africa.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

Worker's Day, also called Labor Day or May Day, is celebrated to honor the contributions made by workers around the world. During the apartheid era South Africans celebrated Worker's Day in defiance of a regime that did not recognize the day officially and divided the workers based on race and color. Worker's Day in South Africa thus honors in particular the struggle of black workers against oppression, inequality, and exploitation.

In the early 21st century, workers in South Africa have a relatively nondiscriminatory work environment and have the right to fair labor practices. They are free to form or join trade unions and have the right to strike as well. Huge rallies are organized by trade unions all over South Africa with speeches emphasizing the importance of workers in society.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ NATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 9

This day honors the achievements and contributions made by black South African women for women's rights in South Africa. National Women's Day commemorates the historic protest by black South African women in Pretoria. According to a law passed by the Union government, it was mandatory for black African women to carry passes that served as "proof" that they were entitled by law to enter European areas. On August 9, 1956, more than 20,000 black women from different parts of South Africa assembled in Pretoria and fearlessly marched toward the Union building to protest the law. It was just the beginning of a seven-year-long struggle; women all over South Africa were arrested and intimidated by the government to give up their fight. Eventually the oppressive regime banned the entry of rural black women in urban areas and forcibly implemented the law. This anti-pass movement was the largest demonstration organized by black African women.

❁ DAY OF RECONCILIATION

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 16

Under apartheid, the day was known as day of the Vow, in commemoration of a promise Voortrekkers made to God to build a church should they be granted victory against attacking Zulus, but under democracy the day is used to foster reconciliation and national unity.

Religious Holidays

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

In remembrance of Jesus' Crucifixion, Good Friday, also called Black Friday, Holy Friday, or Mourning Friday, is observed in many parts of the world. It falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent. In South Africa people attend special church prayer services at which the life and teachings of Jesus are remembered. Choirs sing devotional songs and theatrical plays based on his life are performed on Good Friday.

Most Catholics fast on Ash Wednesday (the first day of Lent) and Good Friday, the only "total fast" days for them.

On Good Friday South African families break their fast by sharing a special home-cooked lunch. Although the menu varies according to the region and preferences, the black Anglican community prefers a light lunch consisting of salads and pickled



Women perform in Pretoria during Day of Reconciliation celebrations. (AP Photo/Denis Farrell)

fish. The Orthodox and strict Catholics continue to observe a partial fast until Easter.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus Resurrection from the dead. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. In South Africa the children hunt for colorfully dyed and designed eggs supposedly hidden by the Easter bunny and are treated to sweets and candies. People wear new clothes and attend church. For Easter the entire family gets together for a special meal.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT

❁ ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fortieth day after Easter

Ascension Day celebrates the Christian belief that Jesus rose to heaven 40 days after his Resurrection from the dead on Easter Sunday. According to the

Tribal Dances

During apartheid, the black workers in the mines would perform tribal dances since it helped them stay in touch with their roots and gave them the strength to survive in the harsh working conditions.



Merry Christmas

South Africa is home to many languages. The country has 11 official languages. Here's how to say "Merry Christmas" in four of them:

Afrikaans: Geseënde Kersfees

Swazi: Sinifisela Khisimusi Lomuhle

Sotho: Matswalo a Morena a Mabotse

Zulu: Sinifisela Ukhisimusi Omuhle

Bible during the time between Jesus' Resurrection and his Ascension into heaven he appeared to his disciples numerous times, eating, drinking, and conversing with them about the kingdom of God. Christians also believe that Ascension Day was the last time he was seen on Earth, and that his second coming will coincide with the end of days, or Armageddon. In South Africa Ascension Day is spent with families and church visits. For many people it is a day for enjoying picnics and other pleasures. A few years ago the government dropped this holiday from the calendar of official holidays, leading to a mild outcry. In 2003 there were reports of government schools closing and parents removing their children from school on Ascension Day.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Contrary to the snowy Christmas celebrated in the Western countries, South Africa has a sunny Christmas, because the celebrations take place during summer in the Southern Hemisphere, where South Africa is located. December is a month of glorious sunshine, and people spend a lot of time at the beach.

On Christmas Eve caroling by candlelight is very popular, especially in big cities. Homes are decorated with Christmas trees underneath which are placed wrapped gifts for children. On Christmas children wake up early in the morning and rush to the Christmas tree to open their gifts. In the afternoon it is common for families to spend time in the countryside or at the beach. A special dinner is prepared on Christmas day with roast beef, turkey, vegetables, mince pies, and plum pudding. Some South Africans prefer to eat this meal outdoors.

It was a Christmas day in 1497, when Vasco Da Gama saw the coast of Kwazulu-Natal for the very first time. He named the land Natal, which means

"Christmas" in Portuguese. The word Kwazulu, or "land of the Zulu," was added much later. Thus, the province got its name.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

✿ KAVADI FESTIVAL OF PENANCE

Observed in: Durban

Observed by: Devotees of the God Muruga

Observed on: January–February

In Hinduism *Karttikeya* (also called Skanda, Subrahmanya, Kumara, Arumugan, Shanmugan, Murugan, Guha, Saravana, Swaminatha, Velan, Velavan, or Senthil) is a god born out of a magical spark created by Shiva. The name *Karttikeya* means "he of the Pleiades." Devotees of Muruga perform penance and carry the *kavadi* (a basket float decorated with flowers) to a temple in the city. The penance involves the individuals working themselves into a trancelike state and then piercing their bodies with hooks or inserting miniature spears through their tongue. Some pull wagons with hooks in their backs while others carry the *kavadis* suspended from their skin by an elaborate selection of hooks and spears.

The faithful experience very little pain because they fast, meditate, and enter a deeply trancelike state weeks before the festival begins. Many rub holy ash on their skin, which seems to prevent bleeding. There is very little evidence of blood or pain during this ceremony, and it is considered an esoteric art.

This is the most important festival among Indians in South Africa.

The Hindus worship Muruga for his youth, virtue, healing skills, and ability to dispel misfortune. Kavadi is a time for purifying one's body and mind as well as an opportunity to seek Muruga's love, mercy, and forgiveness.

✿ CAPE TOWN FESTIVAL

Observed by: General Public

Observed in: Cape Town

Observed on: March

The Cape Town Festival is the most celebrated annual event for South African art. Held in the city of Cape Town, the festival provides the perfect opportunity to enjoy South African culture. From the visual to the performing arts, the festival spans several days. Dance and musical performances, a film festival, and craft fairs are some of the highlights of the event.

Fun Fact

Durban actually has the largest number of Hindus outside India.

Rites of Passage

✿ BIRTH

Children are highly valued in South Africa. Without procreation a marriage is considered incomplete. Relatives, neighbors, and the society at large treat a pregnant woman with special love and care, which continues even after childbirth. Barrenness is considered a curse in South African society, and abortion is considered a sin.

The birth of twins or triplets is considered a sign of great fertility and the joy of the fortunate family increases exponentially. However, in ancient times the birth of twins or triplets spelled doom for the mother and the child. It was looked upon as an unnatural event, and either the children or mother and children were killed.

✿ COMING OF AGE

Among the indigenous people of South Africa, when a young boy is at the threshold of manhood, he undergoes an initiation ceremony. As part of the ceremony the young boy or initiate has to lead a secluded life for days, sometimes even weeks. In accordance with the rituals, white ochre is used to smear the initiate, and he begins his life of seclusion. After staying away for the stipulated time, the initiate heads toward the river for a ritual bath. Standing on one bank, the young initiate burns everything that he had worn as a boy and enters the river. He washes off the white ochre during the ritual bath and emerges on the opposite bank, thereby completing his transition from boy to man.

Male circumcision also takes place at puberty among the Xhosa, Zulu, and other indigenous tribes of South Africa. Skilled tribal surgeons perform this ritual, and boys willingly undergo this ritual since it is considered the most important step toward manhood in South African society.

Girls belonging to the Zulu clan in South Africa also have to undergo a traditional initiation ceremony. All the initiates lead a life of seclusion for a stipulated period during which elderly women impart lessons of womanhood, tribal history, duties, and the responsibilities of women in their society.

The government of South Africa has passed the Children's Bill, which states that female circumcision (Female genital mutilation, or FGM) is an unconstitutional act. However, male circumcision is permitted. For the boys, though, the bill grants them exclusive rights to refuse to be circumcised or initiated under unhygienic conditions. Female circumcision, though officially banned in South Africa, is still practiced in rural areas.

✿ MARRIAGE

Marriage customs in South Africa differ according to tribe. In South Africa marriages are broadly categorized into civil marriages and customary marriages. A civil marriage ceremony can take place in a public office, place of worship, or even at home. After submitting the necessary documents, the couple, witnesses, and the marriage officers sign the marriage register, and the marriage officer issues a marriage certificate.

The customary marriages take place in accordance with the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act of 1988 and are inclusive of African Customary Law and Hindu and Muslim marriage rituals. The Ndebele marriage ceremony consists of three stages, which often span many years. The first stage involves negotiations related to payment of a *lobola*, or dowry, for the bride. The payment, in the form of money and livestock, is made in installments. The second stage requires the bride to spend a two-week period with other women who will teach her the nuances of being a good wife. The third and final stage is completed only after the birth of a child. It is only after childbirth that the marriage is said to be complete.

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Spain

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Southwestern Europe, bordering the Bay of Biscay, the Mediterranean Sea, the North Atlantic Ocean, and the Pyrenees Mountains, southwest of France
Size	194,897 sq. mi.
Capital City	Madrid
Flag Description	Spain's flag has three horizontal bands of red, yellow, and red, with the national coat of arms on the hoist side of the yellow band.
Independence	1492 (from the Muslims)
Population	40,341,462 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary monarchy
Nationality	Spanish
Major Ethnic Group(s)	White
Major Language(s)	Castilian Spanish (74%); Catalan (17%)
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (94%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; National Day, October 12; Constitution Day, December 6

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Megalithic structures—menhirs (standing stones), dolmens, and stone structures—abound in Spain, dating back to the Upper Paleolithic, although such structures have also been found that were built in the Neolithic, Chalcolithic, and the Bronze and Iron Ages. Only the British Isles and France have as many. In addition, as in France, there are many sites where petroglyphs and rock paintings are found, engraved or painted works on open air rocks or on the floors, walls, and ceilings of caves, some of them in deep and almost inaccessible crannies. Like megalithic structures, these works of art were created during the Upper Paleolithic period (40,000–10,000 B.C.E.), and the best were produced by people called the Magdalenians (from the name of a site in France), peoples who inhabited Europe from 18,000 to 10,000. The Magdalenian Era was also the longest, lasting for more than two-thirds of the time people have been creating visual art.

It is probable that the art called Magdalenian was the work either of the Neanderthals, *Homo sapiens*, or both. For this reason alone the Magdalenian system must occupy a place of importance in any history of art. When the 20th century ended, scholars had agreed that there were 277 European rock art sites, and no less than 108 of them have been identified in Spain. These works of art are very delicate, and when a cave is opened deterioration sets in almost immediately. For example the exquisite cave paintings found in the Pyrenees Mountains during World War I had utterly disappeared within six months of the cave's opening. Even the Altamira Cave in Spain, unquestionably the finest of them all, is open only for brief periods.

The next people to inhabit Spain were a mix of a number of tribes, generally known as Iberians, who arrived on the Iberian Peninsula from northern Africa. This peninsula had, it seems, always been the target for various invaders. Around the ninth century B.C.E., the Celts arrived and settled along with the Iberians. The Phoenicians came and founded trading colonies in the coastal region, followed by the Greeks in the eighth century.

The Romans invaded the Iberian Peninsula in the second century B.C.E. In 408 C.E. the Roman Empire started disinte-

grating as the Gothic tribes arrived and established control. The Gothic tribes ruled until 711 C.E., when the Islamic Moors from North Africa invaded the region and ousted the Goths.

Gradually Muslim Spain became politically independent, and the region of Córdoba became an important cultural center. In the meantime Christianity was spreading in the northern regions, which the Muslims had not conquered. What is known as contemporary Spain began forming during the Reconquista, the struggle for supremacy that developed between the two religious factions. (The Reconquista, Spanish and Portuguese for “reconquest,” was the military conquest of the Iberian Peninsula by Christian rulers, led against the Moors from 718 to 1492.) By the end of the 15th century all of Spain was Catholic, and three states had emerged as prominent: Portugal, Aragon, and Castile.

The marriage between Isabel of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon in 1469 was the beginning of a royal dynasty, and by 1512 they had brought the entire country under their rule. It was during this time that the infamous Spanish Inquisition (1478–1834) began. In the 15th century Spain was a confederation of realms, and King Ferdinand wanted to consolidate his empire and unify his subjects as Roman Catholics. He also intended to drive the Jews and Muslims from the country. Consequently some Jews and Muslims converted to Christianity, but it was suspected that they were secretly practicing their old religions. The king then proclaimed that he would purify his nation of heretics, and the Spanish Inquisition was his method of achieving this aim. Tribunals were set up for examining the guilt or innocence of those accused of dissension and most of them were severely punished.

Some accounts suggest that the pope was not in favor of the Inquisition, but he did little to stop it, and Ferdinand took extreme measures to enforce it. This violent state of affairs continued for almost four centuries. It was not until Napoleon (1769–1821) conquered Spain that the Inquisition ended, but it was reinstated when Ferdinand VII (1784–1833) came to the throne. The Inquisition eventually ended in 1834.

During the 16th century Spain became a world power and controlled most of South and Central America, much of Pacific Asia, the Iberian Peninsula, parts of southern Italy, and areas in North America. A series of wars and revolts led to a gradual decline of the Spanish Empire in the 17th century. The beginning of the 18th century was marked by internal conflicts for the throne among the royal families, ending with the formation of a new dynasty, the French Bourbons. The Spanish state was centralized, and the head of state was renamed the king of Spain.

Napoleon occupied Spain in the early 1800s, but the Spaniards met this with strong resistance. The war of independence was fought between 1808 and 1814, followed by three civil wars. Eventually

Phoenicians

The Phoenicians were a group of people who lived on the Mediterranean coast in the territory that is modern Lebanon around 1350 B.C.E. These people were originally called Canaanites, but were renamed Phoenicians. They became great sailors and traveled and traded all over the Mediterranean. As they became stronger, they started making their own colonies, the most important of which was Carthage. In 539 C.E. the Phoenicians were conquered by the Persians and became a part of the Persian Empire. In 332 B.C.E. Alexander the Great attacked Persia, and the Phoenicians became a part of his empire.

Spain was declared a republic in 1873. By this time Spain had lost many of its colonies in the Caribbean and the Pacific region.

In the 20th century Spain tried to colonize the Western Sahara, Spanish Morocco, and Equatorial Guinea. The second Spanish Republic was declared from 1923–31, but the Spanish Civil War in 1936 ended the republic, and Spain languished under the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco (1892–1975) from 1939 until Franco’s death.

After World War II Spain was isolated and was kept out of the United Nations until 1955. Then the U.S. president Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890–1969) wanted to establish a military presence in the region, and Spain was granted entry into the United Nations. In the 1960s Spain’s economy experienced a revival and finally became a modern industrial economy in the years following General Franco’s death. Juan Carlos I (Juan Carlos Alfonso Víctor María de Borbón y Borbón; b. 1938), usually addressed as His Majesty King Juan Carlos, became king in 1975, and Spain became a constitutional monarchy. (Juan Carlos also claims the title of king of Jerusalem as the successor to the royal family of Naples.)

Spain joined NATO in 1982 and became a member of the EEC (now the European Union) in 1986. In 1992 Spain hosted the Olympics in Barcelona, and Madrid was declared the European cultural capital.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Spain shares the Iberian Peninsula with Portugal in southwestern Europe. Spain is bound by the Atlantic Ocean in the west, the Mediterranean Sea in the east and south, and the Bay of Biscay in the north. The Canary Islands, off the coast of the Bay of Biscay, is an autonomous Spanish territory.

Most of Spain is made up of vast plateaus known as *mesetas*. The country also has five major mountain ranges. The long Mediterranean coastline is rocky

Fun Fact

In Spain when the clock strikes midnight on December 31, even stage shows and cinemas are stopped for some time for the people to eat the customary 12 grapes!

while the Atlantic coast is sandier. Wet grasslands with alluvial soil, Andalusian deserts, and the snow-capped Pyrenees mountains are all found within the Spanish territory. The highest point in mainland Spain is Mulhacén in the Pyrenees at 11,411 feet. Pico de Teide, at 12,188 feet on Tenerife in the Canary Islands, is the highest point in all of Spain. For the most part Spanish rivers are not navigable but have been harnessed to provide electricity. The major rivers are the Duero, the Mino, the Tajo, the Guadiana, and the Guadalquivir.

The climatic conditions found in Spain can be divided into four distinct types: the Mediterranean regions have hot and humid summers and mild winters; the inner regions of Spain have temperate conditions with harsh snowy winters and very hot summers; the North Atlantic region experiences mild summers with cold winters; while the Canary Islands have subtropical weather throughout the year.

ECONOMY

Spain enjoys a soundly balanced economy in spite of recent slumps. Spain is one of the world's most important producers of citrus fruits, olive oil, vegetables, and wine. The country is rich in mineral deposits such as coal, iron ore, uranium, mercury, copper, and lead, as well as some petroleum and natural gas deposits.

Agricultural products are one of the major exports of Spain, while raw materials, chemicals, cars, and trucks are the other items shipped. The major industries found in Spain are textiles, apparel, footwear, beverages, metals, chemicals, shipbuilding, and tourism. Spain imports consumer goods and fuel.

Spain's major trade partners are France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Spain is a member of the European Union.

Flamenco

Flamenco is a 200-year-old folk art that originated with the Andalusian gypsies. (In the 21st century, the preferred term for these people is *Rom*.) Flamenco dance has complex patterns of rhythm and sophisticated footwork, with emphasis on graceful upper body movements and postures. It blends song, dance, and guitar into passionate rhythms that are often spontaneous. It is characterized by the firm and quick stamping of the feet (*zapateado*) and clapping of the hands (*palmada*).

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The culture of Spain distinguishes the country from the rest of Europe. Latin, Catholic, and Moorish Islamic influences have played an important role in shaping the modern Spanish culture. In spite of the dictatorial oppression Spain suffered under General Franco, the culture continued to flourish. The Spanish are a highly religious people; most of their festivals center on the church.

The Spaniards gave the world flamenco, the first guitar, and Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, which occupies a unique position between medieval chivalric romance and the modern novel. Euskara, the language spoken by the Basque population, is said to be one of the oldest living languages in the world. The guitar was invented here in the 1790s by adding a sixth string to the Arab lute. Spanish music has now emerged to become an international genre, further popularized by other Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America. Artists such as Julio Iglesias, Ricky Martin, and Santana have internationalized Spanish music.

Spanish art and architecture are also very distinct and famous. The art world in the early 20th century was influenced by a remarkable group of Spanish artists including Pablo Picasso, Juan Gris, Joan Miró, and Salvador Dalí. Prehistoric Spanish monuments in Menorca, the Roman ruins of Mérida and Tarragona, the decorative Islamic Alhambra in Granada, Mudéjar buildings, Gothic cathedrals, castles, and palaces, and other modern monuments are distinctly Spanish.

Bullfighting is the national sport and spectacle of Spain. Spaniards are also fanatics about soccer. The country is famous for teams such as the Real Madrid. Being mountainous in its terrain, Spain is also an ideal skiing resort for adventure sports enthusiasts. Cycling and golf are other popular sports in Spain.

CUISINE

Spanish cuisine is known for the liberal use of spices and olive oil, at least by European standards. Most

Flamenco songs are sometimes serious and profound and, at other times, happy, light, and humorous. The themes of flamenco can range from recent events, politics, love, history, and humor. The costumes worn by flamenco dancers are well known for the flowing and frilly long skirts, and the numerous underskirts beneath it. The women wear flowers in their hair, drape themselves in fringed shawls, and carry lacy hand fans. They also tie their hair in elaborate buns and wear large earrings to complement the flamenco dress.

Spaniards love nonvegetarian food items, although vegetables are not totally avoided. Salads without dressings and a wide range of seafood are unique to Spanish cooking, and no meal is complete without them. Distinct influences of Arab and Moorish cooking are also apparent in Spanish cooking, including the use of almonds, egg yolks, and honey. In Spanish cuisine a number of organ meats and other uncommon cuts of meat are prepared in an elaborate manner as delicacies; among these are ox tongue (*lengua*) and pig's knuckles. Squid is also cooked (usually, in its own ink) and served with rice. Spaniards enjoy eating rice spiced and colored with saffron and garnished with shrimp. Another rice-based dish called *paella* that is very popular may contain crabmeat, prawns, fried eggs, sausage, fried pork, beef, chicken, or lamb.

The most well-known Spanish red wine is a sweet, heavy wine called Madeira.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, and is celebrated as New Year's Day, Año Nuevo, all over the world. Celebrations begin on the evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve). In Spain many cities have fireworks on New Year's Eve (Noche Vieja, the Old Night). There are parties on the streets and in clubs and hotels, with people waiting for the clock to strike midnight. At midnight, Spaniards traditionally eat 12 grapes to bring them good luck throughout the year. They also celebrate with a bottle of Cava, a sparkling white wine made by the traditional champagne-making method but using Spanish grape varieties.

New Year's Day is a national holiday, and schools and offices are closed. According to Spanish tradition, the luck of the entire year depends on New Year's Day. If Spaniards have gold coins in their pockets, there will be plenty of gold during the next 12 months, while empty pockets mean a lean year ahead. If good food and good wine are consumed on January 1, one is assured of an abundance of food and drink the whole year round. Meeting a rich man is a propitious sign, but coming face to face with a beggar is bad luck!

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers



Spain's only female bullfighter, Cristina Sanchez, comes face to face with the bull during a May Day fight in Madrid's las Ventas bullring. (AP Photo/Edward Troon)

in building nations and societies. While the earliest May Day holidays are ascribed to the pagan celebrations that were practiced by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages, there are many conflicting stories about the origins of the political occasion. The evidence indicates that the worldwide labor movement initiated the observance in 1889, when the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 12

National Day, Día de la Hispanidad, commemorates the beginning of democracy in Spain in 1492. Spain's National Day also celebrates the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) in the same year. On this day the people gather to watch elaborate military parades and other colorful festivities in the streets of Spain, especially in Madrid.

In 1913 a wealthy Spanish businessman declared that this day would be celebrated in Spain

and Latin America to honor and celebrate the Spanish race, their culture, values, and traditions. The feast was called *Fiesta de la Raza*—literally Festival of the (Spanish) Race. This day was declared a national holiday in 1918. The name of the festival was changed to *Día de la Hispanidad* to include the diversity of South and Central American cultures as well. In the 21st century, most elderly Spaniards celebrate this day rather than their own birthdays.

❁ CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 6

This day is celebrated to commemorate the Spaniards' decision to draft a constitution for themselves in 1978. The celebratory events held on this day are mostly formal and not many people take part in them. Nevertheless this is a national holiday, and all schools and workplaces are closed in Spain.

Religious Holidays

❁ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: January 6

Epiphany, *Día de los Reyes Magos* ("Three Kings Day"), is celebrated to remember the Three Wise Men from the East (the Magi) who came to look for the newly born Jesus. In Spain processions and parades are held all over the country. Colorful floats featuring people throwing sweets from them are the highlights of these parades.

On Epiphany Spanish children wake up to find that *Los Reyes Magos* (the Three Magi) have left gifts for them. They believe that it is one of the Wise Men—Balthazar, who rides a donkey—who is in charge of delivering their gifts. People dressed as the Three Wise Men are often seen distributing gifts and candies to children in hospitals and other places.

❁ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Last Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and begins a seven-day period known by Christians as Holy Week, or *Semana Santa*, a series of observances that chronicle Jesus' final week on Earth, from his triumphant entry into Jerusalem to his death on Good Friday, his lying in the tomb on Holy Saturday, and his Resurrection on Easter Sunday. Jesus was the

prophet of Christianity, and Christians believe him to be the second person of the Holy Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. His arrival in Jerusalem was the way to the Cross. Palm Sunday is as much about the beginning of Jesus' journey to the Cross as it is about his triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

After two of his disciples had fetched a donkey for him to ride, they placed their clothes on it to make a comfortable seat. Then they cut branches and covered the path before him, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, as the Old Testament prophet Zechariah had predicted. People welcomed him by waving palm and olive branches, and strewing garments and branches on the road. There were different perceptions at work: Jesus rode in on a donkey, the humble entry of a peaceful nature by a spiritual king; the people of Jerusalem welcomed him with palm and olive branches and the laying of garments in his path because they hoped for a worldly king who would defeat the Romans.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

The rituals observed on Maundy Thursday are based on a sequence of events supposed to have occurred during Jesus' final meal, thought to have been a *seder*. First Jesus washed the feet of his disciples; then he announced that he had been betrayed by one of them. The traitor Judas left the table. Finally Jesus instituted the Eucharist: a ritual of consuming bread and wine as symbols of his body and blood, also referred to as Communion in some Christian churches. In the Roman Catholic Church, Maundy Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist, the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week, and gives priests an opportunity to prepare for the many rituals that follow on Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter.

In Spain all churches conduct special prayer services on Maundy Thursday. The priest, while celebrating Mass, reenacts the scenes from the Last Supper. He washes the feet of 12 chosen parishioners just as Jesus did. The mood is sober, and all faithful pray during this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent. It is observed in most parts

Fun Fact

The name *Maundy Thursday* may be linked to the Latin word *mandatum*, "command," because Jesus commanded his Apostles to observe the ritual now called the Eucharist.

of the world to remember the Crucifixion of Jesus. In Spain Christians observe a fast on Good Friday, and a ritual called the “Stations of the Cross” is performed. This is a reenactment of Jesus’ final journey as he bore the Cross on his way to Calvary. It is a custom for Spanish women to wear *traje de mantilla*, black costumes, on Good Friday to show their state of mourning. In the Spanish town of Seville a huge procession occurs on Good Friday. The crowd shouts “Viva la Macarena,” as La Macarena, the Virgin of Good Hope, Seville’s most sumptuously decorated image, appears on Good Friday night. The crowd sometimes goes into a trancelike state and women weep emotionally. Now and again a *saeta*—an impromptu walling song of sorrow and repentance—pierces the darkness. The procession stops when the *saeta* begins and resumes after it ends. This kind of interruption occurs many times during the slow march through the city.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Saturday before Easter

Holy Saturday is the day Jesus lay in the tomb. This was the Sabbath (the Jewish day of rest is Saturday). It is also regarded as the second Sabbath after Creation. The final day of Holy Week, which begins with Palm Sunday and includes Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, it marks the threshold between Jesus’ death and Resurrection and is a day of silence and contemplation for devout Christians.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus’ Resurrection. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. The origin of Christian Easter celebrations can be traced back to the end of the first century C.E. According to the Venerable Bede (672–735), a renowned Christian scholar, the English name for this celebration, Easter, was taken from the name of Eostre (or Eastre), the Mother Goddess of the Saxon tribes of Northern Europe; she was also the goddess of fertility. The Germans knew her as Ostara. After the harsh dreary winters of Northern Europe, she brought the warmth of spring, fertility, and abundance. The ancient deities in all civilizations had patron animals, and the rabbit, an obvious symbol of fertility, is Eostre’s companion animal. The deity was believed to preside over conception and birth in human beings and other animals, and pollination, flowering, and the ripening of fruit in the plant kingdom.

Holy Week Traditions

The observance of Holy Week can be decidedly nontraditional. In the village of San Vicente the sect known as the Religious Brotherhood of Holy Penitence carries out a form of severe penance on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. The brothers dress in white robes with holes cut out exposing their backs. They apply wax sprinkled with glass dust on their backs and whip themselves. This flagellation, which produces deep cuts, is viewed as a form of penance for all their past sins.

On the eve of Easter in some Spanish villages people walk in a funeral procession led by a woman dressed in black mourning clothes with a veil covering her face. She poses as the grieving Blessed Virgin Mary.

On Easter Sunday some of the faithful in Spain make an effigy of Judas out of straw and burn it. A child dressed as an angel is lowered by a rope and removes the veil covering Mary’s face. This is to signify the descent of an angel upon Mary after her son’s Resurrection that the Bible claims. Spanish families then gather to celebrate Jesus’ Resurrection and sing traditional Easter hymns. Children decorate Easter eggs and play special Easter games. A big meal is served in every house, and people spend time with their families on this day. There are also colorful parades (*cofradía*) with magnificent floats. Feasting and enjoyment continue on Easter Monday, which is the first day after Easter. People eat chocolate buns and cakes on this day. Easter egg decoration contests are held, and many musicians perform.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ FEAST OF CORPUS CHRISTI

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Sixty days after Easter

The Feast of Corpus Christi is a religious feast celebrated by Catholics all over the world to commemorate the institution of the Holy Eucharist (the sacrament of bread and wine representing the body and blood of Jesus). It is celebrated 60 days after Easter and falls on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday, the first Sunday after Pentecost. Cities all over Spain celebrate this solemn feast in a big way, but the one in the city of Toledo is noteworthy. Solemn processions and mystery plays held on this feast day have been a specialty of this city since 1317. People dressed as noblemen and knights lend a medieval look to the processions in this region. Corpus Christi celebrations in Granada last for more than a week and are distinguished by bullfights.

❁ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: August 15

The Feast of the Assumption commemorates the elevation of Mary, the mother of Jesus, into heaven. According to one legend, when Mary was on her deathbed, all the Apostles visited her, except St. Thomas, who arrived late. When he did arrive, Mary's body was nowhere to be found because she had been raised. It is believed that her soul and body were united at Jehoshaphat (Mary's Tomb), and St. Gabriel took Mary's body and soul to heaven.

On this day in Spain the people attend special church services and watch traditional plays that depict the life of the Virgin Mary and her entry into heaven.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day is a Roman Catholic feast that honors all the saints (known and unknown) of the church. It has been celebrated annually on November 1 since the time of Charlemagne (742–814). It is believed that All Saints' Day celebrations began after the consecration of the pantheon at Rome to the Blessed Virgin by Pope Boniface IV (r. 608–15).

In Spain on All Saints' Day the faithful place flowers on the tombs of their deceased relatives and pray for all saints. In earlier days on All Saints' Day *la castañada* was celebrated after the family evening meal. It evoked memories of ancient funeral meals. After the usual family supper chestnuts were roasted in the open hearth; the chestnuts were then placed on the table where everyone could eat their fill. *Pannellets* (small, tasty almond cakes) and other sweetmeats were also eaten accompanied by a sweet, white wine. The *panellets* were small cakes that godfathers offered to their godchildren. Rarely were these cakes purchased at bakeries; more often than not, they were baked at home. They symbolized the days when offerings were placed in the graves with the dead.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: December 8

The concept of the Immaculate Conception is a Roman Catholic belief that, at the time of her birth, God had protected Mary from all human sins and filled her with his grace. It is believed that, since God wanted Mary to be the mother of Jesus, she had to be totally free of any kind of sin. In Spain the Feast of Immaculate Conception is celebrated with a

ceremony known as *los seis*, or the "dance of six." This dance is performed in front of the Cathedral in Seville by a group of 10 (not six!) boys.

In some areas of Spain people celebrate this day with a procession in Mary's honor. A special Mass is held in every church in Spain. In some towns youngsters wrap themselves in emerald-studded green sheets and gallop through the streets, while the townsfolk cheer and fire gunshots into the air.

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of celebration for Christians all over the world. It falls on December 25 and marks the birth of Jesus, whom Christians believe to be their savior.

In Spain Christmas celebrations begin on December 22, the day of Lotería de Navidad ("Christmas Lottery"), and many Spaniards buy tickets for this lottery. It is a big event that is covered by the national media channels. On Christmas Eve (December 24), called Nochebuena, the "Good Night," Spaniards set up elaborate Nativity scenes with miniature figurines of Joseph, Mary, and the baby Jesus, along with shepherds, and the Three Wise Men. The Christmas tree is decorated, and when the first evening star appears in the sky, people light oil lamps. They prepare an elaborate dinner for this night but do not consume it until they return home from Midnight Mass which is held in all the churches. The main items on the Spanish dinner table are *pavo trufado de Navidad* (Christmas turkey with truffles), seafood, *besugo* (a kind of fish), cod with cauliflower, and a wide array of traditional desserts. After the meal, families gather around the Christmas tree and sing carols.

On Christmas day (Navidad), the festivities continue with more dining at noon. Friends and relatives visit each other and exchange gifts on this day. Swings are set up throughout the country in courtyards and youngsters swing to the rhythm of music. There is more drinking too. Christmas pastries are proffered along with a glass of sweet anise liqueur. Another favorite drink at this time of year is Cava, a sparkling wine produced in many regions of the country but mostly in Catalonia, near Barcelona.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ CARNIVAL

Observed in: Santa Cruz, Cadiz
Observed by: General Public
Observed: Before Lent

Carnivals (*carne + levare*, "cessation of meat") are held in almost all towns in Spain just before the start

of Lent. However, the carnivals held in Santa Cruz and Cadiz are the most famous and they attract a huge number of visitors to the country every year. The carnival season begins two weeks before Lent, the traditional 40-day Christian fast that precedes Easter. Carnival is primarily a Roman Catholic tradition and, to a lesser degree, it is observed in Christian Orthodox communities as well, where it precedes their Great Lent. Carnival is known for its exuberance, color, creativity, and culture. Usually there are street dances and parades leading up to a grand finale.

Carnivals began in the 17th century when crews of Spanish galleons brought back gold and silver to Cadiz from the colonies. They also brought back a variety of musical influences. African and Creole rhythms, sambas, and Colombian tunes are often heard in the carnivals, even today.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; LENT; EASTER

❁ APRIL FAIR

Observed in: Seville
Observed by: General Public
Observed in: April

The Spanish spirit is evident and celebrated during the weeklong festivals called April Fair (Abril Feria) or Spring Fair, held during the month of April every year. The cultural richness and traditions of Spain are the highlights of this event. People wear traditional costumes and celebrate in the streets. Young men and women dressed in traditional attire ride on horseback during the festivities. They sing and dance like professional performers and give the whole event a festive atmosphere. The flamenco dances in the evenings and the bullfights in the afternoons transform the serene city of Seville overnight.

See also Volume III: SPRING FESTIVALS

Bullfighting

Spain is often identified with bullfighting. The very first bullfight took place in 711 C.E. during the coronation of King Alfonso VIII. This sport became popular over the years among the aristocrats and later on with the rest of the country. It is said that at least a million Spaniards go to watch bullfights annually.

During the bullfight a wild charging bull is let into the ring. An assistant of the chief matador (bullfighter) waves a yellow and magenta cape in front of the bull. The other assistants (picadors) weaken the bull by thrusting spears into the animal. At the sound of another trumpet the matador removes his black hat and dedicates the death of the bull to the

❁ SAN FERMIN FESTIVAL

Observed in: Pamplona
Observed by: General Public
Observed in: July

Every year the city of Pamplona hosts the weeklong celebration called the San Fermin Festival or the Running of the Bulls. This event is held in honor of St. Fermin, the patron saint of Pamplona. He was the son of a third-century Roman senator in Pamplona. Fermin, who converted to Christianity, was martyred by the pagans. He was tied to the leg of a bull that dragged him to his death. When the relics of this saint were brought to Pamplona in 1196, the city began to celebrate this occasion with the bull-running festival.

The day begins with the runners gathering at a starting line and singing a song dedicated to St. Fermin, asking for his blessing. A rocket is then fired, and a number of fighting bulls are let loose into the street. The bulls charge toward the bullring, with the runners dashing across or down the street in front of them. They run as close as possible to the bulls, teasing them, but at the same time trying to avoid getting gored by the animals' horns!

❁ LA TOMATINA

Observed in: Bunol
Observed by: General Public
Observed in: August

During this world-famous annual event, the residents of the Spanish town of Bunol throw more than 240,000 pounds of tomatoes at each other and celebrate the La Tomatina Festival, also called the Valencia Tomato Fight Festival. The festival begins with a ham-on-a-stick contest in which competitors climb up a pole to retrieve a smoked ham. Once the

president or the crowd. During the skillful fight session, the matador proves his courage. He carries a *muleta*, a crimson-colored cloth draped over a stick. The cloth is also draped over an *espada*, the killing sword. The sword is held in the right hand while the *muleta* is in the left. The fight with the charging bull is over when the matador drives the *espada* into the animal's body. The matador is awarded trophies, and the crowds cheer him by hurling flowers and waving white handkerchiefs.

Bullfighting is a very risky sport that can result in the death of the matador. His movements in the ring should be precise. If he falters at any point, he can be impaled on the horns of the frustrated and enraged bull.



ham has been cut down, people rush to grab handfuls of tomatoes where truckloads of them have been dumped onto the village streets and pelt each other with them relentlessly, in the world's biggest food fight.

This festival, held on the last Wednesday of August, began in 1945 when a fight erupted between two youngsters in a carnival crowd. They hurled tomatoes that they had picked up from a nearby vegetable stall at each other. One year later more youngsters met at the same place, but this time with their own tomatoes. Another food fight started but was soon halted by the police. Authorities banned the event, but due to popular demand it was given official recognition in 1959.

❁ SAFFRON ROSE FESTIVAL

Observed in: Consuegra

Observed by: General Public

Observed in: October

The Saffron Rose Festival celebrates the gathering of the saffron rose. Saffron is the world's most expensive spice and is used in various Spanish dishes. The flower only blooms for a few weeks, and so harvesting it has to be completed quickly. Farmers celebrate the end of the harvest with this festival featuring special exhibits and other events. Visitors also get to taste Spanish cheese and paprika during this seasonal festival.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

Rites of Passage

❁ MARRIAGE

Spanish weddings are big affairs, where the extended family and often the entire village come together to celebrate. The wedding ceremony is solemnized by a priest in the church. The groom is accompanied by his mother down the aisle. Before the couple exchange their wedding vows, the groom presents his bride with 13 coins. These symbolize his commitment to support her. The bride carries these coins in a little bag during the wedding ceremony.

After the church service Spaniards celebrate the event with a reception party. These normally begin around 7 P.M. and go on until the wee hours of the morning. Firecrackers and loud singing and dancing are part of all Spanish weddings. The guests traditionally dance a *sequidillas manchegas* and present the newlyweds with a gift. Men are offered cigars, and the women, a small present at the end of the celebration.

Further Reading

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❧ Sri Lanka ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Southern Asia, island in the Indian Ocean, south of India
Size	25,332 sq. mi.
Capital City	Colombo (Sri Jayewardenepura Kotte is the legislative capital)
Flag Description	The flag of Sri Lanka has a yellow border and is divided into two unequal parts. The smaller part (toward the hoist side) has green and light brown vertical stripes. The larger part has a deep red rectangle with a yellow lion holding a sword. There is a yellow leaf on each corner of the flag.
Independence	February 4, 1948 (from United Kingdom)
Population	20,064,776 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Sri Lankan
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Sinhalese (74%)
Major Language(s)	Sinhala (official and national language; 74%); Tamil (national language; 18%)
Major Religion(s)	Buddhist (69%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; National Day, February 4; Labor Day, May 1

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

Sri Lanka has been known by many names in various languages over the millennia. Sri Lanka, which means “resplendent land” in Sanskrit, is a modern adaptation of Lanka, the name used for the island in the Indian epic, the Ramayana, where the story is told of how Lord Rama had vanquished the demon Ravana, the king of Sri Lanka, during his 14-year exile. It was also known as Lankadeepa, affixing the word for “island.” Subsequently, the island was known as Sinhala, from the Pāli *sibalam* (pronounced silam), from the Sanskrit *sinhala* (“dwelling place of lion”), with *sinha* (“lion”) as its root.

It is said that the relatives of Yakkas (or demons) called Veddahs first occupied Sri Lanka. These people were nomadic and were conquered by the Sinhalese in the fifth or sixth century B.C.E.

A nearly continuous written history of the island can be found exists in the *Mahavamsa*, which chronicles the growth and development of the Sinhalese kingdom from the days of King Vijaya and his followers.

The *Mahavamsa* also describes how a minister of Vijaya, Anuradha, established the village of Anuradhagamma, which would later become Anuradhapura, and then the capital of Sri Lanka a few centuries later. Archaeological evidence, however, indicates that there was continuous human settlement in the Anuradhapura area from the 10th century on, and that these people, whoever they were, were familiar with agriculture, metallurgy, and livestock breeding.

Buddhism arrived from the Indian subcontinent in the third century B.C.E. with the arrival of Arahath Mahinda Thero, the son of Indian Emperor Ashoka. With four other monks, Mahinda preached the teachings of the Buddha to King Devanampiyatissa (247–07), the first Buddhist Sri Lankan king. After that, Buddhism spread rapidly throughout Sri Lanka. Buddhism reached its peak during the third century under King Devanampiya Tissa (307). Classical Sinhalese civilization (200–1200 C.E.) flourished in the north-central region of Sri Lanka, with capitals at Anuradhapura (from c. 200 B.C.E. to c. 1000 C.E.) and Polonnaruwa (c. 1070 to 1200). When the Polonnaruwa era came to an end, the capital was moved frequently, and the island was rarely unified. Parakrama Bahu IV (r. 1325–6), who ruled from Kotte, was

Fun Fact

Because there are no lions on Sri Lanka, *sinhala* must be taken as a figurative reference to a lion-like man—a hero—perhaps Prince Vijaya, said to have arrived in Sri Lanka in 543 B.C.E. from Orissa, on the eastern coast of India.

the last Sri Lankan king to rule over the entire island.

How the Tamil came to Sri Lanka is unclear, but the island is so close to South India's coastline that it is likely people have traveled back and forth between the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lanka throughout human history. It is known that South Indian rulers attacked Sri Lanka several times, and that the Tamil controlled the island for extended periods when such invasions were successful. Several Sinhala kings are famous for having repulsed Tamil invasions and securing the capital.

When the Portuguese first arrived in 1505, the Island consisted of three independent kingdoms: the *Yarlanam* (Tamil) kingdom in the north, the stronger *Kotte* (Sinhala) kingdom in the southwest, and the *Kandy* (Sinhala) kingdom in the central highlands. In 1517, the Portuguese established a fort and trading post at the present capital, Colombo, and successfully defeated both the coastal kingdoms (*Yarlanam* and *Kotte*) in the 16th century. In the 17th century the Dutch replaced the Portuguese. While both the Portuguese and the Dutch managed to control the coastal regions, the interior, hilly region of the island remained independent, with its capital in the city of Kandy. Great Britain replaced the Dutch in 1796, and the coastal areas became a crown colony in 1802. After the fall of Kandy kingdom in 1815, the British unified the three kingdoms for administrative purposes in 1818.

English became the official language, and infrastructure (such as the rail and road networks) was built to facilitate large-scale trade in coconuts, cinnamon, and coffee. The Sri Lankan economy was based on coffee plantations until they were completely wiped out in the 1870s due to a plant disease. Since then tea has become the backbone of the Sri Lankan economy, making it the second largest producer of tea in the world. Unable to force Sri Lankans to work on their plantations, the British brought in Tamil workers from the neighboring country that was also their colony—India.

The period between World War I and II saw political stirrings in the country against foreign rule, in both Ceylon and India, beginning in the 1930s. India achieved independence in 1947, and on February 4, 1948, Ceylon became a dominion within the British Commonwealth. The flag was also changed in 1948: orange and green vertical bars were added to symbolize the Tamil and Muslim minority populations. Solomon West Ridgeway Dias Bandaranaike (1899–1959), representing the majority Sinhalese, became the prime minister in 1956. He attempted to revive the past glory of Buddhism and made Sinhala

the language to be used for all administrative purposes instead of English. In 1959, a Buddhist monk assassinated Bandaranaike because he felt that the prime minister had failed to do enough for the Buddhist cause. Sirimavo Ratwatte Dias Bandaranaike (1916–2000), the wife of the assassinated prime minister, became the next prime minister in 1960 and the first woman prime minister in the world. She succeeded in translating many of her late husband's dreams into reality.

In 1972, the country became a republic, changed its name to Sri Lanka, and made Buddhism the state religion, thereby ridding itself of the last vestiges of colonial subjugation. In 1982 the legislative and judicial capital was moved from Colombo to nearby Sri Jayewardenapura Kotte. The new government opted for socialist policies while promoting Sinhalese interests through developmental arrangements (providing the best jobs, etc.) for the majority of Sinhalese. This was necessary to strike a balance between the minority English-speaking elite Christians, who had been trained by the colonialists, as against the oppressed majority of Sinhalese people, who practiced Buddhism.

Civil unrest in the Tamil regions provoked by discrimination against Tamils in university education and employment opportunities, led to a vicious cycle of ethnic strife that continued throughout many successive governments. Junius Richard Jayewardene (1906–96) was elected in 1977 as the prime minister and went on to become the president of Sri Lanka the following year. He promoted Tamil to the status of a national language in Tamil regions while arranging for greater controls over the Tamils. Tension between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority (which had become a political force through the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam [LTTE]) reached a point of no return in 1983, when secessionists of the LTTE massacred 13 army soldiers in Jaffna. In response, Sinhalese mobs killed hordes of Tamils, many of whom became refugees. The violence between the two groups simmers and still erupts occasionally.

Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga (b. 1945), head of the People's Alliance coalition, became the prime minister in 1994 and president in 1995. Her mother, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, became prime minister for the second time under her. Chandrika won a second term in office in 1999 as the president. Days before voting, she became the target of an LTTE suicide bomber attack, which cost her an eye. Ranil Wikramasinge (b. 1949; leader of United National Party) was elected as the prime minister in December 2001. The desire for peace has kept both party leaders together. Sri Lanka continues its turbulent struggle for peace with talks being initiated at international levels. The tsunami of December 2004 devastated the coast of the country and caused extensive damage to the island republic.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Referred to as the “teardrop of India” and a “pearl upon the brow of India” by poets, the pear-shaped island lies separated from the Indian landmass by the 31-mile-wide Palk Strait and the Gulf of Mannar. There are a number of islets connecting the two landmasses, forming a bridge called Adam’s Bridge. Colombo is the commercial and administrative capital of Sri Lanka while Kotte (Sri Jayewerdenapura) houses the Parliament.

The island of Sri Lanka is 217 miles long and about 93 miles wide. Lying in the Indian Ocean, and flanked by the Bay of Bengal in the northeast, Sri Lanka is essentially a land of hills and plains. Mountains are found only in the south-central part, with the famous Adam’s Peak and the Pidurutalagala, the latter being the highest, standing at 8,281 feet above sea level.

The longest river is the Mahaveli, which travels through the central portion of the country and flows into the Indian Ocean at Trincomalee. The southern coast has the best beaches of Sri Lanka. The climate in Sri Lanka varies marginally with altitude and distance from the sea. It is mostly equatorial and tropical throughout the year. Average temperatures at sea level are 77°–82°F, while that on hills can be a cool 57°–60°F. The monsoon season begins in mid-May and lasts until mid-October (southwest monsoon), then again from December until March (northeast monsoon). The southwest portion of Sri Lanka can be called the wet zone because precipitation there can reach 98 inches per year, while the entire remaining “dry zone” receives between 47 and 75 inches a year.

Sri Lanka has 11 national parks, 23 reserves and sanctuaries, and 33 protected areas. These places shelter the nation’s rich animal and plant heritage. Of the 86 mammal varieties, 16 are commonly found on the island. Elephants, buffaloes, anteaters, squirrels, jackals, leopards, deer, boar, and many varieties of monkeys live there. The commonly seen monkeys are the Gray Langurs, Red-faced Macaques, Shaggy Bear-monkeys, and Purple-faced Leaf Monkeys. There are 34 fish varieties (rainbow and brown trout being the most famous) and 38 species of amphibians. Reptiles like lizards, pythons, turtles, and crocodiles add up to 75 different varieties. Snakebites from five of the 83 snake species can be fatal. The vipers, cobras, Indian krait, and Ceylon krait are the common snakes. There are 339 bird species in Sri Lanka, a population increased periodically by 160 migrant bird species. There are also 242 species of butterflies, which usually migrate from March to April, providing a spectacular show.

❁ ECONOMY

Cinnamon and tea have put Sri Lanka on the world’s map. While the country has been moderately socialist

Adam’s Bridge

According to Hindu mythology, Lord Rama built Adam’s Bridge to travel to Lanka to rescue his wife Sita from the demon king Ravana. Stressing the natural beauty of the island, Christians maintain that this is the place where Adam and Eve lived in exile after being expelled from the Garden of Eden, though now the bridge stands mostly submerged with only a couple of limestone shoals visible. This natural highway was partially destroyed after the area was hit by a violent storm (probably a cyclone) in 1480.

since its independence, for the last 20 years, the government has gone in for privatization, so the economy has become more export-oriented. This strategy meant that, in a bid to become self-sufficient, the country has tried to produce domestically what it might otherwise import; hence the name, import substitution. Rubber and tea remain important export items, but food and beverages, food processing, textiles and apparel, insurance, telecommunications, and banking are commercial activities that contribute significantly to the gross domestic product (GDP). The economy bounced back from slower growth around the turn of the century, but 2001 saw its lowest phase ever. This performance can be attributed to the continued violence between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority, power shortages, budgetary shortcomings, and a global slowdown. The situation improved after the LTTE agreed to sign a ceasefire in 2002. During the year 2003, Sri Lanka reported its highest growth and one of the highest per capita incomes in the Asian continent. Then, in December 2004, a devastating tsunami caused about 40,000 deaths and the economy of the country was shaken up yet again.

Fun Fact

The Mahavamsa (in Pali, “great chronicle”) is a historical record of the Buddhist kings of Sri Lanka, from the arrival of Vijaya in 543 B.C.E. to the reign of King Mahasena (334–61 C.E.). It was written in the sixth century C.E. by Mahanama, a Buddhist monk, who took much of his information from the *Dipavamsa*, written five centuries earlier, close to the time of the historical events it describes. The *Culavamsa* (or Chulavamsa, “lesser chronicle”), is a companion text compiled by Sinhala Buddhist monks, and covers Sri Lanka’s history from the fourth century to the British takeover in 1815. The two volumes, sometimes referred to together as the Mahavamsa, provide a continuous historical record covering over two thousand years.

❧ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Though Sri Lanka has been marked by strife due to ethnic differences, its culture is a rich blend of traditional art and architecture, especially when it comes to the thousands of stupas (a dome-shaped monument, used to house Buddhist relics or to commemorate significant facts of Buddhism) and images of Buddha dot the entire landscape. Weaving, wood carving, metalwork, and pottery are the highly developed arts of Sri Lanka. It is especially famous for gems (including sapphires, rubies, and moonstones) and the gem trade at Ratnapura, the gemstone capital, located about 60 miles from Colombo. Sri Lankan masks are also famous and can be found at Ambalangoda or Colombo. Kandy (in central Sri Lanka) is a good place to see modern Sinhalese dances, while the Devil Dance (a type of mask dance) can be enjoyed in Colombo. Karnatic music of south India is prevalent in the northern part of the country. The culture of Sri Lanka is a fine blend of Buddhist, English, Hindu, and some Islamic cultures, and the traditions and rituals of Sri Lanka reflect all of these influences. In some places the worship of deities and animism is still practiced, ancient spiritual beliefs indigenous on the island since before the arrival of Buddhism.

Being a Buddhist country, most of the festivals in Sri Lanka are based on the lunar calendar, and the full Moon day of each month is called Poya and is a holiday. Because the Buddha encouraged his followers to undertake spiritual practices on full Moon days, Buddhists in Sri Lanka meditate and pray on these days. On full Moon days, all public places of entertainment are closed and the sale of alcohol is not permitted. Each Poya day symbolizes something of importance, either about Buddha or related to events in Buddha's life.

❧ CUISINE

Sri Lanka has been famous for its spices since ancient times. It grows the best cinnamon, cloves, and other spices, so it naturally ended up developing culinary traditions to suit them. The Europeans arrived and also left their influences on the cooking styles of Sri Lanka. The Dutch and Portuguese influences have especially been strong.

Rice and curry form the staple diet of Sri Lankans. This dish can be eaten with smaller side dishes of vegetables, fish, or meat. Kool (a boiled and fried vegetable combination) and biryani (a rice dish) are very popular. Appa, or hoppers (similar to pancakes), are served with honey, egg, or yogurt as snacks. People of the coastal towns mostly eat tuna fish.

Fun Fact

Legend has it that Adam put his foot on Earth at Adam's peak!

Fun Fact

Most foods in Sri Lanka tend to spoil very fast due to the climate. Because of this reality, most dishes are gravy-based to ensure that all the ingredients have been cooked well.

The tea has an incredible taste and can be enjoyed any time of the day.

The British introduced tea in Sri Lanka in the 19th century. It was only afterward that it became the second largest exporter of tea in the world. Dinner in Sri Lanka is usually a feast. The curry is generally cooked with at least 13 spices that are ground beforehand. Garlic, lime, turmeric, curry leaves, and coriander are some of the famous spices used. These are said to not only enhance the flavor of the food, they also add to the ayurvedic effect. Ayurveda (*ayur* means "life" and *vedic* means "wisdom") has been incorporated in the lifestyle of most Sri Lankans, including in the choice of ingredients used for cooking. According to ayurvedic beliefs, one's health is a blend of food habits and lifestyle.

Public/Legal Holidays

❧ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, and is celebrated as New Year's Day all over the world; the celebrations begin on the evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve). Sri Lankans bring in the new year with enthusiasm and joy at parties organized privately or at hotels and clubs.

❧ NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 4

This holiday celebrates the day Sri Lankans achieved independence from their British rulers in 1948. It is officially celebrated by military parades, pageants, national games, and dances in various parts of the country.

❧ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies.

While the earliest origins of May Day can be ascribed to the pagan celebrations that were practiced by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages, the contemporary holiday has an explicitly political origin. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this

observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor, demanding an eight-hour workday.

In Sri Lanka, there are processions and rallies by the labor unions to mark the day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

Religious Holidays

❁ TAMIL THAI PONGAL

Observed by: Hindus

Observed on: January 13–14

Tamil Thai Pongal is one of the most popular Hindu festivals of Sri Lanka. The festival is dedicated to the Sun god, who ushers in a prosperous harvest. The date has been made to coincide with the first day of the auspicious month of Thai, the first month of the Tamil calendar. This family festival involves rituals such as letting a pot of rice and sweetened/spicy milk boil over (*pongal* means “boiling over”) at the doorstep during sunrise. The direction in which the milk flows after boiling over foretells whether the family will have good or bad luck in the coming year. People also visit the temple on this day.

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, the Muslim Feast of Sacrifice, commemorates the unwavering faith of Ibrahim and his willingness to sacrifice his son to obey God’s command. Muslims believe that God visited Abraham in a dream and instructed him to sacrifice his most valued possession, his son. When Ibrahim told his son about the dream, the boy asked his father to follow God’s command. However, as the blindfolded Ibrahim was about to make the sacrifice, he was instructed by a divine voice to remove his blindfold. To his surprise, instead of his son, a ram lay on the altar. On this day devout Muslims kill a sheep or goat and share it with family, friends, and the poor. This festival is also called Eid al-Kebir and Tabaski.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

❁ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

The Sinhala and Tamil New Year’s Eve is celebrated a day before Avurudu, the Tamil-Sinhala New Year, also known as El am Hejir. In 622 C.E. Muhammad was forced to flee from Mecca to Medina with his family and followers. His flight is called the Hegira.

By this day, usually in mid-April, the store-

houses are full of grain, as the crops have been newly harvested, and the trees are full of fruits and flowers. Naturally, such bounty calls for celebration. Astronomers calculate the date of the New Year and inform the public by ringing temple bells. On New Year’s Eve, people attend functions and concerts, forgiving those who have harmed them and celebrating a new beginning. All activities on Avurudu have to be performed at the nakatha (“prescribed time”) and in the prescribed way because mid-April is the time for planetary transition in Sri Lanka (from Pisces to Aries). It is considered inauspicious for performing birth and other rituals.

All Sri Lankans take a customary bath at the prescribed time. Before bathing, they anoint their body with an herbal oil massage for its soothing and beneficial effects. There is plenty of time to have fun with relatives and friends on New Year’s Day, eating sweets and other good things. People exchange gifts and an occasional betel leaf is also given. Betel is symbolic of good health and is an herb of high medicinal value. Chewing it freshens the breath and cures many oral problems. There are poetry contests and contests between drummers of adjacent villages, for example, testing one’s skill at playing the rabana (one-sided drum). Traditionally, people cook rice with milk (kiribath) in chutties, earthen pots, on New Year’s Day to ensure a bountiful year ahead.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

❁ MAHA SHIVRATRI

Observed by: Hindus

Observed on: Thirteenth or 14th of the month of Phalguna, the 12th month of the Hindu calendar

The Maha Shivratri festival is dedicated to the Hindu God, Lord Shiva, the Destroyer of the universe and the third deity of the Hindu trinity. Maha Shivratri falls on the 13th or 14th day of the month of Falgun (February–March). The name Maha Shivratri means “the great night of Shiva,” and the celebrations of this festival occur mainly at night. During this time, the planets are aligned in such a way that they foster spiritual balance. Sri Lankan Hindus usually fast on this day and remain awake at night for the celebrations. They say that on this night Shiva unites with his spiritual consort, the Goddess Parvati. The devotees stay awake and chant sacred stories and songs of devotion for Lord Shiva. They pour various liquids on the Holy Lingam (or phallic symbol of Shiva). By morning Shiva and Parvati are considered married.

See also Volume III: HINDUISM; MAHA SHIVRATRI

Fun Fact

The point of lowest gravitational field on Earth lies just off the Sri Lanka coast.

Fun Fact

Muhammad’s flight actually occurred in Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar, not Muharram.

Fun Fact

Under British rule, Sri Lanka was known as Ceylon, a corruption of Sielen Diva (“island of Sielen”), the name given the country by a sixth-century Greek sailor.

❧ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Last Friday of Lent

Good Friday falls on the Friday before Easter, the last Friday of Lent. It is observed in most parts of the world in remembrance of the Crucifixion of Jesus. Because this is a day of mourning for Christians, it is also known as Mourning Friday, Black Friday, and Holy Friday.

Some Christians observe a 40-day fast from Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, through Good Friday. Orthodox Christians, who call this day Great Friday, continue to observe a partial fast until Easter. Other Christians fast only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; LENT

❧ EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark the day on which Christians believe Jesus rose from the dead, three days after his Crucifixion. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. At the end of the first century C.E., the Catholic Church decided to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus on the vernal equinox in an effort to convert pagans to Christianity. The Church believed that, by appropriating the festivals, rituals, and symbols sacred to the pagans, and establishing churches and monasteries on pagan sacred ground, pagans would be easier to convert in familiar contexts.

The English name for this celebration, Easter, was almost certainly taken from the name of the pagan deity, Eostre. According to the Venerable Bede, (672–735), a renowned Christian scholar, Easter was named after Eostre (or Eastre), the Mother Goddess of the Saxon tribes of Northern Europe; she was also the goddess of fertility. The Germans knew her as Ostara. After the harsh dreary winters of Northern Europe, she brought the warmth of spring, fertility, and abundance. The ancient deities in all civilizations had patron animals, and the rabbit, an obvious symbol of fertility, is the companion animal of Eostre. Eostre was believed to preside over conception and birth in both animals and human beings and pollination, flowering, and the ripening of fruit in the plant kingdom.

In other countries the name for this holiday is derived from Pesach, the Jewish Passover observance, which was also celebrated around the time of the vernal equinox.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT; PESACH; SPRING FESTIVALS

❧ MOULoud

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

The birth anniversary of Muhammad, the prophet of the Muslims, falls in the third month of the Islamic year. For Muslims all over the world, this is a day of great joy and celebrations as Muhammad is the most revered prophet among the Muslims. On this day, Sri Lankan Muslims offer special prayers in honor of Muhammad and thank Allah for his benevolence in sending them his messenger. Alms are also distributed on Mouloud in Sri Lanka.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULoud

❧ VESAK

Observed by: Buddhists
Observed on: Full Moon of the sixth month of the Buddhist calendar

Vesak is a blessed occasion for Buddhists the world over. Prince Siddhartha, or Buddha, was born, attained nibanna (nirvana) or Supreme Enlightenment, and also died on this day. This day also celebrates the first day of the first month of the Buddhist New Year, that is, Vesak. The day is marked by charity and devotion to the teachings of peace by Lord Buddha. The devout visit temples wearing white clothes, and meditate there in tranquility. People are supposed to abstain from solid foods after midday as a way of keeping the body free of impure habits and thoughts. This is similar to saying that fasting once in a while is good for health. Fasting, it is said, brings people closer to their spiritual side or makes them more introspective or inward looking.

In the evening the houses stand colorfully decorated and illuminated by special lamps (called vesak lamps) made for this purpose. People gather in the evening around a monk who recites chapters from the Buddha’s life. There are plays and roadside stalls distributing refreshments to pilgrims.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM; VESAK

❧ POSON

Observed by: Buddhists
Observed on: Full Moon of the seventh month of the Buddhist calendar

This day is celebrated with religious observances because it marks the arrival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka in the third century B.C.E. The festivities are held mostly in Mihintale (near Anuradhapura) where Arahat Maha Mahinda (son of the great Indian king Asoka) preached Buddha’s sermon to Sri Lanka’s ruler for the first time. The occasion calls for decorations, processions, and illuminations in different parts of the island.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM

❁ DIWALI

Observed by: Hindus

Observed on: Lasting for five days from the thirteenth day of the waning half (Krishna Paksha) of the lunar month Asvina to the second day of the waxing half (Shukla Paksha) of Karttika

Diwali, also called Deepawali or Divali, is the Festival of Lights, usually a five-day holiday that marks the victory of the Hindu God Lord Rama over the evil forces manifested through King Ravanna, the king of Lanka. This finds mention in the Hindu epic, the Ramayana, where Lord Rama returned from a 14-year exile and the people welcomed him and lit lamps to show him the way. In Sri Lanka, illuminated roads, houses, and marketplaces mark the festival. *Deepawali* literally means “a row of lamps,” and the light produced symbolizes the lifting up of spiritual darkness. The Hindus generally make clay and misiri (sugar crystal) figures to mark the occasion. However, there are no firecrackers, games, singing, or dancing on Diwali, in Sri Lanka as there are among Indian Hindus.

See also Volume III: DIWALI; HINDUISM

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First day of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr, also known as the Feast of Fast-Breaking or Korite, marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, during which devout Muslims all over the world observe a month-long dawn-to-dusk fast. This fast is required by the Koran, and it is the fourth of Islam’s Five Pillars of faith. Sri Lankan Muslims end their fast when the new Moon is sighted, and Eid al-Fitr is celebrated on the next day. Fasting on Eid al-Fitr is strictly forbidden in the Koran. Sri Lankans dress in their best clothes on this day, children get sweets or money, and women receive special gifts from their loved ones. It is also a time of reconciliation.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas is a day of celebration for Christians all over the world, because this was the day designated by the early Church for celebrating Jesus’ birth. No one knows when Jesus was actually born, so December 25 was chosen because it is the time of year celebrated by pagans as the winter solstice, the longest night of the year, and also the return of the light, when days begin to grow longer once more.

On Christmas Day, the festivities continue with church services and enjoying special Christmas deli-

ciacies. Friends and relatives visit each other and exchange gifts, and children open gifts they received from Santa Claus. Families gather at lunch or dinner to celebrate Christmas with a special feast.

In Sri Lanka, even though only about 7 percent of the people are Christians, Christmas is an elaborate celebration and spread over many days. The bursting of firecrackers on the first day of December begins the Christmas celebrations in Sri Lanka. It is said that the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the British introduced Christmas celebrations to this island. The shopping centers are decorated and so are the Christmas trees to mark the occasion. The cathedrals and churches are thronged by devout Catholics who gather for Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. Even non-Christians end up enjoying themselves. They are invited to parties thrown by their Christian friends. Wine and cakes mark the occasion and the celebrations continue into the new year.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ KANDY ESALA PERAHERA

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: Mid August

Kandy Esala Perahera, or the Festival of the August Moon, is a 10–12 day festival held in Kandy (in central Sri Lanka), which turns out to be an unforgettable experience for those who participate in it and for those who watch it. It is, in fact, one of the most spectacular events on the continent of Asia. The festival begins on the full Moon day of August. It originated as an occasion for paying respects to the Relic Tooth of Lord Buddha. This is the left canine of Lord Buddha that was recovered after his cremation. The sacred tooth is carried around in a colorful procession of decorated elephants, Kandy dancers, torchbearers, trumpeters, acrobats, and whip-crackers. The onlookers pay respects to the Tooth, which,



The Legendary Sinharaja Forests

The symbol of the lion on the flag of Sri Lanka has been attributed to the legend of sinha (“lion”) raja (“king”), which lived in deep, thick evergreen forests located in the southwestern region of Sri Lanka. They say that the original Sinhalese people who occupied Sri Lanka came from the union of a lion king who ruled this forest and a princess. This forest was declared the International Man and Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 1978 and, 10 years later, a National Wilderness Area under the National Heritage Site program.

Fun Fact

About 15 percent of the Sri Lankan population is vegetarian, more out of religious belief than a concern for the environment.

apart from religious reasons, is also symbolic of national unity and sovereignty. Losing it would mean that the Sinhalese have lost their power or majority in Sri Lanka. The sacred relic is retained in a Tooth Temple Complex (called Dalada Maligawa).

❁ SINHALA-TAMIL CULTURAL FESTIVAL

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October

The Tamils and the Sinhalese (two major ethnic groups of Sri Lanka) often indulge in conflict with each other. It is in literary and cultural festivals such as the Sinhala-Tamil Cultural Festival that artists from both groups bury their differences for a while and participate together concerning the contemporary developments of Sri Lanka. A committee of about 150 (with about 145 being Sinhalese) organizes this festival for fostering peace in Colombo every year in October. There are reports that the festival tends to be disrupted by extremists from both sides.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

In Sri Lanka the first ritual performed after a child is born is rankiri kata gema: The lips of the child are touched with breast milk that has already been touched with gold. The next important event after childbirth is that astrologers cast the child's horoscope after getting the exact time and date of its birth from the parents. The belief is that the planets

have the power to influence the newborn in good and evil ways. Knowing the horoscope will help them to devise remedies for the difficult times in the child's life.

The naming ceremony, called the batkavapu nama, takes place a few months after the child's birth. It is the most important childhood ritual in Sinhalese culture. This is the day when the infant is fed grains of rice for the first time. In certain families this is also the day on which the child is named.

❁ COMING OF AGE

When a girl first starts her menstrual cycle, the exact date and time is noted so the parents can consult with an astrologer regarding her future. The women of the house bathe her from head to toe and dress her in white. Friends and relatives are invited, who give gifts and money to the girl, and there is a lot of celebration and feasting. Intermingling of sexes is kept under close scrutiny.

❁ MARRIAGE

The marriage broker fixes the wedding and commands a lot of power in Sri Lanka. He or she is the one who is a storehouse of information on the prospective brides and grooms of the area. Out of the many matches proposed, the interested family chooses one bride or groom. An "inspection" visit to the selected family's house follows; the prospective bride or groom will be properly presented during another visit. The broker arranges many more inter-family visits, as more emphasis is laid on the intermingling of the two families than the couple getting to know each other. The prospective couple's horoscopes are matched by a local astrologer. He or she decides a wedding date if everything has gone smoothly between the two families. The amount of dowry that will be paid by the bride's family to the groom's is also decided mutually.

As preparation for the wedding, a thorana (a pathway made of palm trunks, leaves, coconut, and other fruit) is usually set up by the roadside. Women begin preparing nonperishable foods many days prior to the wedding day. There is an air of festivity and enthusiasm all around. Firecrackers, loud music, alcohol, and pranks by the youngsters are commonplace.

On the day of the wedding, the groom visits Lord Buddha's temple to seek his blessings. Then he dresses up in the traditional clothing of chieftains, complete with a dagger. The bride wears a sari (a traditional garment made of six to nine yards of cloth) embroidered with gold as well as heavy gold jewelry. As the prescribed auspicious time approaches, wedding vows are taken within a poruva, a stand especially made out of flowers and palm fronds for the occasion. Both exchange wedding rings. Elders exchange gifts. The local registrar is always a guest and he does the necessary paper-



A Sri Lankan family lays a baby on the floor to be blessed at the Gangaramaya Buddhist temple in Colombo. (AP Photo/David Guttenfelder)

work following the ceremony. For the first time, the bride gets to sit next to the husband after the wedding. She leaves her home for her new home where more feasts await her.

❁ DEATH

Death is an important occasion for Sri Lankans and is a reminder of Lord Buddha's teachings. The survivors remember that he taught the impermanence of all things of this world and that all the karmic forces come together at the time of death. Death is, therefore, an important religious event both for the one who died (as the individual's transition into another body has begun) and for the survivors, who remember Buddha's teachings apart from helping the departed soul through the monastic sangha (community). Here, before cremating the body, a white cloth called a pamsukula is offered on behalf of the dead to the monks in a ritual known as matakavastra-puja. One of the assembled monks administers the Five Precepts of Buddha: to refrain from killing living beings and to practice loving-kindness; to refrain from taking anything that is not given and to practice generosity; to refrain from sexual misconduct and to practice contentment; to refrain from lying and harsh speech and to practice truthfulness; to refrain from taking intoxicants and to cultivate mindfulness. The white cloth is cut into pieces (to be stitched into a robe later) and given to the monks. The close relatives of the deceased then sit around a mat and pour water from a common vessel into a cup until it overflows. This is done in the

spirit of giving an offering or dakkhina to the deceased. Grace marks this ritual as all pray for the relief of the departed soul. Another rite is matakabana, or sermonizing for the benefit of the deceased. A monk is invited within a week to give a sermon to the family and friends. They recite stanzas as he requests; the ritual is followed by offering a gift to the monk and refreshments for all. Three months later, an almsgiving ceremony, or a sanghika dana ceremony, is held as offerings are made on behalf of the deceased. The reason for this practice is that, if the dead relative has been born as peta (an unhappy spirit), the merit of the living relatives' almsgiving will reduce his or her misery in the other world.

Further Reading

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St. Kitts and Nevis

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	These two islands are located in the Caribbean Sea, about one-third of the way between Puerto Rico and Trinidad and Tobago
Size	101 sq. mi. (St. Kitts 65 sq. mi.; Nevis 36 sq. mi.)
Capital City	Basseterre (on St. Kitts)
Flag Description	The flag of St. Kitts and Nevis is divided diagonally from the lower hoist side by a broad black band bearing two white five-pointed stars; the black band is edged in yellow; the triangle is green above the band, while the lower triangle is red.
Independence	September 19, 1983 (from United Kingdom)
Population	38,958 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional monarchy with Westminster-style parliament
Nationality	Kittitian; Nevisian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Predominantly black; some white (British, Portuguese, and Lebanese)
Major Language(s)	English
Major Religion(s)	Anglican, Protestant, and Roman Catholic
National Holidays	New Year's Day, January 1; Commonwealth Day, March; Labor Day, May; Queen's Birthday, June; CARICOM Day, July 5; Emancipation Day, August; Independence Day, September 19; Carnival, December 24

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

At the time of discovery by the Europeans, the Caribs inhabited the islands of St. Kitts and Nevis. Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) landed on the larger of the two islands in 1493 during his second voyage and named it after St. Christopher, the patron saint of travelers and his own personal saint. He also discovered Nevis on the same voyage. European colonization of the islands began only around 1623–24, when the English, followed by the French, arrived on St. Christopher's Island. The English eventually shortened its name to St. Kitt's Island.

Settled by Sir Thomas Warner (d. 1648) in 1623, St. Kitts was the site of the first British colony in the West Indies. The following year the French also settled on a part of St. Kitts, a situation that Warner diplomatically tolerated in a bid to gain

the upper hand against the native Caribs living on the island. In 1628, Warner sent a party of about 100 colonists to establish a British settlement on the western coast of St. Nevis. Although the original settlement, near Cotton Ground (a town on the western coast of the island), was destroyed in an earthquake in 1680, Nevis went on to prosper as one of the most affluent plantation societies in the eastern Caribbean region. As on St. Kitts most of the island's wealth was built on the labor of African slaves toiling in the island's sugarcane fields. The local tourist industry got its start in the late 18th century on Nevis, where thermal baths made it a popular retreat for Britain's well-to-do.

The Treaty of Paris in 1783, which also formally ended the American Revolution, handed over both islands to Great Britain. In 1816 the British combined St. Kitts and Nevis with Anguilla and the Virgin Islands into a single colony. They remained part of the colony of the Leeward Islands from 1871 to 1956, and of the West Indies Federation from

1958 to 62. In 1967, together with Anguilla, they became a self-governing state in association with the United Kingdom; Anguilla seceded later in that year and remains a British dependency. The Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis attained full independence on September 19, 1983.

In August 1998 a vote in Nevis on a referendum to separate from St. Kitts fell short of the two-thirds majority needed. In late September 1998 Hurricane George caused massive damage totaling approximately U.S. \$445 million and crippled economic growth for the year.

In the 21st century Nevis has once again been trying to separate from St. Kitts. Although the two islands share much culture, there is a good deal of rivalry between them, and there are those who suggest that Nevis is moving closer to full independence.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Geologically St. Kitts and Nevis are mountainous and volcanic in origin, representing adjacent peaks in a chain of partially submerged volcanic mountains. Both islands are subject to subterranean seismographic activity, which makes them prone to earthquakes. St. Kitts is the larger of the two islands, covering 65 square miles. Mount Liamuiga, a dormant volcanic cone with an elevation of 3,793 feet, is the highest point on the island.

St. Kitts's fertile soil is well watered, has adequate drainage, and usually requires little or no irrigation. Forested areas cover 11,120 acres of land and include both rain forests at the lower altitudes and evergreen forests above 820 feet. Cone-shaped Nevis is about six miles wide, eight miles long, and has a total land area of 36 square miles. The soil on Nevis is generally less fertile than that on St. Kitts, but water is plentiful in the higher elevations. There is no rainy season on Nevis, but showers can be torrential when it does rain. There are several hot mineral springs on the island (the same ones that were so popular with early British tourists in the late 1700s).

Both St. Kitts and Nevis have a tropical climate tempered by northeast trade winds; there is little daily or seasonal variation. Temperatures average approximately 79°F. Humidity is generally about 70 percent. Annual precipitation varies from 39 to 120 inches. Neither island has the distinct rainy season characteristic of many other Caribbean islands. Winds are predominantly easterly and seldom exceed 12 miles per hour except during the hurricane season, which lasts from July to September.

❁ ECONOMY

Although the sugarcane crop still dominates the agricultural sector, tourism, export-oriented manufacturing, and banking have assumed larger roles in the economy. Since tourism revenues are now the chief source of the islands' foreign exchange, a decline in stopover tourist arrivals following Sep-

tember 11, 2001, eroded government finances. The opening of a 1,000-plus bed Marriott hotel in February 2003 has helped to reverse the situation.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

These two islands—the inhabitants are called Kittitians (Kit-TEE-shuns) and Nevisians (Nee-VEE-shuns)—draw on a mix of European, African, and West Indian traditions. While the local architecture is predominantly British, and cricket is the national sport, the music and dances of the islands are very much West Indian and African. Masquerades, St. Kitts's popular folk dance troupe, performs all kinds of dances, ranging from the traditional French quadrille to the spirited African war dance. The troupe wears colorful costumes with unique West Indian designs.

❁ CUISINE

The cuisine available on St. Kitts and Nevis is a blend of local Caribbean and international influences. Native dishes include Arawak chicken seasoned and served with rice and almonds on a breadfruit leaf, curried mutton, and grilled *wahoo* (a species of mackerel). There are also plenty of tropical fruits, seafood (including lobster), pork, goat, and jerk chicken.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

On St. Kitts and Nevis, New Year's Day brings a host of activities including sports competitions, musical shows, and parades. People get together and enjoy this occasion with their families and friends. Dressed in colorful costumes, residents dance in the streets to music played by local bands.

❁ COMMONWEALTH DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Second Monday in March

The 53 Commonwealth countries renew their ties with Great Britain and one another on this day. It is observed on the second Monday in March. Commonwealth Day offers an opportunity for young people from the Commonwealth nations to celebrate and become aware of the 53 countries that make up the free association of states, their 1.8 billion people, and their customs. In St. Kitts and Nevis, as in other Commonwealth countries, people listen to a special broadcast of a speech delivered by Queen Elizabeth II (the present British queen, who

is the official head of the Commonwealth; b. 1926). People use the day to promote understanding about global issues, international cooperation, and the work of the modern Commonwealth.

✿ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First Monday in May

St. Kitts and Nevis celebrate Labor Day (also called May Day or Workers' Day) on the first Monday of May and not on the first day of the month. The origins of this holiday lie in the ancient pagan spring festivals practiced by farmers and peasants. For the islanders the holiday is a British legacy. The day is also observed as a tribute to workers, for their contribution to the progress of nations.

In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, designated May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

Public meetings and lectures, reminding workers of their rights, are some of the activities on the islands; for most it is a time to relax.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

✿ QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Second Monday in June

The birthday of the British monarch is an important day on the islands as a result of their long association with Britain. Although the birthday of the present

monarch Queen Elizabeth II actually falls in April, the local people continue to observe this holiday on the second Monday in June, as they have been doing since the reign of the former king of England, George V (1865–1936), who was born in June. On this day in St. Kitts the nation's various security forces, local dignitaries, and guests attend the annual parade, which features music played by military bands. This day is also referred to as the Birthday of Her Majesty the Queen.

✿ CARICOM DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 5

This day commemorates the founding of the Caribbean Community in 1973. It is marked by official gatherings and political speeches by eminent personalities. St. Kitts and Nevis celebrate the efforts of countries sharing a common history, culture, origin, and language.

✿ EMANCIPATION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 1, or First Monday in August

Most of the inhabitants of St. Kitts and Nevis are descendants of slaves. Therefore Emancipation Day (or Abolition of Slavery Day), which commemorates the abolition of slavery in all the British West Indies on August 1, 1834, is of great significance to them. The celebration of the holiday is on the first Monday of August and not always on the first of the month. On this holiday, banks, most business establishments, educational institutions, and government offices remain closed. Activities include musical performances, displays of local crafts, and parades.

✿ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 19

On September 19, 1983, St. Kitts and Nevis obtained their independence from the British. The celebrations continue for an entire month and include drama festivals and cultural activities. The celebrations culminate with a military parade at Warner Park, in the capital Basseterre, followed by beach picnics and parties.

✿ CARNIVAL

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 24–early January

Carnival is the biggest event in St. Kitts and Nevis. It begins on Christmas Eve (December 24) and ends in early January, which makes it a version of the 12 days of Christmas, culminating with Twelfth Night and Epiphany, as opposed to the traditional pre-

Fun Fact

Soca is a blend of soul music and calypso.



The St. Kitts-Nevis Defense Force Band marches in the capital of Basseterre as part of the two-island nation's celebration of independence from Britain on September 19. (AP Photo/John Parker/St. Kitts-Nevis Observer)

Lenten carnivals held in February in most countries. Carnival in St. Kitts and Nevis is a time for beauty pageants, calypso competitions, parades, and street dancing. People participate in masquerades and wear brightly colored costumes. The final day of Carnival culminates in the Carnival Last Lap, a parade of costumed bands and street dancing.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTMAS; EPIPHANY

Religious Holidays

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, also called Holy Friday, Mourning Friday, or Great Friday (in Eastern Orthodox Churches), commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. The people of these two islands observe the occasion by offering prayers and eating hot cross buns. Stories from the Gospels and Psalms are narrated in public assemblies, and choirs sing hymns about Jesus' life and virtuous deeds.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus on the third day following his Crucifixion. Easter is a public holiday on both islands. In Nevis on Easter afternoon there are horse races, concerts, and parties.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT

❁ PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fifty days after Easter

The name Pentecost is derived from the Greek *pentekost*, which means "fiftieth." It commemorates the descent of the Holy Ghost on the Apostles. It is celebrated 50 days after Easter and 10 days after Jesus' Ascension to heaven. Modern scholars believe that many of the traditions associated with Pentecost were originally borrowed from pagan celebrations of spring.

This holiday is also referred to in many English-speaking countries as Whitsunday, because of the white robes worn this day by those who are newly baptized. Whitsunday and Monday have been recognized since the third century C.E. On Whitmonday most establishments and government offices remain closed on the islands. This day is usually spent with family at picnics and beach barbecues.

Wahoo

This is an offshore game fish highly popular in St. Kitts and Nevis due to its excellent flavor. The fish is typically grilled with melted butter and olive oil. Garlic, cilantro, and parsley are used for seasoning, while lemon wedges provide a final garnish.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; PENTECOST; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas celebrations on St. Kitts and Nevis are a time for family reunions, get-togethers, parties, dancing, drinking, and eating. Hot chocolate and gingerbread are traditional Christmas fare here. People put up Christmas trees in and around their homes, which are typically adorned by glittering lights, ornaments, and gifts. During the afternoon of Christmas Day hordes of masqueraders, clowns, singers, and dancers turn out on the streets of the islands for a big street party.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26

Because of their British heritage the islanders observe Boxing Day (or St. Stephen's Day), a traditional British holiday, on the day after Christmas. People spend the day visiting their relatives and friends, bearing gifts of food or money. Horse racing and dance performances are big events on this day. During the dances, people form long lines, moving rhythmically backward and forward, while one of the performers solicits money.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ EASTER-RAMA

Observed in: Basseterre

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March–April

Easter-Rama is celebrated during the Easter season. There is an official opening ceremony followed by track and field and basketball competitions. Other

events include beauty pageants, kite-flying contests, a gospel night extravaganza, calypso bacchanals, prince and princess shows, mass of *j'ouvert* (a noisy musical carnival that originated in Trinidad), parades, and an awards ceremony at the end of the festival.

❁ THE SHAK SHAK FESTIVAL

Observed in: Basseterre
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Late June

The Shak Shak Festival, also known as the St. Kitts Music Festival, derives its name from the *shak shaks* (pods) that bloom on the *poinciana* (Cock and Hen) tree in summer. The festival was designed by assimilating the best features of leading festivals from around the world. The four-day musical extravaganza showcases Caribbean music and features a blend of musical crosscurrents including calypso, soca, jazz, merengue, salsa, gospel, and reggae.

❁ CULTURAMA

Observed in: Nevis
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July–August

Culturama celebrates the ethnic diversity of Nevis. It is actually a weeklong affair, featuring music, arts and crafts, parades, and cultural events. Folklore, drama, and a Mr. Kool contest (for the best-looking male model) are the other attractions of the festival.

Further Reading

Vincent K. Hubbard, *A History of St. Kitts: The Sweet Trade* (Northampton, Mass.: Interlink Publishing Group, 2003); Frank L. Mills and S. B. Jones-Hendrickson, *Christmas Sports in St. Kitts-Nevis: Our Neglected Cultural Tradition* (U.S. Virgin Islands: Author, 1984); Verna Penn Moll, *St. Kitts-Nevis* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-Clio, 1995); Michelle M. Terrell, *The Jewish Community of Early Colonial Nevis: A Historical Archaeological Study* (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 2005).

St. Lucia

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Island between the Caribbean Sea and North Atlantic Ocean, north of Trinidad and Tobago
Size	238 sq. mi.
Capital City	Castries
Flag Description	The flag of St. Lucia is blue, with a gold isosceles triangle below a black arrowhead; the upper edges of the arrowhead have a white border.
Independence	February 22, 1979 (from United Kingdom)
Population	166,312 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary democracy
Nationality	Saint Lucian (St. Lucian)
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Black (90%)
Major Language(s)	English (official); French patois
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (68%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Independence Day, February 22; Commonwealth Day, March; Earth Day, April 1; Labor Day, May 1; Queen's Birthday, June; CARICOM Day, July 5; Carnival, July; Emancipation Day, August; Remembrance Day, November 11; National Day, December 13

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

During the 17th and 18th centuries the French and the British made several unsuccessful attempts to take possession of the island. Britain finally gained control of it in 1814. The country remained a British colony until it gained its independence in 1979. That same year it also became a member of the British Commonwealth of Nations.

By the mid-1990s, the Banana Trade War between countries of the present European Union (EU) and Latin America had damaged the island's economy. Since then many reforms have been introduced to strengthen it.

Carnival is the most festive time of year in the capital city of Castries. During this holiday the streets resound with calypso music and the city plays host to many activities and cultural events around the clock. These range from religious celebrations and masquerades to yacht races and band compe-

titions. Costume parades add a splash of color to the festivities on land, while bright spinnakers dot the waterfront.

✿ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

St. Lucia is a typical Windward Island, formed out of volcanic rock that came into existence long after the region had already been formed. St. Lucia's physical features are strikingly beautiful. Dominated by high peaks and rain forests in the interior, the small island is known for the twin peaks of Gros Piton and Petit Piton on the southwestern coast, its soft sandy beaches, and its magnificent natural harbors. Mt. Gimie, the highest peak, is located in the central mountain range and rises to 3,143 feet above sea level. The steep terrain also accentuates the many rivers that flow from central St. Lucia to the Caribbean. Fertile farmland, mostly devoted to banana farming, is scattered throughout the island.

The climate on St. Lucia is a tropical and humid one, moderated by northeast trade winds that ensure pleasant

weather throughout the year. Hurricanes are the most severe climatic disturbance in this area and have been known to cause devastating destruction.

❁ ECONOMY

St. Lucia's economy depends primarily on revenue from banana production and tourism. Because of the EU's decision to phase out the preferred access to its markets by Windward Island banana growers by 2006, agricultural diversification has become a priority. The government is encouraging the establishment of tree crops such as mangoes and avocados. A variety of vegetables are being produced for local consumption.

The development of the tourism sector still remains a priority. There has been liberal use of public funds to improve the physical infrastructure of the island, and the government has made efforts to attract cultural and sporting events and to develop historical sites.

St. Lucia is a beneficiary of the U.S. Caribbean Basin Initiative and has been a member of the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) since 1974. St. Lucia is also the headquarters of the Eastern Caribbean Telecommunications (ECTEL) authority, which is developing the regulations to liberalize the telecommunications sector in the region by the early 21st century.

Fun Fact

A spinnaker is a large triangular sail set on a spar that swings out opposite the mainsail of a boat; spinnakers are used on yachts when running before the wind.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The island's culture has evolved from the intermingling of many different ethnic groups. Each has brought its own beliefs and traditions, which are reflected in the composite lifestyle and culture of the island today.

Although Europeans never settled in St. Lucia in large numbers, they had a lasting effect on the island's history and culture. Although St. Lucia remained under British rule for more than a century, it is the French and Creole cultural heritage that predominated and still prevails. To St. Lucia's exciting cultural mosaic, the British contributed their language and educational system in addition to the legal and political structure. French culture is more evident in the arts—music, dance, and the Creole patois, used alongside the official language, English.

St. Lucia takes great pride in its two Nobel Prize winners: the late Sir W. Arthur Lewis (1915–90), who won the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1979, and poet Derek Walcott (b. 1930), who won the 1992 Nobel Prize for Literature.

❁ CUISINE

The rich cultural heritage of the island is vividly expressed in its cuisine. The fertile, volcanic soil of

St. Lucia yields an enormous supply of agricultural products. The island is one of the leading banana exporters in the Caribbean, with six different varieties grown on the island.

Not surprisingly, bananas play a key role in the dishes prepared by St. Lucians. One can find endless varieties of banana bread, banana salad, and boiled green bananas accompanied by salt fish. Other fruits include mangoes, papayas, pineapples, soursops, passion fruit, guavas, and coconuts. Local chefs combine the island's fresh farm products with a wide range of fresh seafood to create intriguing curries, Creole-style entrees, and pepper-pot stews. The local seafood includes lobster, snapper, dolphins, kingfish, and swordfish. *Callao* soup, made from a leafy green similar to spinach, is the national dish.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

St. Lucians bring in the new year with family and friends. It is traditional to greet the new year at midnight on New Year's Eve with horns and other noisemakers. On New Year's Day, many people make resolutions, which they hope to adhere to during the year. Parties, parades, and cultural events are held all over the capital city and in other towns.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 22

In February 1979 St. Lucia became an independent country and a member of the British Commonwealth, a political and economic alliance of former British colonies. The islanders cherish their freedom. Interestingly Independence Day is celebrated in conjunction with Carnival, Ash Wednesday, and Lent, traditional religious events related to Easter. A number of colorful events and parties are held each year to commemorate independence from Britain; these include parades, calypso music performances, and dance festivals. There are also special radio broadcasts, speeches by politicians, and military parades on this day. Often royal dignitaries from the United Kingdom visit the island to mark Independence Day. Church services and school rallies are also held to express national pride.

❁ COMMONWEALTH DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March

Commonwealth Day is an annual event during which all 53 member countries of the British Commonwealth celebrate their links with one another. It

is observed on the second Monday of March. On this day, member-countries, all former British colonies, promote understanding about global issues, international cooperation, and the work of the modern Commonwealth. Each year there is a different theme.

The Commonwealth Day message recorded by the British monarch, Queen Elizabeth II (b. 1926) is broadcast by radio throughout the island. School activities are also an important part of the Commonwealth Day celebrations and schools in St. Lucia organize shows and rallies on this day.

✿ EARTH DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 1

Earth Day is celebrated on April 1 in St. Lucia. Large Earth Day celebrations are held in the southern town of Vieux Fort. Ceremonies are held all over the island at sunrise and sunset. Various meetings and cultural shows are organized that emphasize the need to preserve nature and natural resources.

✿ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, is an international holiday for working people. The day is meant to recognize the contributions of all workers and laborers.

In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

In St. Lucia the day features meetings, speeches, and other events organized by labor unions. Schools, universities, and public offices remain closed. In recent years people have started celebrating this day with picnics and beach parties.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

✿ QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Early June

The British ruled St. Lucia for more than a century. Although independence was declared in 1979, the birthday of the reigning British monarch (Queen Elizabeth II) is still celebrated. The celebrations on this day start with a 21-gun salute by the royal sentinels. A church service is followed by a parade. Arts and crafts shows are also held on this occasion.

Soca

Soca is a mix of Trinidad's calypso, dance, and Amerindian music. Like calypso, soca is used for both social commentary and risqué humor. Some of the all-time favorite soca artists are Shadow, Sparrow, Machel Montano, Xtatik, and Superblue.

✿ CARICOM DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 5

CARICOM Day celebrates the Treaty of Chaguaramas, signed on July 4, 1973. This treaty established the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM), which is dedicated to promoting the political and economic interests of the Caribbean nations. St. Lucia became a member of CARICOM on May 1, 1974. Official gatherings and political messages mark this day in St. Lucia. Dignitaries deliver speeches on the current state of and aspirations for the development of the CARICOM nations.

✿ CARNIVAL

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July

The underlying idea of most Carnival celebrations is to enjoy one last hurrah before the beginning of the austere Christian Lenten period, which lasts 40 days. In St. Lucia Carnival is not associated with Lent. It is, however, St. Lucia's biggest festival and a reason to have a good time. People throng the streets in colorful costumes and headdresses. They take part in parades and dance to the rhythm of the latest soca and calypso hits. The highlight of the festival is a calypso competition. A beauty contest and steel-band competitions (called Panorama) are also held. Individuals wearing traditional costumes perform for a panel of judges as representatives of particular bands.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL

✿ EMANCIPATION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Early August

Emancipation Day, or Abolition of Slavery Day, celebrations mark the end of slavery in the British West Indian possessions in the Caribbean in 1834. The day is celebrated on the first Monday in August. The people of St. Lucia cherish their hard-earned freedom and remember all those who helped to achieve it. Educational institutions, businesses, and government offices remain closed. Parades, street fairs, and private parties are held on this day.

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 11

Remembrance Day, also called Armistice Day, commemorates the signing of the treaty that ended World War I. The treaty was signed at Compiègne, France, in 1918. Remembrance Day was originally designated to honor the soldiers who died in World War I, but the commemoration now includes the dead of other wars as well. On this day a minute of silence is observed at 11 A.M. all over the island as a mark of respect.

St. Lucians place floral wreaths on the graves of fallen soldiers and mark this day with ceremonial parades of veterans' organizations and schoolchildren and parties. Poppies and stickers are sold to help raise funds for the families of ex-servicepeople.

Fun Fact

The Treaty of Compiègne was signed at the 11th hour, of the 11th day, of the 11th month.

NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 13

National Day, also called St. Lucia Day, marks the beginning of Christmas celebrations. It is marked by a number of sporting, cultural, religious, and commercial events. The contests include the national festival of choirs and blindfolded boxing competitions. Feasting, music, dancing, and a spirit of revelry pervade the island on this day.

Religious Holidays

ASH WEDNESDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: February

Ash Wednesday, or Day of Ashes, is primarily a day of repentance. Devout Catholics observe a fast and wear a mark made by ashes on their foreheads as a sign of mourning and penance. It is also a sign of closeness to Jesus, who died on the Cross on Easter. This is the first day of Lent, the 40-day period of abstinence and austerity preceding Easter.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

The Christian holiday of Good Friday commemorates the death of Jesus by Crucifixion. On this day

the islanders attend church services, and the day is spent reading the Gospels and Psalms and singing hymns from the Scriptures. The day is also known as Holy Friday, Great Friday, or Mourning Friday and the mood on this occasion is solemn.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter commemorates the Resurrection of Jesus after his Crucifixion. On the third day following his Crucifixion, Jesus is said to have risen from the grave. Thus this day carries with it the idea of eternal life and renewed hope. In St. Lucia worship services begin before dawn. Easter Sunday is marked by church services and the exchange of gifts. It also marks the end of Lent, the Christian season of abstinence.

On Easter Monday celebrations include egg-rolling competitions and dousing others with holy water, which was used to bless the house and food. The traditional motifs associated with Easter—rabbits and eggs—are pagan symbols of fertility and renewal of life, taken from their celebrations of spring's arrival. In St. Lucia, Easter Monday is a time for hosting elaborate family dinners.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PESACH; SPRING FESTIVALS

PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fifty days after Easter

The Christian feast of Pentecost is celebrated in remembrance of the descent of the Holy Ghost on the Twelve Apostles and about 120 early Christians after Christ's Resurrection. Parades led by clergy, local dignitaries, boy scouts, and other youth groups make their way through the streets of St. Lucia. This observance is also known as Whitsunday and Whitmonday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; PENTECOST

CORPUS CHRISTI

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Sixty days after Easter

The Corpus Christi Festival is believed to have originated in the early 13th century, when the nun Juliana of Liège (Spain), began to have a strange vision when she prayed. In it a full Moon appeared with its center darkened by a shadow. Finally Jesus appeared to her to explain the significance of her vision: The bright circle signified all liturgical celebrations; these were darkened by the absence of a

Fun Fact

In countries where English is not the most important language, the name for Easter is usually derived from the name of the Hebrew observance of Passover, or Pesach.

feast day dedicated to the actual presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. Official recognition of the feast day was given in 1246. In 1317 Pope John XXII (r. 1316–34) ordered that the body of Christ should be part of a solemn, public procession.

Corpus Christi is an important religious holiday on St. Lucia because St. Lucians have combined Corpus Christi with local Creole practices. In large processions clergymen dressed in red carry the cross through the streets. Church Masses on this day include a special benediction.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ ALL SOULS' DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: November 2

All Souls' Day, also called Defuncts' Day and Day of the Dead, is an important holiday on the Catholic liturgical calendar. The day was set aside to honor those who have died. Apart from the offerings and singing of the Office of the Dead, there are three requiem Masses that are said by the clergy to assist the souls in their journey from purgatory to heaven. On this day the people of St. Lucia remember their ancestors and deceased relatives, and a vigil lamp is kept burning in homes all day long. Families also place flowers and light candles on the graves of their ancestors as marks of respect.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ FEAST OF ST. CECILIA

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: November 22

St. Cecilia was a Roman saint who was martyred for her unflinching faith in Jesus and her refusal to show allegiance to false gods. St. Cecilia is venerated as the patron saint of poets, church music, and musicians. This particular day is meant to pay tribute to her. Celebrations of this day on St. Lucia include church services, street concerts, and sporting events.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 25

Christmas marks the birth of Jesus. The people of St. Lucia decorate their homes with strings of decorative lights and attend church services. Worshipers sing traditional Christmas carols. Families get together for special meals where ginger cookies and bread made with saffron are served.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

St. Rose of Lima

Beloved in St. Lucia, St. Rose of Lima is the patron saint of Latin America and the Philippines. Her real name was Isabel, but she was so beautiful that she was called "Rose," and that name remained. As she grew older, she became more and more beautiful, and one day her mother put a wreath of flowers on her head to show off her loveliness to friends. But Rose had no desire to be admired, for her heart had been given to Jesus. So she put a long pin into that wreath and it pierced her so deeply that she had a hard time getting the wreath off afterward. At another time, afraid that her beauty might be a temptation to someone, she rubbed her face with pepper until it was all red and blistered.

Regional Holidays

❁ FISHERMAN'S FEAST

Observed in: Castries
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 29

The Fisherman's Feast (or Fet Peche in the local patois) is celebrated on St. Peter's Day. This is an occasion to pay tribute to St. Peter, the patron saint of fishermen. The day begins with a church service followed by the blessing of boat sheds. The entire day is spent in eating and partying that continues until the following day.

❁ THE ROSE FESTIVAL

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 30

Named for St. Rose of Lima, this annual floral festival is held in different regions of the island. The celebration honors the rose with great pomp and show. Members of the British royal family, if present, or their representatives, host a magnificent party on this occasion. People from indigenous tribes also present music and dance shows. This day is also called Feast of St. Rose of Lima or Fet La Woz.

❁ THE MARGUERITE FESTIVAL

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 17

After obtaining independence, St. Lucia chose the rose and the daisy, or marguerite in French, as their national flowers. This St. Lucia holiday honors the marguerite (the humble daisy) with great pomp and ceremony. The day is also celebrated as the feast day

The Roses versus the Daisies

The rose and daisy societies on the island have a unique rivalry. Each group holds weekly meetings, known as séances, at which a designated female singer of each society improvises French Creole tunes (*belairs*) that blend African and French and are accompanied by violins, banjos, saxophones, and other instruments. The singers typically praise their own flower society while poking fun at the other. These weekly séances build up to the elaborate festivals of each society—roses in August and daisies in October—when the members attend special church services and then parade the streets dressed as royalty, doctors, nurses, policemen, or soldiers.



of Maurgerite Mary Alacoque, the patron saint of polio patients and the sacred heart of Jesus, so it is also called Fete La Marguerite à la Coque. St. Maurgerite was the personification of humility, modesty, and meekness, always mindful of her humble origin. That is why the daisy, the most innocuous of all flowers, is named after her. On this important day St. Lucians attend church services. The much-anticipated celebrations include a grand party replete with music, dances, masquerades, and cultural events that go on throughout the night. On several occasions royal personalities from Britain and other dignitaries have attended as special guests.

Rites of Passage

BIRTH

The birth of a child is a special event since it ensures the continuation of the family lineage. It also adds to the respect of the family. Children are usually named after saints (following the Roman Catholic custom). The family hosts a party to celebrate the birth of a child. Guests and relatives bring gifts, flowers, and cards for the newborn.

MARRIAGE

To prepare for a wedding in St. Lucia family members bake a rich, black cake with dried fruits and rum. This custom of preparing a wedding cake can be traced back to Roman times. The cake is a symbol of unity and the couple's willingness to join their lives, sharing mutual joys and sorrows. Many couples prefer a traditional religious ceremony in a church where a priest performs the Catholic rites with readings from the Gospels. There is an exchange of vows, and a candle is lit by the bride and groom, signifying their new life together.

Further Reading

Linda Molloy, *Saint Lucia Past: A Pictorial History* (Swanage, U.K.: Author, 1996); Dick Romyn, *Saint Lucia, Life and Scenes* (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1985).

St. Vincent and the Grenadines

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Group of islands between the Caribbean Sea and North Atlantic Ocean, north of Trinidad and Tobago
Size	150 sq. mi.
Capital City	Kingstown
Flag Description	The flag of St. Vincent and the Grenadines has three vertical bands of blue (hoist side), gold (double width), and green; the gold band bears three green diamonds arranged in a V pattern.
Independence	October 27, 1979 (from United Kingdom)
Population	117,534 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary democracy; independent sovereign state within the British Commonwealth
Nationality	St. Vincentian or Vincentian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Black (66%); Mixed (19%)
Major Language(s)	English; French Patois
Major Religion(s)	Anglican (47%); Methodist (28%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; St. Vincent and the Grenadines Day, January 22; Labor Day, May 1; Carnival, June–July; CARICOM Day, July 5; Bastille Day, July 14; Emancipation Day, August; Independence Day, October 27; Boxing Day, December 26

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

The islands of St. Vincent and the Grenadines were originally inhabited by the Ciboneys. These hunter-gatherers were largely dependent on marine resources and agriculture for their livelihood. The Arawaks (the aboriginal South American Indian tribe of the Greater Antilles) replaced the Ciboneys about 200 B.C.E. Sometime after 1000 C.E. the Arawaks were invaded and replaced by a wandering culture from South America known then as the Kalinga and later named the Caribs by the Europeans. In 1635 a group of African slaves (survivors

of a Dutch ship that sank in the channel between Bequia and St. Vincent) also settled in St. Vincent. Their descendants came to be known as the Black Caribs.

By 1498 Columbus (1451–1506) had arrived in St. Vincent, but colonial rule did not come to the islands for another two centuries. Britain and France fought to gain control of these islands, and St. Vincent officially became a British colony under the Treaty of Paris in 1763. The conflict between the British and Black Caribs, who remained hostile to the Europeans, continued until 1796. The defeated natives were later deported to Honduras to work as slaves.

From 1763 until its independence, the British made several unsuccessful attempts to unite St. Vincent with the other Windward Islands (St. Lucia, Martinique, and Grenada). In 1834

Fun Fact

Escoveitch comes from *escabeche*, the Spanish that means “pickled.” Recipes for main dishes such as escoveitched fish or chicken evolved from a centuries-old Iberian method of preparing seafood and poultry that involves marinating the fish or fowl in a vinaigrette sauce, usually for about 12 hours.

slavery was abolished on St. Vincent and the Grenadines along with the other British colonies in the West Indies. In 1969 St. Vincent became a self-governing state under the British crown. Ten years later it acquired complete independence and also Commonwealth membership. In the early 21st century, a growing dissatisfaction within the leading political parties has led to political unrest. The political instability has resulted in economic losses, only made worse by natural disasters that have played havoc with the country's infrastructure.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

St. Vincent and the Grenadines is composed of 32 islands and cays (or keys). Some of the prominent islands in St. Vincent and the Grenadines are Bequia, Mustique, Palm Island, Canouan, Mayreau, Petit St. Vincent, Union Island, and Tobago Cays. Located in the Caribbean, just north of Trinidad and Tobago, St. Vincent and the Grenadines enjoys a year-round tropical climate with little temperature variation. Soufrière volcano, on the island of St. Vincent, is a constant threat, as are hurricanes.

❁ ECONOMY

Tourism is by far the most important economic force in the country, followed by agriculture, with bananas being the largest crop. Both sectors are seasonal, which is a challenge for the economy. St. Vincent has some offshore banking, which it has sought to bolster by moving toward adopting international regulatory standards. It is also a large producer of marijuana and has become a transshipping center for illegal narcotics from South America.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Though they remained under British rule for over a century, these islands feature a vital mix of cultures, including French and West African influences. The French influence can still be seen in the prevalence of the Creole language as well as the observance of Bastille Day. Most Vincentians are descended from slaves and mix African traditions and beliefs with Christian (mostly Anglican and Catholic). Religious commemorations and masquerades play an important role in all the festivals. Celebrations often last for weeks and involve a great deal of dancing and singing. The African influence is clearly evident in the music of the islands, which includes reggae,

calypso, and steel bands. Processions, prayers, street shows, and costume parties are also integral to many celebrations. Hymns, lullabies, ballads, and working and healing songs are also very popular.

❁ CUISINE

The cooking of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, like the cuisine of other Caribbean islands, reflects its diverse history and borrows liberally from both African and European cooking. Seafood of all kinds is readily available, always fresh, and figures prominently in many local dishes such as conch fritters, lobster fritters, and lobster salad, various curries, pepper pots, and escoveitched fish.

Among the fish recommended in escoveitch recipes are kingfish, tilapia, red snapper, monkfish, jack, and dolphin (not the mammal).

A variety of fresh fruits, including bananas, coconut, pineapple, papaya, and mango, are also very popular as snacks or refreshing juice drinks. Because bananas are the most important cash crop of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, they are used in many popular dishes either raw or cooked. In addition to being eaten raw at any time of the day, other fruits are versatile as well and turn up in such dishes as mango chutney or salsa, pineapple chicken, and avocado salad. The very hot hot sauces, lobster and pumpkin soup, and fish varieties including porgy, parrot fish, and snapper are typical Caribbean fare. Rum is the local drink of choice. It can be drunk neat, although it is perhaps more refreshing served with fruit in cocktails and punches.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

In St. Vincent and the Grenadines the beginning of a new year is a time for entertainment, celebrations, and making resolutions. People get together and enjoy this occasion with their families. Special church services are also held to welcome the new year.

❁ ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 22

Christopher Columbus was the first European to discover these islands on January 22, 1498. His discovery coincided with the feast day of St. Vincent, the patron saint of wine makers. He named the islands as a mark of respect to the saint, although there is no recorded history of wine-making on the islands. Both beer and rum are produced.

J'ouvert

The word is derived from the French *jour ouvert*, which means “daybreak.” It marks the beginning of a raucous two-day street festival. As early as 2:00 a.m. shadowy figures clad only in briefs dip into paint pots and coat themselves in motley colors. Others don masks adorned with long strips of cloth, while still others make a piercing sound with their whips. Soon they will transform themselves into figures associated with African folklore or with local superstitions introduced into the Carnival celebrations by emancipated slaves.

Slaves born in the West Indies had only oral references to connect with a culture with which they had little or no direct contact. In the 18th century freed slaves were not allowed to participate in the celebrations of the Europeans, so they often satirized their former masters and celebrated their freedom by turning to folkloric characters. These influences have now been assimilated into the local Carnival culture.

It is not uncommon to see roving bands of devils painted blue or red or covered from head to toe in thick black grease, beating large tin pans, demanding that you “pay the devil.” Ignoring them can be dangerous.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines Day, or St. Vincent's Day, is still observed in honor of St. Vincent—by the Catholic community and special church services are held. People participate in parades organized by local and national groups, and local musicians and dancers perform at events held on this day.

✿ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Labor Day, also called May Day or Workers' Day in some countries, was created to recognize the social and economic achievements of the international labor movement. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, designated May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

In St. Vincent and the Grenadines this day is celebrated with parades and conferences. This day is also observed as Fisherman's Day. Fishing and trolling competitions as well as fish-cooking competitions are also held.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

✿ CARNIVAL

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Late June, Early July

Originally a pre-Lenten observance, the Carnival in St. Vincent's and the Grenadines was moved so it would not conflict with other carnivals in the Caribbean region. This extravaganza, also known as Vincy Mas, is the biggest event in the country. For about 10 days street parties, beauty pageants, and parades are held mainly in Kingstown. People dress

up in colorful clothes. Calypso, soca, jazz, and reggae music competitions are also held. The star attraction of the Carnival is the Miss Carnival beauty pageant. The Vincentian Carnival incorporates the tradition of J'ouvert (opening of the day), when revelers disguised as devils paint their faces and bodies with mud and roam the streets until the early morning hours.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT

✿ CARICOM DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 5

CARICOM Day celebrates the Treaty of Chaguaramas, signed on July 4, 1973. This treaty established the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM), which is dedicated to promoting the



Revelers dance to calypso music in Kingstown during Mardi Gras, one of this Caribbean island's biggest Carnival events. St. Vincent and the Grenadines Carnival, known as Vincy Mas, ends with a street party where revelers with painted faces wearing colorful costumes, beat African drums and dance to local music. (AP Photo/Chris Brandis)

political and economic interests of the Caribbean nations. The islands became a member of this organization on May 1, 1974, and Vincentians celebrate the regional unity of the Caribbean countries. This day is marked by official speeches and political conferences.

❁ BASTILLE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 14

Bastille Day marks the beginning of the French Revolution (1789–99) and the end of the monarchy in France. (The Bastille was a prison and armory in Paris where the common people who rebelled against the abuses of King Louis XVI [1754–93] were incarcerated). The French influence has been widespread in St. Vincent since the 18th century, and the ideals of the French Revolution inspired the struggle for independence in this country. Vincentians celebrate Bastille Day by organizing various cultural events, dances, musical shows, and food festivals on the islands. Fireworks displays, grand balls, and masquerades make for festive nighttime celebrations.

See also Volume III: BASTILLE DAY

❁ EMANCIPATION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: First Monday of August

Slavery was abolished in St. Vincent and the Grenadines in 1834, when Great Britain emancipated all the slaves in its West Indian colonial possessions. Emancipation Day, or Abolition of Slavery Day, is an important holiday as most Vincentians are descendants of the African slaves who were brought to the islands in the 17th century. Many cultural and political programs are held to commemorate this day. A musical concert featuring an eclectic mix of gospel, calypso, jazz, and classical music is held in the capital city of Kingstown.

Breadfruit

The breadfruit (*Artocarpus altilis*) tree is native to the East Indian and Pacific islands. The name derives from the fact that the unripe fruit tastes like fresh bread. Captain Bligh (1754–1817) brought the first breadfruit tree to St. Vincent from Tahiti in 1793. His first mission to deliver these trees in 1788 ended in his being cast adrift after the infamous mutiny on his ship, the HMAV (His Majesty's Armored Vessel) *Bounty*.

Breadfruit, a nutritious starchy melon, was intended to be used as food for the slaves in the plantations of the Caribbean. Initially the slaves disliked the taste of breadfruit and refused to eat it. Years later the descendants of these slaves learned to appreciate the breadfruit and now use it in a number of tasty dishes.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 27

The Independence Day celebrations begin with a military parade. Political speeches followed by cooking competitions, street festivals, and concerts are some of the major attractions.

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 26

Boxing Day, or Feast of St. Stephen (the first Christian martyr), is observed by making donations to charitable institutions and to the poor. Many observe it as Family Day with special church services followed by picnics, luncheons, and festivals. It is customary to use the money collected from the Nine Morning Services (see under Regional Holidays) to pay for the revelry on Boxing Day. This is also a legal holiday.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY

Religious Holidays

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

The day commemorating Jesus' Crucifixion and is a somber observance; special prayer services are held, and the Gospels are read in churches. The Vincentians usually prepare a couple of special fish dishes, *builjol* (salted fish salad) or salmon, which are served on this day. Good Friday is a legal holiday in St. Vincent and the Grenadines; schools, government offices, and many businesses remain closed.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter commemorates the Resurrection of Jesus three days after his Crucifixion. Church services start before daybreak, and parades and feasts mark the day. Girls and women wear special Easter bonnets on this occasion.

On Easter Monday the children of St. Vincent and the Grenadines participate in traditional Easter egg hunting competitions. For adults the celebrations also include animal races, food stalls, and an arts and crafts exhibit. Schools, government offices, and many businesses remain closed on this day, because it is also a legal holiday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

✿ PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fifty days after Easter

Pentecost, or Whitsunday, is a Christian holiday recalling the visitation of the Holy Spirit to about 120 of the early Christians after the Crucifixion of Jesus, 50 days following his Resurrection, and 10 days after Ascension Day. Whitsunday and Monday are observed on the seventh Sunday and Monday after Easter.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY; PENTECOST; SPRING FESTIVALS

✿ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

On Christmas in St. Vincent the faithful attend church. Music is an important element of the holiday with the singing of Christmas carols and playing of *cuatros*, ukuleles, and guitars. Special celebrations are held in Port Elizabeth and Hamilton. People dance around Christmas trees and exchange gifts. The shops in Kingstown are decked out for the holiday and filled with all kinds of goods. Families gather for a traditional Christmas feast, where a special dessert called Caribbean Christmas Pudding with Brandy Butter will be served.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

✿ EASTERVAL

Observed in: Union Island

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Easter weekend

Easterval, a four-day festival held over the Easter weekend, takes place on Union Island (located midway between Grenada and St. Vincent). The origins of this festival can be traced back to the pre-Columbian tradition of praying to the rain god for good rains and a bountiful harvest. Easterval features concerts, sports competitions, pageant shows, parades, and food fairs. The traditional African Big Drum dance is also performed on this occasion.

✿ BIG DRUM FESTIVAL

Observed in: Union Island

Observed on: May

The Big Drum Festival of Union Island (located midway between Grenada and St. Vincent) marks the end of the dry season. On this occasion people introduce social commentary and satire in their dances and theatrical performances. The Big Drum

Cuatro

As the Spanish colonized the islands of the Caribbean, they brought many things that were peculiar to their native country including musical instruments. Guitars were very popular, and as time passed several new variants developed. At least four different instruments were adapted from the six-string Spanish classical guitar: the *requinto*, the *bordonua*, the *cuatro*, and the triple, each of which produces a unique tone and pitch.

The *cuatro* (which means “four”) is much like a guitar. Originally it had only four strings, but around 1875 it acquired five sets of double strings.

Dance, influenced by African and French traditions, is performed on the last day of the festival.

The Big Drum dance is common to many Caribbean countries. The term “big drum” has nothing to do with the size of a drum. Rather it refers to a large communal gathering of different tribes for a social reason, whether a wedding or a gathering to show respect for the ancestors. These tribes were originally West African, and the songs and dances are derived from their traditions. The significance may be historical or religious. The songs are mainly in patois, interspersed with many ancient words related to African spiritual beliefs, spirits, or ancestors. Such a gathering and dance is also known as Gwa Tambu.

A Big Drum dance begins with the soloist (the chantwell), who opens with a musical statement and repeats it. The chorus joins in, and the song develops into a call-and-response performance. As the chorus continues, two brass drums (*boulas*) enter to play a nation theme (of any one tribe) and the solo drum (*kata*) enters soon after with a quicker tempo. At this point the dancers enter, moving to the drumbeats. It is the flourish and color of the dance, together with the drumbeats, that give this ceremony its distinctive nature.

✿ UNION ISLAND MAROON FESTIVAL

Observed in: Union Island

Observed on: May

The annual Maroon Festival held at Union Island (located midway between Grenada and St. Vincent) celebrates the culture of the Maroons, who are descendants of escaped slaves. This festival is celebrated three days before or after the full Moon night in May. It marks the beginning of the planting season. An exhibition of traditional foods and crafts is held during this festival.

See also Volume III: SPRING FESTIVALS

✿ BREADFRUIT FESTIVAL

Observed in: Kingstown

Observed on: August

This annual community festival celebrates the history and significance of breadfruit. During this festival the party-loving people of Kingstown focus on the use of breadfruit in preparing various dishes, as well as on its cultural significance. Cooks, chefs, restaurant owners, hoteliers, church and community groups, caterers, and homemakers from all over the country participate in this festival. They prepare different types of dishes made with breadfruit. There is also a parade of dancers and drummers.

✿ NINE MORNINGS CELEBRATION

Observed in: Kingstown and Calliaqua

Observed on: Nine days before Christmas

The origins of this festival, unique to St. Vincent, are unclear, although popular belief relates it to the novena of the Catholic Church on the nine days before Christmas. It is believed that in the 1920s a Vincentian member of the Dominican Order (a Catholic order) initiated a tradition of celebrating a Christmas novena in the early hours of the morning. After the early morning church services, some worshippers took to walking back to their homes, while others stopped off for sea baths.

Gradually it became customary for the boom drum bands (musicians playing goatskin drums and wooden flutes) to accompany the walkers. Street dancing followed, and in time, the character of the Nine Mornings' celebration changed. Over the years the number of walkers grew, and with the advent of the steel drum band a carnival-style nine mornings tradition evolved. Street vendors joined the celebration, selling drinks made from ginger and sorrel as well as holiday cakes and sweets. A later addition was the tradition of the carolers, who went house-to-house singing Christmas carols. In Kingstown cyclists decorated their bicycles with lights and joined the walkers. Picking up hot bread from bakeries also became a tradition.

Nine Mornings became particularly popular with young people, because rules and regulations are relaxed on this day, giving them an opportunity to socialize freely with other young people.

The Nine Mornings practice is entirely unique to St. Vincent and provides a wide-ranging view of Vincentian culture. The money collected during this period is used to pay for the revelry on Boxing Day.

Rites of Passage

✿ BIRTH

Among the black Caribs of Central America, the most important ritual connected with a birth is the

practice of *couvade*. It marks the resumption of normal life after the birth of a child by the mother while the father symbolically takes to bed as if bearing the child. Baptism of infants is the norm and is performed in a church.

✿ MARRIAGE

Among upper- and middle-class couples dating is restricted. Girls are married at an early age, usually between 16 and 18. It is customary for an unmarried woman to wear a garter on her right leg; the garter is removed only when she marries.

Marriages follow Catholic tradition with the priest who will conduct the marriage ceremony being consulted before fixing the date for a marriage. On the day of the marriage the bride dresses in a white gown. The bride and groom exchange rings and kiss. Once the ceremony is over, the newlyweds bow to receive a blessing.

✿ DEATH

Vincentian funeral ceremonies, which combine Christian and African traditions and beliefs, begin at night. The family members and friends of the deceased participate in the funeral rites. The men create a sacred space by making a tentlike roof out of canoe sails. Within the shelter they play card games, tell traditional folktales, sing, and dance traditional dances such as the *punta* and circle dances. Food and beverages made of rum and local roots are served to the family members and close friends.

Everyone stays for the rites through the night because it is said that anyone leaving before dawn may invite the wrath of the dead and be exposed to his or her revenge. In the morning following the wake the body is carried to a church where customary Christian rites are performed. The body is then buried according to Christian custom.

A nine-night wake is observed following the death. The rituals include praying and lighting candles. Vincentians make sure that the wishes of their *abari* (dead ancestors) are followed. They place food, flowers, traditional costumes, and other items of day-to-day use over the altar to please the departed soul.

Further Reading

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Sudan

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Northern Africa
Size	967,499 sq. mi.
Capital City	Khartoum
Flag Description	The flag of Sudan has three horizontal bands of equal size displaying the Pan-Arab colors: red (on the top), white (in the middle), and black (at the bottom), with a green triangle based on the hoist side.
Independence	January 1, 1956 (from Egypt and United Kingdom)
Population	40,187,486 (2005 est.)
Government	Authoritarian regime; ruled by the coalition government comprising the military and the National Congress Party
Nationality	Sudanese
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Blacks (52%); Arabs (39%)
Major Language(s)	Arabic (official); Ta Bedawie; Nubian; varying dialects of Nilo-Hamitic, Sudanic, and Nilotic languages; English
Major Religion(s)	Sunni Muslim (70%); indigenous beliefs (25%); Christian (5%)
National Holiday(s)	Independence Day, January 1; Uprising Day, April 6; May Revolution Day, May 25

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The Republic of Sudan is the largest and one of most diverse nations on the African continent. The witness to a string of civil wars that severely scarred the nation, Sudan remains in the shadow of a 21-year civil war that ended in January 2005.

In ancient times, northeast Sudan was known as Nubia, the homeland of Africa's earliest black culture. Its history is well documented by Nubian monuments and artifacts as well as written records from Egypt and Rome from 3800 B.C.E. onward. In antiquity Nubia was a land of great natural wealth, of gold mines, ebony, ivory, and incense, resources that were much envied among her neighbors.

The three earliest Nubian cultures were all Bronze Age, the A-Group (3800–3100), the C-Group (2300–1550), and the Kerma culture. The A- and C-Groups were located in northern Nubia. For a long time anthropologists thought the A-Group people were seminomadic herdsmen, but more

recent evidence has found that a line of kings lived in Qustul in northern Nubia as early as, or even earlier than, the first pharaohs of Egypt. The people of the A-Group and the C-Group interred their dead in pit graves lined with stone. Pottery and cosmetic articles were placed in the graves with the bodies, perhaps because it was thought that such objects would be useful in the afterlife.

By 1550 a series of kings with their capital at Kerma ruled Nubia. In contrast to the cultures of the A- and C-Groups, these kings were interred in huge round tombs, and hundreds of their retainers were killed and buried with them, perhaps to serve as companions or servants in the afterlife. The people of the Kerma culture were skilled at metallurgy, and their thin-walled pottery was sought after. Egypt and Cush, as the Egyptians referred to Nubia during this period (c. 2000–1559), were now engaged in more extensive contact.

Egypt controlled various parts of Nubia from about 1950 to 1000. Forts, trading posts, and temples styled after those of the Egyptians appeared in Cush, and the Nubian ruling class began to worship the Egyptian gods and adopt their hiero-

Fun Fact

At this early stage of history the Egyptians referred to Nubia as Ta Sety, the “Land of the Bow,” because the skill of the Nubian archers was well known.

glyphic writing system. The Egyptians, for their part, significantly increased their material wealth with the gold, ebony, and ivory they took from Nubia, and many of the fabulous treasures found in the tombs of Egyptian kings were made of materials from Nubia.

By 800 the Egyptian Empire had broken down into quarreling petty states. In 747 the Egyptian city of Thebes was threatened by northerners, and the Egyptians sought protection from the Nubian king. The Cushite king Piye marched north from his capital at Napata, rescued Thebes, and reunified Egypt. As often happens the invited Cushite armies decided to stay, and Cushite kings reigned over both Nubia and Egypt for the next century. The armies of Assyria ended this era when they invaded Nubia in 663; the Nubian king fled south to his capital at Napata. By 200 the Nubian capital had been moved even farther south to Meroe. During this period (200 B.C.E.–300 C.E.) the kings were still interred in pyramid tombs and constructed temples dedicated to both Nubian and Egyptian gods in a fused Egyptian-Roman-African style. Sometimes called Nubia’s Meroitic Period, many scholars regard it as the high point of the empire’s history.

By 250 C.E. the culture of Nubia had been radically altered, perhaps because new groups (the X-Group) had moved into the Nile Valley, and the Meroitic era gave way to the Ballana period (250–550). The pyramid tombs previously favored by Nubian kings were replaced by the great tumulus burials of the Ballana kings, who were joined in their death by sacrificed retainers, horses, camels, and donkeys. In the seventh century Nubia was converted to Christianity. Because of the skill of Nubian archers, the people of Nubia were able to resist forced conversion to Islam until 1400.

In 1821 the Egyptian army, sent by Muhammad Ali (c. 1769–1849), crushed the Sudanese resistance, and Sudan was forced give up Coptic Christianity under Islamic Egyptian rule. However, Egyptian efforts to extend their rule into the southern part of Sudan prompted a strong revolt led by Muhammad Ahmad (1844–85), who claimed to be a Mahdi, “the one guided by divinity.” Egyptian moves to penetrate the southern part of Sudan proved futile, and the Egyptians were ultimately forced to abandon their plan to conquer the region. After Mahdi’s death, Khalifa Abdullah, a Sudanese tribal leader, took up the cause of Mahdi’s resistance. A series of battles were fought between the Mahdists and the English, who now controlled Egypt. Eventually, an Anglo-Egyptian force led by Herbert Kitchener (1850–1916) was successful in destroying the power of the Mahdists, and the region fell to the Anglo-Egyptian forces.

After centuries of foreign rule, Sudan gained its independence on January 1, 1956. Post-independence, the country was constantly disrupted with coups by military rulers. The biggest irony of Sudan’s era of coups was the experience of Colonel Muhammad Gaafur al-Nimeiry (b. 1930), who led a bloodless coup in 1969 against the incumbent president. President Nimeiry’s oppressive policies, in turn, generated another revolution, and President Nimeiry was himself ousted in a coup led by the Sudanese People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) in 1985.

The numerous changes of regime took their toll on the people of Sudan. Violent fights between Muslims and Christians occurred frequently, and by the early 21st century Sudan had become a haven for international terrorists. Sudan’s economy had been crippled by the numerous sanctions imposed by world organizations. The country that once suffered at the hands of foreigners continued to suffer at its own hands. The Darfur region suffered tragically. The war there between progovernment militia and

Nubian Queens

Throughout the history of Nubia, women were more important culturally and politically than they were in other cultures of the time. And although the Nubians ended up adopting the gods and goddesses worshipped by the Egyptians, there was one major difference: The Egyptians placed the Sun God Ra at the center of their spiritual universe, but the Nubians were devoted followers of Isis, the queen of all the goddesses. This emphasis on the female element in their spirituality may explain why, in the course of its history, Nubia had 10 queens who reigned in their own right. And there were six others who, although they ruled with their husbands, were

still regarded as important figures in the country’s politics. These queens were called *gore* (“ruler”) and *kandake*, which means “queen mother.”

The central role of queens in the political structure of Nubia can be traced to early Cushite traditions, and Queen Amanirenas illustrates the power these women wielded. In 24 B.C.E., when Rome ruled Egypt, it was common practice for Nubia to raid Egypt. On one such occasion Kandake Amanirenas joined the party. When the Romans challenged the Nubians, the *kandake* led the army into battle. After defeating the Romans she showed the low esteem she had for them by vandalizing a statue of Augustus Caesar and carrying the head back to Nubia as a trophy.

rebels killed tens of thousands and displaced some two million more.

A predominantly Islamic nation, Sudan is also home to a significant number of Christians and non-Arabs, who live in the southern part of the country. The decision to make Arabic the official language of Sudan and the imposition of the Islamic Sharia Law by the present government has met with strong opposition from the non-Muslim and non-Arabic speaking population, and plunged the country into an era of more bloodshed.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in North Africa, the Republic of Sudan is bordered on the North by Egypt and the Red Sea; on the east, by Eritrea and Ethiopia; on the south, by Kenya, Uganda, Congo, and the Central African Republic; and on the west, by Chad and Libya. Topographically Sudan is dominated by plains and plateaus. The streams passing through the country meet the two tributaries of the river Nile—the Blue Nile and the White Nile—which flow through Sudan. The confluence of these rivers north of Khartoum forms the river Nile.

The northern part of Sudan receives very little rainfall, and dust storms are common. The central part of Sudan, however, receives enough rainfall to sustain agricultural activities. Nevertheless desert storms and droughts wreak major havoc throughout the region.

❁ ECONOMY

Agriculture is the backbone of the Sudanese economy, and crude oil is a major revenue generator. However, the economy has suffered immensely due to a string of droughts and ongoing conflict in the region. The government is faced with the daunting task of framing sound economic policies that will bring economic stability to the country. Agriculture remains Sudan's most important sector of the economy, employing 80 percent of the workforce and contributing 39 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP). Most farms, however, rely on rain and are thus vulnerable to drought.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Sudan is home to more than 600 tribes and 147 languages. Based on lifestyle and culture, the people of Sudan are classified as Northerners, Westerners, and Southerners. Northerners, who live in the northern part of Sudan, are predominantly Muslim (most of them belong to the Sunni sect), speak Arabic, and adhere to Arab culture. The inhabitants of central Sudan are referred to as Westerners and are also mainly Muslim. Agriculture is their main source of livelihood, and most of them are employed as agricultural laborers or farmers. (The inhabitants of central

Muhammad Ahmad, Mahdi

Muhammad Ahmad lived in Sudan under Anglo-Egyptian rule during the second half of the 19th century. He claimed to be a Mahdi, one graced by divinity, and led an army of believers to fight against the Egyptian occupation. He modified the diktats (harsh decrees) of Islam and called off the pilgrimage to Mecca, which every Muslim is required to undertake once in his or her lifetime, for Sudanese Muslims during the period of the struggle. For the duration of the struggle he said it was every Sudanese Muslim's obligation to stay and fight against the nonbelievers.

Sudan are known as Westerners because they migrated from West Africa.)

The Southerners, as the name suggests, live in the southern part of the country. Mostly Sudanic and Nilotic people, they maintain their traditional indigenous beliefs. Southern Sudan is also home to the country's Christian population. People speak the Nilotic language and are farmers. An ethnic stronghold, the region is home to Bari, Dinka, Shilluk, and other indigenous tribes. Almost 80 percent of the Sudanese population lives in villages and small towns. Women live a life full of restrictions and are expected to perform their traditional duties (raising children, looking after the house, and the like).

❁ CUISINE

A staple of the diet of Sudan is bread called *kissra*, which is made from corn or *durra* (a type of sorghum) and is eaten with stew. *Niamiya* and *miris* are the favorite stews of Sudan. The basic stew is made of dried onions, spices, dried meat, and peanut butter. *Elmaraara* and *umfitit* are the country's favorite appetizers. They are made from parts of the sheep's body such as the liver, stomach, and lungs to which peanut butter, onions, and salt are added. These appetizers are consumed raw.

Soups are important in the Sudanese diet. A special soup made out of the hoofs of sheep or cattle is known as *kawari* and is very popular. *Elmussalaammiya* is another popular soup, which is made of flour, spices, liver, and dates. *Moukbbaza* (banana paste) is the favorite dish in eastern Sudan. Milk and other dairy products play a vital role in the diet of the Westerners.

Fruit beverages such as *karkadai*, *aradaib*, *gud-daim*, and *tabaldi* are immensely popular in Sudan. During the holy month of Ramadan, *bilumur* is the preferred drink and is made from corn flour and spices.

Fun Fact

The word *sudan* is derived from the Arabic word, *Bilad al-Sudan*, which means, "the land of the blacks."

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 1

Fun Fact

The Arabic name for the White Nile River is Bahr Al Abyad, and for the Blue Nile, Bahr al-Azraq. The rivers are so named because of the color of their water.

Independence for the people of Sudan is greatly valued since the country was under foreign occupation for millennia. The Egyptians ruled over Sudan from as early as 2000 B.C.E. After the Egyptians came the British, who made Sudan a British Protectorate in the 19th century. Sudan became a sovereign republic on January 1, 1956, after gaining independence from Egypt and Britain.

On this day, all public and private institutions are closed. The day is marked with official speeches and patriotic songs commemorating the sacrifices made by the people of Sudan during their struggle for freedom.

❁ UPRISING DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 6

Uprising Day is celebrated to commemorate the coup that restored power to the people of Sudan.

On April 6, 1985, after suffering for years under the oppressive regime of the then-president Muhammad Gaafur al-Nimeiry, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) started a popular uprising in Khartoum. A bloodless coup followed, President Nimeiry was overthrown, and an interim government was handed the reins of the country.

❁ MAY REVOLUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 25

Fun Fact

Consumption of pork and shellfish by Muslims is strictly prohibited according to Islamic law, and Sudanese Muslims abide by it.

May Revolution Day is celebrated in commemoration of the successful 1969 coup led by Colonel Muhammad Gaafur al-Nimeiry. After assuming power, he passed a directive banning all political parties and managed a bloodless conclusion to an extremely bloody civil war by signing a peace agreement. Although Nimeiry became a tyrant and was himself overthrown, the May Revolution is still commemorated because it was an important watershed event in the nation's history.

Religious Holidays

❁ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

El am Hejir marks the first day of the Islamic calendar and the first month is called Muharram. It is believed that on this day in 622 C.E., Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina (which is about 200 miles to the north of Mecca) with his family and followers. The Muslim calendar starts from this date.

Sudanese Muslims celebrate this day by wearing new clothes. People visit friends and family to wish them a happy new year.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

❁ MOULOU

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

Mouloud, also called Mulid al-Nabi or Mawlid al-Nabi, commemorates the anniversary of the birth of Muhammad and falls in the third month of the Islamic year. In most parts of Africa, the festival is called Mouloud, but the Sudanese call it Mulid al-Nabi. Sudanese Muslims offer prayers in honor of the Islam's prophet and talk about his life and teachings.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOU

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr, or the Feast of Fast-Breaking, marks the end of Ramadan, Islam's holiest month. Muslims worldwide observe a month-long daily fast that begins every day at dawn and ends at dusk. They believe that observing this fast builds a stronger spirit. Consumption of water and food is strictly prohibited during daylight hours for the entire month of Ramadan. After sunset, families break the fast with a special family meal called *fa-tur*. The Koran forbids fasting on this day.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijah, the 12th or pilgrimage month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, the Feast of Sacrifice, is celebrated in honor of Ibrahim's (Abraham's) readiness to obey

God's command and to sacrifice his own son. Just as Ibrahim was about to kill his son, however, God replaced the child with a goat. On this day sheep are offered as sacrifices, and the meat is distributed among the poor and needy as well as family, friends, and relatives. In addition, the holy pilgrimage, or hajj, takes place in this month. The Koran requires all Muslims to make this journey at least once in his or her lifetime if it is financially and physically feasible to do so. The pilgrimage to Mecca is the fifth pillar of Islam's Five Pillars of faith.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is celebrated all over the world to commemorate the birth of Jesus. Sudanese Christians attend church on Christmas Eve and decorate their homes. Christmas carols are sung, and the life and teachings of Jesus are showcased through special prayer services and theatrical plays. For Christmas families share a special meal.

Before the military junta came to power, Sudanese Christians and Muslims lived peacefully, celebrating each other's festivals. In fact on the birthday of Muhammad (Mouloud) and on Christmas and Easter, special celebrations took place in the streets of Sudan, adding to the festive atmosphere. Special sweets were distributed, and the whole of Sudan wore a holiday look. In the 21st century Christian holidays are low-key affairs while Mouloud is celebrated with the same zest as before.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Rites of Passage

BIRTH

Midwives are an integral part of Sudanese culture. Sudanese women depend on them for prenatal care as well as ensuring a safe childbirth. *Geem*, the Dinka tribe's word for "midwife," means "the receiver of the gifts of God."

When a male child is born in Sudan, his father (or another male relative) whispers the *adhan* (the Muslim call to prayer) in the child's right ear: "There is no God but Allah and the prophet Muhammad is Allah's Messenger." These words resonate with the fundamental belief of every Muslim, making it one of the most important Islamic ceremonies, and one performed religiously by all Sudanese Muslims.

Tabneek is another ceremony of great significance, during which a respected member of the family gently rubs a softened date or honey on the newborn child's upper palate. By doing so, it is



Sudanese Muslims perform Friday prayers during Ramadan in Khartoum (AP Photo/Abd Raouf)

believed that the good qualities of the respected family member are passed on to the child. This is the first thing fed to the newborn immediately after birth.

A ceremony called *Aqiqah* is performed on the seventh day after the child is born. A sheep is offered as a sacrifice to thank Allah for his kindness and for blessing the family with a child. The meat is distributed among the poor and the needy.

COMING OF AGE

Circumcision of males and females, which marks the acceptance of the child as an adult, is customary in Sudan. This age-old practice is still prevalent in modern-day Sudan and is scrupulously followed by Sudanese Muslims. For boys circumcision is performed either at birth or when the child is at the threshold of manhood. Muslims consider this a hygienic practice, and it has deep religious significance throughout the Muslim world.

Female "circumcision," the genital cutting ritual often referred to by critics as female genital mutilation (FGM), is performed to mark a girl's transition into womanhood. FGM, in particular excision and infibulation, is widely practiced in northern Sudan and to a much lesser extent in the south. It is estimated that 89 percent of the women in Sudan have had some form of FGM done to them.

Vigorous attempts have been made to eradicate FGM in Sudan. It was the first African country to outlaw FGM, starting with the 1946 Penal Code, which prohibited infibulation but permitted sunna, the less destructive form of FGM. The law was ratified again in 1957, when Sudan became independent. In 1991 the government affirmed its commitment to the eradication of the traditional form of FGM. The 1993 Penal Code, however, does not mention FGM, leaving its status unclear.

DINKA RITUALS OF INITIATION

The Dinka tribe has its own initiation ceremony. At the onset of youth, the boy becomes a *parapuol*, “the one who is no longer milking (cattle).” The initiation ceremony begins with the etching of a V-shaped scar on the youth’s forehead after which he is sent to the camp in the plains along with the other initiates. These young initiates are now warrior-protectors, who have to protect their cattle from the wild animals for a stipulated time period.

The initiation ceremony begins in the harvest season and involves singing of the clan’s traditional songs by the initiates on the night before the main ceremony. The next day the boys sit in a row with their legs crossed, waiting for the initiator to engrave the scar pattern of their clan on their foreheads. They are expected to endure the pain of this scarring in silence as screaming is considered a sign of weakness. After the ceremony the boy is proclaimed a man and a warrior, and is deemed ready for marriage. Even today the Dinka tribe follows this tradition.

❁ MARRIAGE

In Sudan different wedding customs are followed in different regions. The most common wedding ceremony is that of the Sudanese Muslims. It begins with the bridegroom ceremony wherein the bride’s mother offers a garland of flowers to the groom in a ceremony called *umbul-umbul*. She whispers the traditional *keris*, or secret message, asking him to keep his spirits high while working relentlessly for the betterment of his family. Led by a procession of women holding candles, the groom sits next to the bride under an umbrella, which symbolizes respect. Then, as a mark of respect and expressing gratitude toward their parents, the groom and the bride bend and kiss the knees of their parents, seeking their forgiveness and blessings. They also promise to serve them for the rest of their lives. This ceremony is called *sungkem* and is performed in front of a fountain to draw a parallel between the perennial flow of love of parents and the continuous flow of water in the fountain.

Then the *nincak endog*, or the egg-breaking ceremony, takes place in front of their house. The bride waits at the door with her back to the house while the groom stands outside the door, facing her. Their relatives burn seven broomsticks and throw them away to discard the seven bad habits that are believed to ruin a marriage. After the egg is broken, the groom is proclaimed as the rightful master of the house. The bride cleans her husband’s feet using water from the *kendi* or an earthen jug and then breaks the *kendi*. She crosses over a log and vows obedience to her husband.

After the marriage ceremony, the bride and groom are blessed by their relatives, and *sawer* (coins, candy, and turmeric rice) is thrown at the couple to bless them with happiness and good fortune.

❁ DEATH

The Egyptians had a significant influence on burial customs in ancient Sudan. This region was part of the Cushite kingdom ruled by the kings of Meroe. Despite the fall of the Egyptian Empire in the 12th century B.C.E., the ancient Egyptian burial customs continued to be practiced until the third century C.E. Archaeological sites in the ancient city of Meroe include a number of pyramids. However, these lack the grandeur of their Egyptian counterparts.

In modern-day Sudan, which is predominantly Muslim, the dead are buried in accordance with the rules laid down in the Koran.

Further Reading

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Suriname

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Northern part of South America, bordering the North Atlantic Ocean, between French Guiana and Guyana
Size	63,039 sq. mi.
Capital City	Paramaribo
Flag Description	Suriname's flag has five horizontal bands of green (top, double width), white, red (quadruple width), white, and green (double width); there is a large, yellow, five-pointed star centered in the wide red band.
Independence	November 25, 1975 (from the Netherlands)
Population	438,144 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional democracy
Nationality	Surinamese
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Asian (Hindustanis, also known locally as "East Indians," 37%), Creole (31%); Javanese (15%)
Major Language(s)	Dutch (official); English (widely spoken); Sranang Tongo (Surinamese, sometimes called Taki-Taki, is the native language of the Creoles and much of the younger population and is the lingua franca among others); Hindustani (a dialect of Hindi); Javanese
Major Religion(s)	Hindu (27%); Protestant (predominantly Moravian, 25%); Roman Catholic (23%); Muslim (20%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Emancipation Day, July 1; Independence Day, November 25; Boxing Day, December 26

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Virtually all the prehistoric sites excavated in Suriname to date indicate extensive contact and influences moving east from the Venezuela-Orinoco area over long periods of time. Twenty-nine sites in southern Suriname, in the Sipaliwini savannah, have been identified, primarily places where stone tools were made using quartz and rhyolite. The points, knives, and scrapers are comparable to the Las Casitas complex of Venezuela, dated at 9,000 to 8,000 years ago. Both oval and round hammerstones—used to split the artifacts from the cores—were found in the stone debris, evidence that these were stone-working sites. The Sipaliwini people lived on the savannahs in

small camps and procured their food by hunting, gathering, and fishing. They hunted small game with bows and arrows. Following the Sipaliwini culture, the archaeological record indicates that no one lived in the region of Suriname for several thousand years, although it is also possible that the inhabitants simply left no evidence that has survived.

Around 4,000 B.C.E., the South American Tropical Forest culture replaced the Hunter-Gatherer culture. Several inter-related developments associated with its appearance happened fairly quickly: The major dietary element was cassava (or manioc), which was produced by shifting cultivation; processing the bitter cassava required a sophisticated ceramics technology to produce pottery containers for storing cassava products (*cassiri*, cassava beer, for example), a *matapí* (a plaited press), a grater, and a griddle. The partial conversion to agriculture forced other changes: People lived in villages more perma-

Orinoco River

The Orinoco, 1,330 miles long, is one of the longest rivers in South America. Starting on the Venezuelan-Brazilian border, in the Cerro Delgado Chalbaud, in the Parima range, the Orinoco meanders through Venezuela, making a wide arc, first flowing southwest, then west, north, and finally northeast, where it drains into the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Paria. A notable feature of the Orinoco river system is the Casiquiare Canal: Initially an arm of the Orinoco, the Casiquiare Canal flows into the Rio Negro, a tributary of the Amazon, forming a natural canal between the Orinoco and Amazon Rivers. The river is navigable for much of its length, and archaeologists posit that the canal served as a major cultural link between Amerindians in Venezuela and Suriname. The Orinoco, as well as the Amazon River, is inhabited by the Amazon River dolphin.

nently; their homes were better constructed than the dwellings of the hunter-gatherers; and these villages were established where the land favored cultivating cassava.

Around 1,000 (or perhaps earlier) an agrarian people inhabited the Central Orinoco region of Venezuela. This culture is distinguished by its pottery: red and white painting; characteristic handles; and figures shaped like humans and other animals attached to the pottery (*adornos*). This culture is called Saladoid after the Venezuelan town where the site is located, Saladero. The Saladoid pottery tradition is found in a vast area stretching from the Central Orinoco to Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic over a long period of time. At sites in Suriname, one a village of slash-and-burn farmers, ceramics characteristic of the Saladoid tradition have been found. Two later pottery styles of the Orinoco-Venezuela region—Barrancoid and Arauquinoid—are also found in Suriname.

The oldest site in Suriname is Kaurikreek, a village situated in West Suriname on a creek with the same name. Kaurikreek is Suriname's oldest ceramic site and evidence that Suriname had a bona fide Tropical Forest culture long before the current era began. The Kaurikreek site has produced two charcoal datings: one about 3,600 years old (c. 2400–1600 B.C.E.) and another about 2,500 years old (c. 800–500 B.C.E.). The pottery has appliqué decorations in geometrical patterns, made by pressing thin strips of clay onto the clay of the vessel wall before it was fired.

Between 300 C.E. and 1000 freshwater conditions occurred in the coastal plain, and a group of Amerindians developed a complex system of permanent agriculture to grow cassava. They built up clay mounds for both their villages and their cassava fields, creating all the elements for permanent cultivation. Around 300 a group raised two mounds for villages in Suriname, where early-Mabaruma pottery

of the Barrancoid Tradition has been found. This community remained on these mounds until around 600, when it appears that they either abandoned them or were forced to flee. Both of the mounds were deserted, and new mound-settlements were constructed farther west. A very different Venezuelan pottery style—the Hertenrits style—has been found at these more recent mounds. Hertenrits pottery belongs to the Arauquinoid style, not the Barrancoid.

Although many of the cultures identified in Suriname came from the west, a couple of centuries prior to European colonization (1492) a group arrived in Suriname that came from the southeast, probably around the lower Amazon. These people were slash-and-burn farmers. Their pottery is referred to as Koriabo style and dates to about 1200. The Koriabo people dispersed throughout Suriname, although more of their settlements are found in the northern part of the country than in the southern. Only one area of Suriname was not inhabited by the Koriabo, the western coastal area. Koriabo sites have been found in the interior of western Suriname and along the entire coast of the Guyanas as far as west Suriname. This geographical distribution may mean that the Hertenrits people were so strong that they stopped the westward expansion of the Koriabo people along the coast.

While the prehistory of Suriname is characterized by three food procurement systems—hunter-gatherers, farmers with shifting cultivation, and farmers with permanent cultivation—in colonial times there were only Amerindians who engaged in shifting cultivation, with cassava as their main crop. No pottery of any prehistoric group has been connected with the pottery of the Amerindians from the colonial period, including that of the Koriabo, who arrived in Central and East Suriname a couple of centuries prior to 1492. It seems likely that the permanent agrarian cultures were already declining when the Koriabo people arrived in the 13th or 14th century to displace them.

When the prehistoric period ended and by the time the first Europeans appeared, the Late Hertenrits culture had a relatively powerful position, and the Koriabo people controlled the remainder of the coastal region. The Spanish came to the region in 1593 but did not settle in Suriname, since it did not look like a lucrative prospect to them. The first Europeans to settle in Suriname were the Dutch, around 1602. The Dutch West India Company, which came to control the region and exploit it, was founded in 1621. In 1650 the English entered the region and developed sugar and tobacco plantations along the west bank of the Suriname River. The settlement they established is now Paramaribo. In 1667, the Dutch and British signed the Treaty of Breda whereby the Dutch traded New Amsterdam (New York) to the English in exchange for their territory in Suriname. They named their new colony Netherlands Guiana.

The Dutch brought slaves from Africa to work on the plantations. The slaves were treated brutally,

and many fled the plantations and settled in the interior of the country. The Dutch called these Maroon, or Bush Negro, settlements.

When France annexed the Netherlands during the Napoleonic Wars in 1799, the British seized the opportunity and reoccupied Suriname. But when Napoleon (1769–1821) was defeated in 1816, they returned the territory to the Dutch. Finally in 1863 the Dutch abolished slavery and after 1870 brought in laborers from India, China, Portugal, and Java in place of slaves.

In 1948 the region was integrated into the Kingdom of the Netherlands and in 1950, the Dutch granted home rule to Suriname. Finally after a spate of rioting, complete independence was granted in 1975. A coup in 1980 established military rule in Suriname, and Lieutenant Colonel Désiré Bouterse (b. 1945) became the military ruler. In 1982 when soldiers killed 15 journalists and a number of politicians and union officials, however, the Netherlands stopped all aid to Suriname. This decision severely damaged the economy of the newly independent nation.

Eventually in 1988 democracy was restored, and the insurgency decreased. A peace treaty between the government and the guerrilla groups was signed in 1992. A series of presidents followed, but none of their different policies slowed the plummeting currency. Finally in January 2004, Suriname changed its currency from the guilder to the dollar.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in the northern part of South America, Suriname is surrounded by French Guiana, Guyana, and Brazil. It is the smallest independent country in South America. The Surinamese terrain is characterized by fertile coastal areas in the north and tropical forests and savannah grasslands in the south. The two important rivers of Suriname are the Marowijne and the Corantijn. The highest point in the region is Juliantop at 4,220 feet above sea level.

Suriname enjoys a tropical climate with no major variations in temperature throughout the year. The temperature ranges from 70°F to 93°F. There are two rainy seasons: from April to July and from November to January. Although hurricanes are not a threat in the region, Suriname is prone to *sibibusi* (which means “forest broom”), heavy thundershowers.

Suriname has a wide variety of flora including several species of orchids, as well as flowers such as *fajalobi* (passionate love) and *beliconia*. Fauna are represented by blue poison frogs, monkeys, hummingbirds, macaws, deer, wild boars, anteaters, armadillos, howler monkeys, and the capybara.

❁ ECONOMY

Suriname is struggling to stabilize its economy, which has been marred by high inflation due to bad eco-

omic policies. With the assistance of the Dutch government, the Surinamese government has introduced a number of progrowth fiscal policies aimed at liberalizing the economy, encouraging privatization of industries, and developing the gold and other mining sectors. The bauxite industry is the main revenue generator for the Surinamese economy; it constitutes 70 percent of the country's export earnings and contributes 15 percent to the nation's gross domestic product (GDP). Some of the export items of Suriname include alumina, aluminum, rice, crude oil, shrimp and fish, bananas, and lumber.

Fun Fact

During the English-Dutch negotiations, the English commissioners offered to return New Amsterdam in exchange for getting back their sugar factories on the coast of Suriname. The Dutch, however, declined the offer.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Suriname is a melting pot of cultures, a mixed inheritance from its past as a colony. The nation is home to Hindustanis (Indians who migrated to Suriname in the 19th century), Creoles (people with mixed—black-and-white—ancestry), Amerindians, Maroons (descendants of Africans brought to Suriname as slaves), Chinese, and some Europeans. Dutch is the official language of Suriname, although English is also widely spoken. Hindustani (a dialect of an Indian language), Javanese, Djuka and Saramaccan (both English-based Creoles), and Sranang Tongo (also known as Taki-Taki, a native language of Creoles) are also spoken in Suriname. Around 48 percent of the population is Christian (Roman Catholic and Protestant), while the remaining citizens adhere to Hinduism, Islam, and indigenous religious beliefs.

Suriname is famous for its *kaseko* music, a fusion of traditional folk and popular styles of music of the Americas, Africa, and Europe. Songs are sung solo or in a choir, and there are also “call and response” songs that require interaction between the main singer and the audience. Musical instruments such as snare drums, trumpets, saxophones, and *skratji* (a large drum) are used. The Surinamese also enjoy jazz, calypso, rock, and reggae.

Maroon women are very skillful in the art of making bowls and utensils from the branches of the calabash tree, which bears hard-shelled, gourdlike fruit on its trunk and main branches.

❁ CUISINE

Although Surinamese cuisine is primarily African in nature, the influences of Creole, Indian, and Chinese cuisines are also evident. Some of the tradi-

Fun Fact

The capybara is the largest rodent in the world. It has short limbs, a vestigial tail, and often grows longer than four feet. It is semi-aquatic.



The Amerindian culture group Waiono prays in its native language near the Kwakoe monument in downtown Paramaribo during a celebration to commemorate the abolition of slavery. (AP Photo/Edward Troon)

tional dishes include *bakkeljauw* (salted fish), *ebi* (salted and dried shrimp), *stfoes* (a dish made from meat and fish), *zoute vlees* (a salted beef brisket), *pom* (casseroles of fish, meat, and vegetables spiced with nutmeg, pimento, and laurel), *pinda soep met tom-tom* (peanut soup), *kouseband* (a dish made with French beans), *aloo tarkari* (potatoes made in the Indian style), *spitskool* (oxheart cabbage), sweet potatoes, and cassava (tapioca).

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, and is widely celebrated as New Year's Day. Celebrations take place all over the world, beginning on December 31 (New Year's Eve). In Suriname elaborate parties are held on Owruyari (the local name for New Year's Eve) throughout the country. In the capital city of Paramaribo, street parties and cultural events, as well as artistic performances, are organized by the Surifesta Foundation, the body that has been put in charge of arranging New Year's Eve parties by the government of Suriname, and turning them into tourist attractions. Besides good music and great food, people are treated to a colorful display of fireworks to announce the arrival of the new year.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day and Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to celebrate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. Although the AFL's strike was postponed, the international holiday was celebrated anyway.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ EMANCIPATION DAY

Observed by: General public
Observed on: July 1

Emancipation Day, also known as Freedom Day, commemorates the abolition of slavery by the Dutch on July 1, 1863. This day is also known as Ketu Koti ("breaking of the chains of slavery") among blacks in Suriname. Descendants of the slaves celebrate this day with great joy and enthusiasm, and special parties are planned. Exhibits, cultural events, and official speeches are the highlights of Emancipation Day events held throughout Suriname. Many people also share stories with the younger generation that narrate the experiences of their forefathers who were slaves to emphasize the importance and value of freedom.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 25

On November 25, 1975, Suriname obtained independence from the Netherlands and declared itself a republic. Suriname was a Dutch colony that had been called Netherlands Guiana since its occupation by the Dutch in the 1600s. In 1799 British forces occupied the region when Napoleon conquered the Kingdom of Netherlands during the Napoleonic Wars. However, after an Anglo-Dutch Treaty was signed between Britain and the Netherlands in 1816, Suriname once again became part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and remained a Dutch colony until its independence on November 25, 1975, after peaceful negotiations between the Surinamese and the Dutch government.

Independence Day celebrations are held throughout the country, but the biggest displays take place in the capital city of Paramaribo. The

president of the country unfurls the national flag and presides over the celebrations and military parades. He also hosts a dinner for foreign dignitaries who attend the Independence Day celebrations. Cultural events such as folk dances, folk songs, and folk theater are integral parts of the celebrations.

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 26

Boxing Day, also observed as St. Stephen's Day by Catholics, is celebrated on the day after Christmas on December 26. There are several accounts to explain this tradition. In one version, Boxing Day was first celebrated as the day when Catholic churches opened the alms boxes used to collect money for charitable purposes and distributed the contents to the poor of the parishes. Another version states that, because the household staff in the United Kingdom worked on Christmas Day, they were given the day off on December 26 to celebrate with their friends and families. As the staff was leaving, their masters would put money in boxes and present the boxes to them.

Most of the countries that were once under British rule observe this holiday. Suriname is among them, because it was under British rule for a brief period between 1799 and 1816.

Locally, December 26 is also known as *tweede kerstdag* (the second day of Christmas). The Surinamese visit family members, friends, and neighbors on this day and exchange gifts and greetings as well.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Religious Holidays

❁ HOLI

Observed by: Hindus
Observed on: Full Moon day in Phalguna (or Falgun), the 12th month of the Hindu lunisolar calendar

Holi, the Festival of Colors or Phagwah (also Fagwah), is an annual Hindu spring festival that is celebrated over a two-day period in either March or April of the Gregorian calendar. It is the most exciting Hindu festival and is also called the Festival of Colors because people throw colored paper and water on each other as part of their celebrations.

The origin of the festival can be traced to Hindu mythology. A demon king named Hiranyakashyap was granted a boon by Lord Brahma (one of the Hindu Trinity, the creator of the universe) that made him almost invincible. Assuming he would never be killed and would live for eternity, he proclaimed him-

self god and banned worship of any Hindu deities. However, his young son Prahlad was an ardent worshipper of Lord Vishnu (the second member of the Hindu Trinity, the caretaker of the universe) and, although he respected his father, he refused to worship him. This angered Hiranyakashyap, who then passed a death sentence on his own son. However, his attempts to kill his son failed because Lord Vishnu came to Prahlad's rescue each time. Eventually Hiranyakashyap sought the assistance of his sister Holika. She had been granted a boon by Lord Brahma that protected her against fire. But Lord Brahma had also warned her that if she used this boon for evil purposes the fire would destroy her.

Holika did not pay attention to Brahma's warning and decided to use her boon to help her brother get rid of Prahlad. On a full Moon night in the month of spring, Holika sat on a pyre with Prahlad in her lap and asked Hiranyakashyap's soldiers to set the pyre on fire. Lord Vishnu's blessings protected Prahlad, and he escaped unhurt, but Holika perished in the flames. Holi is celebrated among the Hindus as the victory of good over evil.

On the night before Holi, a huge bonfire is lit (symbolic of the burning of Holika), and devotees sing traditional songs while moving around the bonfire in circles. On Holi Surinamese Hindus wish each other "Shubh Holi" ("Good Holi") or "Holi Mubarak" ("Happy Holi") and throw colored powder, water, and even balloons filled with water on each other. They distribute sweets among their neighbors on this day and sing traditional songs. Non-Hindus also join in the celebrations

See also Volume III: HINDUISM; HOLI

❁ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Last Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, commemorating the last week of Jesus' mortal life. Jesus Christ was the prophet of Christianity, and Christians believe him to be the second person of the Holy Trinity: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The day is as much about Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem as it is about the beginning of his journey to the Cross. His arrival in Jerusalem was indeed the way to the Cross.

After two of his disciples had fetched a donkey for him to ride, they placed their clothes on it to make a comfortable seat. The disciples then cut branches and covered the path, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the prediction of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. People welcomed him by waving palm and olive branches and strewed garments and branches on the road. There were different perceptions at work: Jesus rode in on a donkey,

Fun Fact

Dawet, made from lemongrass and coconut milk, is a popular beverage in Suriname.

the humble entry of a peaceful nature by a spiritual king; the people of Jerusalem welcomed him with palm and olive branches and the laying of garments in his path because they wanted a worldly king to defeat the Romans.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Last Thursday before Easter

The rituals observed on Maundy Thursday are based on a sequence of events supposed to have occurred during the final meal on this day. First Jesus washed the feet of his disciples; then he announced that he had been betrayed by one of them. The traitor Judas left the table. Finally Jesus instituted the Eucharist: a ritual of consuming bread and wine as symbols of his body and blood, also referred to as Communion in Christian churches. In the Roman Catholic Church, Maundy Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist, the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week, and gives priests an opportunity to prepare for the many rituals associated with Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter. The name Maundy Thursday may be linked to the Latin word *mandatum*, “command,” because Jesus commanded his Apostles to observe the ritual now called the Eucharist.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent. It is observed in most parts of the world to remember the Crucifixion of Jesus. Some Surinamese observe a fast from Ash Wednesday (first day of Lent), for 40 days up to Good Friday and a partial fast from then until Easter. Some fast only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. In Suriname on Good Friday, people visit their local churches and pray to Jesus, taking inspiration from his life and teachings.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Saturday before Easter

Holy Saturday is the day Jesus lay in the tomb. This was the Sabbath (the Jewish day of rest is Saturday),

and he rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. It is also regarded as the second Sabbath after Creation. The final day of Holy Week, which begins with Palm Sunday and includes Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, it marks the threshold between death and Resurrection, and is a day of silence and contemplation for devout Christians.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus’ Resurrection. For this reason it is sometimes known as Resurrection Day. This day is of utmost importance because the fundamental teaching of Christianity is that Jesus, through his death, freed all his believers from the penalty of sin. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. On Easter entire families gather to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus. They often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to offer prayers. Easter eggs have become associated with the festival because they are symbols of rebirth and regeneration taken from the ancient pagan spring festivals. In Suriname people attend midnight prayer services for Easter and celebrate Jesus’ Resurrection by lighting candles. A festive spirit fills the churches as people sing devotional hymns. Surinamese exchange beautifully decorated Easter eggs and visit friends and family members.

The first Monday after Lent is celebrated as Easter Monday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr, the Muslim Feast of Fast-Breaking, marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan and the beginning of much-awaited festivities. Muslims all over the world observe a strict, month-long, sunrise to sunset fast during the holy month of Ramadan, and Eid al-Fitr marks the end of the fast and abstinence. On this day Muslims in Suriname wake up early in the morning and attend local mosques to offer prayers to Allah on this auspicious day. They thank Allah for his benevolence and exchange greetings.

All Surinamese Muslims distribute food, money, or clothing among the poor and needy on this day. Muslims visit their friends and family members and are also greeted by non-Muslims on this day. Chil-

dren receive gifts and money from their elders and feast on sweets and candies. The Koran forbids fasting on this day.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world, because it is the day chosen by the Catholic Church to celebrate the birth of Jesus, whom they believe was the Son of God. Christmas celebrations in Suriname begin on December 6, when children wait for Goedoe Pa (“Dearest Daddy,” or the Surinamese Santa Claus) to give them presents. Post-independence, children in Suriname are taught that Goedoe Pa is a black man who, along with his black servants, travels throughout Suriname and delivers presents to children if they have behaved well in the past year. Children leave cookies and milk for Goedoe Pa and his servants, and in the morning they find gifts with poems attached to them.

During Dutch rule the legend of Sinterklaas, or Santa Claus, was very much a part of Surinamese culture and a white man dressed as Santa Claus greeted young children and distributed gifts. Children were told that Sinterklaas had a host of black servants who worked for him. However, in an attempt to create a sense of pride among the ethnic black Surinamese, the story was modified, and Goedoe Pa replaced Sinterklaas, although the essence of the celebration remains the same.

On Christmas Eve the Surinamese decorate their Christmas trees and place the presents underneath. Catholic families attend a midnight services and then a special Christmas Mass on Christmas Day to celebrate the birth of Jesus. On Christmas Day children open their presents and dine on Christmas cakes, sweets, and candies. Also, friends, neighbors, and relatives join in the celebrations, and gifts and greetings are exchanged. Special Christmas parties are also held, and Surinamese Christians and non-Christians celebrate Christmas as a united community.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ MISS ALIDA BEAUTY PAGEANT

Observed in: Paramaribo

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 30

The Miss Alida Beauty Pageant is an annual African-Surinamese cultural event that takes place on June

30, a day before Emancipation Day, in the capital city of Paramaribo.

The event is dedicated to the memory of a Maroon girl named Alida, who was extremely beautiful. (A Maroon was a fugitive black slave in the West Indies in the 17th and 18th centuries, or the descendant of such a slave.) While working as a slave in the house of a white owner, her beauty caught the attention of the white man. But the jealous white mistress of the house could not stand the insult of being compared to a black slave girl and killed Alida brutally. After independence, a beauty pageant was started in honor of Alida and was aptly named the Miss Alida Beauty Pageant.

Every year African-Surinamese women participate in the pageant. They are judged by a panel of experts based on their dancing skill, creativity in designing a traditional dress, and storytelling skills.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

In Suriname among ethnic tribes the name of the child is based on the time of birth, the circumstances during birth, and even the place of birth. Also many people name their children after their ancestors to honor them. They believe that, in this manner, their beloved ancestor has come again to live among them as the child.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Bigi jari is a Surinamese ritual that takes place when a person reaches an age that ends with a 0 or a 5 (for example, 10, 20, 25, 35, and so on). *Bigi jari* is a big party thrown by the birthday person on reaching particular ages; all friends and family members are invited. Feasting, singing, and dancing are part of the celebrations, and guests bring birthday presents and flowers for the birthday person.

Among the descendants of the Javanese Muslims of Suriname, when a boy reaches puberty he has to undergo the ritual of circumcision. This ritual is considered important as it helps the boy complete his transition from boyhood to manhood.

Further Reading

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Swaziland

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Southern Africa; between South Africa and Mozambique
Size	6,704 sq. mi.
Capital City	Mbabane
Flag Description	The national flag of Swaziland has three horizontal bands of blue (top), red (triple width), and blue. The red band has yellow edges; in its center are: a large black-and-white shield, two spears, and a staff decorated with feather tassels, all horizontal.
Independence	September 6, 1968 (from United Kingdom)
Population	1,173,900 (2005 est.)
Government	Monarchy
Nationality	Swazi
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Swazi (97%)
Major Language(s)	English (official; government business conducted in English); siSwati (or Swati; official)
Major Religion(s)	Zionist (a blend of Christianity and indigenous ancestral worship; 40%); Roman Catholic (20%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; National Flag Day, April 25; Labor Day, May 1; Birthday of King Sobhuza II, July 22; Reed Dance, August–September; Independence Day, September 6

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Since the continent of Africa is humanity's first homeland, it should not be surprising that archaeologists continue to find evidence of human habitation far back in prehistory. The first discovery of ancient human remains—dating back 100,000 years—in southern Africa occurred in 1960 at Border Cave in the Lebombo Mountains, north of KwaZulu-Natal near Swaziland. In the eastern parts of Swaziland, archaeologists have also discovered human remains that are more than 100,000 years old.

For the last 1,000 years Swaziland has been home to users of the Sotho and Nguni languages. The Bantu-speaking population began migrating south from the central parts of Africa around the 16th century. One clan of the Nguni tribe (a Bantu-speaking people) moved toward the east coast and settled in

areas around modern-day Maputo, now the capital city of Mozambique. It is believed that during this period the Dlamini Dynasty (the ruling family of Swaziland) was founded. Certainly there were chieftains of the Dlamini lineage in the region by the 18th century.

There were frequent clashes between the native tribes and the Nguni, and in the 18th century the Nkosi Dlamini, a subgroup of the Nguni tribe, under the leadership of their chief Ngwane III, were forced to move out of Maputo and eventually settled in the northern parts of Zululand (modern-day South Africa and KwaZulu-Natal Province) in 1750. Between the death of Ngwane III in 1780 and the accession of Sobhuza I Ngwane IV (1795–1836), Ngvudgunye (Zikodze; r. 1780–1815), the father of Sobhuza I, occupied the kingdom's throne. In 1815 Sobhuza I came to power. He faced stiff opposition from the native Zulus and was forced to move farther north, along with his tribe in the 1800s, eventually settling in the Ezulwini Valley. Even today the

valley remains the center of Swazi rituals and royalty.

In the 1840s Mswati II (? 1820–68) assumed power as the new paramount king of the Nguni. He was a ferocious warrior but also a gifted diplomat. He dreamed of building a great kingdom for his people and began raising a powerful army. He waged wars with neighboring tribes and overpowered them. He established Swazi rule in the northwest and stabilized the southern boundaries of his kingdom with the Zulus. However, there were frequent skirmishes between the Zulus and Swazi. Around this time the British had also gained considerable ground in South Africa and were fighting the Zulus in that region. Mswati II took advantage of this and sought British assistance in fighting against their common enemy.

This newfound friendship between the British and the Swazi brought white missionaries, traders, and hunters to the region. Mswati II also leased vast amounts of land to the Europeans; slowly and steadily, the British began exercising considerable control over the mineral resources of the region, as well as having a say in the administrative and security matters of the kingdom.

Following the death of Mswati II, the British established total control over Swaziland in 1877. In 1881 the Swazi, the British, and South African governments reached an agreement over issues relating to independence, governance, and control of the mineral resources, as well as security concerns. The agreement provided that the South African authorities would administer the region, which they did until 1902, when South Africa lost the Second Boer War to the British.

As a result of the Boer War Swaziland was declared a British Protectorate. In 1921 after the reign of Queen Regent Lobatsibeni (r. 1899–1921), who had ruled the country for more than 20 years, King Sobhuza II (r. 1921–68) became the *ngwenyama* (the lion, or king) of Swaziland. In 1944 the British High Commissioner recognized the authority of the king of Swaziland to issue orders

that were legally binding for the Swazi.

After World War II the British wanted to make Swaziland a part of South Africa. However, intensification of racial problems in South Africa forced the British to start preparing Swaziland for independence. In the 1960s political parties mushroomed in the urban areas of Swaziland. Prominent among them was the Imbokodvo National Movement (INM), which began pressing for Swaziland's complete independence. In 1964 in response to these demands, the first legislative elections were held in Swaziland, and the INM was voted into power.

Once in office the INM intensified its demands for complete independence, and in 1966 a constitution was drafted that made Swaziland a constitutional monarchy and granted self-governance to its people. Finally on September 6, 1968, the United Kingdom granted full independence to Swaziland.

Fresh elections were held in Swaziland, and the INM candidates were once again elected. King Sobhuza II, however, dissolved the government on April 12, 1973, on the pretext that the constitution was drafted by the British and, thus, did not reflect the Swazi way of life. In 1979 a new parliament was convened that had leaders mostly appointed by the king, and a new constitution was adopted that vested all authority in the king.

In 1982 following King Sobhuza II's death in 1982, Queen Regent Dzeliwe (r. 1982–83) assumed power. According to Swazi tradition, a king was authorized to have more than one wife. Thus, after Sobhuza's death internal conflicts between Queen Regent Dzeliwe and Queen Regent Ntombi surfaced, which led to the displacement of the former. Queen Regent Ntombi's only son, Prince Makhosetive (Mswazi III), was named heir to the throne of Swaziland. Initially the government was administered by Queen Regent Ntombi with the advice of the supreme traditional advisory body, called the Likoqo. The Likoqo had been the traditional advisor of Swaziland royalty since the beginning of the kingdom. Every decision of the royalty was taken only

Boer Wars

The wars between the British and settlers of Dutch origin (the Boers) living in South Africa were termed the Boer Wars. The First Boer War was fought between 1880 and 1881; the Second Boer War was fought from 1899 to 1902.

The First Boer War, also known as the Transvaal (South African Republic) War, was fought between the British and the Transvaal Boers after the region was annexed by the British in 1877. The war began in 1880, and after initial showdowns between the two forces, a truce was signed in 1881 that gave the

right of self-governance to Boers in Transvaal under British supervision.

The Second Boer War was sparked by the discovery of the largest gold field in the world in Witwatersrand near Pretoria. British and Boer commercial interests clashed, which culminated in a full-fledged war. More than 75,000 lives were lost before the Boers finally surrendered in 1902. The Treaty of Vereeniging was signed by the British and the Boers on May 31, 1902. It ended all hostilities between the two warring factions.

after discussion with the Liqoqo. In 1982 after the death of King Sobhuza II, the Liqoqo voted to support Queen Regent Ntombi and her son Prince Makhosetive. After Queen Regent Ntombi assumed power, however, internal differences grew between her and the Liqoqo over decisions relating to the administration of the kingdom. In October 1985, due to ongoing disputes and differences of opinion with the Liqoqo, Queen Ntombi exercised her power and dismissed leading members of the advisory council.

Finally on April 25, 1986, after her son's return from England, where he had been studying, Prince Makhosetive was enthroned as King Mswazi III. When the prince assumed power, he immediately abolished the Liqoqo due to internal disputes. The kingdom of Swaziland is still ruled by King Mswazi III and his council of ministers. The Public Order Act enacted by the king prohibits political parties, and police permission is required to hold a meeting in Swaziland.

In the early 21st century the country was facing a huge crisis due to a persistent drought in the region that began in 2002. The UN was providing food aid to Swaziland. At the same time, Swaziland was afflicted with the world's highest known rates of HIV/AIDS infection, and the country's average life expectancy at birth was less than 37 years.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The Kingdom of Swaziland (also known as Ngunwane) is a small, landlocked nation, flanked by Mozambique in the east and by the Republic of South Africa to the north, south, and west. The Kingdom of Swaziland is one of the smallest countries in southern Africa. It is named after the Bantu-speaking Swazi tribe, whose members constitute the majority of the population. They derive their name from King Mswazi II, who realized the dream of establishing the kingdom of Swaziland.

Geographically Swaziland is divided into three regions: the Highveld (*veld* is an Afrikaans word that means "vast open space"; it also refers to the high plateau of South Africa that runs across Swaziland as well), the Middleveld, and the Lowveld. The Highveld has an average altitude of 3,937 feet and is situated along the western borders of Swaziland. The capital city of Mbabane is located in the Highveld. The region is home to mountains, rivers, and deep gorges.

The Middleveld is located 2,297 feet above sea level and is the most densely populated region of Swaziland. The commercial and industrial city of Manzini is located in the Middleveld. The Lowveld is 820 feet above sea level and is sparsely populated because, in the past, the region has experienced severe outbreaks of malaria, which, in turn, affected development. Thorn trees and grasslands abound in the Lowveld region.

Emlembe (the place of the spider) is the highest mountain of Swaziland and is located along the

western border of the country in the granite region of Ukhahlamba (the barrier). Piggs Peak is a small town in the northwestern part of Swaziland, which is known for its pine plantations and logging industry. The Lubombo is a mountain ridge that lies along the eastern border. The mountain is broken by the gorges of three rivers. These are the Ngwavuma, the Umbuluzi, and the Usutu, the largest river that flows through Swaziland. The Usutu gorge is also in the lowest point of Swaziland (69 feet above sea level). The Komati, the White Umbuluzi, the Black Umbuluzi, and the Ndlotane are the other important rivers in Swaziland.

The climate of Swaziland varies from region to region. The Highveld region is mainly humid and wet and experiences heavy rainfalls during summer (December–March). The Middleveld and Lowveld are drier and experience tropical to subtropical climates toward the east. The Lowveld has very hot summers with temperatures soaring as high as 104°F. The eastern parts of the Lowveld have a subtropical climate and remain comparatively warm even during winter, while the rest of the Lowveld is subject to a frosty winter.

Swaziland is home to a wide variety of wildlife including zebras, elephants, baboons, warthogs, vervet monkeys (a species of green monkey found in sub-Saharan Africa), leopards, waterbucks, jackals, and numerous species of antelopes. It has a wide variety of flora including lilies, cape primrose, gladioli, ferns, aloes, mahogany, ironwood, and red ivory, to name only a few.

❁ ECONOMY

More than 80 percent of the Swazi population are dependent on subsistence farming, which means that they produce just enough grain to meet the needs of their own families. Wood pulp and sugar are major revenue generators for the economy. The government is also trying to develop the tourism industry and attract foreign investment. Mining activities in the region are restricted to stone quarrying and coal mines. South Africa is the major trading partner of Swaziland.

In the early 21st century the economy of the country was in shambles due to a series of droughts that have affected the region since 2002. More than one-fourth of the country's population was left impoverished, and the country began to depend on food aid from the UN. In 2004 the government of Swaziland declared a major humanitarian crisis and

Fun Fact

While Dlamini is the surname of the royal family, the king is also referred to as *nkosi*, which means "ruler" or "king." The founder of the Dlamini Dynasty is unknown, but the Swazi consider Ngwane III to be their first king. Thus, modern-day Swaziland is also known as Ngwane in honor of its first king.

sought international help. Unfortunately, more than one-third of the country's adult population has also tested positive for AIDS/HIV, which has been a cause of great concern for the government.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The culture and lifestyle of Swaziland is a blend of traditional customs and modern outlook. Although Swazi are the dominant population of Swaziland, the country is also home to a small number of Zulu, Europeans, and Mozambican refugees of African and European descent. English and siSwati (or Swati) are both official languages, but English is the official written language.

Traditionally men and boys wear loincloths made from skins of wild animals. Girls wear grass skirts, but the women prefer cow skin skirts and put their hair up in the style of a bun or a beehive. A married woman traditionally wears a goatskin apron over her shoulders, besides the cowskin skirt. The Swazi live in homesteads called *umuti*. These are traditional beehive huts made of dry grass. Polygamy is the norm in Swazi society, and each wife has her own hut and yard, which is fenced with reeds for privacy. The *umuti* is divided into three main parts: the sleep area, the cooking area, and the storage area.

The head of the family is called the *umnumzane* and is entitled by law to have more than one wife. He is responsible for advising his wives on domestic and social affairs and for looking after the survival of the household. Typically the *umnumzane* spends time with the other male members of the family, especially his sons, to discuss the duties and responsibilities attached to growing up and manhood. In Swazi society children are expected to help their elders in the daily chores. Young boys are assigned the responsibility of tending the cattle, and the girls either take care of their younger siblings or help their mother with domestic chores. Respect for elders is a core value of Swazi society and is inculcated

in every child from a very early age.

The *sangoma* (traditional diviner) and the *inyanga* (doctors who specialize in traditional medicine) are an integral part of Swazi society. Every family has a *sangoma*, who is chosen by the family's ancestors. He is consulted about various concerns, such as illness, death, and crop failures, and he helps diagnose the cause of the problem through *kubbula*, a process of communication with supernatural powers. The *inyanga* helps determine the cause of sickness, using an ancient method called *kushaya ematsambo*, or the bone-throwing skill. The *inyanga* throws animal bones on the ground in a particular manner, and the pattern formed by the bones reveals the cause of the illness and is interpreted by the *inyanga*.

Every aspect of Swazi life, from birth to death, is governed by special ceremonies. The two most important are the *incwala*, or "the first fruits" or "first harvest ceremony," which is held in December; and the *uMblanga* (or *uHlanga*), the reed dance ceremony, which is held in August or September. The cultural dance of Swaziland is called *sibhaca* and is performed by groups of men. Locals and visitors alike admire this vigorous rhythmic style of dancing and the colorful costumes worn by the dancers.

❁ CUISINE

Corn is the staple diet of the people of Swaziland. It is generally eaten as porridge and is served with a wide variety of stews. Historically Swazi are meat-eaters but, due to the increasing poverty in the region, few people can afford meat. The Swazi diet has been reduced mostly to vegetables, milk, and corn.

As a beverage, beer made from sorghum or corn is preferred. *Manganu* is a kind of beer made from the fruit of the *marula*, or *manganu*, tree (a single-stemmed deciduous tree belonging to the mango family), and is also a local favorite.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar and is celebrated as New Year's Day in Swaziland. It is a national holiday, and all public and private institutions in Swaziland are closed on January 1.

❁ NATIONAL FLAG DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 25

National Flag Day, celebrated on April 25, commemorates the adoption of the national flag of

Manganu, or Marula, Tree

In Swaziland, the *marula* tree (a single-stemmed deciduous tree belonging to the mango family) is called *manganu* or *banganu*. The manguna fruit has four times as much vitamin C as an orange. It is also high in potassium, magnesium, and calcium. The fruit of the *manguna* has been used as a cure for scurvy, and *manguna* oil, derived from the seeds of the *manguna* tree, is high in anti-oxidants, oleic acid, and vitamin E.

The *manganu* is so popular in Swaziland that an annual Manganu Festival is held in the Royal Palace. The king and the queen mother are presented with beer by each family, after which all the subjects of Swaziland drink the beer.

Swaziland on April 25, 1967. The day also honors King Sobhuza II, who began administering the region by striking a balance between traditional and Western styles of governance.

✿ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

The May 1 observance of Labor Day, also called May Day or Workers' Day, was established in 1889 by the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations as a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world. The first demonstrations and celebrations were scheduled for the following year, 1890, and the event was to be coordinated with a strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), to demand an eight-hour workday. The AFL ended up canceling the strike, but the new holiday was celebrated as planned. Labor Day is a national holiday in Swaziland, and all government and private institutions remain closed on May 1.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

✿ BIRTHDAY OF KING SOBHUZA II

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 22

King Sobhuza II of Swaziland was born on July 22, 1899. After the death of his father King Bhunu, he was proclaimed the king of Swaziland in 1901. However, due to his youth, his mother, the queen mother of Swaziland Queen Regent Labotsibeni ruled the region in his name.

In 1902 after the Boer Wars, the region was declared a British Protectorate. In 1921 King Sobhuza II assumed power as the king of Swaziland and played a vital role in buying back the land rights in Swaziland from Europeans who had obtained them on lease from King Mswazi II. He continued to rule the kingdom until his death in 1982. He is remembered for upholding traditional Swazi values and for reclaiming the land rights of Swaziland from Europeans. He also played a vital role in negotiating with the British for the independence of Swaziland.

On this day a memorial torch kept at the King Sobhuza II Memorial Park at Lobamba is lit in honor of his birthday. The memorial torch is only lit on special days such as the king's birthday, Independence Day, and during visits by foreign heads of state. People also visit a pictorial exhibit at the Memorial Park to relive the life and legacy of King Sobhuza II.

✿ REED DANCE

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August–September

The uMhlanga, or reed dance, is a special ceremony for unwed girls and childless young brides, who pay their respects to the king and queen mother of Swaziland. It usually takes place in the month of August or September over a period of eight days. During this celebration the king and other suitors select their brides from the countless beautiful young women who participate in the ceremony from all over the country.

To open the festival the girls are segregated into different groups by age. Then they march to vast beds where they cut the reeds with long sharp knives. They use plaited wild grass to tie the reeds together and stack them in bunches. By nightfall they return to the royal kraal. A kraal is a collection of huts and, in this case, it also refers to the royal village, which is Lobambo.

The next day the girls present the stacks to the queen mother as a token of respect. Then they sing and dance, each hoping to catch the eye of a suitor.

Fun Fact

King Sobhuza II, the king of Swaziland, ruled the kingdom for 61 years and is believed to have had more than 70 wives and 250 children.



A Swazi maiden protects herself from the cold weather at the country's annual reed dance at Ludzidzini. The annual event brings unmarried girls from all over Swaziland to pay homage to the Swazi Queen Mother, Ntombi Thwala. In recent years Swazi king Mswati III has also used the occasion to select a new wife. (AP Photo/Naashon Zalk)

Fun Fact

The term *Boer* means “farmer” in Dutch and refers to rural inhabitants, especially of South Africa, descended from Dutch Huguenot colonists.

On the seventh day the king attends the dance ceremony and, if he finds a suitable bride, shows his approval by the touch of his hand. He also orders the slaughter of cattle, and a lavish feast is prepared. On the eighth day the girls return to their villages, and those who have found suitors start making arrangements for their marriages.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: September 6

Before it gained its independence in 1968, the kingdom of Swaziland had been a British Protectorate. After World War II the British had hoped that the region would eventually become part of South Africa. However, due to the racial problems in South Africa, reflected in the infamous policy of apartheid, the British decided not to pursue that option. In the 1960s political parties were formed in Swaziland, and they voiced the people's demand for total independence. King Sobhuza II also pressured the British government, which eventually relented and granted total independence to Swaziland on September 6, 1968.

This event is commemorated with great celebrations all over Swaziland. The king and queen of Swaziland preside over the Independence Day festivities and unfurl the national flag. Several dance and musical performances highlight the Independence Day celebrations in Swaziland.

Religious Holidays

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

This Christian festival commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. It is a somber, solemn occasion and falls on the Friday before Easter, the last Friday of Lent (an austere season of fasting and penitence).

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

The Christian festival of Easter marks the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead three days after his Crucifixion. This is the most important Christian festival and is marked in Swaziland with church services followed by family meals.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT

ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Forty days after Easter

Ascension Day is a day of special celebration for Christians all over the world. It commemorates Jesus' Ascension to heaven 40 days after he was resurrected from the dead (on Easter). On this day, Christians in Swaziland attend a special Ascension service in their local churches.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 25

Christmas is the day designated for Christians to celebrate the birth of Jesus, although this is not the day on which he was born. Because no one knows when Jesus was born, the Catholic Church chose this day because it falls within the period of time when pagan cultures celebrated the winter solstice, the longest night of the year, to welcome the return of the light.

Swazi living in urban areas travel to the countryside to celebrate Christmas with their friends and families. On Christmas Eve devout Catholics attend the Christmas Eve Mass, which is celebrated with Christmas carols and devotional hymns sung by church choirs.

On Christmas Day, friends and family get together to exchange gifts and greetings. Children are allowed to open their gifts, and they join their elders in singing Christmas carols.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 26

The day after Christmas, December 26, is celebrated as Boxing Day. The day is also known as the Feast of St. Stephen, in honor of the first Christian martyr. On this day, boxes used by churches for collecting money for the poor are opened and the money they contain is distributed; hence the name, Boxing Day. Also, on this day gifts are given to those who render useful services to the community throughout the year.

Boxing Day is celebrated in most of the countries that are members of the British Commonwealth. The Kingdom of Swaziland was declared a British Protectorate in 1902 and was under British rule until its independence in 1968. Swaziland has retained the British tradition of celebrating Boxing Day the day after Christmas.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY

Regional Holidays

❁ SIYAVUKA ARTS FESTIVAL

Observed in: Mbabane
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December

The Siyavuka is an annual cultural festival held in Mbabane in Swaziland. Siyavuka, a nonprofit organization that is part of Swaziland's National Council of Arts and Culture, organizes the event. The annual cultural festival provides a perfect platform for Swazi artists, craftspeople, and performers to showcase their talents in the ancient art forms of Swaziland.

The objective of the event is to create a general awareness among the Swazi of their traditions and rich cultural heritage. Through a number of musical and dance performances, as well as art exhibits and workshops, the annual Siyavuka Festival encourages a sense of pride in their work among Swazi artisans and performers.

❁ INCWALA

Observed in: Ngabezweni
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December–January

Incwala, or the Festival of First Fruits, is a sacred annual ceremony that aims to renew the strength of the Swazi king as well as that of the kingdom. It is the most sacred ceremony for Swazi. It is usually performed in December or January. Astrologers decide the exact date after a thorough study of planetary movements. During this period the king goes into seclusion.

In this ceremony, the *bemanti* (the learned) people, a small clan living in the Manzini area of Swaziland, travel through Mozambique and toward the Indian Ocean to collect the foam of the ocean waves, which is believed to possess medicinal and mystical powers. Their return to Swaziland is called Little Incwala and marks the beginning of the main celebration called Incwala.

Adolescents from all over the country assemble at the royal kraal where the king orders them to collect branches of a shrub called *lusekwane* (a type of acacia).

The elders build a sacred hut for the king using the branches of the *lusekwane* shrub collected by the youth. Swazi warriors, wearing ox hides and leopard skins, dance throughout the ceremony and request the king to join in their celebrations.

On the fourth day of the ceremony, the king comes out of his seclusion with his face blackened with medicines. His body is covered with bright green grass and has a silver-colored monkey belt (a belt made from monkey-skin) around his waist. His headdress is made up of large black plumes and feathers from the *sakabula* bird (a long-tailed widow bird native to the KwaZulu Natal Midlands). The word *sakabula* is a Swazi word that means “show-off”

Imbokodvo National Movement

The Imbokodvo National Movement (INM) is a political party formed by traditional Swazi leaders, including King Sobhuza II and members of his council. The INM emphasized maintenance of the Swazi lifestyle and avoidance of the “corrupting” influence of Western values. In 1964 the first legislative elections were held in Swaziland by the colonial government, and the INM won all 24 seats in the legislature. The INM, in its talks with the colonial powers, incorporated the demand made by radical parties to grant immediate independence to Swaziland. Swaziland became an independent nation on September 6, 1968.

or “flirt”). He dances with the warriors while the queen mother looks after the guests. The king eats a pumpkin called *lusekwa*, especially kept aside for this ceremony, and throws it toward his warriors. This signifies that the king has had the first fruit and now the local Swazi people can consume their new crops.

The fifth day is a day of rest, and no activity takes place. However, on the sixth day a huge bonfire is lit and all articles representing the past year are burned. Also, the king, along with his people, prays to the ancestral spirits to extinguish the fire by sending down rains, which will indicate a good beginning for the new year.

Dancing and feasting take place and the ceremony ends after the successful weeding of the king's fields by the youth assembled for the ceremony.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

The birth of a child is marked with elaborate celebrations in Swaziland. Each clan in Swaziland has its own set of animals whose furs are used to make headdresses for the tribesmen of that particular clan. Immediately after birth, the family of the child collects plants and animal furs specific to the child's clan and burns them together. The child is then made to inhale the smoke since the Swazi believe this will ensure his or her good health and well-being.

❁ MARRIAGE

In Swaziland, as in other African countries, payment of *lobola*, or bride-price, to the bride's family is required from the groom's family. The *lobola* is generally paid in the form of cattle since cattle are considered wealth. The number of cattle offered by the groom reflects his family's status. Payment of *lobola*

Fun Fact

Once married, a bride cannot leave the family, unless of course she is thrown out by the groom's family on charges of witchcraft, theft, or adultery.

in phases is also acceptable. However, the marriage ceremony takes place only after the entire payment of *lobola* has been made.

On the day of the engagement, or *kuteka*, the bride's side of the family arrives at the groom's home to sing traditional songs and perform ceremonial dances. Then the groom takes his bride into his home. During her stay she is subjected to harsh treatment. She is rudely woken up at odd hours and taken to the cattle shed. Here she is verbally abused by the women of the groom's family until she is reduced to tears. This is done to acknowledge that the bride is an unknown entity in the family, who might be the cause of disputes in the future.

The actual marriage ceremony, which is called *umtsimba*, also takes place in the cattle shed. During it the bride is introduced to the ancestors of the family. After smearing the bride's forehead with red ochre (red clay), a goat is slaughtered, and its skin is tied around her wrist. Then messengers carry selected portions of the slaughtered goat, *umsasane*, and deliver the meat to the bride's family and relatives.

In another ceremony, the groom's family hands over a girl child to the bride who is smeared with animal fat. Although the actual parents of the child retain their parental rights, the girl is now considered to be the bride's child, and the bride is put in charge of his or her upbringing.

Swazi men who can afford it are polygamous. In a polygamous homestead, each wife usually has her own huts and yard surrounded by reed fences for privacy. There are at least three beehive huts in each wife's yard: one used primarily for sleeping, one for cooking, and one for storage (brewing beer).

DEATH

The Swazi traditionally bury their dead. The funeral ceremony is a simple affair. After the cleansing of the body of the deceased, he or she is laid to rest next to the homestead. Kings and members of the royal family, however, are buried in mountain caves.

The Swazi believe in ancestral spirits and perform religious ceremonies from time to time to maintain communication with them.

Further Reading

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Sweden

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Northern Europe, bordering the Baltic Sea, the Gulf of Bothnia, Kattegat, and Skagerrak, between Finland and Norway
Size	173,732 sq. mi.
Capital City	Stockholm
Flag Description	The flag of Sweden is blue with a golden-yellow cross; the vertical part of the cross is shifted toward the hoist side.
Independence	June 6, 1523 (Gustav I elected king after Sweden broke away from the Kalmar Union in 1521)
Population	9,001,774 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional monarchy
Nationality	Swedish
Major Ethnic Group(s)	White (indigenous cultural groups include Swedes, Finns, and Sami minorities; immigrant minorities include Yugoslavs, Danes, Norwegians, Greeks, and Turks)
Major Language(s)	Swedish; Sami; and Finnish
Major Religion(s)	Lutheran (87%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; National Day, June 6; Midsummer's Eve (June); All Hallows' Eve (November); Boxing Day, December 26

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The region now known as Scandinavia has been inhabited by various cultures since the last glaciers receded. After the end of the last Ice Age (c. 9500 B.C.E.), Denmark and Sweden were joined. This period is called the Ancylus Age, after a small mollusk (*Ancylus fluviatilis*) common at this time. The Ancylus Age was followed by the Litorina Age (named after another common mollusk) around 7500, when the Litorina Sea was formed. The Ancylus and Litorina Ages mark the beginning of the Nordic Stone Age, when people started moving into the region. During the Upper Paleolithic nomadic tribes, called the Ahrensburg culture, wandered over the plains of Denmark and southern Sweden, hunting reindeer.

By about 6000, the reindeer and their hunters had moved into northern Scandinavia to be followed by the Maglemosian culture. North of these people the Fosna-Hensbacka culture inhabited the shores of thriving forests. The Ahrensburg,

Maglemosian, and Fosna-Hensbacka cultures were able to survive the cold of northern Europe because they had already mastered fire and knew how to build boats and fashion stone implements. The cultural traditions of these early peoples were much like those of other far northern groups in areas that included modern Finland, Russia, and across the Bering Strait into the northernmost strip of North America.

During the sixth millennium, tribes now called the Kongemose culture hunted aurochs (a species of cattle), wisent (a species of bison), moose, and red deer in the rich broadleaf forests of southern Scandinavia. Nomadic hunter-gatherers, descendants of the Fosna and Hensbacka cultures—the Nøstvet and Lihult—continued to roam the region to the north of the Kongemose people. Toward the end of the sixth millennium the Kongemose people were supplanted by people from the south, the Ertebølle, who had learned the ceramic arts from neighboring agrarian peoples.

During the Neolithic period, between the fifth and fourth millennia, the Ertebølle also took up farming and herding, becoming part of the megalithic Funnelbeaker culture. As the

Funnelbeaker tribes pushed farther north in the fourth millennium, the Nøstvet and Lihult nomadic tribes, like the Ertebølle, learned to make pottery—but did not take up agriculture—from the advancing farmers and became the Pitted Ware cultures. Sometime near the end of the fourth millennium, some scholars think the Pitted Ware tribes stopped the advancing farmers and pushed them into southwestern Sweden. Others, however, believe that the farmers were not killed or chased away, but that they were assimilated by the Pitted Ware culture. At least one important settlement, the Alvastra pile-dwelling, may have been mixed.

Ekornavallen, consisting of huge megalithic chambers, was a Neolithic burial site where generation after generation was laid to rest. One of Sweden's most puzzling stone monuments also dates back to this period (c. 3000–2500), Ales stenar (“Ale’s Stones”), one of the largest ship settings, 220 feet long and 62 feet wide. The shape was constructed with 59 carefully selected stones weighing between 1,100 and nearly 4,000 pounds. The reasons for building Ales stenar remain opaque. Most ship settings were burial monuments (for example, Lugnarö Mound, c. 700 B.C.E., where the remains of four burials have been found), containing one or more graves, but no graves have been found at Ales stenar. Some believe that the stones are a monument built to honor a ship’s crew lost at sea, while others think it is an ancient astronomical site used to measure the times of the year.

There are no written records that would indicate the language spoken by the earliest nomadic Scandinavians, but they were overrun by the Battle-Axe culture, patriarchal tribes who probably spoke a dialect of Proto-Indo-European. As the Indo-Europeans advanced into Uppland and the Oslofjord, they brought with them the ancestral language of the modern Scandinavian languages. During the Nordic Bronze Age, an advanced civilization manufacturing bronze weapons and bronze and gold jewelry appeared in Denmark, Sweden, and parts of Norway. This is also the period (2300–500) when most of the many petroglyph carvings in Sweden were created.

By and large these carvings are of an agricultural nature and depict warfare, ships, domesticated animals, and other motifs from daily life. There are also petroglyphs depicting sexual activities at Bohuslän, dated between 800 and 500.

The Roman historian Tacitus (c. 56–c. 120 C.E.) described a people he called Suiones, who had ships with a prow at both ends (the shape thought of as “Viking” ships). The word *Suiones* is the same as the Anglo-Saxon *Sweon*, whose country was Sweoland (Svealand).

The historian Jordanes,

writing around the middle of the sixth century, mentioned a tribe named Suehans, thought to refer to the Suiones of Tacitus. During this period the kings were actually warlords, or chieftains. They reigned over petty kingdoms in the region that would eventually become Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. *Beowulf* and the Norse sagas also recount the politics and disputes of these territories in some detail. One of the most powerful of these chieftains was the Swedish king, the king of the Sweon, who is said to have ruled Sweorici. Some historians regard this era as the beginning of Sweden as an autonomous nation.

In the late Iron Age and early Middle Ages, sometimes called the Viking Age, the Norse moved into Sweden. Swedish Vikings, whose name came from a Scandinavian word for the Norse warriors, traveled and traded extensively and accumulated a good deal of wealth and power over the next century. These people spoke Old Norse, an Indo-European language, and used the Proto-Germanic runic alphabet called the Futhark, a name based on the first six letters. Strictly speaking, not all of the Scandinavians are properly referred to as Vikings. The Vikings were seafarers and pirates, who raided up and down the coasts of Europe and the British Isles, including the settlements of other Scandinavians. The Vikings were also the first Europeans that we know of who tried to settle in North America. Runes were already hundreds of years old by the dawn of the Viking Age, and the earliest surviving runic inscriptions have been dated to the second century C.E.

Among the most striking monuments dating to this era are the rune stones. The tradition of raising such stones probably goes back to the old custom of raising menhirs to honor the dead or mark a burial site during the Pre-Roman and Roman Iron Ages. Although runes were known throughout the Germanic-speaking world, they were used more in Scandinavia during the Viking Age than in any other time or place. Somewhere between 5,000 and 6,000 runic inscriptions have been identified in Scandinavia, and more than half of them are in modern-day Sweden. Many of the rune stones in Scandinavia record the names of participants or some who died in Viking expeditions. Among them are around 25 Ingvar stones in the Mälardalen district of Sweden. The Ingvar rune stones commemorate members of a disastrous expedition into present-day Russia in the early 11th century. In the same century Christianity was introduced into Sweden.

In 1389 Norway, Denmark, and Sweden entered into a union called the Kalmar Union and consolidated themselves under a single monarch, while each country maintained its independence and pursued its diverse interests. Following several violent disagreements in 1521 King Gustav I (1496–1560) of Sweden (House of Vasa), often regarded as the “father” of the modern state, removed his realm from the Kalmar Union and established a nation-state. Shortly thereafter he rejected Catholicism, and Sweden became a party to

Fun Fact

It is thought likely that the runic alphabet was derived from the northern Italic alphabets (Lepontic, Rhaetic, and Venetic, used from the fifth to the first century B.C.E.), because many of the characters are quite similar in shape and value.

the Protestant Reformation.

Following its military successes in the Thirty Years' War (1618–48) Sweden expanded its boundaries to include Finland and the Baltic countries. During the 17th century Sweden prospered and became a European power. However, in the 18th century, with the rise of Russian imperialism, Sweden lost Finland to Russia, and the Russian Grand Duchy of Finland was formed.

Sweden's recent past has been relatively peaceful. The last war was the campaign against Norway in 1814, which established the dominance of Sweden in a union with Norway, but this union was dissolved in 1905. During World Wars I and II, Sweden remained neutral, which turned out to be advantageous for Sweden. After World War II ended, most of the participating European countries were trying to revive their industry and economy, but Sweden was already a well-established country with a stable economy.

Sweden became a member of the European Union (EU) in 1995 and accepted the Euro as its standard currency in 1999.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Sweden occupies most of the area on the Scandinavian Peninsula and shares its western border with Norway. Most of Sweden consists of low-lying plains, except for a fairly small Scandinavian mountain range (Skanderna) that separates it from Norway. The north of Sweden, generally known as Norrland and comprising nine provinces, lies above the Arctic Circle and is forested. In the east and the southeast, the country has a long coastline with the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Bothnia. This 4,350-mile-long coastline is regularly cut in with fjords (long, narrow sea inlets).

Sweden has a temperate climate. In the southern parts of the country winters are cold and cloudy, while summers are cool. The climate in Sweden is not as cold as it should be, considering the country's relatively northern position. This is because of the warm currents from the Gulf Stream, which keep the waters warm and the climate temperate. The northern mountains of Sweden, however, have a subarctic climate with chilly winters. Sweden, as in other polar countries, experiences the phenomenon of polar days and nights. In summer the Sun does not sink below the horizon, and there can be daylight for several months. In the same way during winter the Sun does not rise above the horizon, and it remains dark for many months.

The relatively warmer parts of southern Sweden are forested with pine trees and birches. This region is also suited to agriculture. The northern parts of the country remain under snow and are sparsely populated. The tundra vegetation (where tree growth is hindered by low temperatures) is seen here. It comprises grasses, mosses, and lichens. Swedish fauna include the moose, deer, wolf, lynx, and the brown bear. The country also boasts of various species of birds and fish.

Öland

Öland is a tiny scenic island that contains ruins, forts, and around 400 windmills. Öland is a popular place and attracts a huge number of tourists who come there to celebrate Midsummer every year. Öland is reached from Kalmar via a 19,685-foot-long bridge, the longest in Europe.

❁ ECONOMY

Sweden has enjoyed a relatively peaceful and neutral political atmosphere that has been conducive to the growth of its economy. The Swedish standard of living is very high, with minimal unemployment and other such detrimental issues. Apart from excellent internal and external communications, the country has a skilled labor force. The availability of timber, hydropower, and iron ore has been beneficial for development. The agricultural sector is not a major contributor to the Swedish gross domestic product (GDP), compared to the contributions of the industrial and service sectors. The major industries of Sweden are forestry, mining, engineering, high-tech manufacturing, telecommunications, and furniture. Sweden shares good trade relations with the members of the EU and the United States. This is the country that gave us Volvo cars, Ericsson handsets, and world-class furniture from IKEA.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Swedish artists have produced some of the finest works of art in the world. The pioneering work of Mauritz Stiller and Victor Sjöström in the field of cinema is also well-known, while many Nobel Prizes have been awarded to Swedish literature. Sweden ranks third among the countries that have produced the most Nobel laureates.

Swedish music has a long history, and includes many genres of music from folk, to waltz, to pop, to heavy metal. The accordion, clarinet, and fiddle are among the common Swedish folk instruments. In the 1960s, Swedish youth sparked a revival in Swedish folk culture. Many Swedes joined folk musicians' clubs and performed on radio and TV.

Scandinavian death metal bands are mostly based in Stockholm and Gothenburg. Swedish pop bands, such as ABBA, Ace of Base, and The Cardigans, have achieved international success. Meja, Robyn, and Emilia are other successful Swedish singers who have enjoyed worldwide acclaim.

Sweden is well-known for the highly skilled and talented people it has produced. Inventions, such as dynamite and the ATM, are of Swedish origins. Noted scientists, such as Alfred Nobel, who instituted the prestigious Nobel Prize, and Carl Linne, were Swedes.

Swedish Furniture, Phones, and Cars

Among all the major contributions made by Sweden, some are worth a special mention. IKEA, the Swedish home-furnishing retailer, was founded by Ingvar Kamprad in 1943. The name IKEA is made up of the first letters of his name, his property, and his village: Ingvar Kamprad Elmtaryd Agunnaryd. Earlier, IKEA marketed pens, wallets, picture frames, table runners, watches, jewelry, and nylon stockings. The very first furniture was added to the IKEA product range in 1947, and by 1955 the company began designing its own furniture. Today the IKEA products catalogue, showcasing around 12,000 IKEA items, is the second most widely distributed book after the Bible.

Ericsson (Telefonaktiebolaget L. M. Ericsson) is a Swedish telecommunications equipment manu-

facturer that began in 1876 as a telegraph equipment repair shop owned by Lars Magnus Ericsson. Ericsson is now in a joint venture with Sony, called Sony Ericsson. The company concentrates on supplying infrastructure for all major wireless technologies and modernizing existing copper lines for broadband services.

The Swedish Volvo Group is a leading manufacturer of commercial vehicles, buses, and construction equipment, marine and industrial applications, and aerospace components. The company was founded in 1927, in Gothenburg, as a roller ball bearing maker. The Ford Motor Company, in another joint venture, owns Volvo cars. *Volvo* is Latin for “I roll,” and was originally a name for the ball bearings that were being developed by the company.

The museums of Gothenburg are famous for the collection of paintings created by renowned artists such as Rubens, Van Gogh, and Rembrandt.

CUISINE

Swedish cuisine is essentially Scandinavian in nature. Fish and meat play a major role. Deer and Moose meat are used in a wide variety of dishes. A typical Swedish day begins with bread and milk. This is supplemented with juice, yogurt, and a bowl of cereal.

The Swedes are heavy coffee drinkers. Other favorite beverages include akvavit, a herbally suffused distillation of potatoes or grain, and glog, a hot, spiced, brandied wine.

Fun Fact

Greta Garbo, Ingrid Bergman, and Anita Ekberg are some of the Swedes who made their name and fame overseas.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, and is celebrated as New Year's Day all over the world, beginning on the evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve). In Sweden many cities have fireworks on New Year's Eve. At the stroke of midnight, shivering Swedes wish each other a Happy New Year and toast with champagne and firecrackers. Traditionally Swedes make personal New Year's resolutions and enjoy a special meal on this day, during which salmon, crab, and lobster are usually served. Those who dare venture

out in the bitter cold enjoy the displays of fireworks; those who stay at home watch a TV recital of Lord Tennyson's classic poem “Ring Out, Wild Bells” from the Skansen open-air museum in Stockholm. New Year's Day is a national holiday, and schools and offices remain closed.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also as Workers' Day or May Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. While the earliest celebrations of May Day are associated with the pagan festivals observed by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages, the origins of the political occasion are to be found in the unions that fought for decent working conditions. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. In Sweden, workers hold marches and demonstrations in the streets.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 6

June 6 was adopted as the National Day of Sweden, Sveriges nationaldag, in 1980. This day has also

been celebrated as the Day of the Swedish Flag, Svenska flaggans dag, since the 1920s. This day was chosen to celebrate National Day because it is also the anniversary of the election of Gustav Vasa as king of Sweden in 1523. King Gustav I is thought to be the person who established modern Sweden and is also considered the father of the nation.

The people of Sweden celebrate this day with strong feelings of patriotism. Every Swedish town is decorated, and there are speeches, music, and the distribution of Swedish flags. The celebrations held in Skansen, an open-air museum in Stockholm, where some 15,000 people gather together with the royal family, is the most noted in the country.

❁ MIDSUMMER'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 24–25 and June 25–26

Midsummer's Eve is an ancient pagan celebration linked to the summer solstice. The importance of this night is to be found in the belief that midsummer plants are at the peak of their miraculous and healing powers, so they are picked at this time. People used to light bonfires to protect themselves from evil spirits said to be roaming at a time when the Sun was turning southward.

Midsummer's Day is one the greatest summer festivals in Sweden. The Swedes celebrate this festival on the longest day of the year (summer solstice). On this day people decorate the front porches of their homes with birches and leafy branches. A *majstång* ("maypole") is set up in the center of the village square, where all the celebrations take place. The youngsters decorate this maypole and sing and dance around it all night long.

People feast on the year's first potatoes, pickled herring, sour cream, and the first strawberries of the season. On this occasion the Swedish people serve food in the form of a smorgasbord. This is a sort of buffet, where the table is laid with all sorts of dishes, and the diners can choose what to eat. Smorgasbord was earlier used as an appetizer before the main course, but gradually, it has become a complete meal in itself.

The celebration of Midsummer is an old pagan custom, dating back at least to the Viking era. It was a fertility rite: The maypole was a phallic symbol that fertilized mother nature. People prayed for a good harvest in the autumn.

❁ ALL HALLOWS' EVE

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First Saturday of November

In Sweden, All Hallows' Eve/Day (Alla Helgons Dag) can be celebrated on any day from October 31 until November 6. This Swedish equivalent of Halloween is a recent phenomenon and is only now

catching on with children. On this day schools and offices are closed for either a half-day or a complete day. As in the United States, the children here go door-to-door "trick or treating."

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; HARVEST FESTIVALS

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26

Boxing Day is observed on December 26, the day following Christmas, and is only celebrated in a few countries, primarily those that were once British colonies or members of the Commonwealth. It originated in the United Kingdom about 800 years ago as the day when the alms boxes were opened in parish churches, and their contents distributed to poor people. Many churches still have these boxes and open them on Boxing Day.

Servants were also given the day off to celebrate Christmas with their families on Boxing Day. Before World War II it was common for working people (such as milkmen and butchers) to travel around their delivery routes to collect their Christmas boxes or tips, but this tradition is now rarely observed.

December 26 is also St. Stephen's Day. There are two St. Stephen's in history: The first St. Stephen was a very early follower of Jesus and the first Christian martyr. He was stoned to death. The second St. Stephen was a missionary to Sweden in the 800s. He loved all animals but particularly horses (perhaps why there is horse racing on Boxing Day). He was also a martyr and was killed by pagans in Sweden.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Religious Holidays

❁ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: January 6

Epiphany is celebrated to remember the Three Wise Men from the East who were looking for the newly born Jesus. In Sweden Christmas celebrations end on this day. Priests visit all the houses in their parish and bless the families. Swedish families remove their Christmas decorations and dismantle the Christmas trees on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Last Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, commemorating the last week of

Fun Fact
The safety match was invented in Sweden in 1855.



Two young women with flower garlands in their hair, pick bouquets of wild flowers in Hassleholm in preparation for the annual midsummer holidays. Swedes traditionally celebrate Midsummer with dancing and feasting and maidens sleep on wildflowers to dream of their loved ones during the shortest night of the year. (AP Photo/Pressens Bild/Patric Berg)

Jesus' mortal life. Jesus Christ was the prophet of Christianity, and Christians believe him to be the second personage of a holy trinity: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. During Holy Week, weddings, and christenings do not take place in Sweden because such joyous occasions are thought to be inappropriate during such a somber observance.

Palm Sunday is as much about his triumphal entry into Jerusalem as it is about the beginning of his journey to the Cross. His arrival in Jerusalem was indeed the way to the Cross. Jesus had already foretold his betrayal and Resurrection to his disciples on the way to Jerusalem from Judea. The day was April 10, 30 C.E., according to some calculations. They stopped at the Mount of Olives, near Bethany, and Jesus sent two disciples to the village of Bethphage to bring a donkey and its foal tied at the crossway of two roads to him. They did so and placed their clothes on the foal to provide a comfortable seat. The disciples then cut branches and covered the path, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the words of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. People welcomed him by waving palm and olive branches and strewing garments and branches on the road. There were different perceptions at work: Jesus rode in on a donkey, a humble entry of a peaceful nature by a spiritual king; the people of Jerusalem welcomed him with palm and olive branches and the laying of garments in his path because they wanted a worldly king to defeat the Romans.

Because palm trees cannot grow in Sweden's climate, some other kind of branches have to take the place of palms; early budding varieties of willow are a common choice. Such branches are brought into homes and offices so that they have leaves on Palm Sunday. These branches have even come to be called

palms in many parts of Sweden.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

✿ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

The rituals observed on Maundy Thursday are based on a sequence of events that are supposed to have occurred during the meal served on this day. First Jesus washed the feet of his disciples; then he announced that he had been betrayed by one of them. The traitor Judas left the table. Finally Jesus instituted the Eucharist: a ritual of consuming bread and wine as symbols of his body and blood, also referred to as Communion in Christian churches. In the Roman Catholic Church, Maundy Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist, the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week and gives priests an opportunity to prepare for the many rites associated with Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter.

The name Maundy Thursday may be linked to the Latin word *mandatum*, "command," because it is believed to have been the first word spoken by Jesus before he began washing the feet of his disciples: "*Mandatum novum do vobis*," which means, "a new commandment I give to you" Jesus commanded his Apostles to observe the ritual now known as the Eucharist. Holy Thursday or Maundy Thursday is an important Christian celebration since it also commemorates the Last Supper. It is said that Jesus washed the feet of all the Apostles before the meal, which is believed to have been a seder. In Sweden all churches conduct special prayer services on this day. The priest, while celebrating Mass, reenacts the scenes from the Last Supper. He washes the feet of 12 chosen parishioners just as Jesus did. The mood is somber, and all faithful pray during this day.

In Sweden certain superstitions have been associated with Easter and other major holy days. For example, people once believed that witches were especially active and their black magic especially powerful during this week, and such superstitions (and the fear they arouse) persist even in the 21st century. Many people in Sweden believe that women who practice black magic—Easter hags—are roaming about and practicing witchcraft. In earlier times, they were thought to fly off on brooms to consort with the devil at a place called Blåkulla ("blue hill") on Maundy Thursday, returning the following Saturday. People did everything they could to protect themselves from the evil powers at play on these days. They lit bonfires, shot off firearms into the sky, painted crosses, stars, and other holy symbols over their doors, buried psalters under their thresholds, and hung crossed scythes and axes over their livestock. Hysterical fear of the supernatural even triggered off witch trials from time to time over the centuries, sending unknown numbers of women to the gallows or the stake.

These grim superstitions, however, have a more cheerful legacy in modern times: On Maundy Thursday or Easter Eve Swedish girls (and boys, too) dress up as “hags” and visit their neighbors. Some leave small decorated cards or Easter letters, hoping for a sweet or coin in return. The custom of making Easter letters is especially widespread in western Sweden, where villages vie with each other to see who can make the biggest card. The custom of shooting also lives on in spectacular fireworks displays.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday (Långfredag, “Long Friday” in Swedish) falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent. It is observed in most parts of the world to remember the Crucifixion of Jesus. In Sweden Christians observe a fast on Good Friday, and a ritual called “Stations of the Cross” is performed. This is a reenactment of Jesus’ final journey to Calvary before he was crucified. Until relatively recently, all amusement places, including movie theaters, were closed to mark the occasion, and children were not allowed to play. Perhaps that is how this day came to be called Long Friday in Swedish.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Saturday before Easter

Holy Saturday is the day Jesus lay in the tomb. This was the Sabbath (the Jewish day of rest is Saturday) and he rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. It is also regarded as the second Sabbath after Creation. The final day of Holy Week, which begins with Palm Sunday and includes Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, it marks the threshold between death and resurrection, and is a day of silence and contemplation for devout Christians. On Easter Eve (known as Påskafton in Sweden), many Swedish families get together with friends and eat special foods: eggs are featured, along with pickled herring, lamb; the feast rivals the traditional Christmas smorgasbord. Salted salmon (*rimmad lax*) is another common dish, a custom that may be traced to the days when Sweden was still a Catholic country and meat was forbidden on Good Friday. This is also the day when children are usually given their Easter eggs, which are usually filled with candy and, sometimes, small toys. Many parents hide the eggs and let the children hunt for them. Children who did not dress up as “hags” on Maundy Thursday usually do it on Holy Saturday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER;

GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus’ Resurrection. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. The origin of Easter celebrations in Europe can be traced back to pre-history, when pagans celebrated the return of spring and honored their Great Mother Goddess Ostara with joyful festivals. It was part of the Roman Catholic Church’s program to convert pagans to Christianity by incorporating and reinterpreting their rituals and symbols, which is how Easter got its name in Germanic countries. The church also incorporated eggs, a well-known symbol of fertility and rebirth, as part of Easter’s celebration. In Sweden Easter is known as Påsk and got its name from the Hebrew holiday known as Pesach. Easter is the central religious observance of Christianity and the entire suite of holidays of the Christian liturgy are scheduled on the basis of the date on which Easter falls. On Easter Sunday people give each other beautifully decorated Easter eggs and play different egg games. The children who get hard-boiled eggs roll them down a roofing-tile, held slanted onto the floor. If the egg hits another egg the child gets to keep both eggs. The dining and exchange of greetings and Easter eggs continue through the next day, Easter Monday, which is the first Monday after Lent. Easter Day (Påskdagen) is a national flag day in Sweden, and both Easter Sunday and Easter Monday (Annandag Påsk) are public holidays.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

ST. VALBORG’S EVE

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: April 30

St. Valborg’s Eve, or Walpurgis, is Sweden’s annual feast of the witches. It is the eve of Beltane, believed by medieval Christians to be the occasion of a witches’ Sabbath. People light bonfires to scare them away as they fly overhead toward Germany. The people celebrate around a communal bonfire with fireworks, singing, and dancing all night. For most Swedes though, this festival signifies the end of winter, and they sing special songs of spring that are unique to Sweden. Colorful parades and carnivals are also held all over the country on this day.

St. Valborg’s Eve is also the birthday of the king of Sweden, and flags are raised to salute him. The

Fun Fact

Swedish wives normally wear three rings, signifying, respectively, betrothal, marriage, and motherhood.

Fun Fact

IKEA furniture is so thoroughly associated with Sweden that, in Japan, Swedish pop music is called “IKEA soul”!

Fun Fact

According to Swedish customs, when the couple enters the church together, the one that sets foot inside the building first is said to control the marriage! It is also said that the person who says “I do” the loudest will control the family.

name of this festival is derived from St. Valborg or Walpurga, an eighth-century German saint.

✿ ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Forty days after Easter

The Feast of the Ascension is a day of special celebration for Christians all over the world. It celebrates the day Jesus ascended into heaven, 40 days after he rose from the dead. In Sweden the day is celebrated by getting up at an extremely early hour of the morning and meeting in a forest glen to hear the birds sing at daybreak. It is also customary for the youth of each parish to visit a nearby parish. They make an excursion together and more often than not end the day with a dance. These outings are called *gokotta*, or “early cuckoo morning.” It is, however, not a trip free of superstition. If the cuckoo calls from the west, it means good luck; a cuckoo call from the east bodes ill. During the course of the day, the team may indulge in a picnic breakfast that ends with coffee. The festival is generally accompanied by music and song.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY

✿ PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Fifty days after Easter

Pentecost, which means “the fiftieth day” in Greek, is usually a two-day observance celebrated by Roman Catholics and some Lutherans in Switzerland. This observance takes place 50 and 51 days after Easter Sunday. On these days, the Swedes attend special prayer services in churches.

The observance is sometimes called Whitsunday and Whitmonday from the white garments worn by those who were baptized during the Easter vigil service. Whitsunday and Monday recognize the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and have been celebrated since the third century C.E.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; PENTECOST

✿ ALL SAINTS’ DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: November 1

The tradition of placing lighted candles on graves, virtually unknown during the 19th century, became

commonplace in Sweden only at the beginning of the 20th century. This custom is followed by the adherents of both the Lutheran and the Roman Catholic Churches. Scholars believe that this tradition was probably inspired by the Germans.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS’ DAY; ALL SOULS’ DAY; CHRISTIANITY

✿ FEAST OF ST. MARTIN OF TOURS

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: November 11

The Feast of St. Martin of Tours, or Martinmas, is celebrated by Swedish Catholics on November 11. This feast honors the Hungarian saint who, as legend goes, hid in a barn when he heard he had been appointed a bishop because he did not believe he deserved the honor. According to the tale, a honking goose exposed his hiding place, so roast goose is the traditional dish associated with Martinmas, along with wine made from the grape harvest. This day has characteristics shared with the Halloween tradition of children marching and carrying homemade lanterns.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

✿ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 25

Christmas, also known as Julen (Yule) in Sweden, is a day of celebration for Christians all over the world; it marks the birth of Jesus, believed by them to be the Son of God. In Sweden Christmas celebrations begin on Christmas Eve (December 24), and last until December 26 (Boxing Day). On December 24 Swedish families perform an old tradition called the “dipping in the pot,” dipping slices of bread into ham broth. The broth is consumed later during the Christmas feast.

Christmas decorations are often prepared well in advance. A manger with figures of Joseph, Mary, and the baby Jesus, along with shepherds and the Three Wise Men, are placed in all the churches. Decorations are put up and cookies, cakes, and bread are baked. The Christmas tree is decorated with stars, straw animals, spangles, and other items. Then families gather around the Christmas tree and light candles. Children sing carols and wait for Tomte—the Christmas gnome—who is believed to live under the family home’s floor or in the barn and is said to protect the family and its livestock. Tomte is to Sweden what Santa Claus is in other countries. He is believed to bring presents for children in a sack. But, unlike Santa Claus, he does not drop the gifts in stockings at fireplaces but gives them to each child directly.

Christmas Day begins early in Sweden with the families attending the early morning Mass, which is called *julottan*. The rest of the day is usually spent with family members and a special Christmas feast. A Swedish dish served only on Christmas is *lutfisk*, or air-dried codfish soaked in a lye solution for several weeks, a process that gives the fish its characteristic gelatinous consistency. It is served with white sauce, salt, and pepper. The dessert consists of boiled rice pudding with milk, sugar, and cinnamon.

Festivities continue into the next day, known as Boxing Day, or the Feast of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

✿ STORSJÖYRAN FESTIVAL

Observed in: Östersund
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July

The Storsjöyran, or Great Lake, Festival is an annual event held in Östersund, Sweden. The event dates back to the early 1960s and gathers thousands of visitors every year. The festival is held to honor the indomitable and relentless spirit of the ancient people of Jämtland (the county where Östersund is situated), who withstood the harsh natural conditions and developed the area. The various events and exhibitions held during this festival showcase the zest, courage, and knowledge of these people, along with their skills and talents in the fields of music, dance, art, and pottery. Some of the internationally famous musicians who have performed at this festival include Bryan Adams, The Pretenders, BB King, and Suede.

✿ THE NOBEL PRIZE FESTIVITIES

Observed in: Stockholm
Observed by: Invited Guests
Observed on: December 10

The Swedish Nobel Prize Ceremony is held every year in Stockholm on December 10. This ceremony has been held every year since 1901, on the anniversary of Alfred Nobel's death. The festivities celebrate those "who during the preceding year have conferred the greatest benefit on mankind," in accordance with Alfred Nobel's will. The Nobel Prize is awarded in six categories: physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, literature, peace, and economics. The Nobel laureates, along with the king and queen of Sweden and guests, dine at Stadshuset, Stockholm's City Hall.

✿ LUCIA DAY

Observed in: Sweden
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 13

In Sweden the feast day of Lucia (or Lucy) is celebrated as a festival of lights. It is held on December 13, one of the shortest days of winter, and the lights help to brighten the long winter nights. In the early morning hours of Lucia Day, a young girl, dressed in white, and wearing a red sash and a crown of lingonberry twigs, would go from one farm to another carrying a torch to light her way. She carried baked goods, stopped at each house, returning home by morning. Every Swedish family has its own Lucia, often the youngest daughter in the household. She wakes the rest of the family with a song, and brings along with her a tray of coffee, ginger biscuits, and saffron buns called *lussekattor*.

This custom began in the richer farming areas of Sweden and is based on the legend of a Sicilian girl who devoted her life to God instead of marrying. She was killed when she refused to marry a nobleman.

Fun Fact

The word *aquavit* comes from *aqua vitae*, the Latin for "water of life."

Rites of Passage

✿ BIRTH

The Swedish people like to decorate their homes with the national flag on their birthdays. Birthday cakes in Sweden resemble pound cakes and are decorated with marzipan (almond paste and egg whites).

✿ MARRIAGE

Swedish brides wear a beautiful crown made of ribbons and myrtle leaves. This bridal crown is worn on top of the veil. They normally wear a traditional white dress.

After the church wedding ceremony, there is a lavish reception party held in honor of the newlyweds. Many delicious dishes are served, and there is ample drinking and dancing. Throughout dinner *snapsvisor* ("drinking songs") are sung and the guests may give speeches in honor of the couple. The bride's father places a silver coin in her left shoe while her mother puts a gold coin in her right shoe. This is to ensure that their daughter is always wealthy and secure. Her shoes are untied to signify that childbirth will be easy for her. The day after the wedding, the bride receives a *morgongåva* (morning gift).

Fun Fact

Alfred Nobel, the founder of the Nobel Foundation, invented dynamite.

The Nobel Prizes

The Nobel Prizes were instituted by the will of Alfred Nobel (1833–96), a Swedish chemist, industrialist, and the inventor of dynamite. He was shocked to see how his invention of dynamite was used for destructive purposes and wanted the prizes to be awarded to those who served humanity well. In order to accomplish this, in his will Alfred left 94 percent of his assets to the establishment of five prizes (physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, literature, and peace) for “those who, during the preceding year, shall have conferred the greatest benefit on mankind.”

Because Nobel’s will was incomplete, it took five years before the Nobel Foundation could be established, and the first prizes were not awarded

until 1901. Since 1902, the King of Sweden has formally awarded all the prizes, with the exception of the Nobel Peace Prize, in Stockholm. The Nobel Peace Prize is given in Oslo, Norway, by the Norwegian Nobel Committee. The prizes are awarded at a formal ceremony held annually on December 10, the date that Alfred Nobel died. However, different committees and institutions that serve as selection boards for the prizes typically announce the names of the laureates in October. Each award can be given to a maximum of three people per year.

Each individual awarded a prize receives a gold medal, a diploma, and a huge sum of money (about US\$1,252,668). This was originally intended to allow laureates to continue their research without the pressure of raising funds.

❁ DEATH

In the event of a death in Sweden, the body is wrapped in a shroud. Normally the undertakers provide the shroud, but some Swedish families prefer to use their own. A majority of Swedes are cremated after death. This is the preferred method of disposing of the corpse in cities. After the cremation the ashes are either buried or scattered in a grove, but they are never scattered on the snow.

Further Reading

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Switzerland

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Central Europe; east of France, north of Italy
Size	15,943 sq. mi.
Capital City	Bern
Flag Description	Switzerland's flag is a red square with a bold, equilateral white cross in the center that does not extend to the edges of the flag.
Independence	August 1, 1291 (founding of the Swiss Confederation)
Population	7,489,370 (2005 est.)
Government	Federal republic
Nationality	Swiss
Major Ethnic Group (s)	White
Major Language(s)	German (64%; official); French (20%; official); Italian (7%; official)
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (42%); Protestant (35%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Instauration de la République, March 1; Confederation Day, August 1

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Like other countries in Europe, human activities in Switzerland probably began early in prehistory, but most of the archaeological work has been done at sites occupied after the withdrawal of the glaciers at the end of the last Ice Age. For example Thayngen-Weier is an early Neolithic (Cortailod culture) Alpine lake settlement, and Egolzwil, an Alpine Neolithic lake dwelling site on the shores of Lake Wauwil. Occupied about 5,500 to 5,000 years ago, Thayngen-Weier has provided evidence for the use of elm and wild onion as fodder for domestic cattle, and the presence of the elm bark beetle (suggesting elm disease).

Egolzwil is another Alpine Neolithic (late fifth millennium B.C.E.) lake dwelling site in Canton Lucerne. Like many such sites, Egolzwil was very well preserved. Excavations exposed several rectangular timber houses, floored by logs covered with bark and heated by clay platform hearths. The inhabitants made pottery with circular bases, cultivated cereals, kept sheep and goats, and gathered plants and hunted ani-

mals. Both humans and animals shared the houses, probably in separate rooms.

A late Neolithic lake dwelling site, located at Saint-Blaise is located in the Neuenburgersees Canton. At least three different occupations have been identified: Horgen (3166–21 B.C.E.), Luescherz (2793–2673), and Auvernier cordé (2640–2451). Like Egolzwil and other lake dwelling sites, Saint-Blaise is well preserved, making it possible to recover cultural material including 360 tons of stone, 400,000 animal bones and bone fragments, 8,500 wood fragments and other paleobotanical remains, and over three tons of pottery.

Yet another lake dwelling site, Cortailod-Est, has been dated to the Late Bronze Age (1009–955). Cortailod-Est was a palisaded village found in a lake. The site was first identified from a 1927 aerial photograph, but it was not excavated until the 1980s by a team of underwater archaeologists. The village was found to have seventeen houses, all built within an eight-year span (1009–01), and containing more than 180,000 potsherds.

By 500 B.C.E. Celtic languages were spoken in Austria, Switzerland, southern Germany, northern Italy, most of France, much of Spain, Britain, and Ireland. These languages completely displaced the earlier languages spoken in the same

Fun Fact

Cannabis sativa has also been found at the Thaygen-Weier site, one of the earliest known places in Europe where the herb has been found.

areas, and we know nothing about these earlier languages. In the first century a group of Celts, known as the Helvetii, left southern Germany and settled in Switzerland. Helvetia was the Roman name for a region of central Europe occupying a plateau between the Alps and the Jura Mountains, the western part of modern Switzerland.

Eventually the Celts encountered the Romans and were pushed back into Switzerland by Caesar's army in 58. The Roman Empire founded its province of Helvetia in what is now Switzerland in 15 B.C.E.

In the fifth century, the Altemanni tribe (ancient Germanic people) came and settled in Switzerland. In 1032 C.E. Switzerland became a part of the Holy Roman Empire. In 1291 in an attempt to become independent, local leaders united and formed the Swiss Confederation. Gradually the Swiss began to expand their territory and gained independence from the Holy Roman Empire in 1499.

The Protestant Reformation started by Martin Luther (1483–1546) in the 16th century affected all parts of Europe and caused upheaval in Switzerland as well. Although central Switzerland remained Catholic, in Zurich relics were burned, and adoration of saints was banned (saintly veneration was a practice favored by Catholics). In 1536 Geneva refused to accept the authority of the Roman Catholic bishop and became the center of the Protestant movement in Switzerland.

The French Republic invaded Switzerland in 1798. Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821) unified the country under the name Helvetic Republic and a written constitution was imposed, an act that was bitterly resented by most of the Swiss. After the British and the Prussians defeated Napoleon at Waterloo, the Congress of Vienna granted independence to Switzerland in 1815.

In 1848 a new federal constitution was set up, and Bern was made the capital of Switzerland. Improving the economic and social condition of the country was a priority, and industries, railways, and roads were developed.

The International Red Cross was founded in Geneva in 1863.

During World War I Switzerland remained neutral and only extended its help in organizing Red Cross camps for the victims of the war. After World War II most European countries were engaged in reviving their economies and repairing the ravages of war, but Switzerland was already a powerful commercial center. In 1948 Switzerland joined the Organization for European Economic Cooperation. It became a founding member of the European Free Trade Association in 1959 and joined the Council of Europe in 1963. For many years Switzerland did not wish to become a member of the United Nations,

Fun Fact

There are 450 known varieties of Swiss cheese. These are classified into extra-hard, hard, semi-hard, semi-soft, and soft.

but in 2002 Switzerland officially joined. As of midyear 2005, Switzerland had not applied for membership in the European Union (EU).

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Switzerland is a landlocked territory surrounded by France, Germany, Liechtenstein, Austria, and Italy. This tiny country has mostly hilly terrain, with the Alps and the Jura mountain ranges in the south and the north, respectively. Dufourspitze is the highest point at 15,203 feet. The central parts of Switzerland form a plateau with numerous beautiful lakes, rivers, and plains. The Swiss mountains are world famous for ski resorts and other recreational activities.

The climatic conditions in Switzerland vary from one region to another. The northern regions of the country experience a continental climate with very cold winters and mild summers; precipitation is minimal in this region. The southern parts of Switzerland are more Mediterranean, with warm summers and comparatively mild winters. Rainfall is abundant and in winter it snows in the higher elevations. The Alps act as a divide between the south and the north of the country. The climatic conditions are distinctly different in these two regions. The temperature in Switzerland ranges from 95°F during summer to way below freezing on winter nights.

The vegetation all across the different areas of Switzerland varies depending upon the prevailing climate. Palm trees, alpine forests, coniferous soft-wooded trees, bushes, shrubs, and grassy meadows are all found within the same country. Alpine animals, such as the ibex and the chamois, also live in Switzerland.

ECONOMY

Switzerland is a politically nonaligned nation, and this has enabled the Swiss to make their economy one of the most stable in the world. In spite of having low reserves of natural resources, Switzerland is rich in other resources. The nation's service sector comprises a highly skilled and specialized workforce in the fields of watchmaking, handicrafts, microtechnology, biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, banking, and insurance. Switzerland's banks are known for maintaining absolute secrecy about their customers' accounts, with the result that it is seen as a safe place for investors from all over the world. The banking sector is one of the most important contributors to the nation's gross domestic product (GDP). The other major industries are pharmaceuticals, chemicals, precision instruments, and tourism. Switzerland enjoys good trade relations with the other European nations and has realigned the Swiss economy to improve trade opportunities with EU members. The United States and Japan are its other major trading partners.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The Swiss have been known for their neutrality for centuries. Many foreign personalities have adopted Switzerland as their country and lived there, including Voltaire, Rousseau, Byron, Shelley, James Joyce, Carl Jung, and Charlie Chaplin. At the same time many Swiss have left their country and made their name elsewhere. Among them were Charles Le Corbusier, Paul Klee, Albert Giacometti, and Jean-Luc Godard.

Swiss culture is a result of influences from its neighboring countries over the years. A strong sense of regionalism is seen in Switzerland. It is so pronounced that it is hard to believe so diverse a people can stay together as a nation. The Swiss believe in “unity, but not uniformity.” Yodeling, the alp horn, Swiss wrestling, Swiss knives, and watches are an integral part of Swiss culture, and famous all over the world.

❁ CUISINE

Swiss cuisine concentrates on a wide variety of breads, milk, cheese, and other dairy products, meat products, and sweets. Vegetables are used but in lesser quantities compared to sausages and meat. Dishes prepared from veal, pork, beef, chicken, or turkey, are popular in Switzerland. The Swiss enjoy eating locally grown fruits, such as apples, pears, grapes, and various berries including blackberries, blueberries, raspberries, red currants, and strawberries. Swiss chocolate is also world famous and is just as popular as Swiss cheese.

A typical Swiss breakfast is heavy, featuring bread, butter or margarine, marmalade or honey, some cheese or cereals, milk, cold or hot chocolate, and tea or coffee. The Swiss often have light lunches that may just be sandwiches. Dinner can be a full meal made up of bread, cheese, and dried meat. The Swiss consume modern popular soft drinks, beers, local and branded wines, tea, and coffee in different flavors.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar. Celebrations take place all over the world and begin right on the evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve). In Switzerland many cities have fireworks. On New Year's Day the Swiss have processions in the streets, wearing costumes and hats that represent good and evil spirits. Swiss followers of the Julian calendar celebrate New Year's Day on January 13 as Old Sylvester's Day.

In Switzerland people also believe that good luck comes from letting a drop of cream land on the floor New Year's Day. This is said to bring a year of overflowing abundance. Traditionally the Swiss make personal New Year's resolutions and have elaborate meals on this day. It is a national holiday and schools and offices are closed.

❁ INSTAURATION DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 1

On Instauration de La République, or Day of the Republic, public offices were appointed in 1848 through many regions of the Graubünden canton of Switzerland. However, in the 21st century it is the day of one of the largest children's festivals in the country. Little boys clang bells and parade through the streets collecting money and goodies. They are dressed in long blue overskirts and red scarves. The origin of this custom is unknown.

❁ CONFEDERATION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 1

Confederation Day, or Swiss National Day, commemorates the founding of the Swiss Confederation in 1291. On this day the president of the confederation addresses the nation on national television and radio. The celebrations related to this day vary from place to place in Switzerland, and cultural performances and competitions often mark this day. Fireworks displays and bonfires are held in many parts of the country as well. On this day all schools and workplaces in Switzerland are closed.



New Year's in Laupen

In Laupen New Year's Day is celebrated in a wild and rowdy way. Young boys wearing wooden masks, nightgowns, and pointed hats assemble at the foot of an ancient castle. They carry brooms, inflated animal bladders, and cowbells. This weird procession parades to the village square for all to see. They sing traditional New Year's songs and wish goodwill to all. The boys then disappear, only to make their appearance once again, this time to chase the village girls. What follows is a lot of noisy fun and other festivities. This tradition originated in the early 19th century, but it did not enjoy everyone's patronage. The town officials have time and again tried to suppress and ban this custom, but to no avail.

Religious Holidays

ST. BERCHTOLD'S DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: January 2

This holiday is celebrated in honor of Duke Berchtold V von Zähringen, the founder of the city of Bern, the capital of Switzerland. He had vowed to name the city after the first animal he killed on a hunt. This happened to be a bear (*bern*, in German) and that is how the city got its name in the 12th century. The city of Bern was founded in 1191 and became the eighth member of the Swiss Federation in 1353. Between the 14th and 16th centuries it reached the peak of its power by enlarging its territory and gaining great political influence. Bern was made a free imperial city by the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II in 1218, after Berchtold V died without an heir.

Fun Fact

Heidi, written by Johanna Spyri, is a story about a girl living in the Swiss Alps. This is Switzerland's most popular literary work and is famous all over the world.

PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Last Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, commemorating the last week of Jesus' mortal life. Jesus Christ was the prophet of Christianity, and Christians believe him to be the second personage of a holy trinity that include the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. The day is as much about Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem as it is about the beginning of his journey to the Cross. His arrival in Jerusalem was indeed the way to the Cross.

Jesus had already foretold his betrayal and Resurrection to his disciples on the way to Jerusalem from Judea. The day was April 10, 30 C.E., according to some calculations. They stopped at the Mount of Olives, near Bethany, and Jesus sent two disciples to

Swiss Army Knife

The Swiss Army Knife, sometimes abbreviated as SwAK, is one of the most unique export items of the country. This small knife has a toothpick, scissors, serrated knife, tweezers, can opener, and screwdriver; in fact, some of the larger models have over 20 tools and blades! There are two Swiss Army knife manufacturers, Victorinox and Wenger. They supply about 50,000 knives to the Swiss army each year. The rest of production is exported to the rest of the world.

the village of Bethphage to bring the donkey and its foal tied at the crossway of two roads to him. They did so and placed their clothes on the foal to provide a comfortable seat. The disciples then cut branches and covered the path, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the words of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. People welcomed him by waving palm and olive branches and strewing garments and branches on the road. There were different perceptions at work: Jesus rode in on a donkey, a humble entry of a peaceful nature by a spiritual king; the people of Jerusalem welcomed him with palm and olive branches and the laying of garments in his path because they wanted a worldly king to defeat the Romans.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Catholics

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

The rituals observed by Roman Catholics on Maundy Thursday are based on a sequence of events that are supposed to have occurred during this meal. First Jesus washed the feet of his disciples; then he announced that he had been betrayed by one of them. The traitor Judas left the table. Finally Jesus instituted the Eucharist: a ritual of consuming bread and wine as symbols of his body and blood, also referred to as Communion in Christian churches. In the Roman Catholic Church, Maundy Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist, the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week, and gives priests an opportunity to prepare for the many rites associated with Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter. The name Maundy Thursday may be linked to the Latin word *mandatum*, "command," because Jesus commanded his apostles to observe the ritual now called the Eucharist.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent. It is observed in most parts of the world to remember the Crucifixion of Jesus. In Switzerland Roman Catholics observe a fast on Good Friday, and a ritual called the "Stations of the Cross" is performed. This is a reenactment of Jesus' final journey (carrying the Cross) to Calvary before his Crucifixion. Children march carrying antique lanterns, and elders hold articles that are related to the Passion of Christ, such as candles, ladders,

sponges, hammers, nails, and whips. Funeral music is often played during these processions. This is a day of fasting and abstinence in Switzerland. On Good Friday the church bells do not ring; instead a rattling sound is made by clapping pieces of wood to call the faithful for prayer to the church. This custom has been prevalent in Switzerland since the 16th century.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Last Saturday of Lent

Holy Saturday is the day Jesus lay in the tomb. This was the Sabbath (the Jewish day of rest is Saturday), and he rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. Roman Catholics also regard this day as the second Sabbath after Creation. The final day of Holy Week, which begins with Palm Sunday and includes Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, it marks the threshold between death and resurrection, and is a day of silence and contemplation for devout Christians.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. On Easter in Switzerland the entire family gathers to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus. Children receive specially decorated Easter eggs made from chocolate from their parents and grandparents. In the mountain valleys of Switzerland, where winter lasts for more than six months, Easter not only signifies the Resurrection but also the reawakening of nature. This rebirth of life is celebrated by sharing wine and blessed bread and donating gifts to the poor—a tradition (called *Osterspende*) that has been followed since the 16th century. In Switzerland dining and exchanging greetings and Easter eggs continue even on the next day, Easter Monday, which is the first Monday after Lent. The custom of egg cracking, known as *Eiertütschen* locally, is extremely popular. In the towns of Frömsen, Oberriet, St. Gallen, and Effingen, in the canton of Aargau, the custom of egg throwing takes place every Easter Sunday or Monday. The participants in this game throw the brightly colored eggs at spectators, who eat them right away. This festive day ends with music and dance.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Forty days after Easter

Ascension Day is a day of special celebration for Christians all over the world. It celebrates Jesus' Ascension into heaven, 40 days after his Resurrection on Easter. The Swiss celebrate this day with special prayer services in churches. A group of men on horseback, followed by local people and the clergy on foot, conduct a large and lively procession around the border of their parishes and villages. When the procession enters the church, the bells are rung in celebration. This 15th-century custom, which began as a simple procession of worshippers, has now become a colorful event. Its underlying purpose is to bless the fields and encourage the use of the sacraments. The procession passes through fields, stopping four times for blessings under huge arches made of fir twigs, ribbons, and flowers. The Swiss also decorate their houses and their horses on this day, in order to welcome spring.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ PENTECOST

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Fifty days after Easter (Pentecost Sunday), 51 days after Lent (Pentecost Monday)

Both Pentecost Sunday and Monday, also called Whitsunday and Whitmonday, are usually celebrated; *Pentecost* means "the fiftieth day" in Greek. In the Western Roman Catholic Church there are special observances, including a penitential vigil, and in ancient times neophytes were baptized at this time. From the white garments of these converts comes the name Whitsunday, the English name for Pentecost. Whitsunday and —monday have been celebrated since the third century C.E. and commemorate the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and early Christians

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; PENTECOST

❁ ALL SOULS' DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: November 2

Roman Catholics observe All Souls' Day to remember the dead. On this day all saints, martyrs, and the dead are remembered and honored. In many places

Fun Fact

Young unmarried adults, on their way to the midnight service in church, stop near nine fountains on the way. They take three sips of water from each fountain. The Swiss believe that by doing so they will meet their future spouse at the church doorstep.



Around 800 people from all around the world celebrate the traditional Christmas Midnight Mass at the church of the Abbey of Einsiedeln, one of the most famous abbeys in Switzerland, on December 24. (AP Photo/Keystone, Urs Flueeler)

in Switzerland, processions, accompanied by bands playing funeral hymns, go to the cemeteries. Families decorate the graves of relatives and light candles. The Swiss believe that the dead mingle with the living on this day. That is why efforts are made to make the dead feel content. During the family meal food is offered to the dead to appease them, and prayers are also said for their souls to rest in peace. All Souls' Day is a public holiday in many parts of Switzerland.

See also Volume III: ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: December 8

The Immaculate Conception is a Roman Catholic belief that states that, at the time of her birth, God had protected Mary from all human sins and filled her with his grace. It is believed that, because God wanted Mary to be the mother of Jesus, she had to be totally free of any kind of sin.

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 24–25

In Switzerland, Christmas celebrations begin with the “pursuit of St. Nicholas”—*Klausjagen*—on December 5. Marchers parade on the street carrying tall, decorated cardboard hats (some six feet tall). They light candles and escort someone posing as St. Nicholas through the town. Some strong men march with heavy bells hanging around their necks, while others blow horns and play brass instruments. The people who lead this parade crack whips to announce their arrival. That evening, St. Nicholas rides a donkey to the town square, where he gives a speech about the events of the past year.

On Christmas Eve, a *Wienectchind* (“Christmas Child”), along with six other girls, walks from house to house carrying a lantern. The children are dressed in rose-colored clothes while the Christmas Child wears white. They sing carols and receive several edible goodies in return.

Swiss families eat homemade doughnuts (*ringli*) and drink hot chocolate when they return from church after the service. On Christmas Day, the festivities continue with church services and enjoying special Christmas delicacies. Friends and relatives visit each other and exchange gifts on this day.

It is said that Father Christmas gives gifts to little boys, while his wife, Lucy, distributes gifts to the girls. In some parts of Switzerland, Santa visits children in a car and gives them a ride in it. The Christmas traditions in Switzerland vary from place to place because of the mixing of diverse European cultures. Christmas decorations are often prepared well in advance. A manger with figures of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus, along with shepherds and the Three Wise Men, are placed in all churches.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ HOMSTROM

Observed in: Scuol
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: First Saturday in February

On the first Saturday in February, the children of Scuol gather to make a huge straw man called *Hom Strom*. This straw man, made of twisted rye fiber, is completed by noon. Older children and adults then place this straw man in a specially made pit in the fields and set it on fire by hurling balls of fire (made of rags dipped in oil) into the pit. The villagers then sing folks songs and celebrate the end of the winter spirit. The origin of this ritual is not known.

❁ CARNIVAL

Observed in: Basel
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March

Among all the carnivals held in various parts of Switzerland, the Carnival held in Basel is the most famous with over 10,000 people participating in it. This event, also called Basler Fasnacht, is traditionally held on the first Monday after Ash Wednesday. The day begins at four in the morning with the sound of flutes and drums. The Swiss march on the streets wearing masks and colorful costumes. All streetlights are switched off and decorated lanterns are displayed. The whole day passes by with people indulging in music and dance, procession, and other forms of revelry. In the recent past the processions held here have been theme-based, reflecting some current event.

❁ GENEVA SUMMER FESTIVAL

Observed in: Geneva
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July

Lake Geneva, situated in this city, is the country's largest lake. The Geneva Summer Festival is known for its lake parades, where beautiful floats are displayed. There are firework displays and musical performances of various kinds. Children's theater and dancing parades are also held. The Geneva Summer Festival brings big crowds and is a major contributor to Swiss tourism revenue.

The Swiss city of Geneva is so popular that people often mistake it for the country's capital city. Though it is not the capital, picturesque Geneva is the headquarters of many international organizations. The people living in Geneva are also truly international in nature: Every third person one meets in Geneva is not Swiss-born.

Geneva was chosen as the headquarters for the League of Nations in 1919. Known for political neutrality, the city was the chosen venue for signing peace treaties, for setting up the World Health Organization, and the headquarters of the Red Cross. The city is also known for its tourist attractions such as St. Peter's Cathedral and the Water Fountain.

Geneva is often called "the city of parks." Many of the city's parks are situated on the shores of the lake and are known for their exquisite landscaping. The English Garden is home to the Monument National. There is a statue of two young women—one called the Republic of Geneva, the other Helvetia—signifying Geneva's annexation to the Swiss Confederation on September 12, 1814.

❁ TRADITIONAL ONION MARKET FAIR

Observed in: Bern
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Fourth Monday of November

This fair is held on the fourth Monday of every November in Bern. All the farmers in the vicinity flock to the market in Bern to display their produce. This fair is a remnant of the two-week autumn fair, known as Bernese Martinmas Fair, which used to be held in Bern on Martinmas (St. Martin's Day, November 11). Quantities of onions and garlic, as well as other fruits and vegetables, are sold here. In the evenings people don colorful costumes and visit the market, giving it a festive air. Poetry recitations and other events are held in this locality on Onion Market Day. The traditional food served at the fair consists of onion and cheesecake, quiche with steamed onions or grated cheese with batter, and tangy white wine from the canton of Valais.

Fun Fact

On carnival day in Basel, some cafés and restaurants provide a platform for a tradition called Schnitzelbank, in which participants get up and spout satirical verses about a subject of their choice.

Rites of Passage

❁ MARRIAGE

Most weddings in Switzerland take place in a church, officiated by a priest or minister. The bride wears a traditional wreath for the ceremony. This is to signify her maiden status. The wreath is burned after she is married. The faster the wreath burns, it is said, the luckier she will be in marriage.

The wedding guests are then led in procession from the church to the reception venue, where the bridesmaids greet them by distributing colorful kerchiefs. The guests give a coin each, in return. These coins are collected and given to the couple for setting up their new home. At the end of the party, the couple retires to their home, after planting a pine tree in the front yard. This is to symbolize their future children.

Further Reading

Joy Charnley and Malcolm Pender, eds., *Visions of Utopia in Switzerland* (Berne: P. Lang, 2000); Martin Killias, Mathieu Simonin, and Jacqueline De Puy, in collaboration with Jelena Keller et al., *Violence Experienced by Women in Switzerland over Their Lifespan: Results of the International Violence against Women Survey* (Berne: Staempfli Publishers, Ltd., 2005); Jonathan Steinberg, *Why Switzerland?*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

~ Syria ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Middle East, between Lebanon and Turkey bordering the Mediterranean Sea
Size	71,498 sq. mi.
Capital City	Damascus
Flag Description	Syria's flag has three bands of red, white, and black; two small green five-pointed stars are centered in the white band.
Independence	April 17, 1946 (from League of Nations mandate under French administration)
Population	18,448,752 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic (under military regime since 1963)
Nationality	Syrian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Arab (90%)
Major Language(s)	Arabic (official); Kurdish; Armenian; Aramaic; Circassian
Major Religion(s)	Sunni Muslim (74%); Alawite, Druze, and other Muslim sects (16%); Christian (16%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Revolution Day, March 8; Mother's Day, March 21; National Day, April 17; Labor Day, May 1; Martyrs' Day, May 6; October Liberation War, October 6

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

In the early 21st century, archaeologists from many countries have been conducting extensive excavations in Syria and uncovering artifacts that continue to extend further into pre-history knowledge of how ancient humans lived. Syrian archaeologists, for example, have found two firestone axes used for hunting prey some 35,000 to 40,000 years ago. The almond-shaped axes, both just over three inches long, were found a little more than three feet down in al-Wadi's cave, located near the Mediterranean port of Tartous.

Archaeologists from the United Kingdom have spent the past two decades excavating and studying a site near Abu Hureyra, unique for its unbroken sequence of strata from hunter-gatherers to well-developed agrarian activities. At the earlier hunter-gatherer levels they have found, as expected, lots of thin wild cereal seeds; but at higher levels they found what they had not expected, the kind of fat seeds typical of cultivation. The seeds recovered at Abu Hureyra are the old-

est cultivated seeds ever found. These early people of Syria were growing their own wheat and rye 13,000 years ago. During this period, called the Younger Dryas by geologists, there was a long drought, causing the wild cereals to gradually die out: The seeds of varieties that require a lot of water were the first to go, followed eventually by hardier types. This suggests that, as the wild grains the people needed disappeared, they began to cultivate grains in order to survive.

Dutch archaeologists, excavating at Tel Abyad, a site that was abandoned because of drastic climate changes toward the end of the seventh millennium B.C.E., report having found ceramics dating back to 6800–6300. At the al-Wadi cave site, stone arrowheads and bone needles used for hunting and making leather items, respectively, have been dated to 6000, and shards of clay jars used to store wine and other liquids were probably used between 5000 and 3000. Additional and spectacular Bronze Age items (c. 3000) have been found at Terqa, a site in the region of al-Ashaara, including pieces of jewelry made with precious stones and bronze knives.

In 1968 Italian archaeologists, excavating what is now called Tell Mardikh, found a statue dedicated to the goddess Ishtar with the name *Ibbit-Lim* on it, a king of Ebla. Ebla,

which means “white rock,” was an important city-state in northern Syria that had two distinct peak periods, the first during the late third millennium, the second between 1800 and 1650, and was known only from Egyptian and Akkadian inscriptions. Over the next 10 years, the team uncovered a palace, dating from around 2500 to 2000. Within the palace they found more than 20,000 tablets with cuneiform script, written in Sumerian and in a previously unknown Semitic dialect labeled Eblaite. The tablets, dating to around 2250, were an archive of governmental and commercial transactions including law cases, trade contracts, and diplomatic materials.

A team of Syrian and French archaeologists has found a city at Rawda, a site in central Syria, dating back to the Early Bronze period, around 2000 B.C.E. They believe that its location, surrounded on three sides by valleys, means that it was an important trade center. They have also found what they believe was a space used for worship; this area includes two smaller chambers, perhaps for the use of priests. One of these rooms had a clay pot filled with beads from Afghanistan and shells, probably from the Syrian coast. At Tel Abyad, in addition to the more ancient pottery artifacts, the Dutch team excavated 37 clay tablets, which date back to 1200, when the Assyrians constructed a fortress along the border. The cuneiform writing on the tablets indicates that this fortress figured significantly in regional politics.

At the town of Gharieh in southern Syria, an ancient cemetery has been excavated. Built of four parallel pillars, its arched tombs resemble those found in the ancient city of Palmyra. Among the items discovered are perfume bottles, glass containers of different sizes (perhaps serving various household functions), and pieces of clay oil lamps. The cemetery was apparently used between 400 B.C.E. and 106 C.E.

Over the millennia Syria has been occupied by a succession of Semitic cultures—the Canaanites, Hebrews, Arameans, Assyrians, and Babylonians—followed by the non-Semitic Persians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, then, finally, by Arabs. Damascus is probably one of the oldest inhabited cities of the world. After it came under the rule of Muslims in 636 C.E., it flourished and prospered.

Eventually in 1516, the Ottoman Turks took over the region. For the next 400 years the Ottomans ruled over the region except for a brief period of eight years—from 1832 to 1840—when the Egyptians, under their military general Ibrahim Pasha (1789–1848), occupied the territory. He used the internal rift between the Ottomans to his advantage and gained popularity with his diplomacy and tact. But the people were dissatisfied with some of the laws he enacted. In 1838 war broke out within the country. When the United Kingdom and Austria intervened, Ibrahim Pasha was forced to leave the country, and the Ottoman Empire was reestablished.

The Turkish Empire disintegrated after World War I, and France gained control of the area. In

1920 an independent Arab kingdom of Syria was established under King Faisal (1885–1933) of the Hashemite Dynasty, who later became king of Iraq. However, the Hashemite Dynasty, after ruling for only a few months, was defeated by the French in the Battle of Maysalun in July 1920. Syria was occupied by the French troops later that year after the League of Nations put Syria under French mandate.

The Syrians chafed under French rule and never accepted the constitution proposed by France. The Syrians rose in revolt in 1925–26. France had promised independence to Syria in 1941, but it was finally granted in 1946. Although the economy of Syria underwent rapid economic development after independence, a series of military coups kept the political side always tense. Syria united with Egypt to create the United Arab Republic in 1958. The union was not, however, a success and, after a military coup in 1961, the union disintegrated. The Syrian Arab Republic was formed. In 1963 the Baath Party, an Arab political party founded in Damascus in 1941, which also exists in Iraq, took control of Syria.

After initiating a bloodless military coup in 1970, the minister of defense, Hafiz al-Assad (1930–2000), became prime minister. He ruled the country with an iron fist for 30 years, until his death in 2000, after which his son, Bashar al-Assad (b. 1965), assumed power.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Syria shares land borders with Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Turkey. The major cities of Syria include the capital city of Damascus, Aleppo, and Homs. Apart from the fertile strips of coastal land, mountainous regions, a river basin, and stony deserts, the terrain is generally semi-arid. The Euphrates crosses Syria in the east. The Jabal an-Nusayriyah mountains, parallel to the coastal plain, average close to 4,000 feet in height, the highest peak being Nabi Yunis (over 5,000 feet).

Syria has a Mediterranean climate, with hot, dry summers and wet, mild winters. The climate is continental farther inland. The temperature can range from 50°F in winter to a sweltering 115°F in the summers.

Syria once boasted of abundant mountain forests, but the biodiversity found in this country is dwindling due to many environmental threats. Yew, lime, and fir trees grow naturally in this region. Wolves, hyenas, foxes, badgers, wild boars, jackals, deer, bears, squirrels, polecats, donkeys, goats, and camels are typical fauna found in Syria.

Fun Fact

Damascus has been inhabited for over 4,000 years—beginning a couple of thousand years before Rome was founded in 753 B.C.E.—and this makes it the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world.

❁ ECONOMY

Syria is a middle-income country. Its economy is based on agriculture, industry, and energy. The major industries of Syria are oil, chemicals, cement, food processing, textiles, and agriculture. The main crops cultivated are cotton, wheat, and barley. The production of crude oil may be little in comparison to the other countries of the Middle East, but this resource is an important source of income for the nation.

Syria enjoys good trade relations with Ukraine, Turkey, Lebanon, Iran, the Arab states, Japan, and the members of the European Union. The main export items are crude oil, cotton, and phosphates.

Fun Fact

Claiming he was a prophet, al-Mutanabbi led the Qarmatians in revolt in 932, but the revolt was put down, and he was imprisoned by the governor of Emesa. For his part in this event, he was given the nickname by which he is usually known, al-Mutanabbi, or “he who would be a prophet.”

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Syria is littered with remains of architecture and religious works from various periods in history. The impression of the Muslim caliphs, Romans, and the Byzantines can be recognized throughout Syrian culture.

Syria was once the center of Arab poetry. The most noted poet who lived in this region was Ahmad ibn al-Husayn al-Mutanabbi (915–65). Bedouin artworks, such as silver jewelry, textiles, and metalwork are also legendary.

Syria’s capital Damascus was famous for the quality of textiles produced there. This woven fabric, known as damask, was made from silk, wool, linen, or cotton. There were floral prints with woven gold or silver threadwork. Damask was used for tablecloths, napkins, towels, and wall or furniture coverings. Syrian metalwork, such as the traditional *cezve* (a long-handled coffee pot), is world famous. Intricate designs of wheat and olive

plants cover these coffee pots, which are also adorned with elaborate gold and silver trim.

Syrian music is a blend of Arab and Western styles. Bedouin culture is also evident in the musical traditions of this region. Some of the famous Syrian artists are Mayada El Hennaway, George Wassouf, and Kazem al-Saher.

Syrian hospitality is the mainstay of the culture. Families often invite complete strangers into their homes for a cup of coffee or a meal. This Bedouin tradition of providing food and

Fun Fact

Coffee drinking plays an important role in the Syrian lifestyle. Prospective brides have to prepare and serve coffee to their future in-laws as a test of their culinary skills, while reading the future from leftover coffee grounds is an enjoyable social activity in Syria.

shelter to desert travelers developed because of the harsh weather in the deserts.

❁ CUISINE

Syrian cuisine has European and Eastern influences. Many dishes prepared in Syria have become so popular in the region that what most people think of as exotic Arab cuisine is originally Syrian. The use of grains, yogurt, cheese, cucumber, eggplants, chickpeas, nuts, tomatoes, and sesame seeds, along with parsley, mint, lemon, onion, garlic, and olive oil, distinguish Syrian cuisine.

Syrians begin their day with a light breakfast of olives, cheese, yogurt, and coffee. Lunch is normally the main meal of the day. A typical Syrian meal begins with *mezze*—a bowl of salad, hummus, mousaka, tabouleh, or any of 40 to 50 appetizers. Rice or flat bread, meat, vegetables, beans, sweets, and fruits feature in a Syrian meal. A popular item is *burghol* (steamed, dried, and ground wheat), which is added to many dishes, including the national dish, *kibbeh* (ground lamb).

Every meal invariably ends with very strong and sweet Turkish coffee or tea. This is accompanied by ice cream, pastries, fruits, or another dessert. Syrian sweets, such as baklava (filo dough baked with nuts and honey) and *halawat al-jibna* (syrup-topped pastry filled with cream cheese) are very popular.

Hummus (a puree of chickpeas and sesame), baba ghanoush (an eggplant puree), falafel (fried ground chickpeas), and *shawarma* (shavings of lamb or chicken rolled in flat bread) are popular Syrian dishes. *Makkadem* (sheep’s feet) is a traditional dish and a delicacy. Syrian Muslims do not eat pork or drink alcohol. They eat meat that is specially prepared according to Muslim traditions.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR’S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, and is widely celebrated as New Year’s Day. Celebrations take place all over the world beginning right on the evening of December 31 (New Year’s Eve). In Syria, it is a national holiday and schools and offices remain closed.

❁ REVOLUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 8

On this day Syria commemorates the 1963 revolution, during which the Baath Arab Socialist Party came to power. A political state of emergency has

been imposed in Syria since that event. The Syrian government organizes rallies and demonstrations on Revolution Day. Political symposia and peaceful marches are held locally and in all Syrian embassies around the world.

❁ MOTHER'S DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 21

It is believed that Mother's Day celebrations date back to ancient times. They are thought to have originated with an ancient Greek spring festival honoring Rhea, the mother of the gods and goddesses according to Greek mythology. Mother's Day is celebrated in many countries across the world, although on different dates.

On this day in Syria children and husbands honor mothers and grandmothers by presenting them with flowers and gifts and allowing them to have a day of rest.

❁ NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 17

National Day, or Independence Day, commemorates the liberation of Syria from French occupation in 1946. To celebrate this occasion the Syrian government holds mass rallies, and the nation's leaders address the general public. The Military Museum and the Martyr's Monument are open for visitors on this day. Many exhibits in the fields of art, technology, and culture are also held on the Syrian National Day.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in building their nations and societies.

In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. Although the strike was postponed, the day for the observance remained May 1. The United States made efforts to discourage the May 1 commemoration because of its obvious socialist origin, so Labor Day is celebrated on the first weekend of September there, and most of its political content is forgotten.

In Syria, workers hold marches in the streets throughout the country.
See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ MARTYRS' DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 6

Martyrs' Day commemorates the Syrian struggle against Ottoman domination in 1916. Many Syrian patriots were killed on Martyrs' Day. To remember these war heroes, the president of Syria visits the Martyrs' Monument and places a flower wreath there, while the army band plays music in their honor. The national anthem is played and a 21-cannon-shot is fired to salute the martyrs. In Syria it is a national holiday, and schools and offices remain closed.

❁ OCTOBER LIBERATION WAR

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 6

Syria commemorates the anniversary of the October Liberation War on this day, also called Tishrin War Anniversary. The October Liberation War was fought under the leadership of the late president Hafez Assad against Israeli occupation in 1973. This war was seen as a means to strengthen Arab collaboration against the Israeli forces. Anniversary celebrations are held all over Syria by the armed forces and civilians. Many people pay homage to the late president and visit the monument of the Unknown Soldier. Exhibitions and cultural activities are held on this day.

Fun Fact

A Syrian host may insist that a guest continue to eat until everything set on the table is finished. The Arabs say that the quantity guests eat reflects their affection for the host!

Religious Holidays

❁ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

El am Hejir marks the first day of the Islamic calendar. It is believed that on this day in 622 C.E., Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina with his family and followers (an event known as the Hegira) and formed the first Islamic state in Medina. This day is celebrated as the Islamic New Year's Day.

In Syria, special prayers are held in mosques all over the country. A holiday meal is prepared and enjoyed by Syrian families on this day.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM



A Syrian vendor arranges sweets at his shop in downtown Damascus. Sweets sales rise during the last week of Islam's holiest month of Ramadan as Muslims prepare to celebrate Eid al-Fitr, or Feast Day, ending their month-long daylight fast. (AP Photo/Bassem Tellawi)

❁ MOULOU

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

Muhammad's birthday, known as Mouloud or Mawlid al-Nabi, falls in the third month of the Islamic year. For Muslims all over the world, this is a day of great joy and celebration because Muhammad is the most revered prophet among them.

In Syria this event is a two-day celebration. Special prayers are held in mosques all over the country. An elaborate meal is prepared and shared by Syrian families on this day.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOU

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr, also called the Feast of Fast-Breaking, marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, during which devout Muslims all over the world must observe a month-long dawn-to-dusk fast. It is required by the Koran, and it is the fourth pillar of Islam's Five Pillars of faith. In Syria this is a four-day celebration, and special prayers and feasting mark

Fun Fact

Syrian children believe that their Christmas gifts are not brought by Santa Claus but by the smallest camel of the Three Wise Men, who arrive bearing gifts on Epiphany. The children leave water and hay outside the house for the camel. In the morning the water and hay are gone, replaced by presents.

the occasion. In Damascus there is a carnival atmosphere during Eid al-Fitr. Street corners are crowded with small fairgrounds and stalls, presents are exchanged, fireworks explode, and music and dancing go on till the early hours of the morning. The city is festooned with ribbons and decorations, and people wear their best clothes. The Koran forbids fasting during this observance.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world because it is the day on which they celebrate the birth of Jesus, whom they believe was the Savior promised by the Old Testament prophets.

In Syria Christmas decorations are often prepared well in advance. A manger with figures of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus, along with shepherds and the Three Wise Men, are placed in all the churches. Christians begin Christmas celebrations on Christmas Eve (December 24), when families attend church and offer prayers in a midnight service. They return home to share a special meal during which they cut a cake specially made for the occasion. Also on Christmas Eve everyone in the family carries a lit candle and stands around an unlit bonfire outside the house. The youngest child, or the youngest son of the family, reads the Christmas story and then lights the bonfire. Syrian Christians believe that the way the flames spread is an omen indicating the luck of the family in the coming year. When the fire burns, psalms are sung; as it dies everyone leaps over the embers making wishes.

On Christmas Day the festivities continue with church services. The image of the infant Jesus is carried in a joyous procession around the church. Afterward friends and relatives visit each other, exchange gifts, and enjoy special Christmas delicacies. Syrian Christian families gather at lunch or dinner to celebrate the holiday with a special feast consisting of chicken, oranges, nuts, and pastries.

In Syria Christmas is not a legal holiday since only 16 percent of the population is Christian.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS; EPIPHANY

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th and pilgrimage month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, also called the Feast of Sacrifice, is a very important festival for Muslims all over the world because they believe that on this auspicious day Ibrahim (Abraham) agreed to sacrifice his young son in order to obey God's command. Muslims

honor Ibrahim for his willingness to do God's will, whatever the sacrifice.

In Syria this festival is celebrated for four days. On the first day Muslim families slaughter a fattened sheep and prepare an elaborate feast for friends and family members. Special prayer services are conducted in mosques all across the country.

During this month, many Muslims also undertake the required pilgrimage, or hajj, to Mecca. It is the aspiration of every Muslim to go to the sacred city once in his or her lifetime, and the Koran requires it if it is physically and financially possible. The hajj is the fifth of Islam's Five Pillars of faith, and many Muslims undertake the pilgrimage several times during their lifetimes.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

Regional Holidays

INTERNATIONAL LEATHER GOODS FAIR

Observed in: Damascus
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April

Syria is one of the most important manufacturers of shoes and leather products in the Arab world. The four-day International Leather Goods Fair is held in the Damascus New Fair Ground to showcase the latest leather products manufactured in the country. This event attracts many visitors from the fashion industry in nearby nations.

SILK ROAD FESTIVAL

Observed in: Damascus
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: September

The historic and famous Silk Road is celebrated during this event. The Silk Road was the major trade route from China through Central Asia, to Europe, around 2,500 years ago. It stretched for about 4,000 miles, from the Great Wall of China to the Mediterranean Sea. With silk and spices, arts, literature, and music were also shared via this route. In ancient times philosophers and preachers used this road to travel to other places to propagate their views. The Silk Road Festival celebrates this transport of ideas, rather than silk, across continents.

During this event many international artists perform musical shows and concerts. Exhibits, lectures, symposia, and workshops that are of cultural relevance are organized in Damascus. Apart from the cultural festivities, exhibits showcasing silk manufacture are also a highlight of this festival.

Rites of Passage

BIRTH

Pregnant Muslim women go to their parents' home following the final fertility ritual and remain there until the confinement period ends. Childbirth is an important event in Syrian families. Because Muslims believe that the first word a child should hear is God's name, when a child is born the father or another male relative whispers the summons to prayer (*azam*) in its ear. On the sixth or seventh day after birth, the child is named. If the child is a son, the mother and father are often identified by the name of their son. If, for example, they name their first son Ali, the father becomes Abu Ali (father of Ali) and the mother becomes Umm Ali (mother of Ali).

After childbirth, Syrian women rest and recover for the next 40 days. During this period, other female relatives and friends tend to the new mother and assist her with daily chores. Fresh bread, butter, honey, and porridges made with fenu-greek are given to her. Visitors who come to see the new baby often leave the child with money and gifts. On the 40th day the child is put in a cradle for the first time. Soon after the child's head is shaved; the hair is placed in a piece of cloth and buried or, alternatively, thrown in a river.

COMING OF AGE

Male circumcision is a part of Syrian's tradition and is carried out at puberty. This practice is only performed among Syrian Muslims and the Jewish community. Muslims and Jews believe that, by undergoing this ritual, a boy becomes a man. Trained elders use knives, razors, and other sharp instruments to perform the circumcision without administering any anesthetic. This practice enjoys social backing, and families take great pride in it. Huge celebrations follow this coming-of-age ritual.

When a girl reaches puberty she is isolated for seven days and is allowed to eat only butter, bread, and sugar. She is forbidden to eat fish, flesh, salt, or any acidic food. On the final evening of her seclusion she is given a warm bath. Among the lower classes, friends may hold a party.

MARRIAGE

Arranged marriages are common in Syria among Bedouins and in rural villages. Traditional Syrian weddings are elaborate affairs that often last for several days. The groom provides plenty of silver and gold jewelry to the bride's family, as well as cash as

Fun Fact

The Muslim call to prayer, or *azam*, is: "God is great. There is no God but Allah. Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. Come to prayer."

Fun Fact

Al-Wadi cave, located in western Syria, is almost 2,000 feet long and contains a Byzantine-era room carved in the rock.

part of an agreed-upon bride price (*mehr*). The couple signs a marriage contract, called a *milka*. After the signing of the contract, the couple is legally married even though they may not consummate the marriage until the night of the wedding party.

On the wedding day, the bride dyes her hair with henna and wears a white wedding gown. The women guests come for the wedding in all their finery and gather inside the bride's house or in a tent set up outside the house. The bride is brought inside the tent and is seated on a large chair. A traditional dance accompanied with singing and clapping is performed for her.

The groom and his relatives gather inside another tent erected near the groom's house, then make a procession to the bride's tent to pick her up. The night is spent at the groom's house, and the celebrations continue throughout the following week.

While some Syrians consider that marriages between first cousins are the best option, Syrian Christians forbid this practice.

❁ DEATH

On the occasion of a death in a Syrian Muslim family, the deceased is washed, shrouded in white cloth,

and buried immediately. The following three days are meant for mourning. Friends, family, and well-wishers come and offer their condolences and help the family accept the death.

Snacks are prepared by neighbors and served to visitors. The mourning period for the widow is four months and 10 days, during which period her family and friends visit her often.

Further Reading

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❧ Taiwan ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Eastern Asia, bordering the East China Sea, the Philippine Sea, the South China Sea, and the Taiwan Strait, north of the Philippines, off the southeastern coast of China
Size	13,892 sq. mi.
Capital City	Taipei
Flag Description	Taiwan's flag is red with a dark blue rectangle in the upper hoist-side corner bearing a white sun with 12 triangular rays.
Independence	N.A.
Population	22,894,384 (2005 est.)
Government	Multiparty democracy
Nationality	Taiwan
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Asian (Taiwanese, 84%)
Major Language(s)	Mandarin Chinese (official); Taiwanese (Min); Hakka dialects
Major Religion(s)	Buddhist, Confucian, Taoist (93%)
National Holiday(s)	January Celebrations, January 1–3; Peace Memorial Day, February 28; Youth Day, March 29; Labor Day, May 1; Teacher's Day, September 28; Double Tenth Day, October 10; Retrocession Day, October 25; Jiang Jie Shi's (Chang Kai-shek's) Birthday, October 31; Constitution Day, December 25

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

The first people to settle on the island now called Taiwan arrived 30,000 years ago, but they were probably genetically distinct from any groups now living there. About 4,000 years ago, the ancestors of contemporary Taiwanese aborigines, who are genetically related to Malaysians and Polynesians, settled Taiwan. The language they speak is Austronesian, a linguistic classification that includes languages spoken on the South Pacific islands of Indonesia, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia.

Linguists and other scholars as well, postulate that contemporary Austronesian language and culture originated on Taiwan approximately 6,000 years ago, because there is a greater diversity of language on Taiwan than in other Austronesian-speaking areas. The linguistic evidence shows that earlier linguistic separations mark the earliest settlements, indicating a lengthy split from its roots in southern Asia.

The indigenous people of Taiwan belong primarily to two groups: the Kao-shan tsu, who live in the high mountains, and the Ping-pu tsu, who inhabit the plains. The government of the Republic of China (Taiwan) recognizes only 12 out of 23 tribes, most of which dwell in the highland mountains and speak archaic Formosan languages that belong to the Austronesian family of languages. In 2004 the total population of these tribes was about 400,000.

Taiwanese aborigines recognized by the ROC government include the following tribes: Ami (Amis; Pangcah), Atayal (Tayal, Tayan), Atayal (proper), Bunun, Kavalan, Paiwan, Puyuma, Rukai, Saisiyat (Saisiat), Tao (Yami), Thao, Tsou (Cou), Northern Tsou, Southern Tsou, Truku (Taroko), and Sediq. Three of these tribes—the Amis, Kavalan, and Tsou—are sometimes regarded as plains tribes. There are 11 aboriginal tribes that the government does not recognize: Babuza, Basay, Hoanya, Ketagalan, Luilang, Pazeh/Kaxabu (Pazih), Popora, Qauqaut, Siraya, Taokas, and Trobiawan. Earlier records suggest that there may be 26 linguistic groups,

Fun Fact

The indigenous people call Taiwan “Pakan.”

and 6 of the nonrecognized tribes—the Babuza, Popora, Hoanya, Siraya, Taokas, and Pazeh—were included in Japanese field studies through 1945.

The Bing-bu Zu (aborigines of the plains) lived in settled villages protected by bamboo walls. The most populated villages were in southern Taiwan and sometimes supported as many as 1,500 people. The villages of the Siraya were made of thatch and bamboo and stood on stilts almost six feet above the ground. A watchtower was used to watch for headhunting parties of the highland tribes. The people of the plains hunted spotted deer and muntjac (a small Asian deer) and farmed millet to some extent. They also cultivated sugar and rice, which were used primarily for making wine. Property was held communally, and the Bing-bu Zu villages were surrounded by a series of concentric rings, each with its specific use: The innermost ring was used for gardens and orchards that followed a fallowing cycle around the ring; the second ring was used to cultivate plants; and the third ring provided hunting and deer fields for the tribe. The structure of plains villages was a central concept in the later Qing administration of Taiwan.

A majority of the Bing-bu Zu lived in matriarchal or matrilineal societies. Women could reject as many men as they wanted before deciding to marry, and men married into a woman’s family following the courtship period. Before Dutch Reformed Church missionaries appeared, plains people generally did not marry until they were in their mid-thirties, when they were less capable of engaging in strenuous labor. Women did the sewing, cooking, and farming, and were often priestesses or mediums to the gods. Men were responsible for hunting and taking heads.

According to ancient records, it’s probable that the Han Chinese knew of the existence of Taiwan’s main island of Taiwan since the Three Kingdoms period (third century), because they named some of the smaller offshore islands, such as Greater and Minor Liuqiu (Ryukyu). None of these names, however, have been connected with the main island of Taiwan with any certainty. Han Chinese began to settle in Penghu— islands attached to Taiwan lying in the Taiwan Strait—during the 1100s, but it was only in the 1400s that people other than aborigines, the Chinese, permanently settled the main island of Taiwan.

It was not until 1517, however, that Taiwan was found by European navigators, Portuguese sailors, who named the island Ilha Formosa (“Beautiful Island”), but the Portuguese made no effort to colonize it. The first serious European incursion occurred in 1624, when the Dutch invaded and built a trading post near Tainan. In 1626 the Spanish ousted the Dutch and annexed the region, but the Dutch returned in 1641 and forced the Spanish out. In 1661 after being expelled from China by the ruling Qing dynasty, the Ming dynasty, led by Cheng Cheng Gong, attacked the Dutch settlements,

which surrendered a year later. The people of Taiwan accepted Cheng as their leader, and the region did well under his regime. Cheng, however, dreamed of returning to China, but first he had to overthrow the Qing Dynasty. To support his objective, he taxed the people of Taiwan heavily, and this so annoyed the Taiwanese that their resentment to Cheng’s rule steadily grew. But in 1683 the Qing Dynasty invaded Taiwan, forcing Cheng and the Ming Dynasty to surrender. The new regime declared Taiwan a territory of China and kept Taiwan’s population low in order to maintain peace in the region.

In the mid-19th century China’s contacts with the European countries increased, and Taiwan started trading with European countries. After the Sino-Japanese War of 1895 (primarily fought over control of Korea) and China’s defeat, China was forced to cede Taiwan to Japan. Although the local people rebelled against Japanese rule, Japan suppressed the rebellion effectively. However, when Japan was defeated, ending World War II in the Pacific theater, China again seized control of Taiwan.

In 1949 Chinese Communists took control of China and forced General Jiang Jie Shi’s (Chiang Kai-shek’s) government to seek refuge in Taiwan. Jiang Jie Shi had been the leader of the Nationalist Party in China, which was called the Kuomintang (KMT). The Communists of mainland China and the Republic of China (Taiwan) both claimed to be the legitimate government of China, and this led to political tensions that remain unresolved in the early 21st century.

In 1975 Jiang Jie Shi (b. 1887) died and was succeeded by his son Jiang Qing-guo (b. 1910). After the latter’s death in 1988, martial law came to an end and Lee Teng-hui (b. 1923) became the first president of Taiwan. In 2000 Chen Shui-bian (b. 1950) of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) became president, ending more than 50 years of Kuomintang rule. His party, the DPP, has traditionally been supportive of Taiwan independence, and the issue of Taiwan independence remains a sensitive political issue.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Taiwan is an archipelago located in East Asia. It is the largest island of the Republic of China and lies off the mainland of the People’s Republic of China. The Tropic of Cancer passes through this country. Taiwan is separated from China by the Taiwan Strait. The country also has maritime borders with the South China Sea, the Philippine Sea, the East China Sea, and the Pacific Ocean. Taiwan has a mountainous region and a rocky coastline in the east and fertile plains in the west. The highest peak of the country is located at Mt. Yushan, which is close to 13,000 feet high.

The climatic conditions in Taiwan are tropical in nature. The country receives abundant rainfall during the months of June, July, and August, and

Taiwan receives close to 100 inches annually. The mountainous regions of Taiwan are cool and snowy during winter, while summers are hot and sticky. Temperatures can range from 68°F to 86°F throughout the year.

The mountains of Taiwan have forests of cypress and camphor trees. This island country is also home to the Formosan black bear and the Sika deer. A wide variety of fish and species of birds are also found in Taiwan. There are 67 reserves and 6 national parks spread around the country.

❁ ECONOMY

Taiwan has a capitalist economy with some of its major investments in mainland China, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines. The main crops are rice, corn, vegetables, fruit, and tea, but agriculture contributes only around 2 percent to the country's gross domestic product (GDP). The nation's main industries include heavy equipment manufacturing, electrical equipment, electronic and computer goods, textiles, and iron and steel. Taiwan has good trade relations with the United States, Japan, Hong Kong, and South Korea. The country exports computer products, electrical equipment, metals, textiles, plastics, rubber products, and chemicals.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The Taiwanese culture is based on many of the same traditions and lifestyles as the Chinese because of the country's long association with mainland China.

Taiwan has at least 23 indigenous tribes, and each one has a style in the various art forms found in Taiwan. A trained eye can easily note the differences in the styles of woodcarving, weaving, and basketry.

Woodcarvings of toys, ornamental objects, religious buildings, furniture, and weapons are notable in Taiwan. Human heads and pairs of snakes are the most widely portrayed subjects. Pottery is important to traditional Taiwanese because pots are closely associated with ancestor worship. The Taiwanese architecture is evident in the indigenous homes of the country. People build homes with stacked slate, and these houses are partly underground in order to withstand typhoons. Handicrafts—paper cutting, knotting, and dough sculpture—and performing arts—puppetry, dragon and lion dances, folk dances, folk opera, and traditional acrobatics—remain vital, receiving special support from the government and other organizations.

The dance and music forms are among the major cultural contributions of the native people of Taiwan. Communal dances, performed at ceremonies and rituals, are mostly simple yet harmonious, accompanied with walking and foot-stomping movements, performed to the sounds of small bells or other metal ornaments. Musical instruments, such as drums, stringed instruments, woodwind instruments, and other percussion instruments are common in Taiwanese music.

❁ CUISINE

Taiwanese cuisine is very similar to that of the Chinese. The people use a lot of seafood and sugar in their cooking but eat simple, light foodstuffs on a daily basis. Pork feet, mushrooms, and shark-fin stew are some of the local favorites. Because it is an island, Taiwan's cuisine features fish and other seafood. Crustaceans, mollusks, and eels are delicacies, while oysters and clams are a regular part of the diet. *Oachian* (an omelet made of oysters, eggs, and cornstarch, served with sweet and sour sauce) is a very popular dish in Taiwan.

Pork, beef, lamb, goose, duck, and chicken are also important ingredients in Taiwanese cuisine. Rice is widely used to make a variety of snacks. *Lopokao* is a favorite dish made of rice, radish, and shrimp. Even though Taiwan does not produce wheat, this grain still plays an important role in Taiwanese kitchens.

Fun Fact

In Taiwan, religious and cultural observances are scheduled using the Chinese lunar calendar; the Gregorian (or Western) calendar is used to schedule public and legal holidays.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ JANUARY CELEBRATIONS

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 1–3

January 1 is a very important day in Taiwan. It is the anniversary of the founding of the Republic of China (in mainland China) under the leadership of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, in 1912. The Republic of China was Asia's first democratic republic, and a flag-raising ceremony is held in front of the Presidential Office Building on this day.

Taiwanese families decorate their homes and streets with the national flag, colorful lanterns, lights, and banners, and honor all the revolutionary heroes who were instrumental in establishing the Republic of China. In Taiwan families get together, including relatives who have been away, and enjoy a

Taiwanese Opera

Taiwanese opera was once performed on almost every auspicious occasion, such as weddings, birthdays, and temple festivals. This art form is similar to that of mainland Chinese opera. The colorful makeup and costumes, stage props, and stylized gestures, music, acting, and the general ambience of the opera are beautiful. There are many opera troupes that perform throughout Taiwan. Yang Li-hua is known to be one of the most celebrated operatic actors in the country. She is known for playing only male roles.

special feast. The day begins by worshipping their ancestors. People love to visit their friends and relatives on this day and watch displays of dragons, lion dancing, and other folk activities on the streets.

Fun Fact

To make sure that no riches are swept outdoors, the Taiwanese do not sweep floors or clear trash on New Year's Day.

January 1 also marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, which is celebrated as New Year's Day all over the world. The Taiwanese mark the occasion with fireworks and other festivities.

On January 2 married women visit their parents' home. The celebrations continue until the Lantern Festival, which falls on the 15th day of the new year. This festival is seen as the second New Year's celebration and is also enjoyed by Taiwanese families. They decorate lanterns, used to decorate temples, with depictions of birds, beasts, historical figures, and other themes. There are fireworks displays in the night and many other festive activities.

January 3 is a bank holiday in Taiwan. All schools and offices remain closed during this festive period.

PEACE MEMORIAL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 28

Peace Memorial Day, or 228 Memorial Day, commemorates the incident that took place on this day in 1947. Often called the "Taiwanese Holocaust," it resulted in the murder of thousands of Taiwanese—by most accounts between 18,000 and 28,000 people—during a protest, and the government has designated this day as Peace Memorial Day. On this

February 28 Incident

When World War II ended, Japan lost control over Taiwan, which then came under Chinese rule. The people of Taiwan were initially very happy with this change of government, but they were soon disillusioned. The Chinese government was corrupt and insensitive to the needs and aspirations of the Taiwanese. In protest on February 28, 1947, thousands of people gathered in Taipei. The Chinese government, under the leadership of Jiang Jie Shi, fired at the demonstrators with machine guns, brutally killing many of them on the spot. More Taiwanese were massacred to curb the uprising. Many teachers and thinkers were detained by the Chinese military. Some of them were released decades later in the 1980s.

Even though in 1995, the Chinese premier apologized to the Taiwanese people on behalf of his government, the wounds from this incident remain fresh for many senior citizens in Taiwan.

day memorial services, concerts, art exhibitions, group runs, and other activities are held to mark the loss of innocent people.

YOUTH DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 29

On this day in 1910 the founding father of the Republic of China Dr. Sun Yat-sen spearheaded the Canton Uprising to topple the Ching government. During this struggle many young soldiers were killed. They were hailed as martyrs, and this day is observed as Youth Day in memory of these heroes. On Youth Day in Taiwan, the Republic of China's (ROC) president attends the public service at the Martyrs Shrine (a shrine to the martyrs of the revolution), and similar ceremonies are also held at the regional level. Ten outstanding youths are honored for their achievements on this day.

LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as Workers' Day and May Day, in many parts of the world; it recognizes the important role played by workers in building their nations and societies.

In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. Although the strike was postponed, the day for the observance remained May 1. The United States made efforts to discourage the May 1 commemoration because of its socialist origins, so America celebrates a cleansed, nonpolitical Labor Day in September.

In Taiwan workers hold marches, rallies, and demonstrations on Labor Day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

TEACHER'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 28

Teacher's Day, also celebrated as Confucius's Birthday, is celebrated on September 28, when the Republic of China remembers and honors the model educator's contribution to Chinese culture and society. On this day, the Confucius Memorial Service is held at the Confucius Temple. The government presents awards to local educational institutes and teachers for their positive influence and contributions to society.

❁ DOUBLE TENTH DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 10

Double Tenth Day, also celebrated as National Celebration Day or Republic Day, is the national day of the Republic of China (ROC). On this day in 1911 the Wuchang Uprising began. This led to the eventual collapse of the Ching Dynasty. In Taiwan, military and public parades are held on the streets of Taipei and in front of the Presidential Office Building. The president of the ROC addresses the country, and firework displays are held in various parts of the island nation. All the streets are specially decorated for this occasion with flags, lights, and colorful banners.

❁ RETROCESSION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 25

On this day in 1945 Taiwan was released from Japanese control and became a part of the Republic of China. Taiwan had been a Japanese territory since 1894, and the condition of the Taiwanese people during this period was deplorable. After the transfer the island country's economy and the standard of living improved considerably.

This day reminds the Taiwanese of the hardships they have endured in the past, and various memorial activities are held on Taiwan's Retrocession Day. Families hang the national flag in front of their homes to commemorate this event.

❁ JIANG JIE SHI'S (CHIANG KAI-SHEK'S) BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 31

This day is the birth anniversary of Jiang Jie Shi, the Chinese military and political leader who succeeded Dr. Sun Yat-sen. During Jiang Jie Shi's rule the seat of government was moved to the island of Taipei because the Communists had taken control in mainland China. However, Chiang spent his last days in Taiwan. On the day he died the Taiwanese mourned his passing by wearing black armbands. Jiang Jie Shi is credited with unifying China and leading the country during the difficult times of World War II.

❁ CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 25

On this day in 1946, the constitution of the Republic of China was passed; it was implemented soon after. In Taiwan this significant day is listed as a national holiday. Government agencies, schools, and families celebrate by raising the national flag to symbolize this historic event.

Confucius (551–479 B.C.E.)

Confucius, the renowned ancient Chinese philosopher and teacher, symbolized the dictum of "educate all without discrimination, and teach according to the abilities of one's students." Confucius used arts, music, archery, chariot driving, reading, writing, and mathematics to bring more than 3,000 disciples under his tutelage. In a class-ridden Chinese society, Confucius never refused any student education because of his class or status. He also played an important role in formulating many of the basic principles that structure Chinese lifestyle and culture, even now. During times of unrest and political tensions Confucius toured China to advise rulers on the ethics of ruling a province.

While his teachings had a great influence on Chinese philosophy, his ideal of equality in education made Confucius one of the foremost educators in Chinese history.

Religious Holidays

❁ CHINESE NEW YEAR

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: First day of the first month of the Chinese calendar

The Taiwanese celebrate the Chinese New Year, also known as the Lunar New Year and the Spring Festival, with great joy. Around mid-December, weeks before the celebrations begin on New Year's Eve, people in Taiwan start their preparations. There is great excitement because New Year's is a time when entire families gather for dinner, if possible. If someone is unable to make the trip home for the celebration, a place setting is still placed on the table; it symbolizes the person's presence in spirit, if not in body. After dinner youngsters are given cash gifts by their elders and everyone stays up late to see the old year out and to welcome in the new one.

The Chinese New Year is a two-week holiday filled with festivities as well as piety. The Taiwanese begin the next day with prayer and worship. This day is set aside to meet and greet friends and relatives and the streets are filled with throngs of people on their way to reunions or watching dragon dancing, lion dancing, and other traditional forms of entertainment and activities that take place on the streets. Families get together to share special feasts on this day. The streets and homes in Taiwan are decorated with colorful lanterns and elaborate lighting and there are firework displays all over Taiwan.

On the second day of the new year, married women return home to visit their families. (The third day is regarded as a bad day for visiting relatives.) On the fourth day a host of deities who made a trip to heaven to report the activities of individual

Fun Fact

To guarantee good luck and wealth in the new year, there are several taboos that must be observed. Floors should not be swept, and garbage cannot be disposed of lest good luck and riches get swept out the door; cursing and quarreling must be avoided; and anyone who breaks a dish on New Year's must immediately say, "Peace for all time," to avoid the possibility of bad luck.

families return to take up their vigil once more, and most people go back to work after celebrating for four or five days. On the 13th and 14th days shopkeepers are open again, and they hang lanterns out for the Lantern Festival (Yuen Siu). The festivities continue until the colorful Lantern Festival, on the 15th day of the new year, before life again returns to its routine.

Though the traditional festivities associated with the Chinese New Year are millennia old, they still have great importance. Cleaning

and rearranging one's home improves cleanliness and symbolizes a fresh start; worshipping ancestors and deities upholds filial piety and family ethics; sitting around the hearth together symbolizes unity and the value of spending important occasions with one's family; and making New Year's visits home after marriage maintains important bonds between friends and families.

See also Volume III: CHINESE NEW YEAR; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ LANTERN FESTIVAL

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Fifteenth of the first month of the Chinese calendar

The Lantern Festival, also known as the Shang Yuan Festival, is the climax of a series of springtime celebrations, a "second New Year's" gladly celebrated by the people of Taiwan. It ends the two-week-long festivities of the Chinese New Year's. On the night of the festival decorative lanterns depicting birds, beasts, historical figures, or any of numerous themes are carried by children or adorn temples.

Competitions are held to show off these glowing works of art. The Taipei Lantern Festival, held annually at Jiang Jie Shi Memorial Hall Plaza (and the largest and most famous of these competitions), is attended every year by thousands. The festivities and different customs associated with this festival not only provide celebrants with rich entertainment, like the his-

torical-theme lantern displays and riddles, but the ancient wisdom expressed is also instructive. The lanterns feature different folk art techniques, impressing these arts deep in the hearts and minds of the people. Fireworks light the night skies around the island, and there are also many regional folk activities unique to Taiwan such as Farmer's Day, which is also celebrated on the 15th day of the first lunar month.

One of the most popular features of the Lantern Festival are the customary lantern riddle parties that are held on this night. Lantern riddles are stuck on the surface of lanterns, and people try to guess the answers to them. The keys to riddles may be found in a single word, a line from a poem, or the name of a place or an object. Because guessing the riddles is said to be "as hard as shooting a tiger," these brain-stumpers are called "lantern tigers." Newspapers, magazines, and department stores all make up riddles for festival-goers to puzzle over. There are also lantern riddle parties held at temples.

See also Volume III: CHINESE NEW YEAR; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ FARMER'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Fifteenth of the first lunar month of the Chinese calendar

This day signifies the commencement of spring in the Republic of China. The aim of celebrating this event is to encourage the farmers of Taiwan and to highlight the importance of agriculture to the Taiwanese economy. The main event held during this occasion is the "Whipping of the Spring Ox." The spring ox is a colorful paper cow stuffed with five types of grains to symbolize a good harvest. This ox is then whipped while the grain pours out from it. This is seen as a good omen for the spring, which is a time of regeneration and new beginnings. While the Spring Cow is being struck, the following words are said: "With the first hit comes timely and favorable weather; with the second comes fertile land and warm rains; with the third comes a peaceful start to a new year; with the fourth comes peace through the four seasons; with the fifth comes a harvest of the five grains; and with the sixth comes springtime to the Six Unities or universe."

On this day, the people drink spring wine and worship the spring deity, the Earth god who can bring a plentiful harvest. They also consume foods associated with the spring season such as celery, chives, and bamboo shoots; these represent industriousness, longevity, and prosperity, respectively.

The fifth day of the first lunar month is also celebrated as Tourism Day in Taiwan, while the second day of the month is the Earth god's birthday.

See also Volume III: SPRING FESTIVALS

Fun Fact

Taiwan is often known for the consumption of dogs, snakes, and bear organs. However, these items are usually medicinal and very expensive, and it is unlikely one will find these items in a typical Taiwanese dish or on a menu.

❁ TOMB-SWEEPING DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: One hundred sixth after the winter solstice

Tomb-Sweeping Day, also known as the Qingming or Ching Ming Festival, and Qing Ming Jie, which can be translated as the “Pure Brightness” Festival, is a traditional Chinese festival observed on the 106th day following the winter solstice, which falls early in April on the Gregorian calendar. It signifies the middle of spring and is a sacred day of the dead. For the Taiwanese this day remembers and honors the dead. Families visit the graves of their dead ancestors and clean and tidy the tombs. They offer prayers and food items at the graves and pray for their souls. The most common dish offered is a special type of “grave cake,” although it differs from one region to another. Most cemeteries are located on hillsides outside towns and villages, so Taiwanese families often combine the visit to the cemetery with a family picnic, taking advantage of the fine weather and the time they can spend with their families.

April 5 is also a very significant date in Chinese history. Major events such as the April Fifth Movement and the Tiananmen Incident occurred on this day, albeit in different years. This is also the date when the Taiwanese leader Jiang Jie Shi died.

❁ DRAGON BOAT FESTIVAL

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Fifth of the fifth month of the Chinese calendar

The Dragon Boat Festival, also called Tuono Ng, is celebrated on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. With the Chinese New Year and Mid-Autumn Festival, it is one of the three major Chinese holidays. Because diseases spread most easily during summers, Dragon Boat Festival was started to drive off evil spirits and disease and to help find peace. The legend of the poet-saint Chu Yuan is a later addition, and the event now also commemorates his death. According to tradition, he drowned himself 2,300 years ago to protest the government’s corruption. Competing teams take part in boat races in specially designed boats with dragon-shaped heads, rowing to the rhythm of drums. People also consume a special dish, *tzung tzu* (rice balls wrapped in bamboo leaves), in memory of Chu Yuan.

This festival continues its original purpose as a day to ward off evil spirits and pests that cause diseases during the summer season. The Taiwanese hang calamus and moxa (herbs) on their front door. The elders drink *hsiung huang* wine, and children carry special sachets to ward off evil spirits and bring peace. The Taiwanese also believe that if they consume well water drawn on the afternoon of the festival, it will cure illnesses. This custom is known as “fetching noon water.”



Dragon boat teams paddle through the course on the Keelung River during preliminary races in the lead up to the Dragon Boat Festival in Taipei. According to historians, dragon boats were used as part of a complex shamanistic ritual for supplicating the water gods in order to prevent floods and other watery disasters over 3,000 years ago. The death of poet and respected bureaucrat Chu Yuan in 290 B.C.E., saw the dragon boats become an integral part of Chinese culture. (AP Photo/Wally Santana)

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

❁ GHOST FESTIVAL

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Fifteenth of the seventh month of the Chinese calendar

Taiwan celebrates the Ghost Festival to honor the deceased, believed to live in the underworld, by offering sumptuous feasts on the 15th day of the seventh lunar month. It is the custom for families to offer sacrifices of the newly harvested grain to their departed ancestors, as well as freshly slaughtered pigs and sheep and wine. Because the Taoist Ghost Festival and the Buddhist Ullambana (Deliverance) Festival fall on the same day, and both festivals pay homage to the spirits of the dead, the seventh lunar month has come to be known as Ghost Month. It is a time when Taiwanese believe the dead return from the underworld to feast on the food provided for them by the living. The Ullambana Festival and Ghost Festival have combined and are now celebrated as Chung Yuan Putu or “Mid-Origin Passage to Universal Salvation.”

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM; TAOISM

❁ MID-AUTUMN MOON FESTIVAL

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Fifteenth of the eighth month of the Chinese calendar

Fun Fact

There are four kinds of mooncakes: *ping*, *su*, *kuang*, and *tai*. *Ping* mooncakes were first made in Peking and are similar to sesame cakes, with a crisp and savory crust. *Su* mooncakes are sweet and have a delicate, layered crust judged on the basis of its tenderness and whiteness. The *kuang* mooncakes are wrapped in a pastry crust and are well-known for carefully prepared fillings. *Tai* mooncakes have a sweet potato filling and are sweet, tender, and tasty. They are a tradition in Taiwan and have also been called “Moonlight Cakes.”

The Mid-Autumn Moon Festival has traditionally been a time when Taiwanese families get together. This festival has ancient Chinese origins and is believed to have been a ceremony of sacrifice to the Moon goddess. At some point that ceremony was merged with the tradition of eating mooncakes, and what is now celebrated as the Mid-Autumn Festival became a major event. On this night the Taiwanese gather at picnic spots and parks for “moon appreciation parties,” eating specially prepared mooncakes and praying for a safe year ahead.

This festival also coincides with the fall harvest in Taiwan. People pray to the Earth god (Tu-ti Gong) so that the next year’s harvest will be bountiful, too.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

DOUBLE NINTH DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Ninth day of ninth lunar month of the Chinese calendar

The Double Ninth Festival falls on the ninth day of the ninth month of the Chinese lunar calendar. This Chinese festival is based on the theory of yin and yang, the two opposing, complementary forces of the universe. Traditionally the number nine is associated with the positive principle, yang, so this observance is also known as Chung Yang, or Double Yang Festival. Yin is thought to be the negative and feminine force; yang is the masculine and positive force. On this day, the odd digit nine occurs twice, and, therefore, is an auspicious occasion to celebrate. On this day the people of the Republic of China drink chrysanthemum wine and eat cakes made with chrysanthemums. This plant is viewed as a medicinal herb that cleanses the body and ward off evil spirits.

In Chinese the word for “nine” sounds exactly like the word for “long time,” so nine has become associated with longevity. As a result in 1966, Double Ninth Day was declared Senior Citizen’s Day in Taiwan, and the week that begins this holiday is observed as Senior Citizen’s Week. Since then Double Ninth Day has lost its original significance and is now a time of expressing gratitude to the elderly for their hard work, a new custom that fits nicely with

the Chinese tradition of revering the old and one’s ancestors.

Regional Holidays

SAISIYAT FESTIVAL

Observed in: Miaoli County

Observed by: Saisiyat tribe

Observed on: Fifteenth of the 10th lunar month of the Chinese calendar

The Saisiyat people are one of the aboriginal tribes who inhabited Taiwan before the Chinese arrived. An agrarian people numbering somewhere between 2,500 and 4,000, they have lived on their land for over 400 years. The Saisiyat Festival, known as Sacrifice to the Short People, is a three-day festival that starts on the first full Moon after the fall harvest. It is observed every two years. According to the Saisiyat elders, the ritual is performed to appease the Short People and to correct a great injustice that involved a man of the Short People and a Saisiyat woman, although the details are vague.

Before this tragic event, the Short People and the Saisiyat lived harmoniously, sharing the bounty of their harvests. The woman, who may have been married or, perhaps, a maiden, was raped or assaulted. No one knows. During a harvest while the ceremonials were being prepared, the brother, or maybe the husband, of the offended woman, sneaked away and chopped halfway through the trunk of the Great Tree where the Short People would return to sleep when the ritual was over. Having covered his work with mud, he went back to the village and rejoined his people, behaving as if nothing was wrong. Eventually, the Short People returned to their tree and fell asleep. Then the tree fell over, killing almost all but two old women. When numerous calamities befell the Saisiyat because of the genocide, the remaining old women of the Short People taught them the ceremonies that would placate the angry spirits and atone for the injustice of their ancestors.

At sunset on the first day, the Saisiyat gather in a circle and invite the Short Spirits to come and receive their offering and share in the bounties of the harvest. The meanings of the songs they sing are said to be so sacred that most Saisiyat cannot understand them. Then the dancing begins. Remaining in the large circle, the people link arms and begin to sway, moving slowly the center. The dancing will not stop until dawn, except for prayer. Eventually participants tire, drop out, and fall asleep under the shelters set up at the edge of the site. Others replace them, while others wait, keeping meals warm and pounding rice. Starting at midnight each night, the dancing stops, the circle turns to the east, and everyone supports the ritual leader as he prays. The shaman-priest intones prayers to appease the spirits,

then the dance begins again.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

❁ CHI HSI

Observed in: Taiwan

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Seventh day of the seventh month of the Chinese calendar

Chi Hsi (Qi Xi) is known by several names in Taiwan, including the Night of Sevens (because it falls on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month), Festival to Plead for Skills, Seventh Sister's Birthday, and Night of Skills; it is also sometimes called the Chinese Valentine's Day. On this day it is traditional for young girls to demonstrate their domestic arts, especially melon-carving, and to wish for a good husband.

During late summer the stars Altair, Vega, and Deneb—the Summer Triangle—are directly overhead in the night sky, and the Chinese tell the tragic story of a young cowherd named Niu Lang (the star Altair) who accidentally found seven fairy sisters bathing in a lake. After stealing their clothes he waits to see what will happen. The fairy sisters choose the youngest and most beautiful sister Zhi Nu (“the weaver girl,” the star Vega) to recover their clothes. In the process, the cowherd sees her naked so she is obliged to agree to marry him. Niu Lang and Zhi Nu are very happy together, but the Goddess of Heaven (in some versions it's Zhi Nu's mother or father or the Emperor of Heaven who wants to separate them) finds out that a mortal has married a fairy girl and becomes enraged. Taking out her hairpin, she scratches a wide river in the sky that will separate the lovers forever (thus creating the Milky Way, which separates Altair and Vega). Zhi Nu sits forever on one side of the river, sadly weaving, while Niu Lang watches her from afar and cares for their two children (his flanking stars). But the magpies of the world take pity on them and annually fly up to heaven and make a bridge across the star Deneb so the lovers can be together for one night, the seventh night of the seventh Moon.

It is the custom on Chi Hsi for a single or newly married woman to put a wreath in the front yard and to make an offering of fruit, flowers, tea, and makeup to Niu Lang and Zhi Nu. When the offering is finished, half of the makeup (face powder) is thrown on the roof, and the other half is shared among the young women. They believe that, by making this offering, they will be bound in beauty with Zhi Nu.

Japan also celebrates this festival, which is called Tanabata there, on July 7, celebrating the meeting of Orihime (Vega) and Hikoboshi (Altair). Other East Asian cultures continue to celebrate the “star-crossed” lovers on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month of the Chinese calendar,

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

After giving birth, a Taiwanese woman is expected to stay indoors and recover. During this period she is not allowed to do any work; she is to recuperate by eating, resting, and sleeping. She is not allowed to eat anything salty or cold. Cabbages, bamboo shoots, oranges, and an assortment of fruits and vegetables are also not considered ideal food for a new mother. Her diet includes eggs, rice, noodles, brown sugar, ginger, chicken, fish, and pig kidneys. *Ma-yu chi* (chicken stewed in sesame oil and rice wine) and *sheng-bua tang* (a concoction of peach kernels, ginger, herbs, and rice wine) are two special dishes prepared for her during this period of postnatal care.

In some communities in Taiwan, the birth of the first child is celebrated on a grand scale. The father's family sends gifts to the mother's family to show their joy and gratitude.

❁ COMING OF AGE

The traditional coming-of-age ceremonies of the various groups in Taiwan are no longer observed in modern Taiwan. The young people are aware of such rituals only from stories they hear from their elders and from books. In former times young boys in Taiwan underwent many rituals before attaining manhood. There was an array of rituals such as admonishments and beatings by the village elders to show that the young boy could withstand pain and suffering. Hunting ceremonies, in which boys were required to hunt a deer or catch a monkey, were performed, and drinking sacrificial beer also signified the coming of age of Taiwanese boys.

Taiwanese girls do not have an organized system that formally declares their reaching womanhood. In some areas young girls received tattoos on their forehead to signify that they were women. Married women were tattooed on their cheeks. These practices are no longer followed.

❁ MARRIAGE

Before Taiwanese marriages take place, the horoscopes of the prospective bride and groom are analyzed and matched. If their match proves to be ideal, the families exchange gifts

Fun Fact

Once known in the distant past as Fu-teh, Cheng-shen (the deity of fortune, morals, and righteous deity), Taiwan's Earth god was also known as She-shen (“village deity”) because he watches over matters central to farming and society. He is probably the god most closely connected with the daily lives of the Taiwanese. Countless temples and shrines dedicated to him around the island indicate how much the people depend on his protective power.

Fun Fact

The number four and the color white are often associated with death in Taiwan, and are therefore often avoided. This is similar to the superstition about the number 13 prevalent in the West.

and confirm the marriage. The groom gives the bride 12 gift items including shoes, jewelry, and pagoda-shaped candies. The groom's betrothal letter is read out loud, and the bride's family responds by sending 12 gift items to the groom's family. These items include chopsticks and a goldfish, to signify prosperity and the wish for male offspring in the future. The couple exchanges rings at their engagement ceremony, rather than on the wedding day.

On the wedding day the groom comes to the bride's home to pick her up. He is expected to kneel in front of her parents and vow that he will take care of their daughter. Then the groom is allowed to see his bride and take her along with him. The couple seeks blessings from the bride's parents and grandparents, then she is taken to the groom's home, where she is presented to the new family. The couple seeks blessings from the groom's parents, grandparents, and their dead ancestors. There are no bridesmaids or a best man in a traditional Taiwanese wedding.

The friends of the newlyweds often organize some special wedding games, and the groom is required to show how well he knows his bride. He may be asked questions about her personal belongings. The groom is allowed to meet his bride only after answering the questions correctly.

Most contemporary Taiwanese weddings feature huge banquets held in restaurants, and wedding guests give cash sealed in red envelopes as gifts.

❁ DEATH

The Taiwanese believe in immortality of the soul in spite of death. When a death occurs, they pay their

respects to the deceased by holding elaborate funeral ceremonies. A dead person may be cremated or buried in Taiwan. Some Taiwanese ritually remove the bones of the buried after seven years. These bones are then washed and placed in a grave again. Special ceremonies are held to remember the dead even after the official mourning period, which usually lasts for 49 days, and no celebrations are held. If the dead person was a close family member, anyone who was planning to marry must do so within 100 days of the death or else wait an entire year.

The different communities of Taiwan have different death rituals. However, they generally share the idea that there are good and bad deaths. If someone dies at home in the company of loved ones, it is considered a good death. However, if it is a suicide, violent death, death during childbirth, or a death outdoors, it is considered to be a bad death.

Further Reading

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~ Tajikistan ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Central Asia, west of China
Size	55,251 sq. mi.
Capital City	Dushanbe
Flag Description	Three horizontal stripes of red, white, and green; gold crown surmounted by seven gold, five-pointed stars located in center of white stripe
Independence	September 9, 1991 (from Soviet Union)
Population	7,163,506 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Tajikistani
Major Ethnic Group (s)	Tajik (official; 80%); Uzbek (15%)
Major Language(s)	Tajik; Russian (widely used in business)
Major Religion(s)	Muslim (85%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; International Women's Day, March 8; Labor Day, May 1; Victory Day, May 9; Independence Day, September 9; Constitution Day, November 6; Reconciliation Day, November 9

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Tajikistan, located in the heart of Central Asia, was inhabited by humans as early as 4000 B.C.E., and the nation's prehistory remains visible, if unknown, in hundreds of thousands of petroglyphs (rock drawings) of numerous animals and hunters. The 4,000-mile-long Silk Road, an old caravan route that connected China with nations in the West, traversed Tajikistan: It followed the Great Wall of China to the northwest, going around the Takla Makan Desert, climbed the Pamir Mountains in Tajikistan, crossed Afghanistan, and went on to the eastern Mediterranean where merchandise was then shipped to ports.

Like neighboring modern nations of Central Asia—Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan—Tajikistan was ruled by a number of empires. Of these, the Persians controlled the region for the longest periods and probably had the greatest influence. In fact the modern Tajik language is nearly identical to Persian, and they are still mutually intelligible.

In the seventh century C.E., the Arabs gained control and introduced Islam. However, a later Persian dynasty—the Samanids—ruled the region from 819 to 992, and Bukhara became the capital. Turks invaded the region at the end of the 10th century. The Persians and the Turks then lived in relative harmony and absorbed each other's culture. Even so, the Mongols conquered the Tajik territory in the 13th century.

In the mid-19th century, when the British and the Russian Empires were fighting for control over the Asian territories, Russia succeeded in establishing its control over the Tajik territory in the 1880s. The region was economically very weak at that time. After the Russian Revolution of 1917 the Tajik people revolted against the Bolsheviks in a war that lasted four years, but eventually the Russians defeated the Tajiks.

Tajikistan was combined with present-day Uzbekistan and, in 1924, the region was made an autonomous republic within Uzbekistan. During the next few decades attempts were made to improve the condition of Tajikistan. Agriculture was encouraged in the late 1950s, and Tajikistan became a major producer of cotton. In the mid-1970s the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) was founded, which gave the nationalist movement an impetus. In 1978 there were anti-Russian riots throughout Tajikistan.

After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Tajikistan declared its independence and became a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States three months later. A civil war between pro-Islamists and government troops followed, however, and about 20,000 to 50,000 people lost their lives, while almost half a million were made homeless. The war weakened the infrastructure and the economy, making Tajikistan one of the poorest countries of the world. It is heavily dependent on aid and assistance from the Russian military to preserve its security.

Although President Imomali Rakhmonov (b. 1952) and the leader of the Islamic opposition Sayid Abdullo Nuri signed a peace agreement in June 1997, tension between the two factions still exists. Thousands of Tajik rebels have settled in northern Afghanistan; and cross-border raids and smuggling are rampant.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

A landlocked country located in Central Asia, Tajikistan is situated between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to the north and west, China to the east, and Afghanistan to the south. The terrain is very mountainous and is dominated by the Trans-Alay range in the north and the Pamirs in the southeast. Two of the principle rivers of Asia, the Amu-Darya and Syr-Darya, flow through Tajikistan, and mountain glaciers feed the rivers. Many canyons and gorges cut across the mountains and form streams. Earthquakes are a common occurrence in the region.

Due to the country's mountainous topography, the climate of Tajikistan varies greatly. Summers are very hot with temperatures often exceeding 104°F during the day. Winters are quite mild, although some valleys do receive snowfall. The climate during spring and autumn is very pleasant.

Tajikistan's mountains are characterized by grassy meadows. During summer, wildflowers (including wild irises and edelweiss) add color to the landscape. The forests are full of spruce, larch, and juniper, and trout can be found in the rivers. The snow leopard, though elusive, can sometimes be spotted. Other animals found are the ibex, lynx, marmots, wolf, wild bear, and brown bear.

❁ ECONOMY

The per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of Tajikistan is the lowest among the 15 former republics of the Soviet

Union. It is one of the poorest countries of the world, with more than 60 percent of its population living in abject poverty. Only about 6 percent of the land is arable, and the main agricultural products are cotton, grain, fruits, grapes, and vegetables. The main imported items are fuels, grains, iron and steel, consumer goods, and finished goods, while the main exports are cotton, fertilizers, metals, silk, fruits, and vegetables. The foreign revenue of Tajikistan depends largely on exports of cotton and aluminum. Tajikistan's major trading partners are the Netherlands, Turkey, Russia, Uzbekistan, Switzerland, Hungary, Latvia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and India.

In the early 1980s, a deposit of gemstone-quality clinohumite, ordinarily found as tiny indistinct grains, was discovered in the Pamir Mountains. Until another deposit of gem-quality clinohumite was found in the Taymyr region of Siberia in 2000, the Pamir clinohumite was the only deposit known. The two deposits, however, are quite different, and the gems found in Tajikistan are harder and less brittle than those of Siberia. Depending on the size of the Pamir deposit and the possibility of other, similar, finds, it could contribute significantly to the nation's GDP.

The economic stability of the country is very fragile, with widespread unemployment and heavy external debt.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Most of the people of Tajikistan are Muslim. Older men dress in the traditional long quilted jackets, knee-high boots, and embroidered caps, while women usually wear colorful, gold-threaded long dresses with trousers and headscarves.

Theater, dance, and drama have a prominent place in the culture. Tajik entertainment art has ancient roots. This can be seen in early rock and medieval wall pictures. The most typical kind of national entertainment art was pantomime, in which the actors performed wearing masks, portraying supernatural creatures, such as the *albastibozi* (demon), and various animals including the *rubobbozi* (fox), *sberbozi* (lion), *maimunbozi* (monkey), *ukkobozi* (eagle), and *hirsbozi* (bear).

Tajik dance is another ancient art, typically depicting everyday domestic life. It is performed at all important events like births, holidays, and so on. These dances are based on ancient rituals, games, and stories from real life. Some of their dances are: pantomime dance, the most ancient type of dance, based on animals and birds; ritual dances like *raksboi marosimi*, which are performed at funerals; male dances like the *shamsberbozi*, which is warlike and features strong movements, sharp turns, and sculptural poses, performed with cavalry swords; and dance accompanied by musical instruments.

The Zochabozi puppet theater is also extremely popular. The performances are accompanied by

Fun Fact

The Pamir Mountains, known in China as Congling, are among the highest mountains in the world.

Some say that they dwarf the Rocky Mountains in North America and the Himalayas. The two highest mountains are Ismail Samani Peak (known between 1932 and 1962 as Stalin Peak, and from 1962 to 1998 as Communism Peak), at 24,590 feet and Lenin Peak, 23,508 feet.

music, and clowns may also participate.

The traditional Tajik music is called *shashmaqam* and is played on a *dutar* (a two-stringed, pear-shaped, long-necked lute). The *hafiz* (singer) of the *shashmaqam* is held in great esteem.

The poetry of Rudaki is very famous and his poems are still read today.

Horsing and games played on horseback are particularly popular in Tajikistan. Another traditional sport is falconry.

❁ CUISINE

The traditional food of Tajikistan is composed of bread, rice, stew, and soups. A popular dish is pilaf, made of mutton, rice, onions, and carrots. Shashlik (grilled mutton on skewers) is also very popular. However, few Tajiks can afford meat every day, and so chickpea *samsas*, or porridge, is a Tajik favorite, as are soups made from beans, milk, and herbs. Another popular dish is *tubum barak*, a tasty egg-filled ravioli coated with sesame seed oil. *Chakka* (curd mixed with herbs) is served with flatbread. Tajiks also make *tushbera* (steamed dumplings), which are served plain or with vinegar or butter.

The men enjoy going out and having tea in a *chaikhana* (teahouse). Here men of all ages get together over a cup of tea. After finishing it, they turn their cups upside down to indicate that they do not want any more.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, and is widely celebrated as New Year's Day. Celebrations take place all over the world, frequently beginning with parties, parades, and other festivities on New Year's Eve. In Tajikistan it is a national holiday, and schools and offices remain closed.

❁ INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 8

International Women's Day (IWD), observed annually on March 8, is a major day of global celebration for the economic, political, and social achievements of women. The proposal to have a special day on which to recognize women and their many achievements was first suggested at the turn of the 20th century, when rapid industrialization and economic expansion led to workers' protests over dangerous

Rudaki

Rudaki, or Rudagi (859–c. 941), was the first literary genius of the Persian language, writing his poems in the (New Persian) Perso-Arabic alphabet script. Born in Rudak, in the ninth century, most of his biographers say he was blind. His accurate references to colors and their properties in his poetry, however, make this very doubtful. Rudaki was the court poet to the Samanid ruler Nasr II (914–43) in Bukhara, but he fell out of favor and died poor.

working conditions. Women who worked in clothing and textile factories held one such protest on March 8, 1857, in New York City, protesting what they saw as very poor working conditions and low wages.

The first IWD was observed on February 28, 1909, in the United States following a declaration by the Socialist Party of America. International Women's Day was declared the following year at the first international women's conference in Copenhagen, organized by the Socialist International. On March 25, 1911, the infamous Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York City killed over 140 women. A lack of safety measures was blamed for the high death toll. In the West, International Women's Day was commemorated during the 1910s and 1920s, then lapsed into obscurity until a second wave of feminism revived it in the 1960s. In 1975 the United Nations began sponsoring International Women's Day. Since then the day has become more of a parody, sort of a combination of Valentine's Day and Mother's Day, even in former Communist nations, when men present women with gifts and flowers. Traditionally the men are supposed to take over all domestic tasks and give the women a day off. In some countries special presentations and lectures regarding improving the role of women are held.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, May Day, or Workers' Day in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. While the earliest celebrations of May Day were associated to the pagan rituals practiced by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages, it is likely that this made May 1 a good date for Labor Day because it was already a popular holiday among the people.

In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the

Fun Fact

The Tajik people respect their elderly and refer to them as *muysaped* (“white-haired”).

world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

In Tajikistan, workers hold marches and demonstrate in the streets on this day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ VICTORY DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 9

Victory Day commemorates the defeat of German Fascists by the Allies during World War II, in 1945. This is one of the most celebrated national holidays in Russia, and it is still a popular holiday in Tajikistan, which was under Russian domination for over 60 years. People attend military parades and other festive demonstrations. War veterans visit the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and honor the war dead, while the national media broadcast patriotic programs and songs. This day is a national holiday in Tajikistan and all schools and businesses are closed.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 9

Independence Day, or National Day, celebrates September 9, 1991, the day when Tajikistan came into being after breaking away from the former Soviet Union. The president of Tajikistan addresses the nation and major celebrations are held in Dushanbe, the capital, and other cities of Tajikistan.

❁ CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 6

On this day in 1994, the Republic of Tajikistan adopted its constitution. The president addresses the country and major celebrations are held in Dushanbe and other cities of Tajikistan.

❁ RECONCILIATION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 9

Almost immediately after Tajikistan disassociated itself from the Soviet Union in 1991, the country was torn apart by a civil war between pro-Islamists and government troops. This day commemorates the end of the civil war that ravaged the country from 1992 to 1997.

Religious Holidays

❁ NAVRUZ

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: March 21

Navruz, or Nevruz, marks the first day in the Old Persian calendar and is celebrated as New Year's by Persians on the vernal equinox. *Navruz* is a Persian word that means “new day” (*nev*, “new”; *ruz*, “day”). This celebration marks the beginning of the spring season and the return of warmth and light. When Islam first spread across Tajikistan, the authorities banned it. However, the people continued to celebrate this festival, and eventually the ban had to be lifted.

Because it is a day of new beginnings, Navruz is also a time to reflect on the events of the past year. Tajikistanis prepare for this three-day festival by cleaning and renovating their homes, and women prepare special sweets and dishes for the holiday. During this festival time, people visit their friends and relatives. Music, theatrical performances, fairs, traditional games, beauty contests, sports, poetry nights, and other such festivities are enjoyed across Tajikistan.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; NAVRUZ; ZOROASTRIANISM

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr, also known as the Feast of Fast-Breaking, marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan and the beginning of much-awaited festivities. Devout Muslims all over the world observe a strict month-long, dawn-to-dusk fast during Ramadan, the holiest month of the Islamic year, in obedience to the fourth pillar of Islam's Five Pillars.

Eid al-Fitr begins on the first day of Shawwal; it is celebrated for three days in Tajikistan. Special prayers and feasting mark the occasion. The Koran forbids fasting during this celebration.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, the Feast of Sacrifice, which is called Eid ul Kurboon in Tajikistan, is a very important festival for Muslims all over the world because it was on this auspicious day that Ibrahim (Abraham) agreed to sacrifice his young son in order to obey God's

command, and Muslims honor Ibrahim for his willingness to do God's will. In Tajikistan this festival is celebrated for four days. On this, the 10th day of the month, Muslim families slaughter a fattened sheep and prepare an elaborate meal for friends and family members. Special prayer services are conducted in mosques all across the country.

Many Muslims undertake a pilgrimage, or hajj, to Mecca during Dhu al-Hijjah. It is the requirement of all Muslims, when it is financially and physically possible, to go to the sacred city at least once in their lifetimes. The Koran commands it, and it is the fifth of Islam's Five Pillars.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

Regional Holidays

❁ GULGARDONI

Observed in: Tajikistan

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Spring

Gulgardon, also called Boychechak (meaning "snowdrop," or "first spring flower"), celebrates the coming of spring. Young men with bouquets of snowdrops, irises, and tulips pass by the homes of villagers and sing traditional songs about spring and the first spring flowers. At the end of the day, the villagers enjoy special meals and musical performances. Dancers and comedians, called *masharabozes*, also give performances that are very popular among the people.

See also Volume III: SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ SAYRI GULI LOLA

Observed in: Tajikistan

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Spring

Sayri Guli Lola, the Holiday of Tulips, is a two-day festival. On the first day sails are tied around trees along with bunches of tulips. People gather around these arrangements and make wishes, sing songs, and dance. They hold torchlight processions to signify the victory of light over darkness. On the second day the Tajikistanis remember their dead. There are special prayer services held in cemeteries and sacred places. People also swim in rivers as part of a cleansing ritual on this day.

See also Volume III: SPRING FESTIVALS

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

The birth of a child is a special occasion in Tajikistani families. Professional musicians, known as the

Matchmaking

Mothers often play matchmakers when their children are infants or very young. The matchmaking of the infants is called *govorabakhsh* ("matchmaking") in the cradle or gift in the cradle, and matchmaking of very young children is called *domanchok*, or shirt-tearing. The shirt-tearing ceremony is conducted by placing the baby boy and girl side by side on the floor. After some prayers, the babies' shirts are tied together by the hems, and subsequently torn.

sozanda, traditionally announce this good news. Groups of *sozanda* consist mainly of female singers.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Male circumcision is a part of Tajikistan's tradition. The operation is performed when boys reach puberty. The Muslims in Tajikistan believe that, by undergoing this ritual, a boy becomes a man. Trained elders use knives, razors, and other sharp instruments to perform the circumcision, without administering any anesthetic. This practice enjoys social backing, and families take great pride in it. Huge celebrations also follow this coming of age ritual.

❁ MARRIAGE

Tajikistani marriages are often arranged by parents or matchmakers. About 10 days after the match has been arranged, the prospective groom and his mother arrive at the woman's house with a dish of pilaf. Relatives, neighbors, and friends are invited for this occasion, when the engagement, called *foṭiba*, is formalized. The bride-price is then given to the bride's parents, and the date for the wedding is set.

The wedding day (called the *nikoh*) begins with preparing pilaf. First the men are fed, then the women and children of the village. After the meal, the bride sits behind a curtain near the entrance door. Her girlfriends dance for her in front of the curtained door. The mullah, who officiates at the wedding, performs prayers and rites for concluding the wedding ceremony. Once this is done, the groom is congratulated by all his friends and relatives. He is then led to where the bride is sitting, with the help of torches held by his friends. The groom is expected to jump over a fire that is lit in front of the entrance. This is to signify that he has been cleansed with the fire.

The groom then lifts the curtain

Fun Fact

Every woman who is invited to attend a wedding gives a cup of flour to the person who invited her. This is a way of wishing that the marriage is a happy one.

and reveals his bride to all the guests. The newlyweds seek blessings from the bride's parents and take their leave. On the way to the groom's home, the couple has to pass fires made by their friends and relatives. The bride is made to jump over a fire in front of the groom's home to signify that she has been cleansed. Her father-in-law then slaughters a lamb at the bride's feet, while the groom's mother welcomes the couple home. Everyone in the groom's house is then treated to some more pilaf.

❁ DEATH

When someone dies in Tajikistan, Muslim prescriptions for burial are followed. Special prayers are said just before the individual dies. Women are not allowed to participate in the funeral services held in the cemetery; rather, they are expected to mourn at home for a prolonged period of time.

In certain parts of Tajikistan the close relatives of the deceased, primarily women, perform special ritualistic dances called *raksboi marosimi*.

Further Reading

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Tanzania

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Eastern Africa; continental territory between Mozambique and Kenya, bordering the Indian Ocean; the island of Zanzibar is 25 miles off the coast
Size	364,900 sq. mi.
Capital City	Dodoma
Flag Description	Tanzania's flag is divided diagonally by a yellow-edged black band from the lower hoist-side corner; the upper triangle (hoist side) is green and the lower triangle is blue.
Independence	December 9, 1961 (Tanganyika from United Kingdom); December 19, 1963 (Zanzibar from United Kingdom)
Population	36,766,356 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Tanzanian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Mainland: Bantu (95%); Zanzibar: blacks, Arabs, and mix of Arab and black
Major Language(s)	Kiswahili or Swahili (in Zanzibar, Kiunguju) (official); English (official); Arabic and other native African languages
Major Religion(s)	Mainland : Muslim (35%); indigenous beliefs (35%); Christian (30%); Zanzibar: Muslim (over 99%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Celebration of the Zanzibar Revolution, January 12; Union Day, April 26; Labor Day, May 1; Saba Saba Day, July 7; Nane Nane Day, August 8; Nyerere Day, October 14; Republic Day, December 9

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Although many gaps remain in what is known about the early history of Tanzania, it is the location of two of the most famous hominid archaeological sites: the Lower Paleolithic site in Laetoli (excavated by Mary Leakey, Richard Hay, and their group), where the footprints of three hominids were found, and Olduvai Gorge, where hominid fossil remains dated to 2.5 million years were excavated by Louis Leakey. What is known so far indicates that East Africa, specifically the region now called Tanzania, may have been the earliest home of the human species.

The Laetoli footprints were preserved in powdery volcanic ash from an eruption of the Sadiman Volcano; soft rain cemented the ash layer without destroying the prints. The Pliocene hominid prints, dated to 3.7 million years ago, were produced by three individuals, although one was walking in the footprints of another. Because the tracks lead in the same direction, they could have been produced by a group, but there is no evidence that supports the common notion that a nuclear family visited the ancient waterhole.

The Lower Paleolithic site in Olduvai (or Oldupai) Gorge stretches for 30 miles along the Great Rift Valley in northern Tanzania, East Africa, and remains one of the most important prehistoric sites in the world.

Olduvai is an extremely valuable discovery because there the stratigraphy is very deep, and several layers of volcanic ash

Fun Fact

The name of Olduvai Gorge is the Masai word for the wild sisal plant, commonly called *oldupai*.

and stones make it possible to use radiometric dating of the embedded artifacts. Although the earliest artifacts—pebble tools and choppers—have been dated to around 2 million years ago, the fossil remains of hominids go back as far as 2.5 million years.

Bed I, the earliest excavated deposit, contained evidence of campsites and living floors, flaked flint tools, and primitive hominid forms—*Australopithecus boisei*—and the first remains of *Homo habilis* to be discovered. Immediately above Bed I, Bed II, dated to approximately 1.5 million years ago, revealed that the crude implements of Bed I were gradually replaced by the more useful Abbevillian hand axes typically produced by *H. erectus*. Beds III and IV, dated to 600,000 years ago, produced fossilized bones resembling those of Neanderthals in association with Acheulean implements.

The beds above the earliest four strata, still working forward in time, are: the Masek Beds (400,000–600,000 years old), with tools from a Kenya-Capsian industry made by modern humans; the Ndotu Beds (32,000–400,000 years old); and the Naisiusiu Beds (15,000–22,000 years old).

Not much is presently known of Tanganyika's interior history during the later centuries of prehistory. It is thought that it may have been inhabited by ethnic groups speaking a click-tongue language resembling that of southern Africa's Bushmen (San) and Hottentots.

While scattered remnants of these earliest peoples still exist, most were apparently pushed out by Bantu farmers arriving from the west and south as well as Nilotes (the famous Masai) and other peoples from the north. Some of these groups lived in well-developed cultures and controlled large areas by the time the Arab slave-traders, European colonizers, and Christian missionaries first entered the country's interior during the first half of the 19th century.

Foreign influence began in the area along Tanzania's coastline during the first centuries of the modern era. Rhapta, the southernmost marketplace of Azania, was known to merchants of the Roman period, evidence of which has been found at points from Tanga down to the mouth of the Rufiji River. Arab traders were the next to set up posts along the coast, perhaps by the eighth century. By the 12th century traders and immigrants were arriving from Persia (now Iran) and even India. These people

built a series of highly developed city and trading states along the coast. The most important was Kibaha, a Persian settlement that controlled the region around it until the Portuguese razed it in the early 1500s.

After the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama (1460–1524) arrived in the region while looking for a sea route to India in 1498, the area began attracting Portuguese attention. Recognizing the strategic and commercial importance of the region, the Portuguese launched an attack on the Arab traders and by 1506 had established control along the coastal areas. But they did not colonize the region, nor did they explore it. Arab traders, with assistance from the Omani Arabs (Arabs from Oman), rebelled against Portuguese rule and ultimately succeeded in overthrowing them by the early 18th century. The coastal strip was conquered by Omani Sultan Syed Said (1804–56). This was the beginning of Arab rule in the region. In 1841 the sultan moved his country's capital from Muscat in Oman to Zanzibar.

Meanwhile Tanganyika had attracted attention from other European nations in the 19th century when a number of German and British explorations explored its interior. The region along Lake Victoria was made up of a number of small kingdoms headed by tribal chiefs. In 1884 Karl Peters (1856–1918), the founder of the Society of German Colonization, signed a number of treaties with the local chiefs in which they agreed to accept German rule in exchange for protection. His endeavors were backed by the government of Prince Otto van Bismarck (1815–98) and led to the formation of the German East Africa Company. After a series of Anglo-German wars in Africa, the two sides finally signed a peace treaty that defined the regions under British and German control. According to the treaty Tanganyika would be controlled by Germany, while Britain would establish a protectorate in Zanzibar.

The British, in a bid to end the slave trade in Zanzibar and stake their claim in the local spice trade, signed a number of treaties with Sultan Said. In exchange for protection, the British shut down the slave trade.

In 1891 the government of Germany took control of Tanganyika from the German East Africa Company and appointed a governor in Dar es Salaam, the former capital of the region. However, European rule faced a good deal of resistance in the form of guerilla warfare waged by local tribes. The Maji Maji Revolution (1905–07) was brutally crushed by the German forces, and more than 120,000 Africans lost their lives as a result of fighting and starvation.

After the German defeat in World War I, major territories of Tanganyika came under British dominance in accordance with the mandate of the League of Nations. After World War II Tanganyika became a UN trust territory under British control.

However, by the late 1950s the voice of independence was spreading throughout Africa. The

Fun Fact

The term *San* was historically applied to this group by their ethnic relatives and historic rivals the Khoikhoi. However, because the term means “outsider” and was intended to be derogatory, many of this group prefer to be called Bushmen, despite the fact that the term is considered an insult by most Westerners.

Maji Maji Revolution

In 1902, the German governor of Tanganyika forced the villagers to grow cotton as a cash crop and appointed a headman in each village to oversee the execution of this order. Even those villagers who had other jobs were forced to become farmers and grow cotton. In addition, villagers were forced to work as laborers, building roads all over the region. This led to widespread protests. In 1905, a spirit medium named Kinjikitile Ngwale claimed that a snake spirit called Hongo possessed him and instructed him to

eliminate Germans from East Africa. He also claimed that the spirit had given him a war medicine that would turn German bullets into water. The war medicine was nothing but *maji* (Swahili word for “water”) mixed with millet and castor oil. He soon had a huge following as the believers increased. Thus began the Maji Maji Revolution. After drinking the war medicine, thousands of Africans marched toward German garrisons armed only with spears and arrows. The German forces, using their superior weapons, had crushed the revolution by 1907.

independence struggle in Tanganyika began under Julius Kambarage Nyerere (1922–99), a school-teacher and cofounder of Tanganyika African National Union (TANU). He pressed the British to grant independence to Tanganyika, and on December 9, 1961, they relented. Julius Kambarage Nyerere was sworn in as the first prime minister of independent Tanganyika.

Meanwhile Zanzibar too was breaking free from Arab-British dominance. Although the region was granted independence under a constitutional monarchy on December 19, 1963, indigenous Africans suffered immensely at the hands of the ruling Arabs. On January 12, 1964, a revolution led by John Okello resulted in the return of power to indigenous Africans in Zanzibar. Abeid Amani Karume (1905–72), a leader of the Afro-Shirazi party was sworn in as the president of Zanzibar.

The leaders of the independent nations of Tanganyika and Zanzibar, to promote political and economic strength, began negotiating the possibility of uniting the two nations to form a single independent republic. On April 26, 1964, these negotiations produced the United Republic of Tanzania. The country was aptly named Tanzania—“Tan” from Tanganyika and “Zan” from Zanzibar. Zanzibar, however, was given semi-autonomous status with the right to elect its own president.

Julius Kambarage Nyerere was chosen as the first president of the United Republic of Tanzania. Unfortunately unsound policies crippled the nation’s economy. Violent ethnic unrest in Zanzibar and political division worsened the problem. After Nyerere took responsibility for the economic downfall of the country and stepped down as president in 1985, new leaders have similarly failed to stem further economic decline.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The largest country in eastern Africa, Tanzania is located along the Indian Ocean between Kenya and

Mozambique. There are three main geographic regions in Tanzania: the islands and the coastal plains in the east, a saucer-shaped central plateau, and northern and southern highlands. The Great Rift Valley runs across the central part of Tanzania, goes farther south, and splits at Lake Nyasa. While one branch of the rift valley passes via Lake Nyasa to Mozambique, the other branch runs northwest along Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania, and the western parts of Uganda.

The salient features of Tanzania’s geography are Mt. Meru and Mt. Kilimanjaro, located in the northeast part of the country, along the Kenyan border. Mt. Kilimanjaro is the highest mountain in Africa, with a height of 19,028 feet.

Lake Nyasa, Lake Victoria (the world’s second-largest freshwater lake), and Lake Tanganyika (the world’s deepest lake) are the prominent sources of water in the region. They are also the three largest lakes on the African continent.

The climate in Tanzania varies from region to region. While the coastal regions have a hot, humid climate, the highland plateau enjoys moderate weather. The mountains in the northeast enjoy a temperate climate and remain pleasant throughout the year.

Fun Fact

The shortest war in history was fought in Zanzibar in 1896. On August 25 within two hours of the death of Omani Sultan, Hamid bin Thuwaini (1857–96), his second son, seized the throne with German support. The British, who feared that this would lead to German control over the island, asked him to step down or face the consequences. On August 27, after requests from the local people, the royal navy had three warships open fire on the palace at nine o’clock in the morning. Forty-five minutes later they had reduced the palace to rubble. The sultan, who had no effective means of retaliation, surrendered, after being granted asylum in the island’s German consulate.

MT. KILIMANJARO

Kilimanjaro is a Swahili word that means “a mountain that glitters.” The highest mountain on the African continent, Mt. Kilimanjaro was once considered highly mysterious in the Western world due to stories of man-eating spirits that were part of Tanzanian folklore. According to the myths, these spirits lived in a huge freestanding and snow-clad mountain in the equatorial region of Tanzania. Mt. Kilimanjaro has the distinction of being the highest freestanding, snow-covered equatorial mountain in the world. A most remarkable aspect of Mt. Kilimanjaro is that,

despite its height, it is easily accessible to climbers because it offers a number of routes (from easy to more adventurous) to choose from. As the climb begins, one passes through equatorial rain forests, waterfalls, moorlands (vegetation that grows on a vast expanse of land that has been burned in the past due to fire or volcanic activities), snow, and ice cliffs. The climb requires neither equipment nor any prior experience in mountain climbing. It typically takes five days to climb the mountain and return to the base. Due to its easy accessibility, Mt. Kilimanjaro is also called “Everyman’s Everest.”

ECONOMY

As one of the poorest countries in the world, Tanzania’s economy is an utter shambles. Agriculture is the driving force of the economy and contributes more than 50 percent to the gross domestic product (GDP) as well as 85 percent of exports. More than 84 percent of the country’s population is dependent on agriculture, fishing, and forestry for their livelihoods.

International financial organizations such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund are assisting the government of Tanzania in restructuring its economy and introducing pro-growth reforms. The government is also focusing on oil explorations and development of the tourism industry to generate revenue. With international support and economic reform, Tanzanian authorities hope to achieve greater stability and prosperity in the early 21st century.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Tanzania is home to more than 120 tribes—from the tall and sturdy Masai warriors to the Hadza Bushmen and Wameru, or Bantu, farmers—and each tribe has its unique identity. Most tribes in the region trace their origin to the Bantu-speaking tribes; exceptions include tribes such as the Masai, who trace their origin to the Nilotic tribes.

Swahili and English are the official languages of Tanzania, and some claim that Swahili is spoken in its purest form in Zanzibar. For students of Swahili, Zanzibar is the “mecca” of learning. Most of the tribes, however, prefer to communicate in their native dialects.

The role of man as breadwinner and woman as homemaker is traditional in Tanzania. Extended family systems composed of uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters, cousins, and even in-laws are

prevalent today. Elders and clan members solve disputes through discussion, and their decisions are binding on all.

Christianity, Islam, and indigenous beliefs are the major religions of Tanzania, with Islam having a stronger hold along the coastal regions. Hindus make up a quarter of the population in the coastal regions while many tribes continue to practice their ethnic beliefs and worship the guardian spirit of their tribe. For example, the Masai worship Engai, their rain god, and Engai’s messiah, Kindong’oi. All priests of Engai are believed to have descended from Kindong’oi.

Tanzanian tribes are very particular about their looks and decorate their bodies, often painting their hands, face, and legs. While the coastal dwellers prefer to paint their lips, hands, feet, and nails with henna, the Makonde people file their teeth and tattoo their faces and bodies. The tattoos depict struggle, conflicts, love, passion, good, and evil. Masai women adorn themselves with jewelry made from beads and metal, while the men wear their weapons, such as large knives, spears, and clubs, along with a piece of cloth that barely covers their bodies.

Tanzanians have a rich culture and are famed storytellers. Each tribe in Tanzania has its own folklore, dancing style, and traditional drums called *ngomas*. The narration of folktales takes place mainly at night. Stories revolve around humans as well as animals, and some feature both of them in a showdown. Animals and birds are endowed with human characteristics, such as greed, honesty, loneliness, and jealousy. Folktales have an underlying message and often serve as social commentary on tribal history, culture, and values, and as a potent means of discouraging antisocial behavior.

Tanzanian music is greatly influenced by traditional African and Arabic styles. *Ngoma*, the great drums, are an integral part of every tribal event. Other musical instruments include the Swahili *udi* (lute), flat xylophone, harmonium, and accordion. *Taraab*, the art of singing poetry, is extremely popular music in Tanzania.

The Masai are known for their “leaping dance,” which is accompanied by deep guttural sounds. Tra-

Fun Fact

The Wa-Tindiga tribe has remained largely untouched by development. They continue to lead a pre-industrial lifestyle and live in underground shelters, just as they have for centuries. They practice hunting and survive on milk and meat.

ditional dances performed in the coastal regions include *lelemama*, which involves clapping in a particular rhythm, as well as a belly dance known as *chakacha*. Women mainly perform these dances during weddings.

❁ CUISINE

Nyama choma, also known as *mishikaki* (barbecued meat), is a delicacy in Tanzania, while Zanzibar's coastal regions boast a wide variety of seafood (lobsters, crabs, octopus) that is seasoned with coconut milk and spices. Other favorite dishes in the region include *ugali* (a dish made from millet flour or tapioca), cinnamon-flavored rice called *pilau* (pilaf), fish stew, vegetables, and meat. Among the Masai, the traditional meal is comprised of six food items: milk, animal blood, meat, tree bark, honey, and animal fat. In recent times, however, the Masai have begun to include grains in their diet.

Safari Lager Beer (a locally brewed beer) is the national beverage, although people also enjoy *konyagi*, a white rum concoction. Tea is a favorite beverage while socializing and visiting friends and family. A sweet fried bread called *maandazi* is served with tea.

Each tribe in Tanzania has its own dining customs and habits. In some tribes women are forbidden to eat eggs or chicken, while in others a man cannot eat at the same table with his daughter-in-law.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

In Tanzania on New Year's Eve people attend parties and other huge celebrations with singing, dancing, drinking, and dining throughout the night. The new capital city of Dodoma wears a festive look and motorists, carrying the national flag of Tanzania, ride through the streets, cheering, honking horns, and shouting as the new year arrives. Many tourists visiting Tanzania usher in the new year by climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest mountain.

❁ CELEBRATION OF THE ZANZIBAR REVOLUTION

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 12

The Celebration of the Zanzibar Revolution commemorates the violent revolution led by African leader John Okello on January 12, 1964. Before the arrival of the British in the region Arabs ruled Zanzibar. Because they oppressed the indigenous black African population, there were frequent violent showdowns between the two groups. After Zanzibar



A Muslim man attends prayers during a celebration of Eid al-Fitr in Zanzibar's Stone Town. Muslims across the world celebrate Eid al-Fitr to mark the end of the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan. (AP Photo/Karel Prinsloo)

obtained independence in 1963 Sultan Jamshid bin Abdullah, the ruler of Zanzibar, became the head of state, while Arab leader Muhammed Shamte Hamadi was appointed the prime minister. Africans were given minimal political representation in the region.

John Okello, a Ugandan, had settled in the Pembe Islands of Zanzibar. He witnessed and experienced the discrimination against the black Africans and led violent protests against the Arabs. He organized groups of black African men, mainly porters, in Pembe and launched a revolt against the existing ruler. Thus on January 12, 1964, the bloodiest revolution in the history of Zanzibar began. More than 17,000 Africans and Arabs were killed, and many more fled the country. Soon Okello and other revolutionaries established their control in Zanzibar, and a new leftist government was formed. Abeid Amani Karume, a leader of the Afro-Shirazi party, was declared the new president of Zanzibar.

This day is celebrated by the people of Zanzibar as the end of oppressive Arab rule and the restoration of power to Zanzibar's indigenous black population. A Revolution Day rally in the Zanzibar national stadium marks the anniversary of the revolution, and people pay tribute to the thousands who died in the course of liberating their land.

Fun Fact

In Zanzibar cloves are offered to guests on their arrival. It is expected that the guest will chew the cloves before dinner is served.

🌸 UNION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 26

Union Day, a national holiday in Tanzania, commemorates the unification of Tanganyika and Zanzibar on April 26, 1964, to form the United Republic of Tanzania. Union Day celebrations are held throughout the country. A presidential speech, military parades, and cultural activities are a part of the celebrations. All public and private institutions remain closed on this day.

🌸 LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day (or May Day or Workers' Day) to commemorate the important role played by workers in their societies. The May 1 observance was established by the Socialist Second International in 1889. The date was chosen to coincide with a general strike in 1890 in the United States called by the American Federation of Labor (AFL) to demand an eight-hour workday. The event continues to promote workers' pride, solidarity, and interests. Labor Day celebrations take place all over Tanzania. On this day workers assemble at factories and workplaces before participating in demonstrations and

parades. The president of Tanzania also delivers a special Labor Day message and acknowledges the important role played by laborers in Tanzania.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

🌸 SABA SABA DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 7

Saba Saba, also called Industry Day, is an annual festival that commemorates the establishment of the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU). TANU initiated the freedom struggle in Tanganyika, held large demonstrations, and intensified demands for Tanganyika's complete independence. As a result TANU became the most popular party in Tanganyika and, later, in Tanzania.

TANU was officially launched on July 7, 1954, the seventh day of the seventh month. The anniversary of its establishment got its name from the Swahili term *saba*, which means "seven." Celebrations are held all over the country, especially in Dar es Salaam, where a large trade fair is attended by traders and businessmen from around the world.

🌸 NANE NANE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 8

Name Name in Swahili means "eight eight," or the eighth day of the eighth month. This holiday, also called Peasants' Day or Farmers' Day, is an annual

Siafu

Driver ants, also known as siafu among the Masai, move from one place to another in extremely long columns fiercely defended by the larger soldier ants, which kill anything that happens to cross their path. The soldier ants take up positions as sentries along both sides of the moving column, establishing a perimeter within which the smaller ants can run safely. Because there can be more than 22 million ants in a single colony, it can take them days to travel from one nest to the next. The siafu are blind and, like most species of ants, communicate using scent pheromones.

Driver ants are extremely dangerous to all forms of life, including much larger animals and humans, and it is believed that some unsuspecting tourists have been the victims of siafu swarms. Their powerful bites and sheer numbers, as well as their habit of swarming into any opening in the body of their prey, including the mouth and nose, make them a threat to be feared. Siafu will attack humans—usually, but not always, the young, sick, or otherwise incapacitated

who cannot move quickly enough to escape the swarm—killing and eventually consuming them, completely stripping the flesh from the bones. The victims of driver ants often die of asphyxiation, which is certainly a more merciful death than being eaten alive from the inside out. Their presence, however, benefits some human communities, such as the Masai, because they are highly efficient at removing pests that endanger crops in farming communities, consuming most pests, including insects and large rats. Because they are so useful, the Masai have learned to live with them, always with extreme caution.

Male driver ants are usually called "sausage flies" because of their swollen, sausage-like abdomen and their wings, and were initially believed to be a different species entirely. They leave the colony soon after they hatch, but will seek out a moving line of siafu, which leaves a scent trail after its members have reached sexual maturity. When a "sausage fly" meets up with a colony of driver ants, they tear off its wings and carry it to the nest where it will be mated with the queen.

national event that acknowledges the contributions made by peasants in the development of Tanzania. The celebrations also remind Tanzanians about the importance of crops, livestock, and cooperatives as means of reducing poverty.

The focus of Nane Nane Day is on ways of helping farmers improve their productivity by empowering them with the latest agricultural techniques. The government of Tanzania regularly conducts research and development activities, such as Tanzania Agricultural Research Programs (TARP II), and recruits researchers to work alongside farmers to provide feedback on their activities. On the basis of this research new technologies are developed and new projects are planned and implemented for the benefit of the farmers. As part of the Farmers' Day celebrations, Nane Nane trade fairs are held in different parts of Tanzania that are attended by national and international agriculture-related companies.

✿ NYERERE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 14

Nyerere Day commemorates the death of the most celebrated president of Tanzania Julius Kambarage Nyerere, who died on October 14, 1999. Hailed as the father of Tanganyika's independence, he was a teacher by profession before he joined mainstream politics and was referred to as *Mwalimu*, a Swahili word meaning "teacher." He was the cofounder of the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) and initiated the independence movement in Tanganyika. His persistence helped Tanganyika attain independence in 1961, and he became its first prime minister.

After the establishment of Tanzania, his party merged with Zanzibar's ruling Afro-Shirazi party and formed Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM), or People's Revolutionary Movement. Nyerere served as the first president of the United Republic of Tanzania. Although he stepped down as president in 1985, the veneration of Nyerere continued. On his death anniversary people of Tanzania pay tribute to his legacy, and special ceremonies are held in his honor.

✿ REPUBLIC DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 9

Republic Day commemorates both the declaration of independence in Tanganyika on December 9, 1961, and the formation of the United Republic of Tanzania. The efforts of Julius Kambarage Nyerere and the TANU for Tanganyika's freedom bore fruit when Tanganyika was granted full independent status on December 9, 1961. Zanzibar achieved independence on December 19, 1963. The day is marked by official speeches and parties. It is a national holiday, and all public and private institutions are closed.

Religious Holidays

✿ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

El am Hejir, celebrated on the first day of the first month marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar. On this day in 622 C.E. Mohammad fled from Mecca with his family and a small band of followers to Medina where he established the first Islamic state. (Medina is about 200 miles north of Mecca.) Although El am Hejir is a New Year's observance, it is a low-key holiday as celebrations in the Muslim world mainly take place during the two *eid* holidays, Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

✿ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent. This somber Christian holiday marks the day when Jesus was crucified. In Tanzania people attend prayer services in churches where his life and teachings are remembered. In bigger towns, special communal Good Friday services are held, attended by thousands of people. The Catholic Mass is followed by processions of people bearing crosses, reminiscent of Jesus' journey to Calvary. Many people fast on Good Friday. It is a day characterized by sorrow and melancholy. Readings of the Gospels and plays about the life of Jesus are regular features during Holy Week in Tanzania.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

The Christian festival of Easter commemorates Jesus' Resurrection on the third day after his Crucifixion. Celebrating his victory of life over death, it falls on the first Sunday after Lent. Devout Tanzanian Roman Catholics attend their local churches for early morning Masses. Special theatrical performances depicting the life and teachings of Jesus are part of the Easter celebrations, and choirs sing hymns in Swahili.

The first Monday after Lent is celebrated as Easter Monday. In Tanzania Catholics attend church services to mark the Resurrection of Jesus. Easter Monday celebrations are not elaborate events; people celebrate with their families and visit relatives and friends. It is a national holiday, and many private and public institutions are closed for the day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT

Fun Fact

Although each tribe has its own customs and rituals for weddings, none can beat the simplicity of the Hazda (an ethnic group). In accordance with their tribal traditions, the prospective groom has to quietly slip into the house of his prospective bride when all her relatives are fast asleep. If he is still there when the relatives wake up, the bride and groom are considered married.

❁ MOULOU

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

The birth anniversary of Muhammad, the founder of Islam, falls in the third month of the Islamic year. In Tanzania Muslims observe Mouloud, or Milad al-Nabi, offer morning prayers at their local mosques, where the imam, or spiritual leader, speaks about the teachings of Muhammad and urges Muslims to follow the path he described. Children receive gifts on this day.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOU

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr, also called the Feast of Fast-Breaking, Idi, or Sikuku (both *Idi* and *Sikuku* are Swahili words that mean “celebration”), marks the end of Ramadan, the holiest month of the Islamic calendar. During Ramadan observant Muslims are required to endure a month-long fast from dawn to dusk. This observance is the fourth of Islam’s Five Pillars. It is believed that Allah revealed the Koran, the religious book of Muslims, to Muhammad during Ramadan. The Ramadan fast ends with the sighting of the new crescent Moon, which marks the beginning of four days of festivities in Tanzania. The Koran forbids fasting during this observance.

On Eid al-Fitr Tanzanian Muslims offer prayers at dawn in their local mosques and then greet each other. Alms, called Zakat al-Fitr, are given to the poor. Tanzanians wear new clothes and visit friends and relatives on this occasion to exchange gifts and greetings. In Zanzibar Eid al-Fitr celebrations include a mock fight between

men from the northern and southern parts of the island using branches of banana trees as weapons. Traditional Swahili *taraab* (art of singing poetry), music, and dance performances are also part of the Eid al-Fitr celebrations.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

Fun Fact

The black, upright, rectangular monolith that appears at the start of the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*, based on Arthur C. Clarke’s novel of the same name, was located in Olduvai.

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th or pilgrimage month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, the Festival of Sacrifice (also known as Eid al-Kebir and Tabaski), commemorates the unwavering faith of Ibrahim (Abraham), demonstrated by his willingness to sacrifice his son to obey God’s command. According to the scriptures, God visited Ibrahim in a dream and instructed him to sacrifice his most valued possession, his son. When Ibrahim told his son about the dream, the son asked him to follow God’s command. As Ibrahim was about to make the sacrifice he was surprised to find that, instead of his son, a ram lay on the altar.

Eid al-Adha is one of the major holy days for Muslims in Tanzania. The day is marked with sacrifices of goats and sheep, and the meat is distributed in three equal parts. One part remains with the family, while the other two are given to neighbors and the poor. A festive spirit rules the whole of Tanzania as people visit friends and family after offering prayers in their local mosques. Gifts and greetings are also exchanged. The festivities last for three or four days.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of celebration for Christians because it is the day chosen by the Roman Catholic Church to observe Jesus’ birth. In Tanzania on Christmas Eve groups of people singing Christmas carols and hymns visit their neighbors and are given gifts or money, which they donate to their churches. On Christmas Day the churches are adorned with ribbons, flowers, garlands, and Christmas trees. Devout Christians attend church services, celebrating the birth of Jesus. People wear new clothes and visit friends, relatives, and acquaintances. Gifts and greetings are exchanged and a special dinner featuring the Christmas favorite, *nyama choma* (roasted beef or mutton), is served.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 26

The day after Christmas, December 26, is celebrated as Boxing Day in Tanzania. The day is also known as the Feast of St. Stephen in honor of the first Christian martyr. The name may derive from the fact that on this day boxes used by churches to collect money for the poor are opened, and the contents distributed. On Boxing Day it is traditional to give money or gifts to those who render service to the commu-

nity throughout the year. Boxing Day is celebrated in most of the British Commonwealth countries. (Zanzibar was under British control until it became independent.)

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ SAUTI ZA BUSARA

Observed in: Zanzibar

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Mid-February

Sauti za Busara is an annual cultural festival centered on traditional Swahili music. It is held on the second weekend of February and lasts for four days. *Sauti za Busara* is Kiswahili for “songs of wisdom.” The festival is held at Stone Town in Zanzibar. Performers from all over Eastern Africa participate in this festival, representing their cultural heritage through dance and music performances. This festival also brings together the best performers of traditional Swahili music from all over the world. It ranges from *taraab* (the art of singing poetry) and *ngoma* (drum) music to more contemporary musical forms, fusing Arab, Asian, and African musical traditions. More than 12,000 people from all over the world join local people in the event, which has helped Tanzania portray itself internationally as a cultural center and an ideal tourist destination.

❁ MWAKA KOGWA

Observed in: Zanzibar

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July

The Mwaka Kogwa is a four-day-long New Year’s festival (based on the Persian solar calendar), which is celebrated in Zanzibar in the month of July. The best celebrations take place in the Makunduchi village located in the southern part of Zanzibar. Mwaka Kogwa has its roots in the Zoroastrian (Persian) religion. It marks the beginning of a new year, also known as Navruz or Nairuzi. The Zoroastrian calendar is one of three calendars followed in Zanzibar. (The others are the Western [Gregorian] solar calendar and the Muslim lunar calendar.) People believe that during this festival God and spirits help them purify the past year and welcome the new one. This festival also reflects on a history of warm relations shared by Zanzibar and the Eastern world (Iran in particular).

The festivities vary from village to village. In some communities burning huts and mock fights are major highlights. During these mock fights, men fight each other with banana tree branches, a symbolic means of letting out grievances to give the new year a fresh start. While the men fight the women stroll

alongside and sing songs about love and life; after the fight they taunt the men. Everyone is dressed in his or her best attire to celebrate the occasion.

See also Volume III: NAVRUZ; ZOROASTRIANISM

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

In traditional African culture, a marriage is considered complete only after a child has been produced. Pregnant women are revered, and being pregnant helps them gain acceptance from their husbands’ families. The emphasis has been embedded in African cultural beliefs since time immemorial.

A number of rituals and ceremonies are associated with childbirth in Tanzania. When a child is born, tribal women usually gather to sing songs dedicated to Mother Africa and glorify her as a compassionate mother or a beautiful maiden. If the new child is a girl, many tribes begin building another house on the same property or add another story to the existing house in order to accommodate the future husband and family of their daughter. Also the birth of a girl is announced by placing a circle of reeds outside the family hut. In this way, communities identify girl children at birth by the role they will be expected to perform as adults. (Traditionally, rings of reeds are worn in place on their heads to balance the heavy loads of food, water, and cooking materials that they must carry to their homes.) The birth of a boy is announced by placing a hunter’s animal-skin pelt outside the family hut. Traditionally, men have been the hunters and food gatherers, and a pelt symbolizes a great hunter.

The Swahili culture has its own beliefs and rituals related to birth. For instance, after a child is born, it should be confined to the hut for at least eight days in order to keep evil spirits away from it. On the eighth day the child is shown the four corners of the house and the Sun, symbolizing his or her position in the social space and the environs where he or she will grow up.

The naming ceremony is another important ritual. After a child is born, the father consults with the wise man of the village regarding a suitable name. Wise men are thought to be able to consult with

Fun Fact

The importance of motherhood in Tanzania is reflected in the practice of calling adult women by the name of their child. For example, if a boy has been named Juma, or a girl is named Alice, their mother would be addressed as Mama Juma or Mama Alice.

Fun Fact

Soldier ants are sometimes used as sutures because of their massive pincers. When a siafu is pressed against a cut, the pincers bite down and remain tightly locked even when the body is detached from the ant’s head.

Fun Fact

The concept of a family name does not exist in Tanzania. Every individual has his or her own name, which serves as a distinct identity that is not shared with any other relative.

the ancestral spirits and thereby determine which spirit is willing to lend its name to the child. On the appointed day the grandfather of the child and the village wise man preside over the naming ceremony and bestow a name on the child.

During the naming ceremony, a goat is sacrificed to the ancestral spirits to thank them for their help. In some tribes an *akika* (a ceremony performed to remove impurity) takes place. It involves cutting the infant's hair, which symbolizes impurity, and burying the hair underground. A lavish meal follows, attended by friends, relatives, and villagers.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Male and female circumcision is integral to Tanzanian initiation ceremonies. Initiation ceremonies not only mark a child's transition to adulthood but also initiation into the rituals of the tribe and its way of life.

For male initiation ceremonies, the boy's mother prepares him for the ceremony by shaving the top of his head. All initiates must take an oath of secrecy during the circumcision ritual, which binds them for the rest of their lives. At the time of circumcision, the initiate is pinned to the ground with the help of his fellow initiates who hold his legs apart. Then, a skilled elder surgically removes the foreskin without the use of anesthesia. Initiates are required to endure the pain of the procedure. Any sign of flinching or crying is considered a sign of weakness and brings disgrace to the child's entire family.

The ages of the initiates range between 12 and 18 years. Initiation ceremonies take place during the long school breaks in either August or November and December. Besides enduring the circumcision ceremony, groups of young girls and boys have to spend a mandatory period of seclusion when they are taught about their tribe's glorious past, rituals, way of life, and duties and responsibilities toward their family and their tribe.

❁ MARRIAGE

Among the ancient peoples of modern Tanzania, arranged marriages were the custom. Parents and

relatives would consult matchmakers and friends and relatives to find a suitable match for their children. Now, most Tanzanians living in urban areas prefer to choose their own partners. As a result, marriages for love and inter-tribe marriages have become quite commonplace in large cities.

Nevertheless, bride price persists as an accepted custom. Prospective grooms are expected to provide cows, hoes, machetes, sheep or goats, and other material gifts to the bride's family as part of her bride price. Tanzanians believe that bride price is a gesture of thanks given by the groom to the bride's family for the wonderful upbringing of their daughter as well as to compensate them for the loss of a productive member of the family.

A marriage is considered fixed after payment of the bride price. Tanzanian weddings are lavish affairs, and dancing is an important part of the celebrations. Wearing heavily frilled dresses, women perform dances such as *unyago*, *bomu*, *beni*, and *lele-mama* in separate ceremonies attended only by women. Men, on the other hand, dress in suits. A hallucinogenic nutmeg preparation is also offered to the wedding guests.

❁ DEATH

In Tanzania, people believe that all rites of passages lead to the last rite, which is death. They believe that, after people die, they return to Mother Africa, their true homeland. Although death may be the end of one life it is also the beginning of the afterlife. For this reason, death is not a time for mourning but a celebration of a life that has gone on to the next level. This spiritual belief that life takes the form of a soul, and thus continues its existence in another realm, helps Tanzanians to accept death as a fact of life.

Further Reading

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Thailand

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Southeastern Asia, bordering the Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Thailand, southeast of Myanmar
Size	198,457 sq. mi.
Capital City	Bangkok
Flag Description	Thailand's flag has five horizontal bands of red (top), white, blue (double width), white, and red.
Independence	1238 (traditional founding date; never colonized)
Population	65,444,371 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional monarchy
Nationality	Thai
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Asian
Major Language(s)	Thai; English; ethnic and regional dialects
Major Religion(s)	Buddhism (95%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Chakri Dynasty Day, April 6; Labor Day, May 1; Coronation Day, May 5; Queen's Birthday, August 12; Chulalongkorn Day, October 23; King's Birthday, December 5

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The central area of Indochina from the Mekong River Valley to the Khorat Plateau, a highland area in northeast Thailand, has been inhabited for at least 10,000 years, and linguists have traced the ancient Chinese language to an earlier Thai language. Archaeologists have also provided insight regarding the early development of humans in the region. In the Ban Chiang area of northeast Thailand, they have found evidence that rice was probably cultivated as early as 4000 B.C.E., when China's agriculture was still devoted largely to millet (even though rice was first cultivated in the Yangtze valley about 6500 B.C.E.), and bronze metalworking began sometime between 1700 and 1500. Beautiful bronze instruments from sites near Ban Chiang show sophisticated technological and artistic abilities.

This prehistoric cultural development formed around a nucleus of migrating people. A linguistic map of south China,

northwest India and Southeast Asia, as far as the islands of Indonesia, clearly shows the presence of these early Thai migrants. They settled in river valleys from the Red River (Hong River) in south China and Vietnam to the Brahmaputra River in Assam. In the second half of the 13th century C.E. however, increasing pressure from the Mongol hordes under Kublai Khan (1215–94) forced the Thais still dwelling in south China to retrace their path and return to their geographical roots.

The Sukhothai are considered the first identifiable Thais, appearing first in the northern part of Thailand, around Chiang Saen and in some valleys south of the area. Early on they formed principalities, and some of these developed into independent kingdoms. In 1238 the Sukhothai Kingdom declared itself an independent state, no longer a part of the Khmer Empire, and this is regarded as the first Thai kingdom. Other lesser known Thai kingdoms (Lanna, Phayao, Chiang Saen) were also established around this time. Many modern-day Thais look back on the Sukhothai era as Thailand's "golden" age when just kings governed contented citizens living in an

Fun Fact

The name *Thailand* means “Land of the Free.”

ideal state, a land of plenty that developed a unique style of its own.

The first Thai writing system—which became the basis of modern Thai—was created during this era, and the Thai form of Theravada Buddhism became the state religion. Hundreds of stone inscriptions remain from the Sukhothai kingdom, and some of the most important are those of King Ramkamhaeng (c. 1239–1317), called Rama the Brave. Under his rule the Sukhothai Kingdom flourished and spread to Nakhon Si Thammarat in the south, to the upper Mekong River Valley in Laos, and to Bago in Burma.

The southern kingdom of Ayutthaya expanded rapidly by teaching the importance of religion over military might and extended control over the Chao Phya River Valley. With the rise of Ayutthaya the Sukhothai influence declined, and in 1378 the seat of power moved to Phitsanulok. Sukhothai’s population followed, and by 1438 Sukhothai was a deserted city.

Apart from Sukhothai, Chiang Mai and Ayutthaya also became important centers of the region. Ayutthaya began as an ancient settlement named after Rama’s legendary kingdom in India. In 1347 Phya U-Thong (1314–69), then the ruler of the principality of U-Thong (now called Suphan Buri), realized that he would have to move his people because of a cholera epidemic. After three years of preparation, he established his new residence in Ayutthaya and renamed himself King Ramathidibodi I in 1350.

(The Ayutthaya kings, unlike the kings of Sukhothai, were absolute monarchs who called themselves *devaraja*, the god kings.) Ramathabodi reign united the Khmer rulers of Lopburi, the Tai in the west, and the Chinese and Malaysian merchants dwelling along the coastal areas. The Ayutthaya kings who followed became very powerful and gradually moved east, first taking the Khmer city of Lopburi and then in 1431 seizing Angkor, the Khmer Empire’s capital city and the site of the famous temple Angkor Wat. Eventually the Thais caused Angkor’s collapse, but not before they had adopted the language, culture, and customs of the Khmer.

In both the 16th and 18th centuries, Burmese forces attacked Thailand, capturing Chiang Mai and destroying Ayutthaya. The Thais, however, responded by driving out the Burmese and moving their capital to another town, Thonburi. In the late 18th century (1782) the Chakri Dynasty was founded by King Rama I after his predecessor Taksin (1734–82) was declared mad and removed from the throne by a coup. Rama I moved the Thai capital to Bangkok and established the Chakri Dynasty, which still rules Thailand.

Throughout the 19th century, the Thais resisted European incursions and managed to retain their independence. In 1932 Thailand was declared a constitutional monarchy.

During World War II Japan fought against the United States, and Thailand sided with Japan. By 1945 Japan had been bombed, and Thailand switched its alliance.

In the decades after World War II there was

Taksin the Great

Taksin the Great ruled Thailand from 1767 to 1782. Born in Ayutthaya to a Chinese father and his Thai wife, Sin (the name his father gave him) began his education in a Buddhist monastery. While he and his friend Tong-Duang were priests a Chinese fortune-teller told them they had lucky lines in the palms of their hands and would become kings. Although neither took this prediction seriously, Tong-Duang would become King Taksin’s successor Rama I.

In 1767 when Taksin became governor of the Kamphaeng Phet province and returned to Ayutthaya, the Burmese attacked the city. Before the city was sacked, however, he got away with a small army. Following the sack of Ayutthaya, Taksin, with his old friend Tong-Duang, now Gen. Chakri, drove the Burmese out and reunited the country. On December 28, 1767, Taksin became the new king of Siam, in a new capital Thonburi.

King Taksin spent most of his reign fighting to protect Siam’s independence, but, according to legend, at some point he began to become a religious fanatic. Believing himself to be the reincarnation of

Buddha, it is said that he had monks flogged if they refused to worship him. It is also possible that this story was concocted in order to justify the coup that ended his rule. At any rate, Taksin was apparently declared insane. Although he planned to return to monastic life, he was executed shortly after the coup on April 7, 1782. His attackers sealed him in a velvet sack—because tradition required that royal blood should never touch the ground—and beat him to death with a scented sandalwood club. The execution was deemed necessary lest the dethroned king become the center of a possible revolution against his successor.

Although Taksin’s friend, General Chakri was away fighting in Cambodia, he quickly returned when he learned of the coup. The rebels soon surrendered after he returned to Thonburi, and Chakri was crowned King Rama I. Some discredit this story, maintaining that it is merely a way for the winners to defend the coup and the events that followed it.

In 1981 the Thai cabinet passed a resolution to give Taksin the honorary epithet “the Great.”

tension in the neighboring countries of Vietnam and Cambodia, and the United States stationed its forces in Thailand during this time. Eventually, at Thai insistence, the United States withdrew its forces in 1976. In the late 1970s Thailand provided aid and housed the refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos who had been forced to leave their homelands because of the ongoing warfare in their countries.

In 1980 the National Assembly elected Prem Tinsulanonda (b. 1920) as their leader, and for at least a decade after that, there was peace and stability in the country. He was reelected in 1983 and then again in 1986. Since democratic rule was reestablished in Thailand in 1992, it has been an active member of the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN).

Thailand has had one of the strongest economies in Southeast Asia. However, a fluctuating real estate market and growing corruption in government in the 1990s led to a decline in the currency in 1997. This was followed by a crisis in Asian financial markets. As a result, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) decided to provide Thailand with substantial monetary aid, and by 2000 the economy was experiencing a revival.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Divided into 76 provinces, Thailand shares its borders with Myanmar (formerly Burma), Malaysia, Cambodia, and Laos. The Gulf of Thailand touches its eastern coast while the Andaman Sea surrounds the west. The country has four geographic zones: the fertile central plains, the northeast plateau (Khorat Plateau), the rain forests of the southern peninsula, and the mountains and valleys of northern Thailand. The highest peak is Doi Inthanon, at 8,845 feet.

The climate of Thailand is tropical—hot and humid. In the southwest, the rains make the weather warm and humid. They last from mid-May to September, while a cooler breeze touches the northeastern part from November until February. This reduces the humidity and makes visiting Thailand more pleasant during this season. The climate in the southern isthmus (a narrow stretch of land joining larger mainlands) is always hot and humid. The average temperature is around 93°F in the central region, where rainfall can be as much as 12 inches during September.

The rain forests that cover one-fifth of the area of Thailand are rich in bamboo, hardwood, and fruit trees. There are mangrove swamps in the south and pine trees in the northern region. The Ko Phi Phi (southern Thailand, close to Phuket) is made up of two islands, Phi Phi Don and Phi Phi Le, which have been spared excessive tourist travel and traffic. Cliffs enclose the islands on all sides. Fish in vibrant colors are plentiful. The major Thai industries are tourism, computers, garments, integrated circuits, jewelry, and gems. It has to import raw materials, consumer goods, and fuels. Most of the Thai trade is

carried on with the ASEAN countries, the United States, and the European Union (EU).

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The cultural traditions of Thailand revolve around Buddhism and the monarchy. Monks wearing yellow, orange, or brown robes are commonly seen in the country. There are numerous statues of Buddha in stone, marble, and even gold to be found throughout the country.

The Theravada School of Buddhism, which teaches that Nibanna (Nirvana) can be attained without the help of from monks or saints, is practiced in Thailand.

The Thais are graceful people who place a lot of importance on etiquette, and they expect the same from their guests. A distinctive Thai custom is the *wai*, a greeting or acknowledgment of people with one's head bowed and hands folded. It is impolite in Thailand to step on a coin with the image of the king. It is also considered rude to let one's feet face any person while sitting as feet are supposed to be the lowest, dirtiest parts of the human body. This is also the reason that people do not sit with their feet at the level of somebody's head, especially when the latter is of a higher social standing. In fact touching anyone on the head is considered to be an insult. Footwear must be taken off before entering a Thai home or temple.

Thai art, primarily its architecture and sculpture, has been divided into 10 historical periods, with some overlap: Mon (6th–13th centuries), Khmer (7th–13th centuries), Lan Na (13th and 14th centuries), Sukhothai (13th–15th centuries), Lopburi (10th–13th centuries), Suphanburi-Sanghlaburi (13th–15th centuries), Ayutthaya A (1350–1488), Ayutthaya B (1488–1630), Ayutthaya C (1630–1767), and Ratanakosin (19th century on). The visual art is predominantly inspired by images of Buddha. Thai literature shows heavy Indian influence and the most well-known work is inspired by the story of the Hindu King Rama, the

Fun Fact

In the Thai language, Bangkok has the longest name of any city in the world and holds a Guinness record for it. Thais call Bangkok: Krunghthepmahanakhonboworn-ratanakosinmahintarayudyayama-hadilokpopnoparatanarajthanibur-irumudomrajniwesmahasatar-namompimarnavatarsatitsakat-tiyavisanukamprasit

Fun Fact

During World War II Allied prisoners of war held by the Japanese in Thailand helped build the Burma-Siam railway. They also built the bridge on the river Kwai to help move Japanese troops and supplies from Bangkok to Rangoon, the story of which was made into a multi-Oscar-winning film of the same name by David Lean in 1957.

Fun Fact

In Bangkok, and elsewhere in Thailand, goods can be bought from floating markets where produce is sold from boats.

seventh avatar of Vishnu and the hero of the epic Ramayana. Thai music is similar to Indian, Chinese, and Japanese music with some Indonesian influences as well. An orchestra is made up of string, woodwind, and percussion instruments.

Popular Thai dance forms are the *khon*, *likhon*, and *likay*. *Khon* is a more elaborate dance form than the others; *likay* is the most popular. *Nang* drama is the popular shadow dance of southern Thailand. Most of the Thai classical dances are connected with dramatizing the epic journey of the Hindu Lord Rama in search of his beloved wife Sita who had been abducted by the evil king Ravana. These performances include masks and elaborate costumes. The poetry of Sonthorn Phu, the great poet of King Rama II (r. 1809–24), is also famous, and a whole statuary theme park is devoted to him in Amphur Klaeng, Jungwat Rayong.

Thai families are close-knit, with the eldest male as the family's patriarch (head). They tend to live in the same house for generations. The youngest daughter inherits the parents' house and she, along with her husband, looks after them.

❁ CUISINE

Thai food is considered very spicy, even pungent at times, due to the liberal use of garlic and chilies in most recipes. Lime juice, coriander, lemon grass (locally called *takrai*), ginger, peanuts, cumin, basil, tamarind juice, and coconut milk are also popular ingredients. Thai food can be sweet, salty, spicy, or sour, though it tends to be more of the latter.

Fish sauce or shrimp sauce are staple ingredients in the Thai diet. Thais eat rice with almost every meal. The main Thai dishes are noodles, hot

and sour fish dishes, green and red curries made with chicken, meat, pork, or vegetables, and soups of different flavors. Thai appetizers and snacks include chopped ginger, fried peanuts, chicken, peppers, and lime slices. There are plenty of fresh and canned fruits. Sugarcane juice and rice whisky are two local favorites. While eating, Thais hold a fork in the left hand and push food onto a spoon held in the right. Knives are not required at the table because most foods are prepared in small bite-size pieces. In northern Thailand people eat rice (steamed and sticky) with their hands.

Chopsticks are used to eat any noodle dish. People usually sit around a table and everyone takes portions of all the dishes they wish to eat. Water is drunk only at the end of a meal.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, celebrated as New Year's Day around the world. The celebrations and revelry usually begin on the evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve).

Even though January 1 marks their official New Year's Day, traditionally Thais celebrate New Year's Day in mid-April (Songkran). In fact the Thai New Year's celebration in April is far more popular than that on January 1, but on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, people travel to meet family and friends because this is a public holiday and many have the day off. They also exchange gifts and greeting cards to mark the occasion.

Thai Black Sticky Rice

Thai black, or purple, sticky rice is a special type of sweet rice, and the method of preparing it described here is not recommended for other varieties of rice. This kind of rice is a beautiful deep purple color after it is cooked, and adds its unique color and unusual taste to many meals. Thai black sticky rice is most often served as a dessert. It can be topped with sweet coconut milk, mango or coconut ice cream, or rambutan in light syrup. (Rambutan is a delicious sweet fruit with a hairy rind and a fragrant, succulent white flesh.)

Rinse the needed amount of rice two or three times, until the water runs clear. Place the rinsed rice in a bowl and fill it with cool water until the water is

about two or three inches above the rice. Let the rice stand in the water for six to eight hours. Drain the rice, wrap the rice in a piece of cheesecloth and put the bundle inside a Thai bamboo steaming basket. Put between six and eight cups of water in a sticky rice steamer and bring to a boil. Then place the bamboo steaming basket inside the sticky rice steamer, making sure that the bottom of the basket does not touch the boiling water. Place a standard eight-inch lid loosely over the wrapped rice. Steam the rice for 45 minutes (or until tender). (Black sticky rice, a special type of cheesecloth used to make sticky rice, and the bamboo steaming basket and sticky rice steamer can be purchased from your local Thai market or online markets.)

❁ CHAKRI DYNASTY DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 6

In 1782 King Rama I founded the Chakri Dynasty in Thailand on this day. The current king Bhumibol is the ninth member of this dynasty to rule. A ceremony is held by the king to pay respects to the dynasty's founder. He also gives donations to the monks on this day. The following Monday is declared a public holiday if this day falls on a weekend.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. While the earliest origins of May Day celebrations are ascribed to the pagan rituals that were practiced by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages, it is generally agreed that the current format was initiated in 1889, when the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world. They scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890, in order to coordinate this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

In Thailand this holiday is a low-key affair celebrated only by some factory and office workers.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ CORONATION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 5

This day commemorates the coronation of King Rama IX (Bhumibol Adulyadej) on May 5, 1950, at the Royal Palace in Bangkok. On this day Thais express their love and loyalty for their king by holding special celebrations throughout the country in honor of his coronation. Folk dances and recitals of poems and songs written in honor of the king are part of the celebrations. On this day the army and navy give the king a 21-gun salute and he gives special awards to Thai nationals who have made significant contributions toward the development of the country.

❁ QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 12

This day commemorates the birth of Her Majesty Queen Sikrit, wife of the king of Thailand Rama IX,

who was born on August 12, 1932. On this day people put up huge portraits of the queen, along with royal symbols and the national flag, in buildings, temples, and schools, as well as homes and shops to honor her. Buddhist sermons are part of the civil ceremonies organized to celebrate the birthday of the queen.

Since Thais regard the queen as their mother, August 12 is also celebrated as Mother's Day.

Because Thais associate the jasmine flower with the selfless sacrifice made by mothers for their children, one custom is for mothers to receive jasmine bouquets from their children. Another is for children to touch their mothers' feet to express their love and respect. In some parts of Thailand, either on the day before Mother's Day or on Mother's Day, schools organize functions in honor of mothers. Many Thai nationals visit temples and offer prayers and thank God for their mothers. In addition, they offer the monks food on this special day.

❁ CHULALONGKORN DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 23

Chulalongkorn Day marks the day on which the former king of Thailand Chulalongkorn the Great, also known as Rama V, died in 1910. He was the fifth king of the ruling Chakri Dynasty and is considered to be one of the most benevolent kings of Thailand. On this day people lay wreaths on the statue of King Rama V at Bangkok's Royal Plaza, and many Thais offer prayers in honor of the late king in local Buddhist temples. Food is also offered to the monks in memory of the king.

❁ KING'S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 5

This day commemorates the birth of the present king of Thailand King Rama IX, who was born in 1927. The king is looked upon as the father of the people, so this day is also celebrated as Father's Day. Celebrations for the king's birthday begin weeks in advance. People express their love for him by placing huge copies of his picture, along with royal symbols and national flags, on public buildings, schools, temples, homes, and shops.

On December 5 Thais get up early in the morning and visit temples. They offer prayers and make food offerings to the monks in the king's honor. Also every year, a grand concert is held in Bangkok where all kinds of music is performed. For singers and musicians it is a great honor to be invited to perform in the concert, and many singers express the wishes

Fun Fact

The world's tallest Buddhist monument in the world stands 387 feet in height. It is located in the town of Nakhon Pathom.

Fun Fact

It is the custom to stand as a show of respect for the royal national anthem that is played across the country twice every day.

of the entire nation by singing songs written specially to honor the king.

Religious Holidays

❁ CHINESE NEW YEAR

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: Second new Moon after the winter solstice

Fun Fact

The double-handed drum is the most important musical instrument of Thailand, and the instrument is offered flowers and incense before it is played. The belief is that the drum conducts the spiritual content of music played at a performance.

Chinese New Year, also known as the Spring Festival, is celebrated by Thai people of Chinese descent for three days. This is the most important event on the Chinese calendar. At the start of the holiday there are dragon processions around towns. People pray for good luck on this day and the time and method of this special prayer is determined by the *Lear Yik Tao*, or the Chinese book on culture and traditions. After this prayer, some Thai families also offer another prayer for their ancestors. They are nice to each other especially on this day for the fear of inviting bad luck!

There are also lion dance performances, which are believed to ward off evil forces. Firecrackers are lit every day, and children holding red envelopes with gifts of money can be seen running around everywhere.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM; CHINESE NEW YEAR; SPRING FESTIVALS

Fun Fact

Lemon grass (commonly used in Thai dishes) has nothing to do with lemons except for its odor, which is similar to that of lemon peel.

❁ MAGHA PUJA DAY

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: Full Moon day of Magha, the third month of the Buddhist calendar

Magha Puja Day, called Makha Bucha Day in Thailand, is also known as the Fourfold Assembly, Macarpoocha, Dhamma Day, or Sangha Day. This day focuses on the right ways of teaching Buddha's sermons (the way he taught them) and remembering his life. It is observed on the full Moon day of the third lunar month (February–March), and commemorates an important event that happened early in the Buddha's life. Around 3,000 years ago, soon after the first Rains Retreat (Vassa), the Buddha went to Rajagaha city where 1,250 Arahats ("enlightened saints"), disciples of the Buddha, had returned from their wanderings to pay him their respects. This celebration is also called the Fourfold Assembly because this gathering had four

significant aspects: (1) all 1,250 of those assembled were Arahats; (2) they had all been ordained by the Buddha himself; (3) they had come together without prior arrangement; (4) they assembled on the full Moon day of the month of Magha.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM

❁ SONGKRAN DAYS

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: April 13–15

In the Thai language, *songkran* means "move" or "change place"; the 12 days celebrated as *songkrans* in the Thai year are days when the Sun changes its place in the zodiac. The *songkran* celebrated for three days in April, usually April 13–15, is the most significant one in the Thai solar calendar because it is the traditional Thai New Year. It begins on April 13 every year and lasts for 3 days. The Songkran festival, also often called the Water Festival, observed on April 13 is Maha Songkran Day, the day to mark the end of the old year; April 14, the second day, is Wan Nao, the day after the old year has ended; and April 15 is Wan Thaloeng Sok, the day on which the new year begins.

This is one of the most active times for the Thai people. People clean their houses and wash the statues of Buddha with rosewater. Activities such as building sand pagodas (also called stupas; dome-shaped structures that are parts of Buddhist temples), pouring water on the hands of the elderly in order to get their blessing, and throwing water (in a playful manner) over anything and anyone that moves are part of this festival. People also indulge in activities like freeing fish and birds and giving alms to the poor. This is their way of earning merit on the occasion of the new year. Monks talk about *dhamma* (dharma or religion) and the teachings of Buddha. Temples attract crowds and donations this day. Thais enjoy dousing people with very cold water on this day. Since water is valued for its ability to cleanse and purify, this is a sign of respect. Strangers or tourists are popular targets for water throwing.

The most popular Songkran celebration is held in the northern province of Chiang Mai. People from all parts of the country flock there to enjoy the water festival, to watch the Miss Songkran Contest, and to see the beautiful parades.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM

❁ VESAK

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: First full Moon day of the sixth month of the Buddhist calendar

Vesak, also called Visakha Puja Day and Buddha Day, is the holiest day for the Buddhists. It marks the Buddha's birthday, his day of achieving enlightenment, and also the day of his death. The occasion is marked by music and chanting of *shlokas* (his teach-

ings) by devotees during the day. Thousands of people through the temples to participate in the religious ceremonies. In the evening, the faithful carry Buddha's statues in a candlelight procession. The focus of all activities on this day is the greatness and teachings of Lord Buddha.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM; VESAK

ASALHA BUCHA DAY

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: July

Asalha Bucha Day commemorates the Lord Buddha's first sermon after his enlightenment. Before they heard him speak, it is believed that his listeners doubted Buddha's credibility; after hearing him, however, one of them named Kondanna asked the Buddha to receive him as a disciple. This first discourse is very important to Buddhists. Not only was it the first structured teaching given by the Buddha after his enlightenment, but most agree that it contains the essence of all his later teachings. Buddhism as an organized practice began with this first discourse. A thorough study of it is considered essential to understanding the Buddhist philosophy, since it puts many of the Buddha's later teachings into perspective. Asalha also marks the beginning of the Asian monsoon season.

Candlelight processions are held in the evening around *wats* ("temples") throughout the country to commemorate this day.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM

BUDDHIST LENT DAY

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: First day of the waning moon in the eighth month of the Buddhist calendar

Traditionally Buddhist Lent Day, also known as Khao Phansa, or the Rains Retreat, marks the start of the period when monks retreat into their huts (which will be their permanent dwellings for some months) because they fear stepping on and damaging the newly grown crops in this season. It is the first day of the fading Moon in the eighth lunar month.

In the early days of Buddhism, monks and nuns wandered the countryside quite freely. As the order grew and became more established, monasteries were built, and the Buddha said that monastics should take up a scheduled residence for the three months of the rainy season.

The monks vow to stay in one place at this time in order to be protected from sun, storm, and rain. The practice of doing this originated with the Buddhist sages and monks in ancient India, but the tradition was carried into Thailand as well.

In fact this time is of great significance to the general population of Buddhists, because they make a special effort to acquaint themselves with, and practice, the precepts taught by the Buddha during

this period. As a result many choose to become monks.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM

Regional Holidays

THAILAND INTERNATIONAL KITE-FLYING FESTIVAL

Observed in: Bangkok

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March or April

The International Kite-Flying Festival is an annual festival held in Bangkok in March or April. The main objective of the festival is to preserve and promote the ancient kite-flying tradition of Thailand. The festival features demonstrations and displays of regional Thai kites and the staging of "kite battles" between competitors to showcase their kites' superiority. These competitions include contests between the small-sized, diamond-shaped kites from the Pak-pao region and the large, star-shaped kites from the Chula region. There are also demonstrations of kite flying as an important means to foster team spirit; U.S. stunt kites; kite-making competitions; and spectators can learn the art of making Chula speed kites. When the competition is over, special prizes are awarded to the most innovatively designed kites. The winner of the kite-flying competition also receives awards.

Thousands of people from around the globe travel to Thailand to witness this spectacular event. Besides Thailand more than 20 countries participate and treat audiences to a wide variety of kites in innovative designs as well as demonstrate their kite-flying skills.

PHI TA KHON FESTIVAL

Observed in: Dan Sai district in Loei province

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June or July

The Phi Ta Khon (*phi* means "ghost") festival is an annual ghost festival held in the Dan Sai district of the Loei Province in Thailand during June or July. It marks the beginning of the three-day Buddhist festival of Boon Pra Wate.

According to tradition one of the incarnations of Buddha Prince Vessandhara embarked on a long trip to an undisclosed destination and remained absent for so long that his subjects assumed he was dead and forgot him. It is said that when he returned to his kingdom, people were so overjoyed

Fun Fact

Thailand's official calendar is based on the Buddhist Era (B.E.), which is 543 years ahead of the Gregorian calendar. For example the Western year 1982 C.E. was the Buddhist year 2525 B.E.

Fun Fact

The couple wears ordinary clothes during their wedding ceremony in Thailand.

that even the spirits and ghosts joined the welcome parade organized in the prince's honor. Since then people have reenacted the welcome procession annually, and many dress up as monsters or wear ghost masks, singing and dancing along the way.

On the second day of the festival, the villagers dance their way to the local temple and mark the end of the procession with bamboo rockets. Special brass plaques are awarded to those judged to wear the best costume and mask. A dancing contest is also organized and the best performance receives other special awards.

On the last day of the festivities, people put away their masks and costumes and listen to monks recite the 13 sermons of Buddha in the local Buddhist temple.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

After a child is born, its parents visit a temple and donate food and flowers to priests to get their blessings for the good karma (luck) of the child. This is believed to help the child during its lifetime.

Thai parents fear the evil spirits of dead childless or unmarried women and feel they must trick these spirits by performing certain rituals. For example, until about the age of one month, children are referred to as though they were animals. The monks give children two-syllable names whereas the parents use one-syllable names. Another way to trick the spirits is by not exchanging any gifts or celebrations before the baby is born. This distracts the spirits and keeps their attention off babies before they are born.

❁ MARRIAGE

August is regarded as the most auspicious month for getting married in Thailand. Arranged marriages are becoming rarer and couples can now decide when they want to marry. A monk then suggests the auspicious date for their wedding. On the wedding day,

the *khan mark* ceremony takes place. In this ceremony, the groom and his close relatives dance to the house of the bride carrying the gifts they wish to present to them. The engagement and the wedding ceremony take place on the same day, primarily to reduce expenses. The usual exchange of rings engages the couple, and that is quickly followed by the *sin sod* ceremony. In this ceremony the groom gives a sum of money (as demanded) to the family of the bride. On the wedding day both families feed the monks, who chant prayers and bless the couple with holy water in the *wat* ("temple"). Then they teach the couple the five precepts of Buddha. The couple agrees with these sermons, while the monks continue to pray and chant. To gain merit, the couple then offers gifts to the monks, receives their blessings, and serves lunch to all present. After the meal the bride and the groom are led to a room decorated with roses by an elder of the family.

❁ DEATH

Buddhists cremate their dead and keep their ashes in an urn in the *chedis* (or stupa)—a dome-shaped monument used to house Buddhist relics or to commemorate significant events of Buddhism. Crying when a person dies is discouraged in Thailand, since that is believed to torture the soul of the deceased, even after cremation. Monks are asked to chant and pray for the deceased, and alms and offerings are made to them in temples to earn merit for the person who has expired. This merit is supposed to give the deceased person a better rebirth.

Further Reading

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Fun Fact

Thailand is the only Southeast Asian nation that was never subjected to European colonization, a fact the Thai people are very proud of.

Togo

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Western Africa, bordering the Bight of Benin, between Benin and Ghana
Size	21,925 sq. mi.
Capital City	Lome
Flag Description	Togo's flag has five equal horizontal bands of green (top and bottom) alternating with yellow; there is a white five-pointed star on a red square in the upper hoist-side corner.
Independence	April 27, 1960 (from French-administered UN trusteeship)
Population	5,681,519 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic under transition to multiparty democratic rule
Nationality	Togolese
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Ewe, Mina, and Kabre (99%)
Major Language(s)	French (official, and the language of commerce); Ewe and Mina (the two major African languages in the south); Kabye (or Kabiye) and Dagomba (the two major African languages in the north)
Major Religion(s)	Indigenous beliefs (51%); Christian (29%); Muslim (20%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Liberation Day, January 13; Independence Day, April 27; Labor Day, May 1; Anniversary of Attempted Disembarkment, September 24

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Historically the land now known as Togo has been alternately ruled by most of the major powers in Europe. Little is known about this region of Africa before the 12th century. During the 12th to 14th centuries, the areas presently known as Togo and Ghana were occupied by the Kwa and Voltaic peoples (two of the six language groups in the region), followed by the Ewe clans from Nigeria and the Ane from Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire.

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive, sometime between the 15th and 16th centuries. The Danes occupied it in the 1700s, and then in 1884 it became a German protectorate. During this period the slave trade flourished in the region, having been started by the Portuguese. In 1914 British and French forces seized Togoland, and in 1921 a mandate of the League of Nations gave Britain the right to

administer the western part (British Togoland), while France took responsibility for the eastern area (French Togoland). After World War II the mandate became part of a United Nations (UN) trusteeship, to be administered by the United Kingdom and France, respectively.

In 1957 British Togoland voted to become part of Gold Coast and later integrated with the independent state of Ghana. French Togoland became an autonomous republic within the French Union in 1955 but also retained its UN trusteeship. Elections were held, and on September 10, 1956, Nicolas Grunitzky (1913–69) was sworn in as the first prime minister of the Republic of Togo. Later there were rumors of irregularities in the plebiscite that was held in 1956 to approve the constitution of the country. Thus in 1958, fresh elections were held in Togo, and Sylvanus Olympio (1902–63) was declared victorious. However, there was a growing demand for total independence. Thus on April 27, 1960, under the leadership of Olympio, Togo adopted a provisional constitution, shed its UN trusteeship, and severed ties with France. There was no

The Ewe of Togo

The Ewe people, one of the three largest groups in Togo, moved into the area now occupied by Togo from the east, probably from Oyo in what is now called western Nigeria. When British Togoland voted to become part of newly independent Ghana, hopes for a unified Ewe people were dashed. The Ewe language now spoken in Ghana and Togo by these divided people is a Kwa language. In all it is spoken by around three million people. Ewe is one of several languages often referred to collectively as Gbe and, like other Gbe languages, is a tonal language. The Fon and Aja peoples of Togo also speak Gbe languages.

The Ewe are essentially a patrilineal people, meaning that descent and inheritance is traced through the father's side of the family, not the mother's. Whoever founds a new community becomes its chief and, under ordinary circumstances, will be succeeded by his male progeny.

Ewe religion is organized around a creator deity Mawu, the supreme deity of the Ewe and Fon peoples. With help from Lisa, her husband and the god of the Sun, the sky, and power, she created the uni-

verse. Lisa is the twin brother of Mawu and the son of Nana Buluku. Sometimes the two deities are thought of as the androgynous creator deity—Mawu-Lisa—who established order in the universe.

Mawu and Lisa's children include Da, Gua, Gbadu. Da, the great serpent god of the Ewe pantheon, helps Mawu-Lisa to order the universe: Above Earth Da has 3,500 coils and, below the Earth, the same number. Mawu-Lisa's creation is supported by these 7,000 coils. Gu is the spirit power of metal workers and, like other patrons of smiths, is also the god of war. It is Gu's responsibility to make Earth habitable for humans, which is apparently an unfinished, ongoing task. Mawu-Lisa's third child is Gbadu, their daughter. Gbadu is the goddess of fate.

The Ewe are also world renowned for their wood carving, including statuary (characterized by the famous statuettes of the twins—the Ibeji—the orisha of children), sculptures, hunting trophies, and masks. The wood-carvers of Kloto are well-known for their "chains of marriage": two characters connected by rings cut from a single piece of wood.

opposition from France, and Togo finally attained independent status in the true sense of the word.

The first president of independent Togo was Sylvanus Olympio. After a three-year tenure he was assassinated in a military coup on January 13, 1963, and Togo became the first country in Africa in which a successful military coup followed independence. It was only the beginning of what would become an unfortunate trend across the African continent, where there are at least two successful coups a year, plus many more unsuccessful attempts.

Olympio's brother-in-law Nicolas Grunitzky, an important political figure of the 1950s who had gone into exile (1958) in Dahomey (now Benin), returned to Togo and became president. Grunitzky unsuccessfully attempted to unify the country by including several political parties in his government. On January 13, 1967, however, he was toppled in a bloodless military coup led by the head of the armed forces Lt. Col. Gnassingbe Eyadema (1937–2005). Eyadema took office in April of that year. One of Eyadema's first actions as president was to put a halt to all democratic processes, starting with the dissolution of all political parties. Not surprisingly, even though political parties regained legal status in 1991, and a democratic constitution was adopted in 1992, the fruits of an effective democracy still eluded the Togolese. Cheating at elections became the norm, and suppressing opposition, a common practice.

With the death of President Gnassingbe Eyadema, Africa's longest serving head of state—38

years—on February 5, 2005, military rule was on its last legs. The military appointed Eyadema's son Faure as president, and this move was internationally perceived as a coup. Allegations of human rights violations were made by several organizations, including the joint UN–Organization of African Unity (OAU) panel. Forced by international public opinion, Faure finally agreed not only to hold presidential elections, but also to step down. In the first decade of the 21st century, Togo has become a republic in transition to multiparty democratic rule.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The region can be broadly divided into six geographic regions. Inland from the narrow coastal area are tidal flats and shallow lagoons with a number of lakes. The largest is Lake Togo. The Ouatchi Plateau, because of its reddish leached soil (rich in iron), is also known as Terre de Barre. Northeast of the Ouatchi Plateau is another plateau 1640 feet above sea level. The rivers Mono and Ogou drain into this region. A chain of hills, known as the Atkora Mountains, runs through the center of Togo. (These hills extend southwest into Ghana and northeast into Benin.) Mount Agou is Togo's highest elevation with a height of 3,235 feet. The Oti River runs through the northern and western part of the Atkora Mountains, draining into the Volta River, which flows through Ghana. The beautiful savannah country lies to the north of the Oti River Valley; on

the southern end there is a plateau that slowly tapers into a coastal plain. Coconut trees are visible all along Togo's coastline, with lagoons and lakes dotting the area. In the northwest is a higher region, characterized by rocks such as gneiss and granite, which features the cliffs of the Dapaong.

Togo has a hot, humid climate. However, it receives less rainfall than the other countries situated along the Gulf of Guinea. The southern part of Togo has two rainy seasons, as opposed to the north, which has one. The two rainy periods in the south are March to early July, and late September to early November. In the northern belt, the rainy season lasts from April until October. However, the heaviest rainfall occurs in the western, southwestern, and central mountains of the Atkora. Lome's annual rainfall is 30 inches and that of Kloto 70 inches annually. On an average the north gets 40 inches, and the south 70 inches. In Togo the average temperature ranges from 72°F to 95°F.

Togo also faces threats from natural hazards. During the winter, hot, dry Harmattan winds reduce visibility in the north. Periodic droughts are another cause for concern.

Added to this are serious environmental issues: deforestation, caused by slash-and-burn agriculture and the use of wood for fuel; water pollution, which has affected the fishing industry; and air pollution, which has become a health hazard for the urban population.

❁ ECONOMY

The Togolese economy is based on both commercial and subsistence agriculture. The main cash crop is cotton. This provides employment for 65 percent of the labor force. Some of the other agricultural products are coffee, cocoa, yams, cassava (manioc), corn, beans, rice, millet, and sorghum. Phosphate mining remains the country's most significant industry in spite of the fact that phosphate prices have plunged on the world market. Togo's other important industries—agricultural processing, cement, handicrafts, textiles, and beverages—have picked up some of the slack. Occasionally supply difficulties occur in one region or another, but, when harvests are normal, Togo is self-sufficient.

Most essential products—like machinery and equipment, foodstuffs, and petroleum products—have to be imported. Togo earns 40 percent of its revenue by exporting cocoa, coffee, and cotton. Even though Togo is the world's fourth largest producer of phosphate, it is only able to produce a small percentage of its total capability on account of severe power shortages and lack of the funds needed to upgrade technology. International aid through the World Bank and International Monetary Fund has not really moved the economy forward because of the political situation in the country. Military rule, in fact, prompted the European Union to impose sanctions at one time, though they have since been lifted.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The majority of Togolese are native Africans. There are as many as 37 tribes; prominent among them are the Ewe, Mina, and Kabye. While the official language of the country is French, many African dialects are used for conducting day-to-day transactions. Ewe and Mina are the two major African languages in the south, and Kabye (sometimes spelled Kabiye) and Dagomba, the two major African languages in the north. These ethnic groups worship the Christian or Islamic God as well as other deities, but ancestral worship is most important. Ancestors are invoked and invited before every major ceremony, especially marriage.

The influence of ethnic cultures is so dominant that it permeates the lifestyles of even those who have adopted Christianity and Islam. This is evident in many of the rituals and ceremonies they observe.

❁ CUISINE

The food habits of the Togolese are greatly influenced by the country's colonial legacy. While most people prefer home-cooked food, there are plenty of roadside stalls and restaurants selling, corn on the cob, peanuts, omelets, brochettes, and prawns, among other items.

Most items are served in a special sauce accompanied by a starchy item like rice, *pâté* (made with millet, corn, plantains, manioc (cassava), or yams), *ablo* (made with corn and sugar), *monple* (made with fermented corn), or *fufu*. Some of the sauces used are *lamounou dessi* or *sauce de poisson* (fresh fish sauce), *aglan* (crab), *gboma* (spinach), *tomate* (tomato), aubergine (eggplant), and *épinard* (spinach).

Togolese delicacies include *abobo* (snails cooked en brochette), *egbo pinon* (smoked goat), *koklo meme* (grilled chicken with chili sauce), and *koliko* (fried yams).

Fun Fact

The intertropical front was named "the doldrums" because of the low spirits early sailors experienced after days of having no wind. When navigators depended entirely on wind to propel their ships, finding themselves becalmed in this region in a hot and muggy climate could mean death.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The first day of the Gregorian, or Western, calendar, January 1, is celebrated as New Year's Day in many parts of the world. The Togolese people cele-

Fun Fact

The Ewe are truly a people blessed by the gods: They have more than 600 deities they can turn to in times of need.

brate New Year's with great enthusiasm. Celebrations are planned all over the country, and revelries begin the evening of December 31. Dance, music, food, and drinks are the highlights as people party all night to welcome in the new year.

✿ LIBERATION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 13

The first president of Togo, Sylvanus Olympio, was assassinated in 1963 and replaced by Nicolas Grunitzky. In 1967 the head of the armed forces, Gnassingbe Eyadema, seized power in a bloodless coup and dissolved all political parties. Ever since, January 13, the anniversary of this coup, has been a public holiday in Togo and is also celebrated as Freedom Day. All government offices, schools, and many businesses are closed on this day.

✿ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 27

In the 1700s Togo was ruled by the Danes; they were followed by the Germans in 1884. In 1914 both the French and British occupied the country. After World War I the League of Nations mandated that the British and the French administer the western and eastern parts, respectively. It was only on April 27, 1960, that France granted independence to Togo (formerly eastern Togo). So every year this historic day is celebrated as Independence Day by the Togolese. It is a public holiday, and all business, commercial, and educational institutions are closed. The national flag is unfurled, and parades and public speeches mark the day.

✿ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day. It is also known as May Day or Workers' Day in many parts of the world, because it honors the important role played by workers in their societies. The May 1 observance of Labor Day has its origins in the international socialist movement of the 1880s and was designated to coincide with an 1890 strike in the United States called by the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding the eight-hour workday. Although the strike was postponed, the day for the observance remained May 1. In Togo, in keeping with French tradition, Labor Day is celebrated on May 1, and all government bodies, schools, and many businesses are closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

✿ ANNIVERSARY OF ATTEMPTED DISEMBARKMENT

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: September 24

On September 24, 1986, a group of 73 Togolese dissidents entered the capital city, Lome, via Ghana and attempted to overthrow the ruling Eyadema government. The army quickly responded to the attack and crushed the attempted coup. The anniversary commemorates this historic attack and salutes the quick action of the armed forces that helped to crush the dissidents.

Religious Holidays

✿ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, also known as Mourning Friday, Black Friday, or Great Friday, is observed on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent. It is a day of mourning in many Christian parts of the world because they believe that this the day when Jesus, their savior, was crucified. In some parts of Togo, people come out in processions, some carrying crosses, to reenact Jesus' final journey to Calvary.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

On Easter Christians mark the day of Jesus' Resurrection, the day they believe he rose from the dead. Easter, called Pascha in many Christian areas of the world, celebrates the victory over death and the renewal of life. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is one of the oldest, and certainly the most important, of Christian festivals. The date for Easter is always scheduled for the first Sunday after the first full Moon after the vernal equinox, and the dates of many Christian observances are, in turn, determined on the basis of the date on which Easter falls. In the Roman Catholic Church, for example, Lent begins 40 days prior to Easter, and Ascension Day falls 40 days after Easter. The vernal equinox was chosen because it was the day on which European pagans celebrated the arrival of spring and honored the mother goddess Ostara (Eastre or Eostre among the northern Germanic peoples).

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: August 15

The Assumption commemorates the final journey to heaven of the Mary, the mother of Jesus. It is an important festival for Roman Catholics because it reaffirms their belief in Jesus' promise that all devout Christians would find a place in heaven. Togolese Christians attend church on this day to offer prayers to Mary. A feast follows the church services.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

❁ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: November 1

All Saints Day is a Christian feast that honors and remembers all the saints, both known and unknown. It is the occasion for prayer, remembrance, thanks, veneration for their acts of kindness and charity. On this day people also pray for their dead family members and friends. In Togo, they attend morning services and pray and seek blessings. Afterward people visit the graves of their deceased relatives and friends and decorate them with flowers.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 25

The birth of Jesus is celebrated in Togo with the exchange of gifts, church services, feasts, and special songs. The churches are beautifully decorated with balloons, ribbons, and Christmas trees. Many people attend the midnight services on Christmas Eve. On Christmas Day faithful Christians attend the special

prayer service where the life and teachings of Jesus are remembered. People gather with their friends and family for lavish meals prepared for this special day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

Considering the large number of ethnic groups in Togo, almost every region has its own unique festival. These events are based on local customs and crop harvesting. Almost all of them have some interesting folklore behind them.

❁ EVALA

Observed by: General Public
Observed in: Kara region
Observed on: July

Evala, or the Festival of Initiation, is held among the Kabye people. As part of this initiation ceremony, eighteen-year-old wrestlers, known as *evalou*, demonstrate their valor and dancing skills. The wrestling matches help the young initiates to distinguish themselves from others through their endurance and strength as well as demonstrate their grace and elegance through their dancing skills. After a successful display of strength and grace, the initiates are declared adults. The final ceremonies end between July 10 and 14, coinciding with the second Saturday of that month.

❁ DZAWUWU-ZA

Observed in: Kpalime in the Plateaux region
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: First Saturday of August

Dzawuwu-Za, or Festival of Harvest, is a ceremony of the Ewe people of Kloto in which they honor their

The Harmattan

The Harmattan is an easterly wind that interferes with the trade winds off the Atlantic coasts of North Africa, across the Gulf of Guinea and the Cape Verde Islands. The intertropical front (IF), also known as the intertropical convergence zone (ITCZ) or the equatorial convergence zone, is a belt of low pressure that surrounds the Earth at the equator. The IF is the convergence zone between the northern wind, called the Harmattan, and the monsoon winds coming from the south. It is formed by the convergence of warm moist air from the latitudes above and below the equator. Within this zone, there are no prevailing winds. Whatever horizontal motion there may be is due entirely to air from the

trade winds, which replaces that taken up by convection, a slow, unpredictable process at best. For this reason sailors called this region "the doldrums."

The Harmattan is a winter wind, blowing between November and February. As it passes over the Sahara, it gathers very fine dust particles, which can cause a haze covering large coastal areas and reducing visibility to as little as 50 yards. When the Harmattan blows hard, it can push dust and sand all the way to South America. The Harmattan is sometimes called "doctor" because it is thought to have healthful properties, but these warm, dry winds actually cause damage to the mucous membranes of the respiratory system and have been linked to meningitis epidemics in West Africa.



Fun Fact

The Ewe regard the birth of twins as a great blessing. The Bassari, however, consider having twins a great misfortune.

ancestors, a spirituality common in the Plateaux region of Togo. They make offerings of the first fruits of the year's harvest, especially corn, cassava (manioc), and yams, to their gods and the ancestral spirits. Dzawuwu-Za is observed every year on the first Saturday of the month of August in Kpalimé.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

✿ AYIZA

Observed in: Ewe in Zio (southern Togo)

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Second Saturday of August

The word *Ayiza* is derived from *ayi*, which means "beans." According to legend, Ayiza, or Festival of Harvest Zio, dates back to 1720, when the founding fathers of the town of Tsevie stopped in Ewe to rest en route to the south from Notse. During this break they planted beans. When the visitors wanted to resume their journey, the local farmers asked them to halt for a while, at least until the crops grew, and they did. Tsevie owes its name to this story, and the festival honors the founders of the town. *Tse* means "yield," and *vie* means "small"; *Tsevie* translates as, "Let it yield small before we leave."

Ayiza is celebrated with gunshots, chicken sacrifices, and dancing. On this occasion people gather at the village square and celebrate the harvest of beans. Prayers are offered to their ancestors for having taken care of the beans. Ayiza is celebrated the second Saturday of August.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

Rites of Passage

✿ BIRTH

Fun Fact

When thinking about making a food offering to the Ibeji, it is important to know that they are particularly fond of popcorn, candy, all kinds of fruit, cakes, and yellow rice.

The birth of a child among the Ewe tribe in Togo has an important spiritual aspect to it. Once the pregnant woman has felt the first pang of labor, a priestess cares for the woman and her child. After the birth of the infant, a *babalarwo* (priest) arrives to determine which ancestral spirit has been reborn in the infant. The parents of the child have to ensure that the child conforms to the manners of the ancestral spirit.

Nine days after the birth of a boy or seven days after the birth of a girl, the *babalarwo* returns and sacrifices a cock and a hen to protect the child from unwanted spirits. The entrails

of the two sacrifices are put in an earthen pot filled with water, which is then placed before images of the gods.

According to the customs of the Ewe tribe, the child and mother are considered impure after birth, and a purification ceremony is undertaken to purify them. The water placed before the image of the gods is brought back into the house and thrown up on the thatched roof. As the water drips down from the roof, the child and his or her mother have to pass under the falling drops of water at least three times. Then the *babalarwo* holds the child in his arms, with the child's legs touching the ground, and bathes its head three times with the water of purification, which he himself has prepared. During the process he repeats the name with which the child shall be known three times.

A small fire is kept burning in the house. Once the ceremony is over, the fire is extinguished, and the house is swept clean of charcoal, ashes, dust, and other impurities. Then a new fire is kindled, and the purification ceremony is complete.

✿ MARRIAGE

Among the Ewe, when a man chooses his wife-to-be, his parents visit hers and make the marriage proposal. If it is accepted, then the groom's family gives the bride's family kola nuts (an indigenous fruit used in the manufacturing of cola drinks) and clothes. Consanguineous unions, especially marriages between cousins, are still prevalent. Such unions have an economic motivation because they ensure that property stays in the family.

A *babalarwo* (priest) is consulted to determine the wedding date. On the day of the event, a lavish banquet is organized at the bridegroom's house, and the bride is led to the party by a procession of women singing poems written for her. After the wedding, she is led to the bedroom by a female relative of the bridegroom and is put to bed. This relative hides in the room until the bridegroom arrives. Then she collects "tokens of virginity" from the bride and groom and shows them to the people who have assembled for the feast. The test of virginity is of prime importance in those cases when the bride has been engaged to the bridegroom at a very young age because the actual wedding occurs well after the engagement.

The "tokens of virginity" are produced by a member of the bridegroom's family to make sure that there is no deception on the part of the bride's family as to her virginity. These tokens are then carried to the house of the bride's parents, who are not allowed to attend their daughter's wedding feast. Eventually they are hung on a fence as public information.

Visiting special shrines and sacrificing animals in the presence of the *babalarwo* is also part of some weddings.

❁ DEATH

In Togo a death in the family is marked with loud wailing and other emotional and physical expressions of grief. In the case of a death of an elderly man, the eldest son of the deceased (or his brother if he has no son) will send for the *babalawo* (priest) to help ascertain whether the death was due to natural causes. The *babalawo* sacrifices a fowl at the oracle of Ifa (the god of death) and inquires about the cause of death. If the cause of death is natural, then normal burial rituals are performed. If the oracle attributes the death to evil spirits, the *babalawo* inquires whether the soul of the deceased will be subjected to more problems by the evil spirits or whether any other member of the family faces a similar fate. If the deceased's soul is in danger, then a sheep or goat is sacrificed, and its carcass is sprinkled with palm oil and buried outside the town at a place where two or more paths meet. This ritual ensures that the evil spirits will become confused and run in different directions, not into the town or the village of the deceased.

The corpse is purified by washing it with aromatic herbs; then it is dressed in the individual's best clothes. In the case of a man, the head is shaved, and the hair is buried in the ground behind the house. In the case of a woman, those parts of the body that are exposed are treated with a solution made from the bark of a tree; when applied, it gives a reddish tone

to the skin. The body is then wrapped in a cloth and placed on a mat outside the house.

The next day, the male relatives pretend to look for their dead relative in the town and later destroy all his or her belongings. This is an indication that the deceased must leave this world and travel to the next. Before heading to the gravesite, the deceased is called three times by his or her name and, if there is no response, the funeral procession heads toward the burial grounds. The relatives of the deceased are forbidden to comb their hair during the funeral ceremonies, and they shave their heads on the last day of the rituals.

Further Reading

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❧ Tonga ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Archipelago in Oceania in the South Pacific Ocean, about two-thirds of the way between Hawaii and New Zealand
Size	289 sq. mi.
Capital City	Nukualofa
Flag Description	Tonga's flag is red with a bold red cross on a white rectangle in the upper hoist-side corner.
Independence	June 4, 1970 (from the United Kingdom)
Population	112,422 (2005 est.)
Government	Hereditary constitutional monarchy
Nationality	Tongan
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Polynesian; European
Major Language(s)	Tongan; English
Major Religion(s)	Christian, Free Wesleyan Church, (27%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; ANZAC Day, April 25; Crown Prince's Birthday, May 4; Emancipation Day, June 4; King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV's Birthday, July 5; Constitution Day, November 4; King George Tupou I's Birthday, December 4

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The first settlers in Tonga came from the Santa Cruz Islands (now part of the Solomon Islands). Their arrival was the result of the Austronesian (Lapita) migration out of Southeast Asia about 6,000 years ago. Tonga is the oldest site in Polynesia where the distinctive Lapita pottery is found, dated between 2,800 and 2,750 years ago. For about 1,000 years the Lapita went about their daily lives before a new generation of explorers sailed east to settle the Marquesas, Tahiti, and, eventually, the remaining Pacific islands. It is for this reason that anthropologists call Tonga, Samoa, and Fiji the “cradle” of Polynesian culture and civilization.

The power of the Tongan monarchy reached the pinnacle of its glory in the 13th century C.E. At that time, the powers of the chieftains of Tonga extended as far as Samoa.

During the 14th century, the king of Tonga delegated much of his political power to one of his brothers and contented himself with retaining only spiritual authority. This

form of governing was repeated in the next generation, resulting in three distinct lineages: the Tui Tonga, with spiritual authority, the Tui Haatakalaua; and the Tui Kanokupolu. The latter two oversaw the day-to-day administration of Tonga.

In the 15th century and again in the 17th, civil wars broke out. About this time the first Europeans arrived, beginning with Dutch mariners Willem Schouten (?1567–1625), Jacob Le Maire (c. 1585–1616) in 1616, who stopped on the northern island of Niuaotupapu, and Abel Tasman (?1603–?59), who visited Tongatapu and Haapai in 1643. Regular uninterrupted contact with Europeans did not begin until 125 years later. Captain James Cook (1728–79) visited the islands twice—in 1773 and 1777—and christened the archipelago “the friendly islands” because of the cordiality of the natives whom he had met. In 1789 the famous mutiny on the British ship *Bounty* took place in the ocean waters between the Haapai and Nomuka island groups.

Shortly after Captain Cook's last visit, war broke out in the islands as the three lines of kings contended for power. Around this time young Tongan nobles serving as mercenaries took Tongan culture to Fiji's easternmost island group the Laus. The missionaries of the London Missionary Society

arrived in Tonga in 1747. A second missionary group followed in 1822, led by Walter Lawry of the Wesleyan Missionary Society. They converted Taufaahau (a contender for royal power), and Christianity began to spread throughout the islands.

Taufaahau and his spouse assumed the names of Siaoisi (George) and Salote (Charlotte) respectively, in honor of King George III (1738–1820) and Queen Charlotte of England (1744–1818). For the first time in recorded history, all the Tongan islands were united, with Taufaahau as their ruler. In 1845 he was formally proclaimed King George Tupou I, and the present dynasty was founded. He established a constitution and a parliamentary government based on the British model. In 1862 the king abolished the existing system of semi-serfdom, establishing a system of land tenure under which every male Tongan, upon reaching the age of 16, was entitled to rent—for life and at a nominal fee—a plot of bush land of 8.25 acres, plus a village allotment of about three-eighths of an acre for his home.

In 1900 European settlers and rival Tongan chiefs tried to overthrow Tonga's second king. This resulted in the Treaty of Friendship, which made Tonga one of Britain's protected states. This situation came to an end in 1970 under arrangements established prior to her death by the third monarch, Queen Salote (1918–65). Tonga joined the Commonwealth of Nations in 1970 and the United Nations (UN) in 1999. Tonga is unique in the Pacific because, although it was exposed to colonial influences, it never lost its indigenous governance.

Tonga became fully independent on June 4, 1970. In 1972 Tonga claimed the tide-washed, isolated Minerva Reefs (298 miles southwest of Nukualofa) to thwart attempts by a private Anglo-American group, the Ocean Life Research Foundation, to establish an independent Republic of Minerva on the reefs. In 1998 Tonga recognized China and broke off relations with Taiwan and the United Kingdom.

In the elections of March 2002, seven of the nine popularly elected representatives were chosen under the pro-democratic banner with the remaining two representing “traditionalist” values. The nine nobles and all the cabinet ministers that make up the legislative assembly generally support the government. Tonga is not a democracy; so the people have no right to change their government through elections, although they can elect some members of the legislative assembly.

In 2003 a Tongan newspaper published from New Zealand that criticized the government was banned from circulation in Tonga, but after the newspaper obtained two court orders, it was again distributed freely. In October 2003 thousands of Tongans marched peacefully through the streets of the capital city Nukualofa to protest the government's plans to curb freedom of speech. Despite the protests the Media Operators Bill and constitutional amendment were passed by the legislature.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Tonga is an archipelago in Oceania, situated on the eastern edge of the Indo-Australian Plate, along the Pacific Ring of Fire, and moving east-southeast at a little more than three-quarters of an inch annually. The fault in the Earth's crust that originally raised Tonga, where the Pacific Plate is forcing up the Indo-Australian Plate at the Tonga Trench, has shifted to the northwest over time. The total land area is 289 square miles spread over 270,272 square miles of territorial sea. Tonga consists of 171 islands, 36 of which are inhabited.

Many of the islands are coralline covered with volcanic ash, comparatively flat, and encircled by fringing reefs. The highest point of the country is Mt. Kao, a volcano (3,379 feet), located on Kao Island. The capital, Nukualofa, is located on the main island of Tongatapu.

Tonga is 13 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time. The climate is pleasant, slightly cooler, and less humid than most tropical areas. The temperature ranges between 64° and 77°F from May to September and 75° and 90°F between October and April. Trade winds blow year-round. The average annual temperatures in Nukualofa are 77°F, with a mean humidity of 77 percent. Average annual rainfall is 70 inches.

Tonga has a vast treasure trove of tropical flora and fauna. A profusion of heilala, hibiscus, frangipani, and bougainvillea create a riot of colors. Common sights on Tonga are the coconut groves, pandanus, and banana plantations. Located at the Veitongo village at Tongatapu, the Tonga Wildlife Centre/Bird Park is a sanctuary for the rare and endangered birds in the kingdom. The Wildlife Centre also showcases Tongan medicinal trees and plants along with typical Tongan food crops.

❁ ECONOMY

Tonga has a narrow export base in agricultural goods. Squash, coconuts, bananas, and vanilla beans are its main crops, most of which are exported. The country has to import much of its food, mainly from New Zealand. Tourism is the second largest source of revenue after remittances from natives living abroad. The government stresses development of the private sector, especially the encouragement of investment, and is allocating more and more funds for health and education. High rates of unemployment among the young and soaring inflation are major problems presently confronting the government.

Fun Fact

In several Polynesian dialects the word *tonga* means “south.”

Fun Fact

In Tonga visitors can make the two-hour trek to the summit of Tofua, the most active volcano in the country. Tofua frequently belches smoke.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Fun Fact

Every year more than 100 humpback whales return to Tonga to give birth during the austral winter (June–August).

The tiny country of Tonga is often romantically described as the place where time begins. It has managed to maintain a low profile compared to most of its Pacific neighbors. Tonga is an idyllic holiday resort with breathtaking natural beauty. The only monarchy left in the Pacific has succeeded in keeping developers at bay. The people of Tonga live a tranquil and peaceful existence in a veritable paradise away from concrete jungles and symbols of modernity like five-star hotels and resorts, glamorous shopping malls, and freeways.

Tonga has a rigid two-tier caste system. The king and 33 “nobles of the realm,” along with their families, constitute a privileged class at the top of the social ladder. Everyone else is a commoner. At present Tongan society is conservative in outlook and practice in almost every aspect of life except the sexual lives of bachelors and spinsters.

In a traditional Tongan family the father is considered the head of the family, and the mother, his subordinate. However, brothers are subordinate to their sisters when the age gap between them is small. The eldest daughter (rather than the eldest son) receives the best of the family’s resources. A father’s eldest sister (*mebekitanga*) is the leader (*fabu*) of the nuclear family in the highly organized extended family system.

As was the case throughout Polynesia, the Tongans accepted most of the puritanical beliefs taught by the early missionaries but resisted adopting the ideas of strict sexual abstinence. It is illegal for either men or women to appear shirtless in public. As in other countries of Polynesia, Tongan families without enough female progeny bring up boys as they would bring up girls. These boys are known in Tongan as *fakaleitis* (“like a woman”).

The people of Tonga are notorious for their promiscuity and their penchant for enticing tourists. Marriages are times for great celebration. Ceremonies follow the religious traditions of the families. Festivities after a ceremony may include singing hymns, giving speeches, and eating and drinking. Young couples usually have their own home, but may choose to move in with the bride’s parents.

The dwellings in modern Tonga vary from the traditional coconut leaf and timber *fale* in rural areas, to

the wooden-frame, tin, or cinder-block *fale* in affluent areas. All families own their homes, though technically the land is owned by the king. Sometimes two generations of a family live in the same house.

Western clothes have become common in recent years, especially among the young, although many Tongans still wear wraparound skirts known as *valas*. These reach below the knee (on men) and down to the ankles on women. To show their respect for the royal family and to each other, men and women traditionally wear finely woven mats known as *ta’ovalas* over their *valas*. Men fasten these with waistbands made out of coconut fiber, while women wear decorative waistbands called *kiekies*.

❁ CUISINE

Tongans traditionally eat two meals a day. These are made up of yams, taro leaves, sweet potatoes, cassava, fish, or pork. *Lu pulu*, a popular dish, is cooked taro leaves with coconut cream and corned beef. Pork (especially roasted pig), chicken, and fish (tuna, shark, grouper, and parrotfish) are the most common dishes. The Tongans enjoy fresh fruit and vegetables including mangoes, guavas, oranges, lemons, limes, grapefruit, papayas, and coconuts.

Families eat together as often as possible. In rural areas the people sit on woven mats to eat, but in urban households dining tables are used. The people traditionally eat with their fingers, though there is now more use of cutlery. Conversation is kept to a minimum while eating. When guests are present, they usually eat with a few selected members of the family. Guests are served first, while the person who has done the cooking usually eats last. Children eat separately.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR’S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

With the International Dateline only “a coconut throw away” (as they say in Tonga), Tonga happens to be the first nation to greet the sunrise of each new day and the beginning of every new year. Hence this occasion assumes tremendous importance for the Tongan people, and this is an official holiday in Tonga. On New Year’s Eve, called Po Leo by Tongans, people celebrate by organizing and enjoying parties and taking part in dance and musical events with their friends and relatives.

❁ ANZAC DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 25

ANZAC is an acronym for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. The name was established in

Fun Fact

In the late 1990s the Tonga Wildlife Centre released 12 kaka (Red Shining Parrots), 6 males and 6 females, into their new home in the caldera of the Tofua volcano. The release was part of the Wildlife Centre’s program to save Tonga’s endangered bird species.

Fun Fact

In Tonga Sundays are considered mandatory days of rest and everything in the country is closed down including taxis, buses and restaurants. Only police officers are at work—enforcing the law.

1914 (during World War I) to represent the grouping of the Australian Imperial and New Zealand Expeditionary Forces stationed in Egypt. On April 25, 1915, the ANZAC soldiers began their combat at Gallipoli, located off the Aegean Sea in Turkey, where hundreds of them were killed or wounded. This day is marked by offering floral wreaths at the memorials of those killed in wars, and marches by war veterans are held in the capital. The ANZAC Day parades from various Australian and New Zealand towns are televised live with commentary. This day is observed as an official holiday in Tonga because of the kingdom's close ties with the two larger nations.

❁ CROWN PRINCE'S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 4

On the island kingdom of Tonga the birthday of the crown prince coincides every year with a highly popular folk festival, the Vavau Festival, which incorporates various sporting, cultural, and social events.

❁ EMANCIPATION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 4

This holiday commemorates the day of Tonga's independence from the United Kingdom in 1970. The day is observed with processions, parades, and public speeches by important political personages.

❁ KING TAUFAAHAU TUPOU IV'S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 5

The present king of Tonga has ruled the country since 1965. Since he is a very popular ruler, the loyal Tongan populace celebrates his birthday with great fervor. On the fifth of July Tongans commemorate King Taufaahau Tupou IV's birthday with the Heilala Festival, which becomes a week-long celebration featuring parades and processions, music festivals, and competitions. It coincides with the flowering of the *heilala*, Tonga's national flower.

❁ CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 4

Tonga's constitution was proclaimed on this day in 1875, so this day is of considerable importance in the history of Tonga. The residents celebrate with processions, parades, and public speeches by eminent people. The king makes a public appearance and presides over some of the functions. This is a public holiday in Tonga.

❁ KING GEORGE TUPOU I'S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 4

Civil wars during the early 19th century ended when King George Tupou I (1797–1893) established the monarchy, unified the nation, and gave it a constitution (1862), a legal code, and an administrative system. To mark their first king's birthday Tongans attend a flag-raising ceremony in the morning, which is accompanied by a police band playing the Tongan national anthem, followed by a gun salute at the flagpole.

Crowds then gather to participate in marches through Nukualofa, the capital; each group has its own agenda. Some demand that the present king give up his power, others pray for divine intervention, and still others pay homage to the monarchy. Those who are unable to decide which march to join gather with the bystanders.

Fun Fact

Every year Tonga hosts the Miss Galaxy Contest, a beauty contest for *fakaleitis*.

Religious Holidays

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, also called Holy Friday, Great Friday, or Mourning Friday, is the day on which Jesus' Crucifixion is recalled by devout Christians. As in the rest of the world, religious services are conducted in Tonga. This is a solemn occasion and people spend the entire day attending public readings of the Gospels and Psalms and singing hymns from scriptures.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a Christian feast that celebrates the day when Jesus rose from the dead. It is also sometimes known as Resurrection Day. This day is of the

Fun Fact

In Tonga it is rude to stand while eating or drinking.

The Crown Prince

Crown Prince Tupouto'a is an unmarried playboy in his 50s who lives in a grand palace on the outskirts of the capital Nukualofa. He is known to zoom around the entire island in a black, chauffeur-driven London taxi. He is famous for his real passions: computer games, toy soldiers, and playing with radio-controlled boats in his private swimming pool.

Fun Fact

Tonga boasts no less than four miles of coastal blow holes where underground caverns force the Pacific Ocean up through fissures, creating giant towers of water more than 98 feet high.

utmost importance because the fundamental teaching of Christianity is that Jesus, through his death, freed all believers from the penalty of sin.

The holiday falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. They often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to offer prayers. The word *easter* is derived from the name of the Germanic fertility goddess Eostre or Eastre, the revered mother goddess of the Saxon people who lived in northern Europe. Easter eggs have become associated with the festival because they symbolize new life.

In a country like Tonga, where the people are devout Christians, the festival of Easter assumes even greater importance. Apart from the traditional ceremonial prayers in churches, the people also organize a grand festival, complete with youth choirs, passion plays, concerts, and other cultural performances. Easter Monday, the day after Easter, is a public holiday, and Tongans take advantage of the long weekend to enjoy themselves with friends and family.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world, because it celebrates the birth of Jesus, whom they believe was the Son of God. Christmas in Tonga is unlike Western traditional observances because there is neither snow nor real pine trees. Singing is a major part of Christmas in Tonga. Celebrations begin in the first week of December and continue up to New Year's Day. All the churches in the country get their parishioners together to sing almost all day and night. In Tonga the government closes down all its functions from Christmas Day until New Year's Day. On Christmas Day Tongans cook a number of delicacies that they exchange with or give to their neighbors. The highlight of Christmas festivities in Tonga is the *tutukupakanava*, for which piles of coconut husks are lined up on the beaches and set on fire. Each island burns its own pile of husks on the seashore, which collectively begins to look like Christmas lights. Moreover people select trees from their backyards and decorate them just as the traditional Christmas trees in northern countries are decorated.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 26

The day after Christmas Day is known as Boxing Day, after the old British tradition of opening the alms boxes placed in churches during the Christmas season. The contents used to be distributed among the poor of the parish. This day is also known as the Feast of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr. It is only since the last century that it has become a holiday in many countries of the world. Combining Boxing Day with Christmas celebrations allows many people to travel and rejoin their families, which has encouraged the tradition of families getting together at Christmas time.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Rites of Passage

DEATH

In ancient times the Tongans used to build elaborate tombs to hold the remains of their dead. The tombs were made up of massive coral slabs that were brought ashore from the deep seas and nearby islands. Though the tomb-making is no longer in vogue, there still persists the ceremony of the *kilikili*, which takes place after the initial mourning period of 100 days. Washing the tombstones with water is called the *lanu kilikili*. Taking them out from the water and washing them with oils is called the *bifo kilikili*. The oils are made out of fragrant flowers such as the *mohokoi*, as well as leaves from the *siaipasi* tree, which also adds to the fragrance. In a bygone age it was also a custom among the Tongans to practice self-flagellation along with other forms of self-mortification and torture to show their grief for the dead.

Further Reading

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Trinidad and Tobago

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Two islands located between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean, northeast of Venezuela.
Size	1,980 sq. mi.
Capital City	Port-of-Spain
Flag Description	The flag of Trinidad and Tobago is red with a white-edged black diagonal band from the upper hoist side to the lower fly side.
Independence	August 31, 1962 (from United Kingdom)
Population	1,096,585 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary democracy
Nationality	Trinidadian(s), Tobagonian(s)
Major Ethnic Group(s)	East Indian (a local term, primarily used of immigrants from northern India; 40%); African (38%); mixed (21%)
Major Language(s)	English (official); Hindi; French; Spanish; Chinese
Major Religion(s)	Protestants (32%); Roman Catholic (26%); Hindu (22%); Muslim, (6%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Spiritual Baptist Shouters Liberation Day, March 30; Labor Day, May 1; Indian Arrival Day, May 30; Emancipation Day, August 1; Independence Day, August 31

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Both Trinidad and Tobago were originally settled by Amerindians from South America. Trinidad was the first of the Caribbean islands settled by archaic hunter-gatherers at least 7,000 years ago. Crop growers brought with them their knowledge of ceramics when they settled on Trinidad around 250 B.C.E. and then gradually moved up the islands. When Columbus (1451–1506) arrived in 1498, Trinidad was occupied by various Arawakan and Cariban groups including the Nepoya, Suppoya, and Yao, who had named the island Kairi (or Iere), usually understood to mean Land of the Hummingbird. (According to some interpreters, *kairi* means “land.”) Columbus, however, decided to call the island La Isla de la Trinidad, the Island of the Holy Trinity. Tobago was inhabited by the Island Caribs and Galibi.

The Spanish, who followed in Columbus's wake, seized many of Trinidad's original Amerindian inhabitants to work as slaves in their newly established South American colonies.

Spain, owing to its frenzied desire for gold, initially paid scant attention to the potentials of tapping the natural resources of Trinidad, a lucky turn for the indigenous peoples. But in 1592 Spain decided to establish its first settlement, San Josef, east of the present-day capital, Port-of-Spain. Over the next two centuries unsuccessful attempts were made by Spanish colonizers to establish tobacco and cacao plantations. Crop failures and lack of support from the authorities in Spain thwarted their efforts.

Taking advantage of Spain's inattention, the British managed to wrest the islands from the Spanish in 1797. After slavery was abolished in the 1830s, the British imported thousands of indentured workers, mostly from India, to work in the sugarcane fields and other jobs in the colony. The indentured labor system functioned for more than 100 years.

Tobago, also happened upon by Columbus and claimed by the Spanish, was simply ignored, and no attempts were made to colonize it. During the 17th century Tobago changed hands numerous times as the English, French, Dutch, and Courlanders (present day Latvians) fought for control. In 1704 Tobago was declared a neutral territory,

Fun Fact

Columbus also named Tobago *Bella Forma*, but this name did not stick and it was later called Tobago (probably derived from *tobacco*).

which gave pirates (who had become a menace to seafarers in the 18th century) the opportunity to use the island as a base for raiding ships sailing in the eastern Caribbean. Then the British returned to establish a colonial administration on Tobago in 1763. Within two decades 10,000 African slaves had been imported to be used on the island's sugar, cotton, and indigo plantations. Tobago's plantation economy suffered a serious setback after the abolition of slavery. Indian, Chinese, Portuguese, and free African indentured laborers were then imported to provide a labor force in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Later immigration from Barbados and the Lesser Antilles and from Syria and Lebanon would also affect the ethnic makeup of the country. Sugar and rum production continued until 1884, when the London firm that controlled the finances for the island's plantations went bankrupt, plunging the country's economy into chaos.

In 1889 the British made Tobago, which previously had had its own independent legislature, a ward of neighboring Trinidad. Demands for greater autonomy grew following World War I. The Depression of the 1930s led to a series of strikes and riots and the growth of a labor movement on the islands. To counter these disturbances the British granted universal suffrage to the natives in 1946 and took measures to institute self-government. Independence finally came in 1962. In April 1970 the Black Power movement's public demonstrations created a political crisis, leading to an army mutiny, but the government managed to retain power. Just when the country's future appeared bleakest, oil was struck in the region. The oil boom of the 1970s brought immense prosperity to the islands, but the East Indian community became increasingly isolated from political power.

In July 1990 members of the minority Muslim population attempted a coup. They stormed the parliament and took 45 hostages, including the incumbent prime minister A. N. R. Robinson (b. 1926). Since the 1990s the oil business has plummeted, and the government has implemented austerity programs in order to avoid a major crisis. Tourism on the islands is currently being heavily promoted. In 1994 the government introduced stringent anti-crime measures to combat the alarming rise in crime in some localities. Corruption developed as a result of a judicial system bogged down with a backlog of drug-related trials—the country is a stopover in the drug trade. Consequently the death penalty was reintroduced in 1999. More petroleum and natural gas reserves were discovered in the late 1990s, promising a return to prosperity for the nation.

☼ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Trinidad and Tobago are the two largest islands of an archipelago consisting of 21 smaller islands. Once

part of the South American mainland, Trinidad, with its bootlike shape, measures 50 miles by 37 miles, and boasts an amazing ecological and geographical diversity unmatched in the region. Gorgeous, sandy beaches are found along the northern coast. Dominated by densely forested peaks, the northern interior offers excellent hiking trails, while low, predominantly agricultural plains make up the central part of Trinidad. The eastern coast is home to protected wetlands and miles of beach frontage lined by groves of coconut palms. The island's industrial capital—San Fernando—lies on hilly terrain, close to the island's modern oil towns. Picturesque fishing villages and calm, deserted beaches dot the coastline.

Tobago is home to the oldest protected rain forest in the Western Hemisphere. This strip of elongated land, just 16 by 5 miles, is the last of the virgin, unspoiled Caribbean. It features palm-lined beaches, lush rain forests, and pristine coral reefs that teem with rich marine life. Contrasts of rolling hills against wave-beaten shores create a stunningly beautiful backdrop for the island. The southern (windward) coast faces the dark green choppy Atlantic and is lined with flourishing fishing villages, while the northern (leeward) coast provides Tobago with some of its finest beaches.

☼ ECONOMY

Trinidad and Tobago has earned a reputation as an excellent investment site for international business ventures. The implementation of successful economic reforms has increased the average economic growth rate, and foreign investment and trade are flourishing. Unemployment—the main cause of the country's socioeconomic problems—is high but has decreased to its lowest point during the early 21st century. The country enjoys a healthy trade surplus of \$500 million, yet its heavy dependence on oil and petrochemical prices makes its trade balance vulnerable to sudden shifts. Furthermore, CARICOM (the Caribbean Community and Common Market), Trinidad and Tobago's main market, is saturated, provoking some countries to establish nontariff trade barriers.

☼ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Integral to Trinidad's outrageous Carnival festivities is the music of the Steel Pan (drum), which was born in Trinidad half a century ago, when musicians began to use the hammered-out ends of discarded oil drums. "Pan Yards," where steel drum bands practice in the evenings, abound in Port-of-Spain, the capital. During the weeks preceding Carnival, the sound of the drums reaches a deafening crescendo. Calypso, a medium for political and social satire, also has its roots in Trinidad. It goes back to the days when slaves sang in the local patois, mocking their colonial masters. Mighty Sparrow, the renowned king of calypso, is a Trinidadian native, as are many of the Caribbean's promising and budding

calypso stars. The music of original indentured laborers from India is also an integral part of Trinidad's musical heritage.

❁ CUISINE

Trinidadian cuisine is as diverse as the ethnic groups that constitute its population—Indian, Créole, Chinese, Syrian-Lebanese, and Italian. Dishes like salt fish *buljol*, brown chicken, and *choka*, or black pudding, are served with fresh hot coconut bake or hop bread. Fried *accra* and boiled cassava with butter are other specialties. Mangoes, papayas, bananas, pineapples, oranges, tangerines, and watermelons are abundant. Fast foods such as fried chicken, hamburgers, pizzas, and lasagna share the islands' menu with East Indian favorites like curried chicken and potato, shrimp, goat, duck, and beef packages in a roti (Indian unleavened bread) skin. Such dishes are accompanied by curried mango *chataigne* (pronounced "shatine") *channa* (chickpeas) as well as pumpkin or mango *kuchela*. Special potato (*aloo*) pies are hot favorites. Seafood, including flying fish, kingfish, *carite*, red fish, and bonito, is best enjoyed when stewed, barbecued, or curried with coconut milk.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

On New Year's Day in Trinidad and Tobago, church bells, horns, and ear-piercing shrieks echo throughout the country. People traditionally make resolutions to eliminate bad habits and adopt good ones in

the coming year. Many people spend the holiday on the beaches or at parties.

❁ SPIRITUAL BAPTIST SHOUTERS LIBERATION DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: March 30

Spiritual Baptists Shouters is a distinct sect of Christians, an offshoot of the Baptist community. Founded in the 17th century with the arrival of African slaves, Spiritual Baptists believe in teaching biblical doctrines, spirituality, mourning, and fasting besides moral values.

In the early days of Trinidadian history there were no churches as they exist today. At that time the buildings used by Spiritual Baptist churches for their meetings were thatched huts or shacks, with wooden altars and benches, in the most remote parts of the country. As a result of this there are no parish churches in Trinidad and Tobago, whereas it is common to find eight or nine separate Spiritual Baptist churches in one area. The Spiritual Baptist Shouters emerged much later. Their method of worship, which involves bell-ringing, shouting, chanting, and a loud manner of singing and praying offended the other Christian communities. The sect was banned from the islands, and they experienced considerable antagonism and repression. Finally the ban was lifted, and in 1996 the Government of Trinidad and Tobago granted a public holiday to the Spiritual Baptist faith, to be celebrated on March 30. Known as Spiritual Baptist Shouters Liberation Day, in memory of the struggle and in recognition of the Ordinance of March 30, 1951, which repealed the 1917 act prohibiting the practice of this faith, this day is observed by the Shouters with processions and religious services.



Some Typical Trinidadian Dishes

A "brown down" of stewed chicken, beef, pork, or fish is a popular Créole dish. This is complemented by side dishes such as *ochro* (or *okra*) *rice*, green figs, yam, *plantain* (a large sweet banana), sweet potatoes, and cassava (manioc) pies. Another common dish, *pilaf*, is made with rice, pigeon peas, and chicken, beef, and pork. Seasoned crab backs are popular as an appetizer. Curried crab and dumplings is another favorite recipe. A rare delicacy is *cascadura*—a small freshwater fish. Local legend says that if you eat *cascadura* you will return to Trinidad again and again.

Buljol

The name of this salad of shredded salt fish comes from the French *brûlé*, meaning "burned," and *geule*,

slang for "mouth." Since it is served at room temperature, the burning sensation is caused by the Congo pepper, which is one of the ingredients. Traditionally, *buljol* is served for breakfast or a Sunday brunch. This is a combination of fish with onion, tomato, Congo pepper, and olive oil. The mixture is placed on lettuce leaves and garnished with eggs and avocado.

Fried Accras

These fritters, of West African origin, are popular throughout the West Indies including Trinidad and Tobago. Earlier they were usually made with black-eyed pea flour, but these days wheat flour is used.

Kuchela

A popular condiment from Trinidad, this Caribbean spicy sauce is a must as an accompaniment to all kinds of curry dishes, including curried goat.

✿ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

Labor Day, also called May Day and Workers' Day, is observed to mark the substantial contributions of the workers and laborers of the world to the economic and social developments of nations. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. In Trinidad and Tobago the day is marked by trade union activities, parades, and processions. Most businesses and government offices remain closed on this day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

✿ INDIAN ARRIVAL DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 30

Indian Arrival Day, also known as Arrival Day or Indian Emigration Day, memorializes the arrival of the first group of indentured Indian laborers in Trinidad and Tobago in 1845. It was made an official public holiday in 1994. People come together to enjoy parties and Indian cultural events on this occasion. The day holds a special meaning for those of Indian ancestry.



African Trinidadians take to the streets of Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, for the annual Emancipation Day celebration on August 1. The holiday marks the end of slavery. (AP Photo/Shirley Bahadur)

✿ EMANCIPATION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 1

On August 1 the whole nation observes Emancipation Day, or Abolition of Slavery Day. The main celebrations are held in Port-of-Spain, the capital city, where thousands of Afro-Trinidadians throng to church services and street processions. It is the occasion for cherishing the freedom won by their slave ancestors from the British colonial rulers in 1834. Preparation and some events usually begin at least a month before the day itself.

✿ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 31

On Independence Day Trinidad and Tobago celebrate the anniversary of the end of their colonial status in 1962. Observances include the president's address to the nation, a parade by the armed forces, and a huge display of fireworks at Port-of-Spain in the evening. There are also performances by Steel Pan bands.

Religious Holidays

✿ CARNIVAL

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Five days before Ash Wednesday

Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival is considered by some to be the best among the Caribbean islands. Drinking, partying, and dancing are the main features of this annual event. Though the African influence is predominant, Carnival brings together the diverse ethnic groups. Carnival activities start as early as 5 a.m. with hordes of people milling around everywhere. In many parts of the country, the celebrations continue uninterrupted throughout the day, and for all five days. Mardi Gras, also called Fat Tuesday or Shrove Tuesday, the two days immediately preceding Ash Wednesday, is the culmination of the Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago. Unofficially, though, the celebrations begin much earlier and include Dimanche Gras, held on the Sunday preceding Ash Wednesday. Colorful and fantastic costumes and steel band performances are major features.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; LENT; EASTER

✿ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, also known as Mourning Friday, Black Friday, or Great Friday, commemorates the Cruci-

fixion of Jesus. As in other parts of the globe the people of these two islands celebrate the occasion with prayers at their local churches. Stories from the Gospels and Psalms are narrated to the Christians assembled at various places across the islands, and choirs sing hymns that are vivid narratives about the life and virtuous deeds of Jesus.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter Sunday, a joyous occasion celebrating the Resurrection and rebirth of Jesus on the third day after his Crucifixion, is considered an ideal day for weddings in Trinidad and Tobago. On Easter day sports matches are also held in small towns and villages. People spend their time flying kites, bathing in the ocean and rivers, and enjoying picnics.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; LENT

❁ HOLI

Observed by: Hindus

Observed on: Full Moon day of Phalgun, the 12th month of the Hindu calendar

The festival known as Holi in India is called Phagwa in Trinidad and Tobago. It is a joyous celebration that marks the onset of the summer season. A riot of colors, this festival is celebrated with songs, music, and dances in a grand style throughout Trinidad. People smear each other with *abeer* (colored powder) and spray colored water all around. The *chowtal* (having a four-beat rhythm) songs, accompanied by the *dbolak* (hand drum) and the *majeera* (cymbals) are sung at a very high pitch. Various sports events and contests of flag-grabbing and eating roti (a flat unleavened Indian bread) are organized.

See also Volume III: HINDUISM; HOLI; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Muslim calendar

Eid al-Fitr, the Feast of Fast-Breaking, marks the end of the daily dawn-to-dusk fasting required of all devout Muslims during the month of Ramadan. It is celebrated on the first day of Shawwal, the month following Ramadan, and the 10th month of the Islamic calendar. Observance of Eid al-Fitr depends on the sighting of the new Moon in Saudi Arabia. Therefore the date may vary from one place to another in the same year. This occasion is commemorated with *salah* (prayers), *zakaat* (alms-giving), and

More on Steel Pan Music

Carnivals with live Steel Pan music are sprouting up all over America and Europe. One of the main attractions during Carnival in Trinidad is the steel band panorama competition. The instrument's tremendous versatility sets the stage for the Steel Pan to stand alone in large orchestras or blend with more modern innovative jazz improvisations.

feasting. On this day Muslims and people from other communities visit each other, exchange gifts, and enjoy traditional Eid al-Fitr fare, the most important of which is *sewiyān*, a dish made with vermicelli, milk, sugar, raisins, and cashew nuts.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ DIWALI

Observed by: Hindus and non-Hindus

Observed on: Day of the new Moon in Karttika, eighth month of the Hindu calendar

Diwali, also called Deepavali or Deepavali, always takes place on the day of the new Moon in the holy month of Karttika (October–November) of the Hindu lunar calendar. The festival entails a thorough cleaning of the house, getting rid of unusable or unwanted articles, and decorating the home. People wear new clothes, exchange gifts, and worship Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity in addition to lighting clay lamps (*diyas*) using coconut oil and cotton wicks.

See also Volume III: DIWALI; HINDUISM

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

In Trinidad and Tobago Christmas Day begins with visits to churches. People welcome the holiday with prayers, local calypso Christmas songs, parties, and the exchange of gifts. On this occasion special foods like *sorrel* (a specialty drink), ham, and pastilles (a small, round, hard confectionery made of sugar, chocolate, cream, and mint with fruity flavors) are prepared in local homes. In addition people gather to sing *parang*, a type of Spanish folk music. As in other countries, it is a time for both giving and receiving gifts.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26



Since Trinidad and Tobago is a former colony of Britain, British culture has left a lasting impact on the beliefs and traditions of the islands. Boxing Day, also celebrated as St. Stephen's Day (the first Christian martyr) in Trinidad and Tobago, is celebrated by giving gifts and money to the poor and children. Folk dances and concerts are held at public gatherings throughout the day. This day largely spent in the company of family and friends, is filled with parties, revelry, and an abiding spirit of love and friendship.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY

Regional Holidays

❁ LA DIVINA PASTORA FESTIVAL

Observed in: Siparia
Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: Fourth Sunday after Easter

This Catholic festival, which originated in Spain, is meant to pay tribute to the Divine Shepherdess. It is interesting that almost all religious communities living in Trinidad venerate this statue. The wooden statue of the Black Virgin resides in the southern town of Siparia's Catholic church, and is called Siparee Kay Mai by the local Hindus. Every year on the second Sunday after Easter, people gather at La Divine Pastora Roman Catholic Church in Siparia to pay homage. They offer flowers, olive oil, candles, jewelry, rice, and money to the wooden statue to ensure fertility, prosperity, and happiness in their lives.

❁ GOAT AND CRAB RACES

Observed in: Buccoo village
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April

During Easter weekend in the village of Buccoo in Tobago, people can watch the famous Goat Race—competing goats running helter-skelter to the finishing line, vigorously urged by barefoot “jockeys” sprinting behind their charges, which are tethered at the end of long ropes. The goats are readied for

the race day with stamina training swimming exercises, and special diets. The crab races too are hilarious events in which trainers try to coax their racers down a track.

❁ FISHERMAN'S FESTIVAL

Observed in: Charlottetown
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: End of June

The Fisherman's Festival honors St. Peter, the patron saint of fishermen and takes place on St. Peter's Day. Celebrations are held at Charlottetown's Man O' War Bay. Churches conduct morning services followed by special prayers during the day. In the evening fishermen and their families seek blessings for their boats and fishing nets. The festival features music, an array of foods, and religious worship.

❁ GANGA DASHARA FESTIVAL

Observed in: Blanchisseuse
Observed by: Hindus
Observed on: Mid-June

This festival commemorates the (mythological) descent of the sacred Indian river Ganga—also called the Ganges, or in the Hindu scriptures, the *Puranas*—to Earth from the heavens. Hindu devotees visit the Marianne River to observe the festival. They take “holy dips” and afterward participate in religious processions.

❁ SANTA ROSA FESTIVAL

Observed in: Arima
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August

This festival honors Saint Rosa, patron saint of the local Carib community, and the original Amerindian inhabitants of the island. On this day a Santa Rosa queen is crowned. A lively procession is held, emphasizing *parang* (Spanish folk music), indigenous music and dance, and traditional Amerindian foods and crafts.

Birthplace of the Steel Pan Bands

Laventille, a hilly, low-income suburb located east of Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, boasts that it is the birthplace of one of the most popular musical instruments created during the 20th century—the steel drum or “Steel Pan.” Laventille was inhabited in the mid-1800s by freed African slaves. There the African tradition of drumming evolved over the years into

rhythm bands of young, often rowdy, men, who paraded through the streets during Carnival and other celebrations pounding skin drums and, when those were outlawed, hollow bamboo drums. In the mid-1930s these bands switched over to metallic objects—garbage can lids, automobile parts, pots and pans, and biscuit tins, which were louder and stronger than bamboo. These evolved into “steel bands” within a decade of their introduction.



Rites of Passage

✿ BIRTH

In Trinidad and Tobago the birth of a child is seen as ensuring the continuity of the family's lineage and enhancing its prestige in society. Owing to the country's long association with Britain, the majority of people follow the customs and practices of the Anglican Church. When a child is born, a church ceremony is conducted to bless the infant; alternatively a christening ceremony is held. A lavish party is held for friends and relatives, who bring flowers, cards, and gifts for the newborn.

✿ MARRIAGE

Wedding ceremonies in Trinidad and Tobago reflect strong European influences on the local culture and traditions. The groom dresses in black and white, sporting a formal three-piece suit, top hat, bow tie, and white gloves. He carries a large umbrella with which to shade the bride. The bride is attired in an 18th- or 19th-century style bustle dress, platform shoes, a wide-brimmed hat trimmed with flowers, and white gloves. In a village the wedding ceremony takes place in the local church, followed by a wedding procession, which winds its way along the streets, with people dancing to the music of tambourines and fiddles. A wedding procession often stops along the way to enjoy cake and wine before moving on to the reception venue. Banquets, speeches, and dances continue throughout the afternoon. The ceremony comes to a close when the bride tosses her bouquet to be caught by one of the guests, which is considered a symbol of good luck.

Several structural and cultural factors have brought about changes in the Indo-Trinidadian family of Hindus. For example, there has been a gradual decline in arranged marriages. When Indians were still indentured, arranged marriages were the statistical norm and were considered the cultural ideal. Increasing educational opportunities and wide-scale urbanization led to changes in attitudes toward

arranged marriages. Since the 1940s marriages have not been parentally arranged, and Indo-Trinidadian women have increasingly opted to choose their own mates. Gradually, most Indo-Trinidadian parents have yielded to personal choice as the best method of finding a spouse.

Today arranged marriages are usually frowned upon by the younger generation of Indo-Trinidadians. The norm is for individual choice with parental approval. Particular aspects of marriage customs associated with Indian weddings are still in vogue in Trinidad, however. For example in northern India (where the majority of indentured Indians came from), the payment of a dowry was a common practice. However, in modern Trinidad the system of a dowry has become obsolete. The giving of gifts to both the *dulaha* (bridegroom) and *dulabin* (bride) has become the accepted practice.

The *muburta* (the time when a Hindu marriage is most propitious) has been replaced by a particular day most suited to celebration, or Sunday. The traditional attire worn by Indo-Trinidadian brides has also undergone some changes. Earlier it was customary for the Hindu bride to wear a yellow sari, then a red sari, and finally, a white sari. With increasing Westernization, Hindu brides now wear both the traditional sari as well as the white wedding gown typical of Western Christian weddings. In spite of these transformations and modifications, Indo-Trinidadian marriages continue to have the full force of moral and social authority behind them, and the "Indian" character of the wedding ceremony remains strong.

Further Reading

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~ Tunisia ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Northern Africa; between Libya and Algeria and bordering the Mediterranean Sea
Size	63,170 sq. mi.
Capital City	Tunis
Flag Description	The flag of the Republic of Tunisia is red with a white disk in the center. Centered within the disk is a red crescent almost encircling a red five-pointed star.
Independence	March 20, 1956 (from France)
Population	10,074,951 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Tunisian(s)
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Arab (98%)
Major Language(s)	Arabic (official); French (commerce)
Major Religion(s)	Muslim (98%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Independence Day, March 20; Martyrs' Day, April 9; Labor Day, May 1; Republic Day, July 25; Women's Day, August 13; Accession Day, November 7

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

The region now occupied by Tunisia has a distinct place in history. It has been fought over by many competing empires because of its strategic position as a thriving commercial center along the Mediterranean.

It is believed that the Berbers were the original inhabitants of Tunisia. However, it was the Phoenicians who ensured Tunisia's place in history by inhabiting the historic port city of Carthage around 1100 B.C.E.

The Phoenicians developed this port city extensively and transformed it into a major trade hub. Around the fifth century B.C.E., the region had become a dominant force in the western Mediterranean region and a rival to the expanding Roman Empire. The rivalry escalated to a full-scale war between the two dominant forces in the region and led to a series of three wars, known as the Punic Wars.

After the Roman conquest of Carthage, the region became a Roman province, and all its original inhabitants were sold as slaves. The city was refounded as a Roman city by the Emperor Augustus in 44 B.C.E. He also made Carthage the

capital city of the Roman holdings in Africa, which were known as African Proconsularis. The Romans developed the region extensively, and by the first century C.E. agriculture was the primary occupation of the people of the region.

But conquests of Tunisia did not end with the Romans. Around the fifth century the region was captured by Vandals (an East Germanic tribe) and became the capital of their kingdom. But Vandal rule was short-lived as the region was conquered by the Byzantines of Constantinople in 533; they exercised control over the region for the next 150 years.

In the seventh century, the Arabs proclaimed their dominance in the whole of North Africa and Tunisia, ended the rule of the Byzantines, and moved the capital to Kairouan.

The Berber tribes converted to Islam but were subjected to brutal treatment by their Arab rulers. Responding to this ill treatment, the Berbers staged repeated uprisings against the Arabs. In 909 a group of Berber Shiites, who called themselves Fatimids, launched a full-scale war against the Arabs and, along with other Berber people, reclaimed North Africa. They formed their kingdom and began exercising control over the region. But a Sunni-Shia schism among the Berber Muslims led to internal conflicts that eventually engulfed all of North Africa, devastating it.

Around the 16th century, Tunisia became a source of friction between Spain and the Ottoman Empire. The region finally became an Ottoman territory in 1574. Toward the 19th century, Tunisia enjoyed autonomy under the Ottoman Empire, and in 1861 it became the first country in the Arab world to enact a constitution. Because of the country's poor economy and political unrest within the Ottoman Empire, however, Tunisia's desire to proclaim itself a republic was thwarted. In 1869 Tunisia declared itself bankrupt, and an international financial commission, made up of France, Italy, and Britain, took charge of its economy.

In 1881 France claimed that Tunisian troops had tried to cross the border into the French colony of Algeria. France invaded Tunisia, and on May 12, 1881, Tunisia was declared a French Protectorate. By 1954 Tunisians wanted to break free from French domination. They protested against French rule and began pressuring the French government for independence. Habib Bourguiba (1903–2000), a Tunisian with a pro-Western outlook, led the independence movement.

In response to mounting pressure, on March 20, 1956, France granted independence to Tunisia, which declared itself a constitutional monarchy. Mohammed Al-Amin Bey, the bey (head of state) of Tunis, became the ruling monarch of Tunisia. Habib Bourguiba was sworn in as the first prime minister.

In 1957, however, Bourguiba abolished the monarchy and declared himself the president of the region. He also declared Tunisia a one-party state. He put his pro-Western outlook into practice by promoting women's rights to an extent unmatched by any other Arab nation and by repressing Islamic fundamentalism. He ruled the country for 31 years, until he was ousted in a coup led by his prime minister Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali (b. 1936) on November 7, 1987.

Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali continued to rule as president of Tunisia in the early 21st century, and under his leadership Tunisia adopted a moderate, nonaligned stance in its foreign relations.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The Tunisian Republic is located on the northern coast of Africa and is flanked by Libya in the southeast,

Algeria in the west, and the Mediterranean Sea in the east and north. The most striking feature of Tunisia's geography is the Atlas Mountains, which divides the country into two main geographical regions: the well-watered north and the semi-arid south.

The Kroumirie Forest, the Medjerda River Valley, and the coastal city of Bizerte are located in the northern part of Tunisia. This region is further subdivided into three areas: the northwest, home to vast cork forests; the north central, with its fertile grasslands, and the northeast, which is famed for its citrus fruits, garden produce, and livestock.

A central plateau and desert region in the extreme south, which is home to date palms, saline lakes, and oases, are the main features of the semi-arid south. The two important mountain ranges of Tunisia are the Massif Meridional, or the Tebessa Mountains, in the southern part of Tunisia; and the Medjerda Mountains that run from Kroumirie to Bizerte in the northern part of the country. The most important river system in Tunisia is the Medjerda, which originates in Algeria and flows into the Gulf of Tunis.

Tunisia has a Mediterranean climate characterized by wet winters and hot and dry summers. So, while the average temperature in January is around 48°F, the temperature reaches 79°F in July.

The region boasts a wide variety of wildlife including wild boar, gazelles (antelope), hyenas, and jackals, in addition to a number of poisonous snake species such as horned vipers and cobras.

❁ ECONOMY

Tunisia has a relatively stable economy. Mining, manufacturing, fossil fuel production, agriculture, and tourism are the main contributors to the nation's gross domestic product. It has a mixed economy with equal participation from public and private sectors. The largest sectors of the economy include agriculture, services, light industries, and production and export of phosphates and petroleum products. Tunisia is also a recipient of foreign aid from countries such as the United States and Germany. It signed an agreement with the European Union (EU) on March 1, 1998, according to which over the next decade Tunisia will gradually remove trade barriers in its dealings with the EU.

The Punic Wars

The three wars fought between the Romans and the Phoenicians were known as the Punic Wars, after the ancient Roman name for the Carthaginians—Punici. The First Punic War began in 264 B.C.E. and ended in 241 with the Romans victorious. Heavy restrictions were imposed on Carthage by the Romans and were the first step in the city's destruction.

In the Second Punic War (218–02), the famed

Carthaginian commander Hannibal crossed the Alps to defeat the Roman Army and compensate for the loss of Sicily to Rome after the First Punic War. The Romans demanded that Carthage surrender Hannibal and, when it refused, Rome declared war on Carthage, which once again resulted in a Roman victory. The Third Punic War (149–46) resulted in the total destruction of Carthage, which was burned by the Romans after they conquered the region.



CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Although the Berbers were the original inhabitants of Tunisia, the culture of Tunisia has been greatly influenced by the empires that exercised control over the region throughout the country's history. Phoenician, Roman, Vandal, Ottoman, and Arab influences are all reflected in the nation's rich cultural heritage. The indigenous Berber tribes were influenced by the principles of Islam and willingly embraced it. Though Islam is the main religion of Tunisia, it is also home to 20,000 Roman Catholics and a small Jewish community that resides in Tunis and on the island of Jerba.

Arabic is the official language of Tunisia, but French and Berber languages, such as Chelba, are also spoken in parts of the country.

In Tunisian society the best place to unwind and relax are the local *hammams* or public bathhouses. *Hammams* are an integral part of Tunisian society and are looked upon not just as a place to clean up but also to socialize. *Hammams* are a common feature not only in Tunisia but also in many countries in North Africa and in the Middle East.

Compared to other African countries, Tunisia allows women a great degree of freedom, which was largely achieved under the leadership of former President Habib Bourguiba. Polygamy and divorce by renunciation were outlawed, and the marriageable age limit for girls was raised to 17 years. They were also given the right to reject a proposal and could no longer be forced into arranged marriages by their parents.

The influence of the different empires is evident in Tunisian music. *Malouf* ("normal" or "customary") is a popular musical form that originated in Andalusia (one of the 17 regions that constitute modern Spain) and is believed to have been introduced to Tunisia in the 15th century. The singing of *malouf* is based on classical Arabic poetry, known as *qasidab* or ode. Other classical forms of Tunisian music include *ngouba* (of Andalusian origin), *chghoul*,

Fun Fact

Dido (also called Elissa), was the founding queen of Carthage in according to legend. Some ancient sources say that Carthage was founded 72 years before Rome.

Hammams

In Tunisia, every town has at least one *hammam*, or public bathhouse, with separate areas designated for men and women. In many places such facilities are located in separate buildings. A *fouta*, or towel, is provided for the men at the *hammam*, but women are expected to bring their own. The entrance fee to the *hammam* includes access to the steam room and bathroom, and a *kassa* (a coarse mitten or scrubber used to clean the skin).

and *bachraf* (Turkish origin). Western notation is used in writing classical Tunisian music.

Tunisia is an archaeologist's paradise. Beautiful floor mosaics, dating as far back as the second century C.E., have been found almost intact in many parts of Tunisia. Architectural marvels dating back thousands of years serve as a window into the architectural genius of a bygone era. Evidence of architectural brilliance can be found all over Tunisia; among the Punic and Roman ruins, among the medinas (the old section of an Arab city in North Africa), among the red-tiled Alpine houses found in Ain Draham, and also among the Berber structures in the southern part of the country.

CUISINE

Tunisians pride themselves on their cuisine. Prominent among Tunisian dishes is *mloukbia* (beef stew). Lamb, however, is the center of many meat dishes. The national dish is couscous. Essentially a pasta, it is made up of small grains, the main ingredients of which are semolina, salty water, and flour. The word *couscous* comes from a Berber term, *seksou*, which means "food." Its variation in Maghrib Arabic (a dialect spoken in Maghrib regions comprising Tunisia, Morocco, Libya, and Algeria) is called *kusukusu*. Couscous has been part of the Berber diet for nearly 3,000 years. Couscous is mainly used as an accompaniment for vegetable and meat dishes. *Harissa* is a popular sauce made from a mixture of sea salt, dried red chilies, olive oil, ground coriander, garlic, and caraway seeds.

Although Tunisians like their food to be hot and spicy, they also relish sweets. A typical Tunisian meal begins with *shorba frik* (a lamb soup flavored with coriander leaves, parsley, tomato paste, and seasonings), which is served with lemon slices. Salad is served in the form of *slata mechouia*, which consists of tomatoes, finely chopped garlic, and grilled green peppers. Olive oil and spices are added to the salad, and it is garnished with olives, hard-boiled eggs, tuna fish, and capers. The main course consists of roasted lamb, veal or fish, and *tajine* (chopped meat baked with cheese and vegetables). The meal is completed with fresh salad, custards, pastries, fruits, and tea or coffee.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, and is celebrated as New Year's Day throughout much of the world. Revelries and big parties begin the evening of December 31, New Year's Eve.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 20

On March 20, 1956, Tunisia won its independence from France and became a republic under the leadership of Habib Bourguiba. In 1952 the architect of Tunisia's independence struggle Habib Bourguiba launched a guerrilla war against the French regime. He intensified attacks on French troops and led widespread demonstrations against the colonial power. With mounting French casualties and growing discontent against French rule, the French were forced to grant independence to Tunisia.

On Independence Day Tunisians pay homage to those who laid down their lives for the nation and its independence. Official speeches and parades by the armed forces are an integral part of Independence Day celebrations in Tunisia.

❁ MARTYRS' DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 9

Martyrs' Day commemorates the death of the Tunisian demonstrators who were brutally killed during a public demonstration against the French regime in 1938. They were protesting the arrest of Alial-Balhawan, a prominent Tunisian freedom fighter. French forces opened fire on the demonstrators, killing more than 100 of them. On this day Tunisians unite in paying homage to those who gave their lives for Tunisia's independence.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, in many parts the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in their societies. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. On this day in Tunisia men and women who are part of the country's workforce are honored.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ REPUBLIC DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 25

Republic Day commemorates the formation of the Tunisian Republic on July 25, 1957. France had

granted independence to Tunisia on March 20, 1956, as a constitutional monarchy and handed the reins of the country to the bey ("ruler") of Tunis, Mohammed al-Amin Bey. In 1957 however, Prime Minister Habib Bourguiba abolished the monarchy and declared the nation an independent republic. Official speeches mark this historic day, and people pay tribute to the legacy of Habib Bourguiba, the first president of Tunisia.

❁ WOMEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 13

On August 13 Tunisians celebrate Women's Day, acknowledging the important role played by women in their society. In the 20th century, the government of Tunisia took several constructive steps toward promoting the welfare of women and protecting their rights. Polygamy and divorce by renunciation, which were unfair to women, were abolished. The age limit for marriage for girls was raised to 17 years, and they were empowered with the right to refuse a marriage proposal. This reform protected women from being forced into arranged marriages, and it put an end to child marriages.

❁ ACCESSION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 7

Accession Day marks the ouster of President Habib Bourguiba by his prime minister Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, on November 7, 1987. Bourguiba had been the leader of Tunisia for more than three decades until his failing health made him unable to fulfill the position of head of state. Thus, with popular support and armed with a medical certificate signed by seven doctors that declared Habib unfit for the presidency, Ben Ali assumed power as the president of Tunisia. As of the early 21st century, he was still Tunisia's president. On this day the government of Tunisia releases prisoners who have a record of good conduct. Special celebrations are organized in the capital city of Tunis, and people pay tribute to Ben Ali and his government.

Fun Fact

The name *Tunisia* is derived from the Berber word *tunis*, which means "to spend the night."

Religious Holidays

❁ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

El am Hejir marks the beginning of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar, and the Islamic

Fun Fact

The Great Mosque of Okba ibn Nafi in Kairouan (considered to be the first Islamic city in the world) is a site of pilgrimage for Muslims.

Kairouan is situated in the Maghrib (the ancient name for the region between North Africa and the Sahara desert that encompasses Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, and Morocco). It is believed that a hair from Muhammad's beard is preserved in this mosque.

New Year. On this day in 622, Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina with his family and followers and established the first Islamic state. (Medina is about 200 miles north of Mecca.) El am Hejir is fairly low key, since more important celebrations in the Muslim world typically take place during Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr. A traditional banquet is prepared, and the hot favorite *mloukbia* (beef stew) is specially served on the Islamic New Year all over Tunisia.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

MOULOU

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

The anniversary of the birth of Muhammad, the holy prophet of the Muslims, falls in the third month of the Islamic year. For Muslims all over the world, this is a day of great joy and celebration. On Mouloud Tunisian Muslims offer morning prayers at their local mosques and thank Allah for giving them his messenger Muhammad. They discuss his life and teachings and take inspiration from his unwavering faith in Allah. Tunisian Muslims greet each other on this day, renewing their commitment to follow the path shown by Muhammad and adhere to the religious principles of Islam. Sweets are distributed among children, and city streets come alive with lights, parades, and feasting. A special sweet dish called *zgougou*, a pudding made from ground pine nuts, topped with vanilla ice cream and decorated with grated nuts, is prepared and served, especially to children on this day.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOU

EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr marks the end of Ramadan, the month during which Muslims all over the world observe a daily dawn-to-dusk fast. It is believed

that Allah revealed the Koran, the religious book of Muslims, to Muhammad during this month; thus, it is their holiest month. Ramadan ends with the sighting of the new Moon in Saudi Arabia, and Eid al-Fitr is celebrated on the next day.

On this day Tunisian Muslims offer the customary morning prayers in the mosques and thank Allah for his benevolence. Then they greet one another, visiting friends and family, and exchange home-baked pastries as gifts.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, the Muslim Festival of Sacrifice, commemorates the unwavering faith of Ibrahim in Allah and his willingness to sacrifice his son to obey Allah's command. Muslims believe that God visited Ibrahim in a dream and instructed him to sacrifice his most valued possession, his son. When Ibrahim told his son about the dream, the latter asked his father to follow God's command. However, as Ibrahim was about to make the sacrifice, to his surprise, instead of his son, a ram lay on the altar.

Eid al-Adha is celebrated enthusiastically in Tunisia. After Tunisians offer prayers in the local mosques, they make sacrificial offerings of lambs. In the afternoon they wear new clothes and visit friends and relatives. Greetings are exchanged, and children receive gifts. Streets are decorated with lights and a festive spirit envelops the country. A lavish dinner is shared with friends and relatives. Lamb cuts, or chops are grilled on charcoal and served as a special dish on this occasion.

The hajj, the annual holy pilgrimage, also takes place in this month, and many devout Muslims return from their visit to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Before the pilgrims depart for the hajj, every village presents them with carpets and shrouds for their journey in a special ritual called the *mabmal*.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; HAJJ; ISLAM

Regional Holidays

THE SPARROW HAWK FESTIVAL

Observed in: El Haouaria (Cap Bon)

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 28–30

The Sparrow Hawk, or Falconry, Festival is an annual event held in El-Haouaria, along the coast of Cap Bon. The event lasts three days, from May 28 to

Fun Fact

After Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem, Kairouan, the first historical center in North Africa, is the fourth most holy city in the Islamic world. According to legend, seven visits to Kairouan equal one to Mecca. The city is also the most famous center for carpet weaving in Tunisia.

May 30. Each year during this three-day festival more than 150 falconers gather in El-Haouaria, each one trying to demonstrate his mastery in training sparrow-hawks and female peregrine falcons to hunt for their prey. The native people of this region are experts in catching birds and training them to hunt for prey. During the spring migratory period, which begins in March and ends in May, the local people trap and train these birds.

Hunting contests are organized between birds, and every flight of the birds is greeted with songs and the beat of drums. The entire village comes alive during this festival.

INTERNATIONAL CARTHAGE FESTIVAL

Observed in: Tunis

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July–August

This is an annual cultural and arts festival held in Tunis during the months of July and August. Carthage was the capital of the Phoenician Empire, which ruled the region during the sixth through the fourth centuries B.C.E. The city was destroyed by the Romans at the end of the Third Punic War (146) It was rebuilt by Julius Caesar and later (439–533 C.E.)

served as the capital of the Vandal Empire before its virtual destruction by the Arabs in 698

It is a popular festival among locals and tourists alike and is marked with traditional music and dance performances in Carthage. Performances include ballet, theatrical productions, and jazz fusion of traditional and modern music. The stage for these performances is the Roman amphitheater in this ancient city. The festival is a major tourist attraction, and people from all over the world flock to Tunis to participate in the International Carthage Festival.

Further Reading

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~ Turkey ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Southeastern Europe and southwestern Asia; Turkey is bordered to the west by Greece and Bulgaria and to the east by Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Iran; to the south by Iraq and Syria; bordered also by the Black, Aegean, and Mediter-ranean Seas.
Size	301,384 sq. mi.
Capital City	Ankara
Flag Description	Turkey's flag is red with a vertical white crescent (closed on the hoist side) and a white five-pointed star centered just outside the open crescent.
Independence	October 29, 1923 (successor state to the Ottoman Empire)
Population	69,660,559 (2005 est.)
Government	Republican parliamentary democracy
Nationality	Turk(s)
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Turks (80%); Kurds (20%)
Major Language(s)	Turkish (official); Kurdish; Arabic; Armenian; Greek
Major Religion(s)	Muslim (mostly Sunni, 99%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Navruz, March 21; National Sovereignty and Children's Day, April 23; Ataturk Commemoration and Youth and Sports Day, May 19; Victory Day, August 30; Republic Day, October 29

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Turkey is a land of rich traditions with its roots deep in pre-history, and the modern state has hundreds of archaeological sites that continue to provide new information regarding the movements of ancient peoples and their daily lives. Because of its strategic location, straddling both Eastern Europe and Central Asia, it has been the home of some of the greatest empires and formed part of the ancient trade route, the fabled Silk Road. Even a short list of its ancient cities brings up names that are immediately recognized: Constantinople (Byzantium), Troy, Midas, Antioch, and Halicarnassus. Certainly the controversial Mt. Ararat, said to hold the remains of Noah's Ark, needs no introduction.

The territory currently called Turkey was known formerly as Anatolia (by the Greeks) and Asia Minor (by the Romans).

Major civilizations, with different cultural and linguistic features, settled in or conquered the Anatolian region. They include the Colchians, Hattians, Luwians, Hittites, Phrygians, Cimmerians, Ionian (Lydians, Carians, and Lycians), Persians, Celts, Greeks, Pelasgians, Armenians, Romans, Goths, Kurds, Byzantines, Seljuk Turks, and Ottomans. From recorded history, it is known that Anatolian peoples have spoken Indo-European and Semitic languages and, in addition, many languages whose origins have yet to be identified.

Neolithic settlements excavated during the second half of the 20th century include Cayonu, at the foot of the Taurus Mountains, thought to be where the pig was first domesticated, and Nevali Cori, in the upper Euphrates Valley, where the earliest life-size figures have been found, have begun to fill in significant gaps in our understanding of the development of civilizations and the technologies of early peoples. One of the most famous Neolithic sites in Turkey is Catal Hoyuk ("fork mound") in southern Anatolia, a large town built up of so many layers of human occupation that it became a large

mound. There were no streets in Catal Huyuk. Its residents crammed their dwellings up against each other and entered them through holes in the roofs. The lower layers have been dated to around 7500 B.C.E., and constitute one of the most sophisticated Neolithic sites in the world.

Probably the first great civilization that dominated this region was that of the Hittites, a group of Indo-Europeans who controlled Anatolia from the Middle Bronze Age (1680–1180). The Hittites apparently referred to themselves as Hatti, and Hattusa was the center of their culture. The true Hatti, however, were a non-Indo-European people that occupied the same region until the beginning of the second millennium, and the Hittites may simply have adopted the Hattis' name for the area. At its peak the Hittite Empire covered from northwestern Syria to Ugarit and Mesopotamia down to Babylon. Around the end of the 12th century that empire began to crumble, leaving behind several city-states that survived until around the seventh century.

The settlement of Troy began during the Neolithic Age and continued into the Iron Age. So far about 12 occupations have been identified, beginning in the third millennium B.C.E. with Troy, a flourishing Bronze Age settlement that controlled the Dardanelles. Troy VI may have been destroyed by an earthquake around 1300, but no human remains have been found. Troy VIIa, with occupation dating to the mid- to late-13th century, is the most likely candidate for the Troy of the Homeric epics. Archaeologists think it was destroyed by war, and traces of a fire have been found. Not enough of the city has been excavated, however, to make certain identification. Two more recent layers appear to have both been destroyed by fire.

The Persians came along from the East, led by Cyrus, emperor of Persia (550–530). The Persians were followed by the Celts and then the Romans, whose rule produced peace and prosperity for close to three centuries, providing a perfect platform for spreading Christianity. From 250 C.E. the Roman Empire started to weaken but was later reconstituted by Constantine, who established his capital in the great city of Constantinople.

The next major milestone in the formation of Turkey was the emergence of Islamic dynasties. The armies of Islam, led by Muhammad (c. 570–632), having conquered everything from Mecca to Persia and Egypt, threatened the walls of Constantinople (669–78). Until this point most of Turkey's rulers had come from the West, but that changed with the arrival of the Great Seljuk Turkish Empire of the 11th century, the first to rule the area that comprises modern Turkey, Iran, and Iraq. The Seljuks were descendants of the Turkish people of East Asia and followed Islam.

The Mongols, and then the Ottomans, arrived in the region around 1300. The Ottomans ultimately created a new empire, taking Constantinople in 1453 and extending their rule through parts of

Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. Their empire finally crumbled at the end of World War I, when the Allies conquered most of their territory. After World War I the Ottoman general Mustafa Kemal, later known as Atatürk (1881–1938), led a nationalistic movement to oust the Greeks. On September 18, 1922, Turkey was granted liberation under the Treaty of Lausanne. With this the country's modern borders were established, and a secular, democratic government was created. On October 29, 1923, the Republic of Turkey was proclaimed. Atatürk became the first president, and moved the new republic's capital to Ankara.

Modern Turkey, a member of NATO since 1952, is more developed and secular than most of its neighbors to the east. But its aspirations to be a part of the European Union (EU) have been thwarted a number of times with a lot of doubt being cast on how democratic the country really is. This has been primarily due to an internal rift with the Kurds, who have been fighting for decades to attain autonomy. Added to this, the country is still reeling from the aftermath of a financial crisis generated by the lack of sound economic reforms. Turkey is now finally on its way to recovering from these problems and obstacles.

Fun Fact

Early literature often refers to the cities of Byzantium, Troy, and Midas. Homer's epics, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, tell the story of the Greek siege of Troy and Odysseus' 10-year effort to return to his kingdom after the war had ended. More modern poets such as W. B. Yeats have used these cities symbolically to call up vast histories of triumph and decay (*Sailing to Byzantium*). Perhaps the most famous is the city of Troy, immortalized by the Trojan War, fought to retrieve the abducted Helen of Troy.

Turkish Kurds

Turkish Kurds have been at war with the Turkish authorities since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1923. After the independent state of Turkey came into existence, ethnic Turks assumed power in the country, and the growing hatred between ethnic Turks and the Turkish Kurds manifested itself in the form of a separatist policy adopted by the government. Turkish officials asserted that there were no Kurds in Turkey, and the Kurdish language as well as the Kurdish way of life was banned. This sparked a series of guerilla attacks undertaken by separatist Kurds based in Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Since 1980 there have been intermittent clashes between the Kurds and the Turks; these continued into the 1990s. In 2004 there was large-scale Kurdish unrest in Syria.

Noah's Ark

During extensive excavation activities undertaken by archaeologists around Mt. Ararat in Turkey, the region was struck by an earthquake in 1948 and an ark, believed to be the biblical Noah's Ark, was exposed. After thorough investigation and corroborating evidence, such as comparing the length of the boat to the one mentioned in the Bible, it was put forward that Noah's Ark was not just biblical lore but a reality. A visitor's center has been opened near the Ark by the Turkish authorities to deal with the visitors who have been flocking to the region since the Ark's discovery. Turkish authorities affirmed in 1987 that the Ark was indeed Noah's.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Turkey is a large country located between Asia and Europe with three seas bordering it—the Black Sea, the Aegean Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea. Together, they create a total coastline of 5,282 miles. Turkey also shares its borders with Greece, Bulgaria, Georgia, Armenia, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. A land of diverse landscapes, Turkey not only has miles of coastline, but snow-topped mountains, valleys, and huge areas of barren land. The highest mountain is Mt. Ararat (16,916 feet), where Noah's Ark is believed to have rested after the great flood subsided. Turkey also has close to 430 lakes, the largest being Lake Van in Eastern Anatolia.

Although Turkey lies in a geographical region where climatic conditions are quite temperate, there are significant differences in climatic conditions from one region to another, mainly due to the diverse nature of the landscape and the existence of the mountains that run parallel to the coasts. Turkey can be divided into seven areas based on distinct geographic and climatic regions.

The countryside around Istanbul, Edirne, Bursa, and the Sea of Marmara is characterized by low hills and rolling farmland, with temperatures ranging from extremes of 3°F in winter to 104°F during summers. These areas are also quite humid.

The Aegean region, centered in the city of Izmir (formerly Smyrna, with a population close to two million), is full of low hills and higher mountains with fertile valleys full of rich alluvial soil. The summer Sun in this region is good for the crops of tobacco, sunflowers, olives, figs, peaches, pears, and apples grown here.

Turkey's southern shore is surrounded by high mountain ranges that remain very hot and humid in summer.

The center of Turkey is a high plateau (elevation 2,953 feet at Ankara) of rolling steppe framed by mountain ranges, some of which have snow-capped dormant volcanoes. The climate here is temperate with temperatures ranging from 30°F to 73°F.

Turkey's Black Sea coast, about 1,056 miles long, is lush and green. There is heavy rainfall in this region, and it is cloudy most of the time because of the winds crossing the Black Sea that rise into the coastal mountains.

Eastern Anatolia is mountainous, rugged, and chilly. This part of Turkey is an elemental place where temperatures drop to -49°F in deep winter, and rise to 100°F in summer, though the annual average is just 48° F.

Southeastern Anatolia, near Syria on the banks of the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, is hot most of the time. It is very dry, with only 23 inches of rainfall per year, but water from the gigantic Southeast Anatolia Project (GAP) irrigation and hydroelectric power system, centered near Sanliurfa, fulfills its needs.

Wildlife in Turkey is similar to that in the Balkans and most of Europe and consists of bears, deer, jackals, lynx, wild boar, wolves, and rare leopards. Bird life is exotic with squawking eagles, vultures, and storks as well as rare species such as the bald ibis.

❁ ECONOMY

Turkey's economy is a complex synthesis of modern industry and commerce mixed with traditional village agriculture and crafts. The government of Turkey is trying to promote growth and improve its economic scenario through structural reform measures, new tax laws, and accelerating the process of privatization. The most important industry in Turkey and also its largest in terms of exports—the textile and clothing industry—is almost completely controlled by private companies. Other parts of the private sector are also growing rapidly and becoming consistently stronger. However, there are still a lot of industries that are controlled by the state, especially the most basic ones like banking, transportation, and communications.

Another area the government is trying to strengthen is direct foreign investment in the country, which remains low. Some analysts say this is because potential investors are concerned about high inflation and the volatile political situation in Turkey. Although most of the country's trade is still with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, Turkey is trying to increase trade with other countries in the region as well.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Modern-day Turkey is a crossroads where the Orient meets the Occident. The amalgamation of cultures, beliefs, and ideas can clearly be seen in the

Fun Fact

Ataturk, known as Father Turk, is considered a hero in Turkey. His statue can be found in every nook and corner of Turkey, and there are laws against defaming or insulting him.

country's art, literature, music, and architecture. All reflect the influences of the ancient Hittite civilization, the Romans, and the Byzantine, Seljuk, and Ottoman Empires. Turkish museums reflect the rich life led by the Ottomans. They are full of delicate colored tiles, graceful glass vases, carved wooden mosque doors, glittering illuminated versions of the Koran, intricate jewelry, and opulent costumes.

The Islamic influence on Turkish art and literature is seen clearly from the time of the Ottoman Empire on. Ottoman literature and court music were mainly religious, although both may sound gloomy and ostentatious to Western ears. There are no visual arts such as portraiture in the region, since they were curtailed by the Muslim dictum that forbids representation of any being "with an immortal soul." Therefore Islamic artists tended to favor the nonrepresentational arts. Ottoman arts, such as paper marbling and shadow puppet plays, are now enjoying a new popularity.

During the Ottoman Empire the introduction of a Roman-based Turkish alphabet brought literacy within the reach of many more citizens, and the direct consequence of this was that the use of courtly prose in the Ottoman Empire abated and use of the vernacular took over. Quite a few Turkish writers, including Nazim Hikmet, Yashar Kemal, and Orhan Pamuk have been read and appreciated worldwide. However, while Turkish is a simple and an elegant language, people across the world have found it difficult to learn due to the rules of word order and verb formation, which are very different from the Indo-European languages.

An integral part of Turkish jewelry is bracelets. An ancient form of adornment, they were originally a form of magic charm or talisman. They are made from wood, stone, and various metals including gold, silver, and copper. Carpet weaving is another art for which the Turks are known.

Folk music in Turkey has always been very lively. *Turku* music, the traditional folk music played with a modern urban slant, is very popular throughout the country. But here too there is a wide variety due to the various cultural mixes. For instance, lively Turkish folk music, which originated in the steppes of Asia, contrasts starkly with the refined Turkish classical music of the Ottoman court. The folk music tradition has been kept alive by the *asiklar* (troubadours) because, until recently, folk music was neither written nor recorded. It was an oral tradition passed down through generations of *asiklar*.

Very different from folk music is Ottoman military music, now performed by the *mehter takimi* (original military band) in Istanbul, which originated in Central Asia. This is played with kettledrums, clarinets, cymbals, and bells. Another form of music is that of the whirling dervishes called *mevleviler*, which has a mystical, haunting sound and is dominated by the reed pipe or *ney*. Apart from folk music, each region in Turkey is also known for its own special brand of folk dance and costume.

Ataturk had a lot to do with the change brought about in Turkey's cultural picture as well as its political structures. He encouraged representative painting, sculpture, literature, Western music (especially opera), dance, and drama.

The population of Turkey is 99 percent Muslim, predominantly Sunni with Shiites and Alawites in the east and southeast, so many Turkish customs and practices are derived from Islamic practices. Turkish etiquette demands that one wear modest clothing and remove one's shoes when entering mosques. There are still many conservative Islamic areas where women cover their heads, arms, and shoulders and wear modest dresses or skirts, preferably reaching to the knees, and sometimes the ankles among more conservative groups. Other Turkish customs generally concern manners, to the extent that modern-day Turks complain about how one cannot even get out of the door without going through at least five minutes of a fixed set of civilities.

Traditional sports in Turkey involve a lot of daring, or strength and agility, the most famous ones being *yagli gures*, or oil wrestling, in which the participants douse themselves with olive oil, and *cirit oyunu*, a game played with javelins and involving horsemanship and camel fights.

Turkey has a wide variety of folk dances that are performed in different regions of the country. *Kasik Oyunu* (the spoon dance) is performed in the regions of Silifke and Konya in Turkey. Beautifully dressed men and women perform the dance by holding wooden spoons in their hands and producing the musical rhythm by striking the spoons together. *Horon* is a dance of the Black Sea region and is performed only by men who dress themselves in black attire with silver trimmings and dance to the tune of the *kemence* (violin). Another male dance is the *kilic kalkan* (the sword and shield dance), in which men, dressed as Ottoman soldiers, dance to the tune of clashing shields and swords to celebrate the victory of the Ottoman Turks.

Fun Fact

Cherries originated in Turkey and are still grown in abundance, as are hazelnuts (filberts), of which Turkey supplies half the world's needs.

Turkish Bracelets

It was an ancient Turkish belief that bracelets, apart from their ornamental function, also have medicinal properties. For instance, it was believed that bloodstones embedded on a bracelet helped to stop bleeding, whereas agate, a sacred Turkish stone, protected weavers against the bites of venomous creatures. A copper bracelet was believed to provide relief from joint pains, and many people who suffer from arthritis in the 21st century wear copper bracelets.

Fun Fact

The beautiful Turkish Van cat is found here. It has pure white fur, and its eyes are two different colors—one blue and one green.

One interesting aspect of Turkish culture is that, despite the restrictions of Islam, some scenes stand in contrast to the modesty of women mentioned earlier. Some historians subscribe to the view that belly dancing originated in Turkey and nomadic gypsies later spread it throughout the region. Nightclubs are the most common venues and the dancer is usually a woman with a well-shaped body. Belly dancers are even hired to perform at weddings or other social gatherings. The dancers are usually scantily clad and move around the audience while dancing. During the dance, when the dancer comes close, observers, invariably men, put money into the dancer's costume as a mark of appreciation of the dance. At a social gathering, men from the audience also participate in the dancing sometimes.

☼ CUISINE

Turkey offers a wide variety of culinary delicacies. Dough made from wheat flour forms the crux of Turkish food and is represented by a wide variety of breads, such as *ekmek* (white bread), *pide* (flat bread), and *simit* (sesame seed rings). Other dishes made from wheat dough include *borek* (pastry) and *manti* (wheat dumplings stuffed with meat). The latter is served with melted butter, paprika, and garlic-flavored yogurt. Pilaf (also known as pilav; grain cooked in a seasoned broth) is also favored among Turks, and the most popular among them are rice pilaf and bulgur (cracked wheat) pilaf. In Turkey, people cook their vegetables in olive oil. Stuffed vegetables, known as dolma, are very popular; they may be stuffed with either rice or meat.

Fun Fact

Turks refer to raki (aniseed-flavored grape brandy) as the "lion's drink" since they believe that one must be as strong as a lion to drink it. Turks also enjoy bottled fruit juices and *boza*, a thick fermented drink made from wheat.

Turkey is also famous for kebabs (grilled or stewed plain or marinated meat) and lamb-based kebabs, such as *doner* kebab (grilled lamb) and *sis* kebab (lamb pieces skewered and grilled over charcoal) are local favorites. At the end of a meal, *muballebi* desserts (eggless puddings made with rice flour and starch made without any butter) are often served.

Tea, coffee, raki (anise-flavored drink), beer, and wine are the preferred beverages in Turkey. On special occasions, some people drink alcoholic beverages.

Public/Legal Holidays

☼ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar and is celebrated as New Year's Day. Celebrations take place all over the world and generally begin the evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve). New Year's Eve celebrations for a typical Turkish family include a special dinner, with close friends and the family getting together to celebrate. People wish each other the best for the coming year and children receive presents. New Year's Day is quieter and a day of rest; all offices, businesses, and educational institutions are closed.

Formerly, Turks spent New Year's Eve at home, but nowadays more and more people can be seen enjoying themselves at open-air parties and as the clock strikes midnight fireworks light up the night sky.

☼ NAVRUZ

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 21

Navruz, also spelled Norouz, Nowruz, or Nevruz, marks the first day of the year in the Old Persian calendar and is celebrated as New Year's Day by Central Asian Turks, Anatolian Turks, and Iranians. *Navruz* is a Persian word that means "new day" (*nev*, "new," *ruz*, "day"). This day is also the first day of spring, the vernal equinox, when days and nights are the same length. In ancient times poets presented Navruziye, a collection of *ghazal* (a Persian verse form of seven couplets written in praise of the emperor) or *kaside* (an Arabic verse form with rhyming couplets) poetry dedicated to the sultans to mark Navruz.

A number of interesting traditions and customs are associated with Navruz in Turkey. In many parts of Turkey on the night of Navruz, young men who want to get married eat half a *tuzlu gyllyk*, a special pastry made from salted wheat dough. After eating this salty dough, they do not drink water and go to bed thirsty, believing that they will marry the woman who offers them water in their dreams. On the following day they place the remaining half of the *tuzlu gyllyk* on the roof or chimney of their homes. If a crow takes the dough and flies away with it to another rooftop to eat it, then the man will marry the daughter who lives in that house. But if the crow grabs the pastry and flies away without stopping, the man will marry a woman from a faraway land.

In the Kars region in Turkey on the evening of Navruz it is the custom for young unmarried men and women to gather at someone's house and send a child to fetch a bucket of water. After the bucket of

Which Children's Day?

In 1925, a meeting of the World Conference for the Well-Being of Children, held in Geneva, Switzerland, declared June 1 the day to celebrate International Children's Day (ICD).

Then on November 20, 1954, the UN General Assembly recommended that all nations should observe a universal Children's Day, to promote the welfare of all the children in the world. November 20 also marks the day in 1959 when the assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, and on November 20, 1989, the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted. To make the situation more confusing, McDonald's, the fast-food giant, instituted World Children's Day, also observed on November 20, to raise funds for Ronald McDonald House Charities; in 2002 UNICEF agreed to merge Universal Children's Day with McDonald's fund-raiser.

Japan also has a claim: In 1948 Japan declared Children's Day a national holiday to be observed early in May. It is a festive holiday when parents pray for the future health and happiness of their children and take them out to fly kites. In addition Japan celebrates the Children's Festival, now called Kodomo Hi, which was originally the Boy's Festival (Tango-no-Sekku). The equivalent holiday for girls was called the Doll Festival.

There is also an International Children's Day (also ICD) cosponsored by UNICEF and the International Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, celebrated on the second Sunday in December, and an International Children's Book Day. Other countries celebrate some version of Children's Day on different dates and with varying customs. Aotearoa (New Zealand), for example, celebrates the nation's children on October 30.

water has been brought back, the men toss colored threads into the bucket, and the women throw in pins. It is believed that those whose threads and pins become entangled will marry each other.

See also Volume III: NAVRUZ; SPRING FESTIVALS; ZOROASTRIANISM

✿ NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY AND CHILDREN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 23

On April 23, 1920, during the War of Independence, Turkey's Grand National Assembly met in Ankara and began deliberations to develop plans for an independent, secular, and modern republic. The founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, dedicated April 23 to the children of the country to emphasize that they are the future of the new nation.

Each year children in Turkey celebrate Sovereignty and Children's Day as a national holiday. Weeklong ceremonies mark this occasion, and events are staged that the entire nation enjoys. On this day children send their representatives to replace state officials and high-ranking bureaucrats. The president, the prime minister, the cabinet ministers, and provincial governors, all turn over their positions to the children's representatives, who sign executive orders relating to educational and environmental policies. Legislators are also replaced in the Grand National Assembly by children and they hold a special session to discuss and debate their issues.

In an effort to internationalize this day, the Turkish government often invited delegates of children from all over the world to participate in the celebrations. Apparently this effort was successful, because there are now many "children's days."

✿ ATATURK COMMEMORATION AND YOUTH AND SPORTS DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 19

This holiday marks the beginning of the War of Independence for the Turkish nation: On this date in 1919 Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder and first president of the Republic of Turkey, arrived in Anatolia at the Black Sea Port of Samsun and began agitating to obtain independence for Turkey.

During his tenure as president, Ataturk declared May 19 as the nation's Youth and Sports Holiday. In 1983 the government of Turkey started Youth Week, when youth between the ages of 12 and 24 gather in their cities, towns, and villages to participate in cultural, sports, and artistic activities.

Fun Fact

No one knows why June 1 was chosen as the ICD: One theory claims June 1 was chosen because the Chinese consul-general in San Francisco had invited several Chinese orphans to celebrate the Dragon Boat Festival in 1925, which happened to fall on June 1 that year, coinciding with the Geneva conference.

Fun Fact

In Turkish, *bayram* means “feast” or “holiday,” and *kurban* means “sacrifice.”

This is believed to foster a spirit of unity among youth and bring them closer to their culture.

✿ VICTORY DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 30

It was on this day in 1922 that the Independence War was decided in favor of the Turks.

This was the fifth day of the big attack against the invading Greek armies; under the command of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Turks defeated the Greeks at Izmir.

The founder of the Republic of Turkey, Atatürk is remembered on this day at a ceremony held at Anıtkabir, where his mausoleum is located. The day is also marked by a number of ceremonies and events organized in Atatürk’s honor, especially at the Atatürk Culture Center in Ankara.

✿ REPUBLIC DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 29

This is the anniversary of the declaration of the Turkish Republic by the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 1923. On this day Atatürk announced the establishment of the Turkish Republic; it celebrates the transformation of Turkey from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic. The festivities begin with major government bodies like the Land Forces War Academy, the Governor’s Office, and the Turkish Armed Services (TSK) laying wreaths at the Atatürk statues located in Ulus, the parliament, at Sıhhiye, the Atatürk Forestry Farm, and at Atatürk’s Mausoleum.

All state offices display the Turkish flag or Atatürk’s portrait. Local municipality and state officials all over the country also mark the day with celebrations.

Fun Fact

Yaglı gures, or oil wrestling, is the Turkish national sport. Every July, wrestling championships are held in Kırkpınar, where, to make the contest tougher, the wrestlers smear themselves with oil.

God replaced the child with a ram. The day is observed to remember Ibrahim’s willingness to make such a sacrifice and to emulate the virtue of generous giving.

Following this tradition the head of each Turkish household sacrifices a sheep on the morning of the first day of this four-day feast. A lavish meal is made from the meat, which is enjoyed with friends and family, and the excess meat and the hide are given to charity.

It is to be noted that, since the dates of these religious festivals change according to the Muslim lunar calendar, the date of the festival is 11 days earlier on the Western calendar each year.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

✿ ASHURA

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: Tenth of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

Ashura, also known as Asure Gunu in Turkey, as well as Aashurah or the Day of Judgment, marks the martyrdom of Hussein bin Ali (d. 680), Muhammad’s grandson, and the third Shia imam, at the Battle of Karbala in 680 C.E. The word *ashura* means “ten” in Arabic; the holiday’s name means “the tenth day.” After the two *eids*, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, Ashura is the third most important Islamic festival because the Battle of Karbala was a watershed in the history of Islam: It was fought between Sunni and Shia Muslims over who was to be Muhammad’s legitimate heir to the leadership of Islam.

Shia Muslims consider Hussein the true successor to Muhammad. For them Ashura is a somber 10-day event, and every evening for 10 days imams whip the faithful into frenzies of guilt and breast-beating. Plays depicting the death of Hussein bin Ali are often enacted, with as much elaboration as can be managed. On the first day of Muharram, men put on their mourning clothes and do not shave or bathe. The culminating events of the 10-day observance are processions of Shia men in which some of the more devout practice self-mortification, and express their grief by beating their chests, flagellating themselves with iron chains, and cutting themselves with swords to show their willingness to sacrifice themselves. In this way they would atone for being too much like the Kufans, who failed to support their would-be leader and allowed him to be butchered by the caliph Yazid.

For some Sunni Muslims, Ashura is also commemorated, but it is observed as only a single day of austerity and fasting because the Sunni mark it as a day to recall important biblical events: the day Nuh (Noah) left the Ark and the day that Musa (Moses) was rescued from the Egyptians by God. They also believe that when the Day of Judgment comes, it will be on Ashura.

Religious Holidays

✿ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, the Feast of Sacrifice or Kurban Bayrami, is celebrated in honor of Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) readiness to sacrifice his own son on God’s command. But, as Ibrahim was about to kill his son,

The Turks celebrate this day by enjoying a special sweet pudding made with cereals, raisins, and nuts called *asure*.

See also Volume III: ASHURA; ISLAM

❁ HIDRELLEZ DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 6

Hidrellez Day is a religious festival that commemorates the day on which the Islamic prophet Hizir (the most revered Muslim saint in Turkey) met another Islamic (and biblical) prophet Ilyas (Elijah) for the first time on Earth. Both are the patron saints of travelers, and it is believed that during their meeting they identified both the provinces where they would be known as the patron saints of travelers and the specific areas in which they would rescue travelers from any harm at the last minute. Elijah is regarded as the protector of people who travel by land, while Hizir is the protector of people who travel by sea. Following their meeting it is believed they embarked on a pilgrimage to Mecca. This holiday is also known as Hizir-Ilyas Day or Ruz-I Hizir (Day of Hizir).

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr, the Feast of Fast-Breaking, immediately follows the end of Ramadan (or Ramazan), the month when all devout Muslims must fast from dawn to dusk. The fast is the fourth of the Five Pillars of Islam. It brings home to them the pain of hunger and thirst so that they know from firsthand experience what the less fortunate around them endure. The most important night of Ramadan is Lailat al-Qadr—the day Muhammad received his first revelation from the angel Gabriel. Muslims believe that on this night all their prayers will be answered.

Eid al-Fitr is a three-day national holiday in Turkey, also called Seker Bayrami (Candy Festival) or Eid es-Seghir in Arabic. Fasting during this observance is forbidden by the Koran. A period of celebration and thanksgiving, this holiday begins as soon as the new Moon has been sighted in Saudi Arabia. Muslims demonstrate their gratitude for their physical well-being, strength, and the opportunities Allah has given them. Apart from celebrating the end of their fast, they thank Allah for the spiritual strength he gave them to practice self-discipline during the austere month of Ramadan. It is also a time to overlook old bitterness and forgive others.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN



A child plugs his ears during the historical Ottoman marching band's (Mehter) concert in the Eyup district of old Istanbul. During Ramadan, the Islamic holy month of fasting, Mehter gives concerts in different parts of Istanbul. (AP Photo/Murad Sezer)

Regional Holidays

❁ CAMEL WRESTLING FESTIVAL

Observed in: Seljuk

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January

Once a practice prevalent in most of Turkey, camel-wrestling is now restricted to a few regions near the Aegean Sea. Elaborately saddled bull camels wrestle each other in a contest for precedence in the herd and, more importantly, precedence in mating a young cow camel paraded in front of its male counterparts to lure them. Once the defeated camel runs away, the triumphant camel charges toward the crowd, and the spectators must scramble hurriedly out of the way. Both owners and spectators at this event make large bets, even though, for spectators especially, it is difficult to tell which camel will be the stronger contestant.

❁ TRADITIONAL MESIR FESTIVAL

Observed in: Manisa

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March–April

Mesir paste, also known as “power gum,” is a blend of 41 different spices, and an annual festival in its

Fun Fact

The Hittites were renowned for their war chariots, which struck terror into the hearts of their opponents.

honor has been celebrated in Manisa for over 465 years. Mesir paste, invented by Hafsa Haftun, the wife of an Ottoman sultan, is intended as a general tonic for curing all kinds of common diseases.

Since this is considered a medicine for the masses, Turks, in order to thank Hafsa Haftun for this invention, fling the paste from the minaret of the Sultan Mosque once a year. The Mesir Paste Festival is also celebrated with craft shows, concerts, and sports events.

❁ MARMARIS INTERNATIONAL MARITIME FESTIVAL

Observed in: Marmaris

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June

The first of its kind, this festival brings together a host of national maritime groups and organizations from the private and public sectors, as well as Turkish and international swimming, diving, sailing, and yachting clubs. The event covers a wide range of activities, including competitions, shows, concerts, and other entertainment. A number of foreign warships and training ships are also invited to take part in the festival.

What makes this festival special is that it is organized by various government organizations like the Turkish Navy, the Marmaris governorship and the Marmaris Municipality, in conjunction with the private sector—the Association of South Aegean Tourist Hotel Managers, the Association of Turkish Travel Agencies, Chamber of Shipping, and many other private sector firms and organizations in Turkey.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

In Turkey after a woman becomes pregnant, she is given a golden bracelet by her mother-in-law. After the birth of the child, family members and well-wishers present gold and other gifts to the mother and the newborn. Traditionally a woman cannot leave her house for 40 days following the delivery; such isolation is thought to protect her from evil eyes. During the first three days after delivery, only family members and close relatives can visit, while friends and

neighbors are allowed to enter the house after the end of the three-day period.

In the Anatolia region of Turkey, the planting of a tree marks the birth of a child. At the birth of a girl child, saplings of apple, chestnut, or mulberry trees are planted; on the birth of a baby boy, pine or poplar trees are planted. Turks believe that the planting of trees for boys is an investment that will be used at the time of his marriage (since the trees will be commercially valuable when they mature).

Children's names are generally inspired by the time they are born; for example Safak (dawn), Ramazan (the holy month), or Bahar (spring), or by the events surrounding their birth, such as Tufan (storm) and Yagmur (rain). If parents want the child to be their last, they name him or her Songul (last rose) or Yeter (enough). Some Turks also name their children after a respected elderly family member.

During the naming ceremony, the imam holds the child in the direction of Mecca and reads a passage from the Koran in the left ear of the child. Then he repeats the chosen name three times in the right ear.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Male circumcision is an integral part of Turkey's Islamic society. It marks the official introduction of a boy into the religious community. It is also believed that the ritual completes the transformation of a young boy to an adult. In Turkey licensed surgeons perform the surgery on young Muslim boys between the ages of 2 and 14 years. After the circumcision ceremony special celebrations are planned, including a lavish banquet, and special invitations are sent to relatives, friends, and neighbors to join in the celebrations.

On the day of the ceremony the boy wears a suit, a scepter, cape, and a fez with the message Mashallah ("Allah preserve him") written on it. He embarks on a city tour in a large convoy of cars or horses, along with children of the assembled guests and musicians. On his return he changes into a long white dress and is circumcised. During the ceremony a close relative keeps him company and becomes his *kirve* (a function similar to that of a godparent). In Turkish society the *kirve* shares equal rights with the father of the child in making decisions about his life. Also the young boy cannot marry the daughter of the *kirve* because they are now related.

❁ MARRIAGE

In Turkey legal status is granted only to civil marriages that take place in the presence of state authorities. However, many Turks prefer to have a religious as well as a civil ceremony. Turkish marriage celebrations can last from four to seven days. Elaborate celebrations take place in the homes of the bride and the groom.

Fun Fact

Verbs can be so complex in the Turkish language that they constitute whole sentences in themselves. For example, *Afyonkarahisarlılastiramadiklarimizdanmisiniz?* can be translated as, "Aren't you one of those people whom we tried—unsuccessfully—to make resemble the citizens of Afyonkarahisar?"

The couple is not allowed to see each other before the wedding ceremony because it is considered bad luck for them to do so.

On the night before the wedding, henna is applied to the hands of the bride-to-be; the event is known as *Kına Gecesi* (“henna night”). The bridegroom’s family presents the bride with dry henna, which is placed in copper or silver vessels. Then her female relatives place a red veil over the bride’s head and escort her to the center of the room amid folk songs and songs about marriage. Gold coins are placed on her hands before the henna is applied. This is done to bless her with prosperity and good luck. On one hand henna is applied by *basi butun*, a happily married woman with children (with no history of separation, divorce, or childlessness); a close friend applies henna to the other.

In religious Turkish weddings, the imam presides over the wedding and asks the bride and groom (separately) three times if they are entering into holy matrimony of their own free will. After a positive response from both individuals, the imam and two witnesses from both sides sign the marriage certificate, and the newlyweds are congratulated. On the morning after her wedding, the bride returns to her parental home to meet her family and friends.

❁ DEATH

The Turks follow a solemn burial ritual. After death the body of the deceased is carefully laid on a bed in a separate room with the head facing in the direction of Mecca. According to Islamic belief the burial ritual should take place during the daytime. But if a person expires in the late afternoon, then the burial ritual takes place on the next day. The death is announced from a minaret. A passage from the Koran is read, and the name of the deceased, the hour of the funeral, and the place where it will be held are also announced.

On the day of the funeral, the body of the deceased is cleansed, draped in a white shroud, and

placed in a wooden coffin covered with a green cloth. Male members of the family carry the coffin on their shoulders and place it on a table kept in the courtyard of the mosque. Women, however, are not allowed to take part in the burial ritual. After the final prayers are said, the deceased is buried, and a tombstone is placed over the grave.

Special commemorative services marked by *mevlit* (readings from the Koran) take place on the seventh and 52nd days after death. Many people also feed the poor and needy in memory of the deceased.

Further Reading

Ekrem Akurgal, *Ancient Civilizations and Ruins of Turkey: From Prehistoric Times until the End of the Roman Empire* (London: Kegan Paul, 2002); David C. Hopkins, ed., *Across the Anatolian Plateau: Readings in the Archaeology of Ancient Turkey* (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2002); Deniz Kandiyoti and Ayse Saktanber, eds., *Fragments of Culture: The Everyday of Modern Turkey* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Seton Lloyd, *Ancient Turkey: A Traveler’s History* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1999); Mehmet Özdoğan and Nezih Başgelen, eds., *Neolithic in Turkey: The Cradle of Civilization: New Discoveries* (Istanbul: Arkeoloji ve Sanat Yayınları, 1999); Ayse Saktanber, *Living Islam: Women, Religion, and the Politicization of Culture in Turkey* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002).

Fun Fact

Heinrich Schliemann (1822–90), a German businessman turned archaeologist, claimed to have discovered Homer’s Troy in 1873–75 when he found a cache of gold, which he named Priam’s Treasure. Then in 1876–78, in excavations at Mycenae, he found several gold funeral masks, one of which he dubbed the Mask of Agamemnon.

❧ Turkmenistan ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Central Asia, bordering the Caspian Sea, between Iran and Kazakhstan
Size	188,457 sq. mi.
Capital City	Ashgabat
Flag Description	Turkmenistan's flag is green with a vertical red stripe near the hoist side, containing five carpet designs stacked above two crossed olive branches; a white crescent moon and five white stars are located in the upper corner of the field just to the fly side of the red stripe.
Independence	October 27, 1991 (from the USSR)
Population	4,952,081 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Turkmen
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Turkmen (85%)
Major Language(s)	Turkmen (72%)
Major Religion(s)	Muslim (89%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Remembrance Day, January 12; National Flag Day, February 19; International Women's Day, March 8; Navruz, March 21; Victory Day, May 9; Constitution Day, May 18; 1948 Earthquake Remembrance Day, October 6; Independence Day, October 27–28; Neutrality Day, December 12

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

Archaeological excavations near the Caspian Sea indicate that human civilization existed in Turkmenistan as early as the Stone Age. Tools have been discovered that suggest that the early inhabitants knew the art of pottery and made metal tools. It is also believed that the early tribes traded with other regions of Central Asia. Carbon dating of artifacts and mummies found at various sites along the Silk Road (a major trade route in the ancient world) indicate that this route may have been used for trade between Asia and the West as early as 3000 B.C.E. Turkmenistan, located on the Central Asian steppes, must certainly have been engaged in commerce. The country's location, however, also made it a popular stopover for armies on their way to more enriching conquests.

Alexander the Great conquered the territory in the fourth

century B.C.E. on his way to India. One hundred and fifty years later Persia's Parthian Kingdom established its capital in Nisa, an area now located in the suburbs of the modern-day capital of Ashgabat. (Large-scale archaeological excavations have gradually been unearthing Nisa since the last decade of the 20th century, revealing the city's structure and artifacts, including a clay face identified as Mithradates I [c. 195–38] or II [c. 123–88].) In the seventh century C.E. Arabs conquered this region, bringing with them Islam and incorporating the Turkmen into Middle Eastern culture.

The Oguz, the ancestors of modern-day Turkmen, migrated from Eastern to Central Asia and established their empire in Turkmenistan in the 11th century. It was called the Seljuk (or Selçuk) Empire; its capital was at Merv. The tribes lived in the northern region of the Kopetdag Mountains. Over time, they came to be known as Turkmen, derived from the name Turk, which in turn originated from the Gokturks, who had established the first Turkic state around 552 C.E. in Central Asia. In the second half of the 12th century the Seljuk

Empire collapsed when the Mongol king Genghis Khan (1162–1227) invaded the region. After his death in 1227 the Mongols lost their hold in the region and, for the next seven centuries, competing empires ruled the Turkmen, and various tribes fought over territories.

The region was devastated by the rampant kidnapping of innocent travelers by the Turkmen in order to feed the slave trade. At the same time the Russian Empire was expanding, and the Czar of Russia sent an expedition to Turkmenistan. In 1716, the Turkmen murdered some of the members of the expedition, and Russia retreated. However, Russia sent expeditions to Turkmenistan again in the second half of the 19th century, and after a conflict, which lasted for five years, Russia finally succeeded in annexing the areas of Bukhara and Khiva in 1868. The people of the western region, who wanted independence from the Muslims, gladly joined the Russians. Although the eastern and southern Turks resisted the invasion, by 1885 Russia had established its control over the entire region.

During World War I an uprising in Turkmenistan in 1916 led to the defeat of the Russians at Khiva. The ensuing unrest and strife over the next few years culminated in Turkmenistan becoming a member of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1924. During the succeeding decades the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic remained one of the Soviet Union's most isolated republics. In the late 1980s many of the Soviet republics were trying to free themselves from the USSR's domination. After the dissolution of the USSR, Turkmenistan proclaimed its independence in 1991. Saparmurat Nijazov (b. 1940), the former leader of the Communists, became the country's first president, and in 1999 the parliament extended his term indefinitely.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Turkmenistan is bound by the Caspian Sea in the west and the Amu-Darya River in the east. It shares borders with Iran and Afghanistan to the south, Uzbekistan to the north and east, and Kazakhstan to the north. The great Karakum Desert covers over 80 percent of the country. The eastern region is largely a plateau where the terrain is mostly sandy. The Kopetdag range of mountains, with its foothills and plateaus, runs from Turkmenistan into Iran, and is an earthquake-prone area. The highest point in Turkmenistan is Mt. Ayrybaba (10,299 feet).

Turkmenistan has a subtropical climate. Summers last from May to September and are hot and dry, with temperatures hardly lower than 95°F, while in winter the temperatures fall as low as -27°F. Turkmenistan receives hardly any rainfall.

In the southern mountains there are ancient forests of wild walnut and pistachio trees. Turkmenistan's wildlife is composed of leopards, porcupines, gazelles, sand rats, jerboas (small jumping rodents), and crocodiles. The region is also known

for poisonous snakes such as vipers and cobras.

❁ ECONOMY

Turkmenistan is largely a desert area and barely 4 percent of the land area is arable. This includes the irrigated oases. In the past one-half of its irrigated land was planted with cotton, and Turkmenistan was the 10th largest producer of cotton. In recent years, however, poor harvests have led to a decline in cotton exports. The other major crops are grains and fodder crops.

The oil and gas industry in Turkmenistan is quite specialized; natural gas and petroleum are principal exports. Other exports include chemicals, processed foods, and minerals. The country's major trading partners are Ukraine, Iran, Turkey, Russia, and Germany. Turkmenistan imports food and beverages, textiles, and machinery. The carpet industry of the country is an important traditional sector that adds to the gross domestic product (GDP).

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Even though Turkmenistan is predominantly a Sunni Muslim country, the people have the freedom to practice other religions if they desire. Most Turkmen holidays reflect ancient traditions brought down to the present day and observe events specific to their way of life and habits that have enabled them to survive.

The most festive holidays are those concerned with various aspects of family life, although many other traditions and rituals related to it are solemn as

Fun Fact

In Turkmen communities, some days are believed to be successful (*sehetli gun*), for example, the 7th, 14th, and 21st days of each month or unsuccessful (*sehetlsiz gun*).

Fragi Makhtumkuli

Poet and thinker Fragi Makhtumkuli is regarded as the father of Turkmen literature. He was born in an area southwest of Turkmenistan, which now forms part of Iran. Makhtumkuli was something of a tragic figure, trapped in a loveless marriage. His two young sons died due to illness, and later in life all his work was not only seized by the Persians, but, as he stood watching, the camel on which his precious manuscripts were loaded lost its footing and fell into a river to be swept away. Makhtumkuli based his writing on homespun wisdom, and his works were characterized by their simple language, the main reason for his popularity with traveling bards. His popularity and influence were so great that no other Turkmen writer or poet has managed to come out of his shadow.

Carpet Making

The first thing that comes to mind when one thinks of Turkmenistan's art is fine carpets. Turkmen rugs and carpets are known all over the world and for the Turkmen, carpet making brings as much national pride as the pyramids do for Egyptians. It is one of the oldest arts in Turkmenistan, having begun as early as the sixth century B.C.E., and the designs have more or less remained the same. It took hundreds of years for these designs, which mainly depict the nomadic lifestyle of the Turkmen, to develop. The ornaments are geometric and traditionally deep red in color. As the art of carpet weaving has been

passed down from generation to generation, the style has been kept intact. There are five traditional carpet designs and they have been incorporated in the country's state emblem and flag. For Turkmen nomads, the carpets were extremely important because they covered wagon floors and were used to form collapsible walls, protecting them from the cold. Modern technological changes have been adopted into the weaving process but, like their ancestors, the Turkmen carpet weavers still prefer to use natural dyes and Sargin sheep wool (the smoothest).

well. These ancient customs have been preserved in the holidays as they are still observed.

While most celebrations may have some elements of religiosity, they are primarily communal or tribal observances, for example, family holidays that celebrate the birth of a son (*ogul toyu*) or the construction of a new house or yurt (*tam toyu* or *ey toyu*). Turkmen living by rivers or along the shore of the Caspian Sea celebrate the purchase or construction of a new boat, *Nav toyu*.

Tribal loyalties, some of which are centuries old, are still observed, and tribal practices predominate, especially in the more remote regions. Still, urban Turkmen follow their tribal customs, and each tribe may have its own unique manner of celebrating even those holidays that are nationwide observances, for example, Navruz. Each tribe can be easily distinguished by dialect, style of clothing, jewelry, and the patterns woven into their carpets. Carpets are the essence of Turkmen culture and the art of carpet weaving is centuries old.

Guests have a special status in Turkmen culture. There is a saying that a guest (*meeomon*) is more honored than a grandfather, and hosts spread out lavish feasts for their guests and insist that the guest eat everything.

Turkmen can be easily identified because of their *telpek*—big sheepskin hats. Their traditional attire also includes baggy pants, knee-length boots, and a cotton overcoat. Women wear heavy ankle-length dresses of silk with trousers. The women always tie their hair and cover it with a scarf.

Turkmen music is basically nomadic and rural. Nomadic singers, called *baksby*, are also healers and magicians and sing to the accompaniment of musical instruments such as the *dutar* (a two-stringed lute). Fragi Makhtumkuli (1770–1840) is called the father of Turkmen literature.

CUISINE

Meat is a vital ingredient in most dishes of the Turkmen. The meat of sheep, camel, mountain goat,

quail, and pheasant is consumed. Sometimes the meat is roasted in a clay oven or fried or cooked on skewers over hot coals. Pilaf—made with rice or bulgur (cracked wheat)—is another favorite dish, although the meat of game birds is sometimes used instead of mutton or lamb. *Gaynatma* is a popular soup made from young camel meat and is served with *patyr* (dry bread). Turkmen living on the Caspian Sea include fish in their diet. A popular dish is *balyk kaurdak*, prepared by frying fish in its own fat in a cauldron.

Surprisingly Turkmen cuisine also features quite a few vegetarian dishes like herb-filled pastries and cornmeal pancakes. Porridges made of beans, cornmeal, and pumpkin, or of rice, milk, and yogurt are also popular.

Turkmen use a good deal of milk in their food, including butter and cheese, and the most exotic drink of Turkmenistan, *chal*, is made by mixing warm milk with a fermenting agent; after sitting for 48 hours it turns into a sour, aerated drink.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, and is widely celebrated as New Year's Day. Celebrations take place all over the world, starting on New Year's Eve. In Turkmenistan, it is a national holiday, and schools and offices are closed.

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 12

This day is observed to remember the southern and eastern Turkmen killed in the 1881 battle with the

Russians at Geok-Tepe, near Ashgabat. This was the time when Russia was sending military expeditions to Turkmenistan, and most Turkmen, who desperately wanted to escape from the domination of the Khans and Shahs of Persia, took the side of the Russians. However, the southern and eastern areas resisted the Russian advances. These war heroes fought against Russian annexation for two years. The Russians eventually besieged Geok-Tepe, capturing it as well as Ashkhabad (modern-day Ashgabat).

On this day, the Turkmen remember their war heroes by laying wreaths at war memorials and a patriotic fervor grips the entire nation.

❁ NATIONAL FLAG DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 19

National Flag Day was celebrated for the first time in Turkmenistan in 1997. The country adopted its new flag on this day. This day is celebrated with various concerts and performances, and the leaders of other countries congratulate the head of state. This event is also marked with military parades and other festivities.

❁ INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 8

International Women's Day was established after the Second International Conference of Socialist Women in 1910. Since then this day has been dedicated to showing appreciation for the work women do and for their contributions to their societies. On this day in Turkmenistan, men present women with gifts and flowers. Traditionally the men take over all domestic tasks and give the women a day off from their chores. Special presentations and lectures about how women's lives can be improved are held on this day.

❁ NAVRUZ

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 21

Navruz, Nov Ruz Bairam, Nevruz, Novruz, or Noruz marks the first day of the Old Persian calendar and is celebrated as New Year's Day in many countries. *Nevruz* is a Persian word, which means "new day" (*nev*, "new"; *ruz*, day), and *Bairam* means "festival." On the Old Persian calendar, this day is also the beginning of the spring season. This holiday has ancient pagan roots and is connected to the worship of the renewal of nature, fertility, and agriculture. This festival is of Zoroastrian origin and dates back thousands of years; the Zoroastrian religion is thought to be the oldest monotheistic religion in the world.

Among Turkmen this ancient spring festival has been celebrated since the early 20th century. Celebrations here are less enthusiastic than in some neighboring countries, and not all groups observe Navruz in the same way. Some Turkmen ignore the holiday altogether, while others go through the motions, thinking of it as a good deed (*yulin*, *sylagi*) that may count toward getting them into paradise. The Tekin, Yomud, Ersarin, Salyri, and Saryk tribes, cattle breeders who are now a majority of the country's population, sometimes celebrate Navruz indifferently or not at all, whereas the agrarian tribes—the Alilin, Mahinlin, Murchelin, Nohurlin, Anaulin, and others settled along the Amudarya River—have ancient agricultural traditions and celebrate Navruz with great enthusiasm and festivities. The traditions associated with Navruz have been preserved only in the settled groups of Turkmen who live in northern Khorasan.

In some areas of Turkmenistan, Navruz has become an Islamic version of the ancient vernal equinox celebrations. Those who celebrate it prepare for the three-day festival by cleaning and renovating their homes. Special sweets and dishes are prepared, notably Navruz *keje*—a millet gruel cereal with meat boiled in huge kettles, and Navruz *yarma*—a sweet ritual meal of wheat sprouts and sugar. In other regions the holiday celebrations are closely connected to the season. In southern Turkmenistan two winter dates are observed before the vernal equinox: the long 40-day Uly chille, which lasts from December 20 to January 30, and the short 40-day Kichi chille, which lasts only 22 days—from February 1 to 22. (February 22 is considered the last day of winter.) For those living at the Atek oasis, Navruz is a three-day holiday and the last day of the festival, March 23, is known as Ahir Navruzi. In other areas Navruz traditions are determined by the activities of the season.

In the southeast Turkmen observe two distinct Navruz periods: one related to breeding cattle, Charva Navruzi, celebrated on February 22, and a longer one related to agriculture, Ypek Navruzi, which starts on March 17 and lasts until March 22. The Persian-speaking population of south and southeastern Turkmenistan, including the Kurds, celebrates the new year's holiday as Navruzi Eid. People arrange open-air fairs, build swings, cook various dishes, and even paint eggs. On Navruz they boil a meat soup of wheat barley and dress it with yellow raisins and other dried fruits. During this holiday, people visit their friends and relatives and bring food with them. Music, plays, traditional games, sports, beauty contests, poetry nights, and

Fun Fact

The world-famous Bukhara rugs are so named, not because they are made in Bukhara, but because they are sold there! These rugs have always been made by Turkmen.

Fun Fact

The Ahal-Teke breed of horse, world-renowned for its beauty and swiftness, is particular to Turkmenistan.

Fun Fact

The number seven has special significance for Turkmen because it is a lucky day in a month (*sehetli gun*). The custom of paying one's respects to a deceased person on the seventh day following his or her death was observed by the ancient Turks and may have some connection with seven animals they worshiped.

other activities are enjoyed all over Turkmenistan during this festival. Navruz is celebrated during the rainy season, and herders slaughter a cow in honor of Burkut-Baba, the god of rain.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; NAVRUZ; SPRING FESTIVALS; ZOROASTRIANISM

🌀 VICTORY DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 9

Victory Day commemorates the defeat of German Fascists by the Allies during World War II in 1945.

This is one of the most celebrated national holidays in Russia and is also commemorated in Turkmenistan. People go to see military parades and other festive demonstrations. War veterans visit the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and Atamurat Monument and honor the dead. The national media broadcast patriotic programs and songs. Turkmenistan, where there are still many World War II veterans and where the war was an immediate reality for most people, shows great respect for the dead of the war. World War II veterans in Turkmenistan are given the highest pensions and other facilities, including preferential treatment for housing, medical care, travel, and other areas of individual concern. This day is a national holiday in Turkmenistan, and all schools and businesses are closed this day.

🌀 CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 18

On this day in 1992, the Republic of Turkmenistan adopted its constitution. The president addresses the country, and major celebrations are held in Ashgabat and other cities of Turkmenistan.

🌀 1948 EARTHQUAKE REMEMBRANCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 6

October 6 is a day of mourning and remembrance in Turkmenistan. On this day in 1948, the capital city of Ashgabat was completely destroyed by an earthquake that measured 9 on the Richter scale. This earthquake was one of the most powerful quakes in recorded history. Apart from property damage, more than 100,000 people died because of this natural disaster.

The government instituted Memorial Day to remember the earthquake victims of 1948, and special memorial services take place on this day. A special monument and a museum have also been dedicated to those who lost their lives.

🌀 INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 27–28

On October 27, 1991, Turkmenistan came into being after breaking away from the USSR. This is a major two-day event, and schools and businesses are closed. On this day the president of Turkmenistan addresses the nation through the national media, and representatives of the administration, diplomats, schoolchildren, visitors, and locals place flowers and wreaths at memorials to remember those who died for Turkmen independence.

Major celebrations are held in Ashgabat and other cities of Turkmenistan. There are civil and military parades, complete with aerial flyovers and a parade of tanks and heavy armaments. The world-famous Ahal-Teke horses are a main attraction of every parade and procession during this event. Exhibitions of economic achievements, paintings, sculptures, graphic designs, and jewelry are held all across the country. Musical concerts, cultural events, various competitions, and displays of fireworks are also held as part of the celebration.

🌀 NEUTRALITY DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 12

This holiday honors Turkmenistan's neutrality and independent policy. On this day in 1995 the United Nations (UN) adopted a special resolution to highlight Turkmenistan's neutral foreign policy. All countries across the world congratulate the president of Turkmenistan on this occasion. Children stage special athletic and musical performances as part of the celebrations on this day.

Religious Holidays

🌀 EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, the Feast of Sacrifice (also called Kurban Bairam or Eid ul-Kurboon in Turkmenistan), is a very important festival for Muslims all over the world because on this day Ibrahim (Abraham) agreed to sacrifice his young son in accordance with God's command. Muslims honor Ibrahim for his willingness to do God's will.

In Turkmenistan this festival is celebrated for four days. Muslim families slaughter a fattened sheep and prepare an elaborate feast for friends and family members, and special prayer services are conducted in mosques all over the country. Turkmen Muslims also visit the graves of their ancestors and pray for them on this day.

In this month Muslims also undertake the pilgrimage, or hajj, to Mecca. It is the duty of every Muslim, when possible, to go to the sacred city at least once in his or her lifetime. It is the Fifth Pillar of Islam's Five Pillars.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; HAJJ; ISLAM

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr, also called the Feast of Fast-Breaking or Ramadan Seker Bairam, marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, and devout Muslims end their month-long dawn-to-dusk fast on this day. Eid al-Fitr, the second of two *eid* festivals (the other is Eid al-Adha), is celebrated for three days in Turkmenistan. Special prayers and feasting mark this occasion, and the Koran forbids fasting on this day.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

Regional Holidays

❁ HOLIDAY OF POETRY OF MAKHTUMKULI

Observed in: Makhtumkuli Etrap

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 19

This day honors the great Turkmen poet, thinker, and spiritual leader Fragi Makhtumkuli (1770–1840). On this day verses from Makhtumkuli's poems are recited and flowers are placed on his monument. The main celebrations of this event are held in his birthplace Makhtumkuli Etrap. This holiday is held along with Constitution Day, which falls on May 18.

❁ CARPET DAY

Observed in: Turkmenistan

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Last Sunday of May

Turkmenistan celebrates Carpet Day on the last Sunday of May. Carpet making is one of the ancient traditions of Turkmenistan. The art of carpet weaving traditionally was passed from one generation to the next. Turkmen carpets were world renowned in

the past. Marco Polo (1254–1324), the famous traveler, wrote about the carpets produced in this region.

For the nomadic Turkmen, the carpet was the only piece of furniture worth possessing. Easily transportable, the carpets served not just as floor coverings, but as wall linings for the yurt ("tent"), providing a highly decorative form of insulation. On this day, there are theater performances and carpet exhibitions in Ashgabat. The different handicraft items of Turkmenistan are showcased in several cities of the country. Folk games, rituals, dancing, and music are an integral part of this day's celebrations.

❁ HARVEST FESTIVAL

Observed in: Turkmenistan, especially Tejen

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Last Sunday of November

Harvest Festival, also known as Harman toyu or Hasil toyu, is normally celebrated on the last Sunday of November. This important agricultural festival celebrates the harvest of the grain crop, and entire villages participate. Members of the farming community collectively cultivate the land and sell a portion of cereals from the harvested amount.

The Turkmen bake flat cakes from the freshly harvested grain to mark the occasion. They pay their respects to the wind god Mirhaidar as they thresh the grain, by placing a stick with donkey or horse dung attached to the edge on the windward side of the barn (the animals are used to thresh the grain).

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

On the 40th day after the birth of a Turkmen child, the baby is given a ritualistic bath using 40 wheat grains and 40 bits of ram's droppings. At one time, due to the lack of medical facilities and unhygienic conditions, very few Turkmen infants survived after they were born. Hence big celebrations are held 40 days after a child is born and considered to be a survivor and a healthy baby. Bakshy—traveling folksingers and shamans, who are also healers and magicians—are summoned to perform during the celebrations.

All Turkmen children use a special triangular-shaped talisman made of cloth (*doga*) to protect them

Fun Fact

It is easy to differentiate an unmarried woman from a married one in Turkmenistan by seeing her hairstyle. Unmarried women have two braids and a small scarf; married women have one braid and a big kerchief.

Fun Fact

In each Turkmenistan village there are women whose profession is performing wedding songs.

Turkmen Deaths and Trees

Turkmens believe that there is a tree in heaven on which every leaf belongs to someone on Earth. When the leaf falls, the person dies. They also believe that, when an old tree dies, it corresponds to the death of an old man; if the tree was young, then a young person must have died somewhere. Turkmens also believe that when people die, their spirits reside in trees. Small babies are viewed as creatures completely belonging to nature. If they die babies are wrapped in birch bark, and their bodies are hung on trees.

from evil spirits. Salt, camel hair, seeds, earth, and paper pieces inscribed with prayers are carried in these *dogas*. These talismans are sewn onto the child's clothing.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Male circumcision, a ritual performed at puberty, is a Turkmenistan tradition. The Muslims in Turkmenistan believe that by undergoing this ritual a boy becomes a man. Trained elders use knives, razors, and other sharp instruments to perform the circumcision, without administering any anesthetic. This practice enjoys social backing, and families take great pride in it. Huge celebrations follow this coming-of-age ritual.

❁ MARRIAGE

Turkmen marriages are often arranged by parents or matchmakers. A suitable date is fixed for the wedding ceremony. People are not invited personally for Turkmen weddings; instead the village crier announces the event to the whole village and invites them all. One important custom still practiced is the ransom for the bride, or *kalom*. Depending on the region and the family's wealth, the bride's family demands huge sums of money from the groom in return for the bride's hand in marriage.

On the wedding day, the bride is dressed by her girlfriends and female relatives. They also sing and dance for her. A beautifully decorated caravan laden with sweets and flat cakes carries the bride to the wedding venue, which is usually a vast open space. The bride brings along with her carpets, bags,

pouches, and household goods. The groom is seated on horseback, and the bride is made to sit behind him on a special seat.

The aunts of the bridal couple play an important role in Turkmen marriages. The groom's aunt does not let the caravan proceed until the father of the groom presents her with gifts. The couple is then blessed and sent on their way to the groom's home. The wedding is solemnized with prayers and blessings. The bride is then made to take off the groom's belt, cap, and boots while she is blindfolded. This symbolizes the bride's humility and her willingness to abide by his rules.

After the wedding the bride cannot return to her native home for a period of two months. When this period ends, the husband accompanies her when she visits her home. He is welcomed into her home with gifts and sweets.

As in other Central Asian countries, Turkmen also follow the custom of marrying their deceased brothers' widows.

❁ DEATH

When a person dies in Turkmenistan, the body is handled in accordance with Muslim burial rituals. Special prayers are said just before the person dies. Women are not allowed to participate in the funeral services held in the cemetery, but they are required to mourn at home for a prolonged period of time.

Further Reading

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Tuvalu

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	An island group consisting of nine coral atolls in Oceania, in the south Pacific Ocean, about halfway between Hawaii and Australia
Size	10 sq. mi.
Capital City	Funafuti
Flag Description	Tuvalu's flag is light blue, with the flag of the United Kingdom in the upper hoist-side quadrant; the outer half represents a map of the country, with nine yellow five-pointed stars symbolizing the nine islands.
Independence	October 1, 1978 (from the United Kingdom)
Population	11,636 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional monarchy
Nationality	Tuvaluan
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Polynesian (96%); Micronesian (4%)
Major Language(s)	Tuvaluan; English; Samoan; Kiribati (on the island of Nui)
Major Religion(s)	Church of Tuvalu (a Congregationalist, 97%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Commonwealth Day, March; Easter, March–April; Queen's Birthday, June 12; International Children's Day, August 5; Independence Day, October 1; Prince of Wales's Birthday, November 13; Christmas, December 25

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Tuvalu's earliest known inhabitants were probably Polynesian settlers from Samoa and Tonga who first set foot on the islands nearly 2,000 years ago.

The first European to locate Tuvalu was Alvaro de Mendaña y Neyra (1541–95) of Spain in 1568, who was actually looking for Terra Australis. He reached the island of Nui but was unable to land. Peruvian slave traders (also known as "blackbirders") combed the Pacific between 1862 and 1864, and Tuvalu was one of the Pacific island groups most affected by their activity. More than 400 of the inhabitants of Funafuti and Nukulele were forcibly taken away, never to return.

During the late 1800s, a handful of European traders began to live on the islands, hoping to profit from whatever local resources were available. Unfortunately, the Europeans brought diseases hitherto unknown in the area, leading to

many deaths in Tuvalu. In 1865 the London Missionary Society, Protestant Congregationalists embarked on a mission to evangelize Tuvalu; the conversion of the inhabitants to Christianity was complete by the 1920s.

In 1892 the islands became part of a British protectorate that also included the Gilbert Islands. They christened Tuvalu the Ellice Islands. The protectorate became a British colony in 1915.

In 1943 Tuvalu was selected as an operations base for Allied forces that were fighting the Japanese in the Pacific, and thousands of U.S. marines were stationed there until December 1945.

In 1974 ethnic differences within the Gilbert and Ellice Islands colony caused the Polynesians of the Ellice Islands to vote for separation from the Micronesians of the Gilbert Islands (now known as Kiribati). In 1975 the Ellice Islands became the British colony of Tuvalu; independence followed on October 1, 1978. However, the country has remained a member of the British Commonwealth and recognizes Queen Elizabeth II (b. 1926) as its sovereign.

In 1997 Tuvalu's government adopted a strong stance on the need to control emissions of greenhouse gases in order for the low-lying island nation to survive. (Tuvalu's highest point is just 16 feet above sea level.) In 2000 Tuvalu became a member of the United Nations.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Tuvalu is part of Polynesia and consists of nine tiny atolls in the western Pacific Ocean. The total land area is only 10 square miles but the islands occupy over 800,000 square miles of ocean between Kiribati and Samoa. Five of the islands are low-lying coral atolls. On most of the islands there are many reefs and saltwater ponds, although the island of Nanumea boasts a freshwater pond, something rarely found on an atoll.

Tuvalu has poor quality soil, no streams or rivers whatsoever, and few remaining outcrops of forest undergrowth.

Fun Fact

In 2000 Tuvalu negotiated a contract with a Canadian entrepreneur to lease its Internet domain name ".tv" for \$50 million in royalties over the next dozen years. Unfortunately the Canadian was unable to raise the \$50 million within the required time period, and the contract went to someone else. These royalties could have tripled the Tuvalu GDP during the life of the contract, but the sum is unlikely to reach the big numbers Tuvalu hoped for.

Coconut palms grow in abundance across all the islands; but there is only enough soil to support subsistence agriculture for about three-quarters of the population. All other food must be imported. Water needs are met by catchment and storage facilities since the porous, low-lying atolls do not hold groundwater. The only land animals are the Polynesian rat, poultry, dogs, and pigs, all introduced by the European settlers.

The climate is pleasantly tropical with the temperatures ranging from 60°F to 96°F; the heat is moderated by trade winds blowing from the east for most

of the year. The area receives about 138 inches of rain annually, with the wet season occurring between October and March. Even though cyclone activity is rare, cyclones Gavin and Hina eroded an estimated 7 percent of the total surface area in 1997.

The Funafuti Conservation Area (FCA), made up of six uninhabited islets with native broadleaf forests and coral sand beaches, covers 21 square miles of water and land on the western side of the Funafuti atoll. Located within the protected area are coconut crabs, nesting seabirds, and turtles. A variety of colorful fish are also visible through the clear waters of the blue lagoon.

❁ ECONOMY

Tuvalu is the fourth smallest country in the world. Its land is unsuitable for agriculture on a large scale, and there is almost no potable water. In 2001 Tuvalu's government announced that the islands, whose highest point is barely 16 feet above sea level, may need to be evacuated in the event of rising sea levels that might deluge the islands.

Tuvalu has hardly any natural resources, and its main sources of income are foreign aid and fishing. Tourism is limited due to the geographical remoteness of the islands. Other sources of revenue include the sale of stamps and coins and remittances from Tuvaluans employed in the phosphate-mining industry of Nauru. Unfortunately Nauru is repatriating Tuvaluans because its phosphate resources are almost exhausted.

Tuvalu is heavily dependent on financial aid from other countries. It receives a lot of its annual income from an international trust fund established in 1987 by Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom; Japan and South Korea also support the fund. Due to good investment strategies and conservative use, the fund has grown from \$17 million to over \$35 million in just 12 years. The U.S. government is a major source of revenue as well, having paid Tuvalu around \$9 million in 1999 in accordance with a 1988 treaty on fisheries, and that total will probably continue to rise in the years to come.

Copra is the nation's only export. Pork and poultry are produced only for local consumption.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The highlights of Tuvalu's culture are adherence to traditional ways, friendliness to strangers, and a relaxed lifestyle. A traditional community system is prevalent on Tuvalu. Each family has its own set of specific tasks, or *salanga*, for which it is responsible to the community such as fishing, construction, defense, and so on. The special skills of a family are handed down from father to son.

The traditional music of Tuvalu consists of a number of dances, including *fakanau* and *fakaseasea*. The *fakanau* was performed by people standing and gently swaying their bodies. But the European missionaries perceived the swaying motion as *erotic*, and this traditional dance was eventually forbidden. The *fakaseasea*, performed to slower songs and less restrictive rules, is performed only by elders. Tuvalu also had a tradition of funeral singing called *kupu*.

The women wear a distinctive traditional dress, made from hand-dyed *pandanus* leaf strips with traditional patterns and colors. Men and women wear floral wreaths in their hair on special occasions. Banquets, coupled with traditional dancing and music, are often held at the Maneapas (meeting houses), the focal points of community and social life.

The Church of Tuvalu

There are usually friendly relationships among the various religions in Tuvalu, and government policy and practice contribute to the prevalent atmosphere. The dominant religion is the Church of Tuvalu, historically connected to the Congregational Church, which has the largest number of members. While there are no official figures on religious membership, the government estimates that 91 percent of the population belongs to the Church of Tuvalu. Other religions and Protestant sects are far behind: 3 percent of Tuvaluans are Seventh-day Adventists, 3 percent belong to Bahai, 2 percent are Jehovah's Witnesses, and 1 percent are Catholic. Also present are small numbers of Muslims, Baptists, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and atheists. Most followers of other religions or denominations live in Funafuti, the capital, except for the relatively large number of followers of the Bahai Faith on Nanumea Island.

Although Tuvalu's constitution provides for

freedom of religion, and there is no state religion, in practice government functions at the national and island council levels—such as the opening of Parliament—often include Christian prayers, clergy, or perspectives. Members of the Church of Tuvalu dominate most aspects of social and political life in the country, not surprising given that they make up such a high portion of the population. Moreover all nine traditional chiefs of the islands are members of the Church of Tuvalu.

However, a degree of social intolerance for non-Church of Tuvalu activities, particularly on some outer islands, has been reported. Unidentified persons have alleged that some residents of Nanumanga were stoned by fellow islanders when they left the Church of Tuvalu to start the Tuvalu Brethren Church, and the island council subsequently voted to ban the new church group in July 2003. The head of the Tuvalu Brethren Church filed a complaint against the island council, but the outcome is unknown.

Each Maneapa is unique in terms of decor and architecture. Christianity has had a strong influence on the lives of the people and is the predominant religion. Sundays are devoted to resting and attending church.

❁ CUISINE

The cuisine of Tuvalu is simple but quite good, and consists primarily of *fuaga mei* (breadfruit), coconut, and *taro* (a high-starch tuber grown in the Western parts of Africa). Though it has an acrid taste while raw, taro emits a pleasant nutlike flavor when cooked, and it is very useful because it can be boiled, fried, or baked. It is also used in soup, *pulaka* (swamp taro), plantains (cooking bananas); it is quite good served with cooked or raw fish, crayfish, pork, chicken, and local vegetables such as *laulu* (spinach). Foodstuffs are normally steamed, boiled, or roasted in underground ovens.

Many dishes are prepared with *lolo* (coconut cream). Tuvaluans also enjoy drinking *pi* (coconut milk). Other popular drinks include the twin K's: *kaleve* and *koa*, sour and very strong toddies of fermented coconut.

Tuvaluans eat tropical fruits, including *oolesi* (papaya) and bananas. Imported items such as flour, sugar, rice, salt beef, corned beef, and tea are gradually growing popular, especially among those who can afford them.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

In most parts of the world, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day (the first day of the year of the Gregorian calendar) are enthusiastically celebrated. In a staunchly Christian country like Tuvalu, this day assumes religious overtones, and the people of



Islanders perform a traditional dance. (AP Photo/Richard Vogel)

Tuvalu attend church services and welcome the new year with the ringing of church bells. This is a public holiday in Tuvalu.

❁ COMMONWEALTH DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Second Monday of March

Fun Fact

Tuvalu is one of the smallest and most remote countries on Earth, and only Vatican City has a smaller population.

Commonwealth Day is an annual celebration of the Commonwealth association and its members (most of which are former colonies of Britain). In some countries this day is also observed as the birthday of Queen Victoria (1819–1901), a former Queen of England. The occasion is marked by a interdenominational service in Westminster Abbey attended by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, the present head of the Commonwealth, and several other dignitaries. The queen delivers an address to the Commonwealth that is broadcast throughout the world by the BBC. This is a public holiday in Tuvalu, and all schools, government institutions, and many businesses are closed.

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a Christian feast that celebrates Jesus' Resurrection from the dead three days after his Crucifixion. It is sometimes called Resurrection Day. This day is of utmost importance because the Christian liturgical calendar is based on the date on which Easter falls each year.

The holiday is celebrated by Christians the world over on the first Sunday after Lent. They often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to offer prayers. The word *easter* is derived from the name of the Germanic fertility Goddess, Eostre (or Eastre). She was the revered mother goddess of the Saxon people of northern Europe. Easter eggs, once associated with Eostre and symbolic of new life, are now associated with the Christian festival.

Easter observances emphasize the resurgence of hope and a renewal of life. Being a staunchly Christian nation, Tuvalu holds many ceremonies and celebrations on this major Christian festival. In Tuvalu, as in other parts of the world, prayer services and worship begin quite early in the day. It is also a public holiday in Tuvalu and is largely celebrated by families and local villages with traditional songs and dancing

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

Fun Fact

Tuvalu has two places where crafts made by local women can be found: the Women's Handicraft Centre (near the airport) and the Funafuti Women's Craft Centre.

❁ QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 12

This is a common holiday observed by nearly all the former, as well as the present, colonies and dependencies of Britain. Since H.M. Queen Elizabeth II is the British sovereign, the countries that owed allegiance (and still do) to Britain celebrate her birthday. This happens to be a movable festival, celebrated on different dates in various countries. Tuvalu is a former protectorate that subsequently became a colony of Britain. Since it is still an associate member of the British Commonwealth, the Tuvaluans celebrate the Queen's Birthday as a public holiday.

❁ INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 5

International Children's Day (ICD) is celebrated by many nations. This holiday began in 1925, when the World Conference for the Well-Being of Children met in Geneva, Switzerland. It is usually (but not always) celebrated annually on June 1, although why this date was chosen remains uncertain.

June 1 has since been observed as the ICD by numerous countries, especially by Communist countries. For this reason Western nations usually celebrate the ICD on other days of the year (if at all), and there is often little or no awareness about these celebrations.

In Tuvalu this day is devoted to honoring all the country's children because they are the future of every nation. This holiday is in keeping with an old Polynesian tradition according to which each community honors its progeny. On this day Tuvaluan children lead their respective villages in celebrations and are treated to a traditional sumptuous feast. This is a public holiday in Tuvalu.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: October 1

This day is of great significance in the history of the island nation. It was on this day in 1978 that Tuvalu became independent from British rule. (The country had been a protectorate and subsequently a colony of Britain.) This is a two-day public holiday in Tuvalu, and all public and government organizations remain closed. The people celebrate this day with great fanfare, processions, dancing, and music. An air of gaiety and mirth surrounds the islands.

❁ PRINCE OF WALES'S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: November 13

The present Prince of Wales, H.E. Charles (son of H.M. Queen Elizabeth II) was born on this day in 1948. Tuvalu was once a protectorate and colony of Britain, and the inhabitants are still loyal to the British Crown. Like other members of the British Commonwealth, the Tuvaluans celebrate the birthdays of British royalty, including the Prince of Wales, as official holidays.

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a term derived from Old English *Christes mæsse* (meaning, "Christ's mass"). It refers to a holiday filled with great joy for Christians all over the world because it is the day on which they celebrate the birth of Jesus, whom they believe was the Son of God and the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. Being staunchly Christian, Tuvalu also holds ceremonies and celebrations on this important festival. The people of Tuvalu, like many devout Christians, attend special church services and visit friends and relatives. This is a public holiday and schools, government offices, and most businesses are closed.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Religious Holidays

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, sometimes called Holy Friday, Great Friday, or Mourning Friday, recalls Jesus' agony and death on the Cross. In Tuvalu devout Christians recall the sorrowful events of this day by gathering to read from the Psalms and Gospels, and to sing hymns about Jesus' death. There are also religious processions in some villages on this occasion.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

In Tuvalu preparations for childbirth begin about five or six months into a pregnancy; the actual delivery is usually performed at the home of the woman's

parents. Her mother gets things under way by choosing a midwife (*tufuga faka fanau*) who will care for her daughter until the child is born. If she cannot find a midwife, then she will do the job herself. In Tuvalu midwives are highly respected professionals. They are usually paid for their care with items of barter such as mats and food. The midwife's "tools of the trade," which she always has at the ready, include: an abdominal binder of pandanus leaves, called a *noa*; a suspensory belt, made from the *te fou* tree's (*faka fafine*) bark; a pad made out of the dried pith of the *pulaka*'s leafstalk, called a *pulu*; coconut oil; a few fresh yellow breadfruit leaves; and a knife or scissors, to cut the umbilical cord.

The *tufuga* visits the expectant mother two or three times a week to massage her abdomen, a procedure thought to keep the fetus in the correct position. During this preliminary period, the women of the mother-to-be's family make mats for her, and her husband's female kinsfolk make mats for the baby. Both families share the responsibility of preparing food for the ceremonial feasts that will follow the birth.

When the labor pains start, the midwife and her assistant get ready by having their tools at hand. Babies are customarily delivered with the mother in one of two positions: lying prone, on her back or sitting and reclining backward. Either position is believed to ease the delivery of the fetus. Once the placenta has been expelled, the midwife measures the cord to the side of the infant's waist, then ties and cuts it. Next she cleans the mother up, wraps the abdominal binder around the woman's waist, and attaches one end of the suspensory belt. The other end of the belt is then brought forward under the woman's buttocks and fastened at the front of the binder. This holds a vaginal pad, wrapped in a breadfruit leaf covered with coconut oil, securely in place.

❁ MARRIAGE

In Tuvalu, once a man has chosen the woman he wishes to marry, it is customary for him to ask his parents' approval. Although others among his relatives may express their opinions regarding his choice, his parents have the last word in the matter. Should his parents disapprove of the match, they may make their own choice. As in many cultures, tradition requires boys and girls to respect their parents' wishes.

In some communities, courting is forbidden, so males and females often meet through the offices of a third person, called a *fai fekau*. A more dangerous courting practice is known as *moetolo* ("sleep crawl"): The suitor sneaks into the woman's home when everyone else is fast asleep. Although such nocturnal visits are prearranged, the intruders are often pun-

Fun Fact

The term *cyclone* is usually used to refer to a hurricane that arises in the Pacific Ocean, although it can also denote a tornado at sea.

ished if they are caught in the act. When a girl's family has decided the suitor is unworthy of their daughter, punishment is almost certain. Young people brave enough to flout tradition frequently elope.

Another device used to get married is the *potu lama*, a torch made of coconut leaves. Each young man has his own *potu lama*. Sometimes a village undertakes the task of marriage negotiations by lighting the *potu lama* for one or more young men. The young men tell the village elders about the women they would like to marry. The older men then visit the woman's parents and ask their approval for the proposed marriage. If the woman's parents agree to the marriage, the young man's *potu lama* is lighted. If his proposal is rejected, his *potu lama* is not lighted, and the elder men approach the parents of other women that the young man admires.

For a marriage brokered in this fashion, the village that sponsored the lighting of the *potu lama* is responsible for the wedding ceremony and the wedding feast too. Everyone from that village contributes food, mats, clothing, or money (as decided by the leaders) for the occasion. For a traditional marriage ceremony, the two families begin to plan their contributions several weeks before the wedding. Each family must prepare a *laulau avaga*, a bed, for the couple. After the bride's family has made her bed, they present it to the bridegroom at the wedding feast. At the same time the bridegroom's family presents their bed to the bride. Both families are also expected to prepare food for the wedding feast, and they frequently compete to see which of them can provide the most food. The prepared foods, like the beds, are exchanged between the two families.

❁ DEATH

In Tuvalu church bells announce a death on the island. When people hear the bells tolling, they know that someone has died. As soon as the identity of the deceased is known, his or her acquaintances and relatives gather to mourn the individual's passing. The body is dressed and placed on new mats in the center of the house. Relatives can pay tribute to someone by donating money or cloth or by praising the achievements and contributions made by the individual to his or her family and the island community. The grave is usually dug by members of some volunteer or philanthropic organization such as the Boy Scouts or Boys' Brigade. Caskets are usually made from one of the family's canoes.

When it is time to bury the deceased, a pastor visits the relatives of the dead person. The coffin is then taken to the place where it is to be buried, and the pastor conducts the funeral service. The night of the funeral, the immediate family and other relatives gather to pray. Having prayed for the dead person, they sit down together for supper. The period of mourning, *faganoa*, can last anywhere from a few days to a few weeks. When the mourning period is over, a big feast, called the *aitagi*, is enjoyed by everyone.

Further Reading

Bill Aalbersberg and John Hay, *Implications of Climate Change and Sea Level Rise for Tuvalu: Report of a Preparatory Mission* (Apia, Western Samoa: South Pacific Regional Environment Programme, 1991); Simati Faaniu et al., *Tuvalu: A History* (Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies & Extension Services, University of the South Pacific and the Ministry of Social

Rising Sea Levels

The nine small islands that make up Tuvalu will be endangered should global warming continue to melt arctic glaciers. Low-lying Tuvalu, with barely 16 feet above sea level on average and no surrounding shelf, is extremely vulnerable to any rise in sea level caused by climate change, and any future sea level rise will likely destroy the atolls and the people who live on them.

During the last 10 years, Tuvalu's tiny atolls have lost 10 feet of beachfront. To make matters worse, the severity and frequency of storms has simultaneously increased. The people are concerned that the islands may eventually be submerged, and they are leaving the islands in growing numbers.

In 2001 the government announced that the islands' inhabitants will probably need to be evacuated if the oceans continue to rise. Plans are already in place to begin evacuating the nation's population

during the next decades to New Zealand or Niue, a small autonomous Pacific island associated with New Zealand that isn't threatened by sea-level rise. New Zealand has already agreed to accept an annual quota of 75 people. Australia, on the other hand, has refused the Tuvaluans' requests, presumably because of its rejection of the underlying basis of the Kyoto Protocol.

In 2002 then-prime minister Koloa Talake said he planned to sue the United States and Australia in the International Court of Justice at the Hague because those countries are responsible for the disproportionate production of carbon dioxide emissions. However, the suit was never filed because he was not reelected.

Unusually high tides in 2004 caused seepage that transformed much of Funafuti's interior into a salty lake, destroying already insufficient root crops.

Services, Government of Tuvalu, 1983); Gerd Koch, *The Material Culture of Tuvalu* (Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1983); Gerd Koch, *Songs of Tuvalu*, Guy Slatter, Trans. (Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific, Institute of Pacific Studies, 2000); Barrie Macdonald, *Cinderellas of the*

Empire: Towards a History of Kiribati and Tuvalu (Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 2001); Habtemariam Tesfaghiorghis, *The Implications of Population Growth for Tuvalu* (Canberra, Australia: Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australia National University, 1994).

Uganda

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Eastern Africa bordered by Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Tanzania, and Rwanda
Size	91,136 sq. mi.
Capital City	Kampala
Flag Description	Uganda's flag has six horizontal bands of equal size in alternating colors (from top to bottom) of black, yellow, and red. At the center of the flag is a superimposed white disk with the image of the national bird of Uganda, the red-crested crane. The image faces toward the hoist side.
Independence	October 9, 1962 (from the United Kingdom)
Population	27,269,482 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Ugandan
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Baganda (or Ganda; 17%); various other indigenous groups including Ankole (8%), Basoga (8%), Iteso (8%), Bakiga (7%), Langi (6%), Rwanda (6%)
Major Language(s)	English (official); Luganda (or Ganda); Swahili
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholics (33%); Protestants (33%); Indigenous beliefs (18%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Anniversary of the Government NRM-NRA, January 26; International Women's Day, March 8; Labor Day, May 1; Martyrs of Uganda Day, June 3; Independence Day, October 9

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Uganda's rich cultural past extends back at least into the Paleolithic era, and the region now occupied by the nation is known for its relatively long record of human habitation. The earliest evidence is stone tools found in the Kagera River Valley and in gravel deposits near Parra and Mweya, dated to between 100,000 and 50,000 years ago. Of particular significance are hand axes associated with the Acheulean culture, stone tools used by prehistoric hominids including the Neanderthals, *Homo erectus*, and early *H. sapiens*, and found in many other places such as Britain, France, Korea, Algeria, and India. Sometimes said to be the "signature tool" of the Lower Paleolithic age, such hand axes were a considerable improvement over earlier hand tools because the stone was chipped on both sides. This innovation made these early people at least as dangerous as the predators they often hunted. The people who

used the hand axes are thought to have been hunter-gatherers who lived in the open or in rock shelters. Many archaeologists and anthropologists believe they had already begun to use fire as well, at least 50,000 years ago.

The continent of Africa did not experience the long Ice Ages that occurred in Europe. The Wurm Glaciation, which covered Europe between 70,000 and 10,000 B.C.E., produced a cooler and wetter East Africa and a cooler and drier West Africa. The development of the Sangoan culture with its distinctive stone tools represents the most prevalent type of early human culture in Africa. Stone tools of the Sangoan culture, named after the Sango Bay on Lake Victoria (the type site), have been found in western Uganda along the Kagera River Valley and on hills around Mbarara. The Mousterian culture, also during the Stone Age, followed the Sangoan culture between 35,000 and 8,000.

The Magosian culture—evidenced in deposits of small stone tools—was named for the site at a water hole in Karamoja in northeastern Uganda; it flourished 7,000 to 5,000

years ago and is also known from Kalambo Falls, on the border between Zambia and Tanzania. Many beautiful quartz tools, similar to those of the Stillbay Stone Age culture found in Somaliland, have been found near Moroto, also in northeastern Uganda. Agriculture apparently reached Uganda between 2,000 and 3,000 years ago, then rapidly spread through western Uganda. At the same time, a hunting and food-gathering people, known for tools like those of the Wilton Stone Age culture, lived in caves and rock shelters near Lake Victoria. Some were eventually assimilated by the more settled Bantu farmers, while others retreated to the mountains.

During the 1960s archaeological work was concentrated on Bigo forts, village sites, and painted pottery, as well as on legendary associations with a mythical peoples known as the Bachwezi. Excavations at Bigo showed a two-phase occupation, one associated with the Bahima Bachwezi, the other with the Babito. In 1961 a rock shelter at Nsongezi, once used by Stone Age survivors, was reexcavated and dated to about 1,000 C.E. These people, thought to be related to present-day Bushmen, may have been responsible for the rock paintings found in Teso, at Kakoro in Bukedi, and on Lolui Island in Lake Victoria. At some as yet undetermined point during the last 1,200 years, ironworking came into Uganda, perhaps from the north. In 1957 the site at Bigo was found to have defensive ditches—cut 12 feet into solid rock, almost certainly made with metal tools—that stretch across nearly four miles. Excavations were also carried out at Kantsyore Island in Ankole and near Suam in Sebei, where dimple-based ceramics, early Iron Age pottery, and hut foundations were discovered.

Bantu-speakers near the shores of Lake Victoria developed the banana as a staple food about 1,000 years ago. Between 600 and 700 years ago the Chwezi, a Bantu subgroup, established settlements at Bigo in western Uganda. The Chwezi were depicted in legends as supernatural but probably were the ancestors of the region's present-day Hima and Tutsi herders. When Arab and European explorers first set foot in Uganda in the 19th century, the region had three main kingdoms: the Buganda, Karagwe, and Kitara. While the Bantu tribes migrated from West Africa and settled in major parts of Uganda thousands of years ago, the Nilo-Hamitic tribes arrived in eastern Uganda only 250 years ago. In modern Uganda the Bantu, Nilotics, Nilo-Hamitic, and Sudanic are the main tribes in Uganda.

There is an interesting legend behind the name *Uganda*, which was documented by a European, John Hanning Speke (1827–64), during his visit to the country with a group of Europeans in 1857. According to the legend a remarkable hunter named Uganda lived in a place called Unyoro. He was extremely poor and started hunting in order to feed his family. Soon he became a skilled hunter and was able to feed his entire community. Acknowledging

Kingdom of Buganda

The kings of Buganda did not value the lives of their subjects, and the royal family dictated the rituals practiced in the kingdom of Buganda. Burying people alive, torture, and mutilation were the norm. An Englishman who visited Buganda while Mutesa was king, John Hanning Speke, witnessed Mutesa's lack of regard for human life. As tokens of goodwill Speke and other Europeans had given some rifles to the king. As a live demonstration, Mutesa ordered a court page to fire at a random person outside the court, without giving it a second thought, much to the horror of the visitors.

his valuable and selfless service, people called him Kimeru, and he became the first king of Buganda.

European influence began to be felt in Uganda in the 19th century when an Italian Giovanni Miani (1810–72), who was working for the Egyptians, became the first European to enter Uganda. Other Europeans and Arabs followed. During this time Mutesa was the king of Buganda. Many Europeans, such as John Hanning Speke, documented their experiences in the kingdom of Buganda, which made for fascinating reading in the West.

In 1893 Uganda was declared a British protectorate and the British controlled it for the next 69 years. The independent state of the Republic of Uganda did not come into existence until 1962. The joy of freedom, however, was short-lived since civil wars in neighboring countries raised concerns related to national security with the sudden influx of refugees into Uganda. Also the kingdom of Buganda and its ruler, or *kabaka*, was promised autonomy by the first president of Uganda Milton Obote (1924–2005), at the time of independence. Obote did not keep that promise, however; he abolished the Bugandan monarchy and rewrote the constitution of Uganda.

In 1969 Idi Amin (1928–2003), following a successful military coup, came to power and unleashed an era of terror in Uganda. Shoot-at-sight orders were issued to silence the voices of protest, and more than 80,000 people lost their lives as a result of Amin's orders. In 1972 the Asian community in Uganda—third-generation descendants of workers brought to Uganda by the British colonial administration—were ordered to leave the country within 90 days, taking with them only the clothes they were wearing. At this time, while Uganda's economic situation was also steadily worsening, Amin forced the country into a war with Tanzania. Uganda lost, and Amin fled to Libya. Many human rights organizations put the death toll in Uganda under Amin's rule at about 300,000, possibly as high as 500,000.

The coups continued, and the country suffered under its dictatorial leaders until 1986, when the

National Revolution Movement–National Resistance Army seized power, and an interim government was established. President Yoweri Museveni (b. c. 1944) won free elections in 1994, 1996, and 2001. Under his leadership Uganda pulled out of the bloody Congo War and slowly began to improve its economy.

In the early 21st century, however, Uganda still faces grave challenges. The country must defend itself from antigovernment factions such as the Lord's Resistance Army and the West Nile Bank Front. Human trafficking is a cause for great concern. Also, the number of AIDS/HIV patients has increased at an increasingly devastating rate. In the villages it is estimated that one out of every four people is infected with the virus.

☼ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in the eastern part of the African continent, the Republic of Uganda is flanked by Kenya in the east, Democratic Republic of Congo in the west, Sudan in the north, Tanzania in the south, and Rwanda in the southwest. A major part of Lake Victoria lies within Uganda, and the capital city of Kampala is located in this area. Uganda is a landlocked, fertile, and well-watered country. Topographically the country has three distinct features: desert, swampy lowlands, and a fertile plateau with an average elevation of 4,000 feet.

Uganda's equatorial climate provides a lot of sunshine, moderated by the relatively high altitude of most areas of the country. The mean annual temperatures range from about 61°F in the southwestern highlands to 77°F in the northwest; but in the northeast, temperatures exceed 86°F about 254 days every year. Daytime temperatures average about 8–10 degrees warmer than nighttime temperatures in the Lake Victoria region,

and temperatures are generally about 14 degrees lower in the southwest.

Except in the northeast rainfall is well distributed. Uganda's southern region has two rainy seasons, usually beginning in April and again in October. Little rain falls in June and December. In the north occasional rains occur between April and October, while the period from November to March is often very dry.

☼ ECONOMY

Agriculture is the backbone of the Ugandan economy and the primary occupation of 80 percent of the population. Coffee is a major revenue generator. Uganda is also home to substantial natural resources with vast deposits of copper and cobalt. The economy has suffered, however, primarily due to the four-decade civil war. The country has mounting foreign debts, but the government has made efforts to improve economic conditions.

☼ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Uganda has a diverse culture. While the Arabs brought Islam to the nation, the Europeans introduced Uganda to Christianity, and Christians now make up two-thirds of the population, while the remaining one-third follows either Islam or traditional animist spirituality. English is the official language of Uganda, although Lagunda, a native language, is widely spoken by the general public and is taught in schools. Uganda is also home to many tribes that speak different languages and follow different customs and traditions. The four main ethnic tribes of Uganda are the Bantu, the Nilotics, the Sudanic Cushites, and Nilo-Hamitic Hamites.

Each tribe has its distinct culture and customs, but a shared love of dance and music has been passed on from one generation to the next. Some of the commonly played musical instruments are the *ndigindi*, a kind of lyre, the *amadinda*, or xylophone, the *lukeme*, a thumb piano, and the *entongoli*, an instrument much like the harp.

The center of Ugandan music is Kampala, which is famous for its *kadongo kamu*, an ancient African tradition of teaching that involves narrating stories in the form of songs; a guitar or a drum usually accompanies the sung narrative.

Ntandi is the home of the Pygmy people, who are famous for their artistic handicrafts. The Ankole people have preserved their cultural heritage by creating the Lake Mburo cultural village.

The people of Uganda generally prefer the Western style of dress, and traditional garb is worn mostly during special ceremonies. However, the men belonging to the Ganda (Baganda) tribe, the largest ethnic group in Uganda, and the Soga tribe, the fourth largest ethnic tribe, wear the traditional *kanzu*, which is a white robe, under their sport coats. The women of these tribes wear the *busuti*, a beauti-

The Pygmies

The Pygmies, who are also known as the people of the rain forest, live in some of the most inhospitable forests of Eastern Congo. These forests are located through Equatorial Africa, Cameroon, and Western Zambia. The Pygmies have been known to the world ever since Homer wrote the *Iliad* in the eighth century B.C.E. They are dark skinned and average less than 59 inches in height. The majority of the Pygmy people in Uganda belong to the Batwa, who live mainly in the mountainous Kabale, Kisoro, and Rukungiri districts of the southwest. As a result of colonialism and commercial development, much of their native rain forest has been destroyed, and they are now a dispossessed people. The dominant peoples of Uganda regard the Pygmies as outsiders. Without land and the ability to farm, they now find themselves forced to beg for their livelihood.

ful long dress, introduced by Christian missionaries in the late 19th century.

❁ CUISINE

Matoke (cooked banana) is a popular dish in Uganda. Most of the other Ugandan delicacies consist of beef or mutton with *ugali*, or maize (corn), as a starch. To make the *ugali*, cornmeal is added to boiling water and cooked into a thick porridge; it is later served on a flat board or plate. *Mkate mayai* (bread and eggs) is a favorite snack of Arab origin. It is a thin pancake made out of wheat dough filled with raw eggs and minced meat then fried on a hot plate after being folded. Beer is a favorite beverage in Uganda. *Pombe* (fermented banana beer) and *waragi* (a millet-based alcohol) are particularly popular.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The people of Uganda bid farewell to the old year and joyously welcome the new one, which embodies new hope and aspirations. In Uganda New Year's Day is celebrated in the company of one's family, friends, and acquaintances. All public and many private facilities are closed.

❁ ANNIVERSARY OF THE GOVERNMENT NRM-NRA

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 26

In 1986 Yoweri Museveni assumed power after a revolution led by the National Revolution Movement–National Resistance Army (NRM-NRA). Prior to the revolution Uganda had suffered under the oppressive regime of Idi Amin. The economy had collapsed, and the entire country was in a state of war. In the coup of 1986 Idi Amin was overthrown, and Museveni became the president.

Under Museveni Uganda began to build a solid economy. The government also took stock of human rights issues and worked alongside international human rights organizations to put an end to human trafficking and child labor.

Since this is a national holiday, all government offices, private institutions, schools, and colleges remain closed. Official speeches and military parades provide the focus for anniversary celebrations.

❁ INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 8

International Women's Day honors the contributions of women all over the world and highlights their human rights issues. It also pays tribute to the contributions women make to their societies. In Uganda the National Association of Women has initiated a drive to create awareness of women's issues and to stop violence against Ugandan women.

On this day government offices and schools remain closed. Special events take place all over the country, led by those in Kampala. Official speeches, exhibitions, and theatrical plays are highlights. Also, an official parade, consisting of women working in the police and armed forces, takes place in Kampala.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

Labor Day, also called May Day or Workers' Day, is celebrated in many countries of the world as a tribute to workers and to recognize their achievements and contributions to society.

Labor Day is marked in Uganda with rallies and meetings on workers' rights and liberties. The day is used to educate the people about their rights. All government, educational, and commercial establishments are closed on this day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ MARTYRS OF UGANDA DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 3

Martyrs of Uganda Day commemorates the killing of 32 African Roman Catholics and Protestants between the years 1885 and 1887 by Mwanga, the then-ruler, or *kabaka*, of Buganda. The *kabaka* wanted to eliminate all signs of Christianity from the kingdom.

In 1920 Pope Benedict XV (r. 1914–22) beatified the martyrs collectively and Pope Paul VI (r. 1963–78) canonized them as saints on October 18, 1964. June 3 is their feast day and is celebrated as Martyrs of Uganda Day. It is one of the most important holidays in Uganda.

On this day thousands of Ugandans flock to the site of the killing in Namugongo. For many Ugan-

Fun Fact

Europeans used the racially motivated Hamitic hypothesis, started by John Hanning Speke, to justify their ongoing exploitation of the African continent. These ideas were still in wide circulation until the 1950s, when Joseph Greenberg (in *The Languages of Africa*) introduced the use of geographical rather than racial terms for Africa's language families. Greenberg effectively ended the term's linguistic use, but the term *Hamitic* is still used in some anthropological nomenclature.

dans it is an important annual pilgrimage so they use any means of transportation available to reach Namugongo. Special prayers are offered in honor of the martyrs, and choirs sing songs in Luganda to the sound of drums. Special plays are held, reflecting on important events in the life of Jesus.

☼ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 9

Every year the people of Uganda celebrate their independence from the United Kingdom on October 9, 1962, when its days as an exploited colony were finally brought to an end. It is a day for joyful celebration as well as an opportunity to take stock of the country's progress toward becoming a true democracy. On this day members of Uganda's government give speeches, parades and huge fairs are held, and the nation's flag flies high.

One of the largest of the fairs is organized by the Uganda Manufacturer's Association (UMA). The week-long international fair attracts tens of thousands of people, including schoolchildren from different parts of the country. One of the many booths at the 2005 fair was that of the United Wildlife Education Centre, whose mission is educating citizens about the importance of conserving Uganda's biodiversity. The activities included snake shows, quizzes, and games for schoolchildren, and the sale of herbal medicines. A display of animal skulls at the show was intended to inform the public about wildlife poaching and the need to stop the destruction of our wildlife.

Because October 9 is a national holiday, all schools, government offices, and many businesses are closed.

Religious Holidays

☼ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics and some Protestants

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, also called Mourning Friday, Holy Friday, or Black Friday, falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent, a 40-day period of fasting and repentance. On this day Christians recall the Crucifixion of Jesus. In Uganda people attend prayer services in church and reflect on Jesus' life and teachings. Choirs sing devotional songs, and plays based on the life of Jesus are performed as part of the solemn Good Friday observance in Uganda. In some parts of Uganda Christians walk in huge processions, some carrying crosses, reenacting Jesus' final journey to Golgotha.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

☼ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection from the dead three days after his Crucifixion. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over because it is the most important holiday of the liturgical calendar and a time for great rejoicing. Many other Christian holidays are scheduled according to the date on which Easter falls every year such as Pentecost, Ascension Day, and Good Friday.

In many parts of Uganda Protestants and Roman Catholics celebrate Easter jointly. Huge feasts are prepared and dishes made from goat meat are very popular. Many Ugandans visit their extended families in the countryside since Easter is a day of celebration for the entire family. In church, prayers and the narration of Easter stories from the Bible are a part of the Easter observance.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

☼ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

In the West Christians celebrate Jesus' birth on December 25, although no one knows the exact date of his birth. The weather in Uganda is hot during Christmas because Uganda is an equatorial nation where December is a summer month. In the week preceding Christmas, people buy new clothes and special gifts for those they love. The people in urban areas also send Christmas cards to their friends and loved ones. It is traditional for Ugandans to congratulate each other for being fortunate enough to add one more Christmas to their age. Families attend church on Christmas Eve and celebrate the joyous occasion by singing and dancing through the night.

Huge Christmas trees are beautifully decorated in many Ugandan cities, and the whole of Uganda echoes with the sound of carols that are sung throughout Christmas week. All public and private institutions remain closed on Christmas. A lavish feast is prepared for this special day and goat meat is a Christmas favorite.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

☼ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26

The day after Christmas is known as Boxing Day, after an old British tradition of giving gifts to one's servants on the day after Christmas. The name *Boxing Day* is thought to come from the church alms boxes in which donations for the poor were collected

throughout the year. On the day after Christmas these boxes were opened, and the contents distributed to the needy. Uganda's observance of Boxing Day, an additional day off following Christmas, is a remnant of its colonial ties to Great Britain. This day is also celebrated as Family Day or the Feast of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ WORLD BIRD FESTIVAL

Observed in: Ngamba Island

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: A period in October, every two years

Since 2001 an international event called the World Bird Festival on Ngamba Island has been held in Uganda every other year. The objective of the festival is to draw people closer to nature, and it is the largest bird festival in the world. Ngamba, a beautifully forested island in Lake Victoria near Kampala, the capital of Uganda, is the perfect venue for the event as it is home to a large number of birds.

A month-long treat for bird lovers, the festival offers a wide variety of events, including bird watching and cultural activities connected with the lives and habits of native birds. In 2001 the event was attended by more than 300,000 bird lovers from around the world, and more than 88 countries participated in the 1,400 events. During the festival people attend lectures, seminars, and workshops, as well as participate in guided nature walks. Children and adults alike enjoy screenings of films on birds and nature. Other events include painting exhibitions, poetry readings, music, and theater.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

In Uganda the birth of a child is celebrated with great joy once it has been determined that the baby is safe and healthy. Women in particular rejoice during these celebrations. It is believed that the child does not belong only to its mother but is in fact the child of the entire village. The child receives special treatment and is showered with love by all the people. Nature plays an important role in the name given to a newborn child. For example, if a child is born on a rainy day, his or her name would be related to rain.

❁ COMING OF AGE

In Uganda the initiation ceremonies for boys and girls take place when they reach puberty. At that time they are taken away from the community for a period of

Imbalu Dance of the Bagishu People

The *imbalu* dance is a part of the initiation ceremonies of the Bagishu boys. The Bagishu believe boys cannot make the transition to manhood unless they have been circumcised. The Bagishu initiation ceremony also requires each initiate to dance for 21 days to achieve spiritual powers and become a man. Without undergoing this ceremony, even an elderly man is not regarded as a man and is looked down on by other people.

weeks and instructed about adult life. In some tribes dancing is an important part of a boy's initiation ceremony. The *imbalu* (ceremonial initiation dance) is the highlight of the mass initiation ceremonies of the Bagishu tribe, which is part of the Bantu ethnic community. This dance is meant to celebrate life, adulthood, and the longevity of the family.

During the girls' initiation ceremony, it is customary for old women to beat the drums. These elderly women also shoulder the responsibility of narrating morality stories to the girls. They assume the role of teachers and help girls to understand the complexities of womanhood.

About 5 percent of the women in Uganda have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM) practiced in the Kapchorwa district. Although the government publicly condemns FGM, there is no law specifically prohibiting FGM at this time.

❁ MARRIAGE

Marriage is the most respected institution in Uganda. But it can also be an expensive affair since lavish weddings are important for maintaining or raising one's social status. The wedding customs and traditions vary from tribe to tribe. Polygamy is permitted in most traditions. Women are responsible for taking care of the home and raising children, while men are the breadwinners of the family. In marriage ceremonies the negotiating and payment of the *lobola* (dowry) plays a vital role.

In the Acholi region prospective grooms gather to perform a ceremonial dance (called the *larakaraka*) in the presence of young women of marriageable age. This event serves as a meeting place for prospective couples. However, if the prospective groom hopes to win a wife, it is imperative that he perform a flawless dance. That is because in Acholi people believe that, if one is a bad dancer, then he will most likely die a bachelor. Similarly the girls perform a dance number called the *ding ding* to attract handsome men.

During the marriage ceremony a chorus of women sings wedding songs. These songs are filled with good wishes for the bride, congratulating her on becoming a selfless and true community member.



The king of Uganda's Buganda tribe, one of Africa's most glorious and powerful 19th-century kingdoms, and his new wife, the queen, step out of church after their wedding at an Anglican Cathedral near Kampala, Uganda. (AP Photo/Peter Busomoke)

❁ DEATH

The Baganda tribe of Uganda starts preparing graves for its people while they are still children. In Uganda women are given the sacred right to sing the dirge, or *dirje*, following a death in the family. A Bantu tradition, this is a duty they must perform for several days after a family member dies. The Bantu also believe that after death the soul becomes a ghost and retains the personality of the deceased. If the soul is not pleased, he or she will make life unbearable for surviving family members and bring disease and death to them. It is also believed that the ghost will be reborn into the same family two years after death.

Further Reading

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Ukraine

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Eastern Europe, bordering the Sea of Azov, the Black Sea, Poland, Romania, Belarus, Moldova, Russia, Slovakia, and Hungary
Size	233,090 sq. mi.
Capital City	Kiev (Kyiv)
Flag Description	The Ukraine flag has two equal horizontal bands of azure and golden yellow, representing grain fields under a blue sky.
Independence	August 24, 1991 (from the USSR)
Population	47,425,336 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Ukrainian
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Ukrainian (78%); Russian (17%)
Major Language(s)	Ukrainian (official; 67%); Russian (24%)
Major Religion(s)	Eastern Orthodox Churches including Ukrainian Orthodox (19%); Ukrainian Greek Catholic (6%); Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox (2%); None (38%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day (Gregorian calendar), January 1; New Year's Day (Julian calendar), January 14; Ukrainian Day, January 22; International Women's Day, March 8; Labor Day, May 1; Victory Day, May 9; Constitution Day, June 28; Independence

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

What is now the Ukraine occupied a prime location along the fabled Silk Road, a region traversed by various cultures. The Ukraine's history began during the late Neolithic period, sometime between 4500–3000 B.C.E. Called the Cucuteni (in Romania) or Trypillian culture (after the Ukrainian Trypillia village) it was an agrarian urban culture—perhaps the first in Europe—located in the countries now known as Romania, Moldova, and Ukraine, and has been identified from 2,000 sites. The sites range in size from small villages to huge settlements with hundreds of structures. Although locations in Romania and Moldova have been suggested as the cultural center, one at least was apparently what is now the village of Trypillia in the Ukraine. The people raised crops and cared for livestock, mostly cattle (but also including goats, swine,

and sheep). That they were hunters too is attested to by the remains of wild animals. Whether they were Indo-Europeans is uncertain, but the ceramics found indicate that the culture was at least influenced by the Indo-Europeans.

Between 700 and 200 Scythian nomads from the area now called Iran occupied the southern and eastern parts of present-day Ukraine.

Much of what is known about the Scythians is based on Greek histories, because it is currently believed they had no system of writing. (However, this may not be true. A silver dish found in the Ziwiye hoard, a treasure of gold and silver metalwork and ivory [dated 680–25] has as yet undeciphered inscriptions that may be some type of Scythian writing.) They were described by the Greeks as skilled archers and were also widely renowned for their horsemanship. It was further reported that they buried their important people in kurgans, a type of burial mound found in Eastern Europe and Siberia. Excavations of kurgans have revealed that Scythian women and men wore the same clothing and fought side by side. One

burial site contained the skeletons of a Scythian man and woman, each with weapons including axes and arrowheads.

From about the third or second century the Zarubintsy culture, now known from about 500 separate excavations, occupied an area that stretched from north of the Black Sea west toward the Vistula Basin. The Zarubintsy culture, like the Trypillian culture, and its successor, the Chernyakhov culture, was a mixture, combining elements of the the Celtic La Tène culture with the those of the nomadic Scythians and the Sarmatians, particularly in ceramics and weapons. These people raised crops and kept livestock in addition to hunting. They cremated their dead and buried the ashes in urns or pits. This culture was overrun by the Goths in the third century C.E., becoming what archaeologists call the Chernyakhov culture.

Beginning in the second century the Bulgars, a Central Asian people, began moving into the Ukraine region, and by the fourth century had assimilated what remained of the Sarmatian culture. A beautiful goblet made of gold, discovered in the Poltava region of Ukraine, is a fine example of Bulgar metalworking. When some Bulgar groups became embroiled in a civil war, they fell to the Khazars, a seminomadic Turkic people, in 568. In 882 the Rus moved in from Scandinavia and founded a state known as Kievan Rus with its capital at Kiev. At the end of the 10th century Kiev was already a significant center of culture. A series of internal wars divided the people of Kievan Rus, making them easy prey for invading Mongols and Turks, and in 1520 the Ottoman Empire controlled Ukraine.

By the middle of the 17th century eastern Ukraine was part of Russia, and by the end of the 18th century Austria controlled the western region of Ukraine. Following the Russian Revolution in 1917 Ukraine was briefly an independent country, but Poland and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) divided it between them in 1922, and much of central and eastern Ukraine became a republic of the USSR.

During World War II Ukrainian forces fought both the Nazis and the Soviet army, and Kiev was recognized as a “hero city” at the end of the war. At this time the USSR–Ukraine border was extended to include most of Ukraine. Then when Ukraine was on the brink of an economic and social recovery, it suffered a serious setback, caused by the terrible Chernobyl disaster in 1986. Chernobyl, just 110 miles north of Kiev, was the site of a nuclear power station. In April 1986 a chemical explosion at the nuclear station resulted in an uncontrollable fire that released radioactive smoke over the skyline of Europe.

Fun Fact

Many English-speaking people used to refer to “the” or “The” Ukraine, which suggests a region, not a nation. Just as it is now incorrect to say “The Sudan,” “the” Ukraine is considered incorrect, and some find it offensive.

Thousands of people lost their lives and millions developed severe health problems, including cancer. Ukraine has still not recovered from this disaster.

With the collapse of the USSR in the early 1990s, Ukraine regained its independence in 1991. The country is a founding member of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Ukraine is the second largest country in Europe after Russia. It shares borders with Russia, Belarus, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova. The Black Sea and the Sea of Azov form its maritime borders. For the most part, Ukraine consists of fertile plains and low hills. The western region of the country is mountainous and contains the Carpathian range, the highest peak of which is Mount Hoverla at 6,762 feet. The Crimean peninsular region is also mountainous. There are around 3,000 rivers that flow through Ukraine.

Ukraine enjoys a temperate continental climate. Winters are mild with snowfall occurring everywhere except the southern region. All rivers and lakes freeze during winter. Summers are quite hot and dry, with occasional rainfall. Ukraine has rich and fertile soil, and large tracts of land are used to cultivate food crops. More than half of Ukraine is covered with fields of wheat, barley, rye, oats, and sugar beets, as well as poppies, mustard, and sunflowers. The forests of Ukraine have oak, maple, linden, and ash trees. Willow and aspen, silver fir, beech, and spruce are also abundant here.

Ukraine is an ideal habitat for animal life such as wolves, foxes, martens, and gazelles. There are also 350 species of birds and 200 species of freshwater fish.

ECONOMY

Prior to the disintegration of the USSR, Ukraine was an important agricultural and industrial center. Currently the country depends on Russia for many factors that affect its economy, such as the supply of energy and natural gas. The nation is working toward rebuilding and stabilizing its economy, and has undertaken a series of economic reforms to this end.

The major industries of Ukraine consist of coal, electric power, ferrous and nonferrous metals, machinery and transport equipment, chemicals, food processing, grain, sugar beets, sunflower seeds, vegetables, beef, and milk. Ukraine conducts trade with many nations including Russia, China, Turkey, Germany, Belarus, the United States, Poland, and Italy.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Ukraine, even though it was merged with Russia for a long time, has a distinct culture and a separate language. The country is the birthplace of borscht (or *borsch*), a hearty soup usually made of beets, as well

as painted eggs, and Cossack song and dance traditions. The Ukrainian language more closely resembles the original ninth-century Slavonic language than Russian and Belarussian.

Ukrainian literature can be traced back to the 12th century. The mid-18th century wandering Ukrainian philosopher Hryhorii Skovoroda (1722–94) is world famous. He was known as the Ukrainian Socrates and authored both poems and philosophical tracts. Ukrainian writers were an important factor in dismantling USSR rule in the country, and the Union of Ukrainian Writers in Kiev was said to be instrumental in bringing about independence from the USSR in 1991.

Ukrainian music is centuries old and began as oral *bylyny* (epic narrative poems) and *dumas*, long ballads glorifying the exploits of the Cossacks. Ukrainian folk music was developed by the *kobzar*, wandering minstrels of the 16th and 17th centuries. During the 18th century, *bandura* (a stringed instrument resembling a lute) choirs became popular, and the Ukrainian Bandura Chorus from Kiev still performs worldwide. Mykola Lysenko (1842–1912) and Nina Matvienko, renowned singer and songwriter, are among noted musical names from Ukraine.

Ukrainian architecture is dominated by church buildings, which have been greatly influenced by the Orthodox Church. Unique wooden churches, with wooden onion-shaped domes, held together without nails, are a Ukrainian specialty. The USSR authorities, in a bid to crush Ukrainian identity and nationalism, destroyed many such churches. Ukrainian painting and iconography are also popular forms of expression for the people. Most of the early paintings have religious themes. Church murals, mosaics, and frescoes are evidence of the nation's artistic style.

❁ CUISINE

Ukrainian cuisine is famous for its diversity and flavor. The most popular Ukrainian meal is called borscht (*borsheb*, or borscht), a thick soup made primarily with beets, but also prepared with meat, mushrooms, beans, and prunes. Borscht is the country's national dish. Other soups made of mushroom, bean, and pea, and soups with dumplings are also popular. Ukrainians consume generous amounts of dairy products, such as cottage cheese pancakes, *riazhanka* (fermented baked milk), and *nalysnyky* (cheese-filled crepes). Meat is typically boiled, fried, or stewed.

Desserts are usually laden with honey and fruit, mainly cherries and plums, and often baked into sweet breads. Some of these desserts are *pampushky* (a fritter), *baba* (a rich cylindrical cake soaked with a rum and sugar syrup), and honey cakes. For special occasions such as Christmas, the Ukrainians make *kutia*, a mixture of cooked wheat, poppy seeds, and honey, served cold. Ukrainian meals are considered incomplete without plenty of vodka.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, and is celebrated as New Year's Day all over the world. Celebrations and revelry begin on the evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve). Even though the start of the new year on the Julian calendar continues to be celebrated in mid-January in Ukraine, people observe the Western holiday as well, since Ukraine adopted the Western, or Gregorian, calendar in 1917. They decorate their new year tree, cook festive dinners, buy presents, and go to parties. This day is usually spent with family and close friends. Ukrainians believe that Ded Moroz (Santa Claus) comes on New Year's Eve and puts gifts under the tree. They also make their new year resolutions and feast on this day. It is a national holiday and schools and offices are closed.

See also Volume III: CHRISTMAS

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: January 13–14

According to the Julian calendar, January 14 is New Year's Day. Although Ukraine adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1917, this day continues to be a celebrated holiday cherished by Ukrainians and other members of the Eastern Orthodox Church. On New Year's Day, the Orthodox Church celebrates both the Feast Day of St. Basil and commemorates the Circumcision of Jesus.

❁ UKRAINIAN DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January 22

On this day, which is also called Unity Day, Ukraine was first declared independent from the USSR in 1922. The celebrations are relatively quiet. Government authorities begin this day with wreath-laying ceremonies at Taras Shevchenko and Mykhailo Hrushevsky monuments. There is also an elaborate celebration at the Kiev National Opera House in the evening. People commemorate this day with rallies, musical performances, and forming "human chains" in the streets.

Fun Fact

The word *vodka* comes from *voda* (which means "water") and can be loosely translated as "a wee drop."

❁ INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 8

Fun Fact

The height of Scythian power in Ukraine coincided with the lives of mathematician Pythagoras (582–496), Gautama Buddha (c. 563–483), Confucius (551–479), and Aeschylus, the Greek playwright (525–456).

As with Labor Day, there are conflicting stories about the origins of this holiday. Some say that International Women's Day was established after the Second International Conference of Socialist Women of 1910, held in Copenhagen. Others believe that it started in other countries sometime between 1900 and 1910. Women workers staged protests as early as 1857 in New York City for better working conditions and better pay. Since 1913, however, this day has been dedicated to the appreciation of women around the world.

On this day in Ukraine, men present women with gifts and flowers. At home it is customary for the men to take over all domestic tasks and give the women a day off from chores.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to recognize the important role workers play in building nations and societies. While the earliest celebrations of May Day are ascribed to pagan holidays observed by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages, the more recent origins of the holiday can be attributed to a declaration in 1889 by the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, which declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. In Ukraine workers hold marches on the streets and organize special meetings. This day is also signifies the commencement of spring holidays in the country. People relax and enjoy this holiday.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

Fun Fact

Scythian warrior-women are likely to have given rise to Greek stories of the Amazons.

❁ VICTORY DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 9

Victory Day commemorates the 1945 defeat of German Fascists by the Soviets and their allies during World War II. This is one of the most celebrated national holidays in Russia and the other countries that were a part of the USSR. People go to see military parades and festive demonstrations. They lay wreaths and flowers on the graves of soldiers and those who died in the war. Family and friends congratulate veterans who wear their uniforms and medals on this day.

❁ CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 28

Constitution Day, also called St. Vladimir Day, celebrates the signing of the Ukrainian Constitution in 1996. Concerts of popular Ukrainian singers are held in various venues, and the national media broadcast special patriotic shows. Since this is a relatively new holiday in Ukraine, there are not yet any traditions associated with this observance. This day also commemorates the feast day of St. Vladimir, or King Volodymyr, Grand Duke of Kiev and all of Russia, who introduced Christianity to Russia in 988.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 24

On this day in 1991 Ukraine became independent from the USSR and was declared a sovereign state. This day is celebrated all over Ukraine with festivals, military parades, and performances by military orchestras.

Religious Holidays

❁ CHRISTMAS EVE/DAY

Observed by: Orthodox Christians
Observed on: January 6–7

Christmas is a day of celebration for Christians all over the world because it celebrates the birth of Jesus, although no one knows when he was born. In Ukraine Christmas is celebrated according to the Julian calendar, as in other Orthodox Christian countries, on January 7. Ukrainian Christmas customs are based not only on Christian precepts, but primarily on those of the pre-Christian pagan culture and spirituality, elements of which survive to this day, hidden by a veneer of Christianity. When Christianity was brought to Ukraine in 988, the pagan religion and the traditions

Sviata Vecheria (Holy Supper)

Sviata Vecheria, or Holy Supper, was once a pagan feast that has been transformed into a Christian ritual, symbols and all. First, before anyone can be seated, two tablecloths cover the table: one is for the ancestors of the family, because Ukrainians believe that their souls visit the family on Christmas Eve to share the Holy Supper; the second is for the family's living members. Pagans believed that ancestors were benevolent spirits who, when shown proper respect, would bring good fortune to the living. A bit of hay is spread under the table and both tablecloths to remind those gathered that Jesus was born in a manger. There is always an extra place setting for the family's ancestors. Three braided, circular loaves of bread, called *kolach*, are stacked in the middle of the table, and a candle is placed in the center of the one on top. The three rings of bread symbolize the Holy Trinity; their circular shape is symbolic of eternity.

One of the most important Ukrainian customs is placing a sheaf of wheat, or mixed grain, stalks under the icons kept in the house. The stalks are called *didukh* (which means "grandfather") because they represent the family's ancestors, and Ukrainians believe that the spirits of their ancestors will reside in the stalks during the Christmas holidays.

Once the *didukh* has been positioned in the place of honor, the father (or head of the household) places a bowl of *kutia* (boiled wheat mixed with poppy seeds and honey) beside it. *Kutia* is the most important food of the Sviata Vecheria; it is known as God's food. A jug of *uzvar* (a mixture of 12 different stewed fruits), called God's drink, is also served.

Once the preliminary rituals have been performed, the father offers each member of the family a piece of bread dipped in honey, previously blessed by a priest, and the family prays. After the prayers, the father extends his best wishes to everyone with the greeting, "Khrystos razhdaietsia" ("Christ is born"), and everyone sits down to enjoy their 12-course meatless Holy Supper. The first course served must always be *kutia* because it is the main dish of the feast. Next, borscht (a hearty soup of beets or other vegetables) accompanied by *vushka* (boiled dumplings filled with chopped mushrooms and onions). The third course is some variety of fish, which can be prepared in a number of ways: baked, broiled, fried, served cold in aspic, fish balls, or marinated herring. The fourth course is *varenyky* (boiled dumplings filled with cabbage, potatoes, buckwheat grains, or prunes). *Holubtsi* (stuffed cabbage) is also one of the courses, and the meal concludes with *uzvar*.

associated with it were too deeply rooted in the people for the church to wipe them out utterly. It was more efficient, and prudent, to adopt a policy of converting most of the ancient customs and incorporating them. In this way many Christian holidays began. The ancient pagan feast associated with the winter solstice and those associated with fertility are now Christian Christmas customs.

In Ukraine, the Christmas festivities begin on Christmas Eve (January 6) and end on the Feast of the Epiphany. The Christmas Eve supper, or Sviata Vecheria (Holy Supper), brings the family together to share dishes prepared especially for the occasion and to begin their holiday with customs and traditions that reach back to antiquity. The rituals of Christmas Eve are dedicated to God, to the welfare of the family, and to the remembrance of ancestors. When the first star appears in the night sky, thought to be the star of Bethlehem, the family gathers for Sviata Vecheria (Holy Supper), a 12-course vegetarian meal. The pagans considered the meatless dishes sacrifices to their deities, and the 12 courses represented the 12 full Moons of the year. Orthodox Christians have continued the tradition of meatless dishes because the Church requires a fast before Christmas, which is called the Little, or Lesser Lent,

to distinguish it from Great Lent, the 40-day fast observed before Pascha. The number of courses have been adapted to symbolize Jesus' 12 Apostles.

The traditional dishes served include *kutia*, *vushka*, some type of fish, *vareniki*, *holubtsi*, and three loaves of *kolach* (a special Christmas bread).

On Christmas Day, the festivities continue with church services and special Christmas delicacies. Traditionally families gather at lunch or dinner to celebrate Christmas with a special feast. A variety of meat items are served, especially goose and pork.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ FEAST OF JORDAN

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: January 19

On the eve of Jordan (January 18), families gather to share another *vechera* ("supper") similar to the Sviata Vechera enjoyed on Christmas Eve. This night is called Schedrij Vechir, which, loosely translated, means "bountiful night."

Jordan Day, also known as Epiphany Eve or Jordan Day, commemorates Jesus' Baptism by John the Baptist in the river Jordan, and falls on the eve of the Feast of Orthodox Epiphany. On this day special



Caroling in Ukraine

Many Ukrainian Christmas Eve traditions are solemn events, but caroling is a joyful and merry custom. The Christmas carols of Ukraine are of pre-Christian origin, as are many of the traditions enjoyed during the Christmas season, and there are two main varieties: the *koliadky*, sung on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day; and the *shchedrivky*, sung during the Feast of the Epiphany. Both the *koliadky* and *shchedrivky* are the most ancient Ukrainian folk songs, and reflect the country's pagan past, but many have been Christianized. One pagan carol is about a landowner awakened by a swallow (a herald of spring) and told to get ready to receive three guests: the Sun, the Moon, and the rain. In the Christian version the three guests have become Jesus, St. Nicholas, and St. George.

Ukrainian carols cover a wide range of subjects; though many have been rewritten to deal with Jesus' birth and its attendant festivities, others remain purely pagan and contain mythological elements from Ukraine's ancient past. The content of another group is focused primarily on Ukrainian history between the ninth and 12th centuries and relate the heroic deeds of the people's favorite. Most of the carols, however, are songs that glorify the country's agrarian past and its people.

In the Ukraine caroling is not a simple matter and requires a great deal of planning and thought. For example, each group must have a leader, someone to carry a bag and collect the gifts people give the group; another holds a stick to which a six-pointed star, with a light at the center, is attached to a long stick; this symbolizes the star over Bethlehem. And one person must be dressed as a goat. Some groups carry musical instruments with them including violins, a *tsymbaly* ("dulcimer") or the *trembita* (a wooden pipe between eight and ten feet in length, an instrument used in the Carpathian Mountains by the Hutsuls).

And carolers cannot simply stroll from house to house singing. It is actually a demanding performance. First the carolers must ask permission to sing. If the people of the household say "yes," then they enter the house and sing carols for everyone in the family, including the smallest children. Then the carolers perform a funny skit involving the goat. The goat that accompanies every caroling group originated in pagan fertility festivities. The goat represented the god of fertility; in the skit the goat dies and is then resurrected, following a common mythological motif. The goat's death also symbolized the death of winter and the birth of spring. Both of these pagan celebrations fit neatly into Christian mythology.

prayer services are held in all the churches in Ukraine, and blessed water is distributed to all parishioners, who then keep it in their homes throughout the year. Ukrainian families celebrate this day with a special feast.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EPIPHANY

❁ HOLY WEEK

Observed by: Orthodox Christians

Observed on: Begins on Lazarus Saturday

Easter, called Pascha in Eastern Orthodox Churches (because it is thought that the Last Supper shared by Jesus and his disciples was a Seder), and all of its related observances are known as "movable feasts" because the date of Pascha is recalculated every year based on the lunar calendar. The exact date each year is set to be observed on the Sunday after the first full Moon on or after the day of the vernal equinox. The Paschal cycle includes approxi-

mately 10 weeks before and seven weeks following Pascha. The 10 weeks before Pascha are sometimes called the period of the Triodion, which includes the three weeks preceding Great Lent (the "pre-Lenten period"), the 40 days of Lent, and Holy Week. (The 50 days after Pascha are known as the Pentecostarion.)

Devout Orthodox Christians observe the Great Lent—the six weeks (40 days) preceding Palm Sunday—and Great Week (Holy Week), which precedes Pascha (Easter). Lazarus Saturday begins Holy Week, or Great Week, eight days before Pascha. On this day, Orthodox Christians remember how Jesus raised his friend Lazarus from the dead. According to the Bible, he waited four days, until Lazarus was dead, before answering Martha and Mary's call. Jesus knew that his own death on the Cross was near. He knew that his own death was approaching and raised Lazarus from the dead so that the disciples would believe that he had power over life and death and was indeed "the resurrection and the life." This was the miracle that prepared the way for Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem.

On Lazarus Saturday believers often prepare palm fronds by knotting them into crosses in preparation for the procession on Palm Sunday. In the Russian Orthodox Church, the custom developed of using pussy willows instead of palm fronds because

Fun Fact

"Carol of the Bells," a popular carol in the United States, was actually a Ukrainian *shchedrivka* about a swallow who goes to a landowner's house and tells him to come out and see how rich he is, how many calves he has, and so on.

palm fronds are not readily available. Since the kind of branches to be used is not established, some Orthodox believers use olive branches.

Palm Sunday, or the Triumphant Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, falls on the last Sunday before Pascha. Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, commemorating the last week of Jesus' mortal life. The first three days of Holy Week recall Jesus' last teachings to his disciples. These teachings inspire the readings and hymns. The Gospels are read at Matins and Liturgy, and the entire Psalter and the four Gospels up to the point of the Lord's Passion are read during services on the first three days of Holy Week. Jesus was the prophet of Christianity, and Christians believe he was the Son of God incarnate and the second person of the Holy Trinity: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Palm Sunday is as much about Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem as it is about the beginning of his journey to the Cross. His arrival in Jerusalem was indeed the way to the Cross.

Jesus had already foretold his betrayal and Resurrection to his disciples on the way to Jerusalem from Judea. The day was April 10, 30 C.E., according to some calculations. They stopped at the Mount of Olives, near Bethany, and Jesus sent two disciples to fetch a donkey and its foal that were tied at the crossway of two roads. They did so and placed their clothes on the foal to provide a comfortable seat. The disciples then cut branches and covered the path, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the prediction of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. People welcomed him by waving palm and olive branches, and strewing garments and branches on the road. There were different perceptions at work: Jesus rode in on a donkey, a humble entry of a peaceful nature by a spiritual king; the people of Jerusalem welcomed him with palm and olive branches and the laying of garments in his path because they wanted a worldly king to defeat the Romans.

Great and Holy Monday is observed six days before Pascha. On Holy and Great Monday the parable of the barren fig tree is repeated because the fig tree symbolizes those who think only of the external appearance of goodness, not what comes from the heart. The Gospels relate Jesus' prophecies about the fall of Jerusalem, wars and tribulations, and the end of the world.

Great and Holy Tuesday, five days before Pascha, emphasizes the seriousness of God's examination of our lives and the account we will have to give of ourselves. Orthodox Christians attend to Jesus' answers to the questions of the Pharisees and scribes and how he rebuked their envy and deceit. The Gospel tells of Jesus' prophecy of his second coming and the final judgment, and ends with the warning that Passover will be observed in two days, and Jesus will be betrayed and crucified.

On Great and Holy Wednesday, which falls four days prior to Pascha, Orthodox Christians remember the two women, one a harlot, the other virtuous, who anointed Jesus with myrrh. They also remember



Ukrainian women dressed in multicolored traditional folk costumes, with small bells in their hands, smile as they approach the St. Michael Cathedral to attend Easter services in downtown Kiev. More than 10 million worshippers attend all-night Orthodox Easter services held at 13,200 Orthodox parishes across the country. (AP Photo/Efrem Lukatsky)

Judas' betrayal on this day because both occurred two days before the Passover, on Wednesday. Because the betrayal took place on Wednesday, Orthodox Christians fast on Wednesday throughout the year.

On Great and Holy Thursday, which falls three days before Pascha, known as Maundy Thursday in English-speaking countries, Orthodox Christians recall that this is the day on which Jesus and his disciples arrived in Jerusalem to celebrate what would be his last feast of the Passover, how Jesus washed the Apostles' feet, and his introduction of the Holy Eucharist.

Great and Holy Friday, known as Good or Black Friday in Western Churches, is observed two days before Pascha. It is a solemn observance and a day of mourning because it is the day Jesus was crucified. Orthodox Christians recall that Jesus was handed over to the soldiers, stripped of his clothing, crowned with thorns, was spat upon, and struck on his face and head. After this, carrying the Cross, Jesus came to Golgotha, and about the third hour was crucified between two thieves. They believe that Jesus died on the day when the Moon was full, at the time when Jewish law required the sacrifice of the Passover lamb.

Great and Holy Saturday is observed one day before Pascha, and recalls how Jesus is believed to have descended into hell to defeat death. It also commemorates his entombment. In Ukraine, Orthodox Christians begin to celebrate Pascha, the day on which they believe Jesus was resurrected from the dead, very late Saturday night (usually around midnight) when people go to church to attend the Easter vigil service. This day, usually known as Easter in English-speaking countries, is the most important

Fun Fact

At one time Ukraine was known as the “breadbasket of the USSR.” This important feature of Ukraine is represented on its flag: two equal horizontal bands of blue and yellow that represent grain fields under a blue sky.

Christian feast because the fundamental teaching of Christianity is that Jesus, through his death and Resurrection, freed all believers from the penalty of sin. The holiday falls on the first Sunday after Great Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. The priest blesses *kulich* (traditional Easter cake) and *pisanki* (painted Easter eggs) brought to church by families. During the day, people visit relatives and close friends. They exchange Easter baskets filled with *kulich* and *pisanki*, which are believed to possess spiritual power. Everybody greets each other and exchanges

three kisses (Khrystosuvanni).

In many Ukrainian villages, people light bonfires on Easter night to announce the news of Jesus’ Resurrection to the world.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY; PESACH

✿ PENTECOST

Observed by: Orthodox Christians
Observed on: Fifty days after Easter

Pentecost, also called the Feast of the Holy Trinity or Radunitsa in Ukraine, celebrates the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles of Jesus 50 days after his Resurrection. In English-speaking countries this may be a two-day observance called Whitsunday and Whitmonday. On this day people decorate their homes with greenery to signify new life. Wildflowers are believed to possess special spiritual powers, and people have them blessed by their priest, then dry them and place them behind the icons kept inside many homes. On this day young girls make garlands and throw them in rivers or lakes to foresee the future, an ancient Ukrainian pagan ritual.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; PENTECOST

Regional Holidays

✿ ST. MELANIA’S FEAST DAY

Observed in: Ukraine
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 13

The Feast Day of St. Melania, also called Malanka, is a Ukrainian folk holiday celebrated on New Year’s Eve, according to the Julian calendar. In the night carolers traditionally go from house to house playing

pranks or performing short plays; a bachelor wearing women’s clothing leads the troupe. Malanka marks the end of the festivities of the Christmas season, and is often the last opportunity to party before the somber period of Great Lent that precedes Easter.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS; LENT

✿ TARAS SHEVCHENKO DAY

Observed in: Kiev
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 9

Taras Shevchenko is one of the most prominent personalities in Ukrainian history. He was a poet, singer, and a national hero who advocated freedom for Ukraine. On this day people show their respect for him by visiting a monument created in his honor and leave flowers and wreaths there.

✿ KIEV DAYS

Observed in: Kiev
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Last weekend of May

Kiev Days are celebrated during the last weekend of May. Kiev is at its magnificent best during this time of the year, with chestnut trees (the symbolic tree of Kiev) in full bloom. People come to Kiev from all over Ukraine to celebrate the spring and attend various performances of popular actors and musicians. They walk along decorated streets and watch displays of fireworks at night.

See also Volume III: SPRING FESTIVALS

Rites of Passage

✿ BIRTH

Godparents play an important role in the life of a Ukrainian child. The child’s first birthday is normally celebrated with an ancient custom called *postryzhyny*. The family prepares a big feast for this occasion. The godparents hold the child and position themselves near the feast on the table. One of the godparents places a coin inside a soup bowl and passes the bowl to the rest of the family. All of them drop coins in the bowl, which are collected and saved for the baby. Next the baby is made to sit on a high chair, and all the godparents cut off tiny locks of its hair. After this some vodka is poured into the bowl full of coins. The baby’s feet are then dipped into this bowl. This symbolizes that the child dominates over alcohol and money in his or her life. This alcohol is then drunk by the godparents. The rest of the day is spent partying with a lot of food, drinks, music, and dancing.

❁ MARRIAGE

A traditional Ukrainian wedding begins with a formal engagement. The groom and some elders visit the home of the bride and ask her parents for her hand in marriage. Both parties then exchange loaves of bread. If she wishes, the woman can reject her suitor by giving him a pumpkin instead of a loaf of bread. But if all goes well, the preparations for the wedding begin.

On the day before the wedding, many guests, along with the bride or groom, may walk through the village announcing the wedding. The bride usually has a farewell party where she, along with her friends, makes the *biltse*, a ritual tree, which will be used as a decorative piece during the wedding.

After a church wedding, both the bride's and groom's houses serve meals separately. A special bread, called a *korovai*, is baked for this occasion. After their meal the groom and his entourage go to the bride's house, where he pays a "ransom" for his wife. The couple then joins the bride's family at the dinner table. After the wedding cake is cut, the guests exchange gifts with the couple for drinks and the cake. Later the couple visits the groom's home, where the merrymaking continues. The next morning, the couple has a ceremonial breakfast.

❁ DEATH

Ukrainians have combined many traditional beliefs from pre-Christian times with the Christian traditions they follow. For example, they believe that good people die easy deaths while the bad suffer agonizing pain during their last hours. When a death occurs in a Ukrainian family, the windows and doors are opened to let out the soul. The body may be bathed with certain flowers or herbs. Funerals are held in the morning. Male voices are traditionally associated with Ukrainian funeral services to render an emotional farewell to the departed soul.

In Eastern Orthodox Churches, heaven is not a place or a static state. Rather, the Orthodox believe

Ukrainian Weddings

At a Ukrainian wedding following the solemn ceremony, guests often have great fun teasing the newlyweds by playing mischievous pranks. Sometimes they steal chickens and other small foodstuffs from other villagers and force their way into the groom's house. Or they visit other homes and take gates off their hinges or hide equipment. During Soviet times such good-natured pranks were discouraged.

humanity will be made perfect again, as God intended us to be, without hate, greed, and other negative characteristics. People who do not accept God's love and mercy will experience painful torment, but as the devout acquire a more profound sense of God's love and wisdom, they know heavenly bliss.

Dying alone is considered terrible in Ukraine because there would be no one to light the candle (held by a dying person), or to hear the person's last words. "May God prevent a death without people!" and "May God prevent a sudden death!" are two common exclamations heard in this country.

Further Reading

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United Arab Emirates

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Middle East, bordering the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf, between Oman and Saudi Arabia
Size	32,000 sq. mi.
Capital City	Abu Dhabi
Flag Description	The flag of the United Arab Emirates has three horizontal bands of green (top), white, and black with a vertical red band on hoist side.
Independence	December 2, 1971 (from United Kingdom)
Population	2,563,212 (2005 est.)
Government	Federation with specified powers delegated to the UAE federal government and other powers reserved to member emirates
Nationality	Emirati
Major Ethnic Group(s)	South Asian (50%); Arab and Iranian (23%); Emirati (19%)
Major Language(s)	Arabic (official); Persian; English; Hindi; Urdu
Major Religion(s)	Muslim (96%, mostly Sunni)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan Accession Day, August 6; National Day, December 2

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Over the past 10 years archaeologists working in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have excavated numerous sites, including some on the more than 200 islands off the Emirates' Persian Gulf coast. In 2001 archaeologists completed a survey of 51 sites on Abu Al-Abyadh, the largest of the islands, where hearths, structures, and middens are found, in addition to pottery shards and flint tools and points. The sites there, as well as excavations on numerous islands and the mainland, indicate four primary periods of human activity: the Late Stone Age (c. 5500–4000 B.C.E.), the middle Bronze Age (c. 3000–2000), Late Pre-Islamic or Early Islamic (400–700 C.E.), and Late Islamic (1400–1950).

Of special interest are three flint “teeth,” the crescent-shaped blades of a kind of sickle found at other sites in the Near East but unknown in the UAE until now. These microliths (small pieces of worked stone), found at a site at the Abu Dhabi Airport Golf Club, would have been set in a wooden or bone handle and used to cut grass or grain. Even such small artifacts can tell part of a much larger story: The Late Stone Age people who inhabited the area were pastoral, not hunter-gatherers, although research has not yet revealed whether they were harvesting crops or wild plants. Other finds indicate the existence of trade routes that might have stretched across the Arabian Peninsula during the same period, evidence that the community enjoyed a broader economic base than one might think. It is believed that these inhabitants were Arab tribes.

In the medieval era the Arabian Gulf was a crucial route

between Europe and Asia. The Portuguese captured this land in the early 1500s and occupied the areas of Sukatra, Muscat, Sahar, Khor Fakkan, and the Hormuz Strait. The Portuguese stayed until 1633 and were followed by the British who wanted to establish their control over sea routes to promote their trade with India. The Qawasim tribal confederation of UAE, a seafaring clan whose influence extended to the Persian side of the Gulf, resisted the British invasion. They had a fleet of about 900 vessels and were called pirates by the Europeans. By 1820, however, the British had destroyed all the ships of the Qawasims and burned down the coastal towns.

Over time the Persian Gulf gained in importance while the oil industry was developing at a rapid pace. Boundaries between the seven ruling sheikhs of the time had to be divided but this was a mammoth task as the sheikhs could never come to a consensus on their own. It was left to the British to demarcate the borders. Between World War I and World War II (1917–39), Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq also claimed some of the Gulf region.

In 1968 the British announced their decision to leave the Gulf by 1971. They planned to create a single state consisting of Bahrain, Qatar, and the Trucial coast, and it would be called the United Arab Emirates. Qatar and Bahrain refused to join the union and became independent states when the British left in 1971. The United Arab Emirates was formed in 1971, and six of the sheikhdoms joined the union. The seventh, Ras-Al-Khaimah, joined the UAE in 1972. Over time, the UAE has emerged as one of the most developed and stable countries of the Arab world.

The United Arab Emirates sent troops to assist Kuwait in the Gulf War in 1990–91, strengthening the country's ties with the West.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a federation of seven emirates: Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras al-Khaimah, Sharjah, and Umm al Qaiwain. The country shares borders with the Sultanate of Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. The UAE is located on the Arabian Peninsular region and projects into the Persian Gulf. Most of the terrain in the Emirates' region consists of featureless, sandy deserts, with a hilly region located in the east of the union. There are no rivers or lakes in any of the states. The highest point is the Jabal Yibir at 5,010 feet. The northern and the eastern areas of the UAE are scenic with abundant greenery. The government of the United Arab Emirates has made concrete efforts to increase the greenery in this region and spends huge sums of money for this purpose. Apart from grasses, shrubs, and trees like acacia that grow naturally in the UAE, date palms are also found. Not many animals inhabit the UAE apart from the Arabian leopard, ibex, camel, and wild goat.

Summers are generally humid and breezy, last-

ing from May to September, when the temperature can soar beyond 104°F. The winters are relatively wetter and cold, especially in the desert regions.

❁ ECONOMY

The United Arab Emirates has one of the most liberal economies of the Gulf region. The UAE has an open economy with a high per capita income due to the crude oil reserves found in the deserts of this region. The oil industry generates large-scale employment and has drastically improved the general quality of life of the people during the last 30 years. Petroleum and petroleum products account for 73 percent of export revenues and are also major contributors to the country's gross domestic product (GDP). The major industries of the nation are oil production, petrochemicals, and fishing. The United Arab Emirates has good trade relations with Japan, India, South Korea, the United States, and the members of the European Union.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The states of the United Arab Emirates have an essentially Bedouin (nomadic) culture, still evident in the lifestyle of the people. Poetry, song, dance, and storytelling take cultural precedence over art and architecture in the Emirates as in most other cultures of the Gulf region. Emirati architecture incorporates elements of traditional Arabic style and decoration. The city mosques, national museum, and the royal palace are examples of Emirati architecture.

Emirati culture is influenced by the major religion of the country Islam. Most people belong to the

Pearl Diving

The Arabian Gulf was famous for producing some of the finest pearls in the world. The United Arab Emirates, along with the other countries in the Gulf region depended on the ancient pearl industry to provide the only real income for the people. As this industry flourished many families abandoned their nomadic lifestyle and began to settle in the coastal regions of Abu Dhabi and Dubai. These areas gradually grew into flourishing cities.

Pearl diving was a communal activity: A group of fishermen who were able to dive to as much as 130 feet without equipment worked in unison. Divers remained underwater for nearly a minute and a half, and they descended about 30 times in a day! The empty shells were thrown back into the sea because the divers believed that raindrops caught by those oysters would form pearls in the night. Many traditional songs have been written in their honor, and these songs were sung while the fishermen went out into the sea in search of precious pearls.



Wahhabi sect. However, the Emirati are not as strict and conservative as the Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia. The women enjoy more freedom compared to their counterparts in Saudi Arabia. They are educated and are not prohibited from driving vehicles. Most women wear the traditional Islamic veil and the long black loose dress. Some of the younger women wear stylish Western clothes beneath the black robe. Emirati women are conscious of the clothing trends of the rest of the world and give importance to makeup, perfumes, and accessories.

The people of the Emirates are sports enthusiasts. They enjoy auto racing, horse racing, camel racing, and soccer. Emirati literature, music, and dance are also well enjoyed in this region, and the music lays a strong emphasis on rhythm and features traditional Arab string instruments such as the *tamboura* and *oud*.

Singing and dancing are indispensable during celebrations. Young girls perform their characteristic dance by swinging their hair from side to side and by swaying their bodies in tune to the music. Men perform the traditional dance of *al ardab*, a stylized martial arts form: Two rows of male dancers face each other, waving sticks, rifles, and swords and singing challenges accompanied by drumbeats, cymbals, and the rhythmic clapping of hands.

☼ CUISINE

Emirati cuisine still carries the strong influence of their earlier nomadic life and consists of a good measure of food items such as rice, dates, and the meat of sheep and camels. These were foodstuffs that could be carried easily by the nomads while they wandered in the deserts of the region. Emirati cuisine also reflects the influence of Indian, Pakistani, Iranian, and Lebanese cuisines in its liberal use of a variety of spices such as cinnamon, cardamom, cloves, black pepper, onion, ginger, garlic, and lime. Good measures of sesame oil, pine nuts, walnuts, almonds, and parsley are also used.

A variety of fish and seafood, including lobster, crab, shrimp, tuna, kingfish, and red snapper are a part of daily meals in the Emirates. Milk is usually consumed in the form of *laban* (yogurt) or *labneh* (cream cheese). Specialties include hummus (a paste of chickpeas and sesame seeds), tabbouleh (crushed bulgur wheat, chopped tomatoes, onions, parsley, and mint); *ghuzi* (roast lamb with rice mixed with nuts), *wara enab* (grape leaves stuffed with rice), *koussa mahshi* (stuffed zucchini), and *shawarma* (grilled shavings of lamb or chicken, mixed with salad and rolled inside Arab bread). Emirati Muslims do not eat pork or drink alcohol, because both are forbidden by their religion.

Arab coffee (*kabwa*) is an important part of Emirati hospitality. The rich and aromatic *kabwa* is prepared by brewing roasted and ground coffee beans with water and spices. This concoction is served in tiny cups without sugar or milk.

Public/Legal Holidays

☼ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar and is widely celebrated as New Year's Day. Celebrations take place all over the world beginning on the evening of December 31, New Year's Eve. In the United Arab Emirates, it is a national holiday and schools and offices are closed.

☼ SHEIKH ZAYED BIN SULTAN AL NAHYAN ACCESSION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 6

The anniversary of the accession day of His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan (1918–2004), the late president of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), is an important day of celebration, particularly for the people of Abu Dhabi, while it is a national holiday for the people of the UAE in general. To celebrate this occasion all government buildings and streets are illuminated with elaborate lighting. Dignitaries visit the royal palace in the UAE and congratulate the ruler. Glittering fireworks light up the sky. Arabic music, concerts, and traditional dances form part of the celebrations, particularly in Abu Dhabi. The programs are prepared by various government and nongovernment organizations. Huge crowds pour into Abu Dhabi, and residents and expatriates alike roam around the town square in colorful attire celebrating the day. Vehicles decorated with UAE flags and portraits of Sheikh Zayed are a common sight. Local TV and radio stations also broadcast several programs and documentaries on Accession Day celebrations throughout the day. The grand celebrations, including a series of activities and games representing United Arab Emirates' heritage and history, are organized at the Heritage Village in Abu Dhabi.

☼ NATIONAL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 2

On this day in 1971 the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was formed. To mark the anniversary of this event, there are many celebrations all across the federation. Parades are held on this day to celebrate the achievements of the country since it was founded. In the UAE it is a national holiday, and schools and offices are closed; many sporting events like cricket tournaments are also organized on this day.

Religious Holidays

❁ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

El am Hejir marks the first day of the Islamic calendar, and the first month is known as Muharram. It is believed that on this day in 622, Muhammad fled with his family and followers from Mecca to Medina and formed the first Islamic state in Medina. This day is celebrated as the Islamic New Year's Day. In the United Arab Emirates special prayers are held in mosques all over the country. A special feast is prepared and relished by Emirati families on this day.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR; ISLAM

❁ MOULOU

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic year

Mouloud, or Mawlid al-Nabi, the birth anniversary of Muhammad, Islam's prophet, falls in the third month of the Islamic year. For Muslims all over the world, this is a day of great joy and celebration since Muhammad is the most revered prophet among the Muslims. Conservative groups of Muslims, however, do not celebrate birthdays, even Muhammad's, because they believe it distracts people from worshipping Allah.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; MOULOU

❁ SHAB-E-MIRAJ

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twenty-seventh of Rajab, the seventh month of the Islamic calendar

This festival commemorates the ascension of the prophet Muhammad into heaven. The Muslims believe that he was visited by two archangels while he was asleep and was taken from Mecca to Jerusalem, where he ascended into heaven and met God. In the United Arab Emirates special prayers are offered on this day in all the mosques of the country.

See also Volume III: ISLAM

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr, or the Feast of Fast-Breaking, marks the end of the month of Ramadan, when Muslims all over the world observe a daily dawn-to-dusk fast throughout the entire month. Observing the fast is

the fourth pillar of Islam. Eid al-Fitr falls on the first day of Shawwal, the 10th month in the Islamic calendar. The Koran forbids fasting on this day.

In the United Arab Emirates, people visit family members, enjoy special meals together, and wear new clothes. Children receive gifts from their relatives and enjoy amusement rides that are set up in the streets for them. There are fireworks displays at night and a lot of dancing and singing. Women paint their hands with henna for the occasion. The entire community gets together for huge banquets and lavish feasts that go on until far in the night. Officially the celebration lasts for three days, but if it falls in the middle of the week, shops and schools may stay closed for the entire week.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, or the Feast of Sacrifice, is celebrated on the 10th day of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar. This festival is celebrated in honor of Ibrahim's (Abraham's) readiness to sacrifice his own son on God's command. However, just as Ibrahim was about to kill his son, God replaced the child with a ram. It also marks the end of the required pilgrimage to Mecca that every devout Muslim must make in his or her life if it is financially and physically feasible.

In the United Arab Emirates, Muslim families slaughter a fattened sheep and prepare an elaborate feast for friends and family members. The family consumes one-third of the food prepared, another third is given to relatives, and the rest is used to feed the poor. Special prayer services are conducted in mosques all across the country. All businesses in the Emirates close for this celebration, which usually lasts three days.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; HAJJ; ISLAM

Regional Holidays

❁ DUBAI SHOPPING FESTIVAL

Observed in: Dubai

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: January–February

The Dubai Shopping Festival is a month-long annual festival held in Dubai. This event, which attracts shoppers and visitors from all around the world, started in 1996. This shopping festival is seen as an ideal family celebration, and has the theme, "One World, One Family, One Festival." Apart from shopping, cultural events, competitions, children's

activities, sports events, firework displays, and kite-flying contests are highlights of this festival.

❁ DUBAI MOTOR SHOW

Observed by: General Public

Observed in: Dubai

Observed on: December

The Dubai Motor Show is one of the most popular car shows in the Middle East. This biennial event, held at the Dubai World Trade Center, showcases the latest technology and futuristic models of vehicles from all over the world. Exhibitors arrive from different countries to showcase road vehicles, concept cars, sports cars, and motorcycles. This event attracts a huge number of visitors from around the world.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

After childbirth Emirati women are allowed to rest and recover for 40 days. During this period female relatives and friends tend to the new mother and assist her in the daily chores. Fresh bread, butter, honey, and porridge made of fenugreek—a clover-like plant having white flowers and pleasantly bitter, slightly sweet seeds—are given to the mother. Visitors who have come to see the new baby often present the child with money and gifts.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Male circumcision is a part of the Emirate's tradition and is carried out at puberty. The Muslims in the United Arab Emirates believe that, by undergoing this ritual, a boy becomes a man. Trained elders use knives, razors, and other sharp instruments to perform the circumcision without administering any anesthetic. This practice enjoys social backing and families take great pride in it. Huge celebrations also follow this coming-of-age ritual.

❁ MARRIAGE

Most marriages in the United Arab Emirates are arranged. Emirati weddings are elaborate affairs that last for several days. The bride is generally not seen by anyone except her family for 40 days before the wedding. She devotes this time to her preparations for the wedding and beauty care. She is lavished with all sorts of oils and perfumes to prepare her for her big day. The groom provides plenty of silver and gold jewelry to the bride's family, as well as cash as part of an agreed-upon bride-price (*mebr*). The couple signs a marriage contract called a *milka*. After the signing of the contract the couple is legally married,

even though they may not consummate the marriage until the night of the wedding party.

During the week that precedes the wedding, traditional music, continuous singing, and dancing take place, reflecting the joy shared by the bride and the groom's families. Laylat al Henna, or the night of the henna, which takes place a couple of days before the wedding, is a very special women's night. On this night, the bride's hands and feet are decorated with henna. The bride also applies the traditional Arabian kohl or eyeliner. The groom has a henna night separately. On the wedding day the bride dyes her hair with henna and wears a white wedding gown. All the women who have come for the wedding are dressed in finery and gather inside the bride's house or a tent erected outside the house. The bride is brought inside the tent and is seated on a large chair. A traditional dance accompanied with singing and clapping is performed for her.

The groom, with his family, gathers inside a tent erected near the groom's house. They come in a procession to the bride's tent to pick her up. The night is spent at the groom's house. The celebrations continue throughout the following week.

In 1992 under the directives of His Highness Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al-Nahyan (1918–2004), a Marriage Fund was set up in order to limit overspending on weddings and celebrations. This fund was intended to encourage Emirati men to marry Emirati women only; it helps cover the expenses of the wedding, setting up a family, thereby increasing the birth rate, and discouraging men from marrying foreigners.

❁ DEATH

On the occasion of a death in an Emirati family, the deceased is washed, shrouded in white cloth, and buried immediately. The following three days are spent in mourning. Friends, family, and well-wishers come, offer their condolences, and help the family.

In the United Arab Emirates women are not allowed to stay near a dying person and do not stay long near a dead body alone. The Emirati also believe that the dead body should not be left alone as the lonely dead become the prey of Satan. It is also a custom to buy the shroud and make funeral arrangements with the property of the dead person only. The body is buried without a coffin, facing Mecca.

Food snacks are prepared by neighbors and served to visitors. The mourning period for a widow is 4 months and 10 days, during which period her family and friends visit her often.

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United Kingdom

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Western Europe, islands including the northern one-sixth part of the island of Ireland, between the North Atlantic Ocean and the North Sea, northwest of France
Size	94,526 sq. mi.
Capital City	London
Flag Description	The flag of the United Kingdom has a blue field with the red cross of St. George (patron saint of England) edged in white, superimposed on the diagonal red cross of St. Patrick (patron saint of Ireland), which is superimposed on the diagonal white cross of St. Andrew (patron saint of Scotland). It is properly known as the Union Flag, but commonly called the Union Jack.
Independence	N.A.
Population	60,441,457 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional monarchy
Nationality	Briton(s), British (collective plural)
Major Ethnic Group(s)	White (93%)
Major Language(s)	English; Welsh (about 26% of the population of Wales); Scottish form of Gaelic (about 60,000 in Scotland)
Major Religion(s)	Christian Anglican, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist (72%); unspecified or none (23%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; May Day Bank Holiday, May; Spring Bank Holiday, May; Summer Bank Holiday, August

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Although Britain was largely unlivable during the Ice Age, it has been inhabited for at least 500,000 years. Early Stone Age hunter-gatherers were eventually replaced by agrarian Neolithic settlements. Then a sophisticated megalithic culture arose in western England about 4,000 years ago. There are several types of structures called megaliths, which are usually made with extremely large stones, including menhirs (standing stones), dolmens (two or three standing stones that support a huge slab, thought to be burial sites), and stone circles. The British Isles and the European continent have numerous megalithic sites, the most famous of which is Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain in Britain.

Stonehenge was constructed in four distinct phases: pre-Stonehenge, between the ninth–eighth millennia B.C.E.; Stonehenge 1, c. 3100; Stonehenge 2, c. 2550; and Stonehenge 3, c. 2100. Other important megalithic sites in Britain include Avebury, which covers 28 acres, the largest stone circle in the world; Long Meg and Her Daughters, a Bronze Age structure and the third largest circle in Britain; and Stanton Drew near Bristol, a huge megalithic complex with three stone circles and two stone avenues.

With the exception of Stonehenge's earliest phase, these megaliths were built by Celtic tribes, known as Britons, that crossed the Channel from Western and continental Europe, mainly from France, around 2500. Apparently Phoenician traders gave these tribes their name, which indicates that, even this early, the island was already involved in a European trading network.

The name *Briton* (or Britain) may have been derived from *Pritani*, a Celtic word that means “painted.” In the 4th century B.C.E. the Celts’ influence and territories covered the length of Europe and stretched from Britain to Asia Minor. They were famous throughout much of the Western world because they painted and tattooed their bodies. It is also possible that the name *Britain* was derived from the goddess Brigid, the threefold goddess of the Celts. (In one of her aspects she is the goddess of poetry.)

The Greek explorer Pytheas of Massalia visited a group of islands in 325 B.C.E. that he called Pre-taniké; the two major ones he called Albion (Albion) and Ierne (Erin), which may indicate that Pythias’s information came from the Celtic-speaking inhabitants of the islands themselves. The Britons were significant players in continental politics and supported their allies in Gaul militarily during the Gallic Wars with the Roman Republic. This prompted the Romans to invade and subdue the island, first with Julius Caesar’s raid in 55 B.C.E., and then with the Emperor Claudius’s conquest in the following century. In 43 C.E. after an ousted tribal ally appealed to him, Claudius sent Aulus Plautius with four legions to Britain. Because the island was a safe haven for Gallic rebels and the like, it would have been unwise for Rome to continue to ignore it. Moreover, it was an attractive target for Rome because of its mines and because it had promise as a source of slaves. In fact, Claudius made a trip to the island after it had been subdued, bringing reinforcements and elephants. During this second invasion, the Romans brought Christianity with them to the Celtic tribes—the Irish, Cornish, Welsh, Scottish.

When Rome withdrew its armies early in the fifth century C.E. Germanic tribes were happy to occupy the power vacuum created by the Romans’ departure. Exactly how, or why, the Anglo-Saxons immigrated to the British Isles remains unclear, and historians disagree about whether they came as invading conquerors or as mercenaries in response to a plea for help from Vortigern, a fifth-century Briton warlord. Wherever the truth may lie, archaeologists agree that Britain was in sad shape after the Roman withdrawal: the roads were in disrepair and the manufacture of goods was cruder.

The Anglo-Saxons were originally several different Germanic tribes—the Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Frisians (and, perhaps, some Franks)—from the peninsula of Angeln, which protruded into the Baltic Sea, and what is now Lower Saxony, on the northwest coast of Germany. These several tribes became dominant in southern Britain beginning around the mid-fifth century. Eventually these became a single people around the ninth century, the Anglo-Saxons, and became, for the most part, the basic genetic stock of modern England, its people, and their language and culture.

According to the venerable Bede (c. 672–735), Vortigern granted Thanet in Kent to the Jutish warrior leader Hengist (or Hengest) in return for his

help in repelling the invading Picts and any other enemies. Vortigern’s subsequent refusal to pay the Saxon mercenaries led to Hengest’s rebellion and the conquest of England during the next 200 years. Archaeological explorations have indicated that Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were established in Kent, Sussex, Middlesex, and Essex in the latter part of the fifth century, as well as East Anglia, Lindsey (now Lincolnshire), Deira (now East Yorkshire), and the Isle of Wight. Archaeologists have found the remains of several Saxon warriors buried around 600 in Suffolk, and one of them was interred with his sword, shield, and horse. The Britons resisted and fought the invaders, possibly led by the legendary King Arthur, and successfully stopped further incursions.

But the Britons were eventually unsuccessful in their efforts to discourage the Germanic tribes. By the end of the seventh century Anglo-Saxons controlled most of what is now England and the victorious tribes established kingdoms that were later combined and called the Heptarchy.

The terms *England* and *English*, used to refer to the territory, its people, and their language, were derived from the name of one of the Germanic tribes, the Angles. Genetic research on the modern-day populations of the United Kingdom supports history as it was recorded by Bede and others: Apparently the Germanic tribes wiped out between 50 and 100 percent of the Romano-British Celtic population. Twenty-first-century genetic studies support the traditional story that a Saxon conquest, and genocide did occur. Only the Welsh seem to have escaped the slaughter. The English, as well as the Scottish and Cornish, are the descendants of the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings. The Welsh, on the other hand, are genetically related to the Irish (not including Ulster), the Highland Scots, and the Basques.

Starting in the early ninth century, Vikings began raiding the coastlines of Britain, and invaded northern Scotland, Cumbria, and Lancashire. These marauders were eventually followed by waves of settlers, and the Vikings rapidly expanded their areas of control. These incursions, however, resulted in the consolidation of the various Germanic groups, leading to unification under Alfred the Great (849–99), the first king of England. Following Alfred’s defeat of the Vikings at the Battle of Edington in the late ninth century, he established the Danelaw in the Treaty of Wedmore. The Danelaw was an area of England

Fun Fact

Missionaries Christianized Brigid, making her the foster-mother of Jesus, and called her St. Brigit.

Fun Fact

In 601, St. Gregory I (the Great) (r. 590–604) instructed Abbot Mellitus to build Christian churches wherever he found pagan stone circles because he thought the Celts would more readily embrace Christianity in familiar surroundings.

Fun Fact

The Lady of the Lake, a figure sometimes associated with Brigid because one of her aspects was connected with fire and metalworking, was said to have forged Excalibur, King Arthur's sword.

still under the control of the Viking leader Guthrum, but the long-term result was a consolidation of power for Alfred. Guthrum would eventually become a Christian, and the Danelaw was destroyed by ongoing Anglo-Saxon attacks. Finally, the region was assimilated into the new kingdom called England by Eadweard I, or Edward the Elder (c. 874–77–924).

Then in 1066, yet another invasion from across the English Channel occurred, when William of Orange (c. 1028–87), a French Norman, landed on the southern coast. King Harald II (c. 1022–66), the last Anglo-Saxon king of England,

had just returned from fighting off an invading army of Norwegians, but he hurried south with his army and engaged William at the famous Battle of Hastings. Harald was killed during the encounter, and William became the new ruler of England.

The Anglo-Norman nobility took over administration and government at every level and changed the English language forever. The nobility, speaking proto-French for the next 300 years, ruled over English commoners, who continued to speak Anglo-Saxon (or Old English). The result was a Romance-Germanic hybrid of Middle English widely spoken in Chaucer's time, and Modern English retains the class distinctions. Because the Normans ruled England and constituted the elite class, virtually all of the words associated with government, law, religion, and commerce still used in the 21st century came from Norman French. While the nobility chatted amiably in French, the peasants were eating and swearing in Anglo-Saxon. The

result is clear: The cost of one's table and what one could afford to eat on it left behind pairs of competing Anglo-Saxon and Norman French words for meat: *deer/venison*, *sheep/mutton*, *ox/beef*, *swine/pork*.

The Middle Ages (fifth century to 1517 in Europe) were characterized by internal disputes between the ruling kings and civil war and strife. Over the centuries,

England was in conflict with the remaining Celtic strongholds, Ireland, Wales, and Scotland repeatedly. There were constant clashes between the nobility and the monarchs, and this led to a civil war in the middle of the 17th century. Eventually though the United Kingdom was formed by a number of Acts of Union, which led to the unification of the kingdoms of England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. In 1536–43, England and Wales were joined; Scotland and Ireland were added later, in 1707 and 1800, respectively.

During the 16th century Britain went through a colonial period, although its attempts to gain a foothold in France were continually frustrated. The Spanish and Portuguese monarchs were also enrich-

ing their regimes with the wealth of their new colonies in the Western Hemisphere. So England began colonizing the east coast of North America. At the same time the East India Company was formed, which soon exceeded its trading purposes and started acquiring various states in India. Later, all these acquisitions were taken over by the Crown, and soon England was in possession of all of Burma, Ceylon, and even a part of Afghanistan, as well as many countries in Africa and Asia. In the 1770s the American colonies challenged British rule and became independent after the American War of Independence (also known as the Revolutionary War). Nevertheless it has been said that "the Sun never set" on the British Empire under Queen Victoria (1819–1901). Britain became extremely wealthy and powerful as a result of its territorial control.

At roughly the same time while the nation was extending its reach around the world, the late 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries witnessed a period of economic and social upheaval and modernization called the Industrial Revolution, and London became the major social and cultural center of England.

The end of World War I was followed by widespread unrest. The United Kingdom had not yet recovered from the effects of World War I when the Great Depression occurred in 1929. Even though the country had financed itself during the war, there was a major slump in foreign investments and this led to an economic crisis. Some areas of the United Kingdom had begun to recover during the 1930s while others remained depressed. Unemployment and poverty were prevalent.

By 1936 the possibility of yet another war had also become evident. Britain entered the war (along with France) two days after Hitler invaded Poland in 1939. During the Second World War England was heavily and frequently bombed by Germany and, despite the eventual victory of the Allies (primarily the United Kingdom, the United States, and the USSR), the country lost many resources by the end of World War II.

Following the end of World War II in 1945, many European colonies, including those of the United Kingdom, began to demand their freedom, and the dismantling of the British Empire began. In 1947 one of Britain's prime Asian colonies India gained independence. This was followed by Malaysia in 1957, then Kenya in 1963. As Asian, African, and Western Hemisphere colonies demanded, and got, their independence, colonialism ended. This also served to hasten the process of rebuilding the United Kingdom into a modern and prosperous European nation.

The United Kingdom is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and is also a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Although it is a member of the European Union (EU), it has not adopted the Euro currency.

Fun Fact

Ironically the Norman French were also Norse-men, or Northmen, descendants of the Vikings.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The United Kingdom is situated in Western Europe. It lies between the North Atlantic Ocean and the North Sea and is separated from France by the English Channel. It is made up of the island of Great Britain (shared by England, Scotland, and Wales), the northern one-sixth of Ireland, and several other smaller islands. The United Kingdom's Northern Ireland shares a 224-mile international land boundary with the Republic of Ireland. The Channel Tunnel (*chunnel*), dug under the English Channel and finished in 1994, now links the United Kingdom with France.

The landscape of the United Kingdom is quite varied. One can enjoy the chalk cliffs of Kent and Dorset, the hills of southeast England, Cornwall's granite cliffs, the Welsh mountains, the highlands of the Peak District and the Pennines, Cumbria's lakes and mountains, Scotland's lowlands, uplands, and islands, and the breathtaking fields, lakes, and mountains of Northern Ireland, all in one country.

The 10 highest mountains of the United Kingdom are all found in Scotland, the highest being Ben Nevis (4,409 feet). The highest point in Wales is Snowdon (3,560 feet), while that of England is Scafell Pike (3,209 feet); Northern Ireland's highest point is Slieve Donard (2,795 feet). The longest river in the United Kingdom is the Severn River, which flows through both England and Wales. Other important rivers are the Thames (England), Tay (Scotland), Bann (Northern Ireland), and Towy (Wales).

The United Kingdom is estimated to be made up of 1,098 small islands, some natural and some manmade, built of stone and wood and made bigger by natural waste accumulation.

The noted 18th-century English writer and lexicographer Samuel Johnson (1709–84) said, “When two Englishmen meet, their first talk is of the weather.” This may be because of the country's highly unpredictable weather. In general the climate can be classified as temperate with warm summers, cool winters, and an abundance of rain throughout the year. However, it is situated at the junction between the warm tropical air to the south and the cold polar air to the north. This temperature variation creates instability and is the main cause of the notoriously unsettled weather the United Kingdom experiences in a single day. Winters are generally cool, wet, and windy, with the mercury dipping to 50°F on average, and it is much lower farther upland. Summers, on the other hand, are generally dry with the maximum temperature reaching 86°F.

At one time the United Kingdom was heavily forested, but deforestation has wreaked havoc over the years, reducing the tree cover to the second lowest in Europe (after the Republic of Ireland). Alders, birches, cherries, oaks, plums, hawthorns, hazels, pines, poplars, and willows are some of the native trees. About 25 percent of the land is arable. During springtime lovely flowers like snowdrops, daffodils, bluebells, primrose, buttercups, and cowslips add

color to the English countryside.

The United Kingdom has an abundance of red deer, which is also the largest mammal in England. There are also fox, badgers, hedgehogs, rabbits, squirrels, and many varieties of small rodent. England's only poisonous snake, the adder, is rare and protected.

❁ ECONOMY

The United Kingdom has a prosperous economy and is one of the world's important centers of trading and finance. Agriculture is intensive, highly mechanized, and efficient by European standards, producing about 60 percent of the nation's food needs while requiring only 1 percent of the labor force. The United Kingdom is also naturally blessed with large supplies of coal, natural gas, and oil, so energy production contributes 12 percent to the country's gross domestic product (GDP). The service sector, particularly banking, insurance, and business services, is the largest contributor to the country's GDP. The industrial sector employs 25 percent of the workforce and contributes 21 percent to GDP. The United Kingdom is Europe's largest manufacturer of cars, armaments, petroleum products, personal computers, televisions, and mobile telephones. It also exports manufactured goods, fuels, chemicals, food, beverages, and tobacco, and its main trading partners are the United States, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Ireland, Belgium, Spain, and Italy. In 1973 the United Kingdom joined the European Economic Community (EEC), which evolved into the European Union (EU).

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The United Kingdom is the birthplace of such cultural giants as Sir Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin, William Shakespeare, Stephen Hawking, and the Beatles. It is also home to the world's largest foreign exchange markets, the world's richest football (soccer) club Manchester United, the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and the inventors of the steam engine, locomotive, television, telephone, submarine, the three-piece suit, and the World Wide Web.

William Shakespeare is probably the most famous writer in world history. Other famous writers that this country has produced are Chaucer, Sir

Fun Fact

During his gambling days, the Earl of Sandwich considered eating meals to be an unwelcome interruption of the time spent gambling, so he invented a kind of meal that did not require him to leave the gaming tables. He would ask for two slices of bread with layers of a meat and cheese between them. Soon this became a favorite item, and the name was shortened from “whatever the Earl of Sandwich has” to “sandwiches”!

Cricket

It is difficult to determine the origins of cricket, though there is a reference in the household accounts of King Edward I in 1300 of a game like cricket being played in Kent. It is also known that this game originated in the sheep-rearing country of the southeast United Kingdom, where the short grass helped bowling a ball at a target, usually the wicket-gate of the sheep pasture, which was defended with a bat in the form of a shepherd's crooked baton. The game had become quite popular by the 17th century, particularly in Kent, Sussex, and London. By the middle of the 18th century, cricket, which started as an elite game, was being played at every level of society.

However, the game lacked a coherent set of rules. The first and most influential cricket club in United Kingdom was at Hambledon, Hampshire, in the 1760s. It was the Hambledon Club, which established techniques of batting and bowling that still hold today, and Hambledon is credited with being the birthplace of cricket. The game then shifted its base to London, notably with the formation of the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC), which had its headquarters at Lord's ground. In 1835 the MCC gave cricket its first rules, which still stand largely intact today. The game spread to the colonies of the United Kingdom, especially the Indian subcontinent, South Africa, and Australia.

Walter Scott, the Brontë sisters (Charlotte, Emily, and Anne), Jane Austen, Thomas Hardy, Agatha Christie, Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Dickens, and J. K. Rowling. Important poets include John Donne, Lord Byron, John Keats, Samuel Coleridge, William Wordsworth, Robert Burns, Robert Browning, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Matthew Arnold, William Blake, T. S. Eliot, and Dylan Thomas.

The stately homes, castles, and cathedrals of the United Kingdom are overwhelming. The architecture has a diverse history from Stonehenge to Buckingham Palace to Big Ben and the notorious Tower of London. One of its most famous architects is Christopher Wren.

The British are said to be reserved in their manners, dress, and speech. They are famous for their courtesy, self-discipline, and wry sense of humor. England does not have a national costume, but that of Scotland is the kilt, which is worn around the waist. In Wales the women wear long skirts with petticoats and shawls.

Bird-watching is very popular in the United Kingdom, as is gardening. Sports are another favorite pastime of the people in the United Kingdom. The national sport is cricket and other sports are football (soccer), rugby, tennis, net ball, golf, horse racing, polo, and foxhunting. The world's oldest and most famous tennis tournament, Wimbledon, started at a small club in south London in the 19th century. The tournament begins on the Monday nearest to June 22. It is traditional for visitors to eat strawberries and cream while watching the game. The Derby originated here, as did the Grand National, which is the most demanding horse race in the world. Ascot, a small town in the south of England, becomes the center of the horse-racing world for one week in June. It is called Royal Ascot because the Queen always goes

to Ascot. The Ascot race is also famous for the designer hats that ladies wear.

The United Kingdom is also noted for its achievements in the world of classical music. English composers William Byrd, John Taverner, Thomas Tallis, Henry Purcell, and, more recently, Sir Edward Elgar, Sir Arthur Sullivan, and Benjamin Britten, have made significant contributions in classical music.

The United Kingdom, with the United States, has been the main contributor to the development of rock and roll music. It is the home of the Beatles, Queen, the Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, Deep Purple, Oasis, and the Spice Girls. Colonial influences are manifested in the *bhangra* (music from the Indian state of Punjab) and Jamaican reggae.

Scottish folk music includes many kinds of songs, the most famous being ballads and laments, sung by a single singer to the accompaniment of bagpipes, fiddles, or harps. Traditional dances include waltzes and jigs. Wales is a Celtic country that features folk music played at *twmpathau* (communal dances) and *gwyl werin* (music festivals).

Fun Fact

London has the largest nonwhite population of any European city, and over 250 languages are spoken there.

CUISINE

Although the British culture does not stand out for its culinary excellence, it has made its contribution to world cuisine by introducing the steak culture and sandwiches (attributed to the Earl of Sandwich, 1718–92).

British cuisine has been greatly influenced by its numerous former colonies. From eastern Asia the British acquired a love for tea, and from India, curry and spices. Nowadays most towns in the United Kingdom have Indian restaurants serving curries, but the dish threatening to become the British national dish is chicken tikka masala (barbecued chicken in spicy gravy).

Fish and chips is a British institution in itself. This deep-fried battered fish served with deep-fried potato fingers is one of the most class-defying dishes in Britain—eaten anywhere and everywhere by everyone. It is also the most dominant takeout food item in the United Kingdom.

Another traditional dish of the United Kingdom is Yorkshire pudding. It is a savory dish, which is made from batter and most often served with roast beef. It is also eaten with sausage or other dishes, or on its own accompanied by gravy. Steak and kidney pie is another typical British dish with a filling of diced beefsteak and beef kidneys in a thick sauce. Most often it is a single-crust pie, which means that the filling is covered but not completely enclosed by the pastry. As far as desserts are concerned, the British love puddings, and the famous Christmas pudding is made in every kitchen.

Tea is not only a drink in the United Kingdom, it is also the name of two meals: tea (served between 3:30–5 P.M.) and high tea (served around 6 P.M.). But most British drink tea throughout the day. On average, the British population drinks more than 200,000,000 cups of tea every day! Tea is generally served with scones, sandwiches, biscuits, and assorted cakes. The British are also fond of beer, gin, and whisky. And who has not heard of the famous Scotch whisky?

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar and is widely celebrated as New Year's Day. Celebrations take place all over the world, and revelries begin the evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve). In London the British gather in Piccadilly Circus and Trafalgar Square. As the clock strikes midnight, they listen to the chimes of Big Ben (a world-famous clock), cheer the New Year, and sing "Auld Lang Syne" (an old English song written by Robert Burns [1759–96]). Also the British believe that on New Year's Day the first person entering the house (whom they call a first-footer) should be a healthy and handsome young man with dark hair carrying coal, money, salt, and bread in his pocket. The British believe that this will bring good luck to the members of the family, and their New Year will be filled with good health, happiness, and wealth. Also, it is considered unlucky if the first-footer on New Year's Day is a woman or anyone with red hair.

In Scotland, preparations for New Year's Day involve cleaning the house and preparing a traditional meal consisting of black buns, shortbread, oatcakes, cheese, wine, and whiskey. Here, New Year's Eve is also known as *hogmanay* (a term derived from

the traditional Scottish oatcake). Scots celebrate by burning an effigy of "auld wife" (the old year) since they believe that it is evil and should be banished so that the new year can arrive. They make a dummy called "auld wife" with the help of rags, twigs, and straw, and drag it through the streets of the city or town. The effigy is drowned, burned, or buried. As in England, the first-footing superstition is prevalent in Scotland.

In Welsh villages on New Year's Day, young boys go from door to door around four in the morning and perform a small ritual in every house in the village to bring them good luck in the coming year. It involves sprinkling water with evergreen twigs on the inhabitants and in each room of the house.

❁ MAY DAY BANK HOLIDAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First Monday in May

Early May Bank Holiday falls on the first Monday in May. May 1 is celebrated as May Day, also known as Labor Day or Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. Although Labor Day is not observed in the United Kingdom, on this day special parties and parades are organized throughout the nation. The main highlights of the celebrations include the coronation of a May Queen (a teenager who inaugurates the May Day celebrations), the celebration of the legend of the Green Man (a man with foliage as hair and green leaves as his beard and moustache who symbolizes the spirit of nature), and ritual dancing around a tall, wooden pole decorated with colorful ribbons at the top, popularly known as the maypole.

Fish and Chips

Fish and chips used to be eaten separately. The original dish of fried fish was introduced in the United Kingdom by Spanish and Portuguese Jews in the 17th and 18th centuries. Potatoes were also introduced in Europe in the 17th century. While the fish dish became tremendously popular in London and the southeast of Britain (even Charles Dickens mentions a "fried fish warehouse" in *Oliver Twist*), deep-fried potatoes known as "chips" were becoming increasingly popular in northern England. It is not clear when the two dishes were joined, but the earliest known fish and chips shop was opened in London in 1860. The dish became so popular that during World War II, fish and chips was the only dish that was not rationed in the United Kingdom. The most preferred fish for this dish is the cod, though other white fish are also used. The dish is traditionally served with salt and vinegar; other popular dressings are ketchup and tartar sauce.



Fun Fact

Bank Holidays in England are traditional holidays and trace their origins to an earlier era when, on specific days, banks remained closed and most businesses were unable to function. A special law was passed in 1871 recognizing bank holidays. In England and Wales there are six bank holidays: New Year's Day, Easter Monday, May Day (not necessarily May 1), Spring and Late Summer Holidays at the end of May and August respectively, and Boxing Day. January 2 is a Bank Holiday only in Scotland.

The maypole continues to play a key role in many May Day and Beltane festivities and rites. (Beltane is an old Gaelic celebration. It one of the eight solar holidays of the Wiccan religion and is a cross-quarter day—one falling midway between a solstice and an equinox—celebrated in the Northern Hemisphere on May 1 and in the Southern Hemisphere on November 1.) Maypoles several centuries old in the United Kingdom are usually erected on village greens, and events are often supervised by local Morris dancing

groups. Ribbons were not added to maypoles until the 19th century, when John Ruskin (1819–1900) came up with the idea. Pairs of boys and girls (or men and women) stand alternately around the base of the pole, each holding the end of a ribbon. They weave in and around each other, boys going one way and girls going the other intertwining the ribbons around the pole until the merrymakers meet at the base. Sometimes a crown of flowers is situated atop the maypole, supported by the ribbons, so that it gradually descends the pole as the ribbons are woven together more and more tightly, finally falling to the ground. There are also more complex dances for set numbers of (practiced) dancers, involving complicated weaves and unweaves, but many of them have been forgotten.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY; SPRING FESTIVALS

☞ SPRING BANK HOLIDAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Last Monday in May

This day is a bank holiday in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

☞ SUMMER BANK HOLIDAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: Last Monday in August

This day is a bank holiday observed in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

Religious Holidays

☞ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Last Sunday of Lent

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, commemorating the last week of Jesus' mortal life. He was the prophet of Christianity, and Christians believe he was the Son of God incarnate and the second person of the Holy Trinity (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). The day is as much about his triumphal entry into Jerusalem as it is about the beginning of his journey to the Cross. Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem was, indeed, the path to the Cross.

Jesus had already foretold his betrayal and Resurrection to his disciples on the way to Jerusalem from Judea. The day was April 10, 30 C.E., according to some calculations. They stopped at the Mount of Olives, near Bethany, and Jesus sent two disciples to the village of Bethphage to bring him a donkey and its foal, tied at the crossway of two roads. They did so and placed their clothes on the foal to provide a comfortable seat. The disciples then cut branches and covered the path, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the words of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. People welcomed him by waving palm and olive branches, and strewing garments and branches on the road. There were different perceptions at work: Jesus rode in on a donkey, a humble entry of a peaceful nature by a spiritual king; the people of Jerusalem welcomed him with palm and olive branches and the laying of garments in his path because they wanted a worldly king to defeat the Romans.

See also Volume III: HOLY WEEK; LENT

☞ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Thursday before Easter

Maundy Thursday, usually referred to as Holy Thursday outside English-speaking countries and in the Roman Catholic Church, is the Thursday before Easter, the day on which the Last Supper is said to have occurred, and Jesus created the ritual of the Holy Eucharist. The Middle English word *maundy*, used only in this context, is derived from Old French *mandé*, which came from the Latin *mandatum novum do vobis*, "a new commandment I give unto you," the words reported to have been those spoken by Jesus to his disciples after washing their feet in preparation for the Last Supper. Foot washing is increasingly popular as a part of Holy Thursday liturgies in many churches.

This day is also called Sheer Thursday because it is the day of cleaning (*schere*) and because the churches themselves changed liturgical colors from the dark tones of Lent. In the United Kingdom, it is the custom for the reigning monarch to distribute

Maundy money.

See also Volume III: EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus, so it is observed as a somber, solemn occasion. It falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent (an austere season of fasting and penitence). In the United Kingdom devout Christians attend a service in their local churches at around 3 o'clock in the afternoon, since they believe that Christ was crucified around this time. They offer prayers and remember his life and teachings. Also a reading of passages from the Holy Bible that narrate his journey to the Cross takes place in many parts of the United Kingdom.

Since this is a day of mourning for Christians, churches are devoid of any decorations, and even portraits and pictures inside the church are covered with a cloth. An interesting Good Friday tradition involves eating hot cross buns and fish. Tradition maintains that hot cross buns baked on Good Friday have magical powers and will not spoil for a year.

A number of superstitious beliefs are associated with Good Friday. Fishermen do not catch fish on this day, and farmers do not plant crops, since it is believed that iron should not enter the ground on this day. Also sailors used to take hot cross buns with them on their sailing ventures, since they believed that these buns would protect them from shipwrecks.

See also Volume III: EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a Christian feast that celebrates Jesus' Resurrection from the dead three days after his Crucifixion. This day is of utmost importance because the fundamental teaching of Christianity is that Jesus, through his death, freed all his followers from the penalty of sin. The holiday falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. They often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to offer prayers. Easter eggs have become associated with the festival. They are considered the symbol of new life.

In the United Kingdom on Easter, special Easter services are held to celebrate Jesus' Resurrection. Easter eggs and gifts (usually chocolates) are exchanged. Easter bunnies are another favorite Easter toy and are extremely popular in the United Kingdom. Children participate in Easter bonnet-tying and basket-making competitions. The winners receive beautifully decorated Easter eggs. Children

Poppies

The poppy is the flower worn on Remembrance Day in many parts of the world. The poppy came to symbolize Remembrance Day because it was the only flower that continued to bloom in Flanders, despite the mayhem in its surroundings, during World War I. During the war in the same area, buildings, ports, roads, and trees were completely destroyed. Farms and buildings were razed to the ground, the region was covered with mud and bodies, and only a few men survived. Thus the poppy was practically the only the sign of life. Since then the poppy has become a symbol of hope and assurance.

also embark on egg hunts to find the Easter eggs, which they believe are hidden by Easter bunnies in the hedges and nooks and corners of gardens.

A traditional Easter meal consists of Easter biscuits (also known as cakes), boiled eggs, and roast lamb. Children and adults alike love to eat chocolate eggs, which also serve as excellent Easter presents for children.

See also Volume III: EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

EASTER MONDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Monday after Easter

Easter Monday is the first day of Easter Week and is generally regarded as a continuation of Easter Sunday. The day was once part of a weeklong celebration but was later made a one-day holiday. It is a day filled with fun and frolic. Egg-rolling competitions are extremely popular in England. This involves rolling hard-boiled eggs down slopes and grassy banks. The rules of the game vary from region to region, and the person judged the winner might be the one whose egg rolls the farthest or survives the roll down the hill.

In Biddenden in Kent county, a charity known as Biddenden Dole takes place. It is believed to have been started by two Siamese twin sisters in 1100. For this event, cheese, tea, and bread are served along with cakes bearing the image of the Siamese twins. In the Hallaton region of Leicestershire, Bottle Kicking and Hare Pie Scrambles are major

Fun Fact

The armistice treaty was signed at the 11th hour (11 A.M.) of the 11th day of the 11th month and ended all German hostilities on the Western Front (which refers to the territory disputed by the Allies—the United States, United Kingdom, and France—and Germany).

Fun Fact

It is estimated that in England 80 million chocolate eggs are consumed every Easter.

events that take place on Easter Monday. In the Hare Pie Scrambles game, a baked beef pie, blessed in a small ceremony, is broken into pieces and thrown among the assembled crowd. Later, a rugby match takes place between the towns of Hallaton and Medbourne. In this match, instead of rugby balls small wooden barrels are used, and each team has to get each of the three barrels to the touchline in either of the villages.

See also Volume III: EASTER; HOLY WEEK;

LENT

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

This is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world because it celebrates the birth of Jesus, whom Christians believe was the Son of God. In the United Kingdom Christmas celebrations begin on Christmas Eve (December 24) and last until Boxing Day on December 26. Weeks before Christmas people start buying cards and gifts as well as decorative items to adorn their homes and Christmas trees. It has long been an old Christmas tradition in England for children to hang up their stockings on Christmas Eve. They expect a visit from Santa Claus who is supposed to come down the chimney bringing them gifts. They leave out a carrot for the reindeer and mince pie and brandy for Santa. Children also believe that Santa will bring them a special Christmas present if they were good during the past year.

Christmas Day is celebrated with great joy and enthusiasm in England. Children wake up early in the morning and are delighted to see their stockings stuffed with presents brought by Santa Claus. People attend church in the morning and offer prayers on this special day. In the afternoon the entire family gathers around the Christmas tree, open their Christmas presents, and sing Christmas carols. A major highlight of the celebration is the Queen's annual Christmas speech. Her address is broadcast live on

Hot Cross Bun Ceremony

A traditional Hot Cross Bun Ceremony takes place at a London pub called "The Widow's Son" on Good Friday. The tradition began in the 19th century when this place wasn't a pub but the home of a widow whose son was a sailor away at sea. He was expected to return for Easter, and she had baked a hot cross bun for him. Although her son never returned, she kept on baking hot cross buns every year on Good Friday, hoping for his safe return. After her death successive landlords have continued the practice in memory of the widow.

television and radio throughout the United Kingdom.

In general, the British spend Christmas with friends and family. Their traditional Christmas dinner consists of roasted stuffed turkey, roasted vegetables and potatoes, cranberry juice, bread sauce, and *furmenty* (Christmas plum pudding). An interesting custom related to Christmas is mummering. Mummers are people who get dressed up in colorful costumes and masks, march in procession, and often perform plays that depict biblical stories. Mummering is staged in many towns and villages throughout England.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26

Boxing Day is celebrated on the day after Christmas. This day is also celebrated as St. Stephen's Day; St. Stephen was the first Christian martyr. In earlier days servants in the United Kingdom worked on Christmas Day and took a day off on December 26 to visit their friends and family. It is believed that, as they were leaving, their masters would put some money, food items, clothing, and other gifts in boxes and present them to their servants. Also the church boxes meant for collecting money for charitable purposes were opened, and the money distributed among the poor.

In the 21st century, people give small gifts or tips to milkmen, newspaper boys, and other tradespeople on Boxing Day. It is also a day of foxhunting in the United Kingdom. Riding a horse, preceded by a pack of dogs that sniff out the foxes and chase them, hunters enjoy Boxing Day. However, wildlife activists have strongly opposed this cruel tradition and have started a campaign to place a ban on foxhunting throughout the year.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

ST. GEORGE'S DAY

Observed in: England

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April 23

St. George is the patron saint of England, and every year on April 23 St. George's Day is celebrated to mark the birth of this Christian saint. It is also the national day of England. St. George was an accomplished warrior in the Roman Empire who had earned the title of centurion due to his courage, loyalty, and sense of honor. He was also known as George the Victorious, in recognition of the innumerable battles he won. With the advent of Christianity he was influ-

enced by the religion and took a vow to protect Christians. But his support of Christianity invited the ire of the Roman Empire, and he was asked to denounce Christianity. When he refused he was tortured to death.

No elaborate celebrations take place in England on this day. It is observed in a solemn manner. In some parts of England scouts and guides organize a ceremonial parade on the Sunday nearest to April 23 and attend prayer services held in honor of St. George to pay their respects to their patron saint. Also people throughout England wear red roses, the national flower of England, on this day.

❁ GUY FAWKES NIGHT

Observed in: England

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 5

Guy Fawkes Night, or Bonfire Night, commemorates the Gunpowder Plot hatched by a group of Roman Catholics (including Guy Fawkes) to blow up the English Parliament and kill King James I of England. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I of England (1533–1603), certain laws had been passed against Roman Catholics. When King James I (1566–1625) ascended to the English throne after her death, Catholics had hoped that he would treat them fairly, but he continued to uphold the laws passed by Queen Elizabeth I. So a group of Roman Catholics, led by Robert Gatesby, hatched a plot that involved assassinating King James I and blowing up Parliament on the opening day of the parliamentary session, November 5, 1605.

To accomplish this they bought the house next to Parliament that had a cellar connected to parliament's. They hoped to sneak barrels of gunpowder into the cellar of Parliament and blow up the entire building with everyone inside it. Guy Fawkes was given the charge of the barrels and the task of lighting them at the correct moment. However, he was captured and imprisoned the day before. After days of torture and brutal treatment, he told the soldiers about the alleged plot and named all those involved in the conspiracy.

On this day the British celebrate the fact that the conspiracy was foiled. Throughout the country huge bonfires are lit in towns and villages, followed by spectacular displays of fireworks. An effigy of Guy Fawkes is set on fire. Also people cook hot potatoes (wrapped in foil), have hot soup, and enjoy a night out on November 5. A sticky cake known as Parkin cake is eaten on this day as well. In many parts of the country children blacken their faces with soot and wheel around a figure representing Guy Fawkes, chanting "Remember, remember the fifth of November, gunpowder, treason, and plot." The figure is stuffed with cloth, straw, and fireworks and burned in the evening.

❁ REMEMBRANCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 11

Remembrance Day commemorates the end of World War I on November 11, 1918, after an armistice treaty was signed between the Allies and Germany in a railway carriage at Compiègne in France. Ferdinand Foch (1851–1929), a French marshal, was the commander-in-chief of the Allies and led them to victory against the German forces.

Remembrance Day, also known as Armistice Day, was originally observed in memory of all those men and women who lost their lives during World War I. Over the years it has come to include the dead of other wars as well.

In the United Kingdom people observe a minute-long silence at 11 A.M. on Armistice Day as a mark of respect for the brave soldiers who lost their lives in various wars. Remembrance Sunday is held on the second Sunday of November (nearest to November 11). Special prayer services are organized at war memorials and at churches across Britain, and people pay homage to the victims and soldiers who died during the war. A national memorial service is organized at the Cenotaph (War Memorial) at



Britain's Queen Elizabeth lays a wreath during the annual Remembrance Day service at the Cenotaph Memorial, Whitehall. This service commemorates the soldiers who died for Britain in both World Wars and other conflicts such as the Gulf War. (AP Photo/Findlay Kember)

Whitehall in London with the Queen, prime minister, and other government officials in attendance.

Also in November the British wear a red poppy in memory of all those who died defending the nation's freedom.

Rites of Passage

✿ BIRTH

The rituals of the Anglican Church are quite similar to those of the Roman Catholic Church. The head of the Anglican Church (or Church of England) is the

King or Queen of England. In the United Kingdom, there are no specific rituals associated with the birth of a child. However, parents may choose to baptize their children or christen them when they are infants. Through the ritual of baptism, an infant is welcomed into the church. The ritual involves sprinkling water or immersing the infant in water to wash away its sins and welcome it into its new life as a Christian.

Baptism or christening is performed in a church. The parents choose relatives or friends to be the godparents of their child. As godparents, these individuals share in the responsibilities of parenthood. They are expected to contribute significantly in shaping the personality of the child and to help him or her become a better Christian. During the baptism ritual, parents and godparents issue a declaration on

behalf of the child to turn away from everything evil and sinful and to completely dedicate the child's life to Jesus and his teachings. Although most children are baptized in infancy, the Church of England believes that there is no age limit for baptism.

The baptism ceremony takes place in the morning in the presence of the community. The priest makes the sign of a cross on the child's forehead, pours water on the child's head (to cleanse him or her of all sins), and anoints the forehead with holy oil, thereby formally welcoming the child into the community.

Fun Fact

The Green Man is a pagan fertility figure or nature spirit, perhaps related to the *woodwose*, the wild man of the woods, who was able to survive as a symbol of pre-Christian pagan religious traditions despite the efforts of the Christian Church to eradicate or transform the customs. Early Christian missionaries often adopted and adapted local gods, sometimes turning them into obscure saints. The Green Man continued to appear frequently, carved in wood or stone, in churches, chapels, abbeys, and cathedrals, as recently as the 11th century.

✿ COMING OF AGE

A coming of age ritual performed for young girls and boys (at age seven or eight) in the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches is the first Communion. Jesus initiated the ritual of Holy Communion at the Last Supper when he shared bread and a cup of wine with his disciples. As he broke the bread, Jesus said, "This is my body, which is broken for you"; with the cup of wine, he stated, "This is my blood, which is shed for you." In many Christian churches, the priest reenacts the Last Supper by blessing and distributing bread and wine.

The sacrament of the first Holy Communion is an initiation ceremony during which a Christian child is allowed to have the blessed bread and wine for the first time. The church allows this practice only after the child understands the meaning of the ritual. Another Christian rite often associated with coming of age is confirmation. Confirmation usually takes place at a later age (12 or 13), when the individual is old enough to make his or her own decisions. Through this ritual, a baptized child completely confirms a belief in Christianity and is welcomed into the Christian community as a full-time member. A bishop always performs the confirmation by laying hands on the person's head and praying for him or her. Before people are confirmed they usually go to confirmation classes where they are given instruction in the important beliefs of Christians. The actual ritual of the sacrament of confirmation takes place during the Mass, after the priest completes the sermon. The priest reads aloud the names of all those individuals who will be confirmed.

The individuals whose names have been called out go up to the bishop and, after asserting that they have total faith in Jesus and promise to reject evil, the bishop lays his hands on each of the candidates. It is a Christian belief that the hand symbolizes the strength and power of the Holy Spirit that will come to them. Then the bishop calls out the confirmation name of each candidate. This can either be his or her real name or the name of any saint. Using the holy oil, he makes the sign of a cross on the candidate's forehead, thereby indicating that the candidate is now a child of God.

✿ MARRIAGE

There are a variety of rituals, symbols, and superstitions associated with marriage in the United Kingdom. While some of these have fallen into disuse, others are still popular in the UK and many other countries. For example the English believe that rain on a wedding day is a sign of good luck. In addition to ward off evil and ensure good luck, English brides traditionally carried horseshoes strung with ribbons or sewed silver horseshoes in the hem of their wedding gowns. Their bridesmaids wore clothes that were identical to the bride's to create confusion in the mind of any evil person who might want to curse the bride at the beginning of her mar-

ried life. Finally a small girl scattered flowers along the route to the chapel where the couple was to be married before the bride and her wedding party. This ritual symbolically wished good luck and happiness to them in married life.

Traditionally also, English couples exchange their wedding rings and vows at the chapel doorway so that anyone could witness their marriage. However, most weddings take place inside the church in the presence of friends and family members only. The modern wedding ceremony is followed by a lavish reception complete with singing, dancing, and dining. It is customary for a three-tier fruitcake to be an integral part of the reception. It contains raisins, ground almonds, marzipan, and cherries. The top-most layer of the cake is kept aside for the baptism of the couple's first child and is called the christening cake. This fruitcake is served along with a chocolate cake, known as the groom's cake.

A week before a modern Scottish wedding, the mother of the bride holds a show-of-presents ceremony for her friends and relatives to see the gifts the bride has received. The guests add to these by bringing gifts for the bride that will help her in setting up her new home. All the presents are opened and shown to everyone, and the bride's mother also treats the guests to tea and cakes.

The day before, the groom and his male friends hold a stag party that usually involves a great deal of eating and drinking. On the wedding day the bride wears a white gown, while the groom wears traditional dress, which consists of a highland kilt, a *sporran* (a pouch usually made of skin worn in front of the kilt), and a jacket. They enter the chapel to the music of the bagpipe or traditional Gaelic hymns.

A Scottish couple exchanges vows either in English or the Gaelic language, as they prefer, and then the groom welcomes the bride as a member of his clan by pinning a strip of his clan's tartan colors on her wedding gown. A ritual Scottish reception follows in which the bride and the groom are welcomed by the sound of bagpipes and are taken to the wedding cake. Here, one of the bagpipers gives a *dirk* (a long-bladed knife) to the bride who cuts the cake guided by her husband. After a traditional meal the Scottish groom carries his wife off to their new home.

❁ DEATH

The Church of England permits Christians to be buried or cremated, depending on their wishes. At the time of death the dying person or his relatives may ask the priest to bless him or her, a ritual that involves anointing with holy oil. A dying person may also wish to confess his or her sins and receive Holy Communion, a ritual that involves taking the Chris-

tian sacrament of consecrated bread and wine. Prayers are also said for the dying person, and they continue after death. A memorial service is usually held in church, followed by a small meal (like a high tea, but solemnly observed). Christians believe that, after death, the righteous spend eternity in heaven with God and Jesus, while sinners spend eternity in hell.

Further Reading

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Fun Fact

Hadrian's Wall, which runs south of the contemporary border between England and Scotland, was built to protect Roman-occupied Britain from the marauding Picts. Begun around 122, the stone and turf barrier was completed in about 10 years; much of it is still standing.

Fun Fact

The renowned literary figure William Shakespeare, often referred to as the Bard of Avon, was born on April 23, 1564, and passed away on April 23, 1616.

United States

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	North America, including three regions: the territory between Canada and Mexico bordering both the North Atlantic Ocean and the North Pacific Ocean; Alaska to the northwest bordering Canada to the east, the Arctic Ocean to the north, and the North Pacific Ocean to the west and south; and Hawaii in the South Pacific Ocean
Size	3,718,711 sq. mi. (does not include Alaska or Hawaii)
Capital City	Washington, D.C.
Flag Description	The United States flag has 13 equal alternating horizontal stripes of red (top and bottom) and white representing the original 13 American colonies, with a blue rectangle in the upper-left corner featuring 50 five-pointed stars representing the 50 states.
Independence	July 4, 1776 (from Great Britain)
Population	295,734,134 (July 2005 est.)
Government	Federal republic
Nationality	American
Major Ethnic Group(s)	White (82%); black or African-American (13%); Various Native American tribes
Major Language(s)	English (82%); Spanish (11%)
Major Religion(s)	Protestant (52%); Roman Catholic (24%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday, January; Presidents' Day, February; Memorial Day, May; Independence Day, July 4; Labor Day, September; Columbus Day, October; Veterans Day, November 11; Thanksgiving, November

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

For millennia the land that is now the continental United States was covered with forests, prairies, and deserts, and millions of native people called Amerindians, Native Americans, or American Indians lived here. While it is likely that navigators or those lost at sea from other continents, including Africa, Europe, Asia, and Australia had found their way to the Western Hemisphere, archaeologists know from their artifacts and dwellings that peoples from Asia had crossed to the North American continent on a land bridge called Beringia before the end of the last Ice Age, around 12,000 to 13,000 years ago. By the time Europeans

began to investigate the western continents in earnest, the Native Americans had populated the continents from the Arctic to the tip of South America and from the Pacific to the Atlantic Oceans, and had founded numerous civilizations, including the Olmec, the Toltec, the Maya of Central America and Mexico, the Aztec of Mexico and southwestern North America, the Inca of western South America, the Anasazi, the Mound Builders, the Sioux Nations (Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota), and the Six Nations, or Iroquois Confederacy.

The first Europeans were probably Norsemen (sometimes confused with the Vikings, who were pirates) led by Leif Eriksson (? b. 980), who worked their way south from Greenland and Iceland, following the North Atlantic coastline, and made at least three landings around 1006.

The Iroquois Confederacy

One of the strongest political forces in 17th- and 18th-century New England was the Iroquois Confederacy, more properly the Haudenosaunee (or League of Peace and Power, Five Nations, or Six Nations), a group of First Nations/Amerindians who lived in present-day upstate New York when they had contact with the first colonists. According to tradition, two prophets, the Great Peacemaker (in Mohawk, Skennenrahawi) and his student, Hiawatha, urged the squabbling tribes to stop their infighting and join together in peace. At first there were five nations—the Seneca, Onondaga, Oneida, Cayuga, and Mohawks—until a sixth nation, the Tuscarora, of what is now North Carolina, joined them in 1720. The Haudenosaunee had a constitution, recorded with wampum, beads with their own

spiritual value, and said to have influenced the framers of the U.S. Constitution (although this is disputed).

Haudenosaunee, in addition to being the name of the Six Nations, is how the people refer to themselves and to the combined leadership of the nations. It means “people building a long house,” and was provided by the Great Peacemaker when the group came together. The word *Iroquois* is thought to be derived from a French version of a Huron (Wendat) or Algonquin name that means “black snakes,” and is regarded as an insult. (The Huron and Algonquin were enemies of the Iroquois because they were also involved in the fur trade.) The Seneca were symbolically the guardians of the western door of the “tribal long house,” while the Mohawk were guardians of the eastern door.

After a protracted period of reconnaissance and unsuccessful colonization begun in the 16th century, colonists from England, Holland and Sweden settled along the Atlantic coast beginning in the early 1600s. By the middle of the 18th century, British North America encompassed mature colonies from New England to Georgia and a colonial population of 2.5 million.

Following the French and Indian War, in which Britain defeated France and in 1763 claimed a great deal of French North American territory, tensions began to rise between Britain’s colonists and their government. Colonists resented being asked to pay higher taxes to support the British military, especially as they had no representation in the mother country’s government. They also sought to expand their settlements across western borders Britain had agreed to respect in treaties with Native Americans.

In 1775 these tensions erupted at Lexington and Concord in the area that is now the state of Massachusetts, and on July 4, 1776, the rebels declared the independence of “the United States of America” from Great Britain. That event is celebrated as Independence Day in the United States. The new nation’s freedom was won in the American Revolutionary War, which officially ended in 1783. In 1787 a new government structure was drafted in Philadelphia and then ratified by the states. The new nation’s Constitution established it as a democratic republic with powers balanced between the three branches of the federal government—executive, legislative, and judicial—and the individual states. In 1791 the first 10 amendments to the Constitution were approved. Commonly known as the Bill of Rights, these amendments further establish the basic rights and principles of liberty and justice in the United States—among them, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, protection from unreasonable search and

seizure, the right to due process, trial by jury, and protection from cruel and unusual punishment.

The new nation grew rapidly and began stretching beyond its colonial borders past the Appalachian Mountains and into territory held by Native American tribes and foreign powers. The Americans would gradually push these groups off their land, through battle or treaty. Today Native Americans remain but are a small minority, many living on land reserved for them by the federal government. In 1803 the United States acquired the vast Louisiana territory from France, which had colonial holdings throughout North America, and following a war with its southern neighbor Mexico in 1848, the continental United States had nearly expanded to its current borders. Alaska was acquired from Russia in 1867, and Hawaii became a U.S. territory in 1898. As the nation expanded westward, and as commercial and industrial development produced burgeoning cities, immigrants from around the world rushed to the United States seeking economic, religious, and political freedom and opportunity.

However, the thousands of Africans who came to America between the 17th and 19th centuries came unwillingly, in chains, as slaves, crowded together in the filthy holds of the ships that transported them. Through importation and natural increase, the slave population of the United States stood at nearly 4 million by the mid-19th century. Eventually the largely free states of the North and the “slave states” of the South split over the issue of slavery’s expansion to the nation’s western territories. Eleven southern states seceded from the union and went to war with the North. The Civil War (1861–65) was the most traumatic event in the country’s history, but victory for the North restored

Fun Fact

President Lyndon B. Johnson (1908–73) declared October 9 Leif Eriksson Day in the United States in 1964.

Vinland

As he worked his way south along the North Atlantic coast, Leif Eriksson's first landing is thought to have been at what he named Helluland ("Land of the Flat Stones") because there were so many flat rock slabs (Old Norse *hellr*), which has been tentatively identified as present-day Baffin Island. He described his second stop as a flat, wooded region with white sandy beaches, which he called Markland ("woodland"), thought to have been present-day Labrador. At their third landfall, which Leif named Vinland because the grass was green year-round (Old Norse *vinja* means "meadow" or "grazing area"), he and his men decided to attempt a settlement and built some houses. Because it was pleasant, with a mild climate and lots of salmon in the river, they remained for the winter.

Like many other ancient stories once discounted as legends, fables, or myths, Leif Eriksson's story, recorded in the Icelandic sagas, is probably essentially factual although, perhaps, embellished to some degree. In the 1950s and 1960s explorer Helge Ingstad and his wife and archaeologist Anne Stine may have found the remains of the Vinland settlement at the tip of present-day Newfoundland, later

known as L'Anse aux Meadows (from French L'Anse-aux-Méduses, which means "Jellyfish Cove"). The first recorded conflicts between Europeans and indigenous peoples may have occurred around 1006 at that site. The Norse sagas report that the indigenous people whom Eriksson and his men encountered were insurmountably fierce and that the explorers decided to leave. Those inhabitants of Newfoundland and Labrador, who called themselves Beothuk (which meant "the people"), were probably the natives called *skraelings*, or *skraelingars*, by the Norsemen. (By the 19th century they were extinct.)

In 1957, a map called the Vinland Map turned up, purportedly a 15th-century Mappa Mundi, redrawn from a 13th-century original. If it is authentic (and some scholars think it is a fake) its importance would be that, in addition to showing the continents of Africa, Asia, and Europe, the map depicts a body of land across the Atlantic called Vinland and describes it as having been visited in the 11th century. Should the map be confirmed as genuine, it would add further support to the archaeological evidence that Viking explorers found and mapped the Western Hemisphere before Columbus did.



the union and ended slavery, although it would be decades before the achievements of the civil rights movement would bring a measure of freedom to African-Americans.

United States victories in World War I and World War II left it the most powerful nation in the world, militarily and economically. In the 21st century it remains so, although it faces numerous challenges, including the continued threat of terrorism following the attacks of September 11, 2001, the strains of its ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the decline of its economic strength, its failure to confront the dangers inherent in global warming, and the ineffectiveness of its international diplomacy.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The United States is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the east, the Pacific Ocean to the west, Canada to the north, and Mexico to the south. Alaska sits to the northwest, bordered by Canada to the east, the Arctic Ocean to the north, and the Pacific Ocean to the west and south. Hawaii lies in the South Pacific. The United States is the world's third largest country, after Russia and Canada. As befits a nation that stretches across a continent, the United States enjoyed a diverse geography for many years. When

the first Europeans arrived, the territory featured large rivers and plentiful water, abundant natural resources, and some of the world's most productive farmland. The eastern United States is home to the Appalachian mountain ranges as well as forests, wetlands, and popular beaches along the Atlantic Ocean. The nation's largest river, the Mississippi, bisects the country as it runs from the world's largest group of freshwater lakes, the Great Lakes, in the North to the Gulf of Mexico in the South, creating fertile farmland as it flows. The vast plains environment of the Midwest supports forests in the north and crops and livestock in the nation's midsection. The Rocky Mountains of the West form North America's largest and youngest mountain system, and a region dominated by lumber and mining interests. The landforms of the dry Southwest are some of the most unusual in the world, including the natural wonder of the Grand Canyon. The western coast features evergreen forests to the north and, to the south, California's craggy coastline and fertile agricultural valleys.

The nation's climate ranges from the arctic chill of the Alaskan winter to the dry heat of the Southwest and the tropical South Pacific conditions of Hawaii. Most of the continental United States is moderate and temperate. The Northeast and Midwest have cold winters and hot summers, while the

South has longer summers and milder winters. The Pacific region has a generally mild climate year-round, except for the desert areas of the West and Southwest. The mostly favorable climate has influenced population shifts, most recently toward the Sunbelt region in the South, but the eastern and western coastlines remain more densely populated than much of the country's center. In 2005 one of the worst hurricane seasons since records have been kept, New Orleans, Louisiana, once a vital U.S. port, was devastated by Hurricane Katrina, and its population scattered across the country.

❁ ECONOMY

The United States has the world's largest economy. Its gross domestic product (GDP), or the value of all goods and services produced each year, is \$11.75 trillion. It is an economy based on a free-market, capitalist system, leaving most decisions to individuals and businesses, although the government imposes various regulations to maintain competition in important industries, to protect consumers from unsafe products, to ensure environmental health, and to protect workers from dangerous workplace environments. The country has enormous natural resources, yet it still imports more supplies, including oil, to meet its needs. The country has large deposits of coal, iron, oil, and natural gas, as well as wide expanses of fertile farmland, and forests that once covered nearly a third of its total area. Fish is plentiful off the Pacific coast, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Atlantic coast.

Still service industries account for the largest share of the nation's GDP, spread among such industries as health care, tourism, banking, insurance, and retail sales. The largest stock exchange in the nation is the New York Stock Exchange, and the Chicago Board of Trade is the world's leading commodities exchange. The country's largest trade partners include Canada and Mexico, its partners in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), as well as Japan and China. The government itself purchases a fifth of all goods and services produced in the United States. U.S. companies have long been world leaders in technological fields including computers, medicine, and military equipment. Other major exports include cars and airplanes, manufacturing equipment, paper, metal ores, and chemical products. The nation's farmers and ranchers produce all the food its people need, with enough left over to export grain, fruit, and other products. Beef is the nation's most valuable farm product although the threat of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (mad cow disease) may change that. As a center of world business and trade, the United States has four of the world's five busiest airports, as well as leading ports such as New York City; Miami, Florida; Houston, Texas; and Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Long Beach, California.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The United States was once called a “melting pot” because it is, and has always been, a nation of immigrants. The nation was founded by settlers from Western Europe, but over the years people from all over the world have come together to form a diverse, distinctive culture. Today, about one in ten Americans was born outside the country. Recent immigrants come from Mexico and other Latin American countries; Canada; central Europe; and the Philippines and other Asian nations. Many immigrant populations retain the traditions of their homelands, seen most clearly in the nation's large cities, where various ethnic groups have tended to settle in the same neighborhoods, with shops, restaurants, and celebrations reflecting their distinct cultures.

Almost all Americans can speak English, but many Hispanic immigrants, especially in the Southwest, speak only Spanish, by far the second most widely spoken language in the country. Some states have passed laws declaring English the only official language for their governments, but in many cities, public documents and important signs are produced in both English and Spanish. Just as immigrants are drawn to U.S. cities, so are native-born citizens. Three out of four Americans now live in urban areas, and Americans from rural areas continue to move to larger cities for the range of educational, professional, and cultural opportunities available there.

However, in a recent shift, more people now live in the suburban areas surrounding big cities than in the city centers themselves. In the nation's rural areas, only one in ten adults actually works on farms. Major advances in technology have eased the labor involved with maintaining crops and left much of the work to machines and agribusiness. For some Americans the quality of life is among the highest in the world. However, poverty both in cities and rural areas, and an increasing chasm in wealth between the nation's richest and poorest citizens, remain major challenges for the nation. The United States has long considered itself to be a meritocracy based in large part on educational achievement. About three-quarters of U.S. children attend public elementary and high schools, although private secular and religious schools are available in most communities as well. About one in five Americans completes at least four years of college.

Americans are a mobile people and have had a long love affair with the automobile. Of all modern inventions, the automobile is the one Americans say they could least live without. Today 60 percent of American households own two or more cars, and 20 percent own three

Fun Fact

Although one of the sagas specifies that Eriksson name the land Vinland because one of his men Tyrkir (a German warrior) had found grapes, the name has nothing to do with grapes or wine.

Fun Fact

Unlike baseball, which is based on the older game, cricket, basketball was invented by an individual, Dr. James Naismith, who was a Canadian-born U.S. minister, in 1891. After considering and rejecting several ideas as inappropriate for playing in walled-in gymnasiums, he wrote the basic rules, and nailed a peach basket up on the gym wall. The first official game was played on January 20, 1892. One of Naismith's students suggested the name "basket ball."

Fun Fact

Seymour, Wisconsin, is the home of the Hamburger Hall of Fame and the world's largest hamburger, which weighs 8,266 pounds.

or more. Americans from all walks of life are able to experience high culture at some of the nation's thousands of museums, including world-class art collections in cities like Boston, New York, Washington, D.C., Chicago, and Los Angeles.

Religion has always been an important part of American culture. The nation was built in part by people escaping Europe to find religious freedom, and the Constitution guarantees religious freedom to all while prohibiting the government establishment of any particular faith. More than half of all Americans belong to various Protestant denominations, but Catholics are the largest single religious group.

Most Americans have leisure time and disposable income available to invest in it, and they pursue a wide range of interests, including sports. Major spectator sports include wrestling and auto racing, and games invented in the United States, such as football (not to be confused with soccer or rugby), basketball, and baseball.

Many Americans also regularly exercise in fitness centers, run, or participate in team sports like soccer or basketball. For entertainment, almost every U.S. home has at least one television, and millions of people see a movie in a theater each week. The United States is the world leader in movie production, with major films premiering simultaneously across the globe.

When Americans go on vacation, they may travel around the world, although the beaches and national parks of the United States remain leading destinations. America's cultural legacy includes the musicians who created jazz and modern musical theater, sometimes referred to as Broadway after the street where many of the theaters are located. American authors, architects, singers, and painters are widely respected around the world.

Americans annually gather to celebrate national holidays based on their history and culture. When they shoot off fireworks on the Fourth of July, they celebrate "the great experiment" that has drawn a diverse people together to form a world power.

❁ CUISINE

Food in the United States is influenced by two factors: Its historically diverse immigrant population, which has introduced a wide variety of dishes; and the nation's abundance of meat and fish, dairy, and produce, which offers a wide range of possibilities for cooks.

Breakfasts are drawn from a wide range of fruits, juices, breads, cheeses, or cereals. Eggs and bacon or sausage are also popular. Sandwiches are a popular lunch item, often made with meat, cheese, or peanut butter. Meat and potatoes with salad or vegetables remain a typical dinner for many families, who can choose from beef, chicken, ham, or turkey. Fish is also popular as a main course, especially in fishing regions, as are pizza and pasta. Cookies, ice cream, pies, and cakes are popular desserts. Soft drinks such as colas are the nation's most popular beverages.

Coffee, milk, and beer are also widely popular. The U.S. is known for its wines as well, especially those produced in California and the Northwest. Families eat out often, and the nation's restaurants offer popular dishes from nearly every spot on earth. Chinese, Italian, Mexican, and French food have long been mainstays, but in recent years Japanese, Indian, Vietnamese, Thai, and Middle Eastern food have all gained in popularity. Various regions of America have their own distinct cuisines, such as Pennsylvania Dutch country (German), Louisiana (Cajun), and Hawaii (Polynesian).

The creativity of U.S. cooks should not be underestimated, because Americans have invented some of the most popular foods in the world, especially those that are quick, portable, and cheap, such as hot dogs, hamburgers, ice cream cones, and iced tea.

Sometimes the story of how a food was created is as well known as the food. Although other countries, in particular Hamburg, Germany, have claimed the hamburger as their own invention, what is called a hamburger probably originated in the late 19th century in the United States. Inventing the hamburger sandwich, a flattened patty of ground beef, is perhaps attributable to Charlie Nagreen of Seymour, Wisconsin. In 1885 he was selling fried meatballs at the Outagamie County Fair, but his customers found it hard to eat them while walking, so Nagreen flattened the meatball between two slices of bread and called it a hamburger. The distinctive hamburger bun is said to have been invented by a short-order cook J. Walter Anderson in 1916, who went on to found the White Castle restaurant chain in 1921.

The invention of the hot dog, like the hamburger and ice cream cone, is often attributed to the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, Missouri, but similar sausages were made in Germany as early as 1864; the earliest appearance of a hot dog bun dates back to New York City in the 1860s. The summer favorite, a hot dog at the baseball game, also predates the 1904 Exposition: The owner of the St. Louis Browns Chris von der Ahe

was selling them at his ballpark in the 1880s.

Like the hot dog and hamburger, the ice cream cone is popularly believed to have been invented in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1904 at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, although there are other claimants. According to legend a Syrian pastry maker Ernst Hamwi was selling *zalabia*, a crisp pastry cooked in a hot folding waffle-patterned press and dribbled with syrup, and came to the aid of an ice cream vendor, perhaps Arnold Fornachou or Charles Menches, who had run out of dishes. By rolling a still-warm *zalabia* into a cone, Hamwi created a pastry that could hold ice cream. And people could eat their ice cream as they strolled around the Exposition.

Tea, usually served hot, has been a favorite drink in many cultures, but iced tea, which is how most people drink the beverage in the United States, is also said to have originated in 1904 at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition held in St. Louis, Missouri.

Potato chips, not to be confused with British “chips,” are believed to have been invented by Native American George Crum, when he was chef at the Moon Lake Lodge in Saratoga Springs, New York. On August 24, 1853, a customer—by some accounts Cornelius Vanderbilt—kept sending his fried potatoes back because, he said, they were too thick and soggy. To silence the man, Crum sliced the potatoes so thin that it was impossible to eat them with a fork. Crum was amazed when, instead of being angry, the guest was ecstatic about the thin fried chips, and they became a regular item on the lodge’s menu, where they were called Saratoga Chips.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR’S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

Most Americans celebrate the first day of the calendar year (according to the Gregorian solar calendar), as do people in countries around the world. In the United States, banks, schools, and businesses are closed. On the night of December 31, or New Year’s Eve, many Americans gather in cities to celebrate the start of the new year at midnight. The largest such event is in New York City’s Times Square, where hundreds of thousands of people watch a large ball drop down the side of a building at exactly 12:00 midnight. In some cities fireworks are set off at midnight. Celebrations continue on New Year’s Day at events like the Mummers Parade in Philadelphia, featuring marchers in colorful costumes, or the Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena, California, which precedes college football’s annual Rose Bowl game. Privately many Americans make resolutions on New Year’s Day to improve themselves in some way or to break bad habits.

❁ MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.’S, BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Third Monday in January

Civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., was born on January 15, 1929. After his assassination in 1968, a campaign to turn his birthday into a national holiday began. In 1983 Congress made his birthday a federal holiday, first celebrated on January 20, 1986. The day commemorates King as an African-American hero and as a great American crusader for equality and social justice. The holiday is observed in all the states on the third Monday in January. Government offices and schools close for the day, although many businesses remain open.

Fun Fact

At New Year’s Eve parties, many Americans drink a toast of champagne, toot noisemakers, and sing “Auld Lang Syne,” or “old long since,” a traditional Scottish song of friendship.

❁ PRESIDENTS’ DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Third Monday in February

George Washington (1732–99) became the commanding general during the American Revolution and almost immediately assumed mythic status, embodying the new nation itself. Under the new federal Constitution, Washington was elected the first president of the United States and served from 1789 to early 1797. Americans began celebrating Washington’s birthday (February 22) during his lifetime; in the early 19th century, with the exception of Independence Day, it was the country’s only national holiday.

The day was renamed Presidents’ Day and moved from February 22 to the third Monday in February 1971 when the Monday Holiday Law of 1968 took effect. Many states also honor President Abraham Lincoln, who was born on Feb. 12, 1809, and is sometimes considered the greatest U.S. president for his role as the Great Emancipator during the Civil War. After his assassination in 1865, many states designated Lincoln’s birthday as a holiday. Celebration of Washington and Lincoln’s birthdays are now combined into Presidents’ Day, or Washington-Lincoln Day. Banks, government offices, and schools are closed. In many areas the day is the

Fun Fact

On New Year’s Day in many parts of the American South, it is traditional to eat a dish of black-eyed peas and rice called Hopping John, which is believed to have been brought to the United States by slaves from Africa and is thought to bring good luck.

beginning of a week-long public school vacation. Many stores hold special Presidents' Day sales.

❁ MEMORIAL DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Last Monday in May

On Memorial Day Americans honor the men and women who have died fighting for the United States. The holiday emerged through grassroots efforts in both the North and South as Americans struggled to assuage their grief following the Civil War, the most devastating event in U.S. history, which cost more than 600,000 lives. Some credit Waterloo, New York, with the first official observance on May 5, 1866. In the 21st century the holiday honors those who died in all American wars.

The holiday is also known as Decoration Day, because tradition calls for decorating the graves of servicemen with flowers and flags.

Banks, schools, and government offices are closed. Many U.S. towns hold parades and special programs that often include a reading of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Volunteers sell small artificial red poppies to raise money for disabled veterans. To honor naval dead, miniature boats filled with flowers are set afloat from some U.S. port cities.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 4

On July 4, 1776, the Second Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence, in which "the thirteen united States of America" declared their independence from their colonial ruler Great Britain. The Congress actually resolved to declare independence on July 2, but the Declaration was officially adopted on July 4. John Adams correctly predicted that Independence Day, also called the Fourth of July, would "be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great Anniversary Festival," although he thought July 2 would mark the nation's birthday. The Declaration of Independence is among the most cherished U.S. documents, particularly for its statements that "all men are created equal" and all are entitled to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Traditional Independence

Day celebrations featured readings of the Declaration and inspired Americans to pursue and achieve equality, even those—such as millions of slaves before the Civil War—who did not yet possess the freedom to which they were entitled. Government offices, banks, and businesses are closed. In many cities, the day is marked with concerts, parades, and public fireworks displays. One of the largest is in Boston, where the Boston Pops orchestra has performed before fireworks on the Charles River since 1974. Many individuals also set off fireworks, although the sale of fireworks is illegal in many parts of the country. Like the United States, many countries celebrate the day they became independent from oppressive regimes or colonial rulers.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First Monday in September

Labor Day, also celebrated as May Day or Workers' Day in other countries, was created to honor working people and their contributions to their countries. The first Labor Day parade took place in New York City on September 5, 1882, and was followed by a big picnic. The event was not sanctioned by employers but was, instead, a huge, festive, one-day general strike to assert labor's power, build solidarity among workers, and advocate better wages and working conditions. Many recognize as its founders two men, machinist Matthew Maguire of New Jersey and carpenter Peter McGuire of New York. Oregon became the first state to make Labor Day a legal holiday in 1887, and it became a national holiday in 1894.

Many countries celebrate Labor Day on May 1, a holiday with a more radical meaning and agenda. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world, and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

In the United States banks, government offices, and schools are closed. While labor groups still organize parades and events in many areas, for most Americans the holiday marks the end of summer and a time for leisure. Families often take a last long vacation weekend before the start of the school year, which traditionally takes place two or three days after Labor Day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ COLUMBUS DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Second Monday in October

Columbus Day marks the anniversary of Christopher Columbus's (1451–1506) first voyage to the

Fun Fact

In some southern states, a separate Confederate Memorial Day honors those who died fighting for the Confederacy in the Civil War. Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and Louisiana observe the holiday on various dates. Tennessee calls its holiday Confederate Decoration Day. Texas calls it Confederate Heroes Day.

Western Hemisphere in 1492. Some cities hold parades on Columbus Day, but for many Americans it is simply part of a long weekend. The first Columbus Day celebration was in New York City in 1792, the 300th anniversary of Columbus's voyage. In the 19th century Irish, Italian, and later, Hispanic American immigrants promoted the holiday in celebration of Columbus—a Catholic, non-English hero—to declare their own legitimacy as Americans. Columbus Day has been a federal Monday holiday, observed on the second Monday in October, since 1971; it is an official holiday for federal employees and residents of Washington, D.C., but it is not observed by every state or private businesses, and many people work on Columbus Day. Hawaii celebrates the day as Discoverers' Day, honoring Pacific and Polynesian explorers as well as Columbus. In Alabama American Indian Heritage Day is marked on the same day as Columbus Day.

❁ HALLOWEEN

Observed in: United States

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 31

While it is not an official holiday anywhere in the United States, Halloween is one of the country's most popular celebrations, and Americans spend nearly \$3 billion on Halloween-related goods each year. Millions of children put on costumes and go door-to-door in their neighborhoods, "trick-or-treating" for candy, or to raise money for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which aids needy children around the world. Adults gather for costume parties, and decorate their homes and offices with carved pumpkins known as jack-o-lanterns, as well as witches, ghosts, and other symbols of the holiday. The holiday has its roots in the ancient Celtic festival Samhain, when it was believed the souls of the recent dead roamed the land, and worshippers honored the lord of death. In the eighth and ninth century, western European Christians replaced Samhain with All Saints' Day, celebrated on November 1, but retained many of the old holiday's customs. The night before the new holiday was called All Hallow's Eve, and later, Halloween. The holiday gained popularity in the United States throughout the 19th century, as Irish immigrants popularized its customs. Today's secular Halloween is far removed from its pagan origins, but the holiday is highly controversial in many parts of the United States, where a range of religious groups actively protest public schools holding Halloween-themed events.

❁ VETERANS DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 11

Veterans Day honors the men and women who have served in the U.S. military. It is a federal holiday

observed nationwide and takes place on November 11, the day of the armistice that ended World War I in 1918, on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month. In France, Belgium, and other European countries, the holiday is still known as Armistice Day. In Canada, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere, it is called Remembrance Day and honors all those who died in war. President Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924) first declared the holiday in 1919. In 1954 its name was changed to Veterans Day. From 1971–77, it was celebrated as a Monday holiday, on the fourth Monday in October, but the change of date was unpopular among veterans, who believed the timing promoted leisure rather than solemn remembrance, so Congress moved Veterans Day back to November 11. In many U.S. cities veterans march in parades, and a special ceremony takes place at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia.

❁ THANKSGIVING

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Fourth Thursday in November

Thanksgiving is a day set aside for people to give thanks for their families and whatever prosperity they may enjoy. The holiday has its origins in fall harvest festivals held throughout history by farming societies, traditions that the European colonists brought with them to America. Thanksgiving observances are nearly universal, and other harvest festivals no doubt preceded the "first Thanksgiving" in Plymouth Colony in 1621. Nonetheless that event remains the holiday's charter, as it celebrated the Pilgrims' endurance, toleration, cooperation, abundance, and generosity and marked a long-term peace between them and their Wampanoag allies, who outnumbered the colonists at the three-day feast. Many Americans celebrate Thanksgiving with their families, typically sharing a turkey dinner. Some attend church services to give thanks to God, or volunteer to feed the hungry. The Thanksgiving tradition evolved informally and spread into the West and South from New England in the 19th century. It became a national holi-

Fun Fact

July 4 is one of 22 days on which Americans should fly the American flag at their homes or businesses, according to the Federal Flag Code. The other days include Mother's Day (second Sunday in May), Flag Day (June 14), Patriot Day (September 11), Constitution Day (September 17), and National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day (December 7).

Fun Fact

In Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, site of one of the bloodiest battles in the Civil War, schoolchildren come to the national cemetery and scatter flowers over the graves of unknown soldiers.



The National Turkey Federation presents President Clinton with the National Thanksgiving Day Turkey during ceremonies in the Rose Garden November 24, 1999. Continuing a tradition begun by President Truman in 1947, Clinton gave a presidential pardon to the turkey. (AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais)

day in 1863, when Abraham Lincoln hoped it might be a force for reconciliation and declared that the last Thursday of November would be “a day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father.” In 1941 Congress formally set the federal Thanksgiving holiday on the fourth Thursday of November.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS; THANKSGIVING

Religious Holidays

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

One of the two most important celebrations on the Muslim calendar (in addition to Eid al-Fitr), Eid al-Adha, or the Feast of the Sacrifice, commemorates the patriarch Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) willingness to sacrifice his son because God commanded it. According to the biblical account, Ibrahim was asked

to sacrifice his son (in Muslim tradition, the son to be sacrificed is Ishmael—Isaac in the Judeo-Christian tradition), but God intervened, and an angel stopped the sacrifice, directing Ibrahim to sacrifice a lamb instead. As part of this day-long festival, an animal is sacrificed, and one-third of the meat is given to the poor. Muslim families exchange gifts and enjoy a feast. The holiday occurs on the last day of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, in the 12th month of the Islamic lunar calendar. In the United States, this date varies because the Islamic lunar calendar makes no corrections to align it with the Gregorian, solar calendar used there.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, also known as Mourning Friday, Black Friday, or Great Friday (in Eastern Orthodox Churches), marks the day that Jesus died on the Cross and is observed on the Friday before Easter,

the central holiday on the Christian calendar. Many Christians attend a special service mourning Jesus, which traditionally lasts from noon until 3 P.M., representing the three hours that Jesus suffered on the Cross. Some Christians observe Good Friday, especially Roman Catholics, as a fast day in mourning for Jesus. This day is an aliturgical day in the Catholic Church, so Communion is not observed. Church bells are silenced, and lights in churches may be dimmed.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter, which celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus three days after his Crucifixion, is the most important holiday on the Christian calendar, and the culmination of the Christianity's Holy Week. Easter also marks the end of the 40-day fasting period of Lent. The date of Easter is based on the lunar calendar. The exact date each year is set to be observed on the Sunday after the first full Moon on or after the day of the vernal equinox. Depending on the denomination, churches hold services on Saturday evening, at sunrise on Sunday, or on Sunday morning. Families gather on Easter Sunday for a festive meal, often featuring lamb, a symbol of Jesus, who is sometimes called "the Lamb of God." Symbols of the holiday include lilies, candles, and rabbits (or hares).

Easter is also a celebration of spring, and Easter eggs and Easter bunnies, while having no direct connection to the story of Jesus' death and Resurrection, are both symbols of fertility appropriate to the season. According to the Venerable Bede (672–735), a renowned Christian scholar, Easter was named after Eostre (or Eastre), the Mother Goddess of the Saxon tribes of Northern Europe who was also the goddess of fertility. The ancient deities in all civilizations had patron animals, and the rabbit, an obvious symbol of fertility, is the companion animal of Eostre. The deity was believed to preside over conception and birth in animals, including humans, and pollination, flowering, and the ripening of fruit in the plant kingdom. After the harsh dreary winters of Northern Europe, she brought the warmth of spring, fertility, and abundance. The Germans knew her as Ostara.

Many families paint the shells of hard-boiled eggs and hide them for children to find in an Easter Egg Hunt. Some people also wear new clothes on Easter, another symbol of the new life symbolized by Jesus' Resurrection. In some communities, people put on their finest clothes and march in an Easter parade.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PESACH; SPRING FESTIVALS

✿ PESACH

Observed by: Jews

Observed on: Begins on the 15th of Nisan, the first month of the Jewish calendar

Pesach, or Passover, is an eight-day festival celebrating the Exodus of the Jews from slavery in Egypt, probably around 1200 B.C.E. As with other Jewish holidays, the date is based on the Jewish lunar calendar and varies from year to year, but always takes place in March or April. Passover is celebrated in the home with a feast called a seder, in which families retell the story of the Exodus from a book called the *Haggadah*. Some families hold seders on each of the first two nights of Passover while others have a seder only on the first night. During Passover, many Jews eat matzo, unleavened bread, which symbolizes the bread that did not have enough time to rise as the Jews fled Egypt.

See also Volume III: JUDAISM; PESACH

✿ ROSH HASHANAH

Observed by: Jews

Observed on: First two days of Tishri, the seventh month of the Jewish calendar

Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year, observed over two consecutive days during which Jews attend synagogue services marking the beginning of 10 days of penitence, or repentance and spiritual renewal, which culminate on Yom Kippur. The name means "head of the year." The date of the holiday, which like all Jewish festivals begins on the previous evening, is based on the Jewish calendar, a lunar calendar, and can vary widely (but always occurs in September or October of the Western calendar). In Jewish tradition, Rosh Hashanah begins God's annual judging of all human beings, when he decides who will live and die in the year ahead, a judgment concluded on Yom Kippur. During services, a ram's horn (called a shofar) is sounded, as it was in ancient times to announce important events. When families gather to share a meal on the holiday, many dip apples in honey, a tradition symbolizing hope for a sweet year ahead.

See also Volume III: JUDAISM; ROSH HASHANAH; YOM KIPPUR

✿ YOM KIPPUR

Observed by: Jews

Observed on: Tenth of Tishri, the seventh month of the Jewish calendar

Yom Kippur is the holiest holiday on the Jewish calendar, a fast day devoted to atonement for the sins of the past year, and a day on which Jews believe that God completes his judgment of humanity, deciding who will live and die in the year to come. Jews attend a special synagogue service and begin their fast at sundown the evening before the holiday and then

Fun Fact

One unusual Independence Day tradition is the annual Nathan's Hot Dog Eating Contest at New York City's Coney Island. Residents say the contest began on July 4, 1916, when four European immigrants, debating who was the most American, decided to settle it by seeing who could eat the most hot dogs. Irishman James Mullen was the winner, downing 13 franks in 12 minutes.

attend services throughout the day until sundown on Yom Kippur, when a ram's horn called the shofar is blown to mark the end of the 10 days of penitence that began on Rosh Hashanah. The date of the holiday is based on the Jewish lunar calendar and can vary widely, although it always occurs in September or October of the Gregorian calendar. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are sometimes called "the high holidays" because of their importance. In some U.S. cities, schools are closed on Rosh Hashanah and Yom

Kippur, and few Jews work during the holiday.

See also Volume III: JUDAISM; ROSH HASHANAH; YOM KIPPUR

☼ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

During the holy month of Ramadan, the ninth month on the Islamic calendar, many Muslims do not eat or drink between sunrise and sundown, focusing their attention on study of the Koran. In Islamic tradition, the prophet Muhammad received the first of the revelations that make up the Koran during Ramadan. The joyous Feast of Fast-Breaking (Eid al-Fitr) takes place on the first day following Ramadan and signals the end of the month-long dawn-to-dusk fast. The date is based on the Islamic calendar, which is lunar and not aligned with the Western solar calendar, so the date varies and can occur in any season. On the first day of Eid al-Fitr, children dress in new clothes and receive gifts, while families share a special meal, often featuring sweet foods made with dates and honey. The Koran forbids fasting on this day.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

☼ HANUKKAH

Observed by: Jews

Observed on: Twenty-fifth of Kislev; the ninth month of the Jewish calendar

The eight-day holiday of Hanukkah commemorates a victory for religious freedom. In about 165 B.C.E., a successor to Alexander the Great (356–23) turned away from the religious freedom Alexander had

extended to the lands he conquered by banning Judaism and desecrating the Jewish Temple in Israel. A Jewish military revolt succeeded in restoring the Temple, and religious freedom. According to tradition, when the Temple was liberated, there was only enough oil available to provide light for one day, but it lasted for eight days. That miracle is what Jews celebrate on Hanukkah. They light an additional candle on an eight-branch candleholder called a menorah in their homes each night. Hanukkah, which is not the most significant holiday on the Jewish calendar, receives a great deal of attention in the United States due to its proximity to Christmas, and its adopted custom of giving gifts to children each night. The holiday's date is based on the Jewish lunar calendar but usually takes place in December. Fried potato pancakes called latkes and a children's game played with a top called a dreidel are also part of the celebration for many Jewish families.

See also Volume III: HANUKKAH; JUDAISM

☼ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 24–25

Christmas, which celebrates the birth of Jesus, has been the most important religious festival in Western countries for at least 1,000 years. It is the only religious holiday that is an official holiday in the United States; businesses close, and Christian families attend church services, before returning to their homes to exchange gifts and enjoy a festive meal. No one knows the exact date of Jesus' birth, but it has been observed on December 25, replacing pagan festivals that celebrated the winter solstice, since at least the fourth century. It is the happiest and busiest holiday of the year for many Americans. Most families purchase a large Christmas tree (typically a fir or other evergreen) to decorate and assemble gifts for each other around its base. Many cities also put large Christmas trees on display. Some families decorate their homes with Christmas lights and hang wreaths on their front doors; inside, mistletoe and stockings hung for Santa Claus to bring presents for children. Some children write letters to Santa Claus, telling him what gifts they want to receive. Groups of people stroll from house to house singing traditional Christmas carols, some dating from the 17th and 18th centuries. Some of the most popular songs in U.S. history also have Christmas themes, including "White Christmas" and "Jingle Bells."

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

☼ KWANZAA

Observed by: African-Americans

Observed on: December 26–January 1

Some African-Americans follow their observance of Christmas with the holiday of Kwanzaa, an African-

American holiday that borrows some of the traditions of African harvest festivals. *Kwanzaa* is the Swahili word for “first fruits.” The holiday was developed in the United States in 1966 and has steadily gained in popularity. Kwanzaa lasts seven days, from December 26 through January 1. On each night families light a candle on a seven-branched candleholder called a *kinara*. Each candle stands for one of seven principles: unity, self-determination, responsibility, cooperation, purpose, creativity, and faith. Some families exchange homemade gifts, and on one night during the holiday many families share a festive meal called *kamaru*, featuring traditional African foods.

See also Volume III: CHRISTMAS; HARVEST FESTIVALS

Regional Holidays

❁ MARDI GRAS

Observed in: Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, Florida

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Day before Lent

Nearly a million tourists from around the world descend on New Orleans, Louisiana, each year for the celebration of Mardi Gras, held on Shrove Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday and the start of Lent, when Christians make confession and receive forgiveness. The event dates back to Roman traditions of holding a celebration before a fast, and Mardi Gras, a French phrase meaning “Fat Tuesday,” marks the end of a Carnival season that begins on January 6, or the Twelfth Night of the Christmas season.

French colonists introduced the custom to New Orleans in the early 1700s, and it is now a holiday in parts of four states. While similar celebrations take place in Biloxi, Mississippi, and Mobile, Alabama, the biggest party is in New Orleans, where colorful parades begin winding through the city’s streets a week before Mardi Gras. Local groups called *krewe*s organize the parades, in which masked riders on floats toss necklaces, toys, and candy to spectators.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; EPIPHANY; LENT

❁ VALENTINE’S DAY

Observed in: United States

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 14

Valentine’s Day, an annual celebration of romance, is not an official holiday anywhere in the United States, but it is a celebration of enduring popularity for children and adults in almost every community. Americans exchange 200 million Valentine’s Day cards, or “valentines,” annually, and spend billions on flowers and candy. Children traditionally

exchange small valentines and candies with each other in school, and classrooms and offices are decorated with images of hearts and cupids. Scholars trace the holiday’s origins to the Roman festival Lupercalia, which had a fertility theme and whose customs were widely adopted in Rome’s British outpost. Other sources include early Christian commemorations of saints, of which at least two were named Valentine. A third-century priest with that name is said to have conducted secret weddings in defiance of the Roman emperor’s orders forbidding clergy from marrying young men fated to be soldiers. A different Valentine is said to have befriended many children before he was imprisoned for refusing to worship Roman gods, and so youngsters slipped loving notes between the bars of his cell. In 496, February 14 became Valentine’s Day by papal dictate. The British have celebrated the holiday since at least the 15th century, and brought its customs to America.

❁ TEXAS INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed in: Texas

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 2

On March 2, 1836, Texas declared its independence from Mexico with a declaration signed at Washington-on-the-Brazos. It became an independent nation for almost 10 years, until it joined the Union and became a state. March 2 is a state holiday, featuring civic celebrations and parades, including a series of events at Washington-on-the-Brazos, now a state historical park.

❁ CÉSAR CHÁVEZ DAY

Observed in: Arizona, California, Colorado, Michigan, New Mexico, Texas, Utah

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: March 31

César Chávez was born in Arizona in 1927. In 1962 he launched the United Farm Workers union, which in 1968 initiated a successful five-year nationwide boycott of California grapes that forced growers to improve conditions for the poor workers who picked the fruit. Chávez died in 1993, and his birthday became a holiday in California in 2000. It is now a holiday in seven states and several other cities and counties nationwide. It is intended as a day to promote public

Fun Fact

The secret formula for Coca-Cola, among America’s most popular exports, originally and briefly contained cocaine as an ingredient. This is *not* an urban legend.

Fun Fact

Hot dogs are known by many names: frankfurters, or franks, wieners, or wienies, but hot dog, perhaps the most popular name, was in use as early as 1902 and 1903.

Fun Fact

Mariachi bands are Mexican musical groups that consist of at least two violins, two trumpets, one Spanish guitar, one *vihuela* (a high-pitched, five-string guitar), and one *guitar-rón* (a small acoustic bass), although some bands have as many as 20 musicians.

service and education and so is also known as César Chávez Day of Service and Learning.

☼ PATRIOTS DAY

Observed in: Massachusetts, Maine, Wisconsin

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Third Monday in April

Patriots Day commemorates the first battle of the American Revolution, when “the shot heard ’round the world” was fired at Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts, on April 19, 1775. It is also the day of

Paul Revere’s (1735–1818) famous ride to warn residents that British troops were approaching. The day became a holiday in Massachusetts on 1894, supplanting a holiday called Fast Day, a 200-year-old day of prayer and fasting that dated back to the state’s colonial days. Today Patriots Day is celebrated on the third Monday in April in Massachusetts, Maine, and Wisconsin. Reenactors in Massachusetts re-create Revere’s ride and the famous battle.

☼ GATHERING OF NATIONS INDIAN POWWOW

Observed in: New Mexico

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Last weekend of April

The annual Gathering of Nations American Indian Powwow at the University of New Mexico Arena in Albuquerque, New Mexico, is the largest Native

American powwow, or intertribal ceremonial gathering, in North America. Members of nearly 500 tribes and native groups come together during the last weekend of April to promote Native American culture and traditions with song, drumming, and dance performances, culminating in a dance circle featuring thousands of performers. The powwow also includes a marketplace, a dance competition, and a beauty pageant, and is a major social, political, and educational gathering for tribal leaders.

Fun Fact

The world’s oldest annual marathon the Boston Marathon is always held on Patriots Day, attracting 20,000 runners and thousands of fans to the 26-mile route. Just down the street from the race’s finish line, the Boston Red Sox play the only morning game in major league baseball at 11:00 A.M. on Patriots Day.

☼ CINCO DE MAYO

Observed in: Southwest States

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 5

Mexicans and Mexican Americans celebrate the holiday of Cinco de Mayo (Spanish for “May 5”), which commemorates the victory of the Mexican army over French invaders sent to conquer the country by Emperor Napoleon III (1808–73). The Mexicans, led by General Ignacio Zaragoza (1829–62), were victorious at the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862. The French later won control of Mexico City, but the government it installed there had been forced out by 1867. Cinco de Mayo is not an official holiday anywhere in the United States, but it is celebrated by Mexican Americans and others with festive parties, parades, folk dances, and mariachi musical performances.

☼ KING KAMEHAMEHA DAY

Observed in: Hawaii

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 11

Hawaiians have marked King Kamehameha Day since June 11, 1872. The holiday celebrates Kamehameha I (c. 1748–1819), who, according to Hawaiian tradition, fulfilled the prophecy that a warrior-king would come, unite the islands, and become their greatest chief. By 1810 he had done just that, creating the kingdom of Hawaii, and ruling it until his death. June 11 is believed to be the king’s birthday, although the date cannot be confirmed. Kamehameha Day celebrations include parades on every island, as well as fairs, sports events, and an international hula-dancing competition. Residents also cover the giant statue of Kamehameha on the main island of Hawaii with floral garlands called leis.

☼ JUNETEENTH

Observed in: Texas and a growing number of other states

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 19

During the course of the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln (1809–65) issued the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing all slaves in the states of the Confederacy, on January 1, 1863. However, news of the proclamation spread slowly in some parts of the South, as did news of General Robert E. Lee’s (1807–70) surrender at Appomattox, Virginia, that ended the war, with the result that many Texas slaves did not find out they had been emancipated until June 19, 1865, when Union general Gordon Granger (1822–76) read the proclamation to them

in Galveston. That day is now the holiday of Juneteenth (a shortening of “June nineteenth”). The day has been marked by Texas’s African-American community since 1865, but the contemporary state holiday began in 1980. Communities in Texas and elsewhere mark the date with church thanksgiving services, picnics, and family reunions. One of the largest Juneteenth events outside Texas is in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The observance is also called Emancipation Day or African-American Emancipation Day and is celebrated on different dates, depending on the region.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

The birth of a child is a celebrated event in U.S. families. Parents of different faiths welcome their children into their religions in different ways. Roman Catholics and other Christian faiths christen infants in the church through the ritual of baptism, a symbolic washing with water that signifies the child’s entry into the religion. At christening ceremonies children are also formally named, although in practice most children receive their names before the ceremony. Other denominations, such as Baptists, do not baptize infants because they believe that baptism must always involve a public statement of faith by the person to be baptized.

Jewish boys are circumcised, usually on their eighth day of life, in a ceremony known as the brit milah. The ceremony can take place in a synagogue, but it often occurs in a family’s home and is performed by a person called a mohel. The circumcision is considered a sign of the covenant between God and the Jewish people established with the patriarch Abraham. Muslim families also circumcise infant boys.

❁ COMING OF AGE

When Jewish boys reach the age of 13, many take part in a ritual known as a bar mitzvah. Some denominations hold a similar ceremony for girls called a bat mitzvah. The name literally means “son (or daughter) of the law,” and it marks a young person’s entry into the adult community, including his or her responsibility for following all of the commandments of the religion. While no ceremony is required, many young people spend months studying a passage from the Torah that they will read in Hebrew in the synagogue on the day of their bar or bat mitzvah. Families typically throw a large party after a bar or bat mitzvah. Some Jews believe that these parties have become a conspicuous display of wealth that overshadows the spiritual aspects of the day.

Many Christian young people take part in a cer-

emony called a confirmation. For Roman Catholics, confirmation brings the grace of the Holy Spirit; for Protestants, it reinforces the entry into the faith promised at baptism. In many churches confirmation for young people also represents the culmination of several years of religious study.

❁ MARRIAGE

Weddings are important legal and religious events for U.S. heterosexuals. Approximately 2.3 million weddings are held in the United States each year, although about 800,000 heterosexual couples end their marriages each year through the legal process of divorce. While some immigrant cultures retain the practice of arranged marriage, almost all heterosexual Americans choose their own spouse.

Americans have debated whether to extend the right to marry to same-sex couples so that they can enjoy the legal benefits and privileges accorded to heterosexual relationships. States set most rules for marriage in the United States, because marriage licenses are issued by the state governments. As of 2005 only the state of Massachusetts allowed same-sex couples to marry legally. Hawaii, California, and Connecticut allow such couples to enter into partnerships in which both members receive many of the legal benefits of marriage, including access to a partner’s workplace benefits and inheritance rights. Vermont’s “civil unions” offer all of the state’s marriage benefits to same-sex couples but do not legally call the relationship a marriage. Several states and cities recognize the legal unions entered into in other states and extend similar benefits to couples joined in them.

Some Americans get married in civil ceremonies, typically in front of a judge, but for most couples, marriage is an important religious ceremony. Christian and Jewish couples are married by a priest, minister, or rabbi, and both faiths’ ceremonies involve a public declaration of commitment to the marriage, the presence of witnesses, and the exchange of rings, the latter a custom

Fun Fact

King Kamehameha Day is the only public holiday in the United States celebrating a monarch.

Fun Fact

The president of the United States hosts the annual White House Easter Egg Roll on the day after Easter. Children age three to six gather on the South Lawn to roll and hunt for eggs, hear stories, and play games. The event is canceled in inclement weather, and often during wartime as well. The first Washington Easter Egg Roll is believed to have been the idea of Dolley Madison (1768–1849), wife of President James Madison (1751–1836). For many years, the event was held at the United States Capitol building. It was first hosted at the White House by President Rutherford Hayes in 1878.

dating back at least to Roman times. Many couples write their own vows as substitutes or additions to the traditional wedding liturgy. Roman Catholic weddings take place during Mass, and the couple receives Communion.

❁ DEATH

American death customs share many elements with customs in other countries such as the public announcement of a death, a funeral ceremony, and a burial. These long-standing customs are designed to show respect and pay tribute to the dead, and to offer comfort to grieving survivors. Funeral directors usually prepare bodies for burial using the embalming process because funerals often take place several days after a death. However, Jewish funeral preparation differs as tradition requires burial no more than two nights after a death and forbids embalming.

In advance of a funeral, many families hold an all-night vigil beside the corpse. This is the Christian custom called the wake, although other religions have similar practices. Most funerals involve a public ceremony at a funeral home followed by the public burial of the deceased in a coffin at a cemetery. Many families, however, opt for cremation, which is the traditional practice of Buddhists and

Hindus, although Judaism and some Christian denominations discourage it. In the case of burials, a second, shorter ceremony is typically held at the graveside immediately before burial, after which many families return to a relative's home to share a meal.

Further Reading

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Uruguay

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Southern South America, between Argentina and Brazil, bordering the south Atlantic Ocean
Size	68,039 sq. mi.
Capital City	Montevideo
Flag Description	The flag of Uruguay has nine equal horizontal stripes of white (top and bottom) alternating with blue; in the upper hoist-side corner is a white square with a yellow sun bearing a human face known as the Sun of May, surrounded by 16 alternately triangular and wavy rays.
Independence	August 25, 1825 (from Brazil)
Population	3,415,920 (2005 est.)
Government	Constitutional republic
Nationality	Uruguayan
Major Ethnic Group(s)	White (88%)
Major Language(s)	Spanish; Portuguese; Brazilerio (Portuguese-Spanish mix spoken on the Brazilian frontier)
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (66%); other or none (31%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Landing of the 33 Patriots, April 19; Labor Day, May 1; Battle of Las Piedras, May 17–18; Birthday of José Artigas, June 19; Constitution Day, July 18; Independence Day, August 25; Columbus Day, October 12

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Before the arrival of Europeans in what is now called Uruguay, the region was inhabited by the Charrua, who were primarily hunters and gatherers. Few full-blooded Charrua remain. They were either gradually exterminated or “assimilated” by the European colonizers. Said to have been a dark, stocky group, physical traces of them are sometimes noted in the mestizos of their former territories, especially among the gauchos of Uruguay. The Charrua are thought to have killed the Spaniard Juan Díaz de Solís (1470–1516) when he ventured up the Río de la Plata in 1516.

The Spaniards arrived in Uruguay in 1516. The Charrua fought this intrusion valiantly, and their determined resistance, with the absence of gold in the region, discouraged the

Spaniards from further incursions. However, when the Portuguese arrived in Uruguay and started developing their settlements, Spain reassessed the possible utility of Uruguay and wrested it from the Portuguese in 1778.

During the early 19th century, the people of Uruguay started agitating for independence. A revolt led by José Gervasio Artigas (1764–1850), a chieftain, won them independence from the Spanish in 1811. Artigas is regarded as the hero of the independence movement, even though formal independence was not achieved until 1828, when the Republic of Uruguay was finally recognized as an independent state. Until the end of the 19th century, Uruguay was plagued with civil wars and invasions. Uruguay also participated in, and fought in, the War of the Triple Alliance against Paraguay to maintain independence and control of its region.

During the first two decades of the 20th century, Uruguay's social, economic, and political conditions dramati-

The War of the Triple Alliance

The War of the Triple Alliance (1864–70), also known as the Paraguayan War, was fought between Paraguay and the allied countries of Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay. Paraguay had had boundary and tariff disputes with its more powerful neighbors Argentina and Brazil for years; the Uruguayans, although they had also struggled with the same nations, found it more useful to ally with them. The war began when Brazil intervened in Uruguay's civil war on behalf of the leader of the Colorado Party and helped to expel his Blanco Party opponent. This act was interpreted as a threat by the dictator of Paraguay Francisco Solano López (1827–70) because he supported the Blanco Party. So he invaded the Brazilian province of Mato Grosso. When López asked Argentina's president Bartolomé Mitre (1821–1906) for permission to go through Argentina in order to get at the Brazilian army in Uruguay, Mitre refused and instead declared an alliance with Brazil and Uruguay, and the three countries declared war on Paraguay in 1865.

In 1868 Brazilian armored ships broke through the Paraguayan defenses at the river fortress of Humaitá, then bombarded Asunción, Paraguay's capital. By December of 1868 the Paraguayan army had been annihilated. López fled north and

engaged in a guerrilla war until he was finally killed on March 1, 1870. Unfortunately, the Paraguayan people—fanatically committed to López and the war effort—fought to the point of dissolution, and when the war was over in 1871 Paraguay was utterly prostrated. Its prewar population of approximately 525,000 had been slashed to about 221,000, of whom only about 28,000 were men. During the war the Paraguayans had suffered not only from the enemy but also from malnutrition, disease, and the domination of López, who tortured and killed countless people. Argentina and Brazil took about 55,000 square miles of Paraguayan territory: Argentina took much of the Misiones region and part of the Chaco between the Bermejo and Pilcomayo Rivers; Brazil enlarged its Mato Grosso Province by claiming territories that had been disputed with Paraguay before the war. Both countries demanded a large indemnity (which was never paid) and occupied Paraguay until 1876. Meanwhile the Colorados had gained control of Uruguay, and they retained it until 1958.

The War of the Triple Alliance was the bloodiest conflict in Latin American history and the second bloodiest war fought in the Americas. López is held by many to be responsible for its devastating consequences.

cally improved after José Batlle y Ordóñez (1856–1929) became president (1899; 1903–07; and 1911–15). Although his successors were not as effective as he had been, the process of modernization continued. In the 1950s and 1960s, Uruguay's relations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) strengthened, but political tensions within the country increased. An urban guerilla group called the National Liberation Movement-Tupamaros (MLN-T) was formed. The members robbed banks and distributed the money among the poor. Over the next 10 years, they graduated to kidnapping and assassinating politicians. The Uruguayan military, in spite of savage campaigns to catch the guerillas, failed.

Unable to bring an end to the chaos, in 1973 the president of Uruguay Juan Maria Bordaberry (b. 1928), agreed to let the military control the administration of the country. Although the military had succeeded in bringing the country under control by the end of the year, it continued to control the affairs of the government even after the crisis was long past. Civilian rule, however, was eventually restored in 1985.

Since 1998, Uruguay has been suffering from a period of recession. The tourism industry has been deteriorating, and the public debt has been increasing at an alarming rate. The national currency, the peso, has also weakened in the international market. However, the country's economy has been showing some signs of improvement since 2004, when the government changed in the last elections.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in the southern part of South America, Uruguay shares borders with Brazil and Argentina; the South Atlantic Ocean forms a coastline on the east. It is the second smallest independent nation in South America after Suriname. Uruguay's terrain is characterized by rolling plains, low hills (*cuchillas*), and fertile coastlands. Cerro Cathedral is the highest point in Uruguay at 1686 feet. Two of the main rivers of Uruguay are Río de la Plata and Río Negro.

Uruguay enjoys a temperate climate, enjoying warm, pleasant weather throughout the year. Average temperatures range between 70°F and 82°F during the summer, while in winter the average temperature ranges between 50°F and 61°F.

The terrain is characterized by palm savannahs (trees that are scattered over an extensive area) and

Fun Fact

In Montevideo, Uruguay, there is a statue of Tacuabe, one of four Charrua captured and transported to France in 1833.

grasslands. Fauna is represented by the rhea (an ostrichlike bird), but wild animals are rare.

❁ ECONOMY

Uruguay has a stable, export-oriented economy. Some of the major export items include rice, leather products, wool, electricity, meat, dairy products, and vehicles. Between 1999 and 2002, the Uruguayan economy suffered due to a fall in the demand of export commodities by two of its major export partners—Brazil and Argentina. Also, the withdrawal of Argentinean dollars from banks in Uruguay resulted in a major bank crisis and added to the nation's economic troubles. However, with the help of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Uruguay has introduced a number of economic reforms and has successfully undone most of the damage caused by that economic crisis.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Uruguay is a Roman Catholic country, with more than 66 percent of the nation's population practicing that religion. The country is also home to Protestants and Jews, but more than 30 percent of the population remains unaffiliated. In terms of ethnicity, European Uruguayans are the dominant group, followed by the mestizos (people of mixed race), and blacks. In addition to Spanish, Portuguese and Brazilerio (both mixtures of Portuguese and Spanish) are widely spoken.

Uruguayans love music, dance, and theater. One of the traditional forms of Uruguayan music and dance is the *candombe*, which is performed by dancers who dance to the beat of traditional drum

ensembles known as *cuerdas*. This form of music originated with the African slaves who were brought to South America to work on plantations.

Diablada (dance of the devils) is performed during religious festivals such as Virgen de la Candelaria, which is held in February.

Murga is a Uruguayan musical theater performed during Carnival. Three percussionists and a chorus form a traditional *murga* group. They sing songs to the tune of the percussionists, and every song is characterized by an opening song (*saludo*) and an exit song (*retirada*, or *despedida*). The Uruguayan tango, classical music, rock, reggae, and rap are also extremely popular.

Uruguayans are known for their handmade woolen items and leather products such as belts, purses, shoes, and hats. Also, the tradition of gauchos (or South American cowboys) is prevalent even today. They enthrall audiences during rodeo shows by performing daredevil stunts and demonstrating their horseback-riding skills.

❁ CUISINE

Beef is the staple diet of Uruguay, although dishes made from other meats, such as chicken and fish, are also popular. Some of the traditional dishes of Uruguay include: *medias lunas mixtas* (a croissant filled with cheese and ham); *panchos* (sausages); *burgaras* (spicy sausages); *milanesas* (veal cutlets); *chivitos* (steakburgers); *churrasco* (grilled steak); *costillas* (lamb chops); and *asado* (barbecued beef). Meat stews, pies, and roasted meat are also popular.

The favorite beverage of Uruguay is a traditional herb tea known as yerba maté. In the past maté was poured into a gourd and people drank it

Candombe

Candombe, a unique style of musical performance created by the Afro-Uruguayan people of Montevideo, developed from the Kings of Congo ceremonial processions (the slave version of the Three Wise Men processions celebrated on Epiphany, January 6) during the period of African slavery in South America. Based on the Bantu drumming style, it has connections with other musical forms of African origin found in the Americas.

Candombe is performed by groups called *cuerdas*, and each *cuerda* has between 50 and 100 parading drummers. They carry several different sizes of barrel-shaped drums (*tambores*) made of wood, with animal skins stretched tightly over the top. Performers carry their *tambores* at the waist with the aid of a shoulder strap, and play them with one hand and a stick. Each type of drum has a specific function in

the music: The *chico*, the smallest drum, has a high tone and keeps the rhythm); the *repique* is a medium-sized drum used mostly for improvisation; the *piano* is large, with a low pitch, and carries the melody. A fourth, larger drum, called the *bajo* or *bombo*, has the deepest tone, and provides the accent on the fourth beat. Although once common, the *bajo* is now rarely used in *candombe*.

Candombe can be heard on any Sunday evening in Montevideo's streets, but the *cuerdas* perform on many other occasions, especially when important holidays are celebrated, including January 6 (Epiphany), December 25 (Christmas), and January 1 (New Year's). But the most extravagant and intense *candombe* performances are to be seen during Carnival, when all the *cuerdas* (there are somewhere between 80 and 90 in Uruguay) join in a huge parade and compete for prizes.



Origin of the Landing of the 33 Patriots

This day commemorates the arrival of Juan Antonio Lavalleja (1784–1853), a renowned Uruguayan revolutionary and 33 volunteers (the Treinta y Tres, or Thirty-Three Immortals) from Argentina to fight against the Portuguese forces in Uruguay on April 19, 1825. Lavalleja's brave attempt sparked a rebellion in Uruguay and paved the way for Uruguay's independence.

Early in the 19th century, there was a constant struggle in South America between the Portuguese, the Spanish, and other colonial powers over control of the area. The Spanish began settling in the area in the 16th and 17th centuries and established their domination in the region. In 1811 a Uruguayan rev-

olutionary, José Gervasio Artigas, launched a revolution against the occupying forces and eventually was successful in driving them out. In 1821 Portuguese forces in neighboring Brazil began a series of attacks on Uruguay. They eventually defeated the Uruguayans and annexed the region, making it part of Brazil. A series of wars were fought between Uruguayan revolutionaries and Portuguese forces, and the revolutionaries fought valiantly to rescue Uruguay from the Portuguese. The attack Juan Antonio Lavalleja and his 33 men launched against the Portuguese was one of the bravest attempts in the history of Uruguay, and it inspired other Uruguayans to intensify their efforts to gain their independence.

with a straw before passing it around to others. Another popular drink is *clerico*, which is made from fruit juice and white wine.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar and is celebrated as New Year's Day all over the world. Celebrations and revelries usually begin on the evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve), when special parties are held in different parts of Uruguay. Singing, dining, and dancing are an integral part of the celebrations, and Uruguayans usher in the new year with great joy and enthusiasm.

❁ LANDING OF THE 33 PATRIOTS

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 19

On this day special prayer services are held in churches throughout Uruguay in memory of the patriots who lost their lives during the rebellion against Portugal in 1825.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, in many parts of the world. It commemorates the important role played

by workers in building nations and societies. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this



Thousands of people participate in a May Day march through the streets of Montevideo. (AP Photo/Marcelo Hernandez)

observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

May 1 is a public holiday in Uruguay, and all public and private institutions remain closed on this day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ BATTLE OF LAS PIEDRAS

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 17–18

This day commemorates the conflict between Uruguay and Brazil in the Battle of Las Piedras, which ended on May 18, 1828. Brazil, which was under Portuguese domination, had annexed Uruguay in 1821, much to the displeasure of the Uruguayans. In an attempt to free their nation, the Uruguayans launched a series of attacks against Brazil. This started a series of wars between Uruguayan revolutionaries and Brazilian forces. After the battle of Las Piedras, British forces intervened and helped the warring factions reach an agreement. A peace treaty was signed between the two sides, and eventually Brazil recognized Uruguay's independence.

❁ BIRTHDAY OF JOSÉ ARTIGAS

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: June 19

José Gervasio Artigas was a renowned Uruguayan revolutionary. He was born on June 19, 1764, and led Uruguayans in their fight to victory against the Spanish and Portuguese occupying forces in the region. He is known as the father of Uruguayan independence.

Uruguay has declared June 19 a public holiday in honor of the great Uruguayan hero. Uruguayan patriotism is very much in evidence on this day, and plays based on the life of Artigas are staged in different parts of the country.

❁ CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 18

This day commemorates the adoption of the first constitution of Uruguay on July 18, 1830, and is great cause for celebration on the part of its citizens. Important politicians make patriotic speeches in Montevideo, and the national flag is proudly flown in every city and town.

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: August 25

On August 25, 1830, Provincia Oriental del Río de la Plata (modern-day Uruguay) proclaimed its inde-

pendence from Brazil. The region had been made a part of Brazil in 1821, when Provincia was annexed by occupying Portuguese forces. However, Uruguayans staged numerous revolts against the occupying forces, eventually defeating the Portuguese forces and driving them out of Uruguay.

On this day, there are big celebrations in the capital of Montevideo, and the president of the nation presides over Independence Day events. In his ceremonial speech he asks Uruguayans to take inspiration from the revolutionaries and to protect their sovereignty. A number of cultural activities such as folk dances, folk songs, and folk theater are an integral part of the celebrations.

❁ COLUMBUS DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 12

Columbus Day was originally a European holiday to commemorate the arrival of Christopher Columbus in South America on October 12, 1497. Now, however, it is also celebrated as Día de la Raza (Day of the Race) since the Spanish who followed Columbus to South America married into the native communities, and thus a new race of people was born. This race came to be known as Mestizo (people of mixed race—Spanish and the indigenous natives of South America).

In Uruguay, although this day is an official celebration, many indigenous and Native American people organize nationwide demonstrations against Columbus because they believe he opened the door for the colonization of Uruguay and other countries of the region and, as a result, robbed the indigenous people of their freedom. They were forced to work as slaves in mines and were subjected to brutal treatment by colonial rulers.

Religious Holidays

❁ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: January 6

The Feast of Epiphany, also known as Three King's Day, is a Christian feast that celebrates the arrival of the Magi (the Three Wise Men of ancient Persia—Caspar, Balthasar, and Melchior) in Bethlehem to see the infant Jesus. The word *epiphany* means “to reveal” or “to make known.” The word was applied to this holiday because it celebrates the fact that the Magi revealed Jesus to the world as a king. On this day Uruguayans visit friends and family and exchange gifts. This is the second

Fun Fact

Columbus sent hundreds of Taino Amerindians to be sold as slaves in Spain, but Queen Isabella ordered all of them freed and returned to their homeland.

time after Christmas when gifts are exchanged.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS; EPIPHANY

❁ CARNIVAL

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Two weeks before Lent

Carnival is a period of celebration that takes place for two weeks prior to the start of Lent, ending on Shrove Tuesday, the day before Lent. The word *shrove* is derived from the verb “*sbrive*” (meaning “to absolve oneself from sin”). In earlier times people absolved themselves of their sins on this day by confessing them in front of the priest, who was also known as a “shriner” (“absolver of sins”).

During Carnival Uruguay is transformed into a big party. People wear masks and colorful costumes and play pranks on each other. Also a wide variety of events, including comical skits and water fights, are common. *Candombe* is one of the popular dances performed during the festival. It originated with the African blacks brought to work as slaves in Uruguay. A band of 50 musicians and *candombe* dancers are major highlights of Carnival. *Murga* bands (steel bands) play nonstop music during the Carnival procession.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; LENT

❁ PALM SUNDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Last Sunday of Lent

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, commemorating the last week of Jesus’ mortal life. The day is as much about Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem as it is about the beginning of his journey to the Cross. His arrival in Jerusalem was indeed the way to the Cross.

Halting at the Mount of Olives, near Bethany, Jesus sent two disciples to the village of Bethphage to bring the donkey and its foal, tied at the crossway of two roads, to him. They did so and placed their clothes on the foal to provide a comfortable seat. The disciples then cut branches and covered the path, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the words of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. People welcomed him by waving palm and olive branches, and strewing garments and branches along the road. There were different perceptions at work: Jesus rode in on a donkey, a humble entry of a peaceful nature by a spiritual king; the people of Jerusalem welcomed him with palm and olive branches because they wanted a worldly king to defeat the Romans. A special Mass is held in Catholic churches and participants are given a looped strand of dried palm frond, a symbol of this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

Maundy Thursday, or Holy Thursday, is an important Christian celebration because it commemorates the day on which Jesus washed the feet of all his Apostles before the Last Supper. It falls on the Thursday before Easter. It is called Maundy Thursday because *mandatum* (from the Latin verb *mandare*, “to command”) was allegedly the first word that Jesus spoke as he began washing the feet of his disciples: “*Mandatum novum do vobis*,” which means, “A new commandment I give to you.”

On this day people attend prayer services in local churches to offer prayers.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, also called Holy Friday, Mourning Friday, and Great Friday (in Eastern Orthodox churches), is the Friday before Easter and the last Friday of Lent. It is observed in most parts of the world to commemorate the Crucifixion of Jesus. Like other Roman Catholics, Uruguayans observe Good Friday as a day of sorrow and mourning. People offer prayers in local churches, and plays based on the life of Jesus are staged on Good Friday. Fasting is also associated with Good Friday in Uruguay. Uruguayans begin a fast that starts on Ash Wednesday (the first day of Lent) and lasts for 40 days until Good Friday. They also observe a partial fast until Easter Sunday. This day is a nonliturgical day in the Catholic Church, so no Communion is administered. Church bells are silenced for this day of mourning, and the Tenebrae (“darkness”) service is held to symbolize a world without God.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Saturday before Easter

Holy Saturday, the day after Good Friday, is the day before Easter. This day, known as *Sabbatum Sanctum* in Latin (“Holy Sabbath”), commemorates the day on which Jesus’ body lay in a tomb. Catholics believe that on this day, he arose in spirit and rescued those who were held captive in hell and sent them

back to paradise. Holy Saturday is an important observance because it symbolizes the end of one world and the beginning of the era of salvation, represented by Jesus' Resurrection.

On Holy Saturday, devout Uruguayans attend an evening prayer service and participate in an Easter night vigil. During the vigil they carry candles, and when the priest announces Jesus' Resurrection, the candles are lit and greetings are exchanged.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a Christian feast that celebrates Jesus' Resurrection from the dead on the third day following his Crucifixion. This day is the most important observance in the Christian calendar because the dates of so many other church holidays are scheduled on the basis of the date on which Easter falls, which depends upon the date of the vernal (spring) equinox. Christians believe that Jesus, through his death, freed all his followers from the penalty of sin.

The holiday falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. They often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to offer prayers. Easter eggs have also become associated with the festival because they are symbols of rebirth and fertility originally associated with the Germanic mother goddess called Eostre.

Uruguayans enjoy a weeklong holiday throughout Holy Week. In Montevideo, the week is also celebrated as La Semana Criolla ("Rodeo Week"). Gauchos (Uruguayan cowboys) entertain the crowds with their stunts and horseback riding skills. On Easter, Uruguayans visit their friends and family members in the countryside and exchange greetings.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

✿ ALL SOULS' DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: November 2

All Souls' Day is a Roman Catholic festival on which the deceased are remembered. It is celebrated on November 2 unless that date falls on a Sunday, in which case All Souls' Day is celebrated on the following Monday. On All Souls' Day in Uruguay, three Masses are conducted—one for the priest, one for the departed, and the last one for the pope. Then people visit local cemeteries and put flowers on their relatives' graves.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; ALL SOULS' DAY

✿ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world because it celebrates the birth of Jesus, although no one knows the actual date on which he was born. The Catholic Church chose the month and date familiar to us because many pagan groups celebrated a holiday related to the winter solstice and the return of the light at this time.

Christmas Eve is known as Noche Bueno ("the good night") in Uruguay. After dinner, children are allowed to open their gifts that have been placed under a beautifully decorated Christmas tree. Then Catholic families attend Midnight Mass in local churches.

On Christmas Day Uruguayans visit friends and family members and exchange gifts and greetings. Christmas is also known as Family Day since it is a religious celebration that is celebrated by the entire family.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Fun Fact

A popular Uruguayan saying summarizes several centuries of European colonization: "Columbus landed in 1492, and nine months later the first *latinoamericano* was born."

Regional Holidays

✿ VIRGEN DE LA CANDELARIA

Observed in: Puno

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February 2

The festival of Virgen de la Candelaria is an annual religious celebration that takes place in the city of Puno on February 2. Some of the major highlights of the festival include religious ceremonies and cultural events such as concerts and dances, colorful costumes, and parades. During the festival the performance by a group of dancers known as "devil dancers" (due to the devilish attire they wear during the dance) is truly remarkable.

The procession leaves the Chapel of the Virgen de la Candelaria in a strict hierarchical order, with the priests and altar boys in the lead, followed by Christians, pagans, and then the general public and tourists.

During the procession, devil dancers perform the *diablada* ("dance of the devils"), which was conceived by a group of black slaves working in the mines while they were trapped inside the shaft. Just when they thought they were going to die, they decided to entrust their souls to the Virgin Mary. However, they were rescued, and they believed it was due to the blessings of the Virgin Mary.

Dressed as devils and wearing monstrous masks,

horns, and costumes, they dance through the streets to the music of panpipes and drums. A portrait of the Mammacha Candelaria, or Virgin Mary, is paraded, and people make offerings to her. She is also revered as Pachamama, or Mother Earth. At the end of the festivities, the devil dancers go to local cemeteries and offer prayers at the graves. The day is ended by a spectacular display of fireworks that light up the night sky.

❁ MINNESOTA RIVER REVIVAL

Observed in: Montevideo
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: September

The Minnesota River Revival is an annual festival aimed at the preservation of the Minnesota River that flows through the capital of Montevideo. This annual fiesta was begun here recently, although similar celebrations have been taking place in Montevideo, Minnesota, for some time. The relationship between the two Montevideos began in 1905 with the exchange of flags. Over the years the two cities have exchanged several tokens of goodwill. In 1949 the citizens of Montevideo, Uruguay, presented the people of Montevideo, Minnesota, with an 11-foot-high bronze statue of José Artigas, Uruguay's Father of Independence. In the same year Montevideo, Minnesota, began celebrating this historic day as a tribute to its sister city.

For the Uruguayan festival a wide variety of cultural and educational activities are held to create awareness and educate people about the advantages of water conservation. Fireworks, sports, and cultural events are also part of the celebrations.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

Cakes are an integral part of birthday celebrations in Uruguay. Surrounded by friends and family

members, the birthday boy or girl is greeted with loud cheers and applause as he or she blows out the candles on the cake. Also the elders touch the shoulder or head of the birthday boy or girl to bless him or her.

When a girl reaches the age of 15, she puts on a formal dress on her birthday and is allowed to dance the waltz with possible suitors.

❁ MARRIAGE

To abide by tradition, a Uruguayan man who wants to marry must seek the approval of the bride's parents. Most marriages take place in a church, and friends and family members extend their love, blessings, and good wishes to the newlyweds. A reception is held for close family friends and relatives after the wedding and singing, dancing, and dining are an integral part of the celebrations. However, the newlyweds do not stay long and sneak out of the party while the guests celebrate until the early hours of the next morning.

Further Reading

Christine Ehrick, *The Shield of the Weak: Feminism and the State in Uruguay, 1903–1933* (Albuquerque, N. Mex.: University of New Mexico Press, 2005); Christopher Empson, *The Far Horizons: Thirty Years among the Gauchos of Uruguay* (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Rozenberg, 2002); Marvin A. Lewis, *Afro-Uruguayan Literature: Post-Colonial Perspectives* (Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 2003); Gustavo Remedi, *Carnival Theater: Uruguay's Popular Performers and National Culture*, Amy Ferlazzo, Trans. (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Saúl Sosnowski and Louise B. Popkin, eds., *Repression, Exile, and Democracy: Uruguayan Culture*, Louise B. Popkin, Trans. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993).

Uzbekistan

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Central Asia, north of Afghanistan
Size	172,741 sq. mi.
Capital City	Tashkent
Flag Description	Uzbekistan's flag has three equal horizontal bands of blue (top), white, and green, separated by two thin red lines, with a crescent moon and 12 white stars (hoist side, top) to its right in graduated rows (three [top], four, five).
Independence	September 1, 1991 (from Soviet Union)
Population	26,851,195 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Uzbekistani
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Uzbek (80%)
Major Language(s)	Uzbek (74%); Russian (14%)
Major Religion(s)	Muslim (88%; mostly Sunni)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; International Women's Day, March 8; Victory Day, May 9; Independence Day, September 1; Constitution Day, December 8

Introduction

HISTORY

Although Uzbekistan is a landlocked country, archaeological and historical evidence show that it was connected with many of the ancient civilizations of both Europe and Asia and was a significant link in the commercial networks. The country's claim to deep historical roots was corroborated in 1938, when an entire cranium of a child's skull was found in a cave in the Baisun region, proving that the area known as Uzbekistan was inhabited during the Paleolithic by Neanderthals.

Some 200 Neanderthal sites indicate that *Homo neanderthalensis* had an established presence in the Caucasus and Western Asia, but the Baisun discovery set an eastern boundary for the Neanderthal range in Uzbekistan and linked the manufacture of Mousterian implements from the region to this hominid group. Other important Uzbek sites span the Lower to Upper Paleolithic periods, but the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) halted further archaeological research in most Central Asian republics.

Then in 2002, when excavation again became feasible, the Uzbek–American Stone Age Project discovered Anghilak cave in the region of Kashkadariya, a new Middle Paleolithic cave in southeastern Uzbekistan. The varied raw materials used to fashion tools include flint, quartz, siliceous limestone, and quartzite. The similarities between these Mousterian artifacts and those excavated from the Zagros-Taurus, Trans-Caspian, and Altai areas clearly indicate a sustained presence of *H. Neanderthalensis*. However a number of confounding factors make it unclear just how far east the Neanderthals traveled or whether there were other hominid groups in Central Asia at this time.

For 2,000 years the Silk Road, a 4,000-mile-long network of caravan tracts was the major highway for transporting material goods and knowledge between the four major centers of civilization: Europe, the Near East, India, and China. During this time exotic and commercial goods, including silk, skills, knowledge, and religion crisscrossed the Eurasian continent and determined to a large extent the course of European and Asian histories and cultures. Three of Uzbekistan's cities—Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva—were doubtless

The Stone Age Diet

There are people living on this planet who are stronger, faster, and healthier than those of us living in modern “civilizations.” They have straight teeth, perfect eyesight, and their lives are not limited or cut short by arthritis, diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, stroke, depression, schizophrenia, and cancer. They are the last 84 tribes of hunter-gatherers in the world. Why are they healthier than those of us who think our lives are more “civilized” or less “barbaric”? Their diet. They still eat pretty much what the first humans ate two million years ago, and what their ancestors ate about seven million years ago, the diet compatible with our genetic development. It is not a “civilized” or “modern” diet.

This diet is often called the “Paleolithic Diet,” the “Stone Age Diet,” the “Cave Man Diet,” or the “Hunter-Gatherer Diet.” Its basic concepts are simple because it contains only those foods consumed by early humans during their evolution, yet it addresses all the major dietary components we are only beginning to understand including vitamins, fats, protein, carbohydrates, antioxidants, and so forth.

For millions of years, humans ate meat, fish, fowl and the leaves, roots, and fruits of many plants. The problem these people faced was how to obtain more calories from their environment because many plants—grains, beans, potatoes—are inedible and toxic when they are raw. At the end of the Paleolithic, about 10,000 years ago, humans found out that cooking such foods made them less toxic and, therefore, edible. The heat destroyed enough of their natural toxins to enable us to eat them without apparent ill effects. Grains include wheat, corn, barley, rice, sorghum, millet, and oats. Foods based on grain include products such as flour, bread, noodles, and pasta. These foods are now sometimes called Neolithic foods.

In addition to doubling the calories humans

could derive from cooked plant foods, the Neolithic diet had additional advantages: its foods could be stored for long periods; for their light weight, they provided a lot of calories, making it easy to carry them; the edible part of the plant was its seed, making it possible to cultivate the grains. With this discovery the basis for civilization was set. Food could be set aside for winter, when agriculture was impossible, and nomads could carry more food because of its light weight. Agriculture required a more settled life; our ancestors had to stay in one place at least long enough to harvest the crops. Food storage meant that surpluses could be saved, and this freed some people who became specialists in other areas of life such as builders, priests, warriors, writers, accountants, and rulers. Civilization had begun, but our genes have never adapted our systems to the carbohydrates—grains, beans, and potatoes.

The Neolithic diet, with grains, beans, and potatoes at its center, has the following characteristics: It is toxic to some extent, even when cooked; it is high in carbohydrates that are quickly converted to sugar by our bodies; it is a poor source for vitamins, especially A, the B-group, and C, plus minerals and antioxidants. Its foods certainly provide humans with more calories, but they are “empty” calories.

The Paleolithic diet, the one our genetic development enables us to tolerate best, includes the following “dos” and “don’ts”: Do eat meat, chicken, fish (including organ meats); eggs; vegetables, especially “root” vegetables (carrots, turnips, etc.); fruits; nuts, with the exceptions of peanuts (which is a bean) and cashews; lots of berries, of all kinds. Avoid: grains, including bread, pasta, noodles; beans, including string beans, kidney beans, lentils, peanuts, snow peas, and peas; potatoes; dairy products, including milk, cheese, butter, and sour cream; sugar; salt; chemical preservatives.



important stops along one of the Silk Road’s southern routes.

The earliest settlements in the region of Uzbekistan were the encampments and gathering places of seminomadic tribes. These Eurasian peoples left physical evidence of their religious beliefs in the ubiquitous petroglyphs. These drawings, found all over Central Asia, are primarily horned animals such as ibex and mountain goats (frequently including hunters as well). At many sites they are over 3,000 years old. Another type of evidence connected with the ancient nomads’ religious beliefs are the stone figures called *balbals* found scattered across the

steppes and pastures of inner Asia. Each tribal group also had its own burial site, usually set on an elevated location such as a hill. These sites reveal an interesting combination of traditional nomadic, Islamic, and modern Western burial customs.

Present-day Uzbekistan was a part of the Persian Empire for thousands of years, until the Turks invaded the region. This period also saw the arrival of Islam in Uzbekistan, via the Silk Road. Timur Lenk (1336–1405), more familiar as Timurlane, the great Mongol warrior, took over Uzbekistan in the 14th century and made the Uzbek city of Samarkand his capital. During this period Central Asian ancient

shamanic spiritual practices gradually became mixed with Islamic religious traditions and rituals.

The region saw increasing prosperity and development until the 19th century, when the Russian Empire developed an interest in the region. The first major efforts to bring Uzbekistan under Russian control took place in 1839. Even though this effort was met with firm resistance, 25 years later the Russian Empire had successfully annexed this territory. While resistance movements emerged during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Uzbekistan remained under Russian control. Eventually when the Soviet Union was established, this territory became a part of the new Communist country the USSR. Not all Uzbeks were happy with Soviet rule, but their efforts to resist were largely unsuccessful.

During the Soviet era, Uzbekistan was known as the land of “white gold” (cotton) and became an important asset of the USSR. Uzbekistan was also important to the USSR because of its rich mineral resources. The first noncommunist movement began in Uzbekistan in 1989, while the USSR was declining in power, control, and influence. The movement popularized the use of the Uzbek language and attempted to make the people familiar with their heritage and aware of their ethnicity. These efforts eventually paid off. Uzbekistan proclaimed itself independent on September 1, 1991; the USSR was officially dismantled on December 31, 1991.

President Islam Karimov (b. 1938) came to power in this new republic and continues to rule, almost as a dictator. There is strict military oppression in Uzbekistan, and opposition parties are not allowed to contest elections. In 1999 attempts made by Islamic groups to overthrow the current government were foiled. Violence and unrest continue in modern-day Uzbekistan.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Uzbekistan is a doubly landlocked country (surrounded entirely by other landlocked countries) that shares borders with Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan.

Most of the area of Uzbekistan is covered with sandy deserts. The eastern region is made up of hilly and mountainous terrain. The highest point in Uzbekistan is Adelunga Toghi at 14,111 feet. The southern end of the Aral Sea is located in the west of the country; it was once the fourth largest landlocked body of water in the world. However, now the Aral Sea is shrinking due to overuse and diversion of rivers that used to drain into it.

Uzbekistan has a desert-continental type of climate. The temperature can range from 21°F to 90°F. The weather is generally dry throughout the year with sparse rainfall. A drought-prone area, the countryside presents a composite of arid grasslands and mountain meadows. Animal life is varied. Giant lizards, snow leopards, and rare species of mountain goats are found here.

❁ ECONOMY

Uzbekistan was one of the poorest regions that formed the former USSR. After separating and declaring independence, this country has been following the road to economic reforms and reparation. However, political instability has proved a deterrent to many of these efforts. In spite of such difficulties, Uzbekistan has emerged to become the third largest producer of cotton in the world. The country is also a major producer of gold, natural gas, and chemicals.

The country is rich in minerals and natural resources such as natural gas, petroleum, coal, gold, uranium, silver, copper, lead, zinc, tungsten, and molybdenum. Only 9 percent of Uzbekistan’s total land is arable. The major crops grown are cotton, vegetables, fruits, and food grains. The major industries of Uzbekistan are textiles, food processing, machine building, metallurgy, natural gas, and chemicals.

Uzbekistan has good trade relations with Russia, Ukraine, Italy, Tajikistan, Poland, South Korea, Kazakhstan, the United States, Germany, China, and Turkey. The major exports are cotton, gold, energy products, fertilizers, ferrous metals, textiles, food products, and automobiles. The major import items are machinery and equipment.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Uzbekistan is known for the fine architectural styles and structures found in cities like Bukhara, Khiva, and Samarkand. The monumental mosques, minarets, mausoleums, and monasteries of these cities are world renowned. Uzbek art is seen in handicrafts, clothes, arms, jewelry, weaving, embroidery, and rugs. The Uzbeks used to have a seminomadic lifestyle. Because of this, the people of this region concentrated on art forms that are portable, such as weaving and handicrafts. Calligraphy and painting are other art forms found in this region.

The classical music of this region is known as *shashmaqam*. This musical genre developed in the late 16th century and is similar to Persian music. This musical form has been widely influenced by Sufi poetry. *Koshuk* is a dance performed to a lilting melody. *Lapar* is a dialogue-song. *Ulans* are duets and *yallas* are songs accompanied by dance. A special place in Uzbek musical heritage is occupied by *dastans*, which are epic legends with lyric heroic content.

Fun Fact

The suffix *-stan* that ends the names of several new countries in Central Asia goes back to the Proto-Indo-European root *sta*, which means “to stand,” and is also the source of the English word *stand*. In Sanskrit it means “place,” in Persian (Farsi) “home of,” and in Bulgarian “camp,” referring to the temporary camp of a nomadic group.

Uzbek men wear light-colored robes that are closed with colorful sashes tied in the front and white skullcaps. Women dress in colorful clothes consisting of knee-length shirts with trousers made of the same material. Uzbek women braid their hair. If they make one or two braids, it indicates they are married. Single women make multiple braids.

🌀 CUISINE

Uzbek cuisine is known to be hot, spicy, and flavorful. Spices like black cumin, red and black peppers, barberries, sesame seeds, and herbs like cilantro (leaves of coriander or Chinese parsley), dill, parsley, celeriac, and basil are regularly used in most of the dishes prepared in this region.

Uzbek food consists of bread, rice, stews, thick soups, noodles, and dumplings. Meat is popular and is consumed by most people of this country. Although mutton is preferred, lamb and chicken also form part of the diet. Dairy products such as *katyk* (yogurt) and *suzma* (similar to cottage cheese) are eaten in salads or added in soups. Vegetables like eggplant, cabbage, carrots, cucumbers, onions, peas, peppers, potatoes, pumpkins, and tomatoes, and fruits like apples, cherries, dates, grapes, melons, and pomegranates are also enjoyed. Fried nuts and sweets, such as halvah (a pudding made from sugar and spices and flavored with sesame seeds or almonds), are popular among. Pilaf, or pilav, a favorite dish in this region, is prepared with rice, meat, vegetables, spices, dried fruits, and nuts. There are many variations of this dish in different regions of Uzbekistan.

Fun Fact

The Paleolithic, or Old Stone Age, period was the longest period in human history, lasting from 2.5 million years ago to about 10,000 years ago.

The people of Uzbekistan love to drink tea, be it green, black, or sugarless. Offering tea is considered part of the hospitality of the region. Tea is often served with snacks like *samsa* (fried dumplings with stuffing), bread, halvah, and various fried foods. Even though Islam is the predominant religion in Uzbekistan, wine, brandy, beer, and vodka are available for public consumption.

Public/Legal Holidays

🌀 NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, and is celebrated as New Year's Day all over the world. The often noisy festivities usually begin on New Year's Eve, December 31, the last day of the old year. In Uzbekistan it is a national holiday, and schools and offices are closed.

🌀 INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: March 8

International Women's Day was established after the Second International Conference of Socialist Women in 1910. Since then this day has been dedicated to the appreciation of women across the world. On this day in Uzbekistan, men present women with gifts and flowers. Traditionally the men take over all domestic tasks and give the women a day off from their chores. Special presentations and lectures regarding improving the role of women are held on this day.

VICTORY DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 9

Victory Day, also known as Remembrance and Respect Day, commemorates the defeat of German Fascists by the Allies during World War II, in 1945. This is one of the most celebrated national holidays in Russia and is still commemorated in Uzbekistan, even after obtaining independence from Soviet Russia. People go to see military parades and other festive demonstrations. War veterans visit the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and honor the dead. The national media broadcasts patriotic programs and songs. This day is a national holiday in Uzbekistan, and all schools and businesses are closed.

🌀 INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: September 1

Uzbekistan celebrates its Independence Day on September 1. The country broke away from the former Soviet Union and became an independent nation on this day in 1991. The Uzbeks celebrate their independence with patriotic activities and competitions that may extend for almost a month. Sports and cultural events are held in all major cities across Uzbekistan. The president of the state addresses the nation via national media, and he is also greeted by heads of state from all over the world.

🌀 CONSTITUTION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 8

On this day in 1992 Uzbekistan adopted its new constitution. The president addresses the country, and major celebrations are held in the capital, Tashkent, and other cities.

Religious Holidays

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, also called Qurban Hait or the Feast of Sacrifice, is a very important festival for Muslims all over the world, and one of two Islamic *eid* festivals (*eid* means “celebration”). This festival celebrates Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) willingness to sacrifice his young son in order to obey God’s command. Muslims honor Ibrahim for his willingness to do God’s will. In Uzbekistan this festival is celebrated for four days. Muslim families slaughter sheep and prepare an elaborate feast that they share with friends, family, and the poor. Special prayer services are conducted in mosques across the country.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

❁ NAVRUZ

Observed by: Muslims and Zoroastrians

Observed on: March 21

Navruz, also known as Noruz or Nov Ruz Bairam, marks the first day of the year in the Old Persian calendar and was celebrated as New Year’s Day by the ancient Persians. *Navruz* is a Persian word, which means “new day” (*nev* means “new”; *ruz* means “day”). This day also marks the beginning of the spring season, the vernal equinox, when days and nights are equal in length.

This festival is of Zoroastrian origin and dates back thousands of years. Zoroastrians are believed to be the followers of the most ancient monotheistic religion in the world. This festival is believed to have even more ancient roots, and is connected directly to the worship of the renewal of nature, fertility, and agriculture. Uzbeks prepare for this three-day festival by cleaning and renovating their homes. Women prepare special sweets and dishes for Navruz. During this festival, people visit their friends and relatives. Music, dramatics, fairs, traditional games, beauty contests, sports and games, poetry nights, and other such festivities are seen all over Uzbekistan during this festival.

See also Volume III: ISLAM; NAVRUZ; ZOROASTRIANISM

❁ MOULOU

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic year

Mouloud, the birthday of Muhammad, the prophet of the Muslims, falls in the third month of the Islamic year. It is also called Mawlid al-Nabi. For

Muslims all over the world, this is a day of great joy and celebration since Muhammad is the most revered prophet among them. In Uzbekistan this event is a two-day celebration. Special prayers are said in mosques all over the country. A special feast is prepared in every Uzbek home and relished by Uzbek families on this day.

See also Volume III: ISLAM, MOULOU

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, the ninth month in the Islamic calendar. Muslims break a month-long, daylight fast on this day.

Eid al-Fitr, the second *eid* festival observed among Muslims, is a three-day observance in Uzbekistan. Special prayers and feasting mark this occasion, because it is the end of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar as well as the month-long dawn-to-dusk fast required by the Koran—the fourth of the Five Pillars of Islam. Eid al-Fitr in Uzbekistan is celebrated with sumptuous meals featuring pilaf and delicious desserts like halvah. Most families slaughter a sheep. People wear new and colorful clothes. A festive mood grips the entire nation as people travel around the country, visiting relatives and friends. Some also go in for hunting or shooting. There is a good deal of merriment including much music and dancing. The Koran forbids fasting during this observance.

Although the celebration officially lasts three days, it can often stretch into a week. All businesses—government or private—are closed.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

Regional Holidays

❁ CHILDREN’S PEACE AND DISARMAMENT FESTIVAL

Observed in: Samarkand

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 23

This annual event is held on October 23 near the International Museum of Peace and Solidarity to promote an understanding of, and regard for, peace. During this festival children bring toys associated with violence to it (toy guns and action figures). They sign an International Children’s Disarmament Treaty and then exchange their toys for more con-

Fun Fact

Uzbek dances are characterized by smooth movements and easy sliding steps.

Tashkent and Samarkand

Tashkent, Uzbekistan's capital, is a 2,000-year-old city that was one of the most important commercial centers in Central Asia. This city is a major exporter of silk, cotton, textiles, oil, coal, copper, sulfur, rice, and manufactured products even in the 21st century. The word *tashkent* means "stone fortress." The city was once highly developed and had all the characteristics of a modern metropolis, but little remains of those glorious days. The old city of Tashkent was destroyed in a massive earthquake in

1966. The famous Silk Road passes through Tashkent and other famous Uzbek cities, Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva.

Samarkand was a center for trade and economic activity. In the 14th century Timur Lenk (sometimes Timur, Tamburlaine, or Timur the Lame; 1336–1405) made this city the capital of his empire (which covered most of present-day Central Asia). The carpets woven in this city reflected Persian and Turkish culture and have always been world renowned.



structive ones such as paints, crayons, books, multi-cultural dolls, building blocks, balls, creative activity games, crafts, and nature kits. All the children are then awarded a special Peace and Disarmament Diploma. Art competitions, exhibitions, workshops, cartoon film shows, and other events popular among children also are held on this day.

PAKHTA-BAIRAM HARVEST FESTIVAL

Observed in: Karakalpak
Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December

The Uzbek Pakhta-Bairam Harvest Festival is held in December. This is a popular celebration among cotton planters in the country. Various festivities and fun-filled activities, including sports events like wrestling, ram fighting, and cockfighting, are held on this day.

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

Rites of Passage

BIRTH

When a baby is born in Uzbekistan, it is an occasion for celebration. *Beshik Tuyi* is a ritual that is celebrated on the seventh, ninth, or eleventh day after a baby's birth. During this ceremony the baby's grandfather hands a decorated cradle to the father of the child, who in turn takes it to the mother of the newborn infant.

The child, in the presence of all the invited relatives, is placed in a cradle and rocked. Ornate wooden cradles, used for this ceremony, are normally given by the mother's family. There is a lot of music, food, and merrymaking on this occasion. Special sweets and flatbreads are prepared, and the child is presented with toys and clothes that are placed near the cradle.

COMING OF AGE

Male circumcision is a part of Uzbekistan's tradition and is carried out at puberty. The Muslims in Uzbekistan believe that, by undergoing this ritual, a boy becomes a man. Trained elders use knives, razors, and other sharp instruments to perform the circumcision, without administering any anesthetic. This practice enjoys social backing, and families take great pride in it. Huge celebrations also follow this coming-of-age ritual.

MARRIAGE

Uzbek marriages are often arranged by parents, aunts, or matchmakers. The wedding date is finalized during the betrothal ceremony (*fatikha tuyi*). Following the engagement ceremony the matchmakers are each gifted with a *dasturkhan* (ornamental tablecloth), along with two flat breads and sweets. Many days prior to the wedding, the ceremony of *qiz oshi* ("wedding shower") is held in the bride's home, which is attended by her close relatives and friends.

On the wedding day the groom's family cooks a special delicacy called pilaf (or *pilav*) and sends it to the bride's home. The groom, along with his friends, comes to collect her. The bride's friends sing traditional songs and bid her goodbye. The imam, who officiates at the wedding ceremony in the groom's house, recites the "Khutbai Nikoh" (a marriage prayer) and explains to the couple their responsibilities and obligations. He then declares them married. Usually Uzbek couples go to the registrar's office after the ceremony and register the marriage according to civil law.

The wedding party is a lavish affair with lots of special dishes, music, and dancing. At the end of the party the couple is led to their nuptial home, where they spend the night. The next morning, the ceremony of *kelin salomi* (bride's greeting) takes place. All the relatives of the groom gather in the front yard, where they will greet and bless the bride in turns. The bride greets them back by bowing from the waist.

❁ DEATH

When a person dies in Uzbekistan, the body is buried according to Muslim rites and as soon as possible. Special prayers are said just before the person dies. Women are not allowed to participate in the funeral services held in the cemetery; rather, they mourn at home for a prolonged period of time.

Further Reading

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Vanuatu

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	A group of islands in Oceania in the South Pacific Ocean, about three-quarters of the distance between Hawaii and Australia
Size	4,710 sq. mi.
Capital City	Port-Vila
Flag Description	Two equal horizontal bands of red (top) and green with a black isosceles triangle (based on the hoist side) all separated by a black-edged yellow stripe in the shape of a horizontal Y (the two points of the Y face the hoist side and enclose the triangle); centered in the triangle is a boar's tusk encircling two crossed namele leaves, all in yellow; the tusk represents Prosperity, and the leaves Peace
Independence	July 30, 1980 (from France and United Kingdom)
Population	205,754 (July 2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary republic
Nationality	Ni-Vanuatu (singular and plural)
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Melanesian (98%)
Major Language(s)	English; French; Bislama (also known as Bichelama or pidgin), plus more than 100 local languages
Major Religion(s)	Protestant (70%); Roman Catholic (13.1%); indigenous beliefs, including Jon Frum Cargo cult (6%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Labor Day, May 1; Independence Day, July 30; Unity Day, November 29

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

According to historians and archaeologists the first settlers, coming from New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, might have landed in Vanuatu approximately 3,000 years ago. It is likely that they used sturdy, seagoing canoes for the journey. The first European to discover Vanuatu was the Spanish explorer Captain Pedro Ferdinand De Quirós (1565–1615), in 1605. He named the islands Tierra Australis del Espíritu Santo (“Southern Land of the Holy Spirit”), assuming that he had discovered the southern continent of Australia. The island on which he had landed still bears the name Espíritu Santo.

The French explorer Louis Antoine de Bougainville (1729–1811) landed in Vanuatu in 1768. He came ashore and

traversed the islands of Aoba, Pentecost, and Maewo, which he renamed Cyclades after the famous Greek Islands. He named the strait between the islands after himself. In 1774 Captain James Cook (1728–79) sailed through the island chain from north to south. He explored many of the islands and renamed the archipelago the New Hebrides after the islands off the coast of Scotland. After Cook the islands were repeatedly visited by French explorers.

By 1895 both the French and English had settled here. In 1902 both nations appointed resident commissioners. In October 1906 Britain and France signed an agreement resolving their various claims to the country and establishing joint sovereignty. This condominium was the only government of its kind in the world. Apparently as occurred in other places where Europeans had contact with the indigenous peoples, the native people of Vanuatu contracted diseases brought in by the missionaries and traders and died in large numbers.

The population fell from over a million in 1800 to less than 50,000 in 1935. In late 1978 the condominium arrangement ceased, and elections were held in November 1979. Vanuatu became independent on July 30, 1980, and joined the UN on September 15, 1981.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The land area Vanuatu is approximately 5,675 square miles, and the territorial waters stretch over 173,750 square miles. When the very first islands sprang up from the sea, they had little or no vegetation. They were gradually overrun by plants from neighboring countries, brought in by the birds, wind, sea currents, and human beings. The plants initially brought in by people served as sources of food as well as building materials for houses, canoes, fences, and so forth. Vanuatu is now covered with an immense variety of plants, trees, and shrubs. Close to the sea, the commonly found trees include mangroves, coconut palms, casuarinas, pandanus, *burao* (a small tree growing up to a height of 30 feet, often forming dense thickets), and *namele* (a species of fern and used on the national flag) among others. In the interiors of the islands the vegetation becomes denser with a profusion of melek trees, kauri trees, banyan trees, ferns, wild orchids, and vines. The local fauna includes insects, worms, lizards, snakes, bats, birds, and domesticated species such as pigs, chickens, cows, and horses.

There are more than 100 species of birds in Vanuatu. The country also has many varieties of colorful butterflies, some of which are known as “good news” butterflies. The most commonly seen reptiles are the gecko, the green lizard, the Pacific boa, and crocodiles. The sea skirting the islands is home to a wide variety of fish such as yellowfin tuna, barracuda, swordfish, marlin, and shark.

The climate of Vanuatu is tropical in the north and tends to be subtropical in the southernmost parts. The average midday temperature in the capital of Port-Vila is 84°F in summer and 77°F in winter; rainfall is about 93 inches annually. The archipelago lies between two sides of a fault in the Earth’s crust that rub against each other, causing volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. Vanuatu has both extinct and active volcanoes. The Ambrym and Lopevi volcanoes are permanently active. Lopevi was dormant for many years but became active about 50 years ago. On the southern island of Tanna is located Yasur, which can easily be reached by travelers and explorers. There are no rivers on the island, and its highest point is an unnamed location on Banaba at 266 feet.

❁ ECONOMY

The economy of Vanuatu is based on small-scale agriculture, the source of livelihood for 65 percent of the total population. Fishing, offshore financial

Kava

Kava is a beverage consumed on most Pacific Islands. It is prepared from the roots of the plant with the same name (*Piper methysticum*). Kava is usually planted in a field far away from the village, making it difficult to transport kava roots from the fields to the village. For preparing the drink, kava roots are first chopped into very tiny pieces. Then the pieces are ground and twisted by both hands. A little water is added to the mashed kava roots, and the doughlike stuff is kneaded well. A certain quantity of liquid comes out as a result of the squeezing of the kneaded roots. The liquid is then filtered through a sheet of coconut fiber and served in a coconut cup.

services, and tourism are other important industries. Mineral deposits are negligible, and there are no petroleum deposits. Tax revenues come mainly from import duties. Economic development is hindered by dependence on relatively few commodity exports (the island of Espiritu Santo produces the bulk of Vanuatu’s exports including cocoa, coffee, coconuts, and high-quality beef), vulnerability to natural disasters, and long distances from major markets. In mid-2002 the government stepped up its efforts to boost tourism. Australia and New Zealand are the main sources of tourists as well foreign aid. Agriculture, especially animal husbandry, is a second target for growth.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The social fabric of Vanuatu is recognized as a highly cosmopolitan one. On Vanuatu small communities of French, British, Australians, New Zealanders, Vietnamese, and Chinese live in peaceful coexistence.

Up to the 1980s Vanuatu (formerly known as the New Hebrides), was jointly administered by France and Britain as a condominium. Most of Vanuatu’s islands have very thick vegetation and forest cover. Some of the islands are uninhabited. Among the inhabited ones the Malekula and Ambrym are home to groups of primitive people who live in inaccessible areas. Tanna Island is famous for the John Frum Cargo Cult as well as the Toka ritual dance. During this dance men wear tasseled skirts, paint their hair in different hues, and leap in a frenzy trying to trap women in their dance circles. Catching one, they toss her up and down, fondle, and pinch her. This continues all night. In the morning: pigs are slaughtered, followed by feasts.

On the island of Pentecost, the famous land-diving ritual takes place during April and May: Men jump off towers (constructed with bush and shrub

materials) with dried-up vines tied to their legs. This is a highly risky practice because the jumpers' heads may be grazed by the solid earth and cause accidents or injuries.

It is customary on Pentecost for local people to communicate with their eyebrows and facial expressions. If someone raises his or her eyebrows, it can mean "hello" or "yes." What is more, one can even flag down a bus with the appropriate facial expression. It is also a common practice among the islanders to hiss at each other in order to get someone else's attention.

🌸 CUISINE

The intermingling of cultures and racial groups in Vanuatu is strongly reflected in its cuisine, which is a delicious fusion of Melanesian and European styles. Some interesting dishes are warm chicken salad laced with marinated feta, sun-dried tomatoes, and balsamic dressing sweetened with honey; *tuluk* (minced beef sealed in a manioc pastry) is served piping hot in cabbage jackets. *Poe* is the highly popular dessert (made of baked pumpkin mixed with manioc until it forms a smooth dough, to which are added sugars, a vanilla pod, and coconut cream). Coconut crabs, wild pigeons, and flying foxes (bats) are traditionally cooked in ground ovens and said to be highly palatable.

Pork is the mainstay of the local diet, and roast pork is a common dish. Raw ingredients include cabbages, bananas, pink grapefruit, skewered nuts, coconuts, fish and seafood (including squid, mussels, baby octopus, coconut crabs, and lobsters). French dishes served in Vanuatu's restaurants have a local touch, such as *la tarte a l'oignon* (onion tart). The men of Vanuatu drink kava at local kava bars. The rich, tropical soil in the vicinity of the active Yasur volcano on the island of Tanna is conducive to the

cultivation of coffee beans, and coffee is also a highly popular beverage.

Public/Legal Holidays

🌸 NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

The people of Vanuatu say good-bye to the old year and joyously welcome the new one, which brings new hopes and aspirations for everyone. In Vanuatu, as in most parts of the world, New Year's Day is celebrated in the company of one's family, friends, and acquaintances. The day is marked by partying and get-togethers, dance and musical programs, and general gaiety and mirth. This is a public holiday.

🌸 LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

The earliest origins of Labor Day are sometimes ascribed to the pagan spring celebrations practiced by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages. Their customs may have influenced the choice of May 1 to celebrate the contributions made by workers to their societies. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

Cannibalism

Among the Ni-Vanuatu, cannibalism was long a tradition in their tribal cultures, with the exception of the islands of Banks and Torres, where it was never practiced. The last recorded act of cannibalism was in 1969 among the Big Nambas tribe on Malekula, said to have been the last tribe to become Christians. There are also unconfirmed reports of cannibalism in Efate as late as 1987. Accurate information is hard to come by because the government has suppressed the subject of cannibalism; it is a sensitive issue because there are still people alive who once ate human flesh.

Why eat other human beings? Some tribes believed that eating human flesh endowed them

with magical powers. For other groups it was a practical solution: If pigs weren't available, they sacrificed a person and then ate him or her. The meat was said to taste better and to be more tender than pork. A majority of such main courses were slain specifically to be eaten; only on Tanna were people who died of natural causes consumed. In spite of such exceptions cannibalism was usually the result of tribal warfare, though some missionaries were also served up. Europeans, however, weren't generally considered tasty because they were too salty. According to those who know the best parts were the buttocks, the inner upper arms and thighs; the palms of the hands and women's breasts were regarded as delicacies.



In Vanuatu on this occasion, the government draws up plans and implements several schemes for the amelioration of the workers' conditions and their general welfare. This day is marked by speeches, processions, and other trade union activities. This is a public holiday. This day is also celebrated as May Day or Workers' Day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July 30

In Vanuatu July 30 is celebrated as Independence Day. It is a day of festivities, and the waterfront in town is crowded with people from the outer islands who have come to join their relatives for the party. In some years the government adds another day or two to the celebration, depending on the mood of the people and whether it falls close to a weekend.

❁ UNITY DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: November 29

On this day in 1977 a civil uprising took place on the main island demanding liberation from foreign control. (Freedom came in 1980.) A number of people were injured while others hid themselves after an encounter with the armed police. This incident threw the entire region into chaos and disorder.

On this occasion every year the president of Vanuatu addresses the nation. Medals are awarded to those citizens who have made significant contributions to their society and the country at large. The general public prays for lasting peace and the unity of their nation. Some people also go on picnics and enjoy group amusements on this day. This is a public holiday and schools, businesses, and government offices are closed.

Religious Holidays

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday, also called Holy Friday, Great Friday, or Mourning Friday, recalls Jesus' agony and death on the Cross. As in many other countries of the world, in Vanuatu this solemn occasion is marked by readings of the Psalms and Gospels, hymn singing, and church services.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a Christian feast that celebrates the Christian belief in Jesus' Resurrection from the dead three days after his Crucifixion. It is sometimes called Resurrection Day. This is a day of utmost importance because the fundamental teaching of Christianity is that Jesus, through his death, freed all his believers from the penalty of sin.

The holiday falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. They often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to pray. The word *easter* is derived from the name of the Germanic mother goddess Eostre. She was the revered fertility goddess of the Saxon people who lived in northern Europe. Easter eggs, fertility symbols, once associated with the goddess, are now associated with the Christian festival. They are symbols of new life.

Easter signifies the resurgence of hope and a fresh lease on life for all humanity. Early in the morning the people attend Mass and prayer services in the local churches. The rest of the day is spent in outdoor activities and sports. The spirit of joyfulness and festivity spills over to the following day Easter Monday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Forty days after Easter

For a period of 40 days after his Resurrection, Jesus preached and intermingled with his Apostles and other followers. Ultimately he ascended into heaven, and this event is celebrated as Ascension Day by Christians. In Vanuatu the local people go to church and attend special prayer services and Masses.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

❁ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: August 15

Assumption Day celebrates the day when Mary, the mother of Jesus, was received into heaven. Devout Christians consider this evidence of Jesus' promise to all believing Christians that they too will be received into paradise. People of Vanuatu celebrate the festival in the traditional way with prayers and visits to churches.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION DAY; CHRISTIANITY

Fun Fact

People were not really boiled in huge pots full of water. They were cooked in underground ovens.

John Frum Cargo Cult

The island of Tanna is home to the John Frum Cargo Cult, reputedly one of the world's most enigmatic religions. When Presbyterian missionaries came to the Pacific Islands during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, they brought with them Western ideals and material goods that began to erode the Vanuatu traditional, or *kastom* ("custom"), way of life. During the 1930s several reports of sightings of John Frum spread like wildfire through the island. He was believed to be a spiritual messiah who had come to lead the people back to their traditional ways. The actual character and traits of John Frum are still shrouded in mystery. The Ni-Vanuatu believe that he is the Son of God who may take the form of a black Melanesian, or even a white man. According to popular beliefs, he lives in the crater of the Yasur volcano with an army of 20,000 men.

CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world because it celebrates the birth of Jesus, whom they believe was the son of God, and the messiah promised in the Old Testament. In Vanuatu a strongly Christian country, the day is marked by prayers in churches, feasting, giving and receiving of gifts, and general festivities. Both in rural and urban areas, groups of people wander from house to house throughout the night, singing until the inhabitants waken, come out of their homes to listen, and finally donate small gifts of cash or food. Christmas launches the festive Bonane season (pronounced bone-AN-nay, from the French Bonne Année, which means "good year"). The celebrations continue right up to New Year's.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26

The origins of Boxing Day are uncertain but may be based on the ancient practice (particularly among the British) of giving cash or durable goods to public servants and those of the lower classes on the day after Christmas. Gifts among equals were exchanged on or before Christmas Day, but the less fortunate were given gifts the day after. Since Vanuatu was under the influence of Britain for a fairly long time, this practice has become a local custom. In some countries this day is also observed as St. Stephen's Day. St.

Stephen was the first Christian martyr. In Vanuatu the day is also called Christmas Bank Holiday.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY

Rites of Passage

COMING OF AGE

In Vanuatu the young boys undergo circumcision between ages five and seven, but the ritual is not performed for religious or cultural reasons. It originated in a tribal legend about a woman who was married to two brothers. After one brother had accidentally circumcised himself as he passed by a low bamboo branch while out hunting, his wife told him that she enjoyed making love with him more than she did with his uncircumcised brother. On hearing this bit of intimate information, the other brother was circumcised and everyone lived happily ever after. Because of this happy ending, circumcising men became customary on some islands. While all men on Tanna are circumcised, those living on Espiritu Santo are not.

For this important rite of passage they are quarantined or segregated from their families, before and after the actual act, for a total period of nearly three months. Circumcision is often performed by qualified doctors. During this period the female relatives of the boys cannot cook for them or pay them a visit. It is the paternal grandfathers of the boys who are given the task of looking after them. On the actual day of the circumcision the boys don traditional skirts, get their faces painted, and wear colorful feathers as headdresses. On this occasion the maternal uncles of the boys enjoy a great deal of importance, because traditionally they are responsible for the milestones in the lives of their nephews: circumcision, beard shaving, and getting married. The fathers of the boys prepare food and drinks (especially kava) and offer it to the guests who come together to celebrate the occasion. In the evening traditional dances are performed to which the public is invited.

MARRIAGE

In Vanuatu, a traditional marriage ceremony is spread over many days. Prior to the marriage in the villages of the bride and the bridegroom respectively, the families prepare for the wedding by collecting gifts and other belongings that the couple will use in their new life. Traditional dances also take place in the man's house. Thereafter the relatives and kinsfolk of the bridegroom come and take away the bride (along with her belongings) to the village of the groom. The bride's people pretend to cry. As the bride leaves the house her parents unfold a big red mat over her head so that she is not visible to the bystanders. In earlier days the bride customarily killed a tusked boar at this

point; now she merely taps the head or skull of the tusked pig with a walking stick. (In Vanuatu a boar or pig is a symbol of wealth, prosperity, and affluence.) All those who plan to attend the wedding throng the village of the bridegroom.

The bride, led by her paternal aunt, moves to the middle of the ceremonial ground (*sara*) in the village. The bride and groom stand by huge packages containing the bride's belongings. Some of the members of the groom's family then walk over to the bride; her aunt and her father (who join them later) walk in circles around them, and touch the hem of the bride's father's clothes. This gesture shows acceptance of the gifts as well as the bride. Then the mothers of the couple each bring a sack of raw yams to the spot where the ceremonies are being conducted. A sister of the groom gnaws a bit of the raw yam and spits it out. This symbolizes that her brother (the bridegroom) will spit out his semen into the bride. This yam is cooked and eaten only by the sisters of the bridegroom.

An extravagant wedding feast follows in the groom's village, where guests are entertained with lots of kava and special dishes (*vwavwaligi*) cooked in earthen ovens. *Vwavwaligi* involve a process of baking in a casserole. They require heating up many stones, a lot of firewood with which to heat them, and leaves of heliconia in which the raw food items

are wrapped. The relatives and kinsfolk of the bridegroom are assigned the tasks of fetching firewood, the stones, and the leaves in addition to managing the entire banquet. In traditional societies of Vanuatu there are two commodities that play key roles in all weddings: red mats and pigs. *Bwana*, or a big red mat (made with pandanus leaves), is a kind of traditional money. *Bari*, small red mats, are used to supplement the big red mats in case of exchange or payment. Small red mats are also used as traditional clothing. Women once used them as G-strings and men as loincloths.

Further Reading

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~ Vatican City ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	An enclave within Rome, Italy, in Southern Europe
Size	Less than 1 sq. mi.
Capital City	None
Flag Description	Vatican City's flag has two vertical bands of yellow and white with the crossed keys of Saint Peter and the papal miter centered in the white band.
Independence	February 11, 1929 (from Italy)
Population	921 (2005 est.)
Government	Ecclesiastical
Nationality	None
Major Ethnic Group(s)	White
Major Language(s)	Italian; Latin; French; others
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Anniversary of Lateranensi Pacts, February 11; Anniversary of the Pope's Election, April 19; Labor Day, May 1

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Long before the beginnings of Christianity, the area where Vatican City is now located was called Vatican Hill, Vaticanus Mons in Latin. It is situated on the side of the Tiber River across from the legendary Seven Hills of Rome. Even before Christianity was introduced, it was considered a very sacred spot.

The concentration of the Catholic bureaucracy on Vatican Hill evolved gradually. In the first century C.E. it was home to a circus and a cemetery. Around 65 the Romans were slaughtering Christians, and it is thought that St. Peter (who is believed to be the first pope) was among those put to death. A small tomb was built at the spot where he lost his life. In 326 on the orders of Emperor Constantine, a basilica was built over St. Peter's tomb. Afterward the area became more populated.

Vatican Hill has been within the walls and city limits of Rome for more than 1,000 years. Vatican City was included within the city limits of Rome during the reign of Pope Leo IV

(847–55), who expanded Rome's walls to protect St. Peter's Basilica and the Vatican between 848 and 852. Until the 14th century, however, the administrative headquarters of the church (called the Holy See) was at the Lateran Palace in Rome.

In the 14th century, Pope Clement V (a Frenchman named Bertrand de Got whose papacy started in 1305) chose to make his residence Avignon in France. From 1309 to 1377 Avignon was the seat of the papacy. Rome did not have a pope for more than 70 years, and the popes were under the influence of French rulers. Consequently Rome suffered financially and socially, having lost much commercial traffic and prestige. When the papacy returned, the country began to revive. Following the Avignon Captivity the papal palace and church administration moved to Vatican Hill. Around the same time, since St. Peter's Basilica was around 1,000 years old, a new one was designed. The interior of the basilica can hold approximately 60,000 people.

Until the mid-19th century the popes exercised civil as well as spiritual authority over the papal states, which included the present regions of Latium, Umbria, Marche, and eastern Emilia-Romagna. At their maximum size in 1859, the papal states comprised some 16,000 square miles of territory. In 1870

The Etruscans

In the seventh century B.C.E. what is called the Villanovan culture, the first Iron Age culture known in central and northern Italy, was eclipsed by Greek traders and the Hellenic civilization of southern Italy. The rich, and somewhat mysterious, Etruscan culture developed out of the Villanovan culture in northern and central Italy after c. 800. The civilization of the Etruscans flourished in Etruria and the Po Valley in the northern part of what is now Italy before the Gauls arrived and the Roman Republic began. The Etruscans are thought to have spoken a non-Indo-European language.

Early on the Catholic Church saw itself as the guardian responsible for preserving the world's antiquities, and one of the several museums of Vatican City is devoted entirely to Etruscan art and cul-

ture. It is located over the Vatican's Egyptian museum where a succession of 19th-century popes was responsible for its creation: Gregory XVI (r. 1831–46) built the foundation, Pius IX (r. 1846–78) provided many of the treasures that it houses, and Leo XIII (r. 1878–1903) saw to its decoration and the systematic arrangement of the artifacts. The first artifacts that necessitated the museum were discovered during excavations carried out in Western Etruria between 1828 and 1836 and include statues, sarcophagi, bowls, vessels of every shape and function, mosaics, lamps, and many other items of every description. Like all of the Vatican's five museums, their arrangement and the artifacts themselves provide an extremely detailed mosaic of the art of ancient Italy and the culture of the Etruscans.

the newly unified kingdom of Italy seized the papal states. The papal soldiers tried to resist the invasion but failed. Rome was annexed, and the pope's powers were taken away.

In 1928 the Fascist leader of Italy Benito Mussolini (1883–1945) started the process of restoring the authority of the papacy. In 1929 he established

the independent state of Vatican City and granted it full autonomy.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Vatican City is situated on Vatican Hill within the city of Rome. The country consists of 13 buildings in Rome and Castel Gandolfo (the pope's summer residence), which enjoys extraterritorial rights. The wall built around Vatican City constitutes its boundaries.

Vatican City enjoys temperate weather with wet and mild winters and warm and dry summers.

❁ ECONOMY

Vatican City has a noncommercial economy that is supported financially by contributions from Roman Catholic dioceses throughout the world. The sale of postage stamps, coins, medals, and tourist mementos is another source of revenue. This state has some small-scale industries for printing and production of mosaics and staff uniforms.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Vatican City is famous for its magnificent architecture. Its buildings, such as St. Peter's Basilica and the Sistine Chapel, house some of the world's most beautiful art masterpieces, and visitors can admire works by Botticelli, Bernini, and Michelangelo. The Vatican Library and the collections at the Vatican museums are of historical, scientific, and cultural significance.

The population of Vatican City is predominantly male, although two orders of nuns live within the country. The laypersons and others who work in Vatican City normally live outside its walls.



Pope Benedict XVI presides over the Vatican and the Catholic Church worldwide. (AP Photo/Kai Pfaffenbach, pool)



The Great Schism

In the 11th century the Great Schism between Rome and Constantinople occurred, an event that led to the separation of the church of the West, the Roman Catholic Church, and the churches of the East. Although there were doctrinal issues, such as the *filioque* controversy (a disputed part of the Nicene Creed concerning the nature of the Trinity) and the authority of the pope involved in the split, these were considerably aggravated by cultural and linguistic differences as well as the personalities of the religious figures involved in the dispute.

The final schism is thought to have been caused by the sacking of Constantinople by the Fourth Crusade in 1204, which directly involved the Latin Church in a military assault against the Byzantine

Empire, Constantinople, and the Orthodox Patriarchate. In fact among the Orthodox there is still anger regarding both the sacking of the Church of Holy Wisdom and the establishment of the Latin Empire in 1204. In 2004 Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005) formally apologized for the assaults of 1204, and Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople (b. 1940) formally accepted the apology. However many precious items—including relics, riches, and other items of great value—were stolen during the attack and are still kept by various Catholic churches in Western Europe.

The Eastern Orthodox Churches continue to use the Nicene Creed as revised in 381, without the *filioque* clause.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar, which has been followed by the Roman Catholic Church since Pope Gregory XIII (r. 1572–85) decreed its adoption on February 24, 1582. Up to that point most of the Western world had followed the Julian calendar (introduced by Julius Caesar); the Eastern Orthodox Churches continue to use the Julian calendar. The calendar was changed because the mean year in the Julian calendar was a little too long, which caused the vernal equinox (the date used to calculate when Easter should be observed) to drift slowly backward in the calendar year.

In Vatican City, this day is also celebrated as the World Day of Peace. The pope conducts a special Mass on this day. Millions of Catholic followers wait to hear the pope's special New Year's message. The pope also prays for world peace on this day.

❁ ANNIVERSARY OF LATERANENSI PACTS

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: February 11

This day commemorates the signing of three treaties with Italy in 1929. These treaties acknowledged the full sovereignty of the Vatican and established the country's territories formally. The pope conducts a special Mass for Vatican City on this day.

The Lateran Treaties

The treaties signed on February 11, 1929, recognized the then-kingdom of Italy and Vatican City. The Lateran treaties were negotiated between Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Gasparri on behalf of Vatican City, and Benito Mussolini, the Fascist leader, as Prime Minister of Italy. There were three treaties: The first treaty recognizes the independence and sovereignty of Vatican City. The second treaty defines the civil and religious relations between the government

and the Church within Italy. The third treaty was to provide Vatican City with compensation for its losses in the earlier disputes that took place in 1870.

According to the treaty, the pope also agreed to submit the candidates for bishop and archbishop to the Italian government, and the bishops had to swear allegiance to the Italian state. The clergy were also prohibited from participating in politics. The Roman Catholic Church was granted the status of the established church in Italy.

❁ ANNIVERSARY OF THE POPE'S ELECTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: April 19

This day commemorates the anniversary of the election of the pope. A special Mass is held in St. Peter's Square to honor him.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day and Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. Although the earliest origins of May Day are ascribed to the pagan celebrations that were practiced by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages, the modern observance goes back to 1889, when the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world. At that time the group scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890, and coordinated it with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday.

In St. Peter's Square in Vatican City, nuns, the clergy, and thousands of pilgrims wearing the yellow scarf of Italy's Catholic trade union celebrate this day with a special Mass conducted by the pope. For Catholics this day also marks the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker, having been so designated by Pope Pius XII (r. 1939–58) in 1955; many believe that this feast was initiated in response to the May Day celebrations for workers sponsored by Socialists. Special prayers are made to St. Joseph on this day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

Religious Holidays

❁ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: January 6

Epiphany, historically observed on January 6, is celebrated to remember the Three Wise Men from the East (the Magi, Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar) who came to see and pay their respects to the newly born Jesus. The observance originated in the Eastern Christian Churches and celebrated the birth of Jesus, the visit of the Magi, and all of Jesus' childhood events up to his baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist.

In Vatican City, the center of the Catholic world, this feast day is celebrated with a special prayer service conducted by the pope. He blesses the entire Catholic community on this occasion.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS; EPIPHANY

❁ ST. JOSEPH'S DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: March 19

St. Joseph's Day honors St. Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus. On this ecclesiastical feast day, a special Mass is conducted by the pope, and prayers are offered to St. Joseph. St. Joseph is also the patron of the universal church. His other feast day is on May 1, the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker, having been so designated by Pope Pius XII in 1955; many felt that it was in response to the May Day celebrations for workers sponsored by the Socialist International.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: Thursday before Easter

Maundy Thursday, also called Shere Thursday or Holy Thursday, derives its English name from the Latin word *mandatum*, the first word of the office of the washing of the feet, the central rite of the day and the oldest of which there is explicit evidence. On Holy Thursday church bells stop ringing, the altar is stripped following vespers, and the night office is celebrated as Tenebrae ("darkness"), which symbolizes a world without God.

In Rome all the observances are performed during the day, whereas in Africa the Eucharist is celebrated after the evening meal on Holy Thursday, because this conforms to the circumstances of the Last Supper.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

Good Friday falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent. It is observed in most parts

Fun Fact

It took 125 years for the new St. Peter's Basilica to be completed.

Fun Fact

The Council of Carthage released devout Catholics from their Lenten fast before Communion on Holy Thursday because it is also customary to take a bath, and the bath and fast are considered incompatible.

of the world to commemorate the Crucifixion of Jesus. In Vatican City the pope leads a solemn torchlit procession, the Via Crucis (“Way of the Cross”), from the Coliseum through the Monte Palatino, reenacting the 14 Stations of the Cross, from Jesus’ death sentence to the placement of his body in the tomb. The pope carries a large wooden cross part of the way, and at every station he offers a brief prayer.

Fun Fact

The area on the right bank of the Tiber River was called the Ager Vaticanus (“Vatican Field”). No one is certain about the source of the name *Vaticanus*, but some think that the name may come from a now vanished Etruscan town once called *Vaticum*.

At the final station he also gives a speech connecting the reenactment to the current affairs of the world. Good Friday is also called Holy Friday (because it falls during Holy Week), Mourning Friday (because it is a day of mourning for Christians), or Great Friday (in the Eastern Orthodox Churches).

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a Christian feast that celebrates Jesus’ Resurrection from the dead the third day after he was crucified. It is sometimes known as Resurrection Day. This day is the central observance in the Catholic liturgical calendar, and many of the Church’s holy days are scheduled around the date on which Easter falls during the year. It is also important because the fundamental teaching of Christianity is that Jesus, through his death, freed all his believers from the penalty of sin, and his Resurrection was the triumph of life over death.

When the Catholic Church decided to add an observance of Jesus’ Resurrection to its holy days in the first century, it chose the date of the vernal equinox, the day celebrated among pagans as the arrival of spring and the Earth’s renewed fertility. The holiday falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. They often buy new clothes for this special day and go to church to offer prayers.

On Easter, the pope gives his Easter blessings to all Catholics around the world. He appears in the papal window at St.

Peter’s Square and waves to the thousands who wait outside to see him. On Easter Monday the pope declares the official end of the Holy Week celebrations.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; SPRING FESTIVALS

✿ PENTECOST

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Fifty days after Easter

Pentecost, which in Greek means “fiftieth,” is celebrated 50 days after Easter and has been celebrated since the third century C.E. Pentecost, also called Whitsunday and Whitmonday, celebrates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles. On this day special prayer services are held in Vatican City.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PENTECOST

✿ CORPUS CHRISTI

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Sixty days after Easter

The Feast of Corpus Christi is a religious feast celebrated by Catholics all over the world. It is a solemn commemoration of the institution of the Holy Eucharist (the sacrament of bread and wine, representing the body and blood of Jesus) during the Last Supper. It is celebrated 60 days after Easter and falls on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday, the first Sunday after Pentecost. This feast was celebrated for the first time in 1246. The pope conducts special prayer services and leads an elaborate procession.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

✿ THE FEAST OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: June 29

The Feast of Saints Peter and Paul is celebrated with a special Mass conducted by the pope. St. Peter is regarded as the first pope of the Roman Catholic Church, while St. Paul is known for adhering steadfastly to his faith in spite of many trials. He was eventually martyred for his beliefs.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

✿ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: August 15

The Feast of the Assumption commemorates the Virgin Mary’s assumption into heaven. According to legend, when Jesus’ mother was dying at the age of 73, long after he had ascended to heaven, all the

Fun Fact

The Sistine Chapel is one of the most famous churches in the world. It is famous for Michelangelo’s frescoes on the vaulted ceiling and the painting of the *Last Judgment* on the end wall of the chapel. Michelangelo (1475–1564), who was a sculptor, painter, scientist, inventor, poet, and architect, took four years to finish painting the ceiling.

Apostles visited with her before her death, except St. Thomas, who arrived too late to speak with her. Moreover, when he did arrive, her body could not be found because she had been raised up to heaven. Christians believe that her soul and body were united at Jehoshaphat (Mary's Tomb), and St. Gabriel took her, body and soul, to heaven. The Assumption is commemorated with a special Mass celebrated by the pope in Vatican City.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

❁ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Roman Christians
Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day is a Christian feast that honors all the saints (known and unknown) of the Catholic Church. It is believed that All Saints' Day celebrations began after the consecration of the Pantheon at Rome to the Blessed Virgin by Pope Boniface IV (r. 608–15). The Feast of All Saints' has been celebrated on November 1 since the time of Charlemagne (742–814). In Vatican City on All Saints' Day, the pope conducts a Mass and special prayer services to remember and pray for all the saints.

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ ALL SOULS' DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: November 2

Catholics observe All Souls' Day to remember the dead. On this day, all saints, martyrs, and the dead are remembered and honored. Relatives decorate the graves of their loved ones and light candles. In Vatican City on All Souls' Day, the pope conducts special prayer services to remember and pray for souls of the dead, especially those who are waiting in Purgatory.

See also Volume III: ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

❁ IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: December 8

The Immaculate Conception is a Roman Catholic dogma asserting that, at the time of her birth, God had protected Mary from all the sins of the world and filled her with his grace. It is believed that, since God wanted Mary to be the mother of Jesus, whom Christians believe to be the Son of God, she had to be totally free of any kind of sin.

In Vatican City the pope leads the celebrations of the Immaculate Conception. The country plays host to a variety of events attended by followers of Mary from all over the world. Participants join the

pope for a commemorative mass in St. Peter's Basilica. Other events, such as a special Concert for Immaculate Mary, are usually held in the Vatican's Audience Hall, showcasing many hymns written in her honor.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world, because it celebrates the birth of Jesus, whom they believe was the Son of God. No one knows the date of Jesus' birth, and many dates have been suggested as possibilities. During the fourth century a calendar was established that emphasized Christian festivals that gradually took over the dates and seasons of pagan celebrations and rituals.

The latter part of December was one such period. On December 17 (according to the Julian calendar) the Saturnalia, a seven-day festival honoring the Roman deity Saturn, the god of agriculture, was observed. This festival included the winter solstice, which usually occurred around December 25. During the Saturnalia the Romans feasted well, put aside all business and matters of war, exchanged gifts, and freed their slaves for the festival's duration. December 25 was also celebrated as the date honoring the rebirth of the Invincible Sun God of the Romans (Natalis Solis Invicti), and rituals were performed to honor Mithra, the Persian god of light. Both celebrations welcomed the return of the light and the lengthening days.

As the days grew longer the winter festivities stretched to include January 1, the festival of Kalends, the day of the new Moon, and the first day of the month and year of the Julian calendar. Many of the rituals and symbols now associated with this Christian holiday are directly derived from winter solstice celebrations including mistletoe, the yule log, the Christmas tree with all its lights, feasting, and exchanging gifts.

On Christmas Day in Vatican City the faithful wait for the pope to give everyone his Christmas blessing. He prays for Chris-

Fun Fact
Vatican City is the smallest country in the world.

Fun Fact

Within 10 days of the death of a pope, the College of Cardinals meets in conclave to elect a new bishop of Rome, who will also be the pope. During the election process, the cardinals are secluded from the world under exceedingly stringent rules, and their seclusion lasts until they have fulfilled their duty.

Also, starting three days after their seclusion, their meals are reduced until they have elected a new pope. The successful election of a pope is signaled to the world when white smoke is seen rising out of a window of the Sistine Chapel.

tians all over the world and for people of other faiths as well. He also conducts a special Mass on this occasion. He travels across St. Peter's Square and blesses and greets everyone after the Mass. The next day is celebrated as St. Stephen's Day (in countries belonging to the British Commonwealth of Nations also known as Boxing Day) in honor of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Further Reading

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~ Venezuela ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Northern part of South America, bordering the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean, between Colombia and Guyana
Size	352,145 sq. mi.
Capital City	Caracas
Flag Description	Venezuela's flag has three horizontal bands of equal size displaying the following colors: yellow (top), blue, and red with the coat of arms on the hoist side of the yellow band and an arc of seven white five-pointed stars centered in the blue band.
Independence	July 5, 1811 (from Spain)
Population	25,375,281 (2005 est.)
Government	Federal republic
Nationality	Venezuelan(s)
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Mestizo (68%); Caucasian (21%); Black (10%); Indian (1%).
Major Language(s)	Spanish (official); numerous indigenous dialects
Major Religion(s)	Roman Catholic (96%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Declaration of Independence Day, April 19; Labor Day, May 1; Battle of Carabobo Day, June 24; Independence Day, July 5; Birthday of Simon Bolivar, July 24; Columbus Day, October 12

Introduction

🌸 HISTORY

Some early inhabitants of Venezuela are believed to have been people from the present-day regions of Guyana, Brazil, and Antilles, but artifacts, including both practical and decorative objects, indicate that the inhabitants of northern South America drifted south from Mexico and Central America, and there was contact between people living on the eastern slopes of the Andes and the great Incan civilization. There were three main groups of people when the Europeans arrived: the Caribs, Arawak, and Chibcha, and members of these tribes eventually migrated and settled many of the Caribbean islands. These peoples lived primarily in small groups and, while all of them practiced farming to some extent; it was not always necessary because the land provided amply for their needs. The Chibcha, living on the eastern side of the Andes Mountains, were probably the most technologically advanced. They ter-

rored parts of the Andes and constructed irrigation canals to bring water to their crops.

Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) arrived in Venezuela in 1498. Many indigenous tribes inhabited the region at that time. A year later, when Amerigo Vespucci (1454–1512) arrived he named it Venezuela, which means “Little Venice” in Spanish, because the Añu natives had built their homes on stilts (*palafitos*) over the water, and the scene reminded him of Venice, Italy. In 1521 the first Spanish settlement was established at Cumana in Venezuela. The Spanish were interested in Venezuela because they wanted to exploit the region's gold, silver, pearls, and precious stones. Venezuela also became well known for its cocoa plantations. Due to the increasing need for laborers to work on these plantations, slaves were brought in from Africa.

The indigenous people fiercely resisted the Spaniards, but because of the diseases the Spanish brought with them, including smallpox and plague, a large part of the indigenous population died, making it impossible for them to drive the invaders out. Centuries later, under the leadership of the rev-

Fun Fact

It is said that Columbus was so taken with the beauty of Venezuela that he called it Tierra de Gracia (“Land of Grace”), which is still Venezuela’s nickname.

olutionary Simon Bolívar (1783–1830), Venezuela eventually gained independence from Spanish rule in 1821. Bolívar was also called El Libertador, “The Liberator,” and went on to free Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia as well. He is worshipped in Venezuela, and the major plaza of almost every city of Venezuela is called Plaza Bolívar.

Following its independence in 1830, José Antonio Páez (1790–1873) became the first president of an independent Venezuela.

However, over the next few decades, Venezuela suffered from a series of political coups, and the economy was very unstable. In the beginning of the 20th century, huge oil reserves were discovered in the Maracaibo region

of the country, and by the late 1920s Venezuela was one of the world’s largest oil exporters. The economy suffered a setback when world oil prices drastically dropped in 1988.

In December 1998, Hugo Chávez (b. 1954), an army colonel who had led a failed coup a few years earlier, was elected president. Although he promised to improve incomes and eliminate corruption, poverty and unemployment rates have actually increased since Chávez took office. He was reelected in 2000, but the political situation is very tense.

Fun Fact

Of the more than 1,000 rivers flowing through Venezuela; the largest and most important is the Orinoco, the second largest river in South America (and eighth largest in the world).

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Located in the northern part of South America, Venezuela is surrounded by Guyana, Brazil, Colombia, and the Caribbean Sea. In many ways its coastal region is decidedly Caribbean in atmosphere. Topographically Venezuela is divided into three regions: the Guiana Highlands in the southeast, the central Orinoco Plains (Ilanos), and the Andes Mountains and the Maracaibo lowlands in the northern areas of the country. The highest point in the region is Pico

The High Cost of Poverty

The poverty of large segments of Venezuela’s population has made its people vulnerable to sexual exploitation and forced labor, something the government has failed to address adequately. Venezuela is a source, transit, and destination country for women and children trafficked for both sexual exploitation and forced labor.

Bolívar (La Columna) at 16,427 feet. The most striking topographical feature of Venezuela is Gran Sabana in the Guiana Highlands. Gran Sabana is an extensively eroded and large plateau that rises as high as 2,625 feet from the surrounding cliffs. On the flat surface of the plateau, several *tepuis*, or bluffs, emerge that are of a considerable height.

Climatic conditions in Venezuela vary from tropical to alpine depending on the elevation, topography, and wind conditions. In regions below 2,625 feet, a tropical climate exists, and the average temperatures range from 79°F to 82°F. Between 2,625 and 6,562 feet, the climate is temperate, and the average temperature ranges from 54°F to 77°F. Between 6,500 and 9,800 feet, the climate grows colder, and the average temperature ranges from 48°F to 52°F. In the high mountains, above 9,800 feet, permanent snowfields and pasturelands called *paramos* are found and the average temperature is below 46°F.

Flora are represented by orchids, bromeliads, flowering shrubs, ferns, bamboo trees, frailejon plants, and the rare red-trunked *coloradito* trees, which hold the record as the tree growing at the highest altitude in the world. Venezuela is home to fauna such as *babas* (fox, jaguars, small alligators, and pumas), *cunagueros* (small tigers), honey bears, tapirs, palm tree bears, raccoons, limpets, weasels, and the capybara, a semi-aquatic rodent of tropical Central and South America, that has short limbs and a vestigial tail and often grows to more than four feet in length—the biggest rodent in the world.

ECONOMY

Venezuela has an oil-based economy. The petroleum sector constitutes 80 percent of the nation’s total export earnings and accounts for more than 50 percent of the government’s revenue. Venezuela is the largest foreign oil supplier to the United States. Other export items include coffee, bauxite, aluminum, rice, cotton, iron ore, and cocoa. Venezuelan rivers are a significant source of hydroelectric power, which helps in the functioning of the numerous industries in Venezuela.

Because the country is endowed with natural resources such as gold, iron ore, diamonds, and nickel, the government has passed a new mining law that will increase participation of the private sector in the mining industry and provide a boost to the nation’s economy. The government is also investing a large amount of money in infrastructure development.

However, even with recent advances, there is still extensive poverty in Venezuela, and the government is trying to introduce other new policies that will benefit the poor directly.

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Venezuela is a predominantly Roman Catholic country with about 96 percent of the nation’s pop-

The Cult of Maria Lionza

Little is known about the history, development, and practices of the Maria Lionzan religion because there is no dogma, no official beliefs and practices, and historians cannot even agree about when and where it started. Whereas some Afro-Caribbean syncretistic religions have developed a system of beliefs and practices, the Maria Lionzan religion appears to be mainly a matter of participation, perhaps even casual or occasional. At this time most *marialionceros* (those who follow the Maria Lionzan religion) live in the province of Yaracuy in Venezuela, but their numbers are increasing in other cities such as Caracas, Maracaibo, and Barquisimeto. Moreover the cult is spreading to other countries including Colombia, Panama, the United States, and as far north as Canada.

Until the 1950s most Venezuelans apparently ignored such religious practices and beliefs, although there may have been some vague idea that there was a story about a goddess who lived in the mountains of Yaracuy. It is possible that the cult may go as far back as the colonial era. Even so the cult was only one among many. But this situation changed radically when the beginning of the oil industry in Venezuela attracted masses of the rural population seeking work to urban centers, and

migrants from Yaracuy brought the cult with them to the cities.

The cult of Maria Lionza is a syncretistic religious construct. While its attendant rituals and practices are undoubtedly indigenous, its practitioners have incorporated parallel elements from Roman Catholic and African animistic traditions and, from these three sources, produced a new religion. It is hard to estimate how many *marialionceros* there are in the Venezuelan population, because they consider themselves Catholics as well, perceiving Maria Lionza's cult as only another legitimate way of approaching Jesus and the Virgin Mary.

Although there is no established dogma or central organization, there does seem to be a core of beliefs that all the disconnected spiritualist groups share. Starting with its central concept, the divinity of the goddess Maria Lionza herself, *marialionceros* believe she dwells in the mountain of Sorte in Yaracuy. But she is not alone. Rather, she appears to be the most powerful deity in a trinity that includes Guaicaipuro, an Indian chieftain killed by Spaniards, and el Negro Felipe, "the Black Philip," an African slave who was also murdered by his European masters. These three figures seem to be the most significant of a larger pantheon composed of many other lesser deities.

ulation nominally claiming this faith. Although most of the native population has embraced Christianity, many people in the rural areas still adhere to indigenous beliefs and actively practice their religion. Also, a group named the Cult of Maria Lionza enjoys a good following in the interior and preaches a religion that is a mix of pre-Hispanic indigenous creeds, Christian religious practices, and African voodoo rituals.

Spanish is the official language of Venezuela although more than 25 languages and dialects are spoken widely among many tribes in the rural areas. English is spoken, though it is restricted primarily to urban areas.

Venezuelans love their music, which is a mix of indigenous rhythms, African, and European music. Also, they love literature and theatrical performances and share a penchant for the visual arts and handicrafts. Traditional music known as *gaita* consists of improvised rhyming vocals over four-stringed guitars, harps, and maracas (rattle). *Gaita* is the folk music of the Zulia region. *Joropo* is the national dance of Venezuela with a rhythm that is performed over improvised vocals, harps, small guitars, and maracas.

❁ CUISINE

Traditional Venezuelan dishes include *pabellón criollo* (shredded beef, rice, black beans, cheese, and fried bananas) the national dish of the country; *empanadas* (deep-fried cornmeal turnovers with fillings of ground meat, cheese, beans, or baby shark), *cachapa* (a sweet corncake with cheese), *sancocho* (fish stew served with vegetables), *parillada* (barbecued meat), and *cachito* (a bread roll stuffed with ham).

Some of the popular beverages of Venezuela include *café con leche* (coffee with milk), *guayoyo* (espresso), *chicha* (fermented rice beverage), and *papelón con limón* (lemonade).

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or the Gregorian, calendar, and is celebrated as New



Year's Day all over the world. Celebrations and revelries begin on the evening of December 31 (New Year's Eve). People either attend parties or celebrate

Fun Fact

Venezuelan women are known for their beauty, and in international pageants Venezuela has so far produced four Miss Universe winners, five Miss Worlds, and four Miss Internationals. This may be one reason why Venezuela is the largest consumer of cosmetics on a per capita basis in the world.

with friends and families at home. Also on New Year's Eve, around midnight, people eat 12 grapes (one for each month) for good luck. Traditionally Venezuelans drink champagne and hold a lavish dinner with family members.

On New Year's Day, they wear yellow underwear, since they believe that this will bring them good luck in the coming year. Venezuelans also believe that if they write their wishes on a paper on New Year's Day and then burn the paper their wishes will be fulfilled in the coming year.

✿ DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 19

After several unsuccessful attempts to overthrow the Spanish, Venezuelan forces under Francisco de Miranda (1750–1816), a South American revolutionary, entered Caracas, drove the Spanish forces from the region, and declared Venezuela's independence on April 19, 1810.

✿ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day and Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in their societies. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor, demanding an eight-hour workday.

May 1 is a public holiday in Venezuela and all public and private institutions are closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

✿ BATTLE OF CARABOBO DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 24

Battle of Carabobo Day, also called Army Day, commemorates the historic victory of South American patriots led by the great Venezuelan leader, Simon Bolívar, against Spanish forces stationed in Venezuela on June 24, 1821. Although Venezuela had declared its independence from Spanish rule in 1811, Spanish forces fought back and forced the ruling South American patriot, Francisco Miranda, to surrender Venezuela in 1812. Since then, Bolívar had been fighting the battle to regain Venezuela's freedom. From 1813 until 1821, he fought relentlessly alongside several South American patriots for liberation and, after successive victories over a period of time, the crucial battle for Venezuela's independence was fought at Carabobo. His strategic planning and acumen ensured the victory of the South American forces against the Spanish army and, thus, paved the way for Venezuela's independence.

From 1821 until 1830, Bolívar remained the president of Gran Colombia—a republic formed by Venezuela, Ecuador, Colombia, and Panama—until his death from tuberculosis in 1830.

✿ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 5

This day commemorates Venezuela's declaration of independence from Spain on July 5, 1811, at the Congress held in the Chapel of Santa Rosa de Lima. In the capital city of Caracas, the president lays a floral wreath at the Sarcophagus of the Libertador, Simon Bolívar, in the National Pantheon along with thousands of people. Then, a ceremonial session of the National Congress takes place and the president opens a chest that contains the historic Act of Congress, dated July 5, 1811, which is then kept for public display.

✿ BIRTHDAY OF SIMON BOLÍVAR

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: July 24

This day commemorates the birthday of the most celebrated leader of Venezuela Simon Bolívar, who was born on this day in 1783. Known in his day as the George Washington of South America, Bolívar is revered as a great revolutionary and statesman who fought the Spanish to liberate South American countries. He led South American armies to victory and crushed the Spanish armed forces in several battles. In his efforts to unite South American coun-

tries, he founded the Republic of Gran Colombia, which included the modern-day nations of Ecuador, Bolivia, Venezuela, and Panama. He remained the president of the Republic from 1821 until his death from tuberculosis in 1830.

He is one of the most respected leaders in South America, and his birthday is also celebrated in Bolivia. Bolívar had helped liberate Bolivia from Spain and briefly served as its president. On this day in Venezuela, civil and military ceremonies take place in Bolívar's honor, and people share stories of the valor of this great South American hero with the younger generation. This is also the national holiday of Venezuela.

❁ COLUMBUS DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 12

Venezuela instituted this holiday in 1921. This day commemorates the arrival of Christopher Columbus in South America on October 12, 1498. Beginning in the late decades of the 20th century, it came to be celebrated as Día de la Raza (“Day of the Race”) in most Latin American countries, rather than Columbus Day, because Columbus opened the door for European colonization that resulted in the enslavement and brutal killings of the indigenous people by the Europeans. In 2002 the Venezuelan government renamed the holiday as Día de la Resistencia Indígena (“Day of Indigenous Resistance”). In 2004 on Columbus Day, activists toppled the statue of Columbus in the capital city of Caracas to express their anger at him.

As Día de la Raza the holiday commemorates the rise of a new race of people—the Mestizos. The Spanish, who followed Columbus and entered South America, intermixed with the indigenous people of the continent and their offspring are known as Mestizo (people of mixed race).

Religious Holidays

❁ EPIPHANY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: January 6

The Feast of Epiphany, also known as Three King's Day or La Paradura del Niño (“The Parade of Baby Jesus”), is a Christian feast that celebrates the arrival of the Magi (the Three Wise Men of ancient Persia—Caspar, Balthazar, and Melchior) in Bethlehem to see the infant Jesus, as well as the life of Jesus until his baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist.

On this day a lavish family feast is prepared with special food and beverages. The entire family prays

in front of the portrait of the Infant Jesus and sings Christmas carols. Also gifts are exchanged among friends and family members.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EPIPHANY

❁ CARNIVAL

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Early February

Carnival celebrations start two weeks before the beginning of Lent, the 40-day period of fasting that precedes Easter. Carnival ends on Shrove Tuesday, a day before Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. The word *shrove* means “to shrive,” and in ancient times people were absolved of their sins by confessing them to a priest, who was also known as a shriver (absolver of sins).

Carnival is celebrated with great joy and enthusiasm throughout Venezuela. The festivities are marked by dances, colorful costumes, songs, bullfights, and pageants as well the staging of plays such as “La Quemada de Judas” (“The Burning of Judas”) at the end of which an effigy of Judas, the disciple of Jesus who betrayed him, is thrown on a pyre and burned to ashes.

The biggest Carnival celebration takes place in the region of El Callao, where people dress in colorful costumes and march to the tune of calypso music. During these festivities, people wear masks and costumes of cartoon characters and superheroes. However, many people stick to traditional attire, most notably that of the Madamas, costumes depicting women from Guadeloupe and Martinique, complete with traditional headscarves. Devil's costumes are also extremely popular, and many people are seen wearing red and black costumes with horns. Mediopinto devils are the most dangerous people since they paint themselves black and threaten to do the same to anyone who comes near them.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; LENT

❁ ST. JOSEPH'S DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: March 19

On March 19 Roman Catholics observe the Feast of St. Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus and the patron saint of workers around the world. There is a separate feast of St. Joseph the Worker on May 1, although many feel that this later feast day was instituted in the 1950s to compete with socialist celebrations of Labor Day. On the Feast of St. Joseph, a wide variety of events take place in Venezuela, including bullfights, agricultural and handicrafts

Fun Fact

The word *epiphany* means “to reveal” or “to make known,” and the day is so named because it was the Magi who revealed Jesus to the world.

exhibitions, musical concerts, and traditional cultural events such as folk dances and music.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

❁ MAUNDY THURSDAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics

Observed on: Thursday before Easter

Maundy or Holy Thursday is an important Catholic celebration: It commemorates the day on which Jesus celebrated the Last Supper and washed the feet of all 12 Apostles. It falls on the Thursday before Easter. It is called Maundy Thursday, because the Latin word *mandatum* was the first word that was spoken by Jesus before he began to wash his disciples' feet. (*Mandatum* is a Latin word meaning "commandment.") Jesus said, "*Mandatum novum do vobis,*" which means "a new commandment I give to you."

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

❁ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday day before Easter

Good Friday falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of Lent. It is observed in most parts of the world to remember the Crucifixion of Jesus. Most Venezuelans observe a fast from Ash Wednesday (first day of Lent) for 40 days up to Good Friday and a partial fast until Easter. Some fast only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. In



A man dressed as a devil dances while churchgoers observe him outside the church in San Francisco de Yare, about 28 miles south of Caracas, Thursday, June 19, 2003. This Roman Catholic holiday of Corpus Christi celebrates the transformation of the body and blood of Christ into the bread and wine, which the faithful receive at Communion. It is an event townspeople spend the entire year preparing for. The ritual here is followed by two days of drunken revelry. (AP Photo/Fernando Llano)

Venezuela huge processions are conducted, in which the lifeless body of Jesus is symbolically carried in a procession. People mourn over his Crucifixion, and special prayers are offered. The annual Good Friday procession from Iglesia de San Francisco in the capital city of Caracas attracts thousands of mourners every year as people express their sorrow by joining the procession.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter is a Christian feast that celebrates the belief that Jesus was resurrected from the dead three days following his Crucifixion. It is sometimes known as Resurrection Day. This is a day of utmost importance because the fundamental teaching of Christianity is that Jesus, through his death, freed all his believers from the penalty of sin. The holiday falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. They often buy new clothes for this special day. Catholics attend Mass and offer prayers. The word *Easter* is derived from the name of the Germanic mother goddess Eostre, revered by the Saxon people of northern Europe. In addition to the name of the holiday, Easter eggs and rabbits, once associated with fertility rituals, are now part of the activities.

Throughout Venezuela, Easter is celebrated by burning the effigy of Judas, who betrayed Jesus' trust. In every town and city of Venezuela, after the priest announces Jesus' Resurrection during the midnight prayer service on Easter, people greet each other joyously and the effigy of Judas is burned.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ ASCENSION DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Forty days after Easter

Ascension Day is a day of special celebration for Christians all over the world. It commemorates Jesus' ascension to heaven 40 days after his Resurrection on Easter. The Eastern Orthodox Church regards Ascension Day as one of its 12 Great Feasts. On this day devout Catholics in Venezuela offer prayers in their local churches. Then they participate in a wide variety of activities such as cultural events, bullfights, competitions, and agricultural and handicrafts exhibitions. Many people also enjoy a day out with their family. In the province of Tachira, an annual fair known as the Fair of Our Lady of Consolation takes place on this day.

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

✿ CORPUS CHRISTI

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: Sixty days after Easter

The Feast of Corpus Christi is a religious feast celebrated by Catholics all over the world to commemorate the institution of the Eucharist. It is celebrated 60 days after Easter and falls on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday, the first Sunday after Pentecost. On the eve and day of Corpus Christi, performances of the devil dance, *los diablos danzantes*, takes place throughout Venezuela.

At San Francisco de Yare devil dancers dress themselves in yellow and red costumes and sport ferocious, devilish moustaches. On the eve of Corpus Christi, the devil dancers hold a candlelit Mass, which is called *Velorio de los Diablos Danzantes*. In the early hours of Corpus Christi, these dancers visit the graves of their predecessors in the local cemetery and then head to the local church where the Corpus Christi Mass is held. They beat drums and ring bells violently, creating a ferocious sound. Then they run through the streets to drive the evil forces away from the region.

In the area of Naiguata the costumes of the devil dancers are adorned with circles, crosses, and stripes and wear the masks representing ferocious sea creatures. Also, unlike other devil dances, women are allowed to participate in this dance. People summon the devils on Wednesday before Corpus Christi by beating three times on a *caja* (metal drum) and by ringing bells. They run through the streets of the town before kneeling down in prayer in front of the local church. During the Mass on Corpus Christi, the devil dancers run through the church; later they visit homes to drive evil forces away, for which they receive gifts from the people who live there.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CORPUS CHRISTI

✿ THE FEAST OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: June 29

The Feast of St. Peter is observed on June 29 to commemorate this saint's death on June 29, 67 C.E. He was one of the 12 Apostles of Jesus. St. Peter is also considered the first pope. According to Christian belief, he holds the keys to heaven, and devout Catholics who have not sinned believe that they will meet St. Peter at the heaven's gate.

The Feast of St. Paul is also celebrated on June 29. St. Paul is considered by some theologians to be the most important disciple of Jesus and the best interpreter of his teachings.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

✿ ASSUMPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: August 15

Assumption Day commemorates the Virgin Mary's Assumption into heaven. According to legend, when Mary was dying at the age of 73, all the Apostles visited her before her death, except St. Thomas, who arrived too late to speak with her. Moreover when he did arrive, her body could not be found because she had been raised up to heaven. Catholics believe that her soul and body were united at Jehoshaphat (Mary's tomb), and that St. Gabriel took her to heaven. On this day devout Venezuelan Catholics attend prayer services in local churches in honor of Mary and seek her blessings.

See also Volume III: ASSUMPTION; CHRISTIANITY

✿ ALL SAINTS' DAY

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: November 1

All Saints' Day is a Christian feast that honors all the saints (known and unknown). It is believed that All Saints' Day celebrations began after Pope Boniface IV (r. 608–15) consecrated the Roman Pantheon to the Virgin Mary. The Feast of All Saints' has been celebrated on November 1 since the time of Charlemagne (742–814).

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY

✿ IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Observed by: Roman Catholics
Observed on: December 8

The Immaculate Conception is a Roman Catholic doctrine that holds that, at the time of her birth, God protected Mary from all the sins of humanity and filled her with his grace. It is believed that, since God wanted Mary to be the mother of his son Jesus, she had to be totally free of any kind of sin. On this day Catholics throughout Venezuela attend a Mass held in honor of Mary in their local churches and pray for her blessing. It is one of the Holy Days of Obligation, mandated by the Catholic Church, and devout Catholics must attend a Mass on this day.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

✿ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of great joy for Christians all over the world because it celebrates the birth of Jesus, whom they believe was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. In Venezuela Catholics attend Mass

Fun Fact

The world's highest waterfall, Angel Falls, is in one of the *tepuis* in Gran Sabana.

every morning starting on December 16 until the Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve (December 24). On Christmas Eve, known as *Noche Buena* in Spanish, people prepare a traditional Christmas meal that consists of *pan de jamón* (a long bread filled with raisins, olives, and cooked ham), *ballacas* (meat, vegetables, and olive stuffing in corn dough, steamed in plantain leaves), and *dulce de lechoza* (a dessert made from green papaya and brown sugar). Also Christmas trees are decorated and scenes from the Nativity (*nacimiento*) are displayed.

On Christmas Day, children find presents near the Christmas tree or *nacimiento*. They believe these gifts are brought by the infant Jesus, not Santa Claus. *Aguinaldos* are traditional songs that are sung during Christmas. In ancient times *aguinalderos* (singers) visited every home in the village and sang *aguinaldos* to the accompaniment of their musical instruments including maracas (rattles), the *cuatro* (a small four-stringed guitar), and the *furruco* (a small, elongated drum with a wooden stick in the middle).

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

☼ DEVILS OF YARE

Observed in: San Francisco de Yare (Miranda state)

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: February

The Devils of Yare, also known as Los Diabolos de Yare, is an annual Carnival celebrated over a period of four days in February in San Francisco de Yare in Miranda state. This is an annual spectacle that attracts natives and tourists alike. During the festival, devil dancers, attired in red costumes, ferocious, multicolored masks, and beautiful jewelry, dance only to the beat of drums—no other instruments are used—through the streets of Yare. Eventually they reach the church and kneel at its steps in a symbolic submission of evil forces to the good. When the priest blesses them, they believe God has forgiven them. Then they resume their dancing and visit cemeteries, homes, and town squares. They continue celebrating until the procession officially ends with the ringing of the church bells.

☼ FESTIVAL INTERNACIONAL DE TEATRO

Observed in: Caracas

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: April

Festival Internacional de Teatro, the International Theater Festival, is an annual theatrical festival that takes place in the month of April in theaters

throughout the capital city of Caracas. The festival began in 1976. Since then, its popularity has increased immensely. During the festival, Venezuelans are treated to performances of the best theatrical groups from Venezuela and other nations in Latin America. This is a perfect opportunity for theater enthusiasts to enjoy great plays and superb performances. It has become one of the most awaited theater festivals in South America.

Rites of Passage

☼ MARRIAGE

In Venezuela dating is allowed, and parents are hopeful that their children will find mates who are their equals in terms of social status. Also it is traditional for a Venezuelan man to seek the permission of the prospective bride's father before proposing to her. According to Venezuelan law, legal status is granted only to civil marriages. Hence many couples first have a civil ceremony and then formalize their marriage with a church union. Civil weddings generally take place in the bride's house two weeks before the church ceremonies.

Only close family friends and relatives are invited to the civil ceremony, where they are served refreshments and traditional food. After the civil wedding, although the couple is legally husband and wife, they live separately until the day of their church wedding. Bride and groom adorn themselves in wedding attire, and while exchanging vows the couple sings the promise of mutual love, understanding, and care in a traditional manner. Also 13 gold coins, known as *arras*, are exchanged between families of the couple as a token of prosperity and good fortune. In many parts of Venezuela, the *arras* are exchanged between the bride and groom.

After the wedding, a lavish reception is thrown in honor of the newlyweds, and singing, dancing, and feasting goes on until the early hours of the next morning. In accordance with tradition, if the bride and groom can sneak out of the reception without being noticed by the guests, it is considered good luck.

Further Reading

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Vietnam

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Southeastern Asia, bounded by the Gulf of Thailand, the South China Sea, and the Gulf of Tonkin; bordering China, Laos, and Cambodia
Size	127,244 sq. mi.
Capital City	Hanoi
Flag Description	The flag of Vietnam is red with a large yellow five-pointed star in the center.
Independence	September 2, 1945 (from France)
Population	83,535,576 (2005 est.)
Government	Communist
Nationality	Vietnamese
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Kinh (Viet, 86%)
Major Language(s)	Vietnamese (official); English (increasingly favored as a second language); some French, Chinese, and Khmer; mountain area languages (Mon-Khmer and Malayo-Polynesian)
Major Religion(s)	Buddhist (9%); Roman Catholic (7%); none (81%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Vietnam Day, January 27; Foundation of the Vietnamese Communist Party, February 3; Liberation Day, April 30; Labor Day, May 1; Ho Chi Minh's Birthday, May 19; Memorial Day for War Martyrs, June 27; Revolution of 1945, August 19; Independence Day, September 2

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

Vietnamese culture originated in the rich and fertile deltas of the Red River in northern Vietnam between the first and sixth centuries C.E. The people slowly migrated southward to the narrow plains of the Indochina peninsula until they finally settled by the Mekong River (a major river of southern Vietnam).

The first known attack on the indigenous Vietnamese came when the Chinese annexed and occupied the Red River Delta under the mighty Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.) in the first century B.C.E. For the next 800 years various Chinese leaders ruled Vietnam and other bordering areas, both politically and culturally; this continued until the 10th century. Being more in touch with the rulers, the Vietnamese elite were more strongly influenced by Chinese culture than the commoners were. It was during this period that Buddhism

found its way into the Vietnamese Red River Delta, a common stopover point for the traders of that region.

However, in 938 the Vietnamese overthrew the Chinese. For the next 900 years, Chinese attempts to control Vietnam politically were thwarted at every turn. For their part, the Vietnamese began a bid to spread southward until they reached the Mekong River Delta.

From the eighth to the 12th centuries, the Vietnamese fought off the forces of Cham (from the Indian kingdom of Champa) and Khmer (neighboring Cambodia). The Cham were finally forced to withdraw in 1471, while the Khmer were to be pushed out of the Mekong Delta in 1749.

Ruling such a vast country that stretched between the north (Red River Delta) and south (Mekong River Delta) was a great task for the Vietnamese monarchy, and in the 16th century the ruling Le Dynasty divided Vietnam into north and south to make ruling it easier. This decision, however, initiated 200 years of wrestling for power among the Vietnamese nobility.

By the mid-19th century a huge gap had opened up between the rich ruling elite and the commoners. This period coincided with the European drive for expansion into Asia and the non-Western world. Between 1858 and 1873 the French conquered Vietnam and divided it into Cochinchina (Nam Bo, or southern Vietnam), Tonkin (Bac Bo, or north Vietnam), and Annam (Trung Bo, or central Vietnam). These were considered merely geographical divisions by patriotic Vietnamese, and French rule was met with resistance from the very beginning. Two main groups of nationalists emerged, one led by Phan Boi Chau (1867–1940), who favored restoring the Vietnamese monarchy as a means to throw out the French, and the other by Phan Chu Trinh, who favored abolition of monarchy and establishing a democratic regime post-independence. These two groups gradually lost their standing because they ignored the peasantry during a struggle in which there were countless demonstrations, acts of terrorism, and distribution of anti-colonial literature.

After World War I ended in 1918 Ho Chi Minh (1890–1969), a follower of Confucius, a nationalist, and a believer in Lenin's and Marx's theories of power resting in the hands of workers, started organizing the Vietnamese peasantry under the Communist ideals of the Chinese ruler Mao Zedong (1893–1976). The Japanese occupied Vietnam during World War II (1939–45). After Japan lost the war France tried reoccupying Vietnam but failed in this attempt. By 1954 Ho Chi Minh was firmly in power in Vietnam.

The Geneva Accord led to the splitting of the region into North and South Vietnam. Fighting broke out in November 1946 between Vietnamese and French troops in Haiphong, and French ships shelled the city, killing over 6,000 civilians. The following month the Viet Minh (a coalition of Communist and nationalist groups) attacked the French

at Hanoi, ushering in the prolonged and bloody guerrilla conflict that became known as the French Indochina War (1946–54). The French finally withdrew after their defeat at the battle for Dienbienphu. During the Cold War years (1945 until the downfall of the Soviet Union in 1991), the northern part of the country was supported by China and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), while the southern part was influenced by the United States. Domestic and international political struggles resulted in the Vietnam War between northern and southern Vietnam.

It went on until January 1973, followed by the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam in March 1973, following the Paris Peace Accords on January 27, 1973. Though the war started again in 1974, by 1976 Vietnam was unified under the North Vietnamese government and was renamed the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Refugees fled Vietnam for the next few decades. Though the nation is peaceful today, economically it made slow progress due to conservative government policies. Since 2001 the Vietnamese have opened up the economy and followed more competitive, export-motivated policies.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Surrounded by Cambodia, Laos (to the west), and China (in the north), Vietnam is a mountainous country with dense forests. It is situated along the coastline of the Indo-Chinese peninsula (a landmass projecting out into the sea) with the South China Sea and the Gulf of Tonkin surrounding its southern and eastern sides, respectively. The highest mountain peak in Vietnam is Fansipan (10,312 feet), located in the northwest mountains.

The Red River Delta and highlands constitute Vietnam's northern region while the southern part

The Tet Offensive

The Tet Offensive, launched by the North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong (pro-Communist South Vietnamese) against South Vietnam, is generally acknowledged to be the significant turning point of the Vietnam War. Before 1965 the National Liberation Front (NLF) believed that it could foment a social revolution in the south that would start among the rural population and gradually become a nationalist urban rebellion, resulting in a quick victory. The involvement of U.S. ground forces, however, thwarted this strategy, and in 1967 the NLF realized it needed a different strategy in order to win. Ho Chi Minh, the North Vietnamese leader was dying, and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN) wanted to score a significant victory before he died.

So the North Vietnamese Politburo planned a nationwide offensive hoping to start an urban revolution in the south, because they thought that southern Buddhists and student dissidents would support a Communist takeover.

The original plan for the Tet Offensive was formulated in 1967 and involved simultaneous military assaults on most of the major cities in South Vietnam as well as attacks on major U.S. bases, the Presidential Palace of South Vietnam, and the U. S. Embassy. Concurrently, a major assault was launched against the U.S. firebase at Khe Sanh, although this is usually considered a separate, contemporaneous operation. The success of the operations is widely understood to have turned the political tides of war in favor of the Viet Cong.

comprises coastal lowlands, central mountains (the Dai Truong Son), and the Mekong River Delta. In fact these two rivers are the main rivers of the country and most farming activities are carried out on the riverbanks. The humidity averages around 84 percent throughout the country though actual rainfall can vary from 47 to 118 inches annually. The temperature fluctuates between 41°F and 99°F, depending on the distance from the sea and the height above sea level.

Vietnam possesses assorted wildlife, though the number of animals is declining due to pollution, excessive hunting, and deforestation. Rhinoceroses, tigers, lions, black bears, crocodiles, and turtles are some of the animals found in Vietnam, but there are many endangered species in this part of the world.

❁ ECONOMY

A policy called Doi Moi, or “Renovation,” initiated in 1986, transformed the market structure of Vietnam from a socialist model into a capitalist market economy. This policy was similar to one that China had adopted for economic development. It was especially difficult to implement because of internal conflicts within Vietnam. To make things worse the Soviet Bloc eventually withdrew its financial assistance after Vietnam was unified in 1976. From 1986 until the mid-1990s Vietnam made a lot of progress, only to be crippled by the Asian financial crisis that affected growth in most Asian countries in 1997.

The major industries of Vietnam are rice, food processing, rubber, sugar, textiles, and chemicals.

Since 2001 the Vietnamese government has tried to implement economic reforms for liberalizing trade and making it more export oriented. In a bid to cooperate, internationally and regionally, Vietnam has also become a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Free Trade Area (AFTA), and entered into the U.S.-Vietnam bilateral trade pact. These steps have put Vietnam on the path to recovery and modernization. It also joined the WTO (World Trade Organization) in 2005.

The government of Vietnam is making significant efforts to stop such illegal trafficking. In 2004, the government issued a national action plan to combat trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation, as well as a five-year national program for addressing all aspects of Vietnam’s antitrafficking efforts including prevention, prosecution, and protection. In addition to implementing strategies to address trafficking for sexual exploitation, the government took steps to provide greater protection for Vietnamese workers sent abroad by labor export companies.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

The lifestyle in Vietnam can be said to be more community-based than individualistic. For example, up

to six generations (linked by marriage or blood) of a family often live in a single dwelling. If there is insufficient room for everyone, relatives find suitable living places close by. In most Vietnamese homes there is a lot of bonding and emotional attachment between family members.

The central part of rural homes is devoted to the ancestor’s altar. Names of ancestors of up to four generations are inscribed on the tablets, preserved, and worshipped so as to ensure guidance and blessings for future generations. Rural homes are a part of a communal household with lots of gardens, a temple, and a common meeting place. Today these spaces can also be used for modern needs such as clinics or public information centers. Urban homes, in contrast, are self-contained.

According to Confucian belief the father in a family is the teacher and commander of the household. The mother is seen to have similar qualities, but she is also expected to demonstrate a spirit of self-denial, love, and sacrifice while bringing up children. Vietnamese parents not only bring up their children, they also get them married, and still continue to look after them. The children, on the other hand, follow the principle of filial piety, which is taking care of their parents, to the extent of sacrificing their own good for them.

The spiritual life of the Vietnamese is shaped by four systems of belief: Confucianism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Taoism. Over the centuries Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism have been merged into a Triple Religion, or Tam Giou, combining Chinese spiritual beliefs and ancient Vietnamese animism.

Vietnam is famous for traditional paintings on silk, puppetry, religious sculptures, and ceramics.

Many languages are spoken here, including Russian, French, Chinese, and English.

❁ CUISINE

Vietnamese meals usually involve plain rice topped with fish (most commonly), meat, vegetables, spices, and sauces, much like Chinese cuisine. The sauce is a pungent fish sauce (*nuoc mam*), however, not the soy sauce favored by the Chinese. There are about 500 traditional dishes in the Vietnamese cuisine including unusual meats such as bat or cobra. Noodles, spring rolls, and rice dumplings (fried stuffed rice balls) are common snacks. Eel and vermicelli soups, shredded chicken, and bitter soups are also enjoyed in any Vietnamese meal. Being influenced by the French colonialists, the Vietnamese have several dishes such as *banh mi*, a sandwich made with a baguette (French bread) and Vietnamese meats. Many Buddhist dishes are vegetarian.

Fun Fact

Vietnam’s name comes from the Vietnamese *Viet Nam*, a reordering of *Nam Viet*, the name of an ancient kingdom that covered much of what is now northern Vietnam.

Fun Fact

Mangosteen fruit takes from eight to fifteen years to mature.

Cooking in Vietnam includes a lot of lemon grass (which tastes a lot like lemon peel), lime, and *kaffir* lime (its pungent leaves are used to flavor various recipes). The Vietnamese also have developed their own style of cooking. Coffee (called *ca phe phin*) is served very strong and sweet.

The country is rich with many kinds of fruit. The unusual fruits include the green dragon fruit (which is usually red and grows on trees), mangosteen (called “Queen of Fruits,” it is a fleshy fruit resembling tomato), longan (which has a sweet pinkish-white flesh said to banish fatigue), rambutan (or “hairy” cherry), water apple (a brilliant red, sour, bell-shaped fruit used mostly for offerings at temples), and pomelo (a sweet and tangy green citrus fruit). These fruits are often served on special occasions such as the Vietnamese New Year.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

New Year's Day is one of the most popular holidays celebrated all over the world. In Vietnam this day is very special. People begin preparing about a month before January 1. They select gifts, foods, and decorations for the coming year. They wash, clean, and decorate their homes. Before the clock strikes midnight on New Year's Eve, the dining table is ready with special foods and drinks such as fresh fruits, jams, hot tea, and wine. The family gets together and prays for each other's prosperity. Gifts are exchanged. The next morning, people visit the elderly and siblings (in case they live elsewhere) to seek their blessings. They also visit the houses of teachers and friends.

❁ VIETNAM DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: January 27

On this day in 1973 a treaty was signed between the United States and Vietnam declaring the end of U.S. military interference in Vietnam. People take time off from their daily routine to remember all those who have sacrificed their lives during wartime.

❁ FOUNDATION OF THE VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST PARTY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: February 3

This day is celebrated as the day when the Vietnamese Communist Party was founded in 1930. The

roads are dotted with red flags (national flags) and banners. Party members and enthusiasts hold meetings to commemorate this day.

❁ LIBERATION DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 30

On April 30, 1975, North and South Vietnam were unified as a single nation under the leadership of the North Vietnamese. The United States had agreed to withdraw its troops from Vietnam in 1973 while signing the Paris Peace Accord. The process was completed in April 1975, and Saigon (now called Ho Chi Minh City) became completely Communist. The Central Committee of the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF) usually organizes meetings in Ho Chi Minh City to mark the day. Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee also organizes fireworks displays in various parts of the city to mark this day of Communist victory.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. While the earliest celebrations of May Day can be ascribed to the pagan festivals held by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages, the roots of its political associations undoubtedly sprang from a consortium of socialist organizations. In 1889 the Second International declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. On this day in Vietnam banks and public offices are closed.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ HO CHI MINH'S BIRTHDAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 19

This day is celebrated in Ho Chi Minh Square. President Ho Chi Minh spent his life trying to unite northern and southern Vietnam under communist rule. On this day the government organizes events such as fund-raising for the poor, building houses for them, and undertaking other developmental activities.

MEMORIAL DAY FOR WAR MARTYRS

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: June 27

The Vietnamese people have witnessed more wars than peace during the 20th century. This day has been set aside in memory of all the war victims who sacrificed their lives for their country. The government chose June 27 as the Memorial Day for war martyrs of 1947. Celebrations begin a week before this day. Meetings are held to reward the families of the victims, especially their mothers. Houses are built for war veterans or concerned families in gratitude for their services. TV programs made especially in memory of the victims are aired on this day. Leaders make visits to some families of the martyrs.

REVOLUTION OF 1945

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: August 19

The most memorable event in Vietnam's history after 1939 was indisputably the uprising in Hanoi (former capital city of North Vietnam) under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh in 1945. A short-term Vietnamese republic was established on August 19, 1945. The city was dotted with red national flags on that day while loud cries hailing independence could be heard. The French colonialists had to submit to the people's demand for freedom, so August 19 is regarded as one of the proudest moments in the history of Vietnam. Even today there are songs and stories aired about the 1945 uprisings on radio. The city is festooned with banners and flags.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: September 2

Ho Chi Minh declared independence from the French on September 2, 1945. Although the French did not leave Vietnam until the 1950s, a feeling of patriotism and pride envelops the city on the anniversary of this day as it prepares to celebrate its freedom.

Religious Holidays

TET NGUYEN DAN

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: First of the first month of the Chinese lunisolar calendar

Tet Nguyen Dan, which means "the festival of the first day," more commonly known as Tet, is the most important holiday in Vietnam. It is the Vietnamese New Year, which is based on the Chinese lunisolar calendar, although they do not always coincide. Tet is generally (but not always) celebrated on the same day as the Chinese New Year and shares many of the same customs including fireworks and lion and dragon dances, which ward off evil spirits. Beginning with Giao Thua, New Year's Eve, the celebrations last for a week, beginning with the first new Moon after January 20. The Giao Thua is the holiest time because it marks the transition from the old to the new year. In Vietnam it is popularly believed that there are 12 sacred beings in heaven who are in charge of monitoring and controlling affairs on

"Eating" Tet

In Vietnam food has a central place in the festivities; celebrating the Tet holiday is to *an Tet*, which means "eat Tet." While some of the foods prepared are eaten throughout the year, others are very special dishes eaten only during Tet. Prior to Tet each family cooks special holiday recipes; most important is the traditional *banh chung* and *banh giay*, which are symbolically related to Tet. *Banh chung* (rectangular in shape) and *banh giay* (round in shape, much like a hockey puck) consist of rice tightly packed with pork and mung bean fillings wrapped in banana leaves. Because these can take several days to prepare and must cook overnight (for 10 hours), sometimes family members take turns keeping the fire going through the night and pass the time sharing stories about earlier Tet celebrations. Other foods prepared for the Tet celebrations include *dua hau* (roasted watermelon

seeds), *kieu* (pickled vegetables), and *mut* (sweetened dried fruits), such as coconut, melon rind, and lotus seed, that are rarely eaten at any time besides Tet.

According to some Vietnamese *kho* (pronounced "kaw") is one of their "comfort foods." *Kho* is not a difficult dish to prepare. It is a stew in which the delicate sweetness of a light caramel offsets the vibrant saltiness of fish sauce. Traditionally *kho* dishes were made by simmering meat, seafood, or tofu in fish sauce, sugar, and water in clay pots. Now, however, most people use metal pots to prepare their *kho* recipes and use *nuoc mau*, which means "colored water" (pronounced "nook mao"), a prepared caramel sauce that deepens the overall color and flavor. In the north this sauce is called *nuoc hang* (pronounced "nook hahng"), which means "merchandising water," perhaps because food hawkers used it to improve the look of their wares.



Fun Fact

The Vietnamese do not celebrate the actual day on which they were born. Instead everyone becomes a year older on New Year's Day.

Earth, and each of them is in charge of one year. So the Giao Thua is also the moment when the old chieftain relinquishes control at the end of his term, and the new one assumes his high office. Every home makes offerings in the open air to pray for a good new year and to honor the new custodian.

As in China and other Asian countries, elaborate preparations for the Tet holiday begin months before the actual holidays. In Vietnam people attempt to pay all their debts off so that they are debt free when Tet starts, and they buy new clothes for their children. In Vietnam there are three kitchen gods (*ong tao*) for each house, not one, who leave for heaven on the 23rd day of the last month of the Chinese calendar to make their annual report to the Jade Emperor concerning the lives of the family in that house during the past year. A modest ceremony in which the family offers sacrifices for them to use on their journey celebrates their departure.

It is a public holiday in Vietnam, and even shops and restaurants are closed. It may well be compared with the Western celebrations of Christmas, New Year's, and Thanksgiving. People generally go on picnics with their families, and children are given money in red packets, called *mung tuoi*.

See also Volume III: CHINESE NEW YEAR; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ VESAK

Observed by: Buddhists

Observed on: Eighth day of the fourth month of the Chinese lunisolar calendar

This date is the eighth day of the fourth lunar month of the Vietnamese calendar, which is based on the Chinese calendar. Vesak is marked by visits to the temples and pagodas to celebrate Gautama Buddha's birth, his enlightenment, and his death, all of which occurred on this one day, although at different times. People illuminate their homes and places of worship with lanterns and participate in processions during the evening.

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM; VESAK

Regional Holidays

❁ BA CHUA KHO TEMPLE FESTIVAL

Observed in: Bac Ninh Province

Observed on: From the 15th to the 16th day of the first month of the Chinese lunisolar calendar

According to legend Lady Chua Kho, who married the king of the Ly Dynasty, was said to be a very

hardworking woman. After their marriage, she asked the king to let her go to the Vu Ninh area to establish a functioning village there. With the help of locals, she reclaimed and expanded the wasteland, organized activities in 72 villages, took care of the food stock, and kept an eye on military capabilities of the people well before and after the 1076 victory of the Song invaders (who had arrived in Ngu Nguyet River). After the queen's death people built a temple in her memory. This is the Ba Chua Kho Temple where people throng to pay their respects and pray for good fortune and prosperity for the coming year.

❁ LIM FESTIVAL

Observed in: Bac Ninh Province

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Thirteenth day of the first month of the Chinese lunisolar calendar

Lim is the name of a village (11 miles from Hanoi) in the Bac Ninh Province of Vietnam. The Lim Festival is held every year on the 13th day of the first lunisolar month. The festival is held on Lim hill where the Lim Pagoda is located. Hieu Trung Hau, the man who invented Quan Ho (a folk song of the Bac Ninh Province) is worshipped here every year. Visitors come to see *lien anh* (males) and *lien chi* (females) sing different folk songs on the hills, within the pagodas, and in boats. They even sing these songs at home.

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

Because the number of babies born in Vietnam has increased dramatically in the early 21st century, the government has begun penalizing people if they have more than two children. Thus the birth of a child is a low-key affair. The fathers are expected to be in the hospital during and after childbirth. Visiting the mother during her pregnancy or visiting the newborn child for at least 30 days after the child's birth is said to bring bad luck to her. This is the time when the mother is taken care of by other family members. There is no celebration or gift-giving after the child is born. When the baby is three months old, there is a naming ceremony to mark that occasion, along with a small celebration. The baby's birth is registered in the city records.

❁ MARRIAGE

Weddings can be completed by just signing a form declaring them official, or they can be performed following traditional rituals. The betrothal period (the time between engagement and wedding without conjugal rights) is very short and almost nonexistent for the Vietnamese. All decisions are up to the two con-

cerned families. Even though arranged marriages are on the decline, couples usually do not go against the wishes of their parents, and the parents' approval is sought before getting married. An astrologer is consulted for the most auspicious day, and the exchange of gifts occurs once both the families have approved of each other. This is followed by the day of the wedding. A banquet is arranged, and family and friends bring gifts (usually envelopes containing money). The family and guests sit separately (sometimes in separate rooms), while the bride and groom go around thanking them and seeking their blessings.

❁ DEATH

When a person dies in Vietnam, the body is kept at an altar (with a photograph of the deceased in the center), and three musicians play traditional music for two days. Buddhist monks are invited to chant ritualistic prayers. Friends and relatives come to grieve and offer condolences and money to the immediate family. Daughters of the deceased person wear white veils and robes that cover the entire body. Members of the immediate family wear white headbands. A funeral procession usually follows the two days of mourning. The daughters and daughters-in-law walk behind the coffin. The son walks backward and barefoot in front of the procession. The tomb remains open for seven

days after the coffin is interred. Mourning continues for two years with rituals at specific time periods. After that there is a final ceremony. For instance, in the north the remains of the deceased are dug out and reburied at the same place. The position of the grave is determined by geomancy—selecting a particular position as divine by throwing some mud into the air and seeing where it lands.

Further Reading

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Yemen

COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location	Middle East, bordering the Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Red Sea, between Oman and Saudi Arabia
Size	203,850 sq. mi.
Capital City	Sanaa
Flag Description	Yemen's flag has three horizontal bands of red, white, and black.
Independence	May 22, 1990 (Republic of Yemen established with the merger of the Yemen Arab Republic and the Marxist-dominated People's Democratic Republic of Yemen)
Population	20,727,063 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Yemeni
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Arabs
Major Language(s)	Arabic
Major Religion(s)	Islam (Sunni and Shia); Jewish; Christian; Hindu
National Holiday(s)	Labor Day, May 1; National Unity Day, May 22; The September Revolution, September 26

Introduction

❁ HISTORY

The history of Yemen can be traced back to 3000 B.C.E., when a number of ancient kingdoms thrived in the area. From around 1000 B.C.E., three kingdoms—Minaean, Sabaean, and Himyarite—successively ruled it. These kingdoms depended on the spice trade of Yemen and became quite wealthy because of it. Aromatic fragrances like myrrh and frankincense were largely traded with the European countries. In the 11th century B.C.E., the land routes in Arabia improved and this facilitated additional trade in frankincense.

By the first century C.E. the Romans had invaded the region. Christianity was introduced and was made the state religion. But Persia invaded and conquered Yemen 40 years later. By this time the spice trade had declined and aromatics, too, were no longer popular. In 630 Islam was introduced into the region, and a series of Arab caliphs ruled over Yemen. A number of dynasties also came to power in the late seventh century. In 1517 the region became a part of the Ottoman

Empire; in 1636 the Turks were overthrown by the Zaydi Dynasty. Of the many dynasties that ruled over Yemen for short periods, the most prominent was a Shiite Dynasty, called Zaydi. Their control lasted until the 20th century.

In 1839 the British established control over the southern port of Aden, located near the Red Sea, and colonized it. They expanded the territory and signed some treaties and agreements to consolidate their rule over the region. This area was called the Aden Protectorate. The Turks made a comeback in 1849 and extended their control over a large part of the region unoccupied by the British. However, the Zaydis forced the Turks to retreat, and in 1919 Imam Yayha (1869–1948), a Zaydi imam, ruled Yemen until 1948. He was succeeded by his son Ahmad (1895–1962).

In the 1960s Yemen's National Liberation Front (NLF) revolted against the British, and the People's Republic of Southern Yemen was formed in November 1967. The country was very weak and relied on economic support from many Communist countries. In 1970 the republic's name was changed to The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. In 1979 the country became the only Marxist state in all of Arabia.

The Republic of Yemen was recognized in May 1990, when both the Marxist Yemen Republic and the pro-Western northern Yemeni region united to form a new country. Ali Abdullah Saleh (b. 1942) was elected president. In 1991 the constitution was ratified to provide for free elections. Tensions between the north and the south factions led to a civil war in 1994, which was largely fought in the southern area. The northerners emerged victorious and eventually President Saleh resolved the matter and reunified the country. In the second multiparty elections in 1997, President Abi Abdullah Saleh was reelected to the presidency.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The Republic of Yemen shares boundaries with Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman. Yemen has a coastline of 280 miles along the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. The coastal strip of Yemen is a fertile flatland known as Tihama. Flat-topped hills and rugged mountains follow these plains. The highest peak in Yemen is Hadur Shuayb at 12,336 feet. This area is known to have volcanic activity, with hot water springs strewn across the hills. Two-third of Yemen's total land is uninhabited and is located in the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula.

Climatic conditions in Yemen are harsh. The summer extends from April to September. The temperature is extremely high with high humidity during these months. The winter months are extremely cold, especially in the higher altitudes of the country. The region is prone to sandstorms.

Flora and fauna are sparse in Yemen. Overcultivation, deforestation, and desertification have been serious ecological issues in this country. Date palms, acacias, vegetables, grasses, and shrubs are found in different areas of Yemen. In the fertile coastal regions, crops such as coffee, cotton, sorghum, corn, oats, barley, dates, almonds, grapes, and *qat* (a shrub with mildly narcotic leaves that people chew, a very popular activity with Yemenis) are cultivated.

❁ ECONOMY

Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the Arab world, even though the economy heavily depends on the oil produced in the region. Political instability and a high population growth rate have adversely affected the economic development of this republic. The major industries of this country are oil, cotton, leather, and food processing. The natural resources include petroleum, rock salt, marble, coal, gold, lead, nickel, and copper.

Yemen cultivates grains, fruits, vegetables, pulses (the edible seeds of certain pod-bearing plants, such as peas and beans) *qat*, coffee, and cotton. Dairy products, livestock, poultry, and fishing are other related activities engaged in by the people of Yemen.

Yemen shares good trade relations with India, Thailand, South Korea, China, Malaysia, the United States, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Russia, and France.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Yemen is one of the world's most ancient countries. This nation was known for supplying frankincense, myrrh, spices, condiments, and other luxury items to the rest of the world. The country had strong trade relations with different civilizations throughout history. Traces of Greek, Roman, Indian, and Asian influences can still be seen in Yemeni culture.

Yemeni architecture is probably the main feature that stands out in the culture of this region. Buildings used to be made out of stone blocks and were raised to six stories and more. The windows were of a decorative nature and tinted to protect the inhabitants from the sweltering heat outside. The ground floor was meant for keeping livestock. The first floor functioned as the reception area for receiving guests and entertaining them, while the kitchen and bedrooms occupied the top floors. The topmost floor contained a large room (*mafrai*), where the head of the family entertained his friends in the afternoons.

Yemeni music is well known and is said to have evolved during the socializing sessions that took place in the *mafrais* of Yemeni homes. The people sang lines of poetry (*hodayni*) to the tune of Yemeni musical instruments. This musical form is still popular within the country. Two famous Yemeni musicians today are Ahmed Fathey and Osama al Attar.

Qat Chews

Qat chews are spontaneous afternoon house parties, where Yemeni men gather to chew the leaves of the *qat* plant and gossip. If someone wants to join in, he will have to be invited. (This is not very difficult for men—Yemeni men will often stop passersby and ask “do you chew?”) One should bring his own leaves. *Qat* is a mild stimulant, chemically unlike any other drug, and it makes the partaker mellow and contemplative. It is non-addictive and has no major side effects, although long-term use can lead to chronic constipation. It is believed that in ancient times these leaves served as an alternative to alcohol, which is forbidden for Muslims, and the practice has continued.

Much Yemeni business is conducted while chewing *qat*, a leaf grown locally and much enjoyed by the Yemeni people as an aid to thought and decision-making. Westerners in business meetings are not expected to participate in the *qat*-chewing ritual unless they wish to do so.



Fun Fact

Because there is a large Yemeni–Welsh community in the large cities of Wales, Yemeni folk music has become extremely popular in that country.

❁ CUISINE

Yemeni cuisine is unique in many ways in spite of the Arab influence. Lamb, fish, and chicken are the main meat items consumed. The Yemenis prefer their meat grilled or barbecued. The meat is always accompanied with thin, flat Yemeni bread. Many varieties of bread are found in this region, some of them being *ruti*, *khubz tawwa*, and *labub*.

The national dish of Yemen is called *saltab*, a spicy stew made of chicken or lamb, lentils, chickpeas, beans, and coriander. This stew is served hot, accompanied by rice. Yemenis are also fond of sweets. *Bint al sabn* (sweet bread dipped in honey and butter) is a popular dessert prepared here, especially on special occasions.

Alcohol is banned in Yemen. The people here love to drink sweet tea (*shai*). This type of Arab tea is spiced with cardamom and mint and is served without milk. Arab coffee (*kahwa*) is also a popular drink.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, in many parts of the world to commemorate the important role played by workers in building nations and societies. While the earliest origins of May celebrations are ascribed to the pagan festivals that were held by farmers, peasants, and villagers in Europe well before the Middle Ages, conflicting opinions exist about the origins of the occasion. The modern observance, however, was established in 1889 when the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. In Yemen workers hold marches and rallies in the streets. Most organizations also honor their outstanding workers on this day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ NATIONAL UNITY DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: May 22

On this day in 1990 Yemen was reunified and proclaimed a republic. The Republic of Yemen was estab-

lished by merging North Yemen (Yemen Arab Republic) and South Yemen (People's Democratic Republic of Yemen). North Yemen had become independent in November 1918 from the Ottoman Empire, while South Yemen became independent much later, on November 30, 1967, from the United Kingdom. On this day Yemen also decided to adopt democracy and political plurality, marking the start of a new age of prosperity, stability, security, and peace. The new Yemeni constitution that was implemented on May 22 stressed the protection of human rights and freedoms, such as freedom of the press and expression. On this day the Yemeni national flag is unfurled and a patriotic fervor grips the entire nation.

❁ THE SEPTEMBER REVOLUTION

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: September 26

This day remembers the commencement of the September Revolution in North Yemen in 1962. The monarchy of Imam Muhammad al-Badr, the last king of Northern Yemen, was overthrown on this day by revolutionary forces who took control of Sanaa. The Yemen Arab Republic came into being after this revolution. On this day Yemenis watch parades and attend rallies.

Religious Holidays

❁ EL AM HEJIR

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

El am Hejir marks the first day of the first month of the Islamic calendar, which began in 622 C.E., when Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina with his family and followers, an event known as the Hegira, and formed the first Islamic state. Muslims celebrate this day as New Year's Day.

In Yemen, special prayers are held in mosques all over the country. A special feast is prepared and relished by Yemeni families on this day.

See also Volume III: EL AM HEJIR

❁ MOULOU

Observed by: Muslims
Observed on: Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

The birthday of Muhammad, the holy prophet of the Muslims, falls in the third month of the Islamic year. For Muslims all over the world, Mouloud, also called Mawlid al-Nabi, is a day of great joy and celebration since Muhammad is the most revered prophet. In Yemen this event is a two-day celebra-

tion. Special prayers are held in mosques all over the country. A special feast is prepared and enjoyed by Yemeni families on this day. Women make cakes and sweets. They wear new garments and decorate their hands with henna designs.

See also Volume III: ISLAM, MOULOUUD

❁ EID AL-FITR

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr, the Feast of Fast-Breaking, occurs on the first day of Shawwal, the 10th month in the Islamic calendar. It marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, the holiest month in the Islamic calendar, during which Muslims must observe a daily dawn-to-dusk fast. This day is celebrated for four days in Yemen. Special prayers and feasting mark this occasion. The Koran forbids fasting on this day.

Eid al-Fitr is celebrated with sumptuous meals, cakes, cookies, and other sweet dishes. Most families slaughter a sheep or at least buy meat for the occasion. People dress in new and colorful clothes. A festive mood grips the entire nation as people travel around the country visiting relatives and friends. Some also go hunting. There is a lot of merriment, music, and dancing.

The celebration extends for three days, but many times it is stretched to a week. All businesses—government and private—are closed.

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

❁ EID AL-ADHA

Observed by: Muslims

Observed on: Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Adha, also called the Feast of Sacrifice, is an important festival for Muslims all over the world. It was on this auspicious day that Ibrahim (Abraham) agreed to sacrifice his young son in order to obey God's command. Muslims honor Ibrahim for his willingness to do God's will. In Yemen, this festival is celebrated for a period of four days. On this day Muslim families slaughter a fattened sheep and prepare an elaborate feast for friends and family members. The meat is distributed for consumption to family and friends as well as the poor and the needy. Special prayer services are conducted in mosques all across the country.

Yemenis wear their best clothes and attend Salat-ul-Eid, or *eid* prayer, in the morning, followed by a short sermon. People also visit each other's homes and partake in festive meals with special dishes, beverages, and desserts. Children receive gifts and sweets on this happy occasion.

During the month this holiday is celebrated, many Muslims also undertake a pilgrimage or hajj to Mecca. It is required of all Muslims who are physi-

cally and financially able to go to the sacred city once during their lifetime.

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; HAJJ; ISLAM

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

After childbirth Yemeni women rest and recover in isolation for the next 40 days. During this period, women relatives and friends tend to the new mother and assist her in the daily chores. Fresh bread, butter, honey, and porridges made with fenugreek are given to the mother. Visitors who have come to see the new baby often present the child with money and gifts.

❁ COMING OF AGE

Male circumcision is a part of Yemen's tradition and is carried out at puberty. The Muslims in Yemen believe that, by undergoing this ritual, a boy becomes a man. Trained elders use knives, razors, and other sharp instruments to perform the circumcision without administering any anesthetic. This practice enjoys social backing and families take great pride in it. Huge celebrations follow this coming-of-age ritual.

❁ MARRIAGE

Most marriages in the Yemen are arranged. Yemeni weddings are elaborate affairs that last for three days. The bride devotes a considerable amount of time to her wedding preparation and beauty care. She is lavished with all sorts of oils and perfumes to prepare for her big day. The groom provides plenty of silver and gold jewelry to the bride's family, as well as cash as part of an agreed-upon bride price (*mebr*). The couple signs a marriage contract called *milka*. After signing the contract, the couple is legally married, even though they may not consummate the marriage until the night of the wedding party.

Laylat az-Zaffa, when butchers come to prepare the meat for the wedding feast, is the most important part of Yemeni wedding celebrations. Several guests are invited for lunch on this day. The men go to the mosque for midday prayers and, while returning, the groom, dressed in traditional Yemeni attire and carrying a golden sword, is accompanied by dancing men. After the singing and dancing, the guests sit down to enjoy the feast.

Laylat al-Henna, or the night of the henna, which takes place a couple of days before the wedding, is a very special women-only night. On this night the bride's hands and feet are decorated with henna. She also applies the traditional Arabian kohl or eyeliner. The groom also has a separate henna night.

On the wedding day the bride dyes her hair with henna and wears a white wedding gown. All the

women who have come for the wedding are dressed in finery and gather inside the bride's house or a tent erected outside the house. The bride is brought inside the tent and is seated on a large chair. A traditional dance, accompanied by singing and clapping, is performed for her.

The groom, along with his family members, gathers inside a tent erected near the groom's house. They make a procession to the bride's tent to pick her up. The night is spent at the groom's house. The celebrations continue throughout the following week.

❁ DEATH

On the occasion of death in a Yemeni family, the deceased is washed, shrouded in white cloth, and

buried immediately. The following three days are meant for mourning. Friends, family, and well-wishers come and offer their condolences, and help the family in their time of grief. Snacks are prepared by neighbors and served to visitors. The mourning period for the widow is four months and ten days, during which period her family and friends visit her often.

Further Reading

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~ Zambia ~

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Southern Africa, east of Angola and bounded by Democratic Republic of the Congo (Kinshasa), Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Namibia
Size	290,586 sq. mi.
Capital City	Lusaka
Flag Description	Zambia's flag is green with a panel of three vertical bands of red (hoist side), black, and orange below a soaring orange eagle located on the outer edge of the flag.
Independence	October 24, 1964 (from United Kingdom)
Population	11,261,795 (2005 est.)
Government	Republic
Nationality	Zambian(s)
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Black (99%)
Major Language(s)	English (official); major vernaculars: Bemba, Kaonda, Lozi, Lunda, Luvale, Nyanja, Tonga, and about 70 other indigenous languages
Major Religion(s)	Christian (50–75%); Muslim; and Hindu (24–49%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Youth Day, March; Labor Day, May 1; Africa Day, May 25; Heroes' Day, July; Unity Day, July; Farmers' Day, August; Independence Day, October 24

Introduction

✿ HISTORY

Not much is known about the early inhabitants of the region. However, archaeological evidence shows that tribes who were primarily hunters and gatherers inhabited the region earlier than was once believed. Southern Africa is intimately connected to the early history of modern humans, and now new evidence, found in a cave near Lusaka, Zambia, indicates that our early ancestors may have been painting for purely aesthetic and symbolic purposes far earlier than was previously thought. Archaeologists have found Stone Age equipment used to grind pigment and more than 300 pieces of pigment that may be as old as 400,000 years, considerably before the appearance of *Homo sapiens*. Before this, the oldest pigments were 120,000 years old, while the earliest paintings are only 35,000 years old.

The discovery adds to the evidence that developing technologies, art, and rituals combined were crucial to the evolution of modern people. The fragments of pigment and grinding implements indicate that these Stone Age people were using symbols much earlier than had been predicted, evidence that also suggests the use of language, which implies the existence of associated behaviors. The researchers think that the pigments, which range from yellow to purple, were used by hunters to paint their bodies during hunting rituals and, perhaps, other community events.

Bantu-speaking immigrants, who belonged to the Lunda and Luba tribes of southern Zaire and northern Angola, began migrating to the region around the 15th century, forcibly displacing the indigenous people. Around the 19th century the Nguni people, who came from the southern parts of Africa, joined the immigrant population. The region was not unknown to the Europeans as Portuguese explorers occasionally passed by the region. In 1855 Dr. David Livingstone (1813–73) became the first Englishman to enter Zambia. He

Dr. David Livingstone

Dr. David Livingstone (1813–73) was a Scottish doctor and missionary. He is considered one of the most important European explorers of Africa, as well as a pioneer in the fight for the abolition of the slave trade. After completing his course in medicine in 1840, Livingstone was ordained and sent as a medical missionary to South Africa. In 1841 he reached Kuruman, a settlement founded by Scottish missionary Robert Moffat (1795–1883) in Bechuanaland (now Botswana). In 1849 Livingstone successfully traversed the Kalahari Desert and became the first European ever to discover Lake Ngami. On another expedition (1852–56) he followed the Zambezi River to its mouth in the Indian Ocean, thereby becoming the first European to discover the awesome grandeur of the Victoria Falls.

was mesmerized by the waterfalls on the Zambezi River and named them Victoria Falls after the then-ruling monarch of England Queen Victoria (1819–1901). Until then the waterfalls had been known as *Mosi-oa-Tunya*, which means “smoke that thunders.” The town near the falls was renamed after David Livingstone.

For many, Dr. Livingstone is best remembered as the person whom Henry M. Stanley (1841–1904), a reporter sent by James Gordon Bennett (1795–1872), proprietor of the *New York Herald*, “found” after he had not been heard from for several years and was presumed dead. After two years of searching, during which Stanley’s vivid reports—printed in the *Herald*—served to energize public interest in the exploration of Africa, he came upon Dr. Livingstone in the village of Ujiji, and uttered the world famous line, “Dr. Livingstone, I presume?”

In 1888 Sir Cecil Rhodes (1853–1902) obtained mining rights on behalf of the British government from local chiefs in northern (present-day Zambia) and southern (present-day Zimbabwe) Rhodesia, the beginning of British commercial and political interests in the region. From 1891 the British South Africa Company administered Northern Rhodesia; it was only in 1923 that the British government took control of the region and declared it a British protectorate. On the other hand, southern Rhodesia was annexed and granted self-governance in 1923.

The discovery of copper in the late 1920s made control over this region potentially quite lucrative. After World War II in 1953, northern and southern Rhodesia were merged with Nyasaland (present-day Malawi) to form the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. However, Northern Rhodesia’s demand for more African representation in the government and the ruling Europeans’ fear of losing power caused political unrest in the federation.

In 1960 the United National Independence Party (UNIP) was formed by Kenneth Kaunda (a Northern Rhodesian; b. 1924) to campaign for independence and dissolution of the federation dominated by European-ruled Southern Rhodesia. In 1962, after the victory of African parties in the elections, the demand for complete independence from the federation began gaining public support in Northern Rhodesia. As a result the Federation was officially dissolved on December 31, 1963, and the independent Republic of Zambia came into existence on October 24, 1964.

The Republic of Zambia adopted its own constitution on August 24, 1991. This constitution is based primarily on English common law and customary law. Independent Zambia had Kenneth Kaunda as its first president, who, immediately after assuming power, nationalized key enterprises and several large privately owned estates. However, he was unsuccessful in improving agriculture. From 1972 to 1991 Zambia remained a one-party state with UNIP the only legal party. The economy suffered immensely as the result of mismanagement and external pressures. Due to the import and export restrictions imposed by Rhodesia after Zambia’s interference in its domestic matters (Zambia was supporting the black African political parties in their fight against the white government of Rhodesia), the economy took a nose-dive, since Rhodesia was the main export and import partner of Zambia. With inflation skyrocketing, there were widespread protests and demonstrations against the Kaunda government, resulting in riots that killed thousands of Zambians.

In 1991 under pressure from his own people, Kaunda amended the constitution and declared the first multiparty elections in the country since independence. Frederick Chiluba (b. 1943), a labor leader, won a landslide victory and was sworn in as the new president in 1991. Chiluba survived an attempted coup in 1997, but his government was plagued by charges of corruption. In 1999 Chiluba’s government was accused by Angola of sheltering the rebels belonging to the National Union for Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). In January 2002 Chiluba stepped down as the president of Zambia after mounting pressure from members within his party. The labor party won the elections in 2002, and Levy Mwanawasa (b. 1948) was sworn in as the new president. Despite opposition charges of election fraud, Mwanawasa continues to rule. Zambia remains a very poor country, beset by problems of disease (particularly HIV/AIDS but also malaria, hepatitis, typhoid, and even plague). Zambians’ life expectancy at birth is less than 40 years.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Situated in the southern part of Africa, Zambia is a landlocked country sharing its boundaries with Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo (Kin-

shasa), Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Namibia. Currently it is divided into nine provinces: Central, Copper Belt, Eastern, Luapula, Lusaka, Northern, North-Western, Southern, and Western. Zambia sits on an undulated plateau and a major part of the region is situated at 3,500–4,500 feet above sea level. While in the northeast, the Muchinga Mountains exceed 7,000 feet in height, elevations below 2,000 feet exist in the valleys of the major river systems. The main waterway is the Zambezi River. Its main tributaries are the Luangwa River and the Kafue River. Rapids and waterfalls obstruct these waterways throughout their course, which makes navigation difficult. The northern region of Zambia is the home of the Lakes Bangweulu, Tanganyika, and Mweru. In the southern part Lake Bangweulu and swamps cover an area of 3,800 square miles. The Luapula River drains Lake Bangweulu and the swamps.

The Copper Belt was the region responsible for the wealth of Zambia in earlier days. This belt adjoins the mineral-rich Katanga province of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Despite being a tropical country, the climate is pleasant thanks to the high altitude. Temperatures and rainfall both are moderate. Tropical storms are, however, known to occur during the rainy season, which falls between November and April. The regions experiencing the highest temperatures are in the valleys of the Zambezi, Luangwa, and Kafue Rivers and by the shores of Lake Mweru and Bangweulu.

The temperatures vary from season to season. The hottest period, accompanied by high humidity, is October to mid-November, just before the rainy season. This period also experiences thunderstorms caused by moist air from the east. The months from May to mid-August are cool, after which temperatures rise rapidly. September usually is very dry. Most of Zambia experiences extreme temperatures at various times of the year. For example, Lusaka, at 4,100 feet, has a high of 102°F and a low of 41°F, with an average annual rainfall of 45 inches, while Livingstone has a high of 105°F and a freezing low of 27°F, with an annual rainfall of almost 30 inches.

❁ ECONOMY

Zambia's economy is in utter disarray. Despite natural resources such as copper, cobalt, zinc, lead, coal, emeralds, gold, silver, uranium, and hydropower in abundance, the majority of its population continues to live below the poverty line. In addition natural hazards and calamities have contributed to the chaos, in the form of periodic droughts and tropical storms. Copper exports, the mainstay of the economy during the colonial regime, suffered a setback due to a sharp decline in the international market in the 1970s, resulting in heavy losses for the government. Things seem to be looking brighter in the early 21st century. Government-owned copper mines have been privatized, thus relieving the gov-

ernment of mammoth losses generated by the industry. Moreover electronics manufacturers have also increased the demand for copper, a good sign for Zambia's economy.

The main agricultural products are corn, sorghum, rice, peanuts, sunflower seed, vegetables, flowers, tobacco, cotton, sugarcane, cassava (tapioca), and coffee. This sector also produces cattle and poultry products like meat, milk, eggs, and hides. The industrial sector consists of copper mining and processing, construction, foodstuffs, beverages, chemicals, textiles, fertilizer, and horticulture.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

In Zambia indigenous beliefs and Christianity have been merged. When Zambians converted to Christianity, rather than give up their indigenous beliefs, they molded Christianity to fit their local practices. While most of the population is tribal, it also has a small but economically strong Asian population, most of whom are Indians. British and South African expatriates live mostly in Lusaka and in the Copper Belt in northern Zambia. Although most Zambians are subsistence farmers, there is a significant urban population constituting approximately 42 percent of the population. The British impact on Zambia endures. The official language of Zambia has remained English even after independence. However, more than 70–80 dialects, such as Bemba, Kaonda, Lozi, Lunda, Luvale, Nyanja, and Tonga, are spoken.

Music and dance are in the Zambian bloodstream. Singing, music, and dancing are part of tribal rituals and celebrations. Rhythmic drumbeats and thumb pianos accompany the dancing. The rumba is popular here, having originated in the nearby Democratic Republic of the Congo. The main musical instruments used in Zambia are stringed bows, flutes, horns and pipes, xylophones, bells, rattles, and the *kalimba*, the “African thumb piano.” The *kalimba* has a set of flat metal “tongues,” or notes, which are attached to a resonator. The player flicks the tongues with his thumb, and sound is produced.

❁ CUISINE

The staple diet of Zambia is *nshima*, a dish cooked with cornmeal or plain maize or maize flour, which is called *mealie-meal*. In affluent families *nshima* is eaten for lunch as well as dinner, while in the homes of the poor and the unemployed; *nshima* is cooked for either lunch or dinner. The importance of *nshima* in the everyday life of Zambians is evident from the fact that, when the Zambian government attempted to raise the price of cornmeal in 1990s, it led to riots in the capital city of Lusaka.

Nshima is always served hot with vegetables, beans, fish and meat dishes, and with *ndiwo*. *Ndiwo* is

Fun Fact

A Zambian host who offers *nshima* to a guest is considered benevolent, while the one who denies it to the guest is looked upon as cruel.

a dish made from different kinds of meat such as beef, mutton, chicken, or eggs. It could also be made from the meat of animals such as crocodile, warthog, turtle, alligator, or monkey. This is served as a side dish with *nshima*. For vegetables Zambians feast on homegrown collard greens, called *repu* (a loose-leafed vegetable that resembles a cabbage; its taste, depending on its age, could be mild, sweet, or mustardlike, and it is often served with bacon), as well as pumpkin, cabbage, cassava (tapioca) leaves, pea leaves, squash leaves, and bean leaves.

In regions along the rivers and lakeshores, Zambians also eat fish. Popular freshwater fish include bream, lake salmon, and Nile perch.

Public/Legal Holidays

❁ NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: December 31–January 1

January 1 marks the beginning of the Western, or Gregorian, calendar and is celebrated as New Year's Day. In Zambia, the new year is welcomed with much enthusiasm. In places like Lusaka, not only do the local people party all night, but there are several events at various hotels and restaurants for the visiting public who wish to celebrate the New Year. True to Zambian culture, drumbeats and dancing add to the excitement of the evening.

❁ YOUTH DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: Second Monday in March

The youth in Zambia constitute 68 percent of the population so it is appropriate that the Zambian government should make this a public holiday. On this day the government announces various programs aimed at empowering youth. In 2005, for example, while addressing a public gathering at the Freedom Statue, President Levy Mwanawasa (b. 1948) announced the year's Youth Day theme, which was "Youth empowerment through sport, tourism, and agriculture." He said that the combination of tourism, agriculture, and sport would prove to be an unbeatable package for national develop-

Fun Fact

Since vegetables are available in abundance and there is a scarcity of meat in the region, *ndiwo* often is the topic of daily conversation among the rural people. People discuss how they have been eating vegetables for three straight days and are yearning for meat. Thus, the Zambians have coined a special term called *nkhuli*, which refers to the irresistible desire or yearning for meat.

ment and prosperity. On this occasion there is a colorful ceremony every year when various youth groups come together, present musical and dance performances, and participate in pageants.

❁ LABOR DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 1

May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day, also known as May Day or Workers' Day, in many parts of the world and commemorates the important role played by workers. In 1889 the Second International, a consortium of socialist organizations, declared May 1 a day to recognize the importance of workers around the world and scheduled the first demonstrations and celebrations for the following year, 1890. They coordinated this observance with the strike called by the U.S. labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), demanding an eight-hour workday. In Zambia Labor Day is a public holiday and is celebrated at public functions addressed by the president and other dignitaries. Banks, as well as all public offices, are closed on this day.

See also Volume III: LABOR DAY

❁ AFRICA DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: May 25

The anniversary of the establishment of the Organization of African Unity (renamed the African Union in 2002), May 25, is celebrated in all African countries as Africa Day. Established in 1963 this Union has been formed to promote unity, solidarity, and international cooperation among the newly independent African states. Committed to promoting self-government, respect for territorial boundaries, and social progress throughout the African Continent, OAU/AU members celebrate the date of its establishment as a national holiday in their respective countries. In Zambia defense chiefs and members of the diplomatic corps lay wreaths at the Freedom Statue to mark Africa Freedom Day. In addition to a colorful ceremony, the Zambian Army fires a gun salute in memory of the heroes who died in the freedom struggle.

❁ HEROES' DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First Monday in July

For the Zambian people and their government, obtaining independence from colonial rule is so great and meaningful an achievement that it needs to be celebrated in different ways on separate occasions. On this day every year Zambians spend the day remembering those who died in the independence movement.

✿ UNITY DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First Tuesday in July

Unity Day, celebrated on the first Tuesday in July every year, is similar in spirit to Heroes' Day. Here the focus shifts slightly to the thought that these heroes died fighting for an independent and united Zambia. On this day, Zambians renew their pledge to keep the country united.

✿ FARMER'S DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: First Monday of August

A public holiday observed on the first Monday of August, Farmer's Day marks the culmination of eight weeks of provincial and district shows and five days of the annual agricultural show held in Lusaka. It is an important day for Zambians, since the economy is agriculture based.

✿ INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October 24

The Republic of Zambia came into existence on October 24, 1964, bringing an end to British colonial rule. On Independence Day people gather in the capital city of Lusaka and witness the unfurling of the national flag by the president while the national anthem plays in the background. After the customary official speeches and military parades, the president honors those Zambians who have made significant contributions to the development of the nation's economy, growth, and national security in the preceding year. The President's Insignia of Honor, President's Insignia of Recognition, and the Order of Distinguished Service, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Division, are given to the honorees. The function at the State House is marked by musical entertainment and dancing, which form part of the rich cultural heritage of Zambia. A huge cake is also cut by the president to commemorate this special day.

Religious Holidays

✿ GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Friday before Easter

The Christian holiday of Good Friday falls on the Friday before Easter and is the last Friday of the austere 40-day fast of Lent. Good Friday commemorates the Crucifixion of Jesus. On Good Friday, Zambians attend services in church and continue their fast. The services include readings from the



Women dance and sing freedom songs during Zambia's Independence Day at State House in Lusaka. (AP Photo/Salim Henry)

Psalms and Gospel accounts of Jesus' Crucifixion.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER. GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

The Christian festival of Easter, also called Pascha, is celebrated to mark Jesus' Resurrection three days after his death on the Cross. It celebrates the victory of life over death and redemption for Christians. It falls on the first Sunday after Lent and is celebrated by Christians the world over. Zambian Roman Catholics attend a special Easter Sunday Mass. A lavish feast is prepared consisting of *nshima* (porridge) and meat dishes while children enjoy sweets and cakes.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

✿ EASTER MONDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Monday after Easter

The first Monday after Easter is celebrated as Easter Monday. Zambians celebrate Easter Monday with great fervor. Children make multicolored Easter eggs and have egg-rolling contests on this day. Eggs and rabbits are ancient symbols of fertility, life, and birth, going back to pagan spring festivals in Europe and have been associated with Easter since its first observances.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; SPRING FESTIVALS

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas is a day of celebration for Christians all over the world, marking the birth of Jesus, regarded by Christians as the Messiah. In Zambian churches Nativity plays are staged, and crèches are set up. Two days before Christmas, children sing carols in the streets to collect money for charity. On Christmas children are encouraged to give presents to poor and sick children who would otherwise not be receiving presents.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Regional Holidays

❁ ZAMBIA AGRICULTURAL SHOW

Observed in: Lusaka

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: July–August

This show is extremely important for Zambians because the majority of the population is dependent on subsistence agriculture. It showcases not only the farmers' products, but also those of manufacturers who produce agricultural equipment and machinery. Even small-scale farmers get an opportunity to showcase their produce at this international event. This show attracts investors and businessmen looking for opportunities as well as farmers. It is attended not only by the African countries, but is truly international in character. Some of the participating countries are: Botswana, Burundi, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Malawi, Kenya, South Africa, Namibia, Sweden, Holland, Norway, Egypt, England, Pakistan, India, China, France, and Germany. A music festival accompanies the agricultural show.

❁ LUSAKA MUSIC FESTIVAL

Observed in: Lusaka

Observed by: General Public

Observed on: October

At this popular and unique festival, Zambia can be seen at its cultural best. Different tribes come

together with their varied musical heritages and dancing styles to enthrall the public. The performances are accompanied by some community activity such as hunting or fishing. On average around 20,000 people attend this festival.

Rites of Passage

❁ COMING OF AGE

The attitudes of the various tribes on sexual initiation differ across Zambia. The Bemba tribes expect teenage girls to be chaste before marriage, while the Chewa permit discreet sexual relationships among the young. Education through initiation ceremonies nevertheless remains the most common traditional method of sex education. In Zambia it is taboo for a girl's parents to discuss sex with her. The Bemba tribes seclude teenage girls as soon as they begin to menstruate, for a few days to a month, and instruct them about familial and personal matters, such as sexual hygiene and childbirth. Surprisingly, except for western Zambia, where male circumcision takes place, there is little evidence of initiation rites for boys elsewhere in Zambia.

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❧ Zimbabwe ❧

COUNTRY FACT FILE	
Location	Southern Africa bordered by South Africa to the south, Mozambique to the east, Zambia to the north, and Botswana to the west
Size	150,804 sq. mi.
Capital City	Harare
Flag Description	Zimbabwe's flag has horizontal bands in seven colors: Green (top), yellow, red, black (center), red, yellow, and green (bottom) with a white triangle edged in black on the hoist side. A yellow bird native to Zimbabwe, which represents the long history of the country, is superimposed on a red five-pointed star in the center of the triangle.
Independence	April 18, 1980 (from United Kingdom)
Population	12,746,990 (2005 est.)
Government	Parliamentary democracy
Nationality	Zimbabwean
Major Ethnic Group(s)	Black (98%, of which Shona are 82%)
Major Language(s)	English (official); Shona; Sindebele (language of the Ndebele); and numerous minor tribal dialects
Major Religion(s)	Syncretic (50%: part Christian, part indigenous beliefs); Christian (25%); Indigenous beliefs (24%)
National Holiday(s)	New Year's Day, January 1; Independence Day, April 18; Africa Day, May 25; Unity Day, December 22

Introduction

❧ HISTORY

The Limpopo River in Zimbabwe has figured importantly in the history and development of this part of Africa. Around the beginning of the Christian era, villagers living along the Limpopo developed a thriving trade with people who worked their way south along Africa's Indian Ocean coastline. These villagers exchanged animal skins, ivory, and other valuable items for glass beads. Eventually some villages became wealthier than others, and more people moved to the city from the countryside. In the villages some people amassed more wealth than others, through which they gained power in their communities. This elite group proclaimed its superior status

through architecture, using the topography to best advantage, and some settlements became more important than others did. Among them was Mapungubwe.

To date, the Iron Age city of Mapungubwe is the earliest known site in southern Africa where a class-based society had evolved. Mapungubwe, located where the Limpopo and Shashe Rivers meet, was a wealthy trading center from 1220 to around 1300. Settled during the 11th century, the city grew because of its access to the Limpopo River, which provided access to the ports of Kilwa and other sites along the Indian Ocean. This new trade route was connected to existing regional networks along which salt, cattle, fish, metals, chert, ostrich-eggshell beads, and other items had been flowing for centuries. Twenty-three graves have been excavated from an elite graveyard at the top of the hill; three of these graves held bodies that had been buried seated upright, a position that

indicates wealth and power, with a variety of gold and copper items, exotic glass beads, and other prestigious objects.

Mapungubwe's life as a capital did not last long, flourishing only between 1290 and 1300. Instead, the distinctive stone wall architecture, which symbolized differential social status, reached its peak at Great Zimbabwe, a city that grew in importance as Mapungubwe's declined.

No detailed information is known about the people who lived in the ancient city of Great Zimbabwe. They had no written language and their oral traditions did not survive to tell their story. Around 500, the Shona people began moving into this area; in the 1100s they began to build the stone walls.

Great Zimbabwe is but one among many similar settlements built with dry stone walls with distinctive designs at their center. These were not the walls of houses. They symbolized, through their position and design, that an elite class lived near them, utilizing the same logic found in the graves on Mapungubwe's hilltop. These stone buildings, which stretched from the Kalahari Desert in the west to the Indian Ocean in the east, were probably regional centers in a complex social and economic network. Great Zimbabwe was apparently the greatest, undoubtedly the capital of a state founded on the gold trade.

Great Zimbabwe was built as a religious center to worship Mwari, the creator of life. The elliptically shaped building made of stone remains the most remarkable of all their works. The outer wall is 80 feet high and up to 17 feet thick, spanning more than 800 feet. At the height of this great civilization, more than 20,000 people lived near the elliptical building in mud huts. The civilization disappeared with its extraordinary walls, and is considered one of the great lost civilizations of the world. It is now a UN World Heritage Site.

By the mid-15th century the Mwene Mutaoa Empire ruled Zimbabwe and most of what is now Mozambique. Though agriculture was their main source of livelihood, they also exchanged ivory and gold with the Arabs for clothes, glass, and porcelain from Asia. The Rozwi Empire overthrew the Portuguese, who during the 16th and 17th centuries had controlled a fair amount of the territory after sending in troops to avenge the killing of Catholic missionaries. The Rozwi Empire ruled for almost 200 years until the Ngoni tribes overthrew it.

In 1888 British financier and colonizer Cecil Rhodes (1852–1902) acquired exclusive mining rights from King Lobengula (d. 1894), the last king of the Ndebele (or Matabele). Realizing the immense mining potential of the region, Rhodes sought to bypass the king entirely and obtained a charter from Queen Victoria in 1889 and authoriza-

tion for the British South Africa Company (BSAC) to conquer the Ndebele region. In 1895 the region was named Rhodesia, in honor of Cecil Rhodes.

Soon the region swarmed with Europeans. Pressed to the wall, the Shona and Ndebele tribes staged violent revolts against BSAC. By 1897, however, the leaders of the tribe had been caught and hanged by BSAC, ending the revolt brutally. In 1922 Southern Rhodesia became an independent British colony.

In 1953 a federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was formed, which included Northern and Southern Rhodesia. However, the federation lasted only for 10 years and was dissolved in 1963. Around this time the Europeans in Southern Rhodesia demanded independence from the British, who did not show much interest in their demands. Without waiting for British sanction, the white majority, led by Ian Smith (b. 1919), declared independence on November 11, 1965. The region ignored UN sanctions and declared itself a republic in 1970.

During this period there were widespread conflicts between the minority whites and majority blacks in the region. Guerilla warfare activities had transformed the country into a war zone. The Smith government decided to negotiate a peace with the warring factions as his government was under immense pressure to bring stability to the region. Robert Mugabe (b. 1924), the leader of Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), entered into negotiations with the Smith government. Also party to the negotiations was Joshua Nkomo (? 1918–99) of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU).

The first free and open elections in Zimbabwe were held in 1980, and Robert Mugabe was declared the winner. However, internal conflicts between ZANU and ZAPU unleashed an ethnic war in Zimbabwe. In 1987 Mugabe signed a peace accord with ZAPU to put an end to violence in the region, and ZANU-PF (Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front) was formed. Unfortunately the peace lasted only five years. After the drought of 1992, the problem of the white minority owning the majority of Zimbabwe's land again sparked racial violence. In 1999 Mugabe's regime began the redistribution of land by forcing whites to relinquish their ownership rights to the government. This move by the government, along with its inability to curb violence against the whites, received widespread international attention.

The Commonwealth of Nations suspended Zimbabwe's membership in the wake of reports on human rights abuses in the region. Later Zimbabwe itself withdrew from the Commonwealth.

Fun Fact

Both Ndebele and Matabele mean "the people of the long shields," referring to the Matabele warriors' use of the Zulu shield and spear.

❁ GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

A landlocked country with Mozambique, Zambia, South Africa, and Botswana as its neighbors, Zimbabwe was known during its colonial era first as Southern Rhodesia and subsequently as Rhodesia. It

is a beautiful country high on a plateau with the Zambezi River adorning its northeastern border. The incomparable spectacles of Victoria Falls and Lake Kariba are world-famous natural sites.

Most of Zimbabwe is covered with low *msasa* trees and savanna grasslands. In drier regions, aloe vera is plentiful. The area surrounding the Okowango, Kwando, and Zambezi Rivers is known as the Eden of Africa. It extends to the Thirstland of the Kalahari Desert, the Okowango Swamps, and to the tropical paradise around Victoria Falls. The area had not been completely explored until fairly recently. There are approximately 500 native species of birds, sable antelopes, roan antelopes, elephants, buffaloes, hippopotamus, and crocodiles.

Zimbabwe lies south of the equator. October through April are the summer months here. It is hot throughout the day, with thunderstorms in the afternoon. In areas such as the Kariba Falls, Victoria Falls, and the Zambezi Valley, it is warm throughout the year. The rainy season begins in November and lasts until March. Summer is at its peak at Christmastime.

❁ ECONOMY

The major industries of the country include mining, clothing, agriculture, and tourism. Zimbabwe's major trading partners are South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States, Argentina, and Japan. The majority of Zimbabwe's population is engaged in farming and raising poultry and cattle. Agriculture is the main sector in the Zimbabwean economy, and corn is the country's largest crop. The main crops that are exported are cotton and tobacco. The country has a reasonable quantity of metallurgical-grade chromites. Coal, copper, nickel, gold, and iron are also available here, as is considerable hydroelectric power. But the long-term political turmoil and the AIDS epidemic have seriously affected the nation's development. The economy had started off well in the 1970s, but due to internal politics, bloodshed, guerilla warfare, and increasing white emigration, efforts toward economic growth have failed. In recent times President Robert Mugabe's land reform policies have worsened the situation.

❁ CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Zimbabwean society is a fusion of African and European cultures. Its architecture stands out from the rest of Africa. The central granite plateau was home to many Shona people who constructed elaborate stone structures. In Zimbabwe many stone ruins survive, such as the Great Zimbabwe (after which the country is named), Dhlodhlo, and Khami. Some small villages date back to the 11th century C.E.

Artists occupy a prominent position in Zimbabwe. Traditional arts like pottery, jewelry, carving, and textiles are encouraged. Symmetrically woven baskets and stools carved out of a single piece of

Victoria Falls

One of the major tourist attractions of Zimbabwe is Victoria Falls, also known as the "Smoke that Thunders." It is twice as high as Niagara Falls and one and a half times as wide. In 1855 David Livingstone (of "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" fame) was the first European to see these falls.

wood have won worldwide appreciation for their craftsmanship.

Zimbabwean songs are usually sung at weddings and parties. The marimba, a wooden xylophone, and *mbira*, a thumb piano, are the traditional musical instruments. The *mujenjeje*, or "stone bells," are percussion instruments unique to Zimbabwe.

The natives of Zimbabwe follow Christianity as well as their traditional beliefs. A monotheistic animist belief system called the Mwari Cult worships animals and spirits. English is the official language of Zimbabwe although it is only spoken by 1 percent of the population. The natives use Shona and Sendebele, both Bantu languages. Christian missionaries promoted education in Zimbabwe, and many schools are still run by religious orders. Education was traditionally a privilege reserved for men, though women do now have access to education. Until 1965 the country had only two government schools. Since 1987 compulsory education in schools has resulted in an impressive growth in literacy levels.

❁ CUISINE

Born out of a fusion of British and African influences, Zimbabwean cuisine is a combination of bland and spicy tastes. The dietary staple is *sadza*—a white maize porridge—upon which most local meals are built. *Nyama*, or "meat," is usually beef or chicken. However, the more indigenous recipes use crocodile, *kudu* ("antelope"), and impala meat. Zimbabweans do

Parks and Wildlife

In Zimbabwe more than 11 percent of the land is set aside for parks and wildlife. There are as many as 10 national parks and more than 10 recreational parks around the country. Botanical gardens, hunting areas, and sanctuaries also figure in the "must see" list in Zimbabwe. Hwange National Park is the country's largest wildlife park. Regarded as one of the last elephant sanctuaries in Africa, Hwange Park also protects different species of birds and a variety of other animals. The Mana Pools National Park has many varieties of antelopes, buffaloes, and elephants.

Hidden Treasure

The early Europeans who followed the Portuguese into southern Africa spent large parts of their lives seeking hidden treasure, especially gold, and the lost kingdoms of the Bible. When they found the real treasure of the region, the valuable items buried with the royalty of Great Zimbabwe in the 1930s, they hid the find for decades because its beauty contradicted the racist histories they promulgated. Perhaps one of the finest objects illustrating the greatness of Zimbabwe's heritage is a rhinoceros intricately crafted in gold leaf more than a century before the renaissance began in Europe.

not favor fruits and vegetables, but gem squash (a type of marrow) is a delicacy. Chibuku, a local beer resembling cocoa, is the alcohol of the masses.

Public/Legal Holidays

NEW YEAR'S EVE/DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 31–January 1

Zimbabwe follows the Western, or Gregorian, calendar in observing January 1 as the first day of a new year. It is the height of summer in Zimbabwe, and the celebrations with family and friends are often held outdoors.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: April 18

British explorers and missionaries arrived as early as 1850 in the region that was to become British-controlled Rhodesia. In 1923 the European settlers in Southern Rhodesia voted to become a self-governing British colony. The white supremacist government excluded blacks from voting, from ownership of the best farmland, and from most professions and skilled trades. Around 1965 Rhodesia, under the leadership of Prime Minister Ian Smith, expressed its desire for freedom from British control, which Britain would agree to only with a string of conditions unacceptable to the government.

In 1968 Rhodesia proclaimed itself a republic. In the wake of this unilateral declaration by Smith, Britain complained to the United Nations, which imposed sanctions against Zimbabwe. Meanwhile worsening race relations and guerilla attacks led many European farmers to abandon their lands. In March 1978, an agreement was signed to transfer power to the blacks with Smith retaining the post of

prime minister. The European minority was forced to hold free and open elections in 1980. As a result of the first multiracial elections, Robert Mugabe was elected prime minister, then executive president, and finally president (in 1990). Bob Marley and the Wailers were the main attractions at the Independence Day celebrations. The song "Zimbabwe" by Bob Marley had inspired the country's National Liberation Army.

On this day all government offices, commercial establishments, and educational institutions remain closed in Zimbabwe. The national flag is unfurled at official Independence Day functions followed by parades.

AFRICA DAY

Observed by: Africans
Observed on: May 25

Africa Day, or African Liberation Day, commemorates the establishment of the OAU (Organization of African Unity) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 1963. It honors the independence struggles of the African nations and promotes unity and solidarity among the African states. Many of the African countries suffered under colonial rule. The indigenous peoples were denied their basic rights and it was only after years of struggle, courage, and strength that freedom was restored. Zimbabweans use this opportunity to reflect on their history, achievements, and to learn about the culture and heritage of other African countries.

UNITY DAY

Observed by: General Public
Observed on: December 22

This day celebrates the signing of the Unity Accord by Robert Mugabe, the leader of Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), and Joshua Nkomo, leader of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). It put an end to five years of continuous civil war in western Zimbabwe between the two major parties, the ZAPU and ZANU-PF. Unity Day seeks to educate people about their responsibilities as citizens of Zimbabwe. On this day they come together to express their commitment to their nation in public lectures and seminars.

Religious Holidays

GOOD FRIDAY

Observed by: Christians
Observed on: Friday before Easter

Among Christians Good Friday, also known as Mourning Friday, Holy Friday, or Great Friday (in the Eastern Orthodox Churches) is observed as the

day when Jesus was crucified. They believe that he rose from the dead three days later, and this event is celebrated on Easter Sunday. On Good Friday, Christian Zimbabweans mourn Jesus' death and attend special services and prayers during the day, where priests explain the significance of Good Friday. They remember the ultimate sacrifice Jesus made to atone for the sins of people on Earth, and look forward to Easter Sunday.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ HOLY SATURDAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: Saturday before Easter

Holy Saturday is a day of reflection and prayer leading up to the celebration of Jesus' Resurrection on Easter. In the evening, just before midnight, the Easter Vigil is celebrated. This ceremony celebrates Jesus' Resurrection from the dead and the redemption of humanity. In churches, people light the Easter fire to begin the service, and parishioners carry lit candles in a procession.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ EASTER

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: First Sunday after Lent

Easter, which celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus following his Crucifixion, is the most important Christian festival of the liturgical year. This occasion is widely celebrated in Zimbabwe, where priests wear special ceremonial white vestments for the occasion. Hymns are accompanied by the beating of drums. Musical competitions and concerts are held throughout the country, including the Easter Jazz Concert in the capital Harare.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY WEEK; LENT

❁ CHRISTMAS

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 25

Christmas, also called Kisimusi in Zimbabwe, the celebration of the birth of Jesus, marks the onset of a season of gift-giving in Zimbabwe. Fellowship is an important part of Kisimusi in Zimbabwe. Fathers give their children and wives clothes and candy. At the early morning church service, children sing special songs. Christmas celebrations start early, with the collection of bread, jams, tea, and sugar for the Christmas Day feast for the members of the church. This meal is usually hosted at a parishioner's home. Women belonging to a particular church take turns preparing the meal so that no one has to miss the



Zimbabwe president Robert Mugabe lights the independence flame during the country's annual Independence Day celebrations on April 18 in the National Sports Stadium outside Harare. (*AP Photo/Rob Cooper*)

church service. Freshly roasted ox and goat meat, cornmeal porridge, bread, jam, and sugar are the main foods served at the feast. After the meal, everybody gathers in the church common hall to sing carols. The minister then gives an informal sermon. When the Sun sets children play around the fire. At sundown the day is officially considered over.

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

❁ BOXING DAY

Observed by: Christians

Observed on: December 26

Boxing Day falls on the day after Christmas; it is also the feast day of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr. The name Boxing Day is thought to have originated with the opening of church charity boxes on that day. For British Commonwealth countries, including Zimbabwe, this extension of the Christmas holiday is a legacy of their British colonial past. Traditionally business owners present gifts in the form of money to their employees on that day. In Zimbabwe gifts and money are donated to the poor on this day.

See also Volume III: BOXING DAY; CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

Rites of Passage

❁ BIRTH

In Zimbabwe the birth of a child is an auspicious occasion for the whole family. Women gain more status at home after becoming mothers. During the seventh month of pregnancy, the expectant father's relatives escort the woman to her parent's home after a joyous celebration. Before the child is born, the family usually appoints one or two elderly women who will take care of the mother and the baby. One woman will be the traditional midwife; she will handle any problems pertaining to pregnancy such as labor pains. Okra, which is highly recommended during pregnancy, is included in the expectant mother's diet.

Soon after the birth, the mother and the baby lead a secluded life for a week until the umbilical cord drops off. During this period of seclusion, the cord is loosely wrapped around the infant. At the end of seclusion, the naming ceremony takes place, and the mother returns with the baby to the husband's home. The father gives a goat to the midwife as a thank-you gift. The infant also receives gifts from relatives. The mother is welcomed back to her husband's home with gifts and food.

❁ MARRIAGE

There are certain protocols that must be followed before a couple can marry. First the woman introduces the man to her aunt, who in turn introduces him to the rest of her family members. A date is arranged for *lobola*, the dowry the groom's family has to give before the marriage ceremony. At this huge gathering the girl's family has the prerogative to decide whether they want the *lobola* in money, cattle, or clothes. On this day the groom may request the bride's father's permission to have a Christian wedding. Both families share the wedding expenses.

After marriage the women dress more elaborately. Among the Ndebele tribes of the Zimbabwean region, women adorn themselves with spectacular ornaments. Each ornament is symbolic of the woman's status in society. Once a family owns a house, the women wear copper and brass rings around their necks, arms, and legs, expressing their

bond with and faith in their husbands. The rings, known as *idzila*, are removed only after the husband's death. The more rings a woman wears, the richer she and her husband are. After the first child is born, women wear a five-fingered apron, announcing the consummation of their marriage. Women wear a head covering in one form or another as a mark of respect for their husbands. During wedding ceremonies or important social gatherings, men wear ornaments made for them by their wives.

❁ DEATH

In Zimbabwe it is not uncommon for male relatives of a deceased person to shave their heads in mourning. The Shona tribe in Zimbabwe believes that the good virtues of the dead are taken to heaven by the person's soul, and the accumulated evils decompose with the mortal body. *Kufu* is the Shona word for "death." The Shona believe that certain omens foretell death. It is common to weep over the dead, and mourning lasts a week. It is feared that mourning for a longer period will persuade the dead to linger. The flowers kept on the grave symbolize fertility. Meat and beer are also offered to the dead.

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Fun Fact

Zimbabwe is a Shona word that means "house of rocks."

 *Overview Entries* 
A to Z

~ All Saints' Day ~

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Christian populations
Observed on	November 1 or Sunday after Pentecost (Orthodox Christians)
Observed by	Roman Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Lutherans, and Anglicans

Introduction

All Saints' Day is a widely celebrated Christian feast that pays tribute to all Christian saints, both renowned and obscure. According to Pope Urban IV (r. 1261–64), observing this day also makes up for any inadequacies in an individual's observance of saints' feast days during the previous year. In the Western churches (especially Lutheran, Anglican, and Roman Catholic) this festival is celebrated on November 1, while the Eastern Orthodox Churches observe it on the first Sunday following Pentecost. Due to their differing perceptions of the individuality and purpose of the saints, the Christian denominations vary widely in their celebrations of All Saints' Day.

For Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholics, and to some extent Anglicans, the event is a day to remember the saints and to thank God. It is also a day to honor and give thanks to the saints for fulfilling the believer's prayers. It is a common practice among Christians to honor and pay homage to the better known saints on certain days designated as their feast days, but there are many unsung or lesser known saints who have almost passed into oblivion or are given little recognition today. On All Saints' Day, Christians remember such nearly forgotten saints and request their intercession in mundane matters. An "intercessory prayer" is the act of praying on behalf of other people, and it goes beyond the typical requests of routine prayers offered for others. The person making an intercessory prayer acts as an intermediary between God and the person or people being prayed for, thereby bridging the gap between them. The intention of these earnest prayers is not merely to request that God grant the wishes of the intermediary, but to express the expectation that God will bring to pass whatever is prayed for.

This is a unique festival for Christians, one that enlightens and inspires them by examples and incidents from the lives of the saints. The nearly 2,000 years of Church history is replete with anecdotes of faithful, devout Christians, some famous (such as

Augustine, Francis of Assisi, or Joan of Arc), others innocuous and known only to God. On All Saints' Day Christians venerate not only popular saints but lesser known holy men and women as well.

Origins and History

During the very early days of Christianity, only John the Baptist and the martyrs were given the privilege of having a special day for themselves. The rest of the saints were gradually added, and they increased in number after the pope instituted a process of canonization in the fourth century.

The practice of honoring saints and martyrs of the Christian faith may have begun as early as the second century C.E. The "Martyrdom of Polycarp," an encyclical epistle of the Church at Smyrna, writ-

Fun Fact

Samhain means "November" in the Celtic language. The same word was used for the first month of the ancient Celtic calendar and, in particular, the first three nights of this month, the festival marking the beginning of the winter season.

Patron Saints

The various areas and situations of life are watched over by a vast number of patron saints, custodians, and protectors. For example, St. Vitus (c. third century) is the patron saint who keeps people from oversleeping; St. Joseph of Cupertino (1603–63) protects air travelers. Many of these saints have the privilege of their own feast days. For example, St. Hilary of Poitiers (c. 300–68), the patron saint of developmentally challenged children, has his feast day on January 13; the others are all remembered on All Saints' Day.

Fun Fact

The Pantheon in Rome was originally built as a temple to all the gods of the Roman religion, but it has been a Christian church since the seventh century C.E. The Church of Santa Maria ad Martyres is the only building remaining from the ancient world that is still intact and has been used throughout its history.

ten around the middle of the second century, confirms this. In the fourth century, dioceses began to exchange feasts, to transfer relics, and to partake in a common feast. Often, groups of martyrs had been persecuted on the same day; so a joint tribute seemed quite logical. From the persecution of Diocletian (245–313), there were so many martyrs that there were not enough days in the calendar to give each one his or her own feast day. The church, upholding the sentiment that all martyrs deserved to be honored, gradually evolved the practical idea of a common day for all.

The first All Saints' Day has an interesting history behind it. Flavius Phocas Augustus (r. 602–10) ruled Rome and Byzantium as Eastern Roman emperor. During his reign, the Byzantines controlled the city of Rome although the pope enjoyed considerable

power. Since he tended to side with the popes in many of the contemporary theological controversies, Phocas was on good terms with the papacy. During the last year of his reign, Phocas gave the Pantheon (a magnificent edifice in Rome that housed statues of Roman gods and goddesses such as Jupiter, Venus, and Mars) to Pope Boniface IV (r. 608–15) to convert into a church; on May 13, 609, the temple was consecrated by the pope to the Virgin Mary and all the Christian martyrs. Twenty-eight cartloads of sacred bones of various martyrs and saints were believed to have been removed from the catacombs (underground burial places) and placed in a basin made of porphyry (a red Egyptian stone like granite) beneath the main altar of the Pantheon. Boniface renamed the edifice the Church of Santa Maria ad Martyres. This church is believed to be the first pagan temple to be transformed into a Christian shrine, and its consecration, the very first observance of All Saints' Day.

The present observance (November 1) possibly began during the reign of Pope Gregory III (r. 731–41). During his reign All Saints' Day began to embrace all the saints in its observances. In 835 Pope Gregory IV (r. 827–44) fixed the date of the



A French baker's wife shows an All Saints' Day cake that comes with cards detailing the lives of different saints at her bakery in Paris, France. All Saints' Day, which falls on November 1, is a Christian holiday set aside to remember the saints. From left to right, images of St. Thomas, St. Francis of Assisi, and St. Theresese decorate the bakery. (AP Photo/Francois Mori)

festival on November 1 and christened the festival the “Feast of All Saints.”

Around the time of its establishment, the Roman Catholic Church earnestly endeavored to mold pagan local celebrations in order to transform them into Christian holidays. For centuries the church has designated All Saints' Day as a day to exalt the saints. But because the Celts were reluctant to give up their end-of-summer celebration, which is called Samhain (October 31), the Church blended and fused Samhain with All Saints' Day (traditionally celebrated in May) to evolve what is known as the Eve of All Saints, or Eve of All Hallowes, or Hallow Even. The name eventually became Halloween. That is why All Saints' Day has the ancillary festival of Halloween, the underlying purpose of which is to honor and remember everything that is past and gone and to begin life again.

The communion of saints is the focal point of All Saints' Day celebrations. All of God's people, on earth, in heaven, and in the state of cleansing (generally referred to as purgatory) are believed to be inextricably linked in a communion. Orthodox Christians and Catholics alike are steadfast in their belief that the saints are as full of life as those living in this world; what is more, the saints are continually praying for ordinary mortals.

The purpose of all such feasts is to remember each and every one of those noble souls and holy men and women who have departed from this world, whether they are officially recognized by the church as saints or not. It is a celebration of the communion of saints. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the communion of saints provides “a perennial link of charity . . . between the faithful who have already reached their heavenly home, those who are atoning for their sins in purgatory and those who are still pilgrims on Earth. Between them there is, too, an abundant exchange of all good things.”

See also Volume I: ANDORRA; ANGOLA; ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA; ARGENTINA; ARMENIA; AUSTRALIA; AUSTRIA; BELARUS; BELGIUM; BELIZE; BOLIVIA; BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA; BRAZIL; BULGARIA; BURUNDI; CANADA; CAPE VERDE; CHILE; COLOMBIA; CONGO, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE; COSTA RICA; CROATIA; CYPRUS; CZECH

An All Saints' Day Prayer

Father, all-powerful and ever-living God, today we rejoice in the holy men and women of every time and place.

May their prayers bring us your forgiveness and love.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

—From *Christian Prayer: Liturgy of the Hours*

REPUBLIC; DENMARK; DOMINICA; DOMINICAN REPUBLIC; ECUADOR; EL SALVADOR; EQUATORIAL GUINEA; ESTONIA; FINLAND; FRANCE; GEORGIA; GERMANY; GREECE; GRENADA; GUATEMALA; HAITI; HONDURAS; HUNGARY; ICELAND; IRELAND; ITALY; KIRIBATI

See also Volume II: LATVIA; LIECHTENSTEIN; LITHUANIA; LUXEMBOURG; MACEDONIA; MALTA; MEXICO; MICRONESIA, FEDERATED STATES OF; MOLDOVA; MONACO; NAMIBIA; NEW ZEALAND; NICARAGUA; NORWAY; PALAU; PANAMA; PARAGUAY; PERU; PHILIPPINES; POLAND; PORTUGAL; ROMANIA; RUSSIA; RWANDA; ST. LUCIA; SAN MARINO; SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO; SEYCHELLES; SLOVAKIA; SLOVENIA; SPAIN; SWEDEN; SWITZERLAND; TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO; UGANDA; UKRAINE; UNITED KINGDOM; URUGUAY; VATICAN CITY; VENEZUELA

See also Volume III: ALL SOULS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY; PENTECOST

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~ All Souls' Day ~

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Roman Catholic populations
Observed on	November 2
Observed by	Roman Catholics

Introduction

In the Catholic faith All Souls' Day is a day of remembrance for one's deceased loved ones. This festival originated as the early pagan celebration of the dead. These pre-Christian people believed that their deceased loved ones would come back for a meal with their families. Candles were placed near the windows to guide the souls back home, and there were special places set at the table for them. Young children went from house to house asking for food for the returned deceased and gave what they had received to the poor.

On All Souls' Day the living pray for those who are in purgatory. All Souls' Day deliberately follows the celebration of All Saints' Day in order to shift the focus from those in heaven to those in purgatory (where souls are cleansed before going on to heaven). It is observed with festivities and a Mass. The Feast of All Souls is a reminder of the necessity of living a pure life. According to Catholic belief, it is imperative for souls in purgatory to suffer in order to be purged of their sins. All Souls' Day is a time to pray for those souls so that they can enter heaven.

Soulcakes

Soulcakes are flat or round buns made from oatmeal or flour and flavored with saffron and spices. They are eaten on November 1 to celebrate All Hallows' Day, the pagan Feast of the Dead. Plays were once performed on this day to mark the onset of winter. In Cheshire, the actors were called Soul Cakers or Soulers because they visited every house in the neighborhood asking for soulcakes in return for a blessing or a song. This was a tradition in the Middle Ages, when soulcakes were regarded as payment for souls afflicted in purgatory. It was the Protestant Reformation that eventually brought this practice to an end.

Origins and History

Certain beliefs linked with the festival are of pagan origin, a blending of beliefs from the Old and New Worlds. Before it was turned into a church festival in 998, All Souls' Day in Europe was marked with observances from the festival of Odin or Woden, the supreme god of wisdom and war in Norse (Viking) mythology. Odin was believed to welcome the spirits of brave warriors (Einherjar) into his grand hall Valhalla. The souls of these warriors were gathered to aid the gods in Ragnarok (the final battle of the world). In order to get the very best warriors into Valhalla, Odin was believed to start wars and then send his Valkyries (female divinities who served him) to make the battles go the way he wanted them to go and to choose the dead who would reside in Valhalla.

In South America the Spanish conquest in 1521 resulted in a blending of Catholic and Amerindian beliefs. The Aztec calendar had two months dedicated to observances for the dead, including a grand feast for dead adults in the 10th month. The ninth month was dedicated to dead children. The Aztecs believed that the souls of dead people had to go through nine stages before reaching Mictlan, the place of the dead, and that their destiny was set at the time of birth. They also believed that the fate of peoples' souls depended on how they died (which also determined the region to which their soul would go), rather than the quality of the lives they had led. After arriving at their specific destination, the souls either awaited transformation or lingered, waiting for their next destiny. It is possible that some of the practices and beliefs surrounding All Souls' Day (or Day of the Dead) can be traced back to that cultural fusion as well.

All Souls' Day is the day reserved in the Roman Catholic Church to honor the souls waiting in purgatory to enter heaven. Souls that have not been cleansed of venial sins, or those who have not repented for past transgressions, cannot enter heaven. Catholics believe, however, that the Masses

and prayers of living members of the church will help their deceased friends and families get into heaven. To that end the clergy perform three requiem Masses to help the souls proceed from purgatory to heaven: one Mass for the departed, one Mass for the celebrant, and one Mass for the pope.

The custom of celebrating this day started separately from that of the Feast of All Saints on November 1. The Feast of All Souls can be traced back to the seventh-century monks, who offered Mass on the day following Pentecost for their departed community members. In the late 10th century, the Benedictine monastery in Cluny, France, decided to schedule the Mass for their deceased on November 2, the day following the



A woman cleans a tomb in preparation for All Souls' Day (Day of the Dead) at the Metropolitan Cemetery in San Jose, Costa Rica. Throughout the world it is customary to clean and decorate the tombs of loved ones in observance of All Souls' Day. (AP Photo/Kent Gilbert)

Halloween

The festival of Halloween originated in the Celtic Samhain celebration of summer's end and the beginning of winter, also known as the reign of the "lord of death" over 2,000 years ago. The Celts believed that, on their New Year's Eve, the last day of the month of October, dead souls arose and searched for the passage to the netherworld, because the veil between the two worlds was very fragile. Lord Samhain, lord of the darkness, also roamed the Earth on this night, searching for these wandering souls so he could take them back to his world. The practice of putting lights in windows to help the dead elude the clutches of Lord Samhain originated in those days. It was believed that, on the festival's eve, he would also collect the evil spirits that had been dwelling in animals for the previous 12 months.

Feast of All Saints. This tradition broadened, and in the 13th century Rome officially added the feast to the church calendar.

There are many customs connected with All Souls' Day celebrations. In many Catholic homes, an altar is built for offerings of food. It is said that the dead consume the offering in spirit, while the living eat it later. The offerings, are often decorated with marigolds, the flower of the dead. A candle is lit for each departed soul. Incense is widely used, and photos, mementos, and other objects connected with the deceased adorn the altar.

During the Reformation, the observance of All Souls' Day was eradicated in the Anglican Church, although it has been reinstated in some churches in England, in association with the "Catholic revival." Among Protestants in Europe, the custom has been more stubbornly maintained. Even Martin Luther's authority was not adequate to eradicate its observance in Saxony (in Germany) during the great Protestant leader's lifetime, and the festival's memory survives in popular customs among Lutherans. In France, it is customary for people, regardless of rank or creed, to adorn the graves of their departed; in Germany people go to the cemeteries to offer flowers.

It is a long-standing belief in many countries that on one night of the year the souls of the dead return to their worldly homes, where they must be given food. If shelter or food is not given, the spirits cast spells on the house. In Tirol, Austria, cakes are left for the deceased on the table and rooms are kept warm for their comfort. The people of Brittany (in northwestern France) gather in cemeteries at nightfall to kneel bareheaded at the graves of their loved ones, and then sprinkle the tombstones with holy water or milk. Before bedtime, supper is left on the table for the souls.

Venial Sins and Mortal Sins

In Catholicism a distinction is made between venial (lesser) sins and mortal (grave) sins. A mortal sin must meet three criteria:

1. The sin must be a serious moral error.
2. The sin must be committed with total knowledge and consciousness.
3. The sin must be committed with total consent.

A venial sin is one that does not meet all three conditions.



The trio of celebrations comprising All Saints' Day Eve, All Saints' Day, and All Souls' Day came to be known as *Hallowmas*.

See also Volume I: ANDORRA; ANGOLA; ARGENTINA; AUSTRIA; BELGIUM; BELIZE; BOLIVIA; BRAZIL; BURUNDI; CAPE VERDE; CHILE; COLOMBIA; CONGO, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE; COSTA

RICA; CROATIA; CZECH REPUBLIC; DOMINICA; DOMINICAN REPUBLIC; ECUADOR; EL SALVADOR; EQUATORIAL GUINEA; FRANCE; GERMANY; GRENADA; GUATEMALA; HAITI; HONDURAS; HUNGARY; IRELAND; ITALY; KIRIBATI

See also Volume II: LIECHTENSTEIN; LITHUANIA; LUXEMBOURG; MALTA; MEXICO; MICRONESIA, FEDERATED STATES OF; MONACO; NICARAGUA; PALAU; PANAMA; PARAGUAY; PERU; PHILIPPINES; POLAND; PORTUGAL; RWANDA; ST. LUCIA; SAN MARINO; SEYCHELLES; SLOVAKIA; SLOVENIA; SPAIN; SWITZERLAND; TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO; UGANDA; URUGUAY; VATICAN CITY; VENEZUELA

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; CHRISTIANITY; PENTECOST

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Amish

FACT FILE

Located in	United States and Canada
World Population	About 180,000 (only adults are considered Amish)
Place of Origin	Switzerland

Introduction

The Amish are a Christian group with roots in the European Reformation that has become well known for its efforts to maintain its separatist agricultural life, resisting involvement with the state and modern technology. Although the Amish give the impression of living like 19th-century villagers, they have been changing. The Amish scrutinize change and will accept modern gadgetry into their lives, provided doing so does not change their simple lifestyle, which is based on a literal interpretation of the Bible. They live by a set of written and unwritten rules called the Ordnung. They prefer horses and buggies to cars, do not have electricity in their homes, and send their children to small private schoolhouses. The Amish pay school taxes but do not allow their children to continue their education past the eighth grade. Indeed in 1972 the U.S. Supreme Court issued a major decision excusing the Old Order Amish and connected groups from state compulsory attendance laws beyond the eighth grade. However, progressive Amish, along with many Mennonites, attend high school, and some go on to college.

Another point of controversy has been military service, because the Amish are pacifists. During World War II the Amish were given permission to serve their military obligation in civilian public service jobs. This period of public service was awkward for them. After exposure to the conveniences of secular society, they found it difficult to readjust to the Amish way of life once they had completed their service.

Over time the scarcity and rising price of farmland has forced the Amish beyond their historical boundaries in order to find work, making contact with modernity and technology unavoidable and inevitable. As a result of having to abandon farming, some Amish have started their own businesses, while others have accepted “luxuries” such as telephones and, in some cases, even cell phones. A good number of the Amish work in nonagricultural jobs.

The Ordnung (or Order)

The Ordnung comprises the written and unwritten rules and regulations of the Amish church community. It reflects the divine order as opposed to the order of the world and provides laws that give both form and meaning to the daily lives of the Amish. The Ordnung’s purpose is not only to provide a list of individually acceptable or forbidden behaviors, but also to structure a way of life, lived according to God’s will, as expressed in the Gospels. The Ordnung determines broad principles of faith as well as rules for everyday living.

The Amish way of dressing, however, has remained untouched by modern influence. To the Amish, their clothing is an expression of their faith. Their clothing is made from solid colors. Women have the responsibility of making clothes for the family. They wear simple dresses with long sleeves and full skirts. Capes and aprons generally cover their dresses and are fastened with snaps or pins. Amish women do not cut their hair because they believe the Bible discourages the practice.

A man’s good clothing requires a three-piece suit, with hooks and eyes fastening the vest and jacket. The Amish refuse to wear buttons; they believe buttons make their suits resemble military uniforms.

As a rule the Amish avoid anything military because of their pacifism and their persecution by the military in Europe. Men do not shave after marriage, save for the portion above their upper lips, because moustaches also remind them of military harassment.

Choosing a bride is the most important decision of an Amish man’s life. Boys and girls begin to look for partners at the age of 16. By the time a young woman turns 20 and a young man is in his



early 20s, their wedding day is imminent; so it is imperative for the prospective couple to become members of the church. They are baptized into the Amish faith and take on the responsibility of following the *Ordnung*. When he proposes the man may give the woman a clock or a piece of china, not a diamond ring. It is customary for the couple to keep their engagement secret until July or August, when the girl tells her parents about her intentions.

October 11 is Fast Day in Amish communities. It is also the signal for hectic activity to begin. Fall communion occurs the following Sunday, and the second Sunday after the Fast is a big day for the church, because all the couples who want to get married are “published.” This means that after the service the deacon announces the names of the girls to be married and their partners. The fathers then announce the wedding dates. Weddings are set on a Tuesday or Thursday in November or December. The bride wears a blue dress covered by an apron and a cape. Her wedding outfit will become her Sunday church attire, and she will be buried in the same dress when she dies. After the wedding, the couple visits friends’ and relatives’ houses, where gifts await them. The gifts are generally practical items intended for everyday use.

The Amish community is a tightly knit group. They are opposed to buying insurance, and the only

indemnity is the fund supported by the church. In case of a disaster, the whole community helps the victim. If an Amish man is sick, and his work needs to be completed, his neighbors get together to do it for him, before they complete their own tasks.

While the Amish keep a distance from the outside world, the commercialization of their culture has no doubt benefited them. Tourism is one major factor. Initially it was resented, and people started moving away from heavily populated areas. But tourism has brought the Amish great economic benefits. The public’s growing interest in them has earned the Amish some sympathy, and as a consequence the government has been discouraged from infringing on their rights.

Ultimately, commercialization has not done much to change the simple Amish way of life. They continue to adhere to their beliefs, and their communities are still growing.

Origins and History

The Amish movement was started in Europe in 1693 by a Swiss named Jacob Amman (b. 1644), from whom the group gets its name. The movement was in many ways an attempt to restore the early practices of the Mennonites. Menno Simons (1496–1561),



Three young Amish woman sing for dinner guests at an Amish home near Baltic, Ohio. (AP Photo/Mark Duncan)

Amish Sugar Cookies

Ingredients:

- 1 c. sugar
- 1 c. powdered sugar
- 1 c. butter
- 1 c. oil
- 2 eggs
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. cream of tartar
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 4 ½ c. flour

Preparation:

Blend all ingredients together and chill for at least one-half hour. Using floured hands, shape the mixture into balls and place them on a cookie sheet; flatten the balls with the bottom of a chilled glass dipped in sugar. Sprinkle with colored sugar. Bake at 350°F until the edges are golden.

Dutch Anabaptist leader, began the Mennonite movement because he believed that the Catholic Church had lost touch with the New Testament message and was concentrating too much on legends and fables. The Anabaptists (also called Rebaptizers) opposed baptizing children. They believed that only those who were old enough to confess their faith should be eligible for baptism and that they must be isolated from the greater society. This was a declaration that aroused the ire of both Catholics and Protestants, who put them to death for heresy, causing many Anabaptists to flee to the mountains of Switzerland and southern Germany. That was when their tradition of holding church services at home and taking up farming began.

Jacob Amman established the Amish religion because he believed that the Mennonites were drifting away from their original beliefs and practices and paying less heed to the writings of Menno Simons. The Amish faith was created when his group split from the Mennonite movement. Amish practice differed from that of the Mennonites in three ways: Amman wanted the rite of Communion to be performed twice instead of once a year (as was the practice in his time), because he believed that it would help the Amish become more diligent Christians if they received Communion every six months. He also reintroduced the practice of washing the feet of others that Jesus had inspired by washing the feet of his disciples. Third, Amman advocated a tougher, more consistent stance in shunning non-conforming members, those who had strayed from the laws of the Bible.

After a few years as a distinct breakaway group, Amman and his followers unsuccessfully tried to reconcile with the Mennonites. In the early 18th century, some of the Amish started immigrating to the North American British colonies, which would soon become the United States. However, most of them remained in Europe and rejoined the Mennonites. In

1937, when the last Amish stronghold merged with the parent organization in Germany, the Amish ceased to exist in Europe as an organized movement.

The Amish who immigrated to America went to Pennsylvania, a colony that had become a refuge for persecuted religions. Most Amish groups settled in Lancaster County, which is still home to one of the more prominent Amish communities. Now, however, the Amish live in settlements in 22 states across the United States and in Ontario, Canada.

The Amish advocate humility, community spirit, and separation from the world. Notwithstanding their numerous disagreements, they still share a lot with the Mennonites, particularly in matters of baptism, pacifism, and adherence to biblical doctrine. Their differences concern beliefs regarding how to dress, the proper form of worship, the use of technology, their relationship with the world, and the interpretation of the Bible (the Amish interpret the Bible literally). The Amish are arguably the more old-fashioned and rigid of the two, while the Mennonites have been more open to embracing a modern way of life.

Amish Quilts

The Amish women of Pennsylvania Dutch country have been creating dramatic quilts for the last 200 years. Quilt-making serves more than just a functional purpose; it is a source of entertainment as well. When groups of women gather for quilting bees, they use the time to catch up on familial as well as community news after the completion of their household duties. Today it has become something of a business, with a number of quilt cottage industries cropping up.

Holidays and Religious Observances

The Amish celebrate traditional Christian holy days—Easter and Christmas, for example—but their observations are very simple because they do not use electricity or any of the other technological

Fun Fact

The Amish are trilingual: They speak a dialect of German called Pennsylvania Dutch at home; High German is the language of their church services; and they learn English at school. When they deal with people who are not Amish, they speak English, and they also refer to anyone outside their community as “English.”

conveniences many people now take for granted. They also observe a Fast Day on October 11. The Amish do not hold their religious services in a special church building. Instead, they usually meet in each other’s homes every other week. These services include singing, two prayers, Bible reading, a short opening sermon, and a main sermon, after which each baptized male is expected to comment on the sermons’ biblical correctness.

Each congregation is autonomous; there is no centralized “authority” that makes rules or enforces beliefs and observances.

Instead, each community follows its own Ordnung, an oral tradition of rules regarding the proper way to live an Amish life. These Ordnung are periodically reviewed and revised when the community comes to an agreement about a change. Communion services are held twice a year, in the spring and fall. Before the service, a meeting is held in which the participants resolve any disagreements that they have with each other and discuss matters pertaining to proper lifestyle and conduct.

The Amish do not baptize their children when they are born because they believe that making a commitment to the church community is something to be done only after one has become an adult

and is capable of making an informed decision. Instead, some Amish communities have a tradition called *rumspringa* (“running around”). Because they have not been baptized and have not committed to the extremely strict behavioral restrictions and community rules imposed by the religion, they can explore various aspects of the outside world. It is a period of several years when teenagers of 16 years and older are given some freedom and allowed to make their own choices. They continue to live at home, but are no longer under the complete control of their parents. They can date, hang out with their friends, go out into the non-Amish world, attend parties, drink alcohol, wear jeans, and so on. *Rumspringa* ensures that young people are giving their informed consent should they decide to be baptized and accept the strictures of living within an Amish community.

Like other aspects of Amish religious life, funerals are held in the home without a eulogy, flower decorations, or other display. The casket is plain and unadorned. When she dies, an Amish woman is usually buried in her bridal dress. A simple tombstone marks the grave following burial.

See also Volume I: CANADA

See also Volume II: UNITED STATES

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Ascension, The

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Christian populations
Observed on	Fortieth day after Easter; it always falls on a Thursday
Observed by	Christians, primarily Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox Christians, and Anglicans

Introduction

The Feast of the Ascension celebrates the Christian belief that Jesus rose to heaven 40 days after his Resurrection from the dead on Easter Sunday. According to the Bible, during the time between Jesus' Resurrection and his Ascension into heaven he appeared to his disciples numerous times, eating, drinking, and conversing with them about the kingdom of God. Christians also believe that Ascension Day was the last time Jesus was seen on Earth, and that his second coming will coincide with the end of days or Armageddon. Doctrinally, the Ascension of Jesus is important to Christians. Along with his Resurrection, it is one more proof of Jesus' legitimacy as a prophet and the Son of God. According to Christian belief, the Ascension was his ultimate triumph over Satan's powers.

Both Roman Catholics and Anglicans celebrate the Ascension on the 40th day after Easter Sunday. In these traditions, it always falls on a Thursday and is usually celebrated on the actual day. However, there are some places, including the United States, Australia, and Poland, where the feast is observed on the following Sunday. This is also true in places that do not have regular church services on weekdays. Orthodox Christians also observe the Ascension as a feast day, but it falls six days later, because they follow the Julian calendar.

Until recently, it was traditional in Rome to put out the Paschal candle (the candle lit on Easter Day) after the reading of the Gospel on the Feast of the Ascension to symbolize Jesus' departure from the apostles. Flowers, images, and relics embellish the altar. In the Anglican Church, Ascension Day is the only weekday, barring Christmas, for which there is a special preface to the Communion.

Christian art and iconography of former eras frequently depicted Jesus' defeat of evil. The lion (Jesus) vanquishing the dragon (Satan) was a common symbol of the Ascension.

Origins and History

Though the origins of this religious observance are not clear, St. Augustine identified it as an apostolic tradition. By the fourth century, the feast was usually marked by a procession, signifying Jesus' journey to the Mount of Olives, the place of the Ascension.

English history records that during the procession there were banners depicting Jesus at the head and banners depicting Satan at the foot. These represented Jesus' defeat of Satan while ascending into heaven. In some churches the Ascension was symbolized by elevating the figure of Jesus above the altar through a hole made in the roof of the church. In others, while the figure of Jesus was made to ascend, Satan's was made to descend.

Not all customs associated with this day have stood the test of time. One such loss was the tradition of Rogation Days, a community festival that used to be held on the three days preceding the Ascension. During the festival, various saints were asked for

Fun Fact

First celebrated in 68 C.E., the Ascension is one of the earliest Christian festivals, and it is one of the 12 Great Feasts of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Ascension Island

Ascension Island lies in the South Atlantic Ocean, about 750 miles northwest of the Island of St. Helena. In 1501 Joao da Nova Castelia, a Portuguese seafarer, discovered the island, which covers an area of 35 square miles. His visit, however, went unrecorded, and it was rediscovered two years later on the Ascension by Alphonse d'Albuquerque (1453–1515), who named the island.

Fun Fact

Analepsis (“the taking up”) and *episozomene* (“the salvation”) are Eastern Orthodox names for the Feast of the Ascension; both signify the belief that Jesus completed the salvation of humanity by ascending into heaven.

favors. The popularity of Rogation Days declined with the Reformation and had utterly faded by the end of the 19th century.

There is a plethora of superstitions attached to Ascension Day. Eggs placed on the roof were thought to bring good luck and to protect the home from lightning and fire. At midnight on the Ascension, if people suffering from goiter bit the bark of a peach tree, the disease was supposed to be transferred to the tree, and their goiters would be cured. It was also believed that gifts to the blind or the lame

were sure to be rewarded with riches during the next 12 months. Rain collected on the Ascension was said to heal diseased eyes.

The mystique around Ascension Day has different connotations in different countries and different regions within those countries. In Devon, a county in southwest England, it was believed that clouds looked like lambs on this day. Sunny weather signified a long, hot summer; rains meant that crops would fail, and livestock would suffer diseases.

At Tissington in the county of Derby, the residents unfailingly decorate their wells with biblical verses laid out in letters made of flowers. They do this because wells used to be a symbol of purity, and May was considered the best month to visit healing springs.

A Welsh superstition says that it is unlucky to work on Ascension Day. In 1888, quarrymen at the extensive slate quarries near Bangor, Wales, refused to work on Ascension because they believed that an accident was bound to occur during the day if work continued. The management had, a few years prior, convinced the quarrymen to work on Ascension Day, but each year there was a serious accident, and with each death the superstition gained credence.

In Armenia stream water is supposed to have healing powers at midnight on this day. For that matter, any water that falls from the sky would have the same power. In Sweden a person who fishes

from dawn until nightfall on this day would know the exact hour when the fish bite best, thus ensuring luck in his efforts all year. In Greece it is the start of the swimming season. In Venice, the doge (as the chief magistrate was formerly known) marries the sea by throwing holy water in along with a wedding ring. In Armenia it is said that on Ascension Eve inanimate and soulless objects receive the gift of speech and share each others' secrets. In Poland the Sun is said to dance when it rises on this day.

See also Volume I: ANDORRA; ANGOLA; ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA; ARGENTINA; ARMENIA; AUSTRALIA; AUSTRIA; BELARUS; BELGIUM; BELIZE; BOLIVIA; BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA; BRAZIL; BULGARIA; BURUNDI; CANADA; CAPE VERDE; CHILE; COLOMBIA; CONGO, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE; COSTA RICA; CROATIA; CYPRUS; CZECH REPUBLIC; DOMINICA; DOMINICAN REPUBLIC; ECUADOR; EL SALVADOR; EQUATORIAL GUINEA; FRANCE; GEORGIA; GERMANY; GREECE; GRENADA; GUATEMALA; HAITI; HONDURAS; HUNGARY; IRELAND; ITALY; KIRIBATI

See also Volume II: LIECHTENSTEIN; LITHUANIA; LUXEMBOURG; MACEDONIA; MALTA; MEXICO; MICRONESIA, FEDERATED STATES OF; MOLDOVA; MONACO; NEW ZEALAND; NICARAGUA; PALAU; PANAMA; PARAGUAY; PERU; PHILIPPINES; POLAND; PORTUGAL; ROMANIA; RUSSIA; RWANDA; ST. LUCIA; SAN MARINO; SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO; SEYCHELLES; SLOVAKIA; SLOVENIA; SPAIN; SWITZERLAND; TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO; UGANDA; UKRAINE; UNITED KINGDOM; URUGUAY; VATICAN CITY; VENEZUELA

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER

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∞ Ashura ∞

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Shia Muslim populations
Observed on	First 10 days of Muharram, the first month in the Islamic calendar
Observed by	Primarily Shia Muslims

Introduction

After the two Eids—Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha—Ashura is the third most important Islamic festival. The word *ashura* means “ten” in Arabic; the festival’s name means “the tenth day.” Ashura falls on the 10th day of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar. The day marks the martyr-



An Iranian Shiite man weeps as he listens to the story of Imam Hussein bin Ali’s death in Karbala, Iraq. Shiite Muslims observe Ashura each year to commemorate the death of the Shiite saint Imam Hussein. (AP Photo/Hussein Malla)

dom of Hussein bin Ali, Muhammad’s grandson and the third Shia imam, at the Battle of Karbala in 680. The Battle of Karbala was a watershed in the history of Islam, because it was fought between Sunni and Shia Muslims over who was Muhammad’s legitimate heir to the leadership of Islam.

For Sunni Muslims Ashura has been observed as a single day of austerity and fasting since the early days of Islam. It commemorates two biblical events: the day Nuh (Noah) left the Ark, and the day that Musa (Moses) was rescued from the Egyptians by God. The Shia, who consider Hussein the true successor to Muhammad, treat Ashura as a somber 10-day event, and every evening for 10 days imams whip devotees into frenzies of guilt and breast-beating. Plays depicting the death of Hussein bin Ali are also often enacted with as much elaboration as can be managed. On the first day of Muharram, people put on their mourning clothes and do not shave or bathe. The culminating events of the 10-day observance are processions of Shia men in which some of the more devout practice self-mortification and express their grief by beating their chests, flagellating themselves with iron chains, and cutting themselves with swords. In this way participants show their willingness to sacrifice themselves and atone for being too much like the Kufans, who failed to support their would-be leader, allowing him to be butchered by the Umayyad caliph Yazid (c. 645–83). In Karbala, Iraq, Ashura concludes on the 10th day with a procession that ends at the Mashhad al-Hussein, a shrine traditionally recognized as Hussein’s tomb.

People throughout the Muslim world fast on Ashura (either in memory of the martyrs or following Muhammad’s example), maintain a somber mood, and prepare several special dishes to be consumed by families, communities, friends, and acquaintances. Eating food from the same pot creates and maintains harmony, peace, and cordial interpersonal relationships among the individuals.

Fun Fact

Many aging Shia move to Karbala or request that their bodies be taken to the holy city for burial. So many Shia dead have been sent to Karbala that the town has become one huge cemetery.

Aabis Ibn Abi Shabib al-Shakiry

Aabis Ibn Abi Shabib al-Shakiry was one of the most courageous and devoted men in Hussein's army during the Battle of Karbala. It is said that he was so old that he had to bind a piece of cloth on his forehead in order to keep his eyebrows from covering his eyes. When Aabis realized that no one from the enemy camp dared to fight him, he took off all his armor. Someone noticed this and cried out that Aabis had gone crazy. His rejoinder was that his love for Hussein had made him go mad.

Origins and History

Karbala, which means "anguish and vexation," is situated 50 miles southwest of Baghdad and about 6 miles west of the Euphrates River. On the 10th day of the month of Muharram in 680 the political ambitions and thirst for power of Yazid, the Sunni caliph of Damascus, led to the massacre of the Shia imam Hussein bin Ali and his sons, along with 18 relatives, 54 friends, and all the women and children with him. After the death of Muhammad in 632, this battle is considered the second most important event in the history of Islam.

During the pre-Islamic period on the Arabian Peninsula, fighting was prohibited for four months of the year. These months, including what became the first month of the Islamic calendar, were considered sacred. The tradition was maintained even after the advent of Islam, though there were provisions to wage war in special situations. The gory Battle of Karbala was a flagrant violation of this law. The inhabitants on the banks of the rivers Tigris and Euphrates were traditional rivals. Their

Ashura and Ramadan

The practice of fasting on the day of Ashura was compulsory in the early days of Islam. However, Muslims believe that in 624 Allah commanded Muhammad to require all Muslims to observe a dawn-to-dusk fast during the entire month of Ramadan. Fasting on Ashura therefore became a voluntary exercise. Anyone who wants to fast on Ashura may do so, but there is no penalty for not fasting on that day.

animosity was controlled to a certain extent by Muhammad. But when his son-in-law Hazrat Ali was made caliph, the old enmity between the groups resurfaced. Hazrat Ali had two descendants, Hazrat Imam Hussein and Hazrat Imam Hassan. The former was the ruler of a kingdom, part of which is now Iran. The other half of the kingdom was made up of the area of modern-day Iraq, which was ruled by the Umayyads.

Hussein was called upon by the Shia of Kufa, a small town in the Umayyad kingdom, to accept their allegiance and claim his place as the leader of the Islamic community. This was vehemently opposed by the Umayyad caliph, Yazid, who instructed his governor Ibn-e-Ziad to take appropriate action. Meanwhile in response to the request of the Shia, Hussein, accompanied by his family, set out for Kufa. When they reached Karbala, en route to Kufa, the forces of the governor ambushed them. Abandoned by the Shia of Kufa, Hussein, his family, including his two sons, and his troops were tortured and brutally killed; Hussein was decapitated, his head was impaled on a spear, and it was carried back to Damascus. His body, however, was buried at Karbala.

Hussein's death is generally viewed in Shia circles as a heroic fight against tyranny, injustice, and oppression. Among the Shia, "Every day is Ashura, and every land is Karbala." In Iran, Ashura—including its doctrine of martyrdom and messianic redemption—became a key political symbol of the Islamic revolution (1978–79), and banners proclaimed, "We are not the people of Kufa." The same was the case in Lebanon during the civil war (1975–76) that raged there.

In the early days of Islam, Muhammad decreed that the date in the Muslim lunar calendar of the Jewish observance Yom Kippur be observed by the devout with a 24-hour fast. Even though, in due course, it was superseded by the more popular Ramadan fast, Muhammad continued to fast on Ashura and suggested that others do so as well; he believed that people who fasted on that day would have their sins of the previous year pardoned by God.

See also Volume I: BAHRAIN; IRAN; IRAQ

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; EID AL-FITR; ISLAM; RAMADAN

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Assumption

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christian populations
Observed on	August 15 by Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians but continued until August 23 in the Orthodox Church
Observed by	Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox Christians

Introduction

According to the beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church, and the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches, as well as stipulated in Catholic theology, the soul and body of Mary, the mother of Jesus, revered as the Blessed Virgin Mary (Roman Catholic) or Theotokos (Eastern Orthodox), was taken into heaven when she died. Drawing on apostolic tradition, the doctrine of Mary's Assumption was dogmatically defined—a statement of “infallibility” on it was issued—by Pope Pius XII (r. 1939–58) on November 1, 1950. Since Eastern Churches acknowledge neither the pope's claim to authority over all Christians nor the doctrine of papal infallibility, the authorities of these churches do not view it as dogma as Roman Catholics do. Nevertheless, this feast ranks as one of the 12 Great Feasts of the Orthodox Church calendar.

The Feast of the Assumption is Mary's most important feast. The Assumption is significant to Christians because it is celebrated as Mary's heavenly birthday (the day that Mary was taken into heaven). The belief that heaven received her is seen as proof of the promise Jesus made to all Christians that they, too, will be received into heaven. Both churches commemorate it on August 15. In the Eastern Orthodox Church this event is known as the Feast of the Dormition (literally, “falling asleep,” from Latin *dormire*, meaning “to sleep”), stressing the belief that the mother of Jesus did die a physical death before her Assumption.

The Feast of the Assumption is an official holiday in many countries, including Italy, France, Greece, and Spain, and many places hold festivals and parades in observance of the event. In the Lutheran and Anglican churches, the feast is also kept although without specific reference to the words *assumption* or *dormition*.

St. Mary's Feast of Harvest

In Scotland, a special bannock (pan-fried bread) is prepared on the Assumption. New corn is dried in the sunlight, husked by hand, ground with stones, kneaded on a sheepskin, molded into a cake, and baked on a fire of rowan (mountain ash) wood. All the members of the family in turn (according to their ages) take a piece of the bannock and circle the fire.

Origins and History

Like many holiday observances now thought of as Christian, the Feast of the Assumption probably originated in a European pagan festival. Its origins are probably in a rite dedicated to Artemis, the Greek goddess of transitions. Although considered a virgin, she was one of the goddesses associated with childbirth. She was also an avid hunter and protected her chastity fiercely, dealing mercilessly with anyone who threatened to compromise even the modesty of her attendants. Traces of this early ritual observance remain in some areas of Europe, where the Assumption is still called the Feast of Our Lady of the Harvest. Using the fortuitously shared attribute of virginity, the early church seized on the similarity between Artemis and Mary to draw pagans into Christianity.

The story of Mary's Assumption into heaven following her death was initially related in narratives during the sixth and seventh centuries. Mary's Assumption into heaven is not mentioned in the New Testament. The first person to write about the event in 594 was St. Gregory of Tours (538 or 539–593 or 594). Other early sermons on the feast

Ascension of Jesus and Assumption of Mary

In order to make clear to children the difference between the Ascension of Jesus and the Assumption of Mary, his mother, a minister asked one child to walk from one side of the room to the other; he carried the other child across the room. The first child, who did what was asked of him without help, represented Jesus. The second child symbolized Mary, taken into heaven with God's help.

include those of St. Modestus of Jerusalem, around 700.

On May 1, 1946, Pope Pius XII asked the archbishops of the world whether this belief should be defined as an article of faith and whether the bishops, along with their clergy, desired the definition. Nearly every bishop replied in the affirmative. On November 1, 1950, on the day of the Feast of All Saints, Pope Pius XII declared the dogma that Mary's body was taken up to heaven and reunited with her soul following her death.

Though there is no authentic knowledge of the day, date, and manner of Mary's death, estimates normally range between three and fifteen years after the Ascension of Jesus. Both Ephesus (in Turkey) and Jerusalem claim to be the place where Mary died. Though according to tradition Mary lived at Ephesus following Jesus' death, her tomb was apparently found in Jerusalem. Following Pentecost, it is said that Mary remained in Jerusalem, looking after the fledgling Christian community. She was staying with the Apostle John, who later became known as the Evangelist. When she died (in her early 50s according to some) many of Christ's Apostles were already scattered around the world, preaching the Gospel. According to tradition, all except Thomas were brought to the Blessed Virgin, carried on clouds. The disciples sang interment hymns and carried her to a tomb in a place called Cedron, which is near Gethsemane. A man tried to hinder their somber procession, but an angel appeared and cut off his hands, which were later restored. The Apostle Thomas arrived on the third day after Mary's death and asked to see her one more time. When they opened the tomb to satisfy his request, the tomb was empty, and the Apostles concluded that her body had been assumed or taken up into heaven.

There is a significant difference between Jesus' Ascension into heaven following the Resurrection and Mary's Assumption. To "ascend" means to rise under one's own power; while to be "assumed" is something that is done to one. The first action

requires agency; the second is passive. Jesus, as the second element of the Christian Trinity, did not need any help; Mary did not have the same authority.

According to tradition, Mary was forewarned of her death by the Archangel Michael, who is believed to conduct souls to heaven. On her deathbed, she was surrounded by the Apostles, who had been transported miraculously to her bedside from their respective mission fields. It was believed that Jesus appeared, took away her soul, and came back three days following her burial, when angels took her body to paradise, where it was reunited with her soul.

The Feast of the Dormition celebrates the death, Assumption, and veneration of Mary, mother of Jesus. The feast is preceded by a two-week fast. Like the Nativity of the Virgin (September 8–September 21) and the Feast of Mary's Entrance into the Temple (November 21–December 4), this feast also comes from the apostolic tradition of the Catholic Church.

According to the church, Mary died a normal human death and was affected by the corruption in the world like everyone else. Mary needed to be saved by Jesus like the rest of the world from the suffering, trials, and mortality to which humans submit. When she died, she was raised by her son as the Mother of Life and now exists in the everlasting life of paradise, which is promised to everyone who imitates her life of modesty, obedience, and love.

The icon of the Dormition of the Theotokos (the mother of God in the Orthodox tradition) depicts Mary upon a funeral bier. Jesus, who is standing beside her, has come to take her soul to heaven. In his left arm he holds a child in white, representing Mary's soul reborn in heaven. Jesus is robed in white and is seen in an aureole (an elongated halo) that portrays his divinity. The Apostles are portrayed on either side of the funeral bier. St. Peter stands at the head of the funeral bier and leads the group on the left; St. Paul is at the foot of the bier and leads the group on the right. Below the bier is a figure of Antonius the Jew, the man who tried to hinder the funeral procession and was castigated, but who later atoned for his sins and was baptized into the Christian faith.

In Catholic countries, the Virgin Mary's Assumption is one of the more popular festivals of the year. The theme of the heavenly crowning of Mary as the queen of heaven, which is often depicted in sculpture and paintings, is related to her Assumption into heaven, where she sits next to her son.

The title Mother of God was formally bestowed on Mary at the Council of Ephesus in 431.

See also Volume I: ANDORRA; ANGOLA; ARGENTINA; ARMENIA; AUSTRIA; BELARUS; BELGIUM; BELIZE; BOLIVIA; BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA; BRAZIL; BULGARIA; BURUNDI; CAPE VERDE; CHILE; COLOMBIA; CONGO, DEMOCRATIC REPUB-

LIC OF THE; COSTA RICA; CROATIA; CYPRUS; CZECH REPUBLIC; DOMINICA; DOMINICAN REPUBLIC; ECUADOR; EL SALVADOR; EQUATORIAL GUINEA; FRANCE; GEORGIA; GERMANY; GREECE; GRENADA; GUATEMALA; HAITI; HONDURAS; HUNGARY; IRELAND; ITALY; KIRIBATI

See also Volume II: LIECHTENSTEIN; LITHUANIA; LUXEMBOURG; MACEDONIA; MALTA; MEXICO; MICRONESIA, FEDERATED STATES OF; MOLDOVA; MONACO; NEW ZEALAND; NICARAGUA; PALAU; PANAMA; PARAGUAY; PERU; PHILIPPINES; POLAND; PORTUGAL; ROMANIA; RUSSIA; RWANDA; ST. LUCIA; SAN MARINO; SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO; SEYCHELLES; SLOVAKIA; SLOVENIA; SPAIN; SWITZERLAND; TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO; UGANDA; UKRAINE; URUGUAY; VATICAN CITY; VENEZUELA

See also Volume III: ASCENSION, THE; CHRISTIANITY; PENTECOST

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~ Bahá'í Faith ~

FACT FILE

Observed in	Primarily India and Iran
World Population	About 6 million
Place of Origin	Persia (now Iran)

Introduction

The Bahá'í Faith, an offshoot of the Shiite branch of Islam, began to take its present form in Iran in 1844. The faith was originated by a young Iranian named Siyyid Ali-Muhammad (1819–50), who called himself the Bab, which means “the gate.” He alerted people to the coming of a messenger from God, who would be next in the line of great prophets that included Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. The Muslim hierarchy persecuted the Bab and his followers because the Bab’s teachings clashed with the Islamic faith, particularly concerning one point of primary importance to Islam: the Muslim belief that Muhammad was the final messenger of God.

The Bab was subsequently executed for his heresy. Twenty thousand Babís, as the Bab’s followers were known, were martyred for the cause. In 1863 one of the Bab’s followers had a revelation while in prison that he was the messenger of God of whom his deceased leader had prophesied. He called himself Baháullah (1817–92), meaning “the glory of God.” He was the founder of the Bahá'í religion.

Born Mirza Husayn, Baháullah was a man endowed with great wealth, who lost much of it during the persecution that resulted from his open endorsement of the teachings of the Bab. Nevertheless, Baháullah was a man known for his generosity and greatly respected by his comrades.

The Number Nine

The number nine is significant in the Bahá'í Faith. The Local Spiritual Assemblies, the National Assemblies, and the Universal House of Worship are all run by nine-member boards. Nine also signifies the number of current religions in the world, according to the Bahá'í; and, as the highest single digit, nine symbolizes the faith that transcends all human boundaries.

Baháullah’s death was not the end of the Bahá'í religion. Abdul-Baha (1844–1921), the eldest son of Baháullah, spent much of his time spreading Bahá'í teachings around the world and was responsible for taking Bahá'í teachings to the West. Through a series of letters he developed the Bahá'í ideas of social reform and international justice, illuminating the faith with these ideas.

After Abdul-Baha’s death, his eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957), succeeded him; Effendi continued his grandfather’s missionary work and further developed the Bahá'í philosophy. When Shoghi Effendi died, the leadership passed to a group of believers instead of to a single individual. This led to the present leadership, called the Universal House of Justice.

Although the Bahá'í Faith is the youngest of the world’s independent religions, it ranks as one of the most widely practiced. Its adherents cover a broad spectrum of the world community, encompassing nations, races, and myriad cultures.

The central idea of the Bahá'í religion is unity. The Bahá'í Faith is based on three principles: the oneness of God, the oneness of religion, and the oneness of humanity. Followers believe that the time has come for the world to shed its diversity and become one people, ignoring the superficial differences created by the variety of races, cultures, and religions. While the origin of the Bahá'í Faith was Islam, and many of its teachings have their roots in the Koran, it is primarily different from its parent religion in its acceptance of the legitimacy of other great faiths.

The Bahá'í year follows the Badi calendar (see Appendix III).

Origins and History

The Bahá'í Faith first appeared in Persia and spread to the neighboring Muslim regions of Russia, the Ottoman Empire, and the northern part of India.

Although some early followers were of Jewish, Christian, or Zoroastrian backgrounds, the vast majority were followers of Islam.

The Bahai community worldwide can lay claim to being the most widespread body of people on earth. The Bahai Faith is practiced by people from vastly different religious backgrounds who study a common set of writings, observe one code of religious laws, and look to a single international body for guidance.

Given their emphasis on unity, it is not surprising that the Bahai community has constructed one of the world's most unified religious organizations. The Bahai have a range of institutions to preside over the administrative affairs of their faith. In each region, nine-member boards known as Local Spiritual Assemblies are elected annually. There are also National Spiritual Assemblies, which are also nine-member boards, that govern the affairs of the Bahai community in individual countries. The highest administrative unit is the Universal House of Justice, a nine-member board elected every five years by the members of the National Spiritual Assemblies. The Universal House of Justice is now based in Haifa, Israel. Bahai believe that there is no need for a clergy because each individual is capable of exploring the revelations of God.

Bahai has certain tenets at the heart of the faith, and the oneness of humanity is the fulcrum of its teachings. The Bahai believe that all women and men are equal in God's eyes and that people must have the same educational and economic opportunities, regardless of their origin or race. In the Bahai view there is no superior race or religion. They also believe that the current state of the world is one phase in a transition that will ultimately and inevitably lead to the unification of the human race.

The Bahai believe that there is only one God and that all the world's religions have come from God. They argue that the followers of each prophet or messenger should be able to honor the prophets of other religions. Abdul-Baha taught the harmony between science and religion, referring to them as two wings with which the human soul can progress; one cannot work without the other. Religion without science would lead to superstition, he taught, and science without religion paves the way for materialism.

The Bahai believe that the foundation of all great religions is one, that they are divine in origin, and that their basic principles do not differ. Bahauallah once explained that the fundamental spiritual role of religion was to enable human beings to achieve two things: a true understanding of their own nature and God's will and purpose for them. He explained that God transmitted spiritual teachings through messengers or manifestations.

The Fasting Period

The followers of the Bahai Faith observe a 19-day fast from March 2 to March 20. They neither eat nor drink between sunrise and sunset during this period, and people ages 15 to 70 must observe this fast if at all possible. Those who are sick, traveling, engaged in hard labor, nursing mothers, and menstruating women are, however, exempt. At the end of the 19-day period, on March 20, the Bahai celebrate Navruz, a New Year's celebration that is neither religious nor national in nature, nor is it associated with a single ethnic group. Jewish, Zoroastrian, Armenian, and Turkish Iranians and Central Asians celebrate Navruz with equal enthusiasm. Perhaps the universal nature of the message of Navruz makes it particularly attractive to the Bahai.

The Bahai believe in Muhammad, Jesus, Zoroaster, Krishna, and Buddha, among others, as messengers of God. Each of these men foretold a great messenger who would come to this earth and bring peace. The Bahai believe that that messenger was Bahauallah and that the time for peace is now.

The primary goals of the Bahai Faith are to abolish the extremes between poverty and wealth, to eradicate racism, and to promote love among all people. According to the writings of Bahauallah, the time has come for the great leaders of the world to resolve their differences and come together.

Bahauallah did not want anyone to accept his teachings without thinking about the ideas, but to use his or her faculty of reason to make up his or her own mind. According to Abdul-Baha, God has given each of us the ability to reason; all people have the capability of searching and finding the truth for themselves. There is no reason for anyone to follow his or her ancestors because of ignorance, laziness, or indifference.

The Bahai Faith continues to spread, especially in the developing world, where its messages have really taken hold, and its holy scriptures have been translated into more than 800 languages. Yet it has had its fair share of problems. The governments of Islamic countries, especially that of Iran, the land where it began, continue to persecute the Bahai. Iran has banned them from enrolling in the country's universities and holding government jobs since 1979. Many were imprisoned there during the early 1980s, and it is estimated that more than 200 believers were executed between 1978 and 1998. Bahai property has also been demolished, including the house of the Bab in Shiraz, one of three Bahai pilgrimage sites.

Holidays and Religious Observances

There are nine holy days on which Bahai are not allowed to work. These are

Holy Day	Gregorian Date
Navruz	March 21
First day of Ridvan	April 20
Ninth day of Ridvan	April 29
Twelfth day of Ridvan	May 2
Declaration of the Bab	May 23
Ascension of Bahaulah	May 29
Bab's Martyrdom	July 9
Bab's Birth	October 20
Bahaulah's Birth	November 12

Ridvan (Paradise) is a 12-day festival that commemorates Bahaullah's announcement of his status as a prophet and his departure from Baghdad in 1863. This period is also when Bahai elections are normally held. The observance begins at sunset on April 20 and lasts until sunset on May 2. Devout Bahais do not work on the first, ninth, and 12th days of Ridvan because they are major Bahai holy days. The name of the holiday was the name Bahaullah gave to the Najibiyyih Garden in Baghdad where he stayed before leaving Baghdad. There are, in addition, two other Bahai holy days: the Day of the Covenant (November 26) and the Ascension of Abdul-Baha (November 28).

Lotus Temple, India

The Lotus Temple, completed in 1986, was designed by Iranian-born Canadian architect Fariburz Sahba (b. 1948). It is shaped like a lotus flower, a symbol of purity across India. When seen up close, the temple resembles a piece of origami. The interior, particularly the Hall of Worship, conforms to that of all Bahai temples. The inside is so quiet that even a low whisper echoes loudly. There are no religious icons within the Lotus Temple, only copies of the Holy Scriptures and wooden pews.

The naming of a newborn baby in a Bahai community, according to the Universal House of Justice, is strictly the responsibility of the family. The teachings of the Bahai do not provide for any ceremony on this occasion.

The marriage ceremony of the Bahai is remarkably simple. All the wedding ceremony requires is that there are two respectable witnesses and that the couple takes the following vow, as the Bahai teachings ordain: "We will all, verily, abide by the will of God." That vow concludes the ceremony. The wedding does not require a priest; it can be led by anyone belonging to the community. There is also no dowry system, although the bridegroom presents prescribed gifts to the bride.

The Bahai law for the burial of the dead forbids carrying the body for more than an hour's journey from the place of death. It is also necessary to wrap the body in a cloak of cotton or silk. The coffin should be made of crystal, stone, or fine hardwood, and the deceased should wear a ring carrying the inscription, "I came forth from God and return unto Him, detached from all save Him, holding fast to His Name, the Merciful, and the Compassionate."

See also Volume II: INDIA; IRAN

See also Volume III: DECLARATION OF THE BAB; ISLAM; NAVRUZ

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~ Bastille Day ~

FACT FILE

Observed in	France, its overseas territories, Canada, French Guyana, and most former French colonies
Observed on	July 14
Observed by	French nationals, French subjects (in French Guyana), French-speaking residents of Quebec, and other former French colonies

Introduction

Bastille Day, which falls on July 14, marks the origins of the French Republic and celebrates French nationhood. It is observed as a national holiday in



Fireworks illuminate the sky at the Eiffel Tower on July 14 in Paris. Bastille Day, France's national holiday, marks the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille prison and the beginning of the French Revolution. (AP Photo/Michel Euler)

France and its overseas territories (departments) as well as former French colonies. The festival commemorates the day in 1789 when the people of Paris stormed the infamous Bastille Prison and armory, an event popularly understood to be the beginning of the French Revolution. On this day French citizens celebrate liberty, equality, and fraternity, the fundamental principles and rallying cry of their revolution. The day invokes patriotic feelings not unlike those felt by Americans on the Fourth of July, Independence Day in the United States.

The French Revolution was a complex event that stirred controversy within France itself and worldwide. It created the French Republic, divested the king and aristocracy of power, and promised liberty, equality, and fraternity to the French people. And it attracted imitators beyond France who also hoped to liberate themselves from tyranny. Critics of the revolution, however, argued that it went too far, creating chaos and terror, and there is some truth to that. In the wake of the revolution France, experienced a tumultuous history that included a series of wars, internal conflicts, and experiments in government that ranged from the imperial rule of Napoleon, to restoration of the monarchy, to radical democratic regimes.

With the uneasy rise of the Third Republic in the 1870s, born in French military defeat and scarred by internal violence (some 25,000 died in the suppression of the Paris Commune, a short-lived socialist regime), the government sought to identify a national holiday that could unify the country and encourage its identification with the best features of the French Revolution. Bastille Day, marking one potent event among many during the revolution, was thus elevated to supreme significance as France's celebration of liberation from the

Fun Fact

The man who led the siege of the Bastille, Pierre Augustin, was in charge of the queen's laundry. With help from a man named Elie, he provided supplies to arm the mobs.

Fun Fact

Ironically, despite the importance of Bastille Day in French history, it was not formally proclaimed a French national holiday until 1880, almost 90 years after the fall of the Bastille.

monarchy. Bastille Day has largely transcended its controversial beginnings, been depoliticized, and is now widely embraced in France, its foreign possessions, and former colonies.

Origins and History

In the late 1780s, France suffered under an absolute, corrupt monarchy headed by King Louis XVI (1754–93) and his queen, Marie Antoinette (1755–93). In those days, France had the largest population in Europe and could not feed its people. The nobility and the clergy enjoyed royal patronage and privilege in return for their loyalty to the monarch, while the rest of the country starved. The king and the aristocracy also levied exorbitant taxes, impoverishing the peasants.

During the two years that preceded the French Revolution, the urban working class and rural peasants suffered greatly because of an unusually harsh winter followed by the abysmal harvest of 1788–89. These events led to a mass geographical displacement. France was on the verge of bankruptcy and social anarchy; abnormally high prices of food items, notably bread, reduced the lowest strata of society to starvation, the middle class was rendered powerless, and civil society was crumbling under the oppressive and unresponsive regime.

A segment of the upper social strata, composed of high nobility and the clergy, some sincere and others opportunistic, responded to the public insecurity and doubt that resulted. Personalities such as Mirabeau (1749–91), an aristocrat who chose to identify with the peasants, Abbé Sieyès (1748–1836), a clergyman before the revolution, and Talleyrand (1754–1838), a bishop and astute statesman, instigated protests, and the mobs followed them.

Caught between the monarch and the peasants was a growing middle class, the French bourgeoisie.

Their loyalty was divided, but even those who sided with the monarchy eventually became disillusioned with the regime, as few reforms emerged, and liberties, such as free speech, were imperiled. The outbreak of the French Revolution can, thus, be partly attributed to the nobility and clergy behind the scenes who supported the masses. In the vanguard of these protests were the burgeoning bourgeoisie and lesser nobility.

The attack on the Bastille was not spontaneous. A series of events preceded the assault and precipitated the prison's fall. On May 5, 1789, when the discontent in civil society had swelled into a huge public outcry, the king convened the Estates-General, which had not met since 1614, to hear the complaints of a country racked by hunger, poor harvests, and political strife. The Estates-General was a representative body, composed of the First Estate (members of the clergy), the Second Estate (the nobility), and the Third Estate (commoners). Dissatisfied with the inconclusive outcome of the debates, an assembly of the Third Estate broke away and formed the Constituent National Assembly. Locked out of their chamber as a result of their rebellious move, on June 20, 1789, the deputies of the Third Estate took an oath, known as the Tennis Court Oath (or Oath of the Jeu de Paume) and resolved to remain united until a constitution had been established.

For several months, rumors had circulated that the king was gathering troops near Paris in preparation to suppress the growing dissatisfaction. On July 12, when the news broke out that the king had removed the director-general of finance from his position as minister, street orators railed against the king. The director-general Jacques Necker (1732–1804) was popular with the people for his policy of raising funds by borrowing rather than levying taxes. Outraged, a covert group of Parisian revolutionaries and mutinous troops came together on July 14, 1789, to storm the Bastille and release all seven of its prisoners, four of whom were being held for minor offenses such as forgery.

The state prison, the Bastille, epitomized the despotism of the French monarchy: People guilty of nothing more than disagreeing with the king were sent there to be tortured, while rumors about what occurred there served to silence dissent. It was a massive fortification. Originally a 14th-century castle located at the east end of Paris, it had been converted into a prison. Not only was it infamous for unimaginable cruelties and brutal persecution, but the Bastille also held a stockpile of royal arms and ammunition. Gaining access to it meant a lethal showdown with its ferocious governor, Marquis de Launay (d. 1789), and his troops. Compounding the challenge was a 10-foot-thick wall and eight soaring towers, each 90 feet high. Ultimately, it was the commoners who paved the way for the rebels' victory. Infuriated when one of the fortress's cannons on the rampart was aimed at the street of St. Antoine—a public pathway—the general population assumed that the monarch had aimed a

The Debate over Bastille Day Celebrations

Although Bastille Day is France's most important national holiday, the country is divided on the question of whether it should be celebrated at all. Some believe that the French people should celebrate the storming of the Bastille as the moment when France became a republic. Those opposed to celebrating Bastille Day argue that the French people should not celebrate an event that led to the bloody Reign of Terror that followed.

gun at them. In retaliation, the people gathered in the streets, joined the rebels, and attacked.

When the guards realized that their defenses could be breached, they urged Commander de Launay to surrender. Instead he threatened to blow up the fortress if his men did not follow orders. Nonplussed, the soldiers seized the opportunity to surrender to the rebel forces, assured that none of them would be harmed. As the drawbridge was lowered, a mob descended on the prison. De Launay and some of his men were taken to the town hall and murdered, along with the hated officer Flesselles. The mob slit De Launay's and Flesselles's throats, impaled their decapitated heads on poles, and paraded them through the streets of Paris. Nearly a hundred of the Bastille's attackers died in the assault, but the once-impregnable fortress of the Bastille was razed to the ground following an order from the National Assembly.

Alarmed, King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette recognized the anger and power of the revolutionaries, and the king agreed to dismiss the troops camped near the capital, reinstate Necker, and don the red-white-and-blue *cocard*, the symbol of the new France. The storming of the Bastille acquired great symbolic significance as the revolution's baptism in blood and came to represent the French Revolution and the French Republic itself.

The King's appeal to foreign forces to intervene eventually led to the downfall of the constitutional monarchy. After a subsequent attack on the Tuilleries Palace on August 10, 1792, Louis XVI was taken prisoner, and, following a trial, executed on January 21, 1793. Marie Antoinette was also tried and executed shortly thereafter.

The French Revolution introduced the *tricolore* (tricolor) as France's national flag. Blue was the royal color of loyalty; it was the color of the flag flown at Charlemagne's coronation. Red signified the kingdom, from the red banner of St. Denis, France's patron saint, and white was the distinctive mark of command. White was the uniform color of the French Guard, while red and blue were worn by the Parisian militia; together they symbolized the new civic army of France. The tricolor ultimately represented, not civil war, but the restored unity of a new order. Indeed, some have argued that the three colors represent the three orders: blue (Third Estate), red (nobility), and white (clergy). The revolution also established the rooster, or traditional Gallic cock, to symbolize the nation's identity, following its use as an alternative symbol for the French people as opposed to the royal fleur-de-lis, and it is featured on French stamps and coins.

The fall of the Bastille became a symbol of a turning point in France's and, indeed, the world's history. France asserted its identity as a new nation with the Revolution of 1789. On July 14, 1790, a year after the fall of the Bastille, delegates from all parts of the country came to Paris to celebrate and proclaim their allegiance to their new national community.

The Bastille's Prisoners

Much has been written about the horrors of the Bastille, but the prison held only seven prisoners at the time of the assault, none of whom were political prisoners. At one time, however, the prison had had a sizable number of political prisoners including the great writer Voltaire and the famous literary character the Man in the Iron Mask, who served his prison sentence from 1698 to 1703.

French jurists, inspired both by the philosophy of the Enlightenment and a long-standing French legalistic tradition, dominated the Estates-General. This body, which became the National Constituent Assembly after the Tennis Court Oath of June 20, 1789, gave France its first constitution in 1791. Meanwhile the nation was forced to defend its border as well as its revolution. Following victory against its enemies at the Battle of Valmy, the Republic was proclaimed on September 22, 1792. Yet in the years that followed France would endure the Terror, a conservative reaction, the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821), and a complicated history of political triumph and tumult. Fifteen other constitutions and four more republics were to follow the Constitution of 1791, leading to the 1958 Constitution and the Fifth Republic that governs France today.

The ideas generated by the French Revolution—the rights of all people, liberty, equality, fraternity—proved inspiring to French citizens and others worldwide, and Bastille Day continues to represent these ideals and the French nation founded on them.

See also Volume I: FRANCE, FRENCH GUYANA, GUADELOUPE

See also Volume II: MARTINIQUE, RÉUNION

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Fun Fact

King Louis XVI wrote in his diary, "14 Juillet (July): Rien (nothing)." He was at the Palace at Versailles at the time. Little did he know that the events taking place in Paris would forever be associated with the downfall of the French monarchy.

Boxing Day

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries that are members of the British Commonwealth
Observed on	December 26, or the first weekday after Christmas
Observed by	Christians

Introduction

Boxing Day occurs the day after Christmas and is often treated as an extension of Christmas. It is, indeed, a holiday steeped in mystery. When and how it started is not clear, and more widely disputed is how it got its name. The purpose of Boxing Day, however, could not be clearer. Regardless of other local customs, it is a day for giving gifts of money to those who provide services.

Because it falls on the feast day of St. Stephen—the first martyr canonized by the Catholic Church—Boxing Day is closely associated with St. Stephen's Day.

Origins and History

The most credible and persistent theories about how Boxing Day started are rooted in the feudal traditions of medieval England. During that period (400–1500 C.E.), a small number of estate owners managed large tracts of land with the help of numerous servants. Christmas was a particularly busy time for the servants, who had to work hard to prepare the households for the festivities. So on

December 26 the owners gave them time off to rest and spend time with their own families.

This was also a good time for employers to show their appreciation by giving their servants tips and practical gifts. These gifts usually took the form of clothing, leather goods, salt and spices, home-grown grains for making bread, and dried foods such as meat, fish, fruits, and vegetables. The size of the servant's family and his or her position in the master's household determined what and how much was given.

The name of the holiday is believed to have come from the earthenware boxes the masters used to package these gifts, which they left for their servants on Christmas night. The employees broke their boxes open on December 26.

Because the incomes of those who performed services outside the home were very low, the upper class also gave something to snow shovelers, sweepers, and others they considered among the “deserving poor” on Boxing Day. Merchants, too, gave boxes of food and clothing to their employees as end-of-year gifts. By presenting gifts in cash or kind, the more fortunate were offering practical help in the Christmas spirit.

From these beginnings, it eventually became a tradition for apprentices and servants to carry earthenware boxes to their employers' premises, knowing they would receive something after Christmas. In addition the very poor went house-to-house carrying donation boxes for food and clothing. Structuring the distribution of gifts this way reflected a social order based on class. Gifts were exchanged between people of equal rank before or on Christmas Day while charity for the poor was reserved for the day after. Moreover this form of gift-giving was always a one-way transaction: reciprocity on the part of the less fortunate was not possible.

Boxing Day became associated with religion in the ninth century when the Catholic Church adopted the practice of giving to the poor the day after Christmas. Donations were collected in large, locked

“An Irish Measure— The Song of the Wren”

The wren, the wren, the king of all birds,
On St. Stephen's Day was caught in the furze;
Though his body is small, his family is great,
So, if you please, your honor, give us a treat.
On Christmas Day I turned a spit;
I burned my finger, I feel it yet,
Up with the kettle, and down with the pan:
Give us some money to bury the wren.

donation boxes, the contents of which were distributed by the clergy to the poor on December 26. The practice allowed the church to tap parishioners who were not part of the feudal system for donations.

Another story recounts how Boxing Day was adapted to the needs of ships undertaking hazardous journeys. Each ship carried a donation box. On most ships priests would offer Masses for their safe return in exchange for well-filled donation boxes. Those interested in a ship's safe return—whether sailors or passengers—begged money from the wealthy in order to contribute to the fund. Opening the boxes before the ships had docked safely was strictly forbidden. These boxes were known as Christ-Mass (Christmas) boxes.

Boxing Day is also the feast day of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr. He was stoned to death shortly after Jesus' Crucifixion and prayed for his tormentors as he died. There is a possible historical link between St. Stephen and Boxing Day, aside from coincidence. In the very early days of Christianity there was some dissatisfaction about how alms from the community's fund were being distributed to the poor. In an effort to resolve the problem, the Apostles chose seven men to oversee how the poorer members of the congregation were taken care of. Of the seven men selected for this duty, St.

Stephen was the first mentioned and best known. In the years following his death the faithful honored his memory by collecting money in small clay containers throughout the year. These containers were broken open on the saint's feast day, and the money therein was distributed among the poor. The modern practice of saving money in piggy banks stems from this custom.

The popular Christmas carol, "Good King Wenceslas," also has its origins in St. Stephen's Day. Wenceslas (907–35) assumed power in Bohemia in 922 but continued to be governed by Germany's Emperor Henry I, the Fowler (876–936). The subject of the carol is the generosity of Wenceslas, who took a meal of minced pie to a peasant on St. Stephen's Day. When the king, accompanied by his page, carried the food and pine logs to the peasant, the page became cold and fearful in the dark; so Wenceslas told the page to step into his footprints. The page did this, and his feet were warmed.

Fun Fact

Organizing monetary help for the needy can be traced back to the sixth century B.C.E. rule of Servius Tullius (r. 579–35) in Rome. A ceramic altar or container was set up in every village at the beginning of the year and people gave generously.



Boxing Day originated in England as an occasion for the upper classes to show appreciation to workers the day after Christmas. Today it is generally embraced as an additional day of leisure following Christmas. Here, members of the Pendale and Craven Hunt ride out from Gargrave, North Yorkshire, England, on their traditional Boxing Day fox hunt on December 26. (AP Photo/Alastair Grant)

St. Stephen and Horses

St. Stephen is the patron saint of horses. In Europe, it used to be a practice to bless horses in front of churches, along with their water, salt, and oats on the feast day of St. Stephen. These blessed food items were stored safely and fed to the horses if they became sick. The practice of blessing horses continues in rural Europe, and in England horse racing is a popular activity on St. Stephen's Day. Throwing coins or bits of silver into horse troughs for luck is a Finnish tradition.



In Ireland and Wales December 26 is also celebrated as La Fheile Stiofan, the Day of the Wren. These festivities originated with the ancient Druids, who studied the flight of wrens to predict the future. Because the birds were considered special, they were offered to the gods as sacrifices. Later, however, they came to be seen as symbols of treachery. It was reported that a chattering wren gave away St. Stephen's hiding place when he hid in a bush to escape his enemies. In the 700s accounts circulated that a wren betrayed the Irish soldiers who were fighting the Vikings by eating the breadcrumbs off a Viking drum just as the Irish mounted a night attack on a Viking camp. The sound of the wren pecking at the breadcrumbs awakened the drummer, who in turn alerted the Vikings. These stories were used to justify continued sacrifices of the wren.

On the Day of the Wren (pronounced "wran"), groups of boys would go from house to house singing and dancing, accompanied by bands of musicians. These Wren Boys (also known as Straw Boys or Mummers, depending on the region) wore straw masks and colorful outfits, and the leader of each group carried a dead wren hanging from a pole. (The bird would have been either hunted down or chased, until it died or collapsed from sheer exhaustion.)

See also Volume I: AUSTRALIA; AUSTRIA; BAHAMAS; CANADA; CZECH REPUBLIC; GREAT BRITAIN; HUNGARY; IRELAND; JAMAICA

See also Volume II: LESOTHO; NEW ZEALAND; POLAND; SOUTH AFRICA

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~ Buddhism ~

FACT FILE

Observed in	Primarily countries in Central Southeast Asia
World Population	About 350 million
Place of Origin	India

Introduction

Siddhartha Gautama (563–483 B.C.E.), the warrior son of noble parents, formulated the philosophy known as Buddhism in the late sixth century B.C.E. According to legend a soothsayer once predicted that Siddhartha would become a renouncer (someone who withdraws from worldly life). His father, in an attempt to prevent the prediction from coming true, provided him with every pleasure life offers.

Siddhartha had gone on a series of four chariot rides, where he first came into contact with the darker sides of life: old age, illness, death, and an abstemious renouncer. Subsequently he left his wife and son, Rahula (c. 534), and tried severe renunciation in the forest to such an extent that he nearly starved. Realizing the futility of the exercise, he ate food and meditated under a tree instead. By morning the next day (or after six months according to some sources), he had attained Nirvana, or enlightenment. He believed that, through meditation, he had found the answers to suffering and how to achieve a permanent release from it. Siddhartha then proclaimed himself the Buddha (“The Enlightened One”) and began to spread his knowledge so that others could also free themselves from life’s burdens and suffering.

In a vision he saw the human race as a bed of lotus flowers. Some flowers were submerged in the mud; some were just sprouting; and others were ready to bloom. In other words, he saw that all people have the potential to become enlightened, but some need help to do it. His most important doctrines included the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path.

After his death, the Buddha’s celibate disciples gradually settled down in monasteries provided by married laymen in exchange for their teaching of the Buddha’s principles, and a variety of monastic schools developed among the Buddha’s followers. This was at least partly a consequence of the enigmatic nature of his teachings; he refused, for

instance, to give a clear answer on whether a human being has a soul. Furthermore, he did not name anyone to succeed him as the leader of the philosophy. Instead, he instructed his followers to be lamps unto themselves.

Since Buddhism does not have the idea of a creator divinity in its teachings, some do not see it as a religion in the conventional sense. Buddhist teachings are simple and practical guidelines. The basic doctrines observe that everything of this world is temporary, that every action has its consequences, and that change is possible. Buddhism attracts people all over the world, regardless of race, gender, or nationality. There are around 350 million Buddhists, with a growing number in the Western world. Though they may follow different forms of Buddhism, they all adhere to the same core Buddhist principles: nonviolence, lack of dogma, tolerance, and the importance of meditation. Buddhism is the fourth most widely accepted spiritual practice in the world, preceded only by Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism.

Origins and History

When the Buddha started to preach after his enlightenment, the most important doctrines he taught were the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. The first of his Noble Truths states that *dukkha* (“bad location” or “wrong position”) exists and that suffering is inevitable and almost universal. The various reasons for it include loss, failure, pain, and the temporary nature of pleasure. His second Noble Truth deals with *samudaya*, or the causes of suffering. According to the Buddha, it comes primarily from attachment to the things of this world and the desire to possess them. It can take many forms, such as the desire for fame, anger, jealousy, or fear. The third of the Buddha’s Four Noble Truths gives hope. It teaches about *nirodha*, or the

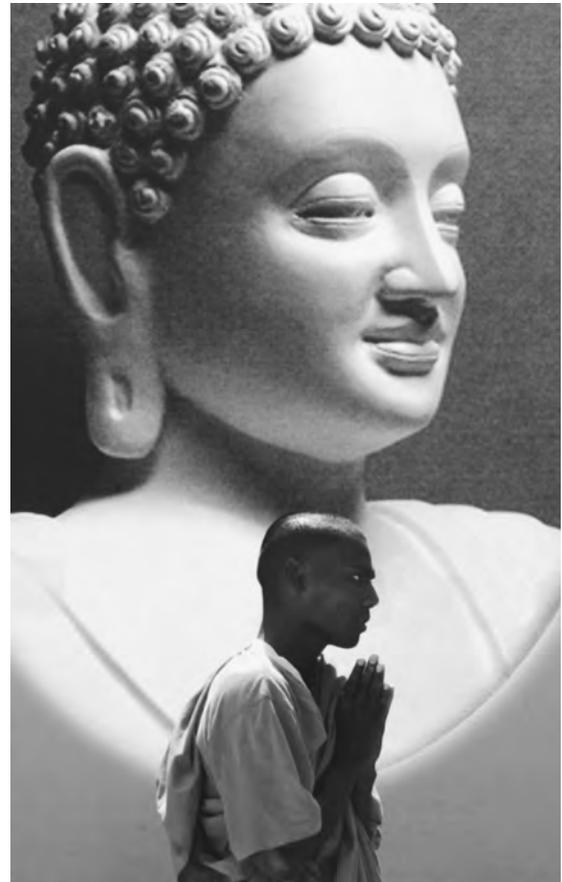
end to all suffering. This can be obtained through Nirvana, a state of consciousness reached when the mind achieves complete liberation and detachment from desire or any kind of craving. The final Noble Truth is *marga*, which teaches that, in order to end suffering, practitioners have to follow the Noble Eightfold Path.

An eight-spoked wheel, also called the Wheel of Dharma, symbolizes the Noble Eightfold Path. Separately the individual spokes represent right views, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right endeavor, right mindfulness, and right concentration. The right views are the understanding of the Four Noble Truths. Right intention refers to following the right path in life. Right speech means not to condemn, lie, criticize, gossip, or use insensitive language. Right action involves following the Five Precepts, which are similar to the biblical Ten Commandments. The first of the Five Precepts enjoins one not to kill; sometimes this is translated as a prescription against all forms of violence. The second precept discourages stealing, which is also generally taken as an injunction to avoid any kind of economic exploitation as well. The third teaches one not to misuse sex. For nuns and monks this means complete celibacy. For laypeople, it entails avoiding adultery, sexual harassment, and exploitation, including that within marriage. The last precept entails avoiding drugs and alcohol, since intoxicants confuse the mind. Nowadays television, the Internet, and other sources of entertainment are included as things that distract one from reality.

Right livelihood means supporting oneself without harming others. It is followed by right endeavor, which requires making an effort to promote good thoughts and dispel evil ones. The seventh path is right mindfulness, or becoming aware of one's body, mind, and feelings. The last element of the Noble Eightfold Path is right concentration, or meditation, a mental state in which one can achieve the highest level of consciousness.

A major split occurred among Buddhists in the first century C.E., when Buddhism divided into the Mahayana branch (the greater vehicle) and the Hinayana branch (the lesser vehicle). Of the latter branch, only the Theravada school remains. Founded in the fourth century B.C.E., it is now practiced in Sri Lanka and other Southeast Asian countries. This school emphasizes the historical figure of Gautama Buddha. In addition, Theravada monks believe that the Buddha taught a doctrine of *amata*, or "no soul." They also believe that human beings continue to be reformed and reborn, collecting karma until they achieve Nirvana.

The later Mahayana branch is today found in Korea, Japan, China, and Tibet. The most prominent of its schools are Pure Land, Zen, and Tantra. These schools stress that even laypeople have it in them to become good Buddhists and that there are other paths to Nirvana in addition to meditation.



A Buddhist monk folds his hands in prayer as he arrives at a ceremony of initiation into Buddhism in Bangalore, India. (AP Photos/Gautam Singh)

One of these methods is the chanting and good works utilized in Pure Land (the dominant form of Buddhism practiced in China and Japan). Pure Land emphasizes faith in, and love of, the Buddha.

The Buddha advised his followers that it was important to meet regularly and in large numbers if they were to thrive. Thus festivals are an integral part of Buddhism. They are occasions that provide followers with opportunities to celebrate as well to express their thanks to the Buddha for his teachings.

Holidays and Religious Observances

The Buddha advised his followers that it was important to meet regularly and in large numbers if they were to thrive. Thus, festivals are frequent, joyous events in Buddhist communities as well as an integral part of Buddhism. They are occasions that provide followers with an opportunity to celebrate as

well to express their thanks to the Buddha for his teachings. There are four religious observances that are central to all Buddhist sects: Vesak or Visakah Puja (“Buddha Day”); Magha Puja Day (Fourfold Assembly or “Sangha Day”); Bodhi Day (“Enlightenment Day”); Asalha Puja Day (“Dhamma Day”). There are also numerous Buddhist celebrations of particular bodhisattvas (embodiments of virtues) as well as observances of special significance in various countries with large Buddhist communities. Also, because Buddhists follow the lunar calendar, and all observances are scheduled according to the phases of the moon, the dates on which celebrations are held, for example, the Buddhist New Year, will differ from country to country.

The most significant religious observance of the Buddhist calendar occurs in May (on the Gregorian calendar) and in the month of Vesak on the Hindu lunar calendar on the night of the full moon, when the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha are celebrated. By a strange coincidence, the birth, enlightenment (moksha or nirvana), and death of Lord Buddha took place on the same date, although, necessarily, in different years, making it the most sacred day of the year for his followers. For Buddhists, this three-in-one festival is a day for rejoicing and contemplation. Celebrations can be elaborate affairs, with lots of festivities and feasting. Silent walks or evening meditations end the Vesak celebration.

Magha Puja Day takes place on the full moon day of the third lunar month (March), and commemorates an important event that happened early on in the Buddha’s life. Soon after the first Rains Retreat (Vassa), the Buddha went to Rajagaha city where 1,250 Arahats (“enlightened saints”), disciples of the Buddha, had returned from their wanderings to pay respect to the Buddha. This celebration is also called the Fourfold Assembly because there were four significant factors: (1) all 1,250 of those assembled were Arahats; (2) all of them had been ordained by the Buddha himself; (3) they had come together without prior arrangement; (4) it was the full moon day of the month of Magha month.

Asalha Puja Day, also called Dhamma Day, is observed on the full moon day of the eighth lunar month (approximately July on the Gregorian calendar). It commemorates the Buddha’s first teaching: the turning of the wheel of the Dhamma to the five ascetics at the Deer Park (Sarnath) in India.

Bodhi Day observes the enlightenment of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha. It is usually celebrated on December 8 (on the Gregorian calendar) with prayer, meditation, and readings from the Buddha’s teachings.

Other important Buddhist observances include the Buddhist New Year, which varies from country to country; Loy Krathong, the Festival of Floating Bowls, one of several “light festivals” of the Buddhist religious calendar; the Plowing Festival, which celebrates the Buddha’s first moment of enlightenment,

Paranirvana Day (The Death of the Buddha)

This day, which falls on the full Moon in February, is revered by Buddhists as the day of Buddha’s death. The Buddha lived until he was 80; the 40 years following his enlightenment were spent teaching. The *Parinibbana Sutta* gives a touching account of his last days, and passages from it are often read on this day. This is also a day used to reflect on one’s own inevitable death and on those who have recently died.

when he went with his father, at the age of seven, to watch the plowing of the fields; and the Festival of the Tooth, an observance held on the night of the full moon in August (on the Gregorian calendar), when what is said to be the Buddha’s tooth is carried through the streets of Kandy in Sri Lanka.

Buddhist festivals are happy occasions. On a typical festival day, Buddhists go to their local temple or monastery and offer food to the monks and perhaps listen to a discussion of dharma. In the afternoon, they may distribute food to the poor and in the evening perhaps join in a ceremony of walking around a stupa three times as a sign of respect to the Buddha. The day ends with chanting teachings of the Buddha’s and meditation.

Although Buddhist marriages are secular in nature, the couple is blessed by monks at the local temple after the civil formalities have been completed. Before a specially erected shrine, replete with flowers, candles, and an image of the Buddha, the couple recites certain verses. The couple then proceeds to light candles and incense sticks and present flowers, placing them on and around the table on which the image of the Buddha stands. The bride and groom then recite more verses. Finally, the assembly, or sometimes only the parents, recites verses as a blessing to the newlyweds.

According to the Buddhist faith, an individual passes through a series of reincarnations until he or she is liberated from worldly passions. Death, Bud-

The Festival of the Tooth

Kandy, a beautiful city in Sri Lanka, is home to a small but historical Buddhist object. On a low hill stands a Buddhist temple that was especially built to house a relic of the Buddha—his tooth. The tooth can never be seen because it is kept hidden in a casket. But once a year in August, on the night of the full Moon, the Buddhists have a special procession for it.

Dalai Lama

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso is the spiritual head of the Tibetan people. Born Lhamo Dhondrub on July 6, 1935, in a remote village called Taktser in northeastern Tibet, his holiness was recognized at the age of two as the reincarnation of his predecessor, the 13th Dalai Lama. In accordance with Tibetan tradition, he was an incarnation of Avalokitesvara, the Buddha of Compassion. The dalai lamas are believed to be the manifestation of the Bodhisattva (Buddha) of Compassion, who chose reincarnation to serve the people.



dhists maintain, is only a vehicle to move to the next reincarnation and move closer to nirvana. Thus, a Buddhist funeral is something of a celebration. The first service is held within two days of death at the home of the deceased. A second service is held two to five days following the death, and this service is conducted by monks at a funeral home. The last service is held seven days after the burial or cremation. It is

meant to generate positive energy for the departed as he or she moves to the next stage of rebirth.

See also Volume I: BHUTAN; CAMBODIA; CHINA; JAPAN; KOREA, SOUTH

See also Volume II: INDIA; LAOS; MONGOLIA; MYANMAR; SINGAPORE; SRI LANKA; THAILAND; VIETNAM

See also Volume III: VESAK

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∞ Carnival ∞

FACT FILE

Observed in	Primarily Caribbean and Latin American countries, as well as Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, Mexico, and Brazil
Observed on	During the two weeks before Lent
Observed by	Christians, general public

Introduction

Carnival is a public celebration, which combines elements of a street party and a circus. It is usually observed during a carnival season that begins two weeks before Lent, the traditional Christian fast before Easter. This festival is primarily a Roman Catholic tradition and, to a lesser degree, it is observed in Christian Orthodox communities as well. Protestants and non-Christians who avoid unrestrained festivities generally ignore these observances. Carnival is known for its exuberance, color, creativity, and culture. Usually there are street dances and parades leading up to a grand finale. The processions feature colorful floats, and people in masks and outlandish costumes participate in the street dances and parades during Carnival.

The basic idea of Carnival is probably to enjoy one last bout of festivities, gaiety, and mirth before the onset of the somber 40-day period of Lent, which exhorts all faithful Christians to spend their days in austerity, abstinence, fasting, prayers, and penance. The official beginning of Lent is Ash Wednesday, the Wednesday immediately following Fat Tuesday (also called Shrove Tuesday or Mardi Gras in French). On this day the faithful have their foreheads marked with ashes in the shape of a cross in church, signifying that they belong to Christ, who died on a Cross. The name Fat Tuesday evolved from the custom of parading a fat ox through the streets of Paris on this day. The name Shrove Tuesday is derived from the practice of confessing one's sins to a priest (also known as a shriver) and receiving absolution in preparation for the Lenten season.

Places particularly noted for elaborate Carnival celebrations include Maastricht and Hertogenbosch in the Netherlands; Cologne, Mainz, and Düsseldorf in Germany; Venice in Italy; Nice in France; Hasselt in Belgium; Santa Cruz de Tenerife in Spain; Rio de Janeiro, Salvador, São Paulo, Olinda, and Recife in Brazil; Pasto and Barranquilla in Colombia; Port-of-

Spain in Trinidad; Santiago in Cuba; and New Orleans in the United States. In Mexico there are huge annual Carnival celebrations in Veracruz and Mazatlán, with street parades and the election of a Carnival queen. The Quebec City Carnival in Canada is a highly celebrated winter Carnival, which depends substantially on the amount of snowfall and intensity of the cold so that the ski trails are in good condition, and the numerous ice sculptures intact. For this reason, the festival does not commemorate the lunar-based celebration but is, instead, established on the final days of January and first few days of February in the solar calendar. The Caribana of Toronto is Canada's summer version of the Carnival. The La Ceiba Carnival in Honduras is celebrated annually on the third Saturday of May and is the largest in Central America.

Origins and History

Carnival dates back to the old Greek spring celebration held in honor of the god of wine, Dionysus. Later the Romans took up the festival as Bacchanalia, a feast held in honor of Bacchus, the Roman



Saturnalia

In Rome, where winters were not as harsh as those in the far north, Saturnalia—honoring Saturn, the god of agriculture—was celebrated. Beginning in the week leading up to the winter solstice (around December 16) and continuing for a full month, Saturnalia was a hedonistic event (based on a philosophy that the greatest good lies in the pursuit of pleasure), when food and drink were in abundance and the normal Roman social order was turned upside-down. For a month slaves were masters and peasants controlled the city.

Lupercalia

Lupercalia was a pagan tradition that goes back to pre-Roman times. Roman shepherds kept their flocks outside the city in nearby fields where packs of wolves attacked the sheep. Lupercus was a deity who guarded the shepherds and their flocks, protecting them from the wolves. In February the Romans honored Lupercus with a feast called the Lupercalia. Sacrifices and offerings were made to Lupercus; in return the god was expected to protect the flocks for the coming year. During the feast of Lupercalia, offerings were also made to the goddess Juno, the goddess of women and marriage. The names of all the young women were put into a box and drawn by the young men. Each boy was matched to the girl whose name he drew out, and they were regarded as partners for the rest of the year.

counterpart of Dionysus. It is sometimes claimed that the festival began with the Saturnalia (Saturn's festival) and Lupercalia (a festival held on February 15 in honor of Faunus, the Roman god of fertility and forests). In the late Roman period, the celebrations of these festivals were characterized by unbridled freedom, mad revelry, and reckless fun; in one way they were a subversion of civil order and discipline. Historians believe that this wild exuberance was carried over to the Carnival of today. Saturnalia was later transformed by the Roman Catholic Church into a festival that occurred in the period leading up to Ash Wednesday. As time passed, the Carnivals grew famous and spread rapidly across the Catholic countries in Europe. As the Spanish,

Notting Hill Carnival

When the first large numbers of Caribbean immigrants arrived in the United Kingdom in the 1950s, they brought with them their musical traditions. In 1959 Carnival first took place on English soil in St. Pancras Town Hall. The festivities were organized by Claudia Jones, the editor of the *West Indian Gazette*. After being held in various halls for the first few years, the celebrations were established in Notting Hill in 1964, mainly due to the vision of Rhaune Laslett, a local social worker. Gradually other West Indian immigrants and white locals joined in the celebrations, and the festivities grew. It was even approved by royalty when Notting Hill Carnival performers started the parade on the mall during the final stages of the Queen's Golden Jubilee festivities. It is now one of the largest celebrations in the world.

French, and Portuguese began to move into the Americas, as well as other parts of the world, they took with them the celebration of Carnival.

Another source, particularly linked to Switzerland, also predates Christianity. In this instance Carnival has been linked to the onset of spring, and the primary purpose of the festival was driving away evil spirits. This was generally done by means of processions, in which the people wore grotesque, hideous-looking masks, made loud noises, and made "music" with whatever happened to be handy. Much later, the processions became observances dedicated to patron saints, the most prominent among them being the Virgin Mary and the local saints of each particular area, after which the local church was named.

In earlier times, Carnival generally began on January 6 and continued until Shrove Tuesday. Some believe that this period represents some sort of compromise that the Catholic Church had made with pagan celebrations and that Carnival was, in reality, a refurbished Roman Saturnalia. Rome has been the recognized headquarters of Carnival, and though many popes were not particularly fond of it, others are known to have been great patrons of Carnival.

Over the years, the meaning of Carnival has become as varied as its history. Once a religious observance, the festival has evolved into an annual celebration of life in many places. The most popular celebrations are the ones in Barbados (Crop Over), in the United States (Mardi Gras), in Trinidad (Trinidad Carnival), Toronto (Caribana), and in Brazil (Rio Carnival).

There are numerous theories pertaining to the origins of the name Carnival. The most widely accepted theory states that the name is derived from the Italian *carnevale* or *carnovale*, which literally translates as "to remove meat." The name might also have originated from the Latin words *carne*, meaning "meat," and *vale*, meaning "farewell," thus "farewell to meat." Yet another theory derives the name from the Latin phrase *carrus navalis*, some sort of cart in which the sacred images were carried during an annual procession organized in honor of the Greek god Apollo. Most commonly, the season started on Septuagesima, the third Sunday before Lent and the 70th day before Easter. This phase of festivities had its roots in the need to finish all remaining products of animal origin, like cheese, butter, and eggs, before the onset of the fasting season. The Carnival celebration ends on Mardi Gras.

See also Volume I: ARGENTINA; AUSTRIA; BELGIUM; BELIZE; BOLIVIA; BRAZIL; CAPE VERDE; CHILE; COLOMBIA; COSTA RICA; DOMINICAN REPUBLIC; ECUADOR; EL SALVADOR; FRANCE; GERMANY; GRENADA; GUATEMALA; HAITI; HONDURAS; ITALY

See also Volume II: MEXICO; MONACO; NETHERLANDS; NICARAGUA; PALAU; PANAMA; PARAGUAY; PERU; PORTUGAL; ST. LUCIA; SEYCHELLES; SPAIN; TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO; UNITED STATES; VENEZUELA

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; LENT



A Carnival parade participant celebrates the start of Carnival in front of the City Palace in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The five-day pre-Lenten bash in Brazil is the biggest Carnival celebration in the world. (AP Photo/Victor R. Caivano)

Carnival de Ponce

Many costumes and masks come from the celebrations in Ponce, a small town in Puerto Rico, where Carnival, with all its music, masks, and costumes, dates back to the 1700s. The masks are made from papier-mâché in devilish and scary shapes, with radiant colors, horns, and artistic designs. Costumes, typically one-piece coveralls done in red and yellow, the colors of the Spanish flag, or in red and black (the symbolic colors of Ponce), dominate the festivities. A person in full ceremonial dress is known as a *vejigante*. His role is to frighten people, especially children, by swatting them with *veggies*, the dried and inflated bladder of a cow.

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Chinese New Year

FACT FILE

Observed in	China and countries with ethnic Chinese populations, such as Korea, Vietnam, and Tibet
Observed on	The second new moon after the winter solstice
Observed by	Chinese

Introduction

The Chinese New Year, also called the Lunar New Year, is a traditional Chinese holiday and the one that lasts the longest. The festivities start on the second new Moon following the winter solstice and end 15 days later on a full Moon. The date of the New Year is established by the Chinese lunisolar calendar, which is used in places where the Buddhist and Confucian traditions have been adopted, as well as in various cultures with a Chinese influence, such as Korea, Vietnam, and Tibet. The celebration is also known as the Spring Festival (Zhun Jie), because it falls between the winter solstice and vernal equinox. Observed wherever people of Chinese heritage live, the New Year is their most significant holiday. The first week of the New Year festivities is the most important, because people travel great distances to visit family and friends and share the all-important New Year's Eve dinner with them.

Superstitions

The first words one hears and the first person one meets on New Year's Day indicate how the new year will shape up. It is auspicious to hear songbirds, swallows, or birds with red plumage. It is considered ominous to greet anyone in his or her bedroom, so everyone (even the sick) makes it a point to sit in the living room on this day. People refrain from using knives and scissors since they believe doing so would "cut off" good fortune.

Preparations begin a month before the celebrations start. During this time people purchase presents, food, clothing, and materials for decorations. Houses are thoroughly cleaned to rid them of bad luck. Windowpanes and doors are usually painted red and adorned with poetic couplets and paper cutouts on themes such as wealth, happiness, and longevity.

New Year's Eve is one of the most exciting phases of the Chinese New Year, because rituals and traditions are meticulously observed in everything from clothing to food. Specific types of meals are associated with different days during the celebration, and most of the dishes prepared are eaten because their names make some connection with what everyone hopes for in the new year. Dinner generally consists of dumplings and seafood, signifying good wishes. *Fagao* (which translates as "prosperity cake," since the syllable *fa* can mean "to raise or generate" or "be prosperous") is made with wheat flour, water, and sugar, and leavened with yeast or baking powder. Then the batter is steamed until it rises and splits open at the top. A whole steamed fish is a symbol of long life and good fortune. *You*, which means "fish," is pronounced just like the word for "surplus"—the good fortune of having money left after expenses are covered, and one of the greetings for the New Year, "*Annyian you you*," can also mean "to enjoy a surplus" year after year. This sentiment is echoed in the wall decorations with fish images.

On New Year's Eve (Je-sok or Je-ya) in Korea, the church bells in the capital of Seoul are rung 33 times, and everyone enjoys a bowl of *duggook*, a hearty soup made with rice, chicken, pheasant, other meats, pine nuts, and chestnuts. Other foods used in New Year's feasts also promote the theme of

future prosperity. These include prawns for happiness and liveliness; dried oysters (*bo xiyi*) for all good things; and *fayi-zhai*, or “angel hair,” a hairlike weed, which also represents prosperity. Sweet mandarin oranges symbolize wealth and good fortune, because in the Cantonese dialect, their name also means “gold.” Baked goods with seeds and *jiaozy* (boiled dumplings) represent good wishes for the family. (*Jiaozyi* means “sleep together and have sons,” so the good wishes express hope for fertility.)

It is traditional to wear red because the color keeps evil spirits away, whereas white and black are unlucky because they are associated with mourning. After-dinner activities include board games or cards and watching television programs. Ancestors are honored by burning incense and offerings of food. Firecrackers are set off to scare away bad spirits, and for days after New Year’s people visit each other and exchange presents.

The Chinese believe that the third day is inappropriate for visiting friends and family, calling it *zhec hao*, which means “easy to get into arguments.” On the fourth day, a host of deities who made a trip to heaven to report the activities of individual families return to take up their vigil once more. Most people go back to work after celebrating for four or five days. On the 13th and 14th days shopkeepers hang lanterns out for the Lantern Festival (Yuan Xyiao), and the celebrations culminate with the colorful and highly significant Lantern Festival on the evening of the 15th day of the New Year.

Origins and History

China’s festivals have evolved through the ages. In ancient times when people had a plentiful harvest, they celebrated their good fortune with major festivities. After natural disasters the Chinese offered sacrifices to their deities and ancestors, seeking stability and peace. Over a period of time creative activities accompanied these events, and those activities gradually evolved into festivals.

The origins of the Chinese New Year are lost in the mists of antiquity, and consensus places its beginnings in prehistory. In the past when China was primarily an agricultural society, people rested only during the period following the harvest and prior to the planting of seeds. This also happened to coincide with the start of the lunar New Year. As a result, of all the traditional Chinese festivals, the New Year was perhaps the most elaborate, colorful, and important because people had time to rest and prepare for a long holiday. Around the time when the winter receded, and spring was about to begin, people from the clans assembled together. They brought forth their bounty obtained from fishing, hunting, and the fields. They shared the rewards of their efforts, danced, ate, and sang heartily. This activity had no fixed date initially, but it was usually observed at the end of each winter.

Zao Run, the Kitchen God

In China, this deity was traditionally the guardian of the family hearth as well as its morals. It is thought that he has been a household god since the second century B.C.E. Many Chinese homes had paper figures of Zao Run and his wife hung on the wall above the stove or hearth. His wife was responsible for writing down everything said in that home during the year so that Zao Run’s report to the Jade Emperor You Huang would be accurate. On the 23rd of the 12th lunar month, it was Zao Run’s duty to ascend to heaven and report the quality of each household during the past year to the Jade Emperor; each household was rewarded or punished accordingly.

This was a time when the Chinese congratulated each other and themselves on having survived another year; it was a time to put the old one behind, and to welcome what the new year offered. The Chinese New Year was a time to begin anew. Socially, it was a time for family reunions, and this remains true. This holiday also stressed the importance of family ties. The dinner get-together on New Year’s Eve was among the most important family occasions of the year.

The 20th of the 12th Moon of each year was set aside for the annual housecleaning, or the “sweeping of the grounds.” Every corner of the house was thoroughly swept and cleaned. Spring couplets, written in black ink on large vertical scrolls of red paper, were put up on the walls or beside the gates. These couplets, short poems written in classical Chinese expressed good wishes for the family in the coming year. In addition, symbolic flowers and fruits were used to decorate the house, and colorful New Year’s pictures (*an hua*) were placed on the walls.

The new year was also the time to send the Kitchen God, Zao Run (literally, “stove master”), one of many Chinese household deities, on his way to heaven. On the 23rd of the 12th lunar month, Zao Run was supposed to rise to heaven and report the quality of each household during the past year to the Jade Emperor.

To ensure that Zao Run’s report to the Jade Emperor was favorable, each family did everything possible to stay on his good side. To ensure that his report was good (or, perhaps, to keep his mouth shut), on the evening of the 23rd a tasty farewell dinner with lots of sweets and honey was prepared, including *niangao* (sticky cakes), so that the Kitchen God would speak sweetly of them when the time came. Sometimes the family lit firecrackers to speed his ascent.

Fun Fact

The Chinese prefer food items such as fruits and tea as gifts rather than other objects.

Fun Fact

The ninth day of New Year's is the birthday of the Jade Emperor, the most important Taoist deity, and fire-works displays honor him.

Nowadays in Taiwan, for New Year's horses and small single-person litters made of yellow paper are burned to ensure that the Kitchen God has transportation for his trip to heaven.

Now freed from the vigilance of Zao Run and his wife, who would not return until the first day of the new year, the family began its serious preparations for the coming celebrations. Because shops used to close during the last two or three days of the old year and did not reopen until after the first week of the new year, families were busy stocking up on gifts and food, preparing delicacies, and visiting barbers and hairdressers to make themselves look good.

Tradition required that all food be prepared before New Year's Day, and all sharp instruments and tools, such as knives and scissors, be stowed away to avoid "cutting" the luck of the new year. The kitchen and the well could not be disturbed on the first day of the new year.

The Chinese New Year was traditionally celebrated on the first day of the first Moon of the lunar calendar. (The corresponding date in the solar calendar varies from as early as January 21 to as late as February 19.)

The New Year's Eve and New Year's Day celebrations were strictly family affairs. All members of the family gathered for the important family meal on New Year's Eve. If a family member could not attend, an empty seat would be kept to represent that person during the banquet. At midnight the younger members of each family would bow and pay their respects to their parents and elders.



Celebrating the beginning of the Year of the Monkey, children dressed as monkeys pose for photos at a temple fair in Beijing on Chinese New Year's Day. Thousands flock to temple fairs across the city to mark the beginning of the new year. (AP Photo/str)

On New Year's Day the children were given *ang bows* (gifts of money) or *lai see* (little red envelopes) that contained good luck money. Everyone wore new clothes and was on his or her best behavior. It was considered improper to tell a lie, raise one's voice, use indecent language, or break anything on the first day of the year. On the second day, people began visiting friends and relatives, taking with them gifts and *lai see* for the children. Visitors were greeted with traditional New Year's delicacies, such as melon seeds, flowers, fruits, and *niangao*, sticky New Year's cakes.

The entire first week of the new year was a time for socializing and having fun. There were numerous lion and dragon dances, acrobats, theatrical shows, and other diversions on the streets of cities and towns. Firecrackers, thought to drive away evil spirits, were set off continuously during the first two weeks of the new year.

One dish called *yousheng* was originally served for the Chinese New Year in Singapore and Malaysia, and it is now commonly served as part of the celebration in other Chinese communities. *Yusheng* is a colorful salad made with raw fish, mixed with shredded, crunchy vegetables such as carrots, jicama, pickled ginger, and pomelo, and dressed with a plum sauce. Originally, it was served only on the seventh day of the new year, but it is often served in China throughout the year and can be eaten on any day of the New Year festivities.

The New Year celebrations came to an end on the 15th day of the first new Moon with the Lantern Festival. On that evening people carried lanterns into the streets and participated in parades that included a dragon dance by the youth. The dragon (made of bamboo, silk, and paper) was commonly more than 100 feet in length. The haphazard movement of the dragon was an impressive sight and made a grand end for the New Year festivities.

Between 1966 and 1980 there were no New Year's celebrations of any length in China because they were banned at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. Today popularly known as the Spring Festival, Chinese New Year's celebrations last for 15 days.

There is a famous legend connected to this holiday. It says that in ancient times, there was an ugly dragonlike monster known as Nian. On the first and the 15th day of every lunar month, the monster would come down from the mountains to devour people. This terrified everyone, and so they locked their doors before dusk. There was an old and wise man in the village who realized that it was the people's fear that was making the monster so strong. Therefore the old man collected the people together and exhorted them to fight the beast by beating drums, burning bamboo, and using fireworks, thinking the noises would scare the beast away. And this worked temporarily. But on one cold winter's night Nian appeared again. This time, however, the people were ready; the noises the peo-

ple were making terrified Nian. While running away, the monster collapsed with fatigue, and the people managed to kill it. So the people have continued the custom of beating gongs and drums and lighting fireworks to drive away monsters.

On this day, Chinese people greet each other by saying “*Guo an*,” meaning “Long live the festival,” and “*Xin nian hao*,” meaning “Happy New Year.”

See also Volume I: CHINA; HONG KONG; KOREA, NORTH; KOREA, SOUTH; MALAYSIA

See also Volume II: SINGAPORE; TIBET; VIETNAM

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM; CONFUCIANISM

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Fun Fact

According to tradition, human beings were created on the seventh day of the new year. Thus, everyone's birthday falls on the seventh day of the New Year's celebration in China, and everyone adds a year to his or her age on that day.

Christianity

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Christian populations
World Population	About 2 billion
Place of Origin	Jerusalem and environs

Introduction

Like Islam, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism, Christianity is a monotheistic religion. It is based on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth as recorded by his apostles. It is the world's largest religion, with approximately 2 billion followers. Most Christians, but not all, believe in one all-encompassing, universal God. The one God is considered to exist in three persons: the Holy Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The past 2,000 years have given birth to a variety of beliefs and sects, of which Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and the Eastern Orthodox Church are the primary branches.

The Roman Catholic Church is the largest Christian church in the world, with over a billion members. The Catholic Church claims to be, doctrinally, the original church, and it is the oldest continually operating Christian institution in existence. The Catholic Church is hierarchical and is separated into the order of bishops, priests, and deacons. The world is divided into over 1,000 bishoprics, each with a presiding bishop responsible for the spiritual welfare of one geographic area. The primary bishopric is that of Rome, whose occupant is called the pope, believed by Catholics to be the direct successor of the original leader of the church St. Peter (the first of Jesus' 12 Apostles). The pope and the Curia (his ecclesiastical administrators) in Vatican City are the final authorities of the church.

Protestantism is a broad grouping of denominations within the Christian faith. They originated with groups that separated from the Catholic Church during the Reformation of the 16th century and include their offshoots and others sharing similar principles. In the broader sense of the word, Protestantism is the collective name for various denominations that severed ties with the Roman Catholic Church in a theological revolution propelled by the rebellions of Martin Luther, founder of the Lutheran Church, and John Calvin, founder of the Calvinist movement. There are also some

Western and non-Catholic groups that are labeled Protestant, even if they acknowledge no historical connection to Luther or Calvin. The major denominations of the Protestant faith worldwide are: Pentecostal, Calvinist or Presbyterian, Reformed and Congregational, United Churches, Anglican Communion, Baptist, Methodist, and Lutheran. There are other minor sects in addition to these dominant groups, such as the Mormons (also called the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), Copics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mennonite, and others.

Most Protestants are considered to be "people of the book" in that they adhere to the teachings of biblical texts. Their beliefs are more abstracted than ritualized, and they multiplied after the translation of the Bible from the original Hebrew, Greek, and Latin texts. They are also less fond of hierarchy.

Eastern Orthodoxy is in general "Christocentric"; that is, in Orthodox churches Jesus is the head of the church. This branch of Christianity has an extensive oral tradition that predates the actual texts of the New Testament. This, however, does not dilute its devotion to the scriptures. Orthodox Christians treat the Old Testament of the Bible as less important, with the exception of the Psalms and the prophecies foretelling the coming of Jesus. The Eastern Orthodox Christian Church teaches that what is sin for one may not necessarily be a sin for another; neither does it see all sin as being the same. The traditional practice of the Orthodox is to have a spiritual father or mother to whom one confesses. He or she will have the authority to treat sin on an individual basis and will know when to enforce strictness when dealing with sin.

Christian traditions are well known around the world. Weddings are especially characterized by delightful customs. Christian weddings are usually conducted in a church (though there are some who prefer outdoor ceremonies). The bride is generally accompanied to the church by her father, and the two of them are the last to enter the church, where they proceed down a large central aisle to the altar

with grand ceremonial music played in the background. Depending on the branch of Christianity, there may be an elaborate nuptial Mass or just a plain ceremony with an exchange of vows and rings. In the presence of witnesses from both the bride's and the groom's side, the couple declares their intention to marry. The priest or minister blesses the rings, and the couple proceeds to put them on each other's ring fingers (the third finger of the left hand). The presiding pastor then declares the couple man and wife.

Christian funerals differ slightly according to the sect, though it is customary for a Protestant funeral to be a simplified version of the Roman Catholic funeral. In the Catholic funeral, a priest is summoned to hear the dying person's confession and to pardon him or her, eventually anointing the individual with oil previously blessed by a bishop. Prayers are followed by burial, and the corpse is sprinkled with holy water and blessed with incense. A Protestant funeral is a far simpler affair. A dying person may have a pastor attend his or her deathbed and say prayers. A church service is held for the deceased and is presided over by a minister. It can be conducted in many ways; at some, friends and relatives get up and relate their personal relationship with and memories of the deceased. During this phase of the funeral, they may also sing one of the deceased's favorite songs or read a favorite poem or author.

Three things fundamental to most types of Christianity are Communion, baptism, and the confession of sin. Holy Communion, also called the Eucharist or Lord's Supper, is the central practice of many sects of Christianity. Bread and wine are sanctified by an ordained minister or priest and consumed by the minister and members of the congregation in compliance with Jesus' command at the Last Supper: "Do this in remembrance of me." In the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, as well as the Anglican, Lutheran, and many other Protestant churches, it is regarded as a sacrament that symbolizes the union of Jesus with the faithful. In Baptist churches and some other Protestant sects, communion is an "institution," rather than a sacrament, emphasizing their observance of a commandment.

Baptism symbolizes the cleansing of sins and the union of the believer with Jesus in his death, burial, and Resurrection. The Christian tradition of baptism goes back to John the Baptist, who, according to the Bible, baptized Jesus in the river Jordan. Baptism in the Christian faith takes various forms including sprinkling water, pouring water, or full immersion (practiced in the Baptist church). The choice to be baptized is made by a believer as a confession of faith (this is called "believer baptism" or "Credobaptism"); for a child the choice is made by his or her parents according to the parents' faith (this is called "Paedobaptism"). Differences of opinion exist regarding the nature and

practice of baptism. Some denominations, such as the Baptist, practice Credobaptism. They also believe that baptism not only saves but is also a public declaration that one has been saved through accepting Jesus.

The Catholic sacrament of confession, now renamed reconciliation, involves admitting one's sins to God and receiving penance (a specific task to complete after having achieved absolution from God; the task is intended to repair one's relationship with God and any others harmed by the sin). Catholics believe that a priest, being a man himself, is not holy enough to forgive sins, but God can and does exercise that power through the ministrations of *men*.

Origins and History

Jesus Christ was born in approximately 6–4 B.C.E., although the exact date will probably never be known. He is called Jesus, because it is Greek for the Hebrew term *messiah*. It is commonly thought that Jesus preached for a period of three years. However, though a specific period of time is not mentioned in any of the Gospels (the four accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus that begin the New Testament part of the Bible).

The Christian faith is based on the acts and words attributed to Jesus in the writings of his apostles, and, for many Christians, especially Catholics, the teachings and traditions of the Roman Catholic Church. There are things common to the four Gospels in the New Testament (the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). They all agree that Jesus preached in Galilee and Judea, that his message was one of repentance and forgiveness by faith through him, that Jesus was sentenced to death by a reluctant Roman prefect named Pontius Pilate (d. after 36 C.E.), and that he was executed by crucifixion. According to at least one interpretation, Jesus declared to the Jews that he was their long-awaited



Vatican City

Vatican City is doubtless the most celebrated city among Roman Catholics. Officially called the State of the Vatican City, it is an enclave within the city of Rome, Italy. In terms of area and population, it is the smallest independent state in the world. The Vatican is the home of the pope, the highest cleric in the Roman Catholic Church. It forms the territory of the Holy See, the central authority of the Roman Catholic Church. Vatican City includes Vatican Hill (Mons Vaticanus), whose name predates Christianity, and the Vatican Fields north of the hill, on which the Sistine Chapel and other Vatican museums stand.

Messiah, but the Hebrew church authorities rejected him and accused him of blasphemy in the year 30. Christians believe that Jesus was dead and entombed but rose again on the third day after his death. His followers, usually called his Apostles (the 12 closest to him) and disciples, carried his teachings forward.

Though Jesus doubtless remains the most influential figure in Christianity, the man responsible for spreading his message more than any other was Paul of Tarsus (from the town in Turkey). He was not one of the original 12 Apostles of Jesus; still, Paul is considered by many to be Jesus' most important disciple, and is sometimes referred to as St. Paul the Apostle. He took Jesus' teachings to the Gentiles (non-Israelites) and is believed to be the primary source of early Christian doctrine (most of the 27 books in the New Testament are attributed to him). Paul is also responsible for establishing the church as we know it today. It was at Antioch, in Syria, that he founded the first church. Many argue that he was largely responsible for establishing Christianity as a distinct religion rather than a sect of Judaism. Originally known as Saul of Tarsus, Paul was a self-confessed persecutor of Christians. His change of opinion regarding the faith came about on the road to Damascus, where a blinding light struck him down; the vision Paul had of Jesus at that moment reversed his outlook on Christians.

After Jesus' death, Paul's message, as the apostles understood it, spread rapidly during the next three centuries with the help of the Roman Empire, which supplied relative peace and excellent roads. Within a mere generation following Paul's death, there were already three distinct movements within Christianity: the Jewish Christians, the Hellenistic Christians, and the Gnostic Christians. As the scriptural canon was developed, primarily by early church councils, Christianity's diversity began to harden into dogmas, especially around theological

central issues such as the divinity of Jesus and the existence of a triune god.

During this initial period of development, Christians suffered sporadic persecution by Roman emperors including Nero, Valerian, and Diocletian, and martyrdom became an ambition that many achieved. Their lives, deaths, and deeds were eventually immortalized by the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches in the perpetual cycle of saints' feast days. This occurred more slowly in some cases than in others. For instance, although Joan of Arc (1412–31) was convicted of heresy and burned at the stake on May 30, 1431, it was 1909 before she was finally beatified, and it was not until 1920 that she was declared a saint.

The Virgin Mary, had to wait even longer on the councils of men. The actual date of Mary's death is unknown, but in the fifth century St. Juvenal, then bishop of Jerusalem, asserted that Mary died in the presence of all the apostles and that her tomb, when opened, was empty; from this fact, the apostles concluded that her body had been taken up to heaven. As is true of other Christian holidays, no one knows when the first Feast of the Assumption (of Mary) was observed, but this, too, seems to have occurred during the fifth century. On one thing the Catholic and Orthodox Churches agree, and that is that it was Mary's physical body that was assumed into heaven. It was not however, until November 1950 that Pope Pius XII (r. 1939–58) declared (infallibly) that the Assumption of the Virgin Mary was an article of the Catholic faith.

By the 11th century, Christianity had spread throughout most of the Western world as well as some way into the Far East. In 1054, however, the Great Schism occurred, splitting the church into the Roman Catholic Church, with its allegiance to the pope in Rome, and the Eastern Orthodox Churches, which recognized the patriarch of Constantinople as the "first among equals." The Eastern Churches adopted the word "orthodox" in order to make clear their commitment to the early traditions of Christianity, as well as their resistance to change.

The European Reformation of the 16th century, started by objections to the abuses of papal authority and doctrinal error, spawned the Protestant and other similar churches, not to mention persecution of the dissenters in some countries as well as numerous, and interminable wars.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, groups calling themselves Fundamentalist Christians, aroused by the perceived threat of scientific research—in particular Darwin's theory of evolution and the new science of geology, which pushed the planet's age further and further back from Bishop James Ussher's first year of 4004 B.C.E., and eager for the dawn of Armageddon and the second coming of Jesus—created still further schisms, splitting even large Protestant congregations like the Baptists and Methodists.

The central emphasis of the Christian faith is that, though doctrines and beliefs are important, by



Statue of Jesus the Redeemer

Standing nearly 100 feet tall and 92 feet from fingertip to fingertip, and overlooking the beautiful city of Rio de Janeiro, the Statue of Jesus the Redeemer (*Christo Redentor*) is one of the tallest statues in the world. The monument represents Jesus standing with his arms outstretched, a welcoming symbol of warmth. Originally conceived in 1921, construction started in mid-1926 and was completed in 1931. The statue is nestled on top of Corcovado Mountain (also called Hunchback Mountain) and is located in Tijuca National Park, a favorite place for picnics and strolls. Visitors have access to the base of the statue, which, at 2,300 feet high, provides a breathtaking view of Sugarloaf Mountain and the world-famous beaches of Rio.



Pope John Paul II baptizes a Brazilian girl held by her parents in the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican during a special Mass. Baptism is a fundamental ritual of the Christian faith. (AP Photo/Claudio Onorati, Pool)

faith in the sacrificial death and the subsequent resurrection of Jesus, one is saved from death—spiritual and physical—and redeemed from sin. Christians believe that, through God’s grace, by faith and repentance, one will enter the kingdom of heaven.

Holidays and Religious Observances

For Christians, Easter is considered the most important Christian festival, and its numerous celebrations and observances form the core of the liturgical year, which begins around the time of the vernal equinox in the Northern Hemisphere (the autumnal equinox in the Southern Hemisphere) and stretches out into summer in the Northern Hemisphere (winter in the Southern Hemisphere). This occasion celebrates the resurrection of Jesus three days following his crucifixion. Christians believe Jesus was the son of God, and died on the cross to redeem humanity from sin. Apart from its religious aspect, the resurrection symbolizes the resurgence of hope and a fresh lease on life for all human beings. The actual dates for Easter and its associated religious observances are different for the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches of the West, which follow the Gregorian calendar, and

the several churches affiliated with the Eastern Orthodox Church, which continues to follow the Julian calendar.

Because of its importance in the early Church, as well as the appropriation of numerous dates and symbols from early European pagan festivals, what can be called the Easter season begins with Carnival in Spanish-speaking countries and Mardi Gras (Fat Tuesday) in French-speaking countries. Both Carnival and Mardi Gras are week-long celebrations that end the day before Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent, a 40-day period of abstinence and fasting observed primarily by Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox devout Christians, although the actual dates differ. On Ash Wednesday, the devout go to a special Mass, where the priest makes the sign of the cross on each person’s forehead with ashes.

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, marking the last week of Jesus’ mortal life. The day is as much about his triumphal entry into Jerusalem as it is about the beginning of his journey to the cross. His arrival in Jerusalem was indeed the way to the cross. Palm Sunday was originally known as the Second Sunday of the Passion, the fifth Sunday of Lent being Passion Sunday/First Sunday of the Passion. It is called Palm Sunday because the people of Jerusalem welcomed him with palm and olive branches and the laying of garments in his path.

The rituals observed on Maundy Thursday are based on a sequence of events supposed to have occurred during the last meal Jesus shared with his disciples, now called the Last Supper. First, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, then announced that he had been betrayed by one of them. At this point, Judas, the traitor, is believed to have left the gathering to meet the Roman soldiers and collect his payment for the betrayal. Finally, Jesus instituted the Eucharist: a ritual of consuming bread and wine as symbols of his body and blood, also referred to as communion. In the Roman Catholic Church, Maundy Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist, the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week, and gives priests an opportunity to prepare for the many rites associated with Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter.

Good Friday, also called Sorrowful Friday, Mourning Friday, and Holy Friday (also Great Friday in the Orthodox Churches) observes the day on which Jesus was crucified by the Romans at Golgotha or Mt. Calvary. Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches hold special services called *Tenebrae* because the churches are darkened until three o’clock in the afternoon, the length of time it is believed it took Jesus to die. Both Good Friday and Holy Saturday are “alitur-gical” days because no communion can be celebrated.

Easter Sunday is the most joyous of the Christian celebrations because it is the day on which Jesus is believed to have arisen from the dead.

Much of the remaining Christian liturgical calendar is dated from this day forward, with the

exception of Christmas, the day chosen to celebrate Jesus' birth. Ascension Day celebrates the Christian belief that Jesus rose to heaven 40 days after his resurrection from the dead on Easter Sunday. Pentecost is a two-day observance also called Whitsunday and Whitmonday, the Christian holiday that observes the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus' apostles and the early Christians, about 50 days (seven weeks) after Easter and 10 days following Ascension Thursday.

The Feast of the Assumption is Mary's most important feast. According to the customs of the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern and Orthodox Churches, as well as Catholic theology, the soul and body of Mary, the mother of Jesus, revered as the Blessed Virgin Mary (Roman Catholic) or Theotokos (Eastern Orthodox), was taken into heaven when she died. Although this feast ranks as one of the 12 Great Feasts of the Orthodox Church calendar, church authorities do not view it as dogma as Roman Catholics do. Both churches commemorate the Feast of the Assumption on August 15; in the Eastern Orthodox Church this event is known as the Feast of the Dormition, stressing the belief that the mother of Jesus did die a physical death before her assumption. The Assumption is significant to Christians because it is celebrated as Mary's heavenly birthday (the day that Mary was taken into heaven).

The last significant celebration of the Christian calendar is Christmas, which commemorates the birth of Jesus. The New Testament gospels say that Mary gave birth to Jesus in the town of Bethlehem. The birth of Jesus (the Nativity) was taken to be the fulfillment of a Jewish prophesy, according to which a messiah would come from King David's lineage to save the Jewish people. The earliest Christians probably celebrated Epiphany (the visit of the Magi to the baby Jesus) on January 6. It was only much later that attempts were made to determine the specific date of Jesus' birth. Roman Catholics and Protestant sects observe Jesus' birth on December 24–25, while Eastern Orthodox and related churches celebrate Epiphany, the visit of the Three Wise Men to Jesus' manger, on January 6–7, following the Julian calendar. Epiphany is regarded as the last day of the Christmas observances.

See also Volume I: ANDORRA; ANGOLA; ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA; ARGENTINA; ARMENIA; AUSTRALIA; AUSTRIA; BELARUS; BELGIUM; BELIZE; BOLIVIA; BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA; BRAZIL; BULGARIA; BURUNDI; CANADA; CAPE VERDE; CHILE; COLOMBIA; CONGO, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE; COSTA RICA; CROATIA; CYPRUS; CZECH REPUBLIC; DENMARK; DOMINICA; DOMINICAN REPUBLIC; ECUADOR; EL SALVADOR; EQUATORIAL GUINEA; ESTONIA; FINLAND; FRANCE; GEORGIA; GERMANY; GREECE; GRENADA; GUATEMALA; HAITI; HONDURAS; HUNGARY; ICELAND; IRELAND; ITALY; KIRIBATI

See also Volume II: LATVIA; LIECHTENSTEIN; LITHUANIA; LUXEMBOURG; MACEDONIA; MALTA; MEXICO; MICRONESIA, FEDERATED STATES OF; MOLDOVA; MONACO; NAMIBIA; NEW ZEALAND; NICARAGUA; NORWAY; PALAU; PANAMA; PARAGUAY; PERU; PHILIPPINES; POLAND; PORTUGAL; ROMANIA; RUSSIA; RWANDA; ST. LUCIA; SAN MARINO; SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO; SEYCHELLES; SLOVAKIA; SLOVENIA; SPAIN; SWEDEN; SWITZERLAND; TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO; UGANDA; UKRAINE; UNITED KINGDOM; UNITED STATES; URUGUAY; VATICAN CITY; VENEZUELA

See also Volume III: ALL SAINTS' DAY; ALL SOULS' DAY; ASCENSION, THE; ASSUMPTION; CHRISTMAS; CORPUS CHRISTI; EASTER; EPIPHANY; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

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Christmas

FACT FILE

Observed in	Worldwide
Observed on	December 25, or January 7 in some Orthodox Churches
Observed by	Christians

Introduction

Christmas commemorates the birth of Jesus (the founder of Christianity) whom Christians believe to be the Son of God. The New Testament Gospels say that Mary gave birth to Jesus in the town of Bethlehem. The birth of Jesus (known as the Nativity) was taken to be the fulfillment of a Jewish prophesy, according to which a Messiah would come from King David's lineage to save the Jewish people. Moreover soon after Jesus' death, his message was taken as well to the Gentiles (one who is not of the Jewish faith or is of a non-Jewish nation). The earliest Christians probably celebrated some events surrounding the birth of Jesus but it was not until much later that attempts were made to determine the specific date.

The date for Christmas on December 25 has long been part of the Christian calendar, however, and it is widely recognized as a religious holiday in most countries where Christians live. December 24, or Christmas Eve, is also an important part of the celebrations. Devout Christians usually begin Christmas by attending Mass or a Eucharistic or midnight prayer service and exchanging gifts on Christmas Eve. The Anglican Church has candlelight services that are characteristically held in the early evening on December 24, and these services often include dramas based on the Nativity.

St. Nicholas or Santa Claus who is associated with the delivering gifts to young children on this night has long been associated with the Christmas season. Christmas Eve also used to be the day when a Christmas tree was set up. In recent years, however, because the holiday season starts on a different schedule in some countries, Christmas trees are set up much earlier in the season. Lavish meals, with ham or turkey as featured items, are an integral part of the celebrations.

Origins and History

Christianity began and spread across the Old World by promising a new life in the hereafter and by promoting Jesus as the Messiah. By the fourth century the Roman Emperor Constantine reformed the Julian calendar and introduced the seven-day week, thereby changing the way the months were subdivided. (It is possible that the idea of the seven-day week was modeled on the Christian sabbatical cycle.) Also during that century a calendar was established that emphasized Christian festivals, and these began to take over the dates and seasons of pagan celebrations and rituals.

The latter part of December was one such period. Previous to this time, according to the



Christmas Pudding

The earliest recipes for preparing this pudding can be traced back to the Middle Ages. The ingredients of the pudding (then called "mince pie") included minced poultry, pheasant, partridge, and rabbit. Later, sugar, apples, raisins, candied oranges, and lemons were added. Another version of Christmas pudding (porridge or frumenty) appeared in the 14th century; its ingredients included beef, mutton, raisins, currents, prunes, wine, and mixed spices. It was a souplike dish consumed prior to the beginning of the celebrations. During the 1600s, spirits, dried fruit, eggs, and breadcrumbs began to be added to the recipe, and it finally became plum pudding. In 1664, the Puritans banned it, considering it a custom unworthy of people who followed the ways of God.

December 25

Since 354 in the Western world, Jesus' birthday has been celebrated on December 25. This date was significant in the ancient world for many reasons. In Phrygia (former Asia Minor, modern Turkey), the sun god Attis's birth was commemorated on December 25. The same was the case for Mithra, the Persian sun god. Saturnalia, a Roman festival honoring the god Saturn, was celebrated from December 17 to December 24. It is believed that the popes selected December 25 to attract converts by changing the object of the observances but not the substance of these pagan festivals. Only their reference was different; the symbols and activities remained the same.

Julian calendar, the Saturnalia, a seven-day festival honoring the Roman deity Saturn, the god of agriculture, was observed on December 17. This festival included the winter solstice, which usually occurred around December 25. During the Saturnalia, the Romans feasted well, put aside all business

and matters of war, exchanged gifts, and freed their slaves for the festival's duration. The Romans also celebrated December 25 as the date honoring the birth of the Unconquered Sun (Natalis Solis Invicti), and the Persians performed rituals to honor Mithra, the god of light. All these celebrations welcomed the return of the light and the lengthening days. Over time, the winter festivities stretched to include January 1, the festival of Kalends, the day of the new Moon and the first day of the month and year of the Julian calendar.

The story of the birth of Jesus is based mainly on the Gospels of St. Luke and St. Matthew, with traditionally accepted folkloric additions. The Gospels of St. John and St. Mark do not mention Jesus' birth or childhood and, to add to the uncertainty, the accounts of St. Matthew and St. Luke are quite different. According to the Gospel of St. Luke, the most popular version of the story and the one usually featured in Christmas Eve religious services, Mary (who was betrothed to Joseph) was told by the Archangel Gabriel that she was carrying God's child, even though she was a virgin. Mary and Joseph were married soon after. Some time later Joseph, who was a Nazareth carpenter, (the son of Jacob and the adopted or legal son of Heli, both of the family of David), trav-



Residents of Nazareth playing the roles of Mary, holding Jesus, center, and Joseph, right, reenact the Nativity, the birth of Jesus. Christians throughout the world celebrate Jesus' birth on the Christmas holiday. (AP Photo/Lefteris Pitarakis)

eled with Mary to Bethlehem of Judea, to enroll in the census that Augustus, the Roman emperor, had ordered. Since the inns in the town were all full, they could only find a stable in which to sleep. It was there that Jesus was born. Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, which was the home of King David, to whose lineage Joseph belonged, fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy about the birth of a savior. The magi (three wise men, named Balthazar, Caspar, and Melchior) arrived in Jerusalem and reported to Herod, the local king, that they had witnessed a star signifying the birth of a king. (We are not told whether they were riding camels. They might have walked.) They eventually arrived at the stable where Mary and Joseph had taken shelter and offered Jesus "frankincense, gold, and myrrh." During the

night, each wise man dreamed that Herod wanted to murder the newborn, so they returned home without telling him they had found the child. The gospel of Matthew narrates that Jesus' family then fled to Egypt to escape Herod, who was having all the newborn children of Jerusalem under the age of two killed in order to eradicate any threat to his position. The Magi, it should be noted, are mentioned only in St. Matthew's Gospel and appear after he has reported Jesus' genealogy and virgin birth. Jesus' family finally returned to Israel after Herod's death and settled in Nazareth.

Fun Fact

The Coptic Church is the indigenous form of Christianity established by the Apostle Mark in Egypt in the middle of the first century C.E. It is the national church of Egypt.

Christmas Trees and Decorations

According to one of the legends about the origin of the Christmas tree, St. Boniface (an English monk who organized the Christian Church in France and Germany), during one of his journeys, came upon a group of pagans gathered around a giant oak tree preparing to sacrifice a child to the god Thor. To stop the sacrifice and save the child's life, Boniface felled the tree with one mighty blow of his fist. In its place grew a small fir tree. The saint told the pagan worshipers that the tiny fir was the Tree of Life and stood for the eternal life of Jesus.

The symbols associated with this holiday are many. The decorations on the Christmas trees are highly significant. Through the centuries the Christmas star, placed at the top of the tree, has been associated with joyous celebrations. It symbolizes high hopes for a bright future and good fortune. The red-and-white striped candy canes represent the humble shepherds who were first to worship the baby Jesus. Their "J" shape also represents his name. The white stripes symbolize the virgin birth of Jesus and his sinless life, while the red stripes represent the Trinity and the blood shed by Jesus on the cross. The hardness of the candy symbolizes the foundation of churches and the strength of the promises made by God.

Bells symbolize the joys of life. A crystal ball maybe added to symbolize redemption, and lights or candles stand

for the triumph of spring over the darkness of winter. They also symbolize the light that Jesus brought into the world. The Doves represent the Holy Ghost or Holy Spirit, when descending to Earth.

Since holly remained green even in winter, the pagan Druids (priests of ancient Celtic Britain, Ireland, and Gaul) considered it a sacred plant, meant to keep Earth beautiful even in the middle of a cold, harsh winter. The Romans offered holly to their god Saturn and used it widely during the Saturnalia. Besides decorating images of Saturn with it, Romans gave one another wreaths of holly. After the advent of Christianity, while Romans continued their pagan worship, Christians celebrated the birth of Jesus at the same time. To avoid persecution, they decked their homes with holly leaves. As the number of Christians increased, holly eventually lost its pagan connotation and became a symbol of Christmas. Holly has sharp edges, symbolic of the crown of thorns worn by Jesus before his Crucifixion, while the red berries represent his blood.

The Druids believed that mistletoe (a hemiparasite that grows most commonly on oak trees; it has leathery evergreen leaves and waxy white berries) fell from heaven and grew onto a tree that sprang from Earth. Mistletoe thus signifies the connection between heaven and Earth, as well as God's reconciliation with humanity. A kiss exchanged under mistletoe symbolizes acceptance and reconciliation.



Santa Claus

Giving gifts is an integral part of Christmas festivities. The notion of a jolly fat man in a red suit trimmed with fur giving children gifts originated with St. Nicholas, a kindhearted bishop who lived in Asia Minor during the fourth century. The Dutch people celebrated his feast day around December 6. The English colonists in North America adopted some features of this tradition into their Christmas celebrations; thus Sinterklaas (Saint Nick) became Santa Claus. In England, however, Father Christmas is a more common name for the jovial, pot-bellied figure who delivers presents all over the world in one night.

The narratives credited to Matthew and Luke, both written decades after Jesus' death, do not agree and focus on different parts of the story altogether. Furthermore, there were no eyewitnesses who could confirm or deny the stories as they were presented, and the other two gospels fail to mention Jesus' birth and childhood, leaving doubt regarding the accuracy of Matthew's and Luke's stories. It is not clear, for example, that the Romans would have taken a census during the worst time of the year, nor can authorities agree on whether shepherds would have been watching their sheep outdoors and at night, as reported, during the rainy season. What remain are questions that, two millennia later, remain unanswered and are probably unanswerable.

Christmas was not among the first festivals of the Christian religion, and attempts to fix a date for Jesus' birth date did not begin until approximately two hundred years after his death, when the

Catholic Church decided to establish its traditions. Neither Irenaeus (130–202) nor Tertullian (155–230) mentions such an observance in his lists of feasts, Origen asserted in 495 that only sinners, not saints, celebrate their birthday, and Arnobius, writing in the 13th century, boldly mocked the “birthdays” attributed to the gods.

The pagan festival observing the Natalis Solis Invicti, which reached the peak of its popularity in 274, is the most logical source for the date of December 25, and the use of solar symbolism and language to refer to the

Judeo-Christian God and Jesus has such a long history that relating its development would quickly become repetitious. The connections are numerous and incontrovertible. Thus Jesus' birth is celebrated on December 25 in Protestant, Catholic, and some Orthodox churches. The Coptic, Russian, Jerusalem, Georgian, and Serbian Orthodox Churches observe the holiday on January 7 because they rejected both the reforms of the revised Julian calendar and its successor, the Gregorian calendar.

Dates for Christmas holiday celebrations vary around the world. The festive season conventionally runs for the 12 days following Christmas in the United Kingdom. This period, signified by merry-making and feasting, ends on the 12th night after Christmas, the Feast of the Epiphany, which matches the liturgical season. Swedish medieval laws proclaimed *julefrid* (Christmas peace) to be 20 days and doubled the fines for manslaughter and robbery during that period. King Knut (r. 1080–86) is considered a saint because of his virtues and generosity. It was he who declared that Christmas should be celebrated for 20 days, officially ending the season on January 13. Until Saint Knut's Day, the time is filled with numerous parties and great rejoicing. After this period, Christmas trees are taken down to mark the official close of the season. Swedish children celebrate a party, and throw out the *julgransplundring* (Christmas tree) on January 13 (King Knut's day).

The Armenian Church emphasizes the Epiphany (the magi's visit to the baby Jesus), not Christmas. The period between Christmas Eve (December 24) and Epiphany (January 6) is commonly known as Yuletide. According to one of the prevalent theories, the root for “Yule” came from the aboriginal Scandinavians and denoted their winter solstice festival. Some scholars say that Yule probably means “feast,” while Yuletide meant the “season of feasting.”

Christmas is, by any computation, the most widely celebrated festival in the world. In many Christian and non-Christian countries, it is a time to be with the family, a period filled with gifts and extravagant feasts of foods served only on this occasion. This day also signifies a time of peace and harmony. Children particularly look forward to this day because Santa Claus (also known as Father Christmas) will bring them the things they hope for.

See also Volume I: ANDORRA; ANGOLA; ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA; ARGENTINA; ARMENIA; AUSTRALIA; AUSTRIA; BARBADOS; BELARUS; BELGIUM; BELIZE; BOLIVIA; BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA; BRAZIL; BULGARIA; BURUNDI; CANADA; CAPE VERDE; CHILE; COLOMBIA; CONGO, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE; COSTA RICA; CROATIA; CYPRUS; CZECH REPUBLIC; DENMARK; DOMINICA; DOMINICAN REPUBLIC; ECUADOR; EL SALVADOR; EQUATORIAL GUINEA; ESTONIA; FIJI; FINLAND; FRANCE; GABON; GEORGIA; GERMANY; GREECE; GRENADA;

Fun Fact

The name of the holiday first appears in Late Old English, Cristes Maesse, the Mass of Christ. In Latin, it was Dies Natalis, the Day of Birth, from which the French name Noël, the Italian, Il Natale, and the Spanish, La Navidad derive. Among the Dutch the celebration is called Kerstmisse (also the Mass of Christ), while the German name, Weihnachtsfest, refers to the sacred vigil of Christmas Eve.

GUATEMALA; GUYANA; HAITI; HONDURAS; HUNGARY; ICELAND; IRELAND; ITALY; JAMAICA; KENYA; KIRIBATI; KOREA, SOUTH

See also Volume II: LATVIA; LESOTHO; LIECHTENSTEIN; LITHUANIA; LUXEMBOURG; MACEDONIA; MADAGASCAR; MALAWI; MALTA; MARSHALL ISLANDS; MEXICO; MICRONESIA, FEDERATED STATES OF; MOLDOVA; MONACO; NAMIBIA; NAURU; NETHERLANDS; NEW ZEALAND; NICARAGUA; NIGERIA; NORWAY; PALAU; PANAMA; PARAGUAY; PERU; PHILIPPINES; POLAND; PORTUGAL; ROMANIA; RUSSIA; RWANDA; ST. KITTS AND NEVIS; ST. LUCIA; ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES; SAMOA; SAN MARINO; SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO; SEYCHELLES; SLOVAKIA; SLOVENIA; SOUTH AFRICA; SPAIN; SURINAME; SWAZILAND; SWEDEN; SWITZERLAND; TANZANIA; TOGO; TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO; TUVALU; UGANDA; UKRAINE; UNITED KINGDOM; UNITED

STATES; URUGUAY; VANUATU; VATICAN CITY; VENEZUELA; ZAMBIA

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EPIPHANY

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Fun Fact

There is not a month in either the Julian or Gregorian calendars that has not been suggested as the time of Jesus' birth.

Confucianism

FACT FILE

Observed in	China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam
World Population	About 350 million
Place of Origin	China

Introduction

Confucianism (*ru-jia*, the School of the Scholars) is a major system of thought in China, not really a religion. It was developed from the teachings of Confucius (Kung fu-tze) and his disciples. Confucius (551–479 B.C.E.) was born poor in the Shandong Province of China. In spite of his birth, he nevertheless managed to get a good education. A remarkable thinker and educator, he became a teacher in his later life and attracted about 3,000 followers, of whom 72 became famous, or so the legend goes. His teachings have had a tremendous influence on China's civilization, the people's lives, their patterns of living, social values, standards for training government officials, and the development of Chinese political theories and institutions.

It is difficult to categorize Confucianism, since it is neither a philosophy nor a religion. It is more of a collection of values, precepts, and adages designed to lead practitioners toward the "middle way" (*tao*) of living. Confucianism does not have the elements that religions, like Christianity and Islam, require. Rather, rituals have been added to what is primarily an ethical system that provides guidelines for right living and right ruling.

Confucius stressed the ways people can live together cordially and develop a just and systematic society. According to Confucius, the "higher good" does not come from the privileges of birth but from the practice of moderate, beneficial, and generous behavior and of service to others. Attainment comes through education and formal behavior. Confucianism does not favor military solutions, but rather spiritual patience. It does not require religious edifices or clergy, and the only sin is a breach of the rule of goodness toward one's parents, one's superior, one's homeland, one's chief of state, or one's sons and daughters.

Confucius not only stressed social rituals (*li*), but also humaneness (*ren*). *Ren*, sometimes translated as "love" or "kindness," is not a single virtue

but the source of all virtues. *Ren* keeps ritual forms from becoming hollow: A ritual performed with *ren* has ethical content apart from form; it nurtures the inner character of the person and furthers his or her ethical maturation. If Confucianism's exterior is conformity and acceptance of social roles, its interior is cultivation of conscience and character. Cultivation concerns extensive education and reflection on one's actions. It is a lifetime commitment to character-building.

The heart of Confucianism is reformist, idealistic, and spiritual. It stresses family interaction: Members are expected to treat each other with love, respect, and attention to the needs of all. It also prescribes the highest ideal for the state: The ruler is supposed to be a father to his people and look after their basic needs. It requires officials to be critical of their rulers and to refuse to serve the corrupt.

Origins and History

Confucius did not set out to found a religion, nor did he consider himself an original thinker. Instead, he saw his work as that of restoring a utopian period of Chinese history based on ancient wisdom, an unnamed core of social values at the heart of Chinese society. This undertaking, he believed, would bring order to his world. Confucius pulled together the common moral ideals of his culture. In its fledgling form the philosophy was principally a system of moral precepts for the proper management of society. To Confucius the old Chou religion framed the activities and events of everyday life.

For Confucius rituals were much more than religious acts of piety seeking the beneficence of the gods. They were everyday manifestations of the humane, cultured behaviors that had developed over centuries of human social activity. These rituals, he believed, were the ethical core of Chinese society, its "social mores." He was not a philosophical pioneer striking out into a wilderness of

abstraction. Rather Confucius's task was restorative and conservative, mining China's past for small nuggets of wisdom, and his teachings affirmed the need for adhering to accepted social values and customs necessary to the social infrastructure and the bonds of human relationships. If each person understood his or her role and performed it, starting from the individual and the family, a society would evolve.

Li and *ren* provide the foundation of Confucianism. According to Confucianism, *li* (or social propriety) is the greatest rule of living. A society that lives by *li* functions smoothly. Confucius viewed people as social creatures who are bound within society by *ren*, or human kindness. *Ren* is expressed through five relationships: sovereign and subject, parent and child, elder and younger brother, husband and wife, and friend and friend. The filial equation is often most stressed among these.

Confucius lived in a tumultuous era in China's history, during the second half of the Zhou dynasty. The Zhou had conquered the Shangs and ruled China for close to 800 years (1050–256 B.C.E.). It was a time of social and moral chaos, when values were often disregarded or cast aside. In the culture of fear created by the warlords, the philosophy of Confucianism flourished, ultimately transforming Chinese society and dominating it for centuries. The reason for its dominance was that Confucianism conformed to the needs of the ruling classes. It stressed five constant virtues: *ren* (benevolence), *yi* (righteousness), *li* (propriety), *zhi* (wisdom), and *xin* (fidelity) as the foundation of a basic ethical code necessary for an ordered society. It presented a utopian world for both the ruling class and the common people. According to Confucianism, the ruler should be like a father to his people and cater to their essential needs. It encouraged officials to be loyal to their rulers and shun corruption, and promoted the absolute authority of a king over his subjects, a husband over his wife, and a father over his son.

Confucius's method of presenting information was indirect, and he frequently used allusions, innuendo, and even tautology to make his points. Had it not been for his disciples, Confucius's ideas would still be unknown. The great social thinker never wrote anything down himself, but his disciples preserved all of his sayings and conversations in a collection of books called the Analects. The Analects contain all that the world knows today of the man whose teachings are largely responsible for shaping the culture of China.

Two of the most important Confucian philosophers viewed Confucianism in totally different ways: Mencius (390–305 B.C.E.) and Xunzyi (mid-200s B.C.E.). Both held beliefs similar to those of Confucius, yet, at the same time, they were quite opposite. Mencius believed that people are born good and that they have to "preserve the natural compassion of the heart." Xunzyi (or Hsün-tzu) argued that people are innately evil but can be changed through moral edu-

Confucius's Name

Confucius was born into the family of Gong and given the personal name of Zhui; thus, his real name was Gong Zhui. Later after earning recognition as a teacher and attaining political power, he was called Master Gong or Gong Fu-Zi. From this name came the Latin translation that is used today.

cation. Xunzyi was also the major exponent of ritualism in Confucianism. He believed that desires should be guided and controlled by the rules of propriety and that character should be shaped by an orderly observance of rites and by the practice of music. This code was to serve as a commanding influence on character by properly directing emotions and providing inner harmony.

Confucianism focused on the needs of society and, in contrast to Buddhism and Taoism, not on the individual's ability to live in harmony with nature. In the 200s B.C.E., however, these two religions began to affect and reshape the standards of Confucianism, and elements like nature began to be incorporated. Between 200 B.C.E. and 600 C.E., there was a rapid decline in interest in Confucianism in China. This was in part because Confucianism now had to contend with Buddhism and Taoism, which were developed around this time. These religions and Confucianism were at the extreme ends of the spectrum. Buddhism and Taoism were largely concerned with the significance of death and suffering, while Confucianism largely ignored those aspects of life.

A revival of Confucianism began around the 600s but had ended by the 700s. In the 1100s, Zhu Xi (1130–1200 C.E.) was a Song Dynasty (960–1279 C.E.) Confucian scholar who led the movement called Neo-Confucianism. He developed a branch of Confucianism known as the rational wing, which dealt with the study of *li*, the relationship between humans and nature. Another branch was called the intuitional wing; it dealt mainly with enlightenment through a blend of meditation and moral action. Zhu Xi and his students are largely responsible for what is considered the Confucian canon: the four

Confucius: Observations of His Own Life

"At fifteen, I set my heart on learning. At thirty, I was firmly established. At forty, I had no more doubts. At fifty, I knew the will of heaven. At sixty, I was ready to listen to it. At seventy, I could follow my heart's desire without transgressing what was right." (Analects, 2:4).

Confucianism and Birth

Confucianism teaches that the spirit of the fetus (*dai-shen*) protects the expectant woman and deals severely with anyone who disturbs her. A special practice is followed in the disposal of the placenta. After delivery the mother is given a special diet and is allowed to rest for a month. While she recovers her family of origin provides whatever the infant needs on the first, fourth, and 12th monthly anniversaries of its birth.

books (*sisbu*), which consist of the *Analects of Confucius*, the *Mencius*, the *Great Learning*, and the *Doctrine of the Mean*; and the five scriptures, which include the *Book of Changes (I Ching)*, perhaps the single best-known Chinese work in the West. Zhu Xi also wrote extensive commentaries for all of these classics. The writings were considered unorthodox in Zhu Xi's time, but they were accepted as standard commentaries on the Confucian classics at a later date.

From the 11th through the 19th centuries, Neo-Confucianism produced reformers, philanthropists, dedicated teachers, officials, and social philosophers.

In the early 20th century, Confucianism came into conflict with Communism. For many years after the Communist revolution in China the government outlawed Confucianism, because it tends to look to the past rather than the future. However, official government opposition ended in 1977.

Holidays and Religious Observances

Because Confucianism is not a religion in the most commonly understood sense of the term, it is more appropriate to talk about ceremonial observances, of which there are six: capping, marriage, mourning rites, sacrifices, feasts, and interviews. The first four are the most important, and they have changed very little over the centuries. Capping is a joyous celebration, held when a son turns 20. Relatives and invited guests gather to witness the father give his son a special name and a square-cornered cap as symbols of his having reached manhood. The ceremony is followed by a feast.

The marriage ceremony is very important because sons are expected to reproduce in order to



Performers dressed in replicas of ancient costumes bow in front of a statue of the ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius in a ceremony marking his birthday in northeast China. The ceremony marked the 2,556th anniversary of the birth of Confucius. (AP Photo)

sustain the patriarchal line and to ensure the continuance of ancestral worship. Young men are supposed to be married by the time they reach 30, whereas the age for young women is 20. Marriage in Confucianism is an elaborate process performed in six stages. During the proposal phase, the couple exchanges the year, month, day, and hour of their respective births. If any unfavorable event takes place in the bride-to-be's family in the subsequent three days, then the bride is believed to have rejected the proposal. After the wedding day is chosen, the bride announces it with invitations and gifts of moon-shaped cookies. Next, the bride's dowry is delivered to the groom's house in a formal procession, and the groom's parents reciprocate by sending the bride-price to the bride. The groom must then send gifts to the bride, which should be equal in value to her dowry. Then the groom goes to the bride's home and brings her to his house amid much celebration. During the actual wedding ceremony, the two recite their vows, toast each other with wine, and then host a banquet. Melon halves are hollowed out to serve as cups and filled with sweet spirits; these are handed to the bride and groom. The morning after the wedding, the bride serves breakfast to the groom's parents, who then reciprocate.

Mourning rituals are also very important because of the connection with the worship of ancestors. They are extremely elaborate, and both their details and the length of mourning are based on the rank and relationship of the deceased. Confucian practice requires that, during a funeral, the family of the deceased put on clothes made of a coarse material. The corpse is washed and placed in a coffin. Mourners bring incense and money to make up for the cost of the funeral. Food and noteworthy objects of the deceased are placed inside the coffin. Because there are no religious "officials" in Confucian groups, the funeral is nondenominational in nature, insofar as a Buddhist or Taoist priest (or even a Christian minister) may perform the burial rites. Friends and family follow the coffin to the cemetery, carrying a willow branch, which represents the soul of the dead person. The branch is brought back to the family altar, where it is used to "install" the spirit of the deceased. Liturgies are performed on the seventh, ninth, and 49th days after the burial and on the first and third death anniversaries.

The importance of sacrifices is repeatedly emphasized in Confucian texts, where instructions are provided for their proper performance. "Sacrifice," however, does not entail blood-letting or death, as the word may suggest to Westerners. It is merely an offering of food to spirit guests, intended

to express homage and reverence. There is always a lot of food and drink available for all at these observances, as well as music and singing, and it is believed that the spirits enjoy the feasting and entertainment as much as the living celebrants.

Finally, the worship of one's ancestors remains of great importance to followers of Confucius, although, like sacrifice, it is not "worship" as Westerners conceive of it. It consists of feasts held to honor one's dead kin. Every home, from the emperor's palace to the smallest peasant cottage, had a space set aside for an ancestral shrine where wooden tablets bearing the names of relatives, including even remote ancestors, were kept. At specific times, offerings of fruit, wine, and cooked meats were placed before these tablets, where the people believed the spirits of their relations temporarily rested. More impressive, public rituals were also performed by local clans, where their common ancestors were honored twice a year, in the spring and, again, in the fall. These observances involved great banquets, including music and formal dances, to which the dead were invited. Although these periodic feasts are largely restricted to those actually related by kinship ties, some public figures also earned the allegiance of the people and were also recognized with gifts of food. Confucius, regarded as one of the greatest social benefactors, is still honored in this way in China.

See also Volume I: CHINA; JAPAN; KOREA, SOUTH

See also Volume II: VIETNAM

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Corpus Christi

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Roman Catholic and Episcopal populations, as well as members of the Church of England
Observed on	Sixty days after Easter, on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday, and in some countries three days later, on Sunday
Observed by	Christians, primarily Roman Catholic, Episcopal, and Church of England

Introduction

During the Last Supper, Jesus offered bread and a cup of wine to his disciples, proclaiming these to be a sacred transformation of with his body and his blood. Jesus' act is the basis of the festival of Corpus Christi. Corpus Christi means "the body of Christ" in Latin. Corpus Christi is a religious feast, observed in May or June on the eighth Thursday (or 60 days) after Easter. It commemorates the institution of the

Holy Eucharist (the practice of consuming of bread and wine representing the body and blood of Jesus by the congregation during the rite of Communion). Roman Catholics, some sections of the Church of England, and the Episcopal Church celebrate this festival. Its date is not fixed to a particular day of the year, but moves according to the date of Easter, which also varies from year to year.

In the early days of the Christian Church, Corpus Christi was celebrated during Holy Week. This was a somber time for Christians who meditated on



A cardinal blesses worshippers during a Corpus Christi celebration at the Zocalo Square in Mexico City. This Roman Catholic holiday celebrates the miraculous transformation of the body and blood of Christ into the bread and wine that the faithful receive at Communion. (AP Photo/Eduardo Verdugo)

the Passion and suffering of Jesus. Since many other functions were also organized during this festival, the significance of the actual event tended to be lost. To safeguard the sanctimony of the main festival Pope Urban IV (r. 1261–64 C.E.) decided to introduce a new feast in 1264. He decreed that the festival be celebrated on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday (the first Sunday after Pentecost, which marks the descent of the Holy Spirit to Earth). St. Thomas Aquinas (1225/27–74) was asked to write the office (the prescribed form of worship) for the festival. The feast has been celebrated in many parts of the world for the 750 years since.

After it was introduced in Belgium, the feast came to be accepted at Cologne in Germany in 1306 and in England between 1320 and 1325. In 1970 the day was changed to the Sunday after Trinity Sunday in the United States and in many other parts of the world.

Corpus Christi is not among the great feasts of Eastern Orthodoxy, but in the Greek Church, the Syrians, Armenians, Coptics, Melchites, and the Ruthenians of Galicia, Calabria, and Sicily observe the feast of Corpus Christi.

Origins and History

The origins of the festival can be traced to St. Juliana, an Augustinian nun. She was born in 1193 at Retines near Liège in Belgium. She had been orphaned early in life and was cared for and educated by the Augustinian nuns. Later she became the superior (head) of the convent. From an early age she displayed a deep devotion to the Eucharist, and this feeling was strengthened when the Lord appeared to her at the age of 16 and told her that there should be a feast to celebrate the Eucharist or Blessed Sacrament. The reasons for the feast given by the Lord were threefold: He wanted to strengthen Catholic faith in the Eucharist. He wanted people to derive strength from it and, thus, lead virtuous lives; and honoring the Eucharist would make up for any sacrilegious acts committed against the Eucharist. Another story that connects her decision to request a feast celebrating the Eucharist describes her vision as one of the Catholic Church, under a full Moon, with a single dark spot. This dark spot represented the lack of such an observance.

Twenty years after receiving this vision, Juliana became the superior of her order, and she decided that this was the time to create the feast. She spoke to the bishop of Liège Robert de Thorte, to the learned Dominican Hugh, later cardinal legate in the Netherlands, to Jacques Pantaleon, archdeacon of Liège, who later became bishop of Verdun, to the patriarch of Jerusalem, and finally to Pope Urban IV. The bishops of those times had the power to order feasts in their dioceses. In 1246 Bishop Robert ordered the feast to be observed, starting the next year, in his diocese.

Corpus Christi Play

The York Corpus Christi Cycle is actually a collection of religious plays performed outdoors in the town of York, England, during the Feast of Corpus Christi. The plays date back to the period in history before England separated from the Roman Catholic Church and emphasize Catholic beliefs and rituals. From the 14th to the 16th centuries, they were performed despite Protestant censorship. Community leaders—religious heads, town officials, and other important locals—would perform a predawn torchlight procession in which the Eucharist would be carried in front, followed by the “play” wagons. Today, the plays are performed in York as a daylong festival.

When Juliana passed away in 1258, the feast had not yet spread to all parts of the world. After she was canonized as a saint, there arose some controversy over celebrating it. It was felt by certain sections of the Catholic Church that there was no need to have a separate feast to mark the Eucharist and that it was being given sufficient importance in daily church rituals. This controversy was, however, resolved by a miracle that took place in the town of Bolsena in Italy in 1263.

A German priest, Father Peter of Prague, was on his way to Rome, when he stopped in the town of Bolsena in Orvieto, Italy, to hold a Mass. He did not fully believe that Jesus was present in the Eucharist, but, as he was speaking the words of the Consecration, blood began to drip from the blessed

Italian *infiorata*

The word *infiorata* refers to carpets of flower petals that have been arranged in myriad patterns on the streets. This custom can be traced back to ancient Greek festivals. The Italian *infiorata* is a combination of the showers of flowers thrown in front of processions and the laying of palm mats for Jesus when he entered Jerusalem. The carpets of flowers usually depict religious and social traditions and customs.

The connection between Corpus Christi and *infiorata* can be traced back to June 16, 1462, when Pope Pius II (r. 1464–71) was celebrating the festival in the Italian town of Viterbo and asked the townspeople to decorate the path of the procession in a way that would be “fitting for the gods.” The people responded by decorating the route with plants, putting up archways of flowers, hanging tapestries from walls, and creating carpets of flower petals for the pope to walk on.

The Year of the Eucharist

The late Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005) declared October 2004 to October 2005 to be the Year of the Eucharist. The International Eucharistic Congress, in Guadalajara, Mexico, was held from October 10–17 and ended with the assembly of bishops in the Vatican.



bread onto the altar cloth below. He ceased to doubt that the bread and wine offered during the Mass were actually the body and blood of Jesus. Amazed by this incident he went to see Pope Urban IV and described what had happened to him. After conducting his own investigation, the pope declared it a miracle and decreed the Feast of Corpus Christi to be celebrated on September 8, 1264.

In 1264 Pope Urban IV died, and this prevented the feast from spreading farther. However, in 1311 at the Council of Vienne, Pope Clement V (r. 1305–14) declared that the feast be adopted throughout the world and published a decree to this effect. Its spread was further encouraged by his successor Pope John XXII (r. 1316–34.)

The procession that is a part of the feast today was not referred to in either of their decrees, though it was being done in some places. This was made a regular part of the celebration by Popes Martin V (r. 1417–31) and Eugene IV (r. 1431–47.)

See also Volume I: ANDORRA; ANGOLA; ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA; ARGENTINA; AUSTRALIA; AUSTRIA; BELGIUM; BELIZE; BOLIVIA; BRAZIL; BURUNDI;

CANADA; CAPE VERDE; CHILE; COLOMBIA; CONGO, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE; COSTA RICA; CROATIA; CZECH REPUBLIC; DOMINICA; DOMINICAN REPUBLIC; ECUADOR; EL SALVADOR; EQUATORIAL GUINEA; FRANCE; GERMANY; GRENADA; GUATEMALA; HAITI; HONDURAS; HUNGARY; IRELAND; ITALY; KIRIBATI

See also Volume II: LIECHTENSTEIN; LITHUANIA; LUXEMBOURG; MEXICO; MICRONESIA, FEDERATED STATES OF; MONACO; NEW ZEALAND; NICARAGUA; PALAU; PANAMA; PARAGUAY; PERU; PHILIPPINES; POLAND; PORTUGAL; RWANDA; ST. LUCIA; SAN MARINO; SEYCHELLES; SLOVAKIA; SLOVENIA; SPAIN; SWITZERLAND; TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO; UGANDA; UNITED KINGDOM; URUGUAY; VATICAN CITY; VENEZUELA

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Declaration of the Bab

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Bahai populations, primarily India
Observed on	Fifth and sixth of Azamat, the fourth month of the Bahai calendar
Observed by	Bahai

Introduction

On May 22, Bahai throughout the world celebrate the Declaration of the Bab, which originally took place in Shiraz, Persia, in 1844 C.E. on the Gregorian calendar. On that day, two hours after dusk, Siyyid Ali Muhammad first referred to himself as the Bab (which means “the gate”), and announced his mission to inform the masses about the impending arrival of another prophet. Reckoned by the Bahai 19-month calendar, the Bab declared his sacred mission on Azamat (“Grandeur”) 5, and the event is observed on Azamat 5–6.

This event opened the Bahai era in 1260 A.H. on the Islamic lunar calendar. The declaration marked the beginning of six turbulent years in Persia. Thousands of the Bab’s followers were killed and the Bab himself was executed in 1850 by a firing squad.

The Declaration of the Bab is one of Bahai’s eleven holy days. Work is forbidden on nine of those days, including the Declaration of the Bab. Bahai refrain from work after sunset on May 22 until dusk on May 23. Greeting cards are sent out on this occasion.

Origins and History

In 1783, a wise man named Shaykh Ahmad-i-Ashai traveled through Persia, teaching that a great day was imminent. That day would see the advent of the promised one of Islam. While spreading the message, he managed to gather a group of students from among the secular leaders and clergy of that time, all of whom were eager to learn from him. Among his students was a man by the name of

Letters of the Living

Mulla Husayn was the first disciple of the Bab. Seventeen more disciples of Siyyid Kazim recognized the Bab as God’s manifestation. One of them was a poet who later earned the name Tahirih (the Pure). These 18 disciples were known as Letters of the Living.

Anis: Anis (or Mulla Muhammad Ali), offered himself to be killed along with the Bab. It is said that he was unharmed when the Armenian firing squad fired at him and the Bab the first time.

Siyyid Kazim-i-Rashti, who became his favorite pupil and successor.

After Shaykh Ahmad’s death in 1826, Siyyid Kazim-i-Rashti continued to spread his predecessor’s message, but opposition to the movement kept growing stronger. In an effort to garner the support of some higher authorities, he sent one of his students Mulla Husayn-i-Bushrui to relate his master’s teachings to the authorities and answer their queries. Mulla Husayn was successful in this task. Still, the opposition to Siyyid Kazim’s message did not abate, and he had to bear great hardship as his foes did everything possible to discredit him, at times even putting his life in jeopardy. Siyyid Kazim continued to proclaim the coming revelation, although he refused to reveal the identity of the promised one, saying that no one would accept it if he did so. Before his death in 1843 C.E., he instructed his followers to go out and look for the Promised One, saying that the time of his discovery had come.

Mulla Husayn-i-Bushrui, his brother, and a nephew went to Shiraz on this quest, on May

Shrine of the Bab

The Shrine of the Bab, in Haifa, Israel, is the place where the Bab's mortal remains are deemed to have been interred. Bahauallah himself designated the location in 1891. It was built by Abdul Baha; years later Shoghi Effendi Rabbani completed the superstructure in the 1950s.



22,1844 C.E. While strolling outside the city gates a few hours before dusk, Mulla Husayn-i-Bushrui was suddenly greeted by a youth wearing a green turban (an indication that he was of prophet Muhammad's lineage). Mulla Husayn-i-Bushrui initially thought he was a follower of Siyyid Kazim who had known of Husayn's coming to Shiraz and was there to welcome him. Even so, the manner of the greeting was astonishing. He took Mulla Husayn-i-Bushrui to his house, where he was kind and extremely welcoming. On being asked by Siyyid Ali Muhammad (the young man) about the purpose of his visit, Mulla Husayn revealed that he was searching for the Promised One of Islam. The youth then asked how the Promised One would be recognized, to which Husayn said that he would be of a pure lineage (of Muhammad), of illustrious descent, blessed with innate wisdom, and free from physical problems. To Mulla Husayn's astonishment, the young man declared that all those signs were manifest in him.

But, in order to be absolutely sure, Husayn proposed two tests for Siyyid Ali Muhammad. The first was a discourse Mulla Husayn had composed himself, which contained the profound teachings of Siyyid Kazim and Shaykh Ahmad. Siyyid Ali Muhammad duly unraveled the intricacies of the composition. Then, without being asked, Siyyid Ali Muhammad proceeded to write a commentary spontaneously (as Siyyid Kazim had told him the promised one would do) on the Surih of Joseph (the 12th sura in the Koran that tells the story of Joseph). Thus, Siyyid Ali Muhammad revealed himself to be the Bab.

Thenceforth, Siyyid Ali Muhammad called himself the Bab, or "the gate," and Mulla Husayn became his first disciple. Although the Bab was the promised one of Islam, he taught the people that he was simply a precursor to another messenger (as John the Baptist was to Jesus) who would follow him and whose powers and revelations would exceed that of any other messiah or prophet previously sent down by God. Siyyid Ali Muhammad's astonishing claim showed his tremendous courage, because he would face vicious opposition from Persia's fanatical clerics, who would be readily backed by an inept monarchy.

The Bab was well aware that his followers would be persecuted in the most horrendous manner

and that he himself would be vilified, flogged, and openly executed. The Bahai believe that the moment of Siyyid Ali Muhammad's declaration identifying himself as the Bab marked the end of humanity's spiritual adolescence and the start of its spiritual maturity. Such a huge transition could not have been accomplished without great turmoil, and the Bab foretold of yet another (and a greater) revelation to come. This ultimately led in 1863 C.E. to the Declaration of Bahauallah, the father of the Bahai faith, as the manifestation of God for that period.

The Bab's main work was the Bayan, which altered some Muslim laws. It stressed a high ethical standard and cleanliness of motive and heart. It elevated the status of women and the deprived people unnoticed in Islamic life. It also endorsed education and the sciences. In addition, the Bayan foretold the coming of Bahauallah that would usher in an age of prosperity and peace as promised in Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and all other world religions. Due to his boldness and the nature of his beliefs, which sometimes contradicted the religious beliefs of Islam, the Bab was branded a rebel and a heretic and was ultimately executed.

On July 9, 1850 C.E. the Bab and a youthful follower were brought out of their cell to be executed. The Bab had previously sought permission to finish what he had been working on, but his request was denied. He was led out to a courtyard where three lines of 250 Armenian soldiers fired at him and his companion. It is said that when the smoke cleared the Bab was not seen and his friend was uninjured. The guards found the Bab in his cell offering final instructions to a follower. Earlier, the Bab had warned that no earthly power could stop him until he had said everything he had to say. His work accomplished, the Bab calmly surrendered himself to the guards. It is said that the Armenian troops refused to fire again. A Muslim firing squad took their place and successfully completed the execution.

See also Volume I: INDIA

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Diwali

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Hindu populations, especially India
Observed on	Five days from the 13th day of the waning half (Krishna Paksha) of Asvina, the seventh month in the Hindu calendar, to the second day of the waxing half (Shukla Paksha) of Karttika, the eighth month in the Hindu calendar
Observed by	Hindus

Introduction

Diwali, or Deepavali (Sanskrit for “row of lights”) is the Hindu Festival of Lights. It is the most important and the most famous of all Hindu festivals and an occasion of tremendous excitement, hectic activities, and rejoicing. Like Dussehra (which precedes it), it commemorates the triumph of good over evil.

The exact event or deity and the date of the observance celebrated by Diwali depend on one’s location. In Northern India, Diwali falls on the last day of the Vikram (lunar) calendar, during the waning (dark phase) of the Moon, and it is the time when businesses start their fiscal year. The following day, called Annakut, begins a new year. In Southern India, where the Shalivahana (solar) calendar is used, Diwali begins in the seventh month (Asvina). (The Shalivahana calendar begins in the year 78 C.E. when King Shalivahana was crowned after defeating the Sakas, an invading Central Asian tribe.)

Throughout the year numerous festivals are celebrated in India, a country renowned for celebrations. Though the Festival of Lights is meant to be celebrated for one day, local customs, traditions, and religious aspirations of the people have transformed it into a four- or five-day festival, starting with Dhanteras—the “day of wealth,” when shoppers return home and light the first Diwali lamps—and culminating with Bhaiya dooj, Brothers’ Day.

During this festive season, all things come to a standstill in India, except happy family activities, shopping, and feasting. Everyone is filled with excitement and enthusiasm (especially children) starting a month before Diwali. During this period people perform a thorough cleaning of their homes and arrange for their houses to be whitewashed and painted. They buy jewelry and new clothes for this festival and exchange gifts and sweets with their families and friends. Hence, during the countdown

to Diwali, there is a flurry of activity: shopping sprees, placing orders for jewelry and ornaments, preparation and packing of dry fruits and sweets (major gift items), and the like. For quite a few days prior to the main day of the festival there are crowds of people on the streets, all in a frenzy to finish distributing their gifts; this frequently causes traffic jams in all the larger towns and cities of India.

The first day of the festival is called Dhanteras or Dhanatrayodashi. Marigolds and mango leaves are hung on the doorways and archways of all buildings and homes. *Rangolis* (colorful designs drawn on the floor using various materials such as colored powders, sawdust or sand, flower petals, paints, or even grains) are created both inside and outside the houses. The conventional motifs are often connected with favorable symbols of luck. *Diyas*, small earthen lamps, are set in and around homes. These flickering lamps give the festival its name. On this particular day people purchase goods for the house or jewelry for the women in every family. Also on this day it is propitious to buy something metallic, especially silver, since it is believed to bring prosperity.

The following day is called Kali Chaudas, Chhoti Diwali, or Bhoot Chaturdashi. Only 14

Fireworks

Fireworks are an important part of Diwali celebrations, with millions of rupees literally going up in smoke during the celebrations. In recent times though, there has been a prohibition against firecrackers since they create a lot of noise, in addition to atmospheric contamination. Every year there are a number of injuries and accidental deaths caused by firecrackers.



Fun Fact

Diyas are earthen lamps lit at Diwali. Oil or ghee (a form of clarified butter) is used for fuel, and the wick is usually made of cotton-wool. *Diyas* can also be made by partially filling a glass with colored water, with ghee floating on top. Children can make their own *diyas* using dried clay or dough.

lamps are lit. It is believed that on this night Lord Shiva, the Destroyer, and the third deity of the Hindu trinity, romps around with his band of ghouls, goblins, and wicked spirits. Evil is afoot on this eerie night.

On the new Moon night—the third and actual day of Diwali—the entryways and surroundings of all homes and dwellings are brightly illuminated with *rangoli* to accord a warm welcome to Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and the consort of Vishnu. Lakshmi Puja (worship of the goddess) is

held on the evening of this day. The day ends with a lavish family meal, displays of fireworks, and the noise of bursting firecrackers. This day is a public holiday, though most shops and businesses stay open in the morning. Diwali is considered a favorable day for opening new homes, shopping, finalizing business deals, or beginning a new project or venture.

On the following day, Hindu families commemorate the New Year (in northern India) by wearing new clothes and jewelry, as well as by paying visits to business colleagues and family members to give gifts. In the business societies in the states of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan, Diwali is the occasion when the commercial year begins. All business families and organizations perform *mubarat puja*, or worship, of their books of accounts. This is also the day when Annakut takes place. Annakut, which literally means “mountain of food,” is a grand, sacred religious feast in which food is offered to God. Thereafter the consecrated food items are distributed among the devotees. The underlying idea of this grand feast is to thank God for the bounty and abundance that he has bestowed on the people.

The fifth and the last day of this holiday is Bhaiyya Dooj, or Brothers’ Day. On this day sisters

Diwali and Other Religions

Diwali is also important to the Sikhs of India. It was during Diwali in 1620 that Hargobind Singh, the sixth of the Sikh Gurus, achieved the liberation of 52 Hindu princes, wrongly imprisoned by the Mughals in Gwallior Fort. The Golden Temple was set ablaze with lights to mark the occasion, and the Sikhs have upheld the tradition. The Jain community also observes this occasion to commemorate Lord Mahavira’s establishment of dharma (divine law).



A girl lights lamps for Diwali celebrations in Ahmadabad, India. Diwali, the festival of lights, celebrates the return of the Hindu god Rama from exile and marks the beginning of the Hindu New Year. (AP Photo/Siddharth Darshan Kumar)

apply *tilak* (a sacred red mark) on their brothers’ foreheads so that they will have long lives and well-being. Although the day is meant to honor brothers, it is the sisters who get all the attention and gifts. Brothers go to a great deal of trouble to meet their sisters on this day, showering them with presents and money, and pampering them a good deal. It is not a public holiday, but educational institutions are closed; and nonessential government offices are closed.

Diwali is commemorated on an impressive scale in all regions of India, chiefly as the beginning of the New Year in northern areas of the country. Diwali is also observed outside India, mainly in Guyana, Malaysia, Fiji, Mauritius, Nepal, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Trinidad and Tobago, Indonesia, Britain, Thailand, Japan, Australia, Suriname in South America, and several countries in Africa.

Origins and History

The stories connected with Diwali and why it evolved into such a widely celebrated festival are different in various regions and states of India. In the north, particularly in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, and Bihar, the first Diwali was celebrated to commemorate the triumphant return of King Rama of Ayodhya (the seventh manifestation of

Vishnu, the Protector), Sita (his wife), and his brother Lakshmana to the capital city Ayodhya after 14 years of exile. During the exile, Lord Rama had vanquished the demon Ravana, the king of Sri Lanka. As night had already fallen before the arrival of the royal trio, the people, delighted to have their king back in their midst, lit clay lamps along the way to dispel the darkness and light up their path.

Any discussion of the origins of Diwali would be incomplete without a mention of the generous, but ambitious (ancient, mythical) king named Bali. Some gods had appealed to Vishnu (the Creator and the second deity of the Hindu trinity) to curb Bali's growing powers. Vishnu came down to Earth in the shape of a dwarf and dressed as a Brahmin priest. The dwarf approached King Bali and asked the latter to grant him the land that he could cover in three steps. Being a generous ruler, Bali granted the dwarf his request. At this point, the dwarf revealed himself as Vishnu, and in three massive strides covered the earth, sky, and the netherworld (hell). King Bali was subsequently banished to the netherworld. The Hindus (especially in Kerala) remember this big-hearted king on the occasion of Diwali.

Another legend tells of Narakasura, a monster, who ruled the kingdom of Pradyoshapuram. He was a troublemaker and frequently disturbed the peaceful existence of the gods and the pious sages or created havoc during rituals. To prove his might Narakasura usurped the territories of Aditi, the king of Suraloka and a relative of Satyabhama, Lord Krishna's wife. Extremely vexed, Indra and other gods approached Lord Krishna and sought his help. Satyabhama requested Krishna to give her this chance to slay Narakasura. The demon was under a curse that dictated he could be killed only by a woman. With Krishna as the charioteer, Satyabhama entered the battlefield and killed Narakasura. The act symbolized the victory of good over evil. Later, Bhudevi, the mother of the slain demon, declared that his death should not be a day of mourning, but an occasion to celebrate. Since then, Diwali has been happily celebrated by people every year.

Also on this day Lakshmi is believed to have emerged from the ocean of milk (*ksbeer sagar*) in the wake of the churning of the ocean (*samudra man-*

Gifts

Like the Western tradition of Christmas, Diwali is a time for buying gifts for family and friends. Conventionally, dried fruits and sweets have been common items of exchange, but the event has given rise to serious shopping, and increasing commercialization is taking the place of spirituality. Shopkeepers expect to profit significantly in the weeks leading up to the festival.

than), bringing with her wealth and prosperity for humanity. On that day a ceremonial prayer (*puja*) was performed in her honor. This significant event is celebrated every year by Hindus.

Yet another legend concerns Lord Krishna. The people of the village where he had grown up always prayed to the god Indra, since they thought that he sent rain to make the crops grow. Lord Krishna convinced them to venerate the mountain Govardhan instead, because it was fertile and provided rich grass for the village cows to graze on, causing them to yield abundant milk. Indra was most displeased. One night, when the villagers were sleeping, he sent torrential rain upon the village. The villagers cried to Krishna for help, who rescued them by lifting the mountain and holding it aloft on the tip of his finger. Under it, the villagers collected until the storm ceased. To Hindus the food offered to God on Diwali is a reminder of the significance of food; it is a time to be grateful to God for all of nature's bounty.

See also Volume I: BHUTAN; FIJI; GUYANA; INDIA

See also Volume II: MALAYSIA; MAURITIUS; NEPAL; SURINAME

See also Volume III: HINDUISM

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❧ Dussehra ❧

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Hindu populations, especially various states of India
Observed on	First through 10th of Asvina, the seventh month of the Hindu calendar
Observed by	Hindus

Introduction

Dussehra, or Vijay Dashmi, is a popular Hindu holiday, observed with great fervor by Hindus throughout the world and second only to Diwali, the Festival of Lights, which it precedes. Dussehra marks the event of the killing of the evil demon Ravana by Lord Rama, one of the most revered deities in Hinduism and the main character of the epic *Ramayana* (a Sanskrit classic traditionally attributed to Valmiki).

Dussehra is celebrated on the day after the nine-day festival of Navratri. During the combined 10-day festival, *Ramleela* (the story of Rama) is performed by professional dance groups and amateur troupes. On the final day of the festival men, young and old, dressed as Rama, Lakshmana (Rama's brother), Ravana, and other actors in the drama, walk through the main roads and streets of the cities and towns. Ravana and Rama engage in a fight, and Ravana is defeated.

The festival is celebrated throughout India. In areas of northern India, people believe Dussehra to be a propitious day for new beginnings, so children start their education, their music, or dance and sports classes this day. Grown-ups also begin new projects and journeys.

Ramleela

The *Ramleela* is a folk play that retells the story of Rama. It is performed for the entire duration (nine days) of Navratri, culminating on Dussehra, the day Rama destroys Ravana. There are songs sung in Rama's praise, and thousands of people witness this traditional theater with its dazzling costumes, makeup, jewelry, and drama. Ravana's effigies are burned, symbolizing the triumph of good over evil.

Dussehra is also the day on which Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge, is celebrated. In the state of West Bengal, where the goddess Durga is venerated, it is observed as Durga Puja. The entire season from Navratri to Diwali is a festive period when people visit relatives and friends to exchange gifts, food, and sweets.

Origins and History

Dussehra is one of the major Hindu festivals, observed with great enthusiasm by Hindus everywhere. The event marks the victory of Lord Rama over Ravana, the demon king. The battle between good and evil and the eventual triumph of good is the fundamental theme of *Ramayana*, which is one of the two most celebrated epics (the other being the *Mahabharata*) of the Hindu religion. Lord Rama, the central character of the *Ramayana*, represents the best of the human race, and Ravana is the evil force.

Dussehra means "taking away ten sins" in Sanskrit. The 10 heads of the demon Ravana signify these 10 sins, and Lord Rama is the one who destroys them. According to the *Ramayana*, Ravana kidnapped Sita (Lord Rama's wife) with the help of the demon Maricha. According to Hindu mythology Ravana was a great scholar and a fervent follower of Lord Shiva, but the same powers that were conferred on him for his unwavering devotion proved to be his downfall, due to his crass misuse of that power.

The demon kept Sita in the Ashoka Grove and insisted on making her his wife. Sita firmly refused to pay any heed to Ravana's advances, entreaties, and threats, while Rama sent messengers to the demon, urging him to return his wife. Ravana, however, refused to do so. Lord Rama went to Sri Lanka with Hanuman, Angada, Sugriva, Jambvan, and hundreds of other powerful monkeys. Vibhishana, Ravana's younger brother, was a devotee of God, and he took



Artists carry the heads of 10-headed demon king Ravana for the Hindu festival Dussehra, in Allahabad, India. The festival culminates with the burning of the Ravana effigy, to symbolize the victory of good over evil. (AP Photo/Rajesh Kumar Singh)

shelter with Rama. Rama built a walkway in the sea to take him and his army across the water.

On the 10th day of the festival, also called the Vijayadashmi day, huge effigies of Ravana, his brother Kumbhkarna, and his son Meghnad, made of various kinds of inflammable and explosive material, are put up in open spaces. A figure of Lord Rama, escorted by his wife, Sita, and brother Lakshmana, appear and shoot arrows of fire at the effigies, which burst into flames. The result is a loud blast, augmented by shouts of triumph from the audience.

This holiday is also observed with passion, particularly in West Bengal and by the Bengalis in India, as Durga Puja. During this celebration, dedicated to the veneration of the goddess Durga, who has a special position among Hindu divinities, the *puja* or worshipping takes place from the fifth day of Navratri on. Durga is Shakti, the cosmic energy that gives life to all beings. Beautifully crafted idols of the goddess Durga and her four children, the elephant-headed Ganesha (the remover of difficulties), Kartik (provider of offspring), Lakshmi (goddess of wealth), and Saraswati (goddess of learning) are worshiped in *pandals* (“stalls”) for five days. Popular Bengali tradition visualizes the five days of the *puja* as Goddess Durga’s annual visit to her maternal home on Earth, accompanied by her children. On the 10th day the idols are carried out in a procession ending in immersion (*visarjan*) in a pond or river. This signifies Durga’s return to her abode in heaven, Mount Kailash.

Durga Puja celebrations can be traced far back in Indian history. Today, Durga Puja is primarily a community festival. It was once the most luxurious of all festivals held under the patronage of the rich and powerful like the feudal lords, important business-



Navratri

Navratri is a celebration of worship, music, and dance observed over nine nights (*nav* means “nine” and *ratri* means “nights”). It is observed from the first to the ninth days of the month of Ashwin in the Shukla Paksha (the fortnight of the waxing Moon), according to the Hindu calendar. This period is dedicated to the veneration of the goddess Durga, who is thought to exist in various forms like the goddesses Jagdamba, Bhavani, Mahakali, and others. The nine days of Navratri are separated and dedicated to the trinity of goddesses revered in the female form—three days each for the goddesses Durga, Lakshmi (Hindu goddess of wealth), and Saraswati (Hindu goddess of learning). On Lalita Panchami, or the fifth day of the Navratri celebrations, it is customary to assemble all books, light lamps, and call upon Saraswati. During the eighth (*aatham*) and ninth (*nom*) days of the festivities, it is customary to carry out *yagna* (a fire sacrifice) as a final tribute to the goddess Durga.

men, and rajas (kings). Even then, it stirred up great fervor and popular support.

According to a legend connected with this day, Mahishasur, the buffalo demon, became indestructible and began to ravage the world. Ultimately, however, killing human beings lost its appeal, and the buffalo demon turned his attention to the gods. The gods used their collective powers to create Durga, who, riding a lion and holding a different weapon in each of her 10 hands, overpowered Mahishasur and saved the world.

See also Volume I: INDIA

See also Volume III: HINDUISM

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∞ Easter ∞

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Christian populations
Observed on	First Sunday after Lent
Observed by	Christians

Introduction

For Christians, Easter is considered the most important Christian festival, and its numerous celebrations and observances form the core of the liturgical year, which begins around the time of the vernal equinox in the Northern Hemisphere (the autumnal equinox in the Southern Hemisphere) and stretches out into summer in the Northern Hemisphere (winter in the Southern Hemisphere). This occasion celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus three days after his Crucifixion. Christians believe Jesus was the Son of God, and died on the Cross to redeem humanity from sin. Apart from its religious aspect, the Resurrection symbolizes the resurgence of hope and a fresh lease on life for all human beings. The actual dates for Easter and its associated religious observances are different for the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches of the West, which follow the Gregorian calendar, and the several churches affiliated with the Eastern Orthodox Church, which still follows the Julian calendar.

Because of its importance in the early church, as well as the appropriation of numerous dates and symbols from early European pagan festivals, what can be called the Easter season begins with Carnival in Spanish-speaking countries and Mardi Gras (“Fat Tuesday”) in French-speaking countries.

Origins and History

The English name for this celebration, Easter, was almost certainly taken from the name of the pagan deity Eostre. According to the Venerable Bede (672–735), a renowned Christian scholar, Easter was named after Eostre (or Eastre), the Mother Goddess of the Saxon tribes of Northern Europe; she was also the goddess of fertility. The Germans knew her as Ostara. After the harsh dreary winters of Northern Europe, she brought the warmth of spring, fertility, and abundance. The ancient deities



A three-year-old girl reaches for an egg during an Easter Egg Hunt in Danville, Kentucky. Eggs, ancient pagan symbols of fertility and rebirth, were adopted by early Christians to symbolize the Resurrection of Jesus, which is celebrated on Easter. (AP Photo/The Advocate-Messenger, Clay Jackson)

in all civilizations had patron animals, and the rabbit, an obvious symbol of fertility, is the companion animal of Eostre. The deity was believed to preside over conception and birth in animals and human beings and pollination, flowering, and the ripening of fruit in the plant kingdom.

The Teutonic dawn goddess of fertility was also known by various names, such as Ostare, Ostern, Austron, and Ausos. According to another version, the name given by the Frankish church to Jesus' Resurrection festival included the Latin word *alba*, which means "white," referring to the white robes worn during the ceremonies. *Alba* also means "sunrise." When the name of the festival was translated into German, an error crept into the meaning of the word and it became *ostern* in German. Ostern is another possible source of the word "Easter."

Although the name of this holiday in English and German is Easter, in most of the languages spoken in Christian societies the concept of the holiday is based on the Hebrew *Pesach* (Passover), a Jewish holiday with which the Christian observance is closely associated. Easter takes many of its symbols and activities from Passover as well as the season in which it is celebrated.

The date of the Christian celebration of Easter is linked to the ancient Jewish celebration of *Pesach* or Passover. The Jewish people followed the Persian (Babylonian) calendar and their new year commenced with the spring equinox. Most of the pagan

societies settled in the Mediterranean region also had a major religious celebration at or following shortly after the spring equinox. A common point of these spring religious festivals was a god whose own death and rebirth symbolized the death and regeneration of life during this time of the year. There are stories of a few gods in pagan religions who were believed to have died only to be reborn.

There are two popular explanations about the origin of the English word, "Sunday," appended to the name Easter. According to one version, "Sunday" is derived from the name of the Scandinavian Sun goddess Sunna. The origin of the word can also be traced to Sol, the Roman god of the Sun. The Latin phrase, *dies solis* means "day of the Sun."

Cybele, the Phrygian fertility goddess, had a consort named Attis. (Phrygia was located within the triangle formed by the modern cities of Afyon, Eskisehir, and Ankara, the capital of modern Turkey.) Attis was believed to have been born of a virgin, and several religious historians believe that the Christian legends of death and resurrection were first associated with him. The ancient Christians, on the other hand, claimed that Satan had created counterfeit deities to preempt the debut of Jesus and to confuse humanity. Modern-day Christians, those who know of it, regard the Attis legend as merely a pagan myth. They believe the account of Jesus' death and Resurrection and do not accept the idea that it might be related to the earlier tradition.

Hare Pie Scramble and Bottle Kicking

Two of England's ancient March traditions are the Hare Pie Scramble and the Bottle-Kicking Match. The hare pie, which usually contains beef, not rabbit or hare, is carried in a procession through the village of Hallaton, Leicestershire, from the Fox Inn to the gate of St. Michael's Church. Immediately behind the pie in the procession are the three "bottles" used for the Bottle-Kicking Match. These are actually small barrels (14 inches high, 9 inches in diameter, and 20 pounds in weight), bound with iron hoops. Two of these are brown in color and filled with about a gallon of ale each. The remaining "bottle" is red and white and is left empty.

Half of the pie is distributed to the surging crowd by the rector of St. Michael's Church. Some portions of the pie are carried away in sacks (with other processions) through the village, finally

winding up at the Hare Pie bank. This is where the Bottle-Kicking Match between Hallaton and the neighboring village of Medbourne will take place.

The competitors arrange themselves in a circle at the top of the bank. The chairman of the Bottle-Kicking Match throws the first full "bottle" into the air and allows it to fall on the ground, repeating the action two more times. When the "bottle" lands on the ground the third time, it is "in play." What follows is a mad scramble between the two teams to move the "bottle" toward their respective villages over their respective touchlines, going past several obstacles between the two touchlines like hedges, lanes, and ditches. Once the first score has been made, the players repeat the process with the empty bottle. In case of a tie, the process is repeated with the final bottle. At the end of the match, both teams walk back to Hallaton, where the winning team drinks the contents of both bottles.



The Origin of Passover

Passover is the most important feast of the Jewish calendar, celebrated at the first full Moon after the vernal equinox (roughly March 21–22 on the Gregorian calendar). The name Passover was derived from the actions of the angel of death as described in the book of Exodus. The story of the exodus of the Jews from Egypt is believed to have taken place around 1445 B.C.E. The Israelites had been captured and enslaved by pharaoh, who feared the strength of their growing numbers. Moses, a foundling, though actually a Jew, had been raised in pharaoh's court and was living as a shepherd in the desert. God exhorted Moses by means of the burning bush to take the Israelites out of Egypt to

the Promised Land. In spite of repeated pleading, pharaoh refused to liberate the Israelites. In order to punish pharaoh for his misdeeds, God told Moses that he would take the firstborn of all the Egyptians as well as the firstborn of all their animals. Led by Moses, who acted on God's command, the Israelite families sacrificed a lamb each, prepared a special meal, and marked their doors with the blood of the lamb. As revealed by God, one of his angels "passed over" the homes of the Jews, which bore the marks of the blood of the slaughtered lamb, leaving their firstborn unharmed. But all the firstborn sons, as well as the firstborn domestic animals of the Egyptians, whose doorways were not marked, were exterminated.

The agonizing and gory Crucifixion of Jesus took place on what is now called Good Friday. In the early morning of the third day after his Crucifixion, which happened to be Sunday, some women disciples of Jesus went to the cave (tomb) where his body had been laid. They were astonished to find that the heavy rock that had covered the mouth of the tomb had been moved, and the body had vanished. They learned that Jesus had been resurrected, or raised from his tomb. Grief turned into celebration following this amazing occurrence.

Easter is not however, a festival confined to a single day. It is spread over a considerable length of time, starting with Lent, a period of spiritual preparation for Easter that traditionally involves fasting, penance, and prayer. In some countries, those in which Roman Catholicism is the dominant religion, in particular, Easter celebrations begin with Carnival called Mardi Gras in French-speaking countries, generally a two-week festival of carousing, eating, and drinking, characterized by noisy masked processions through the streets of cities and towns. The festivities end on Shrove Tuesday (in English) or Fat Tuesday (in French Mardi Gras), the day before Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. On Ash Wednesday, devout Roman Catholics attend a Mass and get a spot of ash in the shape of a cross placed in the middle of their foreheads.

Lent commences on Ash Wednesday and concludes on Holy Saturday, the day before Easter Sunday. Originally, various Christian groups established the observance as an interval ranging from a few days to several weeks. Eventually it was fixed in the eighth century at 40 days. (The number 40 has a religious significance in the Bible. For instance Jesus, Moses, and Elijah had each spent 40 days in

the desert.) Among Roman Catholics, Lent lasts for six-and-a-half weeks before Easter, excluding Sundays. According to the Eastern Orthodox Churches, it comprises a full eight weeks since Saturdays and Sundays are both excluded.

On Palm Sunday (the first day of Holy Week), Jesus and his disciples entered the city of Jerusalem, where people were gathering for the Jewish festival of Passover. As word of Jesus' arrival spread through the city, it aroused great excitement among those who were convinced that he was the long-awaited Messiah of the Jews, foretold by Isaiah. People welcomed his arrival by waving palm fronds and spreading palm branches as a carpet across his path. Palm Sunday commemorates the event, and Roman Catholics receive twisted pieces of palm fronds to take home.

Maundy Thursday, the fifth day of Holy Week, and the day before Good Friday, derives its name from the French *mandé* (from Latin *mandatum*), referring to the command given by Jesus to the disciples during the Last Supper: "Love one another as I have loved you." He uttered the commandment after washing the Apostles' feet, another of his last actions that has become increasingly popular in Christian churches on this day. In the Roman Catholic Church the day is called Holy Thursday. Maundy Thursday as part of the Holy Week celebrations reminds all human beings of their basic duties: establishing a firm relationship with God and loving their fellow human beings and all living creatures.

Good Friday is a solemn day for Christians because it is the day on which they believe Jesus was

Fun Fact

The important Jewish holiday, Shavuot, the Feast of Harvest or First Fruits, is commonly translated as Pentecost because it is celebrated 50 days after Passover.

Fun Fact

Although Australia is overrun with rabbits, there have been reasonably successful efforts to popularize the bilby, an almost extinct, rabbitlike marsupial native to Australia, as an alternative to the Easter Bunny by selling chocolate Easter Bilbies. Sometimes a portion of the profits is committed to protecting the remaining bilbies.

crucified, suffered, and died. In Early Modern English, *good* meant “holy.” Christmas, for example, was spoken of as a “good tide”; in an elided form, *good* in this sense also turns up in the word *gospel*, which means “good news.” For devout Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians, Good Friday is a fast day. Orthodox Christians spend the day abstaining from all food, to the extent that their health permits. Roman Catholics also refrain from more than one normal meal, though they may add up to two small meals, as required, for good health. Good Friday

is the only day that the divine liturgy, or Mass, is not celebrated in those churches, but Catholics can receive the Eucharist (Communion) on Holy Thursday. Members of the Eastern Orthodox Churches meet as many as three times on Good Friday to pray.

In spite of regional variations, the festival of Easter Sunday is marked by early morning Masses for Catholics and special services in Protestant Churches. This day may well be considered the climax, or turning point, of the festivities that take place before and during Holy Week. Easter Sunday celebrates the day that Jesus is believed to have risen from the grave, and his Resurrection became a symbol of resurgence of life and renewed hopes.

Easter Monday is a Christian holiday celebrated on the day after Easter Sunday. Formerly, it was celebrated as a part of the Easter Week but was reduced to a one-day celebration during the 19th century. The events that take place on this day are essentially fun-filled and include egg-rolling competitions and drenching other people with water. Originally, holy water, which was used to bless homes and food, was also used for these playful pranks.

Pentecost, the Christian festival that commemorates the visitation of the Holy Spirit to Jesus’ Apostles, begins 50 days following Easter, and 10 days after the celebration of his Ascension into heaven. In English-speaking countries, especially in Britain, Pentecost is also called Whitsun (Whitsunday), from Old English *Hwita Sunnandæg*. The week beginning on Whitsunday (especially the first three days) is called Whitsuntide. Many Christians observe this time as the beginnings of the church.

There are many activities and beliefs associated with the Easter holiday including eggs, Easter baskets, in which eggs and various candies are placed,

the Easter Bunny (who delivers the eggs), and the special Easter hats worn by women. Before the egg became closely linked with the Christian festival of Easter, it was closely associated with various spring festivals. The Romans, Gauls, Chinese, Egyptians, and Persians all regarded the egg as a symbol of the universe. In pagan times the egg represented fertility and the rebirth of the Earth. After the long, harsh winter, the Earth burst forth with signs of new life just as life emerges from eggs. With the advent of Christianity the symbolism of the egg changed to represent the rebirth of all humankind, and Christians adopted the symbol of the egg and linked it to Jesus’ tomb from which he was resurrected.

Eggs have been a part of many activities commonly attached to Easter observances. Egg rolling, perhaps one of the most popular, is a traditional Easter custom still practiced in Europe and northern England on Easter Sunday or Monday. Scores of eggs are rolled downhill or along slopes by the people to commemorate the rolling away of the rock from the mouth of the cave where Jesus was buried. The gaily colored and decorated hard-boiled eggs that survive the arduous journey are cracked and then eaten. In France egg-rolling contests consist of rolling raw eggs (marked to identify the owner) down a gentle slope. The egg that survives the bumpy journey and attacks by other eggs in the race is declared the “victory egg.”

The basic rule of these egg-rolling contests is to see who can roll an egg the farthest without breaking it. The individual whose egg survives the journey without getting damaged is declared the winner. In Yugoslavia, the Ukraine, and Russia, eggs are rolled down a tilted board. If a player rolls an egg down the board so that it collides with an egg on the ground at the end of the board, then that player gets both eggs.

This entertaining activity has also spread to countries like St. Lucia, Martinique, Grenada, the Cayman Islands, and Guadeloupe, among many others, where egg rolling on Easter Monday has become popular.

Easter baskets originated with the Catholic custom of taking the food prepared for Easter dinner to Mass to be blessed, a custom copied from the ancient ritual of bringing the first crops and seedlings to the temple to ensure a good growing season. This practice, combined with the “rabbit’s nest” awaited by the Pennsylvania Dutch children, has evolved into brightly colored containers filled with sweets, toys, and the like believed to be left for children on Easter morning by the hare.

The Easter lily is associated with purity because of its whiteness and delicacy of form. It also symbolizes innocence and the radiance of the new life promised by Jesus. Lilies are associated with Easter because they bloom in early spring, during the Easter season.

The Easter bonnet and the wearing of new clothes on Easter Sunday are recent additions to Easter traditions, probably based on the ancient

Fun Fact

In the high-tech 21st century, women in many countries continue the tradition of spring housecleaning, a time for opening all the windows to let in the fresh air of spring.

idea that new clothes and colors symbolized the end of winter, new life, and renewal.

See also Volume I: ANDORRA; ANGOLA; ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA; ARGENTINA; ARMENIA; AUSTRALIA; AUSTRIA; BELARUS; BELGIUM; BELIZE; BOLIVIA; BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA; BRAZIL; BULGARIA; BURUNDI; CANADA; CAPE VERDE; CHILE; COLOMBIA; CONGO, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE; COSTA RICA; CROATIA; CYPRUS; CZECH REPUBLIC; DENMARK; DOMINICA; DOMINICAN REPUBLIC; ECUADOR; EL SALVADOR; EQUATORIAL GUINEA; ESTONIA; FINLAND; FRANCE; GEORGIA; GERMANY; GREECE; GRENADA; GUATEMALA; HAITI; HONDURAS; HUNGARY; ICELAND; IRELAND; ITALY; KIRIBATI

See also Volume II: LATVIA; LIECHTENSTEIN; LITHUANIA; LUXEMBOURG; MACEDONIA; MALTA; MEXICO; MICRONESIA, FEDERATED STATES OF; MOLDOVA; MONACO; NAMIBIA; NEW ZEALAND; NICARAGUA; NORWAY; PALAU; PANAMA; PARAGUAY; PERU; PHILIPPINES; POLAND; PORTUGAL; ROMANIA; RUSSIA; RWANDA; ST. LUCIA; SAN MARINO; SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO; SEYCHELLES; SLOVAKIA; SLOVENIA; SPAIN; SWEDEN; SWITZERLAND; TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO; UGANDA; UKRAINE; UNITED KINGDOM; UNITED STATES; URUGUAY; VATICAN CITY; VENEZUELA

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; IMMACULATE CONCEPTION; PENTECOST; PESACH

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The Easter Bunny

The Easter Bunny originated in pagan legends connected with fertility. Celtic traditions viewed the hare and the rabbit as symbols of fertility and the spring-time emergence of new life; the Germanic tribes believed that the hare brought new life each spring. The rabbit was also associated with the goddess Eostre. The bunny as an Easter symbol probably originated in Germany, where it was first mentioned in the 1500s. The first edible Easter Bunnies, made of pastry and sugar, were made in Germany during the early 1800s. The Easter Bunny was introduced to North America by the German immigrants who settled in what is now known as the Pennsylvania Dutch region. The arrival of the *Oschter Haws* (“Easter Bunny” in German) was one of the most exciting events for children. Children believed that if they were good, the *Oschter Haws* would lay a nest of colored eggs.

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❧ Eid al-Adha ❧

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Muslim populations
Observed on	Tenth through 12th of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Observed by	Muslims

Introduction

Eid al-Adha is the most important festival celebrated by Muslims and one of two Eid festivals in their calendar. Eid al-Adha is celebrated for three days while Eid al-Fitr lasts only one day. Eid al-Adha commemorates the Muslim belief that Abraham's (Ibrahim's) faith was so great that he was willing to sacrifice his young son Ishmael because God had commanded him to do so. (Ishmael was born of Hagar [Hajira]. In contrast to Muslims, Jews and Christians believe that it was Isaac, Ibrahim's son from his wife Sarah, who was chosen for the sacrifice.)

The festival of Eid al-Adha reminds Muslims of their morals, ethics, and the lofty ideals of peace and harmony. It is observed on the 10th day of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic lunar calendar. During this month devout Muslims, who are physically and financially able, must undertake a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetime (required by the Fifth Pillar of Islam). Every year several million Muslims make the trip to Mecca and observe Eid al-Adha at the end of the pilgrimage.

Fun Fact

Indonesia has the largest population of Muslims in the world.

On Eid al-Adha Muslims sacrifice animals that are considered *halaal* (pure, fit for sacrifice, and acceptable to God). Muslims consume one-third of the sacred meat themselves, distribute another third to their relatives and neighbors, and give the last third to the poor, doing their best to ensure that no one goes without sacrificial food on this occasion.

History and Origin

The history of Eid al-Adha begins with Ibrahim, who was commanded by God to set up the foundations of Kaaba, the holiest Muslim shrine in the world, located in Mecca (Saudi Arabia). Muslims turn their faces toward the Kaaba during their *salat* ("prayers"). Responding to Allah's call, Ibrahim at once set off for Mecca, a deserted and unproductive desert, with his family. Ibrahim encountered numerous adversities, but he obeyed all of Allah's commands.

Much later in a dream Allah commanded Ibrahim to sacrifice his son Ishmael. Ibrahim and his son left for the village of Mina, where the sacrifice was to take place. Along the way, the Devil tried

Halaal Meat

Animals slaughtered according to the laws of the Koran are considered *halaal*. First, the animal itself has to be *halaal* (clean and pure); pork for example is considered to be unclean and impure. Second, the food that the animal eats should not contain meat or blood; the animal should be herbivorous. Also, according to Islamic law, Muslims cannot consume blood, so

they ritually slaughter an animal with three strokes, a method that causes all the blood to drain from its body by the time the animal dies. Determining *halaal* meat can be extremely tricky, however. According to experts, animals killed by electric shock are not *halaal*, since electric shocks affect the central nervous system, and the blood does not drain completely from the animal's body.

Stoning the Devil

This ritual reenacts Ibrahim's pilgrimage to Mecca. When Ibrahim left Mina, the Devil appeared to him at Jamrat al-Aqaba (Stone-Heap of the Defile). The Angel Gabriel said to Ibrahim, "Pelt him." So Ibrahim threw seven stones at the Devil, and the Devil fled. Again the Devil appeared to him at the Middle Stone-Heap, and Gabriel repeated his command to pelt the Devil. For a second time Ibrahim hit him with seven stones and made the Devil run away. For a third time the Devil appeared before Ibrahim at the Little Stone-Heap. Again, as commanded by Gabriel, Ibrahim showered the Devil with stones. Finally, the Devil withdrew.

The rite of stoning the Devil is performed by pilgrims in Mina, a town located near Mecca. Pilgrims gather a number of pebbles on the plains of Muzdalifah (the number of pebbles varies between 49 and 70) and hurl them at three pillars, which symbolize the Devil. The first pillar, the largest of the three, marks the Devil's effort to tempt Ibrahim not to sacrifice his son; the second pillar marks the spot where he tempted Hajira (Hagar), Ibrahim's wife, to stop her husband; the third pillar signifies how the Devil tempted Ishmael to protest against being sacrificed. All the efforts of the Devil, however, proved futile.

to convince Ibrahim to disobey Allah and refuse to sacrifice his beloved son. The Devil failed, but, just as Ibrahim was about to sacrifice his son, a divine voice ordered him to stop. When Ibrahim (who had covered his eyes so as not to waver while performing the act) removed his blindfold, he found a ram, not his son, on the sacrificial altar.

Ibrahim's acceptance of Allah's will is celebrated annually by Muslims. On this occasion a Muslim reminds himself of his own spirit of submission and readiness to commit any sacrifice for Allah. To honor this unprecedented act of *qurbani* ("sacrifice") by Ibrahim, Muslims everywhere sacrifice a goat, ram, lamb, or any animal on Eid al-Adha and share the sacrificial meat with their family and friends as well as with the poor. This observance is also known the Day of Sacrifice or the Feast of Sacrifice.

The highlight of the worldwide observations of Eid al-Adha takes place in the tiny village of Mina, only a few miles from Mecca. Here stand three pillars symbolizing the Devil that are ritually stoned by Muslims during the Hajj. According to Muslim belief, the Devil tried unsuccessfully to persuade Ibrahim not to sacrifice Ishmael. Mina is also a site where scores of butchers arrange the *balaal* slaughter of the animals for the pilgrims.

Eid al-Adha is known by different names in various parts of the world. For example, the observance is called Hari Raya Aidiladha in Southeast Asia; in Singapore the name for the festival is Hari Raya Haji. In Malaysia, where it is a national holiday, it is known as Id al-Adha. People in India call it Id al-Adha or Idu'z Zuha. Eid al-Adha is celebrated as Tabaski in Senegal, Gambia, and Mali, all located in Africa. In Bangladesh, the festival is known as Id al-Adha or Eid-ul-Azha. In Ethiopia, the festival is

called Arafat or Eid ul-Adhia. In European Turkey, Eid al-Adha is known as Kurban Bayrami. Muslims in central Asian countries such as Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan have similar ways of celebrating the feast day. The variance



A Pakistani woman prays while holding her child during worship to celebrate the holy festival of Eid al-Adha, the Muslim Feast of the Sacrifice, in Lahore, Pakistan. (AP Photo/K. M. Chaudary)

in its name notwithstanding, the festive spirit of Eid al-Adha prevails in all countries of the world.

See also Volume I: AFGHANISTAN; ALBANIA; ALGERIA; AZERBAIJAN; BAHRAIN; BANGLADESH; BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA; BRUNEI; BURKINA FASO; CHAD; COMOROS; CÔTE D'IVOIRE; DJIBOUTI; EGYPT; ERITREA; ETHIOPIA; GAMBIA, THE; GHANA; GUINEA; GUINEA-BISSEAU; INDIA; INDONESIA; IRAN; IRAQ; JORDAN; KAZAKHSTAN; KUWAIT; KYRGYZSTAN

See also Volume II: LEBANON; LIBERIA; LIBYA; MACEDONIA; MALAYSIA; MALDIVES; MALI; MAURITANIA; MOROCCO; NIGER; NIGERIA; OMAN; PAKISTAN; QATAR; SAUDI ARABIA; SENEGAL; SIERRA

LEONE; SOMALIA; SUDAN; SYRIA; TAJIKISTAN; TANZANIA; TUNISIA; TURKEY; TURKMENISTAN; UNITED ARAB EMIRATES; UZBEKISTAN; YEMEN

See also Volume III: EID AL-FITR; HAJJ; ISLAM

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∞ Eid al-Fitr ∞

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Muslim populations
Observed on	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
Observed by	Muslims

Introduction

Eid al-Fitr is an Islamic holiday that takes place at the end of the holy, but austere, month of Ramadan. This is the month when people of the Islamic faith fast and abstain from drink and sexual intercourse from dawn to dusk, eating only before sunrise and at night. Fasting is the fourth “pillar,” or religious duty, of Muslims. Ramadan is also a time of intense worship, of reading the Koran, of purifying oneself, of giving donations, and of performing honorable deeds.

The festival of Eid al-Fitr is celebrated on the first of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar. Al-Fitr means “breaking the fast.” It is one of

the two major Eid festivals of the Islamic year (Eid al-Adha is the other). It is also called the Little or Small Bayram (*bayram* means “feast”). Shawwal, like every month in the Islamic lunar calendar, starts with the official sighting of the new Moon by astronomers in Saudi Arabia, but most people rely on reports of the official date. Because the new Moon is seen at different times in different parts of the world, there are regional differences regarding the precise date on which the festival begins. Depending on where they live, some Muslims may have fasted for 29 days, while others fasted for 30.

Eid al-Fitr, a day of celebration and thanksgiving, begins as soon as the new Moon has been sighted. Muslims, on this day, demonstrate their joy for their physical well-being, strength, and life’s opportunities, which have been given to them by Allah. On this day, apart from celebrating the end of their fast, Muslims thank Allah for the strength he gave them to practice self-discipline during the austere month of Ramadan. Eid is also a time for making amends and forgiveness, a day to overlook old bitterness and forgive others.

On the morning of Eid al-Fitr, men generally begin their day at the mosque, participating in a special Eid prayer. As the priest says “Allah is Great,”



Two Afghan men embrace each other after prayers in a mosque in Kabul, Afghanistan, as they celebrate the three-day Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr. (AP Photo/Amir Shah)

An Eid al-Fitr Tradition

In Indonesia, there is a tradition called *mudik* that generally applies to people who came to the capital, Jakarta, from Java or other islands in Indonesia. Before Eid al-Fitr, people head back to their hometowns to celebrate the festival with parents and relatives, which leads to crowding in seaports, airports, and bus stations. For small children, asking for forgiveness as well as money from relatives, is common.



Fun Fact

The initials *A.H.* before a date in the Islamic calendar stand for Anno Hegirae, “the year of the Hegira.” According to the Gregorian calendar, the Islamic calendar officially started on July 16, 622.

they kneel on their prayer mats, lift their hands, and touch their heads against the ground. Subsequently, they greet everyone with an “Eid Mubarak” (“happiness to everyone”). After the men return from the mosque, families get together for their first daytime meal in a month. The feast includes goat, lamb, spicy vegetables, and *sewvia*, a special dish of thin noodles prepared with coconut, milk, and sugar. There is also candy made from ground nuts, grated cheese, honey, and sesame seeds.

This Muslim holiday is one of celebration and family get-togethers. Muslims are expected to wear their best clothes, and children get new clothes as presents. Girls sport bangles and apply henna to make red designs on their hands. There are special services in and around mosques, processions in streets, and a celebratory meal eaten during the daytime—the first in a month.

Origins and History

The first Eid is believed to have been celebrated in 624 by Muhammad with his relatives and friends

following their triumph in the battle of Jang-e-Badar, when they defeated a much larger army of Arabs. Thus, Eid began as an appropriate reward for hardship and discipline but developed into a social occasion. Feasts, prayers, and family gatherings are the highlights of the festival. Greetings of “Eid-Mubarak” are exchanged on this day.

See also Volume I: AFGHANISTAN; ALBANIA; ALGERIA; AZERBAIJAN; BAHRAIN; BANGLADESH; BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA; BRUNEI; BURKINA FASO; CHAD; COMOROS; CÔTE D’IVOIRE; DJIBOUTI; EGYPT; ERITREA; ETHIOPIA; GAMBIA, THE; GHANA; GUINEA; GUINEA-BISSEAU; INDIA; INDONESIA; IRAN; IRAQ; JORDAN; KAZAKHSTAN; KUWAIT; KYRGYZSTAN

See also Volume II: LEBANON; LIBERIA; LIBYA; MACEDONIA; MALAYSIA; MALDIVES; MALI; MAURITANIA; MOROCCO; NIGER; NIGERIA; OMAN; PAKISTAN; QATAR; SAUDI ARABIA; SENEGAL; SIERRA LEONE; SOMALIA; SUDAN; SYRIA; TAJIKISTAN; TANZANIA; TUNISIA; TURKEY; TURKMENISTAN; UNITED ARAB EMIRATES; UZBEKISTAN; YEMEN

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM; RAMADAN

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El am Hejir

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Muslim populations
Observed on	First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar
Observed by	Muslims

Introduction

The Hegira, or Hijrah (“withdrawal”), refers to the flight of Muhammad (c. 570–632) and his followers to Medina in 622. In the Koran, the word *hijrah* means “moving from a sordid state of affairs to a better one.”

Muhammad continuously preached the doctrines of one God (Allah) and the impending Day of Judgment, but he had very little success in Mecca even though his tribe the Quraysh was one of the wealthiest and most powerful tribes in Mecca. The Quraysh were powerful because they controlled the Kaaba, the house of Allah, said to be older than history. According to tradition Allah commanded Adam to build it in the shape of Baitul Maamoor, the house in heaven, and so it is called Baitullah. When Muhammad began to preach the true religion of Allah, his own tribe violently attacked him, and his followers and committed numerous atrocities against them.

Muhammad and his followers migrated to Yathrib, 199 miles north of the city of Mecca, in September 622. Yathrib was later renamed Madinat

un-Nabi (Medina) or the City of the Prophet. The year in which the Hegira took place was chosen as the first year of the Islamic Era in 638 by Umar ibn al-Khattab (c. 581–644). The Islamic New Year, El am Hejir, commemorates Muhammad’s flight to Medina. It is important to know, however, that the Hegira did not occur on the first day of Muharram (the first month of the Islamic calendar), but in the third month, Rabbi-al-Awwal, about 66 days after the New Year.

Origins and History

The Islamic lunar calendar starts from 622, the year of Muhammad’s flight to Medina. El am Hejir, the Islamic New Year, commemorates this event. After Muhammad had preached openly for a decade, the opposition to his preaching reached such a point that, fearing for his own well-being and that of his followers, he sent some of them to Ethiopia, where the Christian ruler gave them asylum. Meanwhile in Mecca the situation deteriorated. Muhammad’s followers were abused, harassed, and tormented. Even-

Battle of the Trench

The Battle of the Trench (also known as the Battle of the Ditch and the Battle of the Confederates) was precipitated by an attack by the troops of Mecca on the city of Medina in 627. Although Mecca possessed a large army, the attack failed. In addition to its pagan and Jewish inhabitants, the city of Mecca was also home to the Quraysh tribe, led by Abu Sufyan ibn Harb, who wanted to eradicate Islam. The army of Mecca was a confederation

of tribes including Quraysh, Kiawah, Bane Salami, Ghanaian, Bain Murray, Bazaar, and Ashja. Medina was defended by 3,000 Muslims led by Muhammad. It is called the Battle of the Trench because the Muslims dug a trench north of Medina to protect the city. When the Quraysh arrived to fight, their cavalry tried unsuccessfully for three days to cross the trench. On the third day, a strong hurricane forced them to retreat and admit defeat.





Battle of Badr

When the Muslims established themselves in Medina and grew stronger, the Quraysh of Mecca were visibly enraged with their success. Apprehensive lest Islam be accepted by the tribes in the immediate neighborhood of Medina, the Quraysh bribed them heavily not to be swayed or moved by any overtures on the part of the Muslims, and some of Muhammad's missionaries to these tribes were murdered.

The Jews of Medina had expected that the prophet they were looking forward to would promote Judaism, but when Muhammad began preaching Islam, they became hostile. The Quraysh community of Mecca incited the Jews of Medina to create obstacles for the Muslims. In Medina the people who accepted Islam and came to be known as *ansar* were farmers. All trade in Medina was controlled by Jews, so when the Muslims tried to take up trade there, they encountered competition and hostility from the Jews. Muhammad realized that, in such a situation, Muslims would have to wage a war against the combined forces of Quraysh and the Jews.

The caravan route from Mecca to Syria ran close to Medina. There were some vulnerable points on the route where the caravans could be ambushed by a small force. Muhammad decided that, in order to break the trade monopoly of the Quraysh, their caravans should be ambushed at

strategic points. In the winter of 623, Abu Sufyan (b. c. 570), Muhammad's cousin and the Quraysh leader, led a trading caravan to Syria. When Muhammad's spies informed him that the caravan was nearing Badr, he furtively dispatched a force of 313 persons to Badr.

Abu Sufyan suspected that the Muslims would try to ambush the caravan. Accordingly he sent a message to the Quraysh of Mecca that they should send forces to escort the caravan. The Quraysh raised a force 1,000 strong and sent it to Sufyan. When the Muslims reached Badr, they found that the caravan of the Quraysh had already crossed the danger point and could no longer be ambushed. The Muslims were dejected and downcast. God, however, assured Muhammad that a better prize awaited them.

Once the danger was over, Abu Sufyan decided that the force should accompany the caravan back to Mecca. On their return journey, they planned to attack the Muslims and annihilate them. When the Muslim forces learned that the Quraysh forces were approaching Badr, they occupied the wells and encamped in the rocky part of the valley. But the Quraysh reached Badr, and occupied the plains. Although a fierce battle ensued, the Muslims emerged victorious. In its physical dimensions the Battle of Badr was rather trivial, but it was a turning point in the history of Islam.

Fun Fact

The Kaaba is a square building in the center of Mecca, 60 feet wide, 60 feet long, and 60 feet high.

tually Muhammad sent 70 of them to Medina. In the autumn of 622 Muhammad discovered a plot to kill him and with his closest friend, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq (c. 573–634), he too set off for Medina.

When the conspirators arrived at Muhammad's place in Mecca to capture him, they found that Ali, his cousin, had taken his place in bed. Infuriated, they put a price on Muhammad's head and set out in

hot pursuit. Muhammad and his friend, however, had actually taken shelter in a cave where a spider spun its web right across the cave's mouth. When the pursuers saw that the web was unbroken, they continued on without stopping. Muhammad and his friend reached Medina safely. They were cheerfully welcomed by a crowd of Medinans, as well as Meccans who had gone beforehand to prepare the way.

This was the Hegira, a carefully planned migration that not only marked the beginning of the Islamic Era but also, for Muhammad and all Muslims, a fresh start. From that time on, the principle of the community, rather than just blood connections, became the bigger brotherhood of all Muslims. Muhammad's companions on the Hegira were known as the *mubajirun*, "those who made the *Hijrah*." The people in Medina who converted to Islam were called the *ansar*, or "helpers."

Muhammad was well aware of the situation in Medina. Before the Hegira in 622, Medina had sent representatives to Muhammad asking him to intercede in a dispute between two dominant tribes. The interaction of the envoys with him had so impressed them that they invited Muhammad to settle there. Following the Hegira, Muhammad's brilliant qualities so astounded the Medinans that the warring tribes and their partners momentarily closed ranks.

Shia Mourning

The New Year starts a 10-day mourning period for Shia Muslims. The 10th day of Muharram is marked by processions displaying banners and models of the tomb of Imam Hussein and his followers who died at the Battle of Karbala. Generally, an elaborately decorated white horse is featured in the procession to symbolize the vacant mount of Imam Hussein after

his death. Historically the participants have demonstrated their grief by inflicting bloody wounds on themselves, using sharp metal pieces tied on chains with which they whip themselves. This self-flagellation was done to represent and experience the pain of the martyrs. However, this extremely brutal custom has been banned in countries with large Shia populations, including Iran.

During the lull on March 15, 624, Muhammad and his followers moved against the pagans who had settled in Mecca.

The first battle took place near Badr, which is today a little town southwest of Medina. It had several significant effects. The Muslims, who were fewer in number, thoroughly routed the infidels. Also the discipline exhibited by the Muslims showed the pagans the abilities of Muhammad.

The pagans of Mecca struck back a year later. With 3,000 men they fought the Muslims at Uhud, near Medina. They succeeded in driving back the Muslims and managed to wound Muhammad. The Meccans attacked Medina again two years later, but this time luck favored the Muslims. At the Battle of the Trench, Muhammad and his people defeated the Meccans again. Subsequently the Muslims controlled Medina.

Muhammad was so successful in building a series of coalitions among the tribes of Medina that, by the year 628, he had 1,500 followers. This enabled him to gain access to the Kaaba during talks with the Meccans, a milestone in the history of Islam. In 629 he reentered Mecca after a seven-year absence and won over the city without violence and in a spirit of forbearance, which set a precedent for future conquests. He destroyed the idols filling the Kaaba and eliminated the pagan practices permanently. Also he gained the support of Amr ibn al-As (d. 663), Egypt's future conqueror, and Khalid ibn al-Walid (584–642). Although both men had initially been Muhammad's bitterest rivals, they converted to Islam and joined him.

El am Hejir, the Islamic New Year, is not a spectacular observance in the Muslim world and lacks the significance of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, the two most important feasts of the Islamic calendar. Though there is no definite religious ritual necessary on the New Year, Muslims think about the general meaning of the Hegira, and regard the moment as a good time for making New Year's resolutions.

For the Shia sect of the religion, though, the first 10 days of the New Year are reserved for mourning the events of the year 680, when Imam Hussein (c. 626–80), Muhammad's grandson, was killed at the Battle of Karbala. This event is also called Muharram, after the month in which the tragedy took place. In the first nine days of the month, scenes from the Battle of Karbala are reenacted. These scenes are known as *majlish* and take place in Shia mosques.

Since a lunar month varies in length from 29 to 30 days, the Muslim year is 11 days shorter than the Gregorian calendar year and has only 354 days. El am Hejir, therefore, is observed 11 days earlier each year according to the Gregorian calendar than it was the previous year.

See also Volume I: AFGHANISTAN; ALBANIA; ALGERIA; AZERBAIJAN; BAHRAIN; BANGLADESH; BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA; BRUNEI; BURKINA FASO; CHAD; COMOROS; CÔTE D'IVOIRE; DJIBOUTI; EGYPT; ERITREA; ETHIOPIA; GAMBIA, THE; GHANA; GUINEA; GUINEA-BISSEAU; INDIA; INDONESIA; IRAN; IRAQ; JORDAN; KAZAKHSTAN; KUWAIT; KYRGYZSTAN

See also Volume II: LEBANON; LIBERIA; LIBYA; MACEDONIA; MALAYSIA; MALDIVES; MALI; MAURITANIA; MOROCCO; NIGER; NIGERIA; OMAN; PAKISTAN; QATAR; SAUDI ARABIA; SENEGAL; SIERRA LEONE; SOMALIA; SUDAN; SYRIA; TAJIKISTAN; TANZANIA; TUNISIA; TURKEY; TURKMENISTAN; UNITED ARAB EMIRATES; UZBEKISTAN; YEMEN

See also Volume III: ASHURA, ISLAM

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Fun Fact

The initials *A.H.* before a date in the Islamic calendar stand for Anno Hegirae, "the year of the Hegira." According to the Gregorian calendar, the Islamic calendar officially started on July 16, 622.

Epiphany

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Christian populations
Observed on	January 6
Observed by	Christians

Introduction

The word *epiphany*, which means “the appearance; miraculous phenomenon” in Greek, is a Christian feast that commemorates the revelation or “shining forth” of God to humanity in the person of Jesus. The word *epiphany* is also translated as “(divine) manifestation.”

The roots of this observance can be traced back to the Eastern Christian Churches. According to the Bible, the three Magi (wise men)—Melchior, Caspar, and Balthazar—spotted a bright star in the skies on the night Jesus was born. They followed the star to Bethlehem, found the infant Jesus there, and presented the divine child with gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The Feast of the Epiphany celebrates Jesus’ childhood events leading up to his baptism by John the Baptist in the River Jordan. The feast was initially celebrated as the Jewish Feast of Lights (Hanukkah in Hebrew), which usually takes place toward the end of December. Just as the Festival of Lights dispels darkness and gloom, separating the past from the future, so also the Nativity (Christmas), or the birth of the Messiah, symbolizes new life and hope for the future.

Star Singers

The tradition of the Star Singers, evocative of the Magis’ journey, is very much alive in Austria and Bavaria. Beginning on New Year’s Day and continuing right up to January 6, children dressed as kings and holding a large star in their hands, go from house to house singing a three kings song. In return, they are given sweets or money. In the past, the donations were given to veterans and craftsmen; in the 21st century they go to the church or Third World countries.

January 6 is considered the last day of the Christmas season and has its distinct customs, symbols, and rituals. On this day carol singers traditionally go from one house to the next in some countries. In many cultures, the Christmas tree is also taken down; in some areas, the old Christmas trees are piled up and burned in a bonfire. This is a particularly merry occasion for children. In several parts of Germany, along with taking down the tree, the tradition of *plündern*, or “raiding” the tree is a custom that involves grabbing cookies and sugarplums off the tree, an entertaining event eagerly anticipated by children. This custom probably began when Christmas trees stood on tables and the decorative items placed on them were customarily foodstuffs: gilded nuts, cookies and candies, fresh apples, and wafers shaped like stars. In addition to the sugarplums, chocolate ornaments wrapped in foil, candies, or cookies were given as rewards to the “raiders.”

Epiphany is a more ancient celebration than Christmas because Jesus’ birthday was not fixed on December 25 until 354. In terms of religious significance, this holiday is more important than Christmas but less important than Easter and Pentecost. In Eastern Orthodox Churches, bodies of water are blessed on this day.

Origins and History

The history of the Nativity is closely bound up with the feast of the Epiphany, which was also called the Second Nativity because it was seen as Jesus’ second manifestation to the world. While the Western Christian Churches celebrate December 25 as the date of Jesus’ birth, the Eastern Christian Churches, which adhere to the Julian calendar, regard January 6 as the birthday of Jesus. January 6 was considered Jesus’ physical birthday in the town of Bethlehem as well.

In the Western church, Christmas was established before Epiphany; in the fourth century C.E., December 25 was eventually adopted by the Roman

Ark of the Covenant

The Ark of the Covenant (in Hebrew, *aron habrit*), as described in the Hebrew Bible, is a sacred container, built at the command of Yahweh (God), in which the stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments were housed. The Ark and its sanctuary were called “the beauty of Israel.” The true Ark, however, was stolen when Menelik I, the first ruler of Ethiopia and the son of King Solomon and Queen Makeda (the Queen of Sheba), was forced to leave King Solomon’s court and return to Ethiopia. King Solomon is said to have had a replica of the Ark made for Menelik to take with him, but the son of the high priest replaced the true Ark with the replica, and so it came to Ethiopia. Ethiopian Christians say that the Ark of the Covenant is still there and is kept in the Church of St. Mary of Zion, at Aksum, Ethiopia.

Timqat (also Timkat) or Epiphany is celebrated on Tir 11, according to the

lithiopian (Ethiopian) calendar, or January 19 on the Gregorian calendar, which is 12 days after Orthodox Christmas. (This date can change in Leap Years.) It is the greatest of the Orthodox Christian festivals and celebrates the baptism of Iyesu (Jesus) by John the Baptist. The festival begins the day before Timqat, which is called Ketera, and lasts for three days. Everyone dresses in their best clothes, new if possible, the white robes of the people contrasting with the bright colors of the priests’ garb. The true Ark of the Covenant is carefully wrapped by its guardian, who is the only person allowed to see it, to protect the common people from its power, and carried in the annual Epiphany procession.

In every Ethiopian Orthodox Church there is a Tabot, which symbolizes the Ark of the Covenant, and it is the Tabot that is consecrated, not the church, because the church is considered to be nothing more than an empty husk without the Tabot, its living spirit.

Catholic Church as the Feast of Jesus’ birth. The practice of holding a 12-day festival in the West, starting December 25 and ending January 6, was probably an attempt to reconcile the differences in the dates and their meaning. This period is often called the Twelve Days of Christmas. However, some Christian cultures, especially those in South America, stretch the period to 40 days, concluding the festivities on February 2, or Candlemas.

In the Germanic West (the northern European stock that includes the German, Dutch, Scandinavian, British, and related peoples), the feast of the Epiphany was celebrated as the Festival of the Three Kings (or Magi), or simply as Twelfth Night.

Before 1970, the Roman Catholic Church observed Epiphany as an eight-day feast starting on January 6 and ending on the 13th of the same month; hence, it was also called the Octave of Epiphany. Recently, however, Roman Catholics in the United States have started commemorating Epiphany on the Sunday that follows the first Saturday of the New Year, while most Anglicans and Catholics officially end the holiday season on the Sunday following January 6.

For the present Eastern Orthodox Churches, January 6 is also treated as the day of Jesus’ baptism. For them, the importance of Epiphany lies in the revelation and the “shining forth” of Jesus as a savior and the second person of the Holy Trinity, when he was baptized by St. John the Baptist. According to the Bible, Jesus’ baptism in the River Jordan is

the only time when each individual of the Christian Holy Trinity simultaneously manifested itself before humanity: God the Father spoke from the skies; God the Son was baptized in the River Jordan; and God the Holy Spirit descended in the shape of a dove. This feast is also called the Feast of Theophany. (*Theophany* means “God shining forth” in Greek.)

The Eastern Orthodox Churches perform a ritual called the “Blessing of the Waters” on this day. Following a Mass, clerics go to the nearest body of water, be it a harbor, a river, a quay, a lake, or even a swimming pool, and, following a brief ceremony, throw a cross into the water. If swimming is possible and the water is not too cold, many people jump in, trying to retrieve the cross. The person who recovers the cross hands it back to the cleric, who then specially blesses the swimmer and his or her family. Such rituals have become quite popular.

Certain interesting and special traditions were observed in various countries on the eve of Epiphany. In some countries, herbs would be burned in a fire, and their smell filled the entire house. Holy water would be sprinkled on door-

Fun Fact

Shakespeare’s play *Twelfth Night* was written to be presented as entertainment on the Twelfth Night of Christmas. The play was first performed at Middle Temple Hall in London, during the Twelfth Night festivities of 1602.

Fun Fact

The three kings, not Santa Claus, are believed to be the ones who leave gifts for Filipino children the night before Araw ng Tatlong Hari (Epiphany), which is celebrated on the first Sunday in January. Children polish their shoes and leave them on the window sills along with their cleanest socks. The children know that the three kings, on their way to Bethlehem, will pass by their homes and fill their shoes and socks with gifts.

ways, and the head of the house would write C + M + B with a piece of chalk and say, “*Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar, behütet uns auch für dieses Jahr, vor Feuer und vor Wassergefahr*” (“Caspar, Melchior, Balthazar, shelter us this year again from the perils of fire and water”). The letters have traditionally been associated with Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar; however, the Church opines that the letters stand for *Christus Mansionem Benedictat*, or “Christ, bless this home.”

See also Volume I: ANDORRA; ANGOLA; ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA; ARGENTINA; ARMENIA; AUSTRALIA; AUSTRIA;

BELARUS; BELGIUM; BELIZE; BOLIVIA; BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA; BRAZIL; BULGARIA; BURUNDI; CANADA; CAPE VERDE; CHILE; COLOMBIA; CONGO, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE; COSTA RICA; CROATIA; CYPRUS; CZECH REPUBLIC; DOMINICA; DOMINICAN REPUBLIC; ECUADOR; EL SALVADOR;

EQUATORIAL GUINEA; FRANCE; GEORGIA; GERMANY; GREECE; GRENADA; GUATEMALA; HAITI; HONDURAS; HUNGARY; IRELAND; ITALY; KIRIBATI

See also Volume II: LIECHTENSTEIN; LITHUANIA; LUXEMBOURG; MACEDONIA; MALTA; MEXICO; MICRONESIA, FEDERATED STATES OF; MOLDOVA; MONACO; NEW ZEALAND; NICARAGUA; PALAU; PANAMA; PARAGUAY; PERU; PHILIPPINES; POLAND; PORTUGAL; ROMANIA; RUSSIA; RWANDA; ST. LUCIA; SAN MARINO; SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO; SEYCHELLES; SLOVAKIA; SLOVENIA; SPAIN; SWITZERLAND; TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO; UGANDA; UKRAINE; UNITED KINGDOM; URUGUAY; VATICAN CITY; VENEZUELA

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; CHRISTMAS

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Three men dressed as the Three Wise Men in Lima, Peru, participate in the celebration of Epiphany. The men are wrapped in the brocaded robes and capes of Melchior, Balthazar, and Caspar in the biblical tradition. (AP Photo/Silvia Izquierdo)

Good Friday

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Christian populations
Observed on	Friday before Easter
Observed by	Christians

Introduction

Good Friday observes the day on which Jesus, believed by Christians to have been the Messiah, was crucified by the Romans. Christians also believe he was the Son of God, embodying the second person of the Holy Trinity (which is made up of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). The day is a part of Holy Week, or Passion Week, the last week of Jesus' mortal life. His death is believed to have redeemed the world, and the name Good Friday expresses the Christian belief that even death cannot overshadow God's love for humanity.

The original name of this holiday may well have been God's Friday because, in Early Modern English, *good* meant "holy." Also, the two words were often interchangeable as in, "God be with you," now elided and spelled "good-bye."

Origins and History

According to the calculations of the times, Friday began at sundown on Thursday. The changed calculations in 1582, when the Julian calendar was again revised, provided the dividing factor, and Good Friday thus begins at the time of Jesus' arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, sometime between 1:00 and 1:30 A.M., which was followed by his imprisonment, Pontius Pilate's words, "I find no guilt in this man," his attempts to release Jesus, Jesus' imprisonment and torture, and finally Jesus' being crowned with thorns and crucified. His Crucifixion occurred at the same time that the paschal lambs (for the Jewish feast of Passover) were being slaughtered (between 12:00 noon and 3:00 P.M.). He died after three hours on the Cross. Out of this synchrony came the symbolism of Jesus as the sacrificed lamb, the true paschal lamb. Scripture says that Joseph of Arimathea begged Pilate for Jesus' body, and wrapped it in linen in accordance with Jewish custom. The body was then placed in the sepulcher (tomb) that Joseph had had prepared for himself.

It is worth mentioning that crucifixions were a common means of execution in those times and were undoubtedly chosen for their shock value. The purpose lay not so much in punishing the offender as in warning others.

Four centuries later a period of relative safety for Christians began when the Roman Emperor Constantine protected them from persecution. As a result, the fourth century saw the first celebrations of Holy Week, including Good Friday. (Previously, Easter and Epiphany had been the important Christian holidays.) The fourth century was also a good time to search for the holy sites of Christianity that had been partially desecrated, lost, or forgotten. In 327 Macarius (d. 333), Bishop of Jerusalem, ordered excavations, and his workers found not only the holy sepulcher and the site of Calvary, but also the original wooden Cross. A special chapel was built for it between the Basilica of Anastasis (Resurrection) and the Church of Martyrion in Jerusalem.

The "Pilgrimage of Aetheria" is a nun's account of her pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the fourth century. It includes a description of how the different days of Holy Week were observed. One of the accounts Aetheria (or Egeria, or Sylvia, as she is variously called) gives is of the Good Friday ceremony in Jerusalem toward the end of the fourth century.

The Curse on the Dogwood Tree

The dogwood tree is believed to have once been as tall and mighty as the oak. It was thought strong enough to be fashioned into the Cross for Jesus. However, after the Crucifixion, according to legend, God cursed the tree, and so it has since been thin and bent, with flowers in the shape of a cross (two long petals and two short ones). What's more, the outer edges of the petals resemble stained nail marks, and the center of each flower recalls the crown of thorns that it was reported Jesus wore at his death.





The Julian and Gregorian Calendars

Some Orthodox Christians in both Europe and America celebrate the immovable feasts of the Orthodox Church on different civil calendar and church calendar dates: for example: Jesus' birth on December 25 or January 7; the Annunciation on March 25 or April 7; the Dormition (the Virgin's Mary's Assumption into heaven) on August 15 or 28; and the Feast of St. Nicholas on December 6 or 19. The 13 days' difference is a technical problem caused by the fact that most calendars currently in use do not accurately divide the year into days that match the length of the year required for the Earth to orbit the Sun. Thus, for example, the birth of Jesus, which for some parishes falls on January 7 of the civil calendar, is actually shown on the church's old-style Julian calendar as December 25.

For the original Julian calendar, introduced by Julius Caesar in 44 B.C.E., the length of the natural solar year, the time it takes for the Earth to make one orbit of the Sun, was estimated to be 365 days and 6 hours. This error was corrected by "collecting" the extra six hours and adding an extra day to the month of February every fourth year, creating a leap year of 366 days. The original Julian calendar was adopted by the church without correction of its technical errors. As a consequence, the original Julian calendar was revised twice: once by the church in the West and once by the church in the East. The basic civil calendar, however, remained the same.

There are four versions of the Julian calendar. The three relevant to Good Friday observances are as follows:

1. The original Julian calendar: This estimated civil calendar year is 11 minutes and 14 seconds longer than the natural solar year (longer in time means faster in speed), an error that caused the calendar problems. For instance, a regular phenomenon like the spring equinox (when day and night are both about 12 hours long) happens every year at a measurable time in the orbit of the Earth. Over a period of time the extra minutes and seconds added up to a full day and the spring equinox arrived faster, or earlier, every year in the civil calendar. The spring equinox fell on March 25 in the original Julian calendar.
2. What is called the old-style Julian calendar dates from 325. By the fourth century the spring equinox was on March 21 on the original Julian calendar. When the First Ecumenical Council met in Nicea in 325 to settle the date for celebrating Pascha (Easter), the church adopted the original Julian calendar and ruled that Pascha would be observed on the first Sunday after the first full Moon following the spring equinox on March 21, and independently of the Jewish Passover (Pesach). The council did not correct the calendar error, nor did it set the spring equinox date back to March 25 where it had been originally. By fixing a faulty civil calendar date to a fixed phenomenon in nature, the church created the calendar problem. The old-style Julian calendar dates from 325, not from 44 B.C.E. as is commonly believed. The calendar adopted in 325 C.E. had nothing to do with determining the date on which Jesus had been born.
3. The new-style Julian calendar dates from the year 1582. By the 16th century the spring equinox was occurring 10 days earlier on the old-style Julian calendar date of March 11 instead of March 21, because of the uncorrected error in the original Julian calendar. With updated astronomical information, Pope Gregory XIII (r. 1572–85) revised the original Julian calendar so that the average length of the civil calendar more closely approximated the natural length of the solar year. In a 400-year cycle, three leap years were dropped, thereby reducing the error from 11 minutes and 14 seconds a year to 26 seconds a year. Under this revised calendar it takes many years more for 26 seconds of error to accumulate into a full day.

In 1582, 10 days were dropped from the civil calendar so that the spring equinox again fell on March 21 as the church had ruled in 325. This version of the new-style Julian calendar is popularly called the Gregorian calendar and is used by the church in the West to determine the dates for fixed and movable feasts.

Although the first Mass is believed to have been the celebration of the Eucharist (along with the set order of worship) around 150, there was no formal Mass in those early years. All services followed the Jewish synagogue pattern of lessons, chants, and prayers. According to Aetheria, monks and believers would assemble at 8:00 A.M. in the Chapel of the Cross on Good Friday. The Bishop of Golgotha sat behind a table, and the silver-gilt casket holding the sacred wood of the original Cross was placed thereon. The wood was placed on the table, and the bishop held it firmly at both ends. Worshippers came up to the table, bowed, and kissed the cross. People were allowed to kiss it and touch it with their foreheads and eyes, but not with their hands. However, the wish to own a piece of the sacred wood still proved overwhelming for some: At least one worshipper pretended to kiss the Cross and bit off a “relic” for himself.

The Roman Ordines of 800 contain the order of the prayers for Good Friday. The traditional Roman Catholic service is a variation of the original service held in Jerusalem. A veiled crucifix is gradually unveiled while the hymn “Ecce Lignum Crucis” is sung three times. The worshippers respond with “Venite Adoremus,” and everyone in the church, with the exception of the celebrant, singing the hymn, kneels in adoration. (A celebrant is a church official leading a religious ceremony.) The cross is then carried to the altar and placed on a cushion near it. First the celebrant and then the deacon and others remove their shoes, bow to the cross, and kiss it. After this, the clergy hold up other crosses for the congregation to kiss. The cross is placed on the altar, surrounded by lit candles. The choir sings the “Improperia” during this ceremony. This is believed to be based on Jesus’ words to the Jews but is not found in the early *Roman Ordines*. (The “Improperia” appears in a 14th-century *Roman Ordo* and is believed to have originated in the Gallican church, the church of France.) A procession moves toward the spot where the consecrated host (also referred to as the “bread of the sacrament” or “communion”), prepared on Thursday, is kept in an urn. The urn represents Jesus’ tomb. The Mass of the Pre-sanctified, which is not actually a Mass, is sung by the celebrant and others. The host is placed on the altar and then consumed by the celebrant. There is no Communion prepared on Good Friday (and many churches do not offer Communion this day) because the day is not a celebration. Together with Holy Saturday, it is considered a nonliturgical day, since these were the days when Jesus was separated from his followers.

This veneration of the Cross has been the subject of much criticism by believers and nonbelievers alike, many of whom were critical of the Cross (not the dying Jesus) becoming the object of devotion. Even so, the Cross became quite visible in the early days of Christianity and was used by rulers and their subjects alike. It was supported by many who were opposed to icons of any kind. Even iconoclastic

Other Names for Good Friday

In the *Roman Missal* (the book containing all the prayers said by priests at the altar and said or sung throughout the ecclesiastical year in the Catholic Church), Good Friday is called *Feria VI in Parasceve*. *Parasceve* means “preparation,” as in preparation for the Sabbath.

The German word for this day is *Charfreitag*, which means “Mourning Friday.” *Char* is cognate with the English word *care*, as in “problem.”

The Greek phrase is *he hagia kai megale paraskeue*, which means “holy and great Friday.”

emperors like Leo the Isaurian (r. 716–41), Constantine Copronymus (r. 741–75), and Michael II (r. 820–29) had the Cross stamped on their coins, and people undertook pilgrimages simply to adore it. The Saurolaters and the Chazingarii were sects distinguished by their adoration of the Cross. Eventually, the Second Council of Nicaea (787) laid down certain norms and distinguished between *proskynesis* (veneration) and *aspasmos* (salutation) due a cross or other symbols of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, or the saints, and the *alethine latreia* (true adoration) that was owed to divinity alone.

Good Friday is a day of mourning in memory of Jesus’ Crucifixion, even though it contains within it the miracle of the Resurrection. Often, Good Friday services are three hours long in memory of Jesus’ three hours on the Cross, and may be held between 12:00 noon and 3:00 P.M. These afternoon services recall Jesus’ hours on the Cross but have been shifted to the evening at some churches so that more people can attend.

Two observances are an integral part of Good Friday services in most Catholic and Protestant Churches. *Tenebrae*, which means “darkness,” is called the Service of Darkness or Service of Shadows and can be traced back to the earliest traditions of church services held on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday of Holy Week, comprising prayers and readings pertaining to the Passion (suffering) of Jesus. The Lamentations of Jeremiah are always chanted during this service, and the Passion is sung by three deacons as specified in the early manuscripts of the Gospels. Readings of the Passion are traditionally taken from the Gospel of St. John. The final prayer is the “Bidding Prayer,” which dates back to the fifth century in its present form, although the roots are to be found in Jewish worship. As the service progresses, lights are gradually dimmed, and the 15 candles in the candle stand (called the *Tenebrae Hearse*) are extinguished one at a time until only one remains. The darkened atmosphere symbolizes a world without God, and the one lit candle represents Jesus. It is taken from the holder and placed behind the altar, followed



A 16-year-old Mexican Catholic faithful cries as she represents the Virgin Mary during the Crucifixion re-enactment marking Good Friday in Mexico City, Mexico. The annual event draws millions of local spectators and outside tourists. (AP Photo/Elizabeth Dalziel)

almost immediately by a loud noise like the closing of a tomb. This concludes the service and worshippers leave in silence. The Jesus candle is replaced in the holder.

The Service of the Last Seven Words of Christ actually refers to the last seven sentences Jesus is believed to have spoken while dying on the Cross:

“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” (Luke)

“Today thou shalt be with me in paradise.” (Luke)

“Woman, behold your son.” (John)

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew)

“I thirst.” (John)

“It is finished.” (John)

“Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” (Luke)

Since the beginning of Good Friday observances, these have been the focus of church services. Worshippers are expected to meditate on related events from Jesus’ life and also about related problems faced by people the world over, such as starva-

tion, domestic and other kinds of violence, homelessness, child abuse, and poverty. Prayers are offered for peace and prosperity, happiness, and health.

The Stations of the Cross refers to a traditional Catholic ritual that is usually observed as part of the morning Mass. It is performed monthly but assumes special significance during the Good Friday observance. Typically, the “stations” refer to 14 banners or paintings mounted on wooden crosses illustrating scenes from Jesus’ trial and Crucifixion. These are erected in a path in or around the church so that believers can move from one to the other, to reflect, pray, or sing hymns. Some Christian denominations have adapted tradition to create an equally meaningful custom: Worshippers visit places of suffering and people with problems, pondering all the while on Jesus’ last utterances and praying.

In Eastern Orthodox Churches, Holy Week and its special days are celebrated 13 days after the Easter observances in Western churches (including the Roman Catholic and affiliated Eastern churches, as well as Protestant sects) have been held. In Orthodox Churches, Good Friday is referred to as Great Friday, emphasizing Jesus’ victory over death (as symbolized by Easter) rather than his death on this Friday. There are three services: The first one is held before noon and is called Royal Hours; the afternoon service is known as the Vespers of Good Friday; and the evening service is called the Matins of Holy Saturday. In the morning a two-dimensional figure of Jesus is placed on a cross and moved to the center of the church in front of the nave (where the congregation sits). The figure is removed from the cross during the afternoon prayer service and taken to the altar where the *epitaphion* (a cloth icon of Jesus) is placed on a low table already laid out with flowers. During the evening service, the *epitaphion* is carried in a procession by young men and returned to the low table.

The Apokathelosis (“taking down from the Cross”) of the Greek Orthodox Church is a grand procession that simulates a funeral during which the image of Jesus is laid on a bier and carried through the town. Worshippers line the streets to adore the image, and they may pray and kiss the image if they wish. In the Anglican Church, some Roman Catholic traditions are followed but with modifications. After the congregation has kissed the Cross, it is placed in a recess symbolizing the sepulcher. Monks mount a vigil, chanting Psalms day and night, until Easter morning when the Mass of the Presanctified is held.

See also Volume I: ANDORRA; ANGOLA; ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA; ARGENTINA; ARMENIA; AUSTRALIA; AUSTRIA; BELARUS; BELGIUM; BELIZE; BOLIVIA; BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA; BRAZIL; BULGARIA; BURUNDI; CANADA; CAPE VERDE; CHILE; COLOMBIA; CONGO, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE; COSTA RICA; CROATIA; CYPRUS; CZECH REPUBLIC; DENMARK; DOMINICA; DOMINICAN REPUBLIC; ECUADOR;

EL SALVADOR; EQUATORIAL GUINEA; ESTONIA; FINLAND; FRANCE; GEORGIA; GERMANY; GREECE; GRENADA; GUATEMALA; HAITI; HONDURAS; HUNGARY; ICELAND; IRELAND; ITALY; KIRIBATI

See also Volume II: LATVIA; LIECHTENSTEIN; LITHUANIA; LUXEMBOURG; MACEDONIA; MALTA; MEXICO; MICRONESIA, FEDERATED STATES OF; MOLDOVA; MONACO; NAMIBIA; NEW ZEALAND; NICARAGUA; NORWAY; PALAU; PANAMA; PARAGUAY; PERU; PHILIPPINES; POLAND; PORTUGAL; ROMANIA; RUSSIA; RWANDA; ST. LUCIA; SAN MARINO; SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO; SEYCHELLES; SLOVAKIA; SLOVENIA; SPAIN; SWEDEN; SWITZERLAND; TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO; UGANDA; UKRAINE; UNITED KINGDOM; UNITED STATES; URUGUAY; VATICAN CITY; VENEZUELA

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY

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~ Gurpurab ~

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Sikh populations, especially India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, United Kingdom, Canada, United States, Malaysia, Kenya, and Thailand
Observed on	Full Moon day of Karttika, the eighth month of the Hindu calendar
Observed by	Sikhs

Introduction

The word *gurpurab* means “festival of the guru.” The Sikhs celebrate many *gurpurabs* at each *gurpurab* the particular guru to whom the day is dedicated is honored. The devotees organize *akhand path* (marathon readings of the Granth Sahib that go on for 24 hours), *langars* (community lunches and dinners), *kar seva* (social service performed by physical labor), and religious processions to celebrate the occasion.

The most important festival of the year for Sikhs is the Gurpurab celebrating the birth of Guru Nanak Dev (1469–1539), the founder of Sikhism and the first of its 10 human gurus. Because Guru

Nanak is thought to have brought illumination to the world and into the darkened lives of ordinary mortals, the festival is also called Prakash Utsav, the Festival of Light.

Celebrations begin nearly two weeks before the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak. Every day, religious processions (which also function as choruses), known as *prabhat pheris*, go around the streets in the early hours of the morning. A day before the festival, a massive parade (*nagar kirtan*) starts from the *gurdwaras* (“temples”) in the afternoon. Old and young alike join in this march of goodwill and peace. Leading the crowd are the *panj pyaras* (the five best disciples of the guru). Behind them, a profusely decorated *palki* (palanquin) rolls along, on which is placed the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. This is the Sikh’s holy book, which is also regarded as head of the Sikh religion and the 11th and last guru. A band of musicians and singers chanting *shabads* in honor of the guru follow the palanquin. As they wend their way through the lanes and alleys of the city or town, people come forward to seek the blessings of the *panj pyaras*, and bow in reverence before them. Musical bands of schoolchildren, eminent citizens, and *gatka* parties (acting out mock battles with traditional weapons) take part in the processions.

The route of the *nagar kirtan* (“parade”) is gaily decorated with flags, flowers, religious posters, ornamental arches, and banners depicting various aspects of Sikhism. The procession offers an opportunity to the old and frail to pay homage to the Guru Sri Granth Sahib before it is returned to the Sikh temple (*gurdwara*). This sacred volume is believed to sanctify the ground over which it travels.

On this special day, *akhand path* (marathon readings of the holy book) are organized in *gurdwaras* across the country. The *divan* (“assembly”) commences in the *gurdwaras* almost at the crack of dawn. A special *shabad* (“devotional song”), known as “Asa-di-Var,” is sung, followed by *kirtans* (“devotional group singing”) and *kathas* (“lectures and talks on various aspects of Sikhism”).

Shabad

Shabads are similar in style to *bhajans*. These songs are popular among the Sikhs, while the *bhajans* are sung by Hindus. The term *shabad* means “word,” and it represents the verbal description of the nature of God. This is generally from the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of the Sikhs. A *shabad* is also referred to as *gurbani*, which means “message of the teacher.” The philosophy of the *shabad* and its relationship to spiritual growth is extremely sophisticated. It is said that it takes a tremendous amount of study, devotion, and meditation to truly understand the significance of the *shabad* because, by its very nature, it embraces the infinite qualities of God. The *shabad* has historically been performed in very traditional styles. The Guru Granth Sahib is very specific about the *ragas* (a type of melody in Indian classical music) for singing the various *shabads*. These are typical of the more classical *ragas* of north Indian music. The traditional *shabads* are also in the more classical *talas* (rhythms), such as *tintal* and *ektaal*.

Devotees pour into the *gurdwara* from morning on, where they participate in all these programs until noon. After the head priest offers *ardas* (“formal prayers”), the entire congregation recites *shabads* based on the teachings of Guru Nanak. The special prayers end at midday with the *bhog*, the concluding ceremony. Food, which has been cooked in the community kitchen by volunteers, is then offered to the guru in an elaborate ceremony and his blessings are sought. *Karah prasad* (“sacred food,” a viscous sweetmeat prepared with flour or semolina, ghee, and sugar) is also distributed to everyone present.

Thereafter, men, women, and children, regardless of their ages, faiths, beliefs, and social position, sit down to share the food in the *guru ka langar* (“community kitchen”). At night, people light their homes with oil lamps and candles. Some set off fire-crackers to celebrate the occasion. The Sikhs who cannot join the celebrations for some reason, or who live in places where there are no *gurdwaras*, hold the ceremony in their own homes by privately preparing *kirtan*, *akhand path*, *ardas*, *karah prasad*, and *langar*.

The birth anniversaries of the other nine gurus of the Khalsa Panth (the theocracy that governs the Khalsa made up of the *panj pyaras*) are also celebrated as *gurpurabs*, though not on the same scale as that of Guru Nanak. All 10 of the *gurpurabs* commemorate the virtuous lives and pious deeds of the Gurus.

The second major Gurpurab is the birthday of Sri Guru Gobind Singh. He was the 10th guru, who was born at Patna Sahib in the eastern Indian state of Bihar on December 22, 1666. His birthday generally falls in December–January and sometimes occurs twice in a year, according to the computations of the Hindu Bikram (lunar) calendar. The elements of the celebrations are similar to those of Guru Nanak’s birthday, including *akhand path*, processions and *kirtans*, *kathas*, and *langar*.

The Sikh diaspora living in various countries celebrate *gurpurabs* with traditional devotion, zeal, and fervor. Provided the conditions are congenial, the members of the Sikh community participate in peaceful, colorful processions wherever they live. The Sikh expatriates and nonresident Indians through the nearest *gurdwaras* (there are a few in every country) with their families and kinsfolk, where they participate in *kirtans*, chanting, and readings from the Guru Granth Sahib; *karah prasad* and *langars* are also organized on such occasions. Very often a number of local dignitaries, including royal personages, presidents, and prime ministers, participate in such festivals, thereby setting examples of communal harmony and secularism.

Origins and History

During the medieval period, the northern part of India was perpetually in turmoil, with ceaseless Muslim invasions from beyond its northwestern

borders. By the 15th century, constant feuds and factions between the Hindus and Muslims gave rise to a movement of saints, drawn from both communities. They tried their utmost to foster harmony, brotherhood, and peace between the two warring communities and, in the process, attempted to make members of both religions realize that there was only one God. One such noble soul who manifested himself in this world at that crucial juncture was Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism.

Sri Guru Nanak Dev was born at Rai-Bhoi-di Talwandi in the Shekhupura district of western Punjab in what is now Pakistan, on Karttika Puranmashi, the full Moon day of the month of Karttika (October–November). The area has come to be known as Nanakana Sahib, and his home is now a shrine (*gurdwara*) known as Gurdwara Janam Asthan, where devout Sikhs from all over the world come together to celebrate the Gurpurab of Guru Nanak every year.

Born in a Hindu family to Kalu Rai Mehta (father) and Tripta Devi (mother), he refused to observe Hindu rituals and preached that there was only one God and that God was the only truth. He chose two persons, one each from the two communities, and undertook several journeys within India, as well as four to Ceylon, Tibet, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq. Nanak constantly preached that he was neither a Hindu nor a Muslim, but a follower of the truth and that his knowledge came from the word, meaning that God could only be realized by meditation and self-improvement. He criticized and disparaged the Hindu customs and practices of fasting, pilgrimages, penance, and other austerities as well as the dominance of priests. He denounced the Muslims for their persecution of the Hindus and their practice of forcible conversions. Nanak asked his disciples to earn their living by honest means and insisted that they marry and raise families. He preached that

Fun Fact

The *panj pyaras* are called the “five beloved ones.” The first five men to be admitted into the Khalsa brotherhood—the original *panj pyaras*—founded by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699 were: Bhai Daya Singh Ji, Bhai Dharam Singh Ji, Bhai Himmat Singh Ji, Bhai Mohkam Singh Ji, and Bhai Sahib Singh Ji.

Asa-di-Var

Asa-di-var refers to the morning prayer, consists of *slokas* and 24 *pauris*. Guru Ramdas added 24 *chhands* (quatrain). A *var*, or ode, is a heroic measure popular in the Punjab. In all Sikh temples, this particular *var* is sung rather early in the morning. Here Guru Nanak sings of the glory of God and the Name, and describes how an ordinary person can become a perfect servant of God.

Ardas

Ardas are the common Sikh prayers that are invoked at the start and conclusion of every Sikh event. The word *ardas* means “supplication” or “petition to higher authority.” The prayers are ritualized and Sikhs may offer them individually or in congregations. These prayers are always offered after morning and evening services, or to demonstrate gratitude to the Almighty for favors granted.

a man could live a householder’s life, yet could also be a true follower of God by clinging to the truth. No priests were required, nor was a particular place or time necessary for one to communicate with God. Nanak’s followers came to be known as Sikhs, a derivation of a Sanskrit word *shishya*, which means “student.” Both Hindus and Muslims in large numbers became his followers.

Nanak became the first guru or master of the Sikhs and was followed by three others before the Mughal rulers at Delhi took notice of the fast-growing sect. A few of the Sikh gurus fell to assassins’ swords while defending their faith. Their days of martyrdom are also celebrated as *gurpurabs*,

though they are tinged with solemnity and sadness. Martyrdom observances consist of *kirtan*, *kathas*, lectures, *karab prasad*, and *langars* in *gurdwaras* across the length and breadth of the country.

The fifth guru, Arjun Dev (1581–1606), was tortured and executed at Lahore in May 1606 on the instructions of Mughal Emperor Jahangir (1569–1627). This resulted in the members of the sect taking up arms to protect themselves.

Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621–75), the ninth guru, was arrested under

the orders of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (1618–1707). When he refused to give up his faith and accept Islam, he was beheaded on November 11, 1675, at the city square (Chandni Chowk) in Delhi. Usually one-day celebrations of his martyrdom are organized in the *gurdwaras*. These occasions are also marked by special prayers and chanting from the Guru Granth Sahib. Religious discourses and free community meals (*langar*) are an integral part of the celebrations. Since it is the peak of summer, a chilled, refreshing drink made with milk, sugar, essence, and water (*chhabeel*) is freely distributed in *gurdwaras* and along the roads to all passers-by and bystanders.

The constant friction between the royal court in Delhi and the fledgling community led to the 10th master Gobind Singh (1666–1708), converting the members to a warrior class and calling them Khalsa, meaning the “Pure Ones” (those who are pure at heart and in their actions). Sikh men began adding the word *singh* (“lion”), and women, the word *kaurs* (“princess” or “lioness”) to their names. Since the 18th century the community has been in the forefront of battles against any kind of oppression or injustice. Three days before he passed away on October 3, 1708, Guru Gobind Singh conferred the mantle of guru of the Sikhs on the Guru Granth Sahib, also called the Adi Granth, the Sikh’s holy book. Ever since, this sacred book has been venerated as the 11th guru of the Sikh community, its supreme spiritual authority, and the leader of the Sikh religion. There have been no more human gurus.

See also Volume I: INDIA

See also Volume III: SIKHISM

Fun Fact

The number five has special meaning in the Sikh religion. There have been 10 human gurus (a multiple of five), and there were five *panj pyaras* for example. The last guru, Guru Gobind Singh, ordered Sikh men to observe the five *k’s* so they would stand out from other groups: These are *kesh* (uncut beard and hair); *kangh* (a comb in one’s hair); *kara* (a steel bangle on the right wrist); *kachcha* (short drawers); and *kirpan* (a steel dagger).

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Hajj

FACT FILE

Observed in	Saudi Arabia by Muslim pilgrims from all over the world
Observed on	Sixth to 13th of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Observed by	Muslims

Introduction

The hajj is an annual pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, that every Muslim must make at least once in his or her life if it is physically and financially feasible. The requirement to make it is set forth as the fifth of the Five Pillars of Islam, which are the most basic aspects of Sunni Islam. In Shia Islam the hajj is one of the Furu al-Din (“fundamentals of faith”).

Hajj activities take place for six days during Dhu al-Hijjah. The journey can be considered a form of worship involving the complete being—mind, body, and soul. The Saudi Arabian government provides special visas to people from other countries who want to make the pilgrimage. Only Muslims can enter Mecca itself; non-Muslims are forbidden entrance to the city. Muslim women, however, cannot make the hajj alone; they must be accompanied by a man—a husband, brother, or father.

There are two parts to the hajj: the greater hajj (Al Hajjul-Akbar) and the lesser hajj (Umrah). The lesser hajj can be accomplished at any time of the year, but the greater hajj must be completed during Dhu al-Hijjah. Most pilgrims perform both parts of the hajj at the same time because it is more economical. The rituals of the Lesser Hajj are spiritual acts that symbolize both the acts of Muhammad and one’s sense of community with all Muslims.

After completing their journey the pilgrims participate in a week of rituals associated with the “greater hajj.” The first day they leave Mecca for the uninhabited town of Mina, where they spend the day meditating. On the ninth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the second day of the hajj, the pilgrims leave Mina and go to the Plain of Arafat for *wuquf*, “the standing,” which is the central ritual of the greater hajj and is intended to remind them of the Day of Judgment. Right after sunset the pilgrims leave for the Plain of Muzdalifah, which lies halfway between Mina and Arafat. After praying, they gather their pebbles for the stoning of the Devil.

Before dawn on the 10th of Dhu al-Hijjah, the third day, the pilgrims leave Muzdalifah and return to Mina where they cast their stones at three pillars that symbolize Satan’s endeavors to thwart Allah’s will. The largest pillar symbolizes the Devil’s attempt to dissuade Ibrahim from killing his son; the second largest represents his attempt to enlist Hagar in his effort to keep Ibrahim from killing Ishmael; the smallest pillar stands for the Devil’s attempt to persuade Ishmael to beg for his life. Throwing the stones represents the Devil’s three failures. After stoning the Devil, many of the men shave their heads (women cut off a lock of their hair) as a symbol of rebirth, to show that their sins have been cleansed.

Having now completed a large part of the greater hajj, the pilgrims can take off their *ibram* (the pilgrimage outfit) and wear regular clothes until they take up the final elements of the greater hajj. At this stage, all restrictions of the hajj, which include bans on cutting one’s hair and nails, are put aside, with the exception of the ban on sexual intercourse.

Also on this day Eid al-Adha, the Feast of Sacrifice, begins and continues until the 13th of Dhu al-Hijjah. The pilgrims sacrifice a sheep or a goat (or some other animal) to celebrate Ibrahim’s unquestioning devotion to God and his willingness to sacrifice Ishmael, his son. Most of the meat is given to the poor, but the celebrants can, if they wish, keep a



Hajj Pilgrims

The number of people who visit Mecca seems to increase every year. Muslims from all over the world converge on Mecca to experience the hajj, something physically fit Muslims must do at least once in their lifetime. During the pilgrimage in 2004, two million people undertook the pilgrimage to Mecca.



A Muslim man prays on Mt. Arafat in Saudi Arabia during the hajj. The annual hajj pilgrimage peaks with prayers at Mt. Arafat, a gentle hill 12 miles southwest of Mecca. The time spent at Mt. Arafat is believed to symbolize Judgment Day when Islam says every person will stand before God and answer for his or her deeds. Every able-bodied Muslim, who can afford it, is required at least once to perform the hajj, a centuries-old pilgrimage to Mecca, the birthplace of Islam and its seventh-century prophet Muhammad. (AP Photo/Amel Emric)

small portion for themselves. They are joined in this celebration by Muslims around the world who perform their own sacrifices for Eid al-Adha.

The pilgrims then usually visit Medina and the mosque where Muhammad is buried. After one or more nights in Medina, they put on the *ihram* again and resume the hajj. There are three remaining acts that they must perform in order to complete the Greater Hajj successfully: spend an afternoon at the hill of Arafat, where Adam and Eve were forgiven by Allah for their disobedience; walk counterclockwise seven times (*tawaf*) around the Kaaba (the holiest place in Islam), reciting a prayer during each circuit; and finally perform the *say* (or “running”), walking seven times, forward and backward, between the rocky hills of Marwa and Safa, reenacting the frantic search of Abraham’s wife Hagar for water before Allah showed her the Zamzam Spring. The spring is now enclosed in a marble chamber beneath the Kaaba and, though not a custom, most pilgrims drink water from the Zamzam well after completing the lesser hajj. The visit to the hill of Arafat does not require any specific rituals or prayers, so pilgrims usually spend the afternoon reflecting on the course of their lives.

Having fulfilled all of their spiritual obligations, the pilgrims are cleansed and can return to their daily lives. Female pilgrims who have completed the hajj are called *hajjah*; males are called *hajji*.

Origins and History

Four millennia ago Mecca was an arid and unoccupied place. Muslims believe that Abraham (Ibrahim) brought his wife Hagar (Hajira) and their child Ishmael to Mecca in order to protect them from Sarah, Ibrahim’s first wife. Allah instructed Ibrahim to let mother and son be on their own, which he duly did, leaving them with a reasonable supply of water and food. The supplies, however, ran out quickly and Ibrahim’s wife and son were left suffering from dehydration and hunger. Hajira sprinted up and down the hills of Marwa and Safa looking for help, before she collapsed beside Ishmael and prayed for deliverance. Muslims believe that, when Ishmael struck the ground with his foot, a spring of water gushed from the earth, and he and his mother were saved. When Ibrahim returned from Palestine, he was astonished to see his wife and son running a profitable well.

As God commanded Ibrahim, he built a shrine dedicated to Allah at the spot. Ibrahim, and Ishmael also built a stone structure called the Kaaba, which was later the rallying point for those who wanted their belief in Allah to be strengthened. The Kaaba, which symbolizes God's oneness, means that every life must have Allah at its center. With the passing of years, Ishmael came to be regarded as a prophet and preached to the desert nomads the importance of submitting to Allah.

Mecca subsequently became a flourishing city because of its dependable water resource, the Zamzam well. Slowly but surely, the people started adopting polytheistic notions and worshipping spirits and various gods. Ibrahim's shrine became a storehouse for idols. Ultimately Allah instructed Muhammad to restore the Kaaba. In 628, Muhammad took a trip with 1,400 of his followers. This was Islam's first recorded pilgrimage, and it resurrected Ibrahim's sacred traditions.

With about 1.3 billion Islam adherents worldwide, pilgrimages of the recent past have crowded into the city of Mecca. During hajj, Mecca has been the destination of as many as four million pilgrims. Such an influx of people has stretched the city's resources, and it has had problems preventing overcrowding and providing accommodations for those who want to be present during Dhu al-Hijjah. This situation has caused a number of pilgrims' deaths, due primarily to the crowded conditions. Organizations dedicated to managing the hajj, such as the Hajj Commission of Saudi Arabia, have reluctantly established a system of passports, travel visas, and registrations to control the influx of pilgrims. This system is purported to accommodate first-time visitors to the holy city, while establishing restrictions for pilgrims who have already been to Mecca numerous times. The Hajj Commission has, however, openly admitted that they have yet to find a way to prevent tragedies and accidents. Moreover, those who can afford to undertake the pilgrimage several times have objected strenuously.

Notwithstanding the stress of the physical challenge, pilgrims who experience the hajj see it as one of the greatest spiritual experiences of their lives.

See also Volume I: AFGHANISTAN; ALBANIA; ALGERIA; AZERBAIJAN; BAHRAIN; BANGLADESH;

Ihram

When undertaking the hajj, Muslims do away with all class distinctions and wear plain white garments called *ihram*. Men are required to wear two white unhemmed cloths—one below the waist, the other collected around their shoulders—and a pair of sandals. Women wear a headscarf and a plain white dress, or their native dress. The *ihram* represents cleanliness and purity, and shows the pilgrim to be devoted. While clothed in *ihram*, pilgrims are forbidden to harm a living being, fight, or use vulgar language. Vanity is not allowed, and pilgrims approach the hajj in their most natural state. Marriage proposals are also suspended during the hajj.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA; BRUNEI; BURKINA FASO; CHAD; COMOROS; CÔTE D'IVOIRE; DJIBOUTI; EGYPT; ERITREA; ETHIOPIA; GAMBIA, THE; GHANA; GUINEA; GUINEA-BISSEAU; INDIA; INDONESIA; IRAN; JORDAN; KAZAKHSTAN; KUWAIT; KYRGYZSTAN

See also Volume II: LEBANON; LIBERIA; LIBYA; MACEDONIA; MALAYSIA; MALDIVES; MALI; MAURITANIA; MOROCCO; NIGER; NIGERIA; OMAN; PAKISTAN; QATAR; SAUDI ARABIA; SENEGAL; SIERRA LEONE; SOMALIA; SUDAN; SYRIA; TAJIKISTAN; TANZANIA; TUNISIA; TURKEY; TURKMENISTAN; UNITED ARAB EMIRATES; UZBEKISTAN; YEMEN

See also Volume III: EID AL-ADHA; ISLAM

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❧ Hanukkah ❧

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Jewish populations, especially Israel, United States, and Canada
Observed on	Twenty-fifth of Kislev, the ninth month of the Jewish calendar, to the second of Tevet, the 10th month of the Jewish calendar
Observed by	Jews

Introduction

Hanukkah, which means “dedication,” is celebrated for eight days, usually beginning around mid to late December. Also known as the Festival of Lights, the observance recalls the Jews’ struggle for religious freedom and celebrates their triumph against the Hellenistic Syrians in 165 B.C.E. (The observance has more than 10 spellings in English, three more than the seven candles of the ancient menorah.)

On the festival’s first night, one light of a nine-branched *hanukiah* (“candlestick”) is lit. Each night after that, another light is lit until the eighth and final night, when all of them are lit. The gradual addition of lights reminds the Jews of the miracle’s magnitude and growth. The candles are placed in

the *hanukiah* from right to left, but are lit from left to right. The main candle is called the *shamash*, or “servant,” and is used to light the rest of the candles. There are recitations of blessings every night prior to the lighting of the candles: as they burn the eight lights of the *hanukiah*, Jews all over the world narrate stories about the triumph of their ancestors over depravity, the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem, as well as the miracle of one day’s supply of oil that burned for eight days.

For unexplained reasons, the real story of the festival and the rebellion never became a part of the Torah. Rather, it was scripted in four works, in Greek and Hebrew, called The Books of the Maccabees. These works survived after Christians translated them. The Mishnah, where everything related to religious life was documented, has only a few mentions of the festival and its story.

Hanukkah found renewed import in the years that led to the establishment of the modern state of Israel. Post-Holocaust Jews became aware of the profound questions raised by Hanukkah: identity, oppression, religious autonomy and expression, and the fight for independence. Although in a religious context Hanukkah remains a minor Jewish holiday, it has turned into a holiday of historical significance, for the repetition of the miracle narratives both confirm and strengthen a persecuted people.

Origins and History

After Alexander the Great’s death (356–23 B.C.E.), his kingdom was divided among his generals Seleucus (358/54–281), Antigonos (382–01 B.C.E.), and Ptolemy (367–283 B.C.E.). Seleucus reigned over Babylonia, Syria, and Persia; Antigonos over Macedonia and Greece; and Ptolemy ruled Israel and Egypt. Like his legendary predecessor, Ptolemy championed Hellenism (Greek nationalism). The

The Hanukiah

For Hanukkah, a nine-branched candlestick (*hanukiah*) holds the candles to be lit. It is an adaptation of the menorah, one of the most ancient Jewish symbols; which has seven branches and symbolizes the burning bush that Moses saw on Mount Sinai. Jews see in the nine-branched Hanukkah *hanukiah* the menorah used by the Maccabees in the Holy Temple in 165 B.C.E. The Holy Temple’s menorah was created from one solid piece of gold, and had seven branches symbolizing the seven days of the week and an oil container. The menorah was lit daily by a priestly Jew named Kohen. The *hanukiah* has nine branches for nine candles; eight of them stand in a straight row, four on either side of the taller, ninth holder. All nine candles should be of equal height. The candle placed in the ninth space is elevated above the other eight.

The Dreidel

The dreidel is a top with four sides, used to play a game usually associated with Hanukkah celebrations. Each side has a Hebrew letter on it: The four letters are *nun*, *gimel*, *hey*, and *shin*. With their vowel marks, the letters mean, “A great miracle happened there,” in English, and they make sense in the United States, Canada, and other English-speaking countries. Without their vowel marks (*nikkud*), in Hebrew they are translated, “A miracle happened here,” which makes sense in Israel. Each dreidel player starts with 10 or

15 coins, pieces of candy, or chocolate coins (*gelt*). Before the dreidel is spun, he or she puts one piece in the kitty, or *kupah*. Then the dreidel is spun, and the next action depends on which of the four letters is facing up when it stops.

Nun: Nothing special happens and the next player spins.

Gimel: The player takes the entire kitty.

Hey: The player takes half the pot.

Shin: The player must put one or two pieces in the kitty.

The game can continue until one player has won all the pieces.

empire Ptolemy established ruled Israel for nearly a century. Under his reign a great number of Jews began to take up features of Greek culture, and they became known as Hellenists. For these Jews, Greek culture symbolized the future and the quickest way to be successful in Greek society.

The Seleucid Empire that ruled Syria seized control of Israel from the Ptolemies in 199 B.C.E. During this period the practice of Judaism went through a torturous phase. The observance of the Sabbath, the learning of Torah, and circumcisions were prohibited, and the Holy Temple housed images of Greek gods and other artifacts of Greek culture.

In 168 B.C.E., the Holy Temple of the Jews was seized and offered to the Greek god Zeus. While some Jews feared the Greek soldiers and avoided angering them, many had had enough and decided to fight back. The struggle began in Modiin, near Jerusalem. One Greek officer, along with his soldiers, gathered the villagers and ordered them to bow down before an idol and eat pig’s flesh—both activities forbidden by Jewish law. When Mattathias, a high priest, was ordered to participate in the proceedings, he refused, but another villager offered to do it in his place. An outraged Mattathias took out his sword and killed both the villager and the officer. His sons and the rest of the villagers then assaulted and slaughtered the soldiers. Mattathias’ family hid in the nearby mountains after this incident, where they were joined by many other Jews who were ready to oppose the Greeks. Mattathias died about a year after the rebellion began, but, before he died, he declared his courageous son Judah Maccabee as the leader of the growing Jewish army. After about three years of struggle, the Jews overcame the much stronger and better armed Greek forces.

When Judah Maccabee and his forces entered the Holy Temple, they were dismayed by the sight

of missing and broken items. They cleaned and revamped the Temple and, when finished, decided to rededicate it. They sought to light the menorah for the celebrations. After searching thoroughly for oil, they found a flask containing only enough oil to last a day. Extraordinarily, the oil sustained itself for eight days, allowing the Maccabees enough time to procure new oil.

Hanukkah achieved new significance with the rise of Zionism. Israel’s pioneers had to defend themselves against attacks, and they started to connect with the old Jewish warriors who had fought for their freedom in the same place. Hanukkah, with its encouraging depiction of the Jewish fighter, touched the early Zionists, who were fighting for their own liberty and freedom.

Over the last two or three decades, many evangelical Christians have reexamined the roots of their religion and have progressively become conscious

Latkes

The most fashionable themes in a Hanukkah menu are oil-based. The oil reminds a Jew of the oil that burned in the Holy Temple. Latkes, a typical Hanukkah dish, are pancakes made of grated potatoes, eggs, flour, and onions. The pancake is fried in vegetable oil. The surface is crispy on the outside and soft inside. They are served hot, generally accompanied by sour cream or applesauce. The Maccabee soldiers ate latkes frequently, but theirs were made from vegetables, cheese, or fruits. There were no potato latkes in those times, because potatoes were not native to the Old World, so they were not available until the 16th century.



A two-year-old boy prepares to light the first candle on his family's menorah for the first night of Hanukkah at their home in Brooklyn, New York. (AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews)

of, and accepted, a number of celebrations and feasts of Judaism. This inclination is particularly apparent among messianic believers, although it is not restricted to them. Many Christians observe the

lighting of the Hanukkah *hanukiab* and other Hanukkah rituals. Apart from this, some claim a correlation between the miracle of the Temple's light and Jesus' birth. They maintain that Hanukkah (celebrated on the 25th of the Jewish month of Kislev), not December 25, is the correct date to observe Jesus' birth. Some combine the two celebrations (Hanukkah and Christmas), whereas others treat them as unrelated holidays. In recent years, a fusion of Christmas and Hanukkah called Chrismukkah has evolved.

See also Volume I: CANADA; ISRAEL

See also Volume II: UNITED STATES

See also Volume III: JUDAISM

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Harvest Festivals

FACT FILE

Observed in	Worldwide
Observed on	Exact dates vary but are usually in autumn
Observed by	General Public

Introduction

Agriculture is one of the oldest occupations of human civilization. Ever since people learned that they could grow food rather than having to go out and look for it, they have cultivated the soil and reaped the rewards for their labors. Its adaptation led to the development of cities, writing, and, eventually, books. Surplus food had to be stored somehow, so towns grew up around the storage sites. Ancient people had to keep track of their stored food, which led them to create cuneiform and clay tablets, which led to alphabets and papyrus. The ancients wisely thought it worthwhile to express their thanks to the natural elements that helped or hindered the growth of their crops. Having seen years of drought, famine, and pestilence, there was always a lurking fear that the harvest might not be so bountiful in the season that followed. This concern led them to try propitiating supernatural powers, so as to avoid incurring their wrath or displeasure and, thereby, to ensure a good harvest. What had originated in fear or apprehension gradually evolved into a socioreligious occasion for feasting and the enjoyment of good food and companionship.

Origins and History

Since time immemorial, human beings have been celebrating harvests of fruits, grains, and vegetables yielded by the Earth. Over millennia cultures in different parts of the world developed rituals and ceremonies to acknowledge the generosity of Mother Earth and to thank her for the crops that ensured the well-being of each community.

Prior to the establishment of formal religions ancient farmers believed that their crops were inhabited by spirits who caused the crops to grow and to die. It was also believed that these spirits would be released when the crops were harvested

and wreak their vengeance upon the farmers. Therefore, those spirits had to be destroyed. Some of the ancient rituals were thus meant to neutralize such spirits and celebrate their destruction.

With the passage of time people realized that the crops harvested in autumn must see them through the winter. Hence whatever spirit or power provided the bounty deserved praise as well as gratitude. Their perspective shifted from rituals to defeat potentially harmful spirits to ceremonies formulated to thank the deities for a good harvest and to pray for similar good fortune in the next season.

Harvest festivals have been celebrated for thousands of years in every culture—the Chinese, the Greek, Egyptian, Sumerian, Amerindian, and Hebrew—and they continue to be important events in modern societies. One of the earliest recorded harvest rituals took place in ancient Greece. It honored the generosity of the goddess Demeter, who taught people to tend the soil, and took place during a month called Pyanopsion (Puanepsion), according to the lunisolar calendar of the Atheni-



Taille

The goddess of autumn in ancient Ireland, Tailte, was thought to be the foster mother of Lugh, the god of light. One of the prominent Irish Earth goddesses, Tailte lived on the Hill of Tara (Temair) and directed the clearing of an immense forest (the wood of Cuan) from that vantage point. It took a month to create the Plain of Oenach Tailten, where Tailte then built her palace; this place can still be found on regional maps as Telltown, near Kells. Commercial fairs and sporting events were integral parts of this festival. In 433 St. Patrick is said to have come to Tara to confront the pagans at their most powerful site.



Origin of Popcorn

Popcorn is probably the oldest snack food. It originated in Mexico but had already spread to India and China before the first Europeans arrived in the Americas. One of six kinds of maize, it had small kernels with extremely hard seed coats, which made it difficult to chew or grind into flour. Although each ear of corn had lots of kernels, they were very small, and so using it in cooking was more labor-intensive than for other varieties. Small popcorn ears found in the Bat Cave in New Mexico in the mid-20th century are 5,600 years old.

By the 1820s, seed companies began

to feature popcorn varieties in their catalogs. By the 1840s, popping corn entertained many Americans, mainly in New England. Popcorn companies began marketing the seeds for consumption in the 1860s, and a decade later it was a “much relished food” among the middle and upper classes. After the Civil War, Americans made it a practice to consume popcorn while visiting fairs, circuses, and exhibitions. In those days they ate it plain, simply as a snack. By the 1890s, due to developments in technology, mobile commercial popcorn poppers became commonplace. The general public could buy freshly made popcorn from street vendors.

ans. Pyanopsion falls in October–November on the Gregorian calendar. The story about Demeter and her daughter Persephone illustrates how both good and bad harvest years were accounted for.

It seems that Hades, the god of the underworld, was quite taken with Persephone’s beauty and abducted her, taking her with him into the underworld to be his wife. So intense was Demeter’s grieving for her daughter that she withheld her powers, refusing to feed herself or to provide food for mortals. So the other gods, disturbed by the sit-

uation, determined to resolve the conflict between Hades and Demeter. Because Persephone had eaten pomegranate seeds that Hades had given her, the gods decided that she could spend half the year on Earth with her mother, but she had to spend the other half in the underworld. It is winter on Earth during the half of the year that Persephone is in the underworld; the half of the year she spends with Demeter brings us spring and summer.

The Algonquian peoples had thought out the entire agricultural process and celebrated six differ-



Girls from the Paiwan tribe play together as they wear traditional Paiwan costumes and crowns made of millet and leaves during an aborigine harvest festival in Taiwan. (AP Photo/Jerome Favre)

ent harvest festivals in the course of a year. Each one was intended to protect a phase in the growing season. The first thanked the Creator for the maple tree and its syrup. The second was the planting feast, when the seeds to be sown were blessed. The strawberry festival followed, celebrating the first fruits of the season. The green corn festival was held in the summer to give thanks for the ripening corn and in late fall the harvest festival gave thanks for the food they had harvested. The midwinter festival was the Algonquians' last ceremony of the old year.

In several Asian countries—China, Taiwan, and Vietnam—the Moon Festival is held on the fifteenth day of the eighth month of the Chinese lunar calendar, which occurs in mid-autumn. The full moon represents abundance, harmony, and good luck; people celebrate with picnics or special dinners, which are sure to have mooncakes as one of the sweets provided.

The ancient Romans celebrated Cerelia, a harvest festival dedicated to the goddess Ceres (Demeter in Greek). Daughter of Saturn and Ops and the wife of Jupiter, Ceres was their goddess of corn; the word “cereal” is derived from her name. In May Malaysians celebrate a festival to give thanks to their rice god. In addition to agricultural shows there are buffalo races. In some parts of Africa good grain harvests are celebrated, while in West Africa the Festival of Yams goes on for several days, and the people offer yams to their ancestors and the gods.

When the subject is religion, early peoples in Europe are collectively called “pagans,” regardless of the content of their cultural beliefs and religious observances, because that is what the Romans called them, and the Roman Catholic Church followed suit. In Latin, *paganus* means “country dweller,” from the word for “country,” *pagus*. Certainly the various Indo-European groups had their own gods that had to be propitiated, such as Celts and the Teutons. In its very early, formative years, before its holidays and feasts had been established, the church aggressively appropriated not only pagan holidays and festivals but their symbols as well in its quest for converts to Christianity.

While scraps and rumors of those centuries are mostly what remain, some elements from the pagan religion, mostly Celtic in origin, can still be found, and Neo-Paganism has done much to preserve the rituals and festivals. There are three pagan harvest festivals: Lammas, Mabon, and Samhain. Lammas (also called Lughnasadh) occurs in early August and celebrates the harvest of grain. Mabon, which falls on the autumnal equinox on September 21, celebrates the harvest of fruit. Samhain, on November 1, is the time for the harvest of meat, among other things, and it is celebrated with huge bonfires. It is believed to have also been the Celtic New Year. Some of its symbols and activities can be found in

Squash

Squash is native to North America and was one of the “three sisters” planted by Native Americans; the other two were maize (corn) and beans. All three could be planted together (companion planting): The cornstalk provided support for the climbing beans, and its large leaves shaded the squash. Not only the fruit, but also the seeds, blossoms, and tendrils are edible. The blossoms remain an important part of Native American cooking and are used in the cuisines of many countries as well.

the Catholic feasts of All Saints' Day (November 1), All Souls' Day (November 2), as well as in Halloween (October 31).

The Hebrews celebrate a harvest festival they call Sukkoth. Held in autumn Sukkoth has been observed for over 3,000 years, and Jewish families continue to honor this tradition. Known as Hag ha Succot (“Feast of the Tabernacles”) as well as Hag ha Asif (“Feast of Ingathering”), Sukkoth begins on the 15th day of the Hebrew month of Tishri, five days after Yom Kippur.

While most harvest celebrations used to, and still, take place in the autumn, the ancient Egyptians held theirs in the spring. The Egyptian harvest season coincided with the festival held in honor of Min, god of vegetation and fertility. It featured a parade in which even pharaoh took part. After the parade a lavish feast was held, accompanied by music, dancing, and sports. When Egyptian farmers harvested their corn, they wept and pretended to be grief-stricken in order to deceive the spirit, which they believed dwelt within the corn. If this was not done, they feared that the spirit would become angry when they cut down the corn in which it lived.

See also Volume I: CAMBODIA; CHINA; GREECE; HAITI; HONG KONG; HUNGARY; INDIA; INDONESIA; ISRAEL; ITALY; JAPAN

See also Volume II: LAOS; PERU; RUSSIA

See also Volume III: JUDAISM; THANKSGIVING

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Fun Fact

Amerindians popped their popcorn by throwing the kernels onto sizzling hot stones placed in a fire.

∞ Hinduism ∞

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Hindu populations, primarily India, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka
World Population	One billion
Place of Origin	Near River Indus (in modern-day Pakistan)

Introduction

Hinduism is both a religion and a way of life. The rules for good, or dharmic, living provided by the ancestors of present-day Indians are the basis for the Hindu religion. The religion is also known as Sanatana Dharma or Vaidika-Dharma in Sanskrit. *Sanatana* means “everlasting” and dharma can be roughly translated as “divine law.” (Sanskrit is an Indo-European language that is the classical literary language of India, as well as the language of Hinduism and the Vedas, the holy books of Hinduism.) Vaidika-Dharma means “the divine law of the Vedas.” Hinduism, called the everlasting religion, began and flourishes in India.

Unlike the other major religions in the world, Hinduism does not have a founder, a single teacher, or prophets in its history. It developed from the religious observances of people who lived near the Indus River in modern-day Pakistan. The religion, however, has been, and continues to be, influenced by the traditions and practices of people in other parts of India and beyond.

Superficially, Hinduism appears to be polytheistic (a religion having many gods). That, however, is not entirely true. The religion recognizes one God but also acknowledges its countless manifestations around us and in us, eternally. Because Hinduism believes it is impossible for humans to visualize the Infinite, its many forms help us visualize it. This aspect of Hinduism is often confused with polytheism. Hinduism gives form and shape to the endless cycle of birth, death, and existence through the Hindu trinity.

Karma is central to the Hindu faith. Hindus believe that the soul passes through a cycle of successive lives, and one’s subsequent incarnation depends on one’s actions and deeds in the previous life. In short, we reap what we sow. The three most important paths are the path of knowledge (*jnana*), the path of work and religious deeds (karma), and the path of devotion (*bhakti*).

Hinduism is a religion rich in literature. The Vedas (“knowledge” in Sanskrit) represent the earliest collection of Hinduism’s sacred writings. This body of literature primarily consists of four collections of hymns, detached poetical portions, and ceremonial formulas. The collection is made up of four parts called the Rig-Veda, the Sama-Veda, the Yajur-Veda, and the Atharva-Veda. They are also known as the Samhitas, or “collection.”

The Vedic view of God perhaps best illustrates the essence of the Hindu belief in a supreme being. The Vedas tell us this about God: “*Om Poornamadab Poornamidam Poornaad Poornamudachyate; Poornasya Poornamaadaaya Poornamevaavashisyate,*” or: “What is Whole—This is Whole—What has come out of the Whole is also Whole; when the Whole is taken out of the Whole, the Whole still remains Whole.” The real meaning of this verse is that the infinite cannot be measured in human terms; God is infinite, and the infinite can only be represented in immeasurable ways and manifests himself in infinite ways. Hindus believe that God is everywhere, around us and within us.

Origins and History

Hinduism, as a religion, is at least 3,500 years old; the fundamentals of the faith, however, are purportedly much older. The classical theory of the origins of Hinduism traces the religion’s roots to the Indus valley civilization between 4000 and 2200 B.C.E. The development of Hinduism was influenced by countless invasions over thousands of years. The great influence happened when nomadic Indo-European tribes invaded northern India around 1500 from the plains of Russia and Central Asia. They brought with them their religion of Vedism. These beliefs combined with the more advanced, indigenous native Indian beliefs, often called the Indus Valley culture. The classical theory, however, is being rejected by increasing numbers of archaeol-

ogists and religious historians. The Indo-European invasion account of ancient Indian history has been challenged in recent years by new conclusions founded on more recent discoveries in archaeology and cultural and literary analysis.

One of the most ancient aspects of Hinduism, which is as much social as religious, is the caste system. In order to understand Hindu religious beliefs, it is important to comprehend the caste system. According to the religion's teachings, there are four basic social classes. Each caste has its own rules and obligations for dharmic living. The elite caste is the Brahman, or priest caste. Below them are the Kshatriyas, or warriors and rulers. Vaisyas, the merchants and farmers, belong to the third caste. Finally, the fourth caste is the Shudras, or laborers. Beyond these four are the Panchamas, or untouchables (literally, Fifth Division), who constitute 15–20 percent of Indian society. The untouchables are the outcasts of Hindu society: sweepers, washers of clothes, leather workers, and those who kill animals for a living. Although originally called untouchables or pariahs, they were given the name Harijans by the Indian political and religious leader Mahatma Gandhi, who worked for many years to improve their lives. Though the term “untouchable” was outlawed in India by the 1949 constitution, the Harijans

remain a very real part of Indian culture. Many have sought to escape the stigma of their birth by converting to Buddhism, Christianity, or Islam.

Hinduism is a henotheistic religion, a religion that identifies with a single deity but also recognizes other gods and goddesses as facets, forms, and manifestations of that supreme God. The Hindu's three-in-one God is referred to as Brahman. Hindus also venerate the “wives” of Shiva, such as Kali, or one of Vishnu's 10 incarnations. Most urban Hindus follow one of two primary divisions within Hinduism: Vaishnavism, which normally regards Vishnu as the main deity, or Shivaism, which regards Shiva as the primary deity.

The Hindus believe in reincarnation, the transmigration of souls, or *samsara*, a journey on the “circle of life.” In this journey, every person experiences a series of physical births, deaths, and rebirths. Better karma produces higher rewards. A person with good karma can be reborn into a higher caste, or even achieve divinity. Bad karma can relegate one to a lower caste or birth into the animal world in one's next life. Nirvana, the release of the soul from the seemingly infinite cycle of rebirths, is thought to be the goal of life.

Fun Fact

By some counts, it is said that there are as many as 330 million Hindu deities.

Hindu Sacred Writings

Several holy books provide the foundations of Hinduism, primarily the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Bhagavad Gita. The Ramayana consists of about 24,000 verses describing the life of Prince Rama, an incarnation of Vishnu. According to legend, the author Valmiki belonged to the lowest caste and made his living by robbing travelers. After an encounter with the sage Narada, however, Valmiki reformed and became a poet and scholar. Classical Hinduism recognizes him as a Brahman as well as India's first poet. Rama and his wife, Sita, embody virtue and righteousness, and their lives demonstrate the operation of dharma, divine law, in various areas of activity. Their stories in the Ramayana contain lessons for Hindus on ideal behavior in a range of roles, such as son, brother, wife, king, and married couple.

The Mahabharata, an epic story of 100,000 verses, is attributed to a sage named Vyasa. It is thought to be the longest poem in the world. It traces the descendants of two sets of cousins, the Kauravas

and the Pandavas, whose disputes eventually led to the Mahabharata War. Krishna, an avatar of Vishnu the Preserver, is central to the story. Like the Ramayana, the Mahabharata message is centered around questions related to dharma and the actions of individuals and society. These discourses have provided inspiration for Hindus in many spheres of life.

One part of the Mahabharata, the Bhagavad Gita functions as a text on its own in Hinduism. On the eve of the Mahabharata War, the hero Arjuna suddenly develops a reluctance to fight. His decision leads to a prolonged dialogue with Krishna during which Krishna attempts to resolve Arjuna's moral and intellectual dilemmas in 700 verses. Krishna's method of guiding Arjuna has endeared the text to the Hindus as a guide to their faith. It is in the Bhagavad Gita that Hinduism comes closest to possessing a universal scripture. Since the Gupta period (320–550 C.E.), it has stimulated a stream of translations, interpretations, and summaries, all of which demonstrate its wide popularity.





Hindu Architecture

Several Hindu temples are considered to be among the architectural wonders of the world, among them the many temple of Khajuraho and the Sun Temple at Konark. Khajuraho was the capital city of the Chandelas (or Chandels), a Rajput clan that ruled from the 10th to the 16th centuries in Bundelkhand, once a region in central India. Khajuraho is situated in the Chhatarpur district of Madhya Pradesh, located about 385 miles southeast of Delhi, the capital city of India. The Chandelas built 85 temples between 950 and 1050, but only 25 remain. The temples at Khajuraho are dazzling examples of the temple architecture of medieval India. The earliest temples of Khajuraho were built in coarse granite, while the later temples were mostly fine-grained buff, pink, and pale yellow sandstone found in neighboring areas. The ornate temples belong to religious sects such as the Shaiva, Vaishnava, and Jain and mark the peak of the northern Indian, or Nagara, style of temple architecture. The Khajuraho temples are on the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites.

The Sun Temple at Konark (or Arkakshetra), also a World Heritage site, is

located in the northeastern part of Puri, or the Chakrakshetra. It is also known as Konaditya. Konark is derived from the words *kona*, “corner” and *arka*, “Sun.” The temple was built in 1278 by the Ganga king Narasimha Deva. According to folklore, Samba, the King of Jambavati, entered the bathing chamber of Krishna’s wives and was cursed by Krishna with leprosy. It was ruled that he would be relieved of the curse provided he worshipped the Sun god Surya on the seacoast northeast of Puri. King Samba reached Konaditya Kshetra and saw the figure of Surya (the chief solar deity) seated on the lotus. He worshipped him and was relieved of his curse, as promised. The temple represents the chariot of Surya as having 24 wheels, each about 10 feet in diameter, with a set of spokes and sophisticated carvings, pulled by seven horses. Two lions, seen crushing elephants, guard the entrance. There are sculptures of animals, flowers, warriors, and a number of interesting patterns. There are three images of the Sun god, positioned to catch the rays of the Sun at dawn, noon, and sunset. The Sun Temple is widely admired for its architectural grandeur and for the intricacy and profusion of its sculptural work.

Hinduism teaches that all living things have God in their hearts. All living things are Brahman, or God. Enlightenment is only possible by tuning in to the Brahman within. Only then, according to the Hindu faith, can one reach Nirvana. The release from the wheel of life that allows entrance to Nirvana is known as Moksha (Sanskrit for “liberation,” and implying the concept of salvation).

Hinduism recognizes three possible paths (yogas or spiritual practices) to Moksha. The first is through the way of works or Karma Yoga (selfless service). This is an accepted way of salvation and emphasizes the notion that liberation may be gained by fulfilling one’s familial and social duties, thereby overcoming the weight of bad karma one has accumulated. The second path to Moksha is through knowledge, or Jnana Yoga. According to this view, we are bound to the cycle of rebirths because of our ignorant insistence that we are individual selves and not one with Brahman. This gives rise to bad actions and, ultimately, bad karma. Salvation, therefore, is achieved through attaining a state of consciousness in which we appreciate our identity with Brahman.

This is only accomplished through profound meditation, often as a part of the discipline of yoga.

The third path to Moksha is the way of devotion, Bhakti Yoga. This is the way that is mostly accepted and followed by laypeople in India. It is a way of salvation by surrendering oneself to one of the various personal gods and goddesses of the Hindu faith. Such devotion is expressed through acts of worship, temple rituals, and pilgrimages.

Devout Hindus organize their lives around certain activities or *Purusarthas*, also called the “four aims of Hinduism” or “the doctrine of the fourfold end of life.” The first and the most important is dharma, or righteousness, in religious life. The second is *artha*, or success in economic life. The third is *kama*, the gratification of the senses—sexual pleasure and intellectual enjoyment. The three come under Pravritti (social action).

The fourth aim and primary goal of Nivritti (inward contemplation) is Moksha. This is considered the supreme goal of humanity. Meditation is often practiced, with yoga being the most universal method chosen. Other activities of this path include

daily devotions, public rituals, and *puja* (*pooja*), a ceremonial dinner for a god.

According to Sri Shankaracharya (788–820 C.E.), one of the greatest philosophers of India, “The Vedic dharma is verily twofold, characterized by Pravritti (social action) and Nivritti (inward contemplation), designed to promote order in the world; this twofold dharma has in view the true social welfare and spiritual emancipation of all beings.”

Holidays and Religious Observances

Throughout the year numerous festivals are celebrated in India, a country renowned for its exciting and colorful observances. Among the most popular Hindu religious festivals are Diwali, Dussehra (Durga Puja), Holi, Janamashtami, Maha Shivrati, Makar Sankranti, and Ram Naumi. Diwali, also Divali or Deepavali (in Sanskrit, “row of lights”), is the Hindu Festival of Lights. The festivities can begin on the 13th day of the waning half (Krishna Paksha) of the lunar month Asvina to the second day of the waxing half (Shukla Paksha) of Kartika (October or November in the Gregorian calendar). Like Dussehra (which precedes it in the lunar calendar), it commemorates the triumph of good over evil. The exact event or deity, and the date of the observance, celebrated by Diwali depends on one’s location. In northern India, Diwali falls on the last day of the Vikram (lunar) calendar, during the waning (dark phase) of the moon, so businesses start their fiscal year and open new accounts books. The following day, called Annakut, begins a new year. In southern India, where the Shalivahana (solar) calendar is used, Diwali begins in the seventh month (Kartika). The Shalivahana calendar begins in the year 78 C.E. when King Shalivahana was crowned after defeating the Sakas, an invading Central Asian tribe.

Diwali is the most important and the most famous of all Hindu festivals, an occasion of tremendous excitement, hectic activities, and a grand time for rejoicing. Though the Festival of Lights is meant to be celebrated for one day, local customs, traditions, and religious aspirations of the people have transformed it into a four- or five-day festival, beginning with Dhanteras—the “day of wealth,” when shoppers return home and light the first Diwali lamps—and ending with Bhaiya dooj, Brothers’ Day.

The stories connected with Diwali, and why it evolved into such a widely celebrated festival, are different in various regions and states of India. According to the most familiar account, the first Diwali was celebrated to commemorate the triumphant return of King Rama of Ayodhya, (the seventh manifestation of Vishnu, the Protector), Sita (his wife), and his brother Lakshmana to the capital city Ayodhya, after 14 years of exile. During the



Shiva, shown here as Nataraja, Lord of Dance, one of the three manifestations of the Hindu god. (AP Photo/Sackler Gallery)

exile, Lord Rama had vanquished the demon Ravana, the king of Sri Lanka. As night had already fallen before the arrival of the royal trio, the people, delighted to have their king back in their midst, lit clay lamps along the way to dispel the darkness and light up their path, hence one of its alternative names, the Festival of Lights.

Dussehra, also called Durga Puja or Vijay Dashmi, is another popular Hindu festival, observed with great fervor by Hindus throughout the world and second only to Diwali, the Festival of Lights, which it precedes. Dussehra, a 10-day festival celebrated from the first through the tenth day of the month of Asvina (September/ October in the Gregorian calendar), marks the event of the killing of the evil demon Ravana by Lord Rama, one of the most revered deities in Hinduism and the main character of the epic Ramayana (a Sanskrit classic traditionally attributed to Valmiki).

Holi, the Festival of Colors, also called Phagu and Phagwah, is another much anticipated Hindu observance and, like Dussehra and Diwali, it celebrates the triumph of good over evil. Falling on the full-moon day of the Hindu month of Falgun (or Phalgun), Holi is observed with great passion throughout India and marks the end of winter and the beginning of spring as well as the flaming end of

Fun Fact

Much like Christians, Hindus believe in one God with three manifestations:

Brahma, who creates, Vishnu, who sustains or preserves, and Shiva, who destroys, or consumes, everything in the universe.

the demoness Holika; it is a celebration of happiness and hope. Traditionally a two-day festival, Dhulendi, the second day of Holi, is the actual day that gives Holi one of its names—the Festival of Colors. On Dhulendi the old and the young alike gather in the streets to smear each other with colored powder or throw colored powder and water on each other.

The Hindu festival of Janmashtami (sometimes Krishna Janmashtami) celebrates the birth of Lord Krishna, arguably the most venerated god in Hinduism. Janamashtami, also known as Krishna Ashtami, Sri Jayanthi, or Gokula Ashtami, is celebrated in the Hindu month of Sravana. Hindus believe Krishna to be an avatar (incarnation) of Lord Vishnu, the creator of the universe and the second deity, as the Preserver, of the Hindu trinity; the first deity is Lord Brahma, the creator, and the third is Lord Shiva, the destroyer. Hindus believe that it was Krishna who delivered the deeply philosophical message of the Bhagavad Gita (“The Divine Song”), one of the world’s religious classics.

The Maha Shivrati Festival honors Lord Shiva, the Destroyer of the universe and the third deity of the Hindu trinity. Maha Shivratri, also called Shiv Chaturdashi, falls on the 13th or 14th day in the dark half of the month of Falgun (February–March in the Western calendar). The name Maha Shivratri means “the great night of Shiva,” and the celebrations of this festival take place mostly at night. A fast is observed during the day and a vigil is kept throughout the night. The Shiva lingam (the phallic symbol of Shiva, which depicts the creative force) is worshipped all through the night by bathing it with curd, milk, rosewater, and honey, and by ceremonially chanting *Om Namah Shivaya* (“glory be to Shiva”).

The Festival of Makar Sankranti, also called Pongal or Paush, Sankranti traditionally corresponds with the start of the sun’s northward journey, when it appears to move from the astrological sign of Sagittarius to Makar, Capricorn, changing its direction from one zodiacal constellation to the next. Sankranti means “to move from one place to another.” Every time the sun transits from one zodiac constellation to the next, is a *sankranti*. There are 12 signs of the zodiac, so there are also 12 *sankrantis* in a year. Each *sankranti* is named on the basis of where the sun is in relation to the zodiacal signs, and each one has its own significance. However, two of the *sankranti* are extremely important: Mesh (Aries) Sankranti and Makar (Capricorn) Sankranti. Mesh Sankranti is important because the solar year begins when the sun moves into the sign of Aries, the Ram, at the vernal equinox, one of the two times in a year when the day and night are equal

in length. Makar Sankranti is the Hindu celebration of the Winter Solstice, the time when the days start to become longer and the nights shorter. This festival has been observed since the Aryans came to the Indian subcontinent, and it is still considered a favorable day by Hindus because it marks the end of winter. Makar Sankranti is possibly the only Hindu festival celebrated on the same day every year because, unlike other Hindu festivals, its celebration is scheduled according to the solar calendar.

Ninth day of Shukla Paksh (the bright fortnight) in Chaitra, the first month of the Hindu lunar calendar

According to legends and myths connected with Hinduism, Vishnu (who is the second deity of the sacred Hindu trinity—with Brahma and Shiva—and the preserver of the universe) made his appearance on Earth at various times, in diverse forms and manifestations (avatars), to restore righteousness, noble virtues, and peace to the world. The legends further narrate that during the second age of the Earth (calculated at around 3000 B.C.E.), Ravana, the demon king of Lanka (modern Sri Lanka), had been creating havoc on Earth. Because of a boon that Brahma had given him, Ravana could not be killed by any god or goddess. So Vishnu assumed a human form in order to redeem humanity and was born into this world as the son of King Dasharatha and his first queen, Kaushalya, who ruled over the kingdom of Ayodhya. Lord Rama, the epitome of all noble virtues and lofty ideals, is regarded as the seventh incarnation of Vishnu. As was preordained, Rama annihilated Ravana. His birth is commemorated annually with great joy on the ninth day following the new moon in the *shukla paksh* (the bright fortnight) of the Indian lunar month of Chaitra (in April on the Gregorian calendar).

See also Volume I: BANGLADESH; BHUTAN; FIJI; GUYANA; INDIA

See also Volume II: MALAYSIA; MAURITIUS; NEPAL; SRI LANKA; SURINAME

See also Volume III: DIWALI; DUSSEHRA; HOLI; JANMASHTAMI; MAHA SHIVRATRI; MAKAR SANKRANTI

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Holi

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Hindu populations, especially India, Mauritius, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka
Observed on	Full Moon day of Phalguna, the 12th month of the Hindu calendar
Observed by	Hindus

Introduction

Among India's numerous religious festivals Holi is easily the most colorful and exciting, and children keenly await it. Falling on the full Moon day of the Hindu month of Phalguna, Holi is observed with great passion throughout India and is one of the most popular festivals there. Many Indian films have portrayed the vibrant colors of Holi on the silver screen. It marks the end of winter and the beginning of spring, as well as the flaming end of the demoness Holika; it is a celebration of happiness and hope.

In some places in northern India Holi can last up to a week. In the state of Manipur in northeast India, it is a six-day festival. However, traditionally it is a two-day festival; Dhulendi, the second day of Holi, is a holiday celebrated all over India as the Festival of Colors.

During Holi old and the young alike gather in the streets to smear each other with colored powder or throw colored powder and water on each other. It is possibly the most joyous of all Hindu festivals, one that delights people of all ages and classes.

Origins and History

The festival of Holi originated in the ancient Hindu legend of Hiranyakashipu. It celebrates the triumph of good over evil. According to Hindu mythology there was a demon king in India named Hiranyakashipu, who wanted to avenge the death of his younger brother, also a demon, who had been slain by Vishnu (one of the trinity of gods in Hinduism). In order to fight Vishnu, Hiranyakashipu sought to become the ruler of Earth, heaven, and the underworld, performing harsh penance and prayers for numerous years to please Brahma (the all-powerful creator) in order to obtain this power from him. Finally the king was given a boon by Brahma.

Empowered by the boon Hiranyakashipu felt he was invincible.

The arrogant king ordered everyone in his kingdom to worship him instead of God. But the king's young son Prahalad was a devotee of Vishnu. Going against his father's wishes, Prahalad constantly prayed to Vishnu. Unable to make Prahalad change his ways, the demon king decided to kill him. He asked his sister Holika (from whom the name of the festival is derived) to help him because she was supposedly impervious to fire. They planned to burn Prahalad to death. So Holika sat on a burning pyre with Prahalad on her lap. Yet Prahalad emerged unharmed by the flames and Holika, the demoness, was burned to death. The bonfire on the eve of the festival celebrates that event.

According to Hindu belief, Krishna, an avatar (reincarnation) of Vishnu, is believed to have popularized the colorful tradition of Holi. The origin lies in Krishna's boyhood. Krishna used to indulge in pranks—his mischievous nature is legendary—by dousing the village girls with colors and water. Initially the girls were upset, but they were so fond of the boy that his popularity overcame their anger.

Fun Fact

Hindus in Suriname, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago call this festival Holi Phagwa.

The Holi Bonfire

The Eve of Holi, also called Choti Holi ("Small Holi") is the time when bonfires are lit on street corners. It is believed that bonfires drive away evil spirits; they also symbolize the death of the demoness Holika. The bonfires are generally made from cowdung cakes, logs of wood, honey, ghee (semiclarified butter), and harvest offerings. Music, dances, and traditional stories are performed around the bonfires.



Holi Origin Stories

1. When Krishna was young he often complained to his mother Yashoda about his consort Radha's fair complexion and his own dark skin. Yashoda told him to put color on Radha's face and watch how the color of her skin changed. This seems one of the more pertinent legends about the beginning of Holi celebrations.
2. Another origin story, one that explains the practice of throwing water on other people, claims that the monkey god Hanuman succeeded in swallowing the Sun. Because the people disliked living in darkness, the other gods suggested that they smear color on each other and laugh. When the people squirted each other with colored water, Hanuman laughed because he thought it was such a funny sight. When he laughed, however, the Sun flew out of his mouth and light was restored.
3. Yet another tale attributes the origin of Holi to the Mongol emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605), who started the holiday because he thought that people would look like equals if they were covered with color.

Although he was a powerful emperor, Akbar never learned to read because he had dyslexia, the inability to acquire and process language.

Other boys joined in and made it a popular sport in that village. With time the tradition stretched to all regions of the country, and, having survived through the ages, it has become a community festival for everyone. The Holi play of Krishna is documented in numerous ancient paintings, sculptures,

murals, scriptures, and literary works found throughout the subcontinent.

The best part about the festival is that anger and offenses seem to dissolve with one energetic shout of "*Bura na mano, holi hai*," or "Do not be angry, it is Holi." This boisterous shout is part of



School students, smeared with colored powder, laugh during celebrations of Holi in Allahabad, India. This exuberant festival, originally held to celebrate the fertility of the land, is also associated with the immortal love of Hindu god Krishna and his consort, Radha. (AP Photo/Rajesh Kumar Singh)

the festival's long tradition. In accordance with the custom of the festival, people collect around bonfires on the evening before the festival day. These bonfires are burned to send away the cold dark winter nights and usher in spring. People sing and dance around the fire to celebrate Prahalad's miraculous survival and the death of Holika, his wicked aunt. People take cinders from this fire to rekindle their own house fires.

In some places, barley seeds are roasted in the fire, and it is thought that the yield of the coming harvest season can be foretold by reading the future in the roasted seeds or noting the direction the flames take. The remnants of the fire are considered to have curative properties. The morning after the bonfire is Dhulendi, the real Festival of Colors, when children and adults splash each other with colored powder and water. In earlier times, only herbal products and natural colors made from flow-

ers were used; although artificial colors are now cheap and available, old practices seem to be making a comeback.

See also Volume I: BANGLADESH, BHUTAN; FIJI; GUYANA; INDIA

See also Volume II: MALAYSIA; MAURITIUS; NEPAL; SRI LANKA; SURINAME

See also Volume III: HINDUISM

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Fun Fact

In Bangladesh Holi is called Dol-Jatra, the Swing Festival, because a doll representing the god Krishna is kept in a swinging cradle (*dol*).

Holy Saturday

FACT FILE

Observed in	Saturday before Easter
Observed on	Countries with Christian populations
Observed by	Christians

Fun Fact

Easter Matins and Easter Mass were both brief services out of consideration for the fatigue of those who had maintained the Vigil.

Introduction

Since the Jewish day of rest is Saturday, Holy Saturday is regarded as the second Sabbath after Creation. It is the day Jesus lay in the tomb before rising from the dead on Easter Sunday. This is considered the final day of Holy Week, which begins with Palm Sunday and includes Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Because it marks the threshold between death and resurrection, it is a day of silence and contemplation for devout Christians.

Jesus of Nazareth was the teacher whose life and words provided the foundation for Christianity. The promised miracle of his Resurrection is amplified by this sacred day of waiting. The church waits as the Virgin Mary once did, in faith. She is both Theotokos (Mother of God) and the symbol of the church.

Origins and History

As Jesus lay in the tomb, the Pharisees and others asked Pontius Pilate to seal it, fearing that his disciples would remove the body and claim a “Resurrection.” The tomb was, indeed, sealed, and guards posted. As the scriptures tell us, Jesus went to the world of the dead and redeemed them with his own death.

Holy Saturday is part of the Easter Triduum that begins on the evening of Maundy Thursday and concludes with the evening service on Easter. The Easter Triduum is a fifth- and sixth-century practice preceded by the Easter Biduum—a two-day period of fasting that included the Easter Vigil. These are “the days of silence” or the “still days,” and Good Friday and Holy Saturday are aliturgical days: The clergy cannot receive Communion, and there is no Mass because these are the days that Jesus was taken away from humanity. Holy Saturday (together with Good Friday) are the only times on the Christian calendar that have no Mass in the liturgy.

Four Kinds of Holy Water

1. Plain Holy Water: A little salt is added to this water, which is always to be found in the font at the entrance to the church. It is also used for aspersions (sprinkling on the congregation).
2. Baptismal Holy Water: A little chrism (holy oil consecrated by the bishop) and the oil of catechumens (holy oil used to baptize new Christians) have been added to water. It is used only for church baptisms.
3. Gregorian Water: This is water with a little wine, salt, and ashes added. It is used by bishops to consecrate churches.
4. Easter Water: This is the holy water given to churchgoers for use at home. Believers use it to bless their homes, food, and family members. This is also the water they sprinkle on one another during the festivities of Easter Monday.



The fourth century saw the earliest celebrations of Holy Week, the last week of Jesus' earthly life. Originally, all church services were suspended during the day. This was a day of meditation, of remembering the Christian martyrs as well as dead relatives and dear ones, of awaiting the Resurrection. In the early years of the church, this was the only Saturday marked out for fasting. The fast was strict, lasting 40 hours before Easter. Different countries observed different schedules to break the fast, but, traditionally, it was broken at dawn.

From the first to the sixth or seventh centuries, the Easter Vigil, or Easter Watch, began soon after sundown and continued through the night so that the Alleluia (or Hallelujah) could be said at the moment of Resurrection. (According to one estimated calculation, this took place on April 17, 30 C.E.) The Vigil began with the blessing of the new fire (which symbolized the church), and the lighting of the Paschal candle of pure beeswax (representing Jesus) that would remain lit until his Ascension 40 days after Easter. The beauty of the night can be gauged by St. Cyril of Jerusalem's remark that the night became as bright as day. Toward the end of the fourth century and onward, the Roman Emperor Constantine (d. 337) made the twilight hours even more majestic by ordering lamps and torches to illumine not only the basilicas but also the houses and streets. Within the church, the congregation sat in silence, breaking it only to join in the chanting and the singing of psalms. New adherents—catechumens—were baptized. This day, and the Vigil of the Pentecost, were the only days when converts could be baptized. It was not until the Middle Ages that Holy Saturday was established worldwide as a holy day.

The practice of lighting the lamps at twilight was introduced into the Gallican Church (Church of France) in the eighth century. This was also the period when the ceremonies were shifted to the afternoon and, soon enough, to the morning. Consequently, the day that had hitherto been without any special service, apart from the Vigil, was accorded other religious observances, depending on whether it is an Eastern Orthodox or Western Church.

Holy Saturday recalls the silence of the tomb at the same time that it looks ahead to the promise of life. This aspect is reflected in the practices of contemplation and prayer and in the preparations for the Easter feast.

In Roman Catholic churches, the altar is bare and Holy Communion and Penance are provided only to those on the verge of death. The proximity to Easter notwithstanding, this is not a day of joy. The church stands watch over Jesus' tomb just as the Virgin Mary did, waiting for the Resurrection. The Easter Vigil will begin at 10 P.M., and a Mass will be held at midnight.

Basilicas

The word *basilica* is derived from the Greek *basilike stoa*, which denoted a Roman-style public building. Basilicas became prominent in the second century. Ecclesiastical basilicas are those that have been given special rights by a pope, and these, too, can be categorized either as major (assigned to the patriarchs) or minor (assigned to bishops).

Major basilica

St. Peter's in the Vatican
St. John Lateran
St. Paul Outside the Walls
St. Mary Major
St. Lawrence Outside the Walls

Assigned to:

Patriarch of Constantinople
Papacy
Patriarch of Alexandria
Patriarch of Antioch
Patriarch of Jerusalem

Water is blessed during the Vigil, and this holy water will be used for baptisms and other purposes of the church. Participants will also be given some to take home for their own use.

In Greek Orthodox Churches the service recalls the act of Joseph of Arimathea wrapping Jesus' body, and the stress is, as always, on the joy of the Resurrection rather than on Jesus' death. For example, the Kontakion (a part of the liturgy of the Orthodox Church) states that, "This Sabbath is blessed above all others, for Christ, having fallen asleep, will rise on the third day."

The service also recalls Jesus' descent into Hades, a prison for the souls of all who died, not to be confused with hell. Inevitably, the divine nature of Jesus overwhelmed the place, the gates broke, as did the chains that held the souls, and the dead were also resurrected.

See also Volume I: ANDORRA; ANGOLA; ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA; ARGENTINA; ARMENIA; AUSTRALIA; AUSTRIA; BELARUS; BELGIUM; BELIZE; BOLIVIA; BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA; BRAZIL; BULGARIA; BURUNDI; CANADA; CAPE VERDE; CHILE; COLOMBIA; CONGO, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE; COSTA RICA; CROATIA; CYPRUS; CZECH REPUBLIC; DENMARK; DOMINICA; DOMINICAN REPUBLIC; ECUADOR; EL SALVADOR; EQUATORIAL GUINEA; ESTONIA; FINLAND; FRANCE; GEORGIA; GERMANY; GREECE; GRENADA; GUATEMALA; HAITI; HONDURAS; HUNGARY; ICELAND; IRELAND; ITALY; KIRIBATI

Fun Fact

The liturgical name of Holy Saturday is *Sabbatum Sanctum*, but it has other names as well: Angelic Night, Vigil of Easter, Grand Saturday, Great Saturday, Easter Even, and Black Saturday.

See also Volume II: LATVIA; LIECHTENSTEIN; LITHUANIA; LUXEMBOURG; MACEDONIA; MALTA; MEXICO; MICRONESIA, FEDERATED STATES OF; MOLDOVA; MONACO; NAMIBIA; NEW ZEALAND; NICARAGUA; NORWAY; PALAU; PANAMA; PARAGUAY; PERU; PHILIPPINES; POLAND; PORTUGAL; ROMANIA; RUSSIA; RWANDA; ST. LUCIA; SAN MARINO; SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO; SEYCHELLES; SLOVAKIA; SLOVENIA; SPAIN; SWEDEN; SWITZERLAND; TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO; UGANDA; UKRAINE; UNITED KINGDOM; UNITED STATES; URUGUAY; VATICAN CITY; VENEZUELA

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY

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Holy Week

FACT FILE

Observed in	Mainly countries with Roman Catholic populations
Observed on	Last week of Lent
Observed by	Roman Catholics

Introduction

The last week of Lent, which is a 40-day period of fasting and abstinence that precedes Easter, is traditionally known as Holy Week. It commemorates the last week of Jesus' mortal life and includes Palm Sunday, Maundy (or Holy) Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. Easter Sunday—the day of Jesus' Resurrection—is not a part of Holy Week. Rather, the week anticipates the Easter celebration.

According to Christian theology, Jesus is the savior of humanity, the Son of God and second member in the Holy Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the teacher whose life and words provide the foundation for the religion. It is his life and death that Christians remember during this week.

Origins and History

Holy Week has been a period of intensified religious devotion since the time of the Apostles, but official status was accorded it in the fourth century when every day of the week preceding Easter was considered holy. Until the fourth century Easter was the earliest Christian holy day observed and considered the most important, together with Epiphany.

This new perception was reflected in the opinion of St. Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296–373 C.E), when he referred to this week in 329 as a symbol of Creation and mentioned the practice of fasting during these six days. (The fast was usually broken on Thursday for Communion in church.)

“Peregrinatio Artheriae” (“The Pilgrimage of Aetheria”), the nun Aetheria's account of her pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the years 381 to 385, describes the observances of Holy Week. She relates the reenactment of events, first at Bethany, where Jesus' feet were anointed, and then at Jerusalem, recalling Jesus' triumphant entrance into the city on Palm Sunday. People gathered at the

The Pilgrimage of Aetheria

Aetheria, a nun living in the fourth century, went on a three-year pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Her letter to the other nuns in her convent described events she witnessed there. Most parts of Aetheria's account were lost, and only a three-month fragment remains. In the 12th century, however, the monk Valerius provided a brief reconstruction of what had been lost. This is the document known as “The Pilgrimage of Aetheria.”

Mount of Olives to pray, and then all returned to Jerusalem with the bishop, carrying palms and olive branches. The pilgrims who visited Jerusalem returned home with these customs. Holy Week practices reached Spain in the fifth century and England and France in the seventh century. The Wednesday and Friday fasts also became popular, obeying Jesus' command to fast on Wednesday in memory of his betrayal and on Friday to commemorate his suffering on the Cross.

The Thursday evening, Friday, and Saturday of Holy Week form the Easter Triduum. A *triduum* is the three days before a Roman Catholic festival, a time of special prayers and observances. Here it begins on the evening of Maundy Thursday with the sharing of the Eucharist and concludes with the evening prayers on Easter Sunday.

The days that make up Holy Week possess a significance far beyond that of the individual events associated with each day. No one day or event can be seen in isolation because each contains within itself the past, present, and the future. For example the welcome Jesus received on his arrival in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday represents the triumph of his teachings, his past miracles, and the beginning of the end as humanity understands it (because Jesus

Fun Fact

Some opinions hold Lent to be over on Thursday evening, but the traditional and prevalent view regards Holy Week as part of Lent.



Jerusalem

Jerusalem, the city described as “the place where heaven and Earth meet,” was originally a village built on a hill. The first people to live there were the Canaanites, perhaps better known as the Phoenicians or alternatively the Amorites. The name Urushalim is first found on Egyptian statues circa 2500 B.C.E. Urushalim, in fact, is a word of Canaanite-Amorite derivation. The name Urushalim is made up of the prefix *uru*, which means “founded by,” and the suffix *salem* or *shalem*, which is the name of a Canaanite-Amorite deity Shalem, the god of twilight. This evidence is reinforced by tablets found in Elba, Syria, dating back to 3000 B.C.E., where the worship of a god named Shalem in a city called Uruksalem is mentioned. The old name of the city

Urushalim figures also in the Egyptian texts called *Texts of Proscription* of XII dynasty (1991–1786 B.C.E.).

The city has had many names and a long history in several religions. In 1400 B.C.E. it was referred to as Beth-Shalem and as Salem in Genesis; it has also been called Zion, Mount Moriah, City of David, and Jebus. Jebus is the city that King David won in 1004 from the Jebusites, who lived in the area beginning around 2000 B.C.E. It is also the city where King Solomon built the First Temple (Jewish) and the place from which Muhammad ascended to heaven. Another name for Israel, Canaan, is mentioned in what are known as the prophetic documents of Mari, the ancient city (2400) of the Sumerians, rediscovered in 1933 C.E.

would die in Jerusalem only five days later), and the true finality of the Resurrection. Similarly the Crucifixion on Good Friday represents the culmination of Jesus’ Incarnation, his mortal death, and the promise of his Resurrection on Easter Sunday.

This is a special observance in many countries, and processions are held throughout Holy Week. In countries that have a strong Catholic presence, the events of Jesus’ last few days are reenacted, and there are more than a few mock crucifixions. The color purple is the color of the church and therefore the color of the first part of Holy Week. On the

days between the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, black predominates.

See also Volume I: ANDORRA; ANGOLA; ARGENTINA; AUSTRIA; BELGIUM; BELIZE; BOLIVIA; BRAZIL; BURUNDI; CAPE VERDE; CHILE; COLOMBIA; CONGO, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE; COSTA RICA; CROATIA; CZECH REPUBLIC; DOMINICA; DOMINICAN REPUBLIC; ECUADOR; EL SALVADOR; EQUATORIAL GUINEA; FRANCE; GERMANY; GRENADA; GUATEMALA; HAITI; HONDURAS; HUNGARY; IRELAND; ITALY; KIRIBATI

See also Volume II: LIECHTENSTEIN; LITHUANIA; LUXEMBOURG; MALTA; MEXICO; MICRONESIA, FEDERATED STATES OF; MONACO; NICARAGUA; PALAU; PANAMA; PARAGUAY; PERU; PHILIPPINES; POLAND; PORTUGAL; RWANDA; ST. LUCIA; SAN MARINO; SEYCHELLES; SLOVAKIA; SLOVENIA; SPAIN; SWITZERLAND; TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO; UGANDA; URUGUAY; VATICAN CITY; VENEZUELA

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY



Two girls dressed as angels wait to participate in the Good Friday procession in a small village south of Quito, Ecuador. Holy Week, the last week of Lent, leads up to the celebration of Easter. (AP Photo/Dolores Ochoa R.)

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Immaculate Conception

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with significant Roman Catholic populations
Observed on	December 8
Observed by	Roman Catholics

Introduction

The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is a Roman Catholic dogma affirming that, from the time of its creation, the Virgin Mary's soul was free from original sin, because she had to be pure in order to give birth to Jesus. Despite conflicting scholarly beliefs, the Roman Catholic Church has, time after time, reaffirmed the principle of the Immaculate Conception. The festival was observed in the Eastern Orthodox Church as early as the fifth century; in the Western church the feast was observed from the seventh century on. St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153 C.E.), the French monastic reformer, and the celebrated Italian theologian and philosopher St. Thomas Aquinas (born, Thomas D'Aquino, 1225/27–1274), opposed this doctrine in the 12th and 13th centuries, respectively. But the doctrine found support from many quarters, including the Scottish theologian John Duns Scotus (?1270–1308), in the 13th century. When the controversy over the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception gained impetus in the 19th century in 1854 Pope Pius IX (r. 1846–78) issued a decree proclaiming the Immaculate Conception as an “infallible” dogma crucial for the belief of the worldwide church. Under this doctrine—the Feast of the Immaculate Conception—the Blessed Virgin Mary is revered as the patron saint of the United States, Corsica, and Portugal. It is celebrated on December 8.

Origins and History

The Roman Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception asserts that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was protected by God from original sin at the time of her conception. Original sin is that doctrine, shared

Immaculate Conception and Incarnation of Jesus

There is a common misunderstanding regarding the denotation of the term *Immaculate Conception*. Generally, people (Catholics included) consider this to be the conception of Jesus by Mary. Jesus' conception by Mary is more appropriately called the Incarnation.

by most Christian churches, which claims that the sin of Adam and Eve (the first humans) in the Garden of Eden permanently tainted the nature of the human race, in such a way that all human beings since then are inherently predisposed to sin, and they have no power to overcome this without God's help.

The doctrine goes on to state that God wanted the birth of Jesus to be free of sin. Thus he made Mary utterly devoid of original sin so that she could conceive Jesus. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception asserts that Mary also lived a life totally free from sin. Mary's parents Anne and Joachim were married 20 years without having a child. Joachim felt humiliated because of this situation, although he could empathize with his wife, who longed for a child. Their relationship was under great strain. One evening he did not come home. Anne overheard some women whispering that Joachim was in the temple, praying. She, too, decided to pray to God to help them. For a long time she cried and prayed to God to grant that, in spite of her infertility, she should still have a good relationship with her husband.

As Anne was weeping, an angel named Emmerich appeared before her and told her that God



Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception

Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception is the collective and shared name of numerous Catholic cathedrals, especially in the United States. Many of these churches have received the honor of being sanctified as basilicas (a large church that has been accorded some special rights by the pope).

had heard her prayers. He told her to go to the temple the next day to meet her husband under the Golden Gate. Anne felt happy and terrified at the same time. She went home and told the servants to arrange a trip to the temple the following morning. While Anne was asleep, Emmerich appeared again in the figure of a shining youth. Stretching his hands over her, he wrote in big letters on the wall “M-A-R-Y,” before disappearing. About the same time, an angel met Joachim, anointed him on the forehead, and told him to meet his wife at the Golden Gate. When Joachim and Anne met, they embraced and were overjoyed about their good fortune. This is how the doctrine maintains Mary was conceived without original sin. This belief did not become Catholic dogma until 1854.

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary has been observed in the United Kingdom since the ninth century. Eadmer (?1064–?1124), an English Benedictine monk and historian, played a key role in its propagation. The Normans curbed the celebration, after their victory at Hastings in 1066, but it lived on in the public’s mind. It was discarded by St. Bonaventure (1221–74) who, while teaching in Paris, called the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception a “foreign doctrine,” because of its association with England. Alexander of Hales (d. 1245), a prominent British scholar and philosopher, and Bernard of Clairvaux also opposed this doctrine. The Oxford Franciscans (13th century), William of Ware and John Duns Scotus, in particular, defended the doctrine notwithstanding the opposition of other scholars.

Pope Sixtus IV (r. 1471–84) stood by it and established the feast in 1477, with an appropriate Mass and office, to be observed on December 8. In 1483, Pope Sixtus IV gave Roman Catholics the choice to believe whether Mary was subject to original sin or not; this liberty was further enforced by the Council of Trent (a council intermittently held between 1545 and 1563 as a response to the Protestant Reformation). The Catholic public was staunchly behind giving Mary this characteristic, but the issue was so touchy that it was not until 1854 that Pope Pius IX, with almost unanimous backing from Catholic bishops, felt confident enough to declare the doctrine as infallible. Before proclaiming the doctrine Pope Pius IX took

steps to ascertain whether the church agreed with his opinion and questioned 603 bishops about whether he should declare the Immaculate Conception infallible; 546 (90%) answered in the affirmative.

The Roman Catholic Church believes that the dogma of Immaculate Conception is supported by the scriptures and also by the writings of many of the church fathers, either directly or indirectly. Catholic theology maintains that, because Jesus was born to the Virgin Mary, she had to be wholly free of sin to bear Jesus, whom Christians believe to be the Son of God.

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception on December 8 is considered a Holy Day of Obligation in the Roman Catholic Church, and it is an official holiday in countries with predominantly Catholic populations. Before this doctrine became popular, December 8 was observed as the Conception of Mary, since September 8 (nine months later) is the Feast of Mary’s birth.

The doctrine is not totally accepted in either Protestant or Orthodox Churches. Protestants reject the doctrine and do not consider this dogmatic theology to be authentic, since it is not explicitly mentioned in the Bible. Protestant thinkers of earlier eras were more devoted to Mary than their successors. The pioneer of the Protestant school, Martin Luther, for example, was a believer in the theory of Immaculate Conception.

Protestants and members of the Eastern Orthodox Churches opine that this doctrine contradicts the belief of the redemption of humanity by Jesus, which is the basis of the Christian faith. If the Virgin Mary was cleansed before Jesus’ birth, it would make his reason for being born—redeeming humanity since all are born sinners—redundant. Orthodox believers are of the opinion that the doctrine that the Virgin Mary needed cleansing prior to the Incarnation is superfluous. Theologians of the Eastern Orthodox Churches believe that the references to Mary’s purity do not refer to a condition preceding her birth but rather to her conduct after that.

See also Volume I: ANDORRA; ANGOLA; ARGENTINA; AUSTRIA; BELGIUM; BELIZE; BOLIVIA; BRAZIL; BURUNDI; CAPE VERDE; CHILE; COLOMBIA; CONGO, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE; COSTA RICA; CROATIA; CZECH REPUBLIC; DOMINICA; DOMINICAN REPUBLIC; ECUADOR; EL SALVADOR; EQUATORIAL GUINEA; FRANCE; GERMANY; GRENADA; GUATEMALA; HAITI; HONDURAS; HUNGARY; IRELAND; ITALY; KIRIBATI

See also Volume II: LIECHTENSTEIN; LITHUANIA; LUXEMBOURG; MALTA; MEXICO; MICRONESIA, FEDERATED STATES OF; MONACO; NICARAGUA; PALAU; PANAMA; PARAGUAY; PERU; PHILIPPINES; POLAND; PORTUGAL; RWANDA; ST. LUCIA; SAN MARINO; SEYCHELLES; SLOVAKIA; SLOVENIA; SPAIN; SWITZERLAND; TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO; UGANDA; URUGUAY; VATICAN CITY; VENEZUELA

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY

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Islam

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Muslim populations
World Population	About 1.3 billion (2005 est.)
Place of Origin	Saudi Arabia

Introduction

Founded in the seventh century C.E., the religion of Islam (from Arabic *al-islam*, meaning “submission to God”) has gradually spread around the world, becoming the second most popular religious faith in the world and the fastest growing. A Muslim is a follower of Islam. *Muslim* is an Arabic word that refers to anyone who submits him- or herself to the will of God. A Muslim is, therefore, any person, anywhere in the world, who gives obedience, allegiance, and loyalty to God and strives to live in accordance with God’s laws. Islam is also called Muhammadanism, taken directly from the name of the founder of the Islamic faith, the prophet Muhammad (570–632). Considered the messenger and the final prophet of Allah (“God”), he is the central human figure of this religion.

Religious historians believe Islam was established in 622 by Muhammad. Muhammad was orphaned when he was six years old and brought up by his uncle. He was a shepherd in his childhood. Muhammad’s uncle took him to Syria in a caravan before his teenage years. In his youth he served as a camel driver on the trade routes between Arabia and Syria. Muhammad later managed caravans on the merchants’ behalf. He came into contact with people of diverse religious beliefs on his travels and scrutinized and learned about Christianity, Judaism, and other religious groups, including the animistic religion of the Bedouin.

Islam started in Mecca (in present-day Saudi Arabia), when, according to Islamic beliefs, the angel Jibril (Gabriel) visited Muhammad so that he would know and declare the will of Allah. The sacred book of the Muslims, the Koran, is the foundation of Islam and the final authority in dogma and belief, in jurisprudence, worship, ethics, and in social, family, and individual conduct. The Hadith records the reflective statements of Muhammad, compiled by his followers after his death in 632. Muhammad never claimed divinity, and Muslims do

not worship him as a divine being. In fact, the strict monotheism (belief in one God) of Islam will not allow for the worship of any other being but Allah. This monotheistic outlook stems from Abraham, the great patriarch of Israel, who is widely considered the first Muslim.

Followers of Islam do not regard their religion as completely detached from Christianity or Judaism. They hold fast to the authority of the prophets of Judaism and Christianity. In fact they claim to worship the God of the Bible but profess Islam to be God’s ultimate revelation.

There are two branches of Islam: Shia and Sunni, and an independent branch, Sufism, which may predate Islam.

The division between the Shia and Sunni sects of Islam emerged out of a difference of opinion over who was the legitimate temporal and spiritual successor to Muhammad after his death in 632. Known as caliphs, the successors were both religious and political heads of a theocracy set up by Muhammad. After the fourth caliph Ali (the prophet’s cousin) was assassinated in 661, Ali’s supporters argued that it had been his right to succeed Muhammad and that the preceding three caliphs (Abu Bakr, 632–634; Umar, 634–644; Uthman, 644–656) had been usurpers. They upheld that by divine right the caliphate belonged exclusively to those directly descended from the prophet, and therefore only the descendants of Ali and Fatima (Muhammad’s daughter and Ali’s wife) were entitled to rule the Muslim community. This disagreement led to the famous Battle of Karbala in 680, where Hussein, the son of the recently assassinated Ali, was decapitated, and his head carried to Damascus impaled on a spear. This battle is remembered by Shia Muslims on the holiday called Ashura.

Ali’s followers were called Shiites (the party of Ali, or *shiatu Ali*, later simply Shia), and often refer to themselves as *abl al bayt* (“people of the house” [of the prophet]). Although there are specific theological differences between the Shia and the Sunni,

they agree on the core fundamentals of Islam—the five pillars—and recognize each other as Muslims. The great majority of the Muslim community followed the *sunna* (way), rejecting the Shia doctrine about the succession.

The Sunni are a 90 percent majority of the Islam population and are regarded as the mainstream traditionalists. Their comfort in pursuing their faith within secular societies has allowed them to adjust to a variety of cultures, at the same time following their three sources of law: the Koran, Hadith, and consensus of Muslims (their belief that Muslims should be democratically governed by *ijma* [consensus] through the caliph, their elected head of state). Sunnis call themselves *najiyah*, “those who are being saved.”

Origins and History

The early Muslim traders tended to prefer land-based commerce as opposed to maritime trade. As a consequence Islam spread initially west into Syria, Egypt, north along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, and northeast into Iraq, Iran, and parts of central Asia. By 750 C.E., however, Islam had covered the whole of North Africa from Egypt to Morocco, most of the Iberian Peninsula, all of the Middle East, and much of central Asia. By the 10th century Islam was the major religion of much of the civilized world. It had spread over three continents, from the Pyrenees and Siberia in north and western Europe to China and New Guinea in the east. By 1550 Islam had reached Vienna in Europe. By the 18th century there were three Muslim empires: the Ottoman in Turkey, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean; the Safavid in Iran; and the Mogul in India.

Christendom’s resistance against Muslim incursions was a long struggle. The *reconquista* (“recon-

Imam

Imam means “leader” in Arabic. The term, however, has vital connotations in Islam, especially for the Shia tradition. To the Shias, an imam is capable of leading people in all of life’s aspects. The Shia claim that an imam, as the Koran says, can be appointed only by God. In the 12-imam Shia doctrine, an imam’s status is seen as being greater than a prophet’s. The Sunni use the term for a teacher or a recognized religious leader in Islam.

quest”)—to drive the Moors (Arabs and Berbers who had conquered Spain) from the Iberian Peninsula—began in the ninth century but fully succeeded only in 1492, when the last Muslim-held province Granada was retaken by the Spanish monarchs. The Ottomans’ spread into Europe was stalled when they failed to take Vienna in 1529; they continued to expand elsewhere in Europe for another century but were again repelled in another assault on Vienna in 1683, which marked the end of Ottoman expansion.

Islam does not believe in the notion of a church or priesthood and rejects any kind of religious hierarchy. The foundation of the Islamic faith is the practice of the five pillars of Islam: the testimony of faith, prayer, support of the needy (*zakat*), fasting during the month of Ramadan, and, for those who are able, making a pilgrimage to Mecca once in their lifetime. The first pillar, the testimony of faith, is the most important pillar of Islam. The profession of faith states that there is just one God (Allah) and his prophet is Muhammad. The second pillar concerns participating in the public prayers that occur five times a day: at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, at sunset, and at night. In Islam, prayer is a direct link between Allah and his worshippers, and

Sufism

The word *sufi* comes from *tasawwuf* (the Islamic science of self-improvement and spirituality), of which the root is the Arabic term *saaf*, which means “pure, clean, or blank.” Alternative theories suggest that *sufi* may also be derived from the Arabic word for “wool,” *suf*, referring to the simple cloaks worn by the original Sufis, or relate the term to the Greek *sophos* (or *sophia*), “wisdom” or “enlightenment.”

Although Sufism is usually associated with Islam, there is also a major branch of non-Islamic Sufism thought to predate

Islam and to be independent of the Koran and the teachings of Muhammad. In contemporary Muslim thought, Sufism represents the core of Islam because it provides insight to Allah and his creation, and its primary concept is love. Some believe that love is a projection of God’s true meaning in the universe. Sufism strives to see the potential beauty inside the outwardly ugly, and Sufis open their arms to even the most evil people.

There are 19 Islamic orders of Sufism in addition to seven non-Islamic orders and one located in Iran (Nimatullahi).



The Islamic Calendar

Umar ibn al-Khattab (c.581–644), a member of a clan of the Quraish tribe and the second caliph of Islam (634–44), created the lunar calendar used in Islam in order to organize the new Muslim chronology in 638. He is regarded by Sunnis as one of the first four *khulfa-e-rashidun*, or rightly guided caliphs. (Shi'a Muslims, however, believe that Umar was a usurper.) After consulting with his advisors, it was decided that the most logical starting point for Islam's chronology and observances was the Hegira, Muhammad's journey from Mecca to Medina at sunset, on Thursday, July 15, 622, the central historical event of Islam. Islam's chronology is reckoned from this event, so the Muslim calendar begins on Muharram 1, A.H. (Anno Hegirae) 1.

The Islamic year is made up of 12 lunar months; each month begins at the first sighting of the new Moon. Some Muslims use the sighting calculated in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, while others use a local sighting. The Hegira year has 354 11/30 days, so it can be said to "migrate" through the solar year of the Western Gregorian calendar, which has 365 days. When converting the dates of Islamic observances to Gregorian dates, it should be remembered that the Hegira lunar year begins about 11 days earlier each solar year.

ISLAMIC CALENDAR	GREGORIAN CALENDAR
Muharram ("forbidden"; fighting is forbidden during this month)	January–February
Safar ("empty" or "yellow")	March
Rabbi al-Awwal ("first spring")	March–April
Rabi al-Thani ("second spring")	April– May
Jumada al-Awal ("first freeze")	May–June
Jumada al-Thani ("second freeze")	June–July
Rajab ("to respect"; fighting is forbidden during this month)	July–August
Shaban ("to spread and distribute")	August–September
Ramadan ("parched thirst"; month of fasting)	September– October
Shawwal ("to be light and vigorous")	October–November
Dhul al-Qidah ("month of rest"; fighting forbidden)	November– December
Dhu al-Hijjah ("month of hajj")	December–January

each prayer requires only a few minutes to perform. The third pillar requires payment of the *zakat*, a specific percentage of one's wealth given to specific classes of needy people. *Zakat* is a way of purifying one's possessions by setting aside a small sum for those in need. The fourth pillar involves fasting from dawn to dusk during the month of Ramadan (the ninth month of the Islamic calendar), as well as abstaining from food, drink, and sexual relations. Fasting is a method of purifying oneself spiritually. The fifth pillar requires a pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca once in a lifetime; this journey is called a hajj, and it is performed during the 12th month of the Islamic calendar (Dhu al-Hijjah). Unlike the other four pillars of Islam, the hajj is only required of those who are physically and financially capable of making the pilgrimage.

Muslims have certain beliefs around which their religious lives revolve. They believe in one,

indivisible God as the creator, who is just, all-powerful, and compassionate. They also believe in the existence of angels. Although they honor most of the scriptures of the Abrahamic faiths (Judaism and Old Testament Christianity), including the Torah, the Psalms, and the rest of the Bible, they believe that only the Koran is the actual spoken word of God (Allah) revealed by the Archangel Gabriel to Muhammad, whereas the Bible and Torah were divinely inspired but were written by men. They respect and revere the messengers of God, including Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad.

Muslims also believe in the Day of Judgment, when people will be evaluated on the basis of their actions while on Earth, thus attaining either the reward of heaven or the damnation of hell. Hell, they believe, is a place where sinners and nonbelievers spend eternity. Paradise is deemed to be a place of spiritual and physical gratification where

the redeemed (or the blameless) go after death. Finally Muslims believe in the supremacy of the will of God.

Many do not look at Islam as a new religion. Instead, they see it as the same faith taught by the Old Testament prophets of the Abrahamic faith; Muhammad's role was to sanctify and clarify the faith and also purify it by eliminating any foreign notions that might have crept in.

For lay Muslims, public worship is performed in a mosque (*masjid*), where congregational prayers are led by a local imam after the public call to prayer, which is generally chanted from the top of a minaret at the mosque. Generally after leaving their footwear at the entrance to the mosque, men and women separate; men usually sit in front, and women in the back, which may either be inside the mosque or in the courtyard. While women may attend prayers in the mosque, it is not required of them. The prayer leader presents a sermon in the regional native language, perhaps combined with Farsi (sometimes called Parsi or Persian) or Arabic quotations, depending on the prayer leader's education and the erudition of his audience. Announcements of interest, sometimes including political commentary, are often made. These are followed by common prayers involving responses from the congregation, who stand, kneel, and bow in unison during devotion time.

Holidays and Religious Observances

All Islamic holidays are observed according to the Islamic lunar calendar (*hijri*), not the solar Gregorian calendar. Because it is a lunar calendar, the *hijri* year has 354 days. There are 12 lunar months. Six months have 30 days while five have 29 days; the 12th month, Dhu al-Hijja, can have 29 or 30 days. Islam has only two major religious observances that are universally observed, Ramadan and Hajj, and the related holidays associated with each. Ramadan, the ninth Islamic month, is a month of fasting from dawn (*sahar*) to dusk (*iftaar*). At sunset, Muslims enjoy a meal with family and friends. There are two observances related to Ramadan, Laylat al-Qadr, the Night of Destiny (or Power), when the first verses of the Koran were revealed to Muhammad. It occurs toward the end of Ramadan. The second, Eid al-Fitr, occurs on Shawaal 1, the beginning of the 10th lunar month.

Hajj is the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, made by those who are physically and financially able to do so, during Dhu al-Hijja, the 12th month. Two related observances take place, the Day of Arafat and Eid al-Adha, in memory of the sacrifice of the prophet Abraham. On the Day of Arafat pilgrims gather on the Plain of Arafat seeking God's mercy; elsewhere Muslims observe a day of fasting.



A devoted Muslim prays during the last Friday prayers of Ramadan at the Faisal Mosque in Islamabad, Pakistan. The month of Ramadan, during which Muslims observe a dawn-to-dusk fast, is the most holy period in the Islamic calendar. (AP Photo/K. M. Chaudary)

Eid al-Adha comes at the end of the annual pilgrimage and can last up to four days. (It is known as Kurban Bayram in Turkey, Hari Raya Hajj in Southeast Asia, and Tabaski in parts of Africa.)

There are also several holidays based on the history of Islam, but not all Muslims observe them: Muharram, Ashura, Mouloud (or Mawlid an-Nabi), and Shab-e-Miraj. Muharram, also known as Navruz (or El am Hejir), is the Islamic New Year and falls on Muharram 1. On this day Muslims remember the migration of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in 622 C.E. Ashura, the Shia observance of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, falls on Muharram 10. The birthday of Muhammad, Mouloud, is celebrated on Rabiul awwal 12 (the third month of the Islamic calendar). Shab-e-Miraj is observed in some parts of the Muslim world. Shab

refers to Muhammad's miraculous journey from Mecca to Jerusalem, and the Miraj, his ascension to heaven, is believed to have followed. On Layla tul Qadr, ("Night of Destiny"), observant Muslims pray throughout the night, seeking Allah's glory.

See also Volume I: AFGHANISTAN; ALBANIA; ALGERIA; AZERBAIJAN; BAHRAIN; BANGLADESH; CAMEROON; CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC; CHAD; CÔTE D'IVOIRE; EGYPT; ETHIOPIA; GAMBIA, THE; GUINEA; GUINEA-BISSEAU; INDIA; INDONESIA; IRAN; IRAQ; JORDAN; KUWAIT; LEBANON; LIBYA

See also Volume II: MALAYSIA; MALDIVES; MALI; MAURITANIA; MOROCCO; NIGER; NIGERIA; OMAN; PAKISTAN; QATAR; SAUDI ARABIA; SENEGAL; SIERRA LEONE; SOMALIA; SUDAN; SYRIA; TANZANIA; TOGO; TUNISIA; TURKEY; UNITED ARAB EMIRATES; YEMEN

See also Volume III: ASHURA; EID AL-ADHA; EID AL-FITR; EL AM HEJIR; HAJJ; MOULOD; RAMADAN.

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~ Jainism ~

FACT FILE

Observed in	Primarily India
World Population	About 4 million
Place of Origin	India

Introduction

Jainism, or the Jain Dharma (Divine Law), is an ancient ascetic religion seen as an autonomous philosophy and faith. The faith traces its roots to 24 *tirthankaras*, humans who achieved enlightenment and became Jinas in primordial eastern India. *Tirthankaras* (“Crossing Makers”) were the founders of *tirtha*, communities of Jainists who act as a “ford across the river of human misery.” The last Jina was Vardhamana (599–27 B.C.E.), also known as Mahavir, “the great hero.” While pregnant with him, Mahavir’s mother is believed to have dreamed a succession of 14 dreams, each one an omen of her son’s virtues. Later on, Mahavir married and had a daughter but, despite his family’s affluence, Mahavir was not content. His parents died when he was 30, so he left his kin, turned his back on luxury, and joined a band of ascetics.

When he failed to find what he was searching for in the ascetics’ company, he went on his own way to create his a more severe asceticism. He gained much valuable experience during those times. He cleaned the path where he walked and strained water before drinking it. He determined that the way to enlightenment was through torment, so he stripped naked and looked for the coldest and the hottest places in winters and summers, respectively. He begged for his meals, stopped resisting violence, and never rested at the same place for more than a night. Finally, he began to perceive everything in the world indifferently. In the 13th year of such severe practices he accomplished release (or liberation) and realized Nirvana. In 527 he achieved liberation by committing *salekhabana*; he fasted to death, an accepted practice among Jainists. He became a *siddha*, pure consciousness, living forever in a state of bliss. On the night of his liberation people celebrated the Festival of Lights (Dipavali) in his honor.

The critical objective of Mahavir’s teachings is the attainment of total freedom from the cycle of

birth, pain, misery, life, and death, and, in addition, the accomplishment of the lasting bliss of one’s self. This state is known as Nirvana or Moksha. Mahavir explained that every living soul is bound by karma accumulated by good or bad actions in one’s cycle of rebirth, and the soul will seek pleasures in worldly possessions under the sway of this karma. One’s karma causes violent thoughts, such as hatred, anger, and greed. Violence is a manifestation of karma. The only way to escape violence and achieve Nirvana is to live according to the “three jewels,” the three principles of Jainism: right faith (*samyak-darshana*), right conduct (*samyak-charitra*), and right knowledge (*samyak-jnana*). The three principles would together help attain Moksha.

The core of Jainism is concern for the well-being of every organism in the universe (*ahimsa*), from the tiniest to the largest. Jainism teaches that all human beings, plants, and animals have a soul, and that each soul is of commensurate importance and merits respect and empathy. Jains are firm vegetarians, and one can say that their lifestyle is structured to reduce their use of the planet’s resources. A way of life in Jainism, vegetarianism is based on the



Mahavir Jayanti

Mahavir Jayanti, Mahavir’s birthday, is the most important Jain festival of the year. To the Digambaras, Mahavir was born in 615 B.C.E.; the Svetambaras believe his birthday was in 599. They both agree, however, that he was the offspring of Trisala and Siddhartha. According to folklore Mahavir was conceived by Devananda, who was the wife of a Brahmin called Rishabhdeva. The gods cleverly transported the embryo to Trisala’s womb. The Jains observe this religious occasion by visiting holy sites and revering the *tirthankaras*.

Jainism and God

Jainism does not believe in the existence of a universal God. The followers of the faith, however, do believe in the existence of heavenly beings called *arhats*. They also believe in the presence of gods who are like us, embodied souls, except that they possess more freedom and, of course, more knowledge and intelligence. The *arhats*, Jains believe, are completely indifferent to the affairs of the world. Jains worship *arhats*, not to gain favor from them, but because their reverence amounts to good karma.

idea of compassion for all living beings, or *jiva daya*. It is seen as a lifestyle that enables nonviolence and peaceful coexistence. While their food habits do involve harm to the plant kingdom, eating plants is seen as a way of survival, one that involves a minimum of violence toward other beings. But Jains go beyond what is commonly called vegetarianism in that their diet also excludes most root vegetables and certain other foods believed to be unnecessarily injurious. Furthermore, observant Jains do not eat, drink, or travel after sunset and always get out of bed before dawn.

The Jain religion is exceptional in that during its current five millennia of existence there has been no compromise with regard to the theory of nonviolence in practice or principle. It has always espoused nonviolence as the ultimate religion. Jainism teaches the absolute equality of souls, notwithstanding the difference in physical form, a continuum that contains human beings as well as the tiniest organisms. Because humans are more endowed than other beings, we are responsible for acting compassionately toward all forms of life.

The lives of a Jain monk and a Jain layperson differ greatly. The monks practice extreme asceticism and endeavor to make this lifetime their final one. The laity pursue less burdensome practices and attempt to perform good deeds in this life. The laity, however, must choose a livelihood that has nothing to do with inflicting violence to oneself or any other being. In their attempts to reach the most exalted state of beatification (or *siddhatva*)—the total release of the *jiva* (“living being”) from every form of involvement in this existence—the Jains believe that no divine being can aid them in any way. Jainism may be termed a godless religion from this point of view. Moksha, the Jains believe, can only be achieved by individuals through their own hard work. Instead of appealing to an external superior being, Jains believe that human life is the highest good and must be cherished. Jainism holds that not even angels can gain their own release until they experience birth as a human and live the arduous life of a monk.

The moral code of Jainism is summed up in the Five Vows, which are followed by both monastics and lay people. The Five Vows are: Nonviolence (Ahimsa), Truth (Satya), Nonstealing (Achaurya or Asteya), Celibacy (Brahmacharya), and Nonattachment or Nonpossession (Aparigraha). Mahavir also designed a fourfold order for his followers: monk (*sadhu*), nun (*sadbvi*), layman (*shravak*), and laywoman (*shravika*).

Jains feel that reality consists of two everlasting principles: *jiva* and *ajiva*. *Jiva* is made up of an endless number of identical spiritual components; *ajiva* (or *nonjiva*) is matter in all of its shapes, forms, and states—time, movement, and space. Both *jiva* and *ajiva* are everlasting; they always existed and will never stop existing. The world is made up of *jivas* that are trapped in *ajiva*; in other words, there are *jivas* in inanimate objects like rocks in addition to those in animate objects like plants, insects, animals, and human beings, and even spirits.

Contact of any kind of the *jiva* with the *ajiva* causes the *jiva* to suffer. Thus Jains believe that living in this world invariably means suffering. No reform whatsoever can stop that suffering. Even in human beings the *jiva* is trapped, and it suffers as a consequence of being in contact with *ajiva*. The only way to escape from this suffering is for the *jiva* to escape completely from the human condition or existence.

Origins and History

If one follows Jain beliefs, statements about origins or history will be true and not-true, because reality is so complex that no single human mind is capable of knowing everything there is to know about reality. Our perceptions are always partial, subjective, and necessarily limited by our perspective. Jains believe that the universe was never created and that it will never cease to exist. What we know as the universe is eternal and infinite but not unchangeable. In fact it is always changing and never static because, as the universe moves through time, it passes through an endless series of phases, or swings. Each of these upward or downward phases has six world ages called *aras*, as in Pehelo Ara (“First Age”), Beejo Ara (“Second Age”), and so on. The last age is the Chhatho Ara, or Sixth Age. All these ages have fixed time durations of thousands of years.

In the current *ara*, Jainism began before 3000 B.C.E., prior to the beginning of Indo-Aryan culture. Though Jainism can be said to have been founded by Mahavir, the statement is not entirely true. Jainism existed before Mahavir, and his teachings were based on those of his predecessors. Unlike Buddha, Mahavir was more of a reformer of an existing religious order than the founder or prophet of a new faith. He followed the well-established creed of his predecessor Tirthankara Parshvanath, the 23rd

tirthankara of this cycle, who lived in the era immediately prior to this one. However, whereas Lord Parshva preached four great vows for his era, Mahavir preached five great vows for this one.

It is probable that Buddhism may have developed as a result of the pervasive influence of Jain culture and philosophy in India; Buddhists maintain that Jainism is an ancient faith and culture that predates Buddhism. Buddhist scriptures record philosophical dialogues between the Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama, 563–483B.C.E.) and his teacher, Udaka Ramaputta, a Jain who taught that there are eight types of karma. Early Buddhists also thought that there had already been 24 buddhas before Siddhartha Gautama, and many of their names are identical to those of the 24 Jain *tirthankaras*.

There are two major sects of Jainism that developed as a result of events that took place two centuries after Mahavir's death. The issue that divided the Jainists was nudity. Bhadrabahu, who was the leader of the Jain monks, anticipated a phase of drought and took his followers to southern India. There were about 12,000 people. A little more than a decade later they returned, only to find a new sect, the Svetambara. Because they had been living in southern India, where it is warm most of the year, they were accustomed to not wearing clothes. The followers of Bhadrabahu became known as the

Fasting to Death

Salekhana, or *santhara*, is a practice in which a Jain stops eating as preparation for death. This is unlike suicide because there are no traces of anger or passionate moods in this undertaking. It is done when death becomes inevitable. The purpose is to purify the physical being and to erase all thoughts of physical things from the mind. Apart from renouncing food or water, the dying person discards all dislikes and desires in an effort to focus solely on the spiritual as death draws near.

Digambaras, which means “sky-clad” or “naked.” These monks rejected clothing, even in public places. The Svetambara, or “white-clad” monks, wear simple white robes. The laypeople of the sect are allowed to wear clothes of any color.

The Digambara sect is concentrated largely in southern India. They stick to the age-old principles that require their monks to walk about unclothed. They also differ with the Svetambara sect on certain features of Mahavir's life. According to the beliefs of the Digambara sect, women cannot achieve salva-



Young Svetambar (white-clad) Jains participate in a religious procession celebrating Mahavira Jain's birth anniversary in the old section of New Delhi, India. Both the Digambar (sky-clad) and Svetambar sects of the Jain religion celebrate Mahavira's birthday on this day although they disagree as to the year of birth. At the back is a painting of Mahavira. (AP Photo/Manish Swarup)

tion until they become men in their rebirths, nor are they allowed to enter temples and monasteries.

The Svetambara are primarily found in northern India. They are easily the more liberal of the two sects when it comes to interpreting Mahavir's teachings regarding nudity. Women have access to religion and monasteries, and the Svetambara accept the possibility that women can save themselves.

The infinity of time is divided into time cycles, called *kalchakras*, and every time cycle consists of two equal halves: a progressive cycle (*utsarpini*) and a descending, or regressive, cycle (*avasarpini*). Within both cycles are six unequal periods (*aras*), so there are 12 *aras* within an entire time cycle. In an *utsarpini* half cycle, everything—happiness, strength, age, body, religious trends—develops in an ascending order, from the worst conditions to the best. When the *utsarpini* cycle has ended, the *avasarpini* half-cycle begins, and development, happiness, strength, age, body, religious trends, and so on gradually deteriorate, going from the best conditions to the worst. Presently we are in the fifth *ara*, Dukham Kal (“bad”), of an *avasarpini* phase, which started about 2,500 years ago. Although things may seem pretty bad now, they will become worse in the next era, called Dukham Dukham Kal (“very bad”), which will end the current half cycle. Then a new *utsarpini* phase will begin with a Sukum Sukum Kal (“very good”) era, the *kalchakra* will repeat again and go on forever. When a cycle reaches its lowest level, even Jainism itself is lost, but it will be rediscovered and reintroduced by new *tirthankaras*, only to be lost again at the end of the next downswing, and so on, ad infinitum.

Holidays and Religious Observances

Jainism, another world religion that has its roots in India, has close ties to Hinduism and Buddhism and shares holidays as well as core beliefs with both. Like Hinduism, Jainism uses the lunar calendar and has many religious observances in the course of a year, including the birthdays of several *tirthankaras*. Lord Rishabha, whose birthday is celebrated in the middle of Chaitra (early April in the Gregorian calendar) was the first *tirthankara* of our time, so he is also known as Adi-nath, the First Lord. In Jain tradition, he is more than a *tirthankara*. He was also a king, and gave the people important social innovations, such as the professions, to smooth their transition from a simple to a more complex society.

Another important birthday is that of the *tirthankara* called Mahavira, the 24th, and the last, *tirthankara* of the Jain religion. Mahavira was born a prince in Bihar in 599 B.C.E., and his birthday is observed toward the end of the month of Chaitra (late April in the Gregorian calendar). Lord Mahavira taught people about the principle of universal love and compassion, and achieved enlightenment (nirvana) after 13 years of a severely ascetic life. Because he achieved nirvana on the night of Diwali, the Festival of Lights is celebrated in his honor.

Paryushana and Diwali are both significant religious observances among the Jains. Paryushana has its origins in the rainy season, when Jain monks remain in one place for its duration, about four months. The two-day observance itself, however, is not extended for that long (although its minimum length is thought to be 70 days). Jains actually limit the observance to two days during the waxing half of Bhadrapada (early September in the Gregorian calendar). During this time Jains listen to the monks recite the Dharma, meditate, and practice self-discipline. It is a time when they renew their faith.

The Daslakshan observance, which begins on the second day of Paryushana (early September) focuses on the way to enlightenment, and is intended for meditation on the soul's attributes, spiritual reflection, prayers, and fasting. The devout are expected to spend the day in self-study and discussion of the nature of spiritual principles. Because its purpose emphasizes spirituality and removing oneself from worldly desires, it is also known as the Dashlakshan Parva, the Great Festival of Ten Virtues. The 10 Jainist virtues are: supreme patience, supreme modesty, supreme honesty, supreme contentment, supreme truth, supreme self-restraint, supreme austerity, supreme renunciation, supreme possessionlessness, and supreme celibacy.

See also Volume I: INDIA

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM; HINDUISM

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Janmashtami

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Hindu populations, primarily India, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka
Observed on	Eighth day of the dark fortnight of Sravana, the fifth month of the Hindu calendar
Observed by	Hindus

Introduction

The Hindu festival of Janmashtami (sometimes called Krishna Janmashtami) celebrates the birth of Lord Krishna, arguably the most venerated god in Hinduism. Hindus believe Krishna to be an avatar (incarnation) of Lord Vishnu, the creator of the universe and the second deity, as the preserver, of the Hindu trinity; the first deity is Lord Brahma, the creator, and the third is Lord Shiva, the destroyer. Krishna is a hero, teacher, warrior, and philosopher in Hinduism. He is also regarded as the eternal platonic lover, devoid of carnal lust. Hindus believe that it was Krishna who delivered the deeply philosophical message of the Bhagavad Gita (“The Divine Song”), one of the world’s religious classics.

Janmashtami is also known as Krishna Ashtami, Sri Jayanthi, and Gokula Ashtami. It begins on the eighth day of the dark fortnight of Sravana, the fifth month of the Hindu calendar (August–September in the Gregorian calendar). The festivities are spread over two consecutive days. The first day is known as Gokulashtami; the second day is Janmashtami.

The festival is observed with great pomp and splendor in the temples and homes of devotees. During this period, the devotees forgo sleep, opting instead to sing *bhajans* (Hindu devotional songs). Hindus believe that Krishna’s birth took place at midnight; so celebrations usually begin at that time. A number of delicious dishes are made with curd and milk as their base—both these ingredients are believed to be Krishna’s favorites. Some devotees fast during the first day of the celebrations, opting to eat only after midnight. Singing and dancing are ways to venerate the deity. In addition, plays based on stories about Krishna’s childhood are performed. In all the temples devoted to Krishna, his likenesses are bathed and placed in cradles. Hymns and chants are recited with great fervor to praise and glorify him. In this context, Krishna is known by names

Raas Leela

Raas Leela is a captivating play (*leela*) about Krishna. It portrays the deep attraction between the milkmaids (*gopis*) of Vrindavan and the deity. Krishna used to drive his herd of cattle to the forest. Leaving the cows to graze freely, Krishna would play mellifluous tunes on his flute. Hearing the music, the enchanted milkmaids would rush to meet him. Among the maidens was Radha (his eternal beloved), who would go into sheer ecstasy at the mere sight of her Lord. Surrounded by the *gopis*, Radha and Krishna would perform a divine dance all night long, utterly oblivious to the rest of the world.

such as Bal Gopala (“Baby Boy”) or Naadoo Gopal (“the Kid Who Is Fond of Sweet Tidbits”). Incidentally, Krishna’s nickname, Gopala, means “the boy who tends cows.”

Origins and History

Krishna is believed to be the most magnificent incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Hindus believe that merely uttering his name or remembering him will bring untold joy and bliss. They consider Krishna their redeemer since he quelled all evil forces to bring peace and virtues into the world. No other god in Hinduism is linked with romantic tales and radiates all the divine qualities that Krishna does.

Prior to Krishna’s birth his maternal uncle, the wicked King Kansa (who ruled over Mathura), had been told that his sister Devaki’s eighth child (a boy) would slay him. Because of this prophecy, King Kansa locked Devaki and her husband, Vasudev, in the palace dungeon. The first seven of their chil-

Krishna and the Color Blue

Any Hindu deity who has the traits of manliness, bravery, determination, and the aptitude to deal with hard situations is symbolized by the blue color. Since the Hindus believe that Krishna spent his entire life shielding the innocent and fighting against evil, blue is the appropriate color for him.

dren were also brutally killed by Kansa. After the birth of the eighth child a series of miracles took place. The gates of the prison were magically unlocked, and the guards miraculously fell asleep. Then a divine voice ordered Vasudev to take the newborn child to Gokul (a tiny village near Mathura, India) where his friends, a couple named Nanda and Yashoda, lived and exchange Krishna



A Hindu devotee of Lord Krishna prays at Krishna temple in Patan, near Kathmandu, Nepal. Tens of thousands of devotees converge on the temple each year to mark Janmashtami, Krishna's birthday. (AP Photo/John McConico)

with their newborn daughter. Though there were torrential rains that night, and the river Yamuna was flooding, when Vasudeva entered the river to cross to the other side (en route to Gokul), the waters receded and made way for the wonder child who had to be taken to safer environs. Thus, Kansa's plans to kill the eighth child were foiled.

Krishna grew up to be a notoriously mischievous child. His penchant for butter—and all dairy products—is legendary. He is familiarly called *makhan chor* (“butter stealer”). Krishna's favorite pastime was playing his flute. As he grew up, Krishna performed many miraculous and astonishing feats for the people around him. He vanquished the python Kaliya, who tormented people and devoured their livestock. When another Hindu deity, an angry Indra (the king of heaven), unleashed a severe thunderstorm upon his people, Krishna raised the peak of the Govardhan Hill on his little finger to provide shelter for them.

Hearing of his courageous deeds, the evil Kansa called Krishna to Mathura, challenging him to fight with the mighty wrestler Chanura. As Krishna approached the wrestling arena, Kansa unleashed a mad elephant to crush his nephew. Krishna simply picked up the animal by its trunk, threw it into the air, and killed it. Then he wrestled with the mighty Chanura and killed him, too. Finally, he rushed toward Kansa, Chanura's uncle, and killed him, thereby fulfilling the prophecy.

As a youth, Krishna became the bosom friend and close associate of Arjuna (the third of the five Pandava brothers, who figure in the epic Mahabharata). Krishna chose the modest position of chariot driver and remained at his friend's side during the Mahabharata War. Before the commencement of the battle, Krishna inspired Arjuna (as recorded in the Bhagavad Gita) and led the brothers to victory.

During Janmashtami Hindu homes are cleaned and elaborately decorated. In the afternoon, *prasad* (food that is to be offered to the deity for blessings) is prepared and then distributed after the evening prayers are finished. Offerings of sweets, water, flowers, and a variety of fruits are placed before the image of Krishna in a cradle. With the approach of darkness, lamps are lit. At midnight, *tika* (a red sacred mark) is drawn on the face of the idol, and devotees shower it with flower petals, water, and rice. *Bhajans* are sung in praise of Krishna. Thereafter, *prasad* is distributed, and everyone consumes lavish, delicious vegetarian meals. The following day, in the Indian state of Maharashtra, in order to reenact Krishna's favorite childhood pastime of stealing butter, people form pyramids on the streets to break pots suspended from overhead wires and ropes.

See also Volume I: BANGLADESH; BHUTAN; FIJI; GUYANA; INDIA

See also Volume II: MALAYSIA; MAURITIUS;
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See also Volume II: HINDUISM

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Fun Fact

The Bhagavad Gita summarizes the four primary Hindu philosophies: Vedic, Yogic, Vedantic, and Tantric. Bhagavad Gita means “Song of the Lord.”

❧ Judaism ❧

FACT FILE

Observed in	Israel, and as a minority faith in the Diaspora (throughout the world where Jews have migrated after their exile from the Holy Land), particularly the United States, Canada, parts of the old Soviet Union, some European countries, Australia, Argentina, and South Africa
World Population	About 15 million
Place of Origin	Canaan (modern-day Israel and Lebanon)

Introduction

Of the three Abrahamic religions—religions that consider Abraham to be a founder and central prophet (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam)—Judaism is the oldest. Although its followers comprise less than one quarter of one percent of the world's population, their influence the world over has been anything but minimal. The faith that began in the Middle East some 4,000 years ago has reached all parts of the world, as a result of forced expulsion as well as deliberate migrations. The Jewish world population is roughly about 15 million; the majority are concentrated in Israel, the United States, and the former Soviet Union, though there are significant communities in other countries including France, Britain, Brazil, Argentina, Australia, and Canada.

Judaism is a monotheistic religion; it supports a single, all-knowing God who created the universe and functions as its ongoing overseer. The “Shma,” the short, most familiar Jewish prayer, makes this basic statement of faith: “Hear, O Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is One.” This is a rejection of polytheism (belief in many gods) and an affirmation of Adonai (a name for God) as the single God of Abraham and all Jews and the universe. Central to Judaism is the concept of the covenant between God and his people that began with Abraham, in which God has chosen Jews to be a light to the nations, and they have accepted the greater responsibilities and obligations that God's law entails. According to Judaic tradition, God's 10 commandments, or rules for human conduct, were given to Moses and the Israelites on Mount Sinai. Orthodox Jews believe that the Torah, their religious text (and an important part of the Christian Bible and Muslim Koran as well), is the word of God and a guide for all behavior; other movements within Judaism place equal weight on the Torah but interpret it less

literally than Orthodox Jews. Unlike Christians, who regard Jesus as the messiah (savior), Jews believe that the messiah has yet to appear. Ultimately, they believe that a messiah, or a messianic age, will emerge to repair and redeem the broken, imperfect world.

Judaism is both a religion and a civilization, based on its sacred texts, laws, and customs. It is fundamentally rooted in the Hebrew Bible, which is often thought to have begun as an oral narrative in ancient times and was later written down and canonized. Judaism emerged before construction of the First Temple (completed in 957 B.C.E.) in Jerusalem and flowered during the period of the First and Second Temples (957 B.C.E.–70 C.E.) under the direction of a hereditary priesthood.

Following the destruction of the Second Temple (70 C.E.), which made the Temple-centered priesthood obsolete, it was shaped into Torah Judaism by the rabbis (teachers, who would become, increasingly, clerics as well) in the first few centuries of the Christian era.

From the early third through the sixth centuries C.E., the rabbinic sages devised the Talmud (first the Mishnah and later the Gemara), a collection of oral law and commentary. The Talmud constitutes the legal case studies and interpretations derived from Torah (technically, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—but more generically all 24 books of the Hebrew Bible or, even more broadly, all Jewish teaching or law). The Talmud is ingeniously arranged, with central texts surrounded by significant commentaries by great historic interpreters of the Torah and Talmud (not all of whom agree).

It is impossible to summarize as complex a subject as Judaism, but the famous Roman-era rabbi Hillel, responding to a challenge, once reduced the teachings of the Torah to one simple lesson that could be delivered while standing on one foot. Hil-

lel said, “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. The rest is commentary; now go and study.”

The Jewish Sabbath begins at sunset Friday and continues until sunset on Saturday. (Observant Jews hold synagogue services twice a day every day.) The Jewish house of worship is called a synagogue. Besides being used for religious services, it is used for the purpose of community affairs and education. The synagogue liturgy of today continues to follow patterns established centuries ago, making it recognizable to Jews worldwide, though variations (sometimes significant) occur according to regional, ethnic, and doctrinal differences

Jews have suffered centuries of anti-Semitism (a particularly virulent form of racism that stereotypes and demonizes Jews). Anti-Semitism was expressed most horrifically during World War II (1939–1945 C.E.), when Adolf Hitler’s Nazi regime in Germany sought to exterminate, with systematic, industrial precision, the entire European Jewish population. The Holocaust (or Shoah in Hebrew) killed six million Jewish people in one of the most devastating crimes against humanity ever committed. (An additional six million non-Jews were exterminated as well; these included homosexuals, gypsies, the mentally or physically disabled, Communists, and other political dissidents.) In response, a new term was coined, “genocide” (the killing of an entire people), and new efforts were undertaken to prevent such inhuman atrocities in the future (unfortunately, with limited success). The Holocaust and its memory significantly shaped the experience of Jews and non-Jews in the second half of the 20th century and will continue to do so well into the future.

Two major divisions of Jewish culture are based on geography: the Ashkenazim and the Sephardim.

Ashkenazi, an old Hebrew word for Germany, originally denoted Jews who spoke Yiddish, a German dialect, but it has come to include Jews from northern and eastern Europe and their descendants from the Americas. The Sephardim (a designation derived from the old Hebrew word for Spain) were once those Jews who settled in Spain and Portugal, but the denotation of the word has expanded to include the Eastern Jews of Mediterranean, Balkan, Aegean, and Middle Eastern lands and their descendants living in the Americas. Originally, an Ashkenazi Jew was a Yiddish speaker and a Sephardic Jew referred to one who spoke a dialect of Castilian Spanish called Ladino. Some Jews still adhere to this narrow understanding of Sephardim, but, in Israeli colloquial usage, Sephardim have come to include Jews who speak (or whose fathers or grandfathers spoke) dialects of Arabic, Berber, or Persian as well. Sephardim are also called the Edot Mizrah, or Oriental Jews. Although the Ashkenazi and Sephardic differ in their rituals and liturgies, both groups recognize the authority of the other’s rabbinical courts and rulings.

Fun Fact

In 37 B.C.E. the Romans made Herod king of Judea, and he began construction of the Second Temple. Its construction took nearly 20 years and more than 10,000 workers.

Origins and History

According to Jewish tradition, around 2000 B.C.E. the God of the Israelites made a covenant with Abraham. The book of Genesis (present in the

Jewish Funerals

Traditionally, Jewish funerals are organized by the Chevra Kadisha (sacred burial society) and held in a funeral home; at times they take place in a cemetery chapel or the synagogue of the one who has passed away. Burial occurs as soon as possible after death. The body is never left alone, nor is it embalmed. It is ritually washed and dressed in a simple white shroud. Jews, regardless of social status or wealth, are buried in the same simple dress, as all are equal before God. Traditionally, the casket is plain and wooden, to allow its natural disintegration. Flowers are understood to cover death’s reality and are usually avoided. The funeral involves readings

from the book of Psalms. More prayers are offered before the casket is lowered. It is traditional for the family of the deceased and others to shovel dirt on top of the coffin. At times, mourners use the back of the shovel, to distinguish between ordinary shoveling and that employed, reluctantly, for burial of the dead. Jewish mourning proceeds in stages. Jews observe a seven-day period of grieving when they sit shiva (seven) at home, surrounded by friends and family. For thirty days, certain other mourning restrictions apply, and for a year Jewish mourners continue to recite the “Kaddish,” a brief prayer that does not mention death but affirms life and the justice of God.

Fun Fact

King Solomon, the son of David, inaugurated the First Temple on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem in 960 B.C.E.

In it was housed the Ark of the Covenant.

Christian Bible as well as the Torah) chronicles the lives of the first three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The next great leader of the Israelites was Moses, who freed the Jews from slavery in Egypt and was given the law by God while the Israelites wandered in the desert. Ultimately, according to Hebrew scripture, Moses' successor, Joshua, led the Israelites into Canaan, defeated the Canaanites, and took possession of the Promised Land.

According to biblical accounts, God and the prophet Samuel reluctantly acceded to the people's desire to have a king like other nations, and at God's direction, Samuel designated Saul king of Israel. Israel's second and most famous king was David, who established Jerusalem as the hub of the Jews' political and religious life. The third and reputedly wisest of all kings, Solomon (David's son), constructed the First Temple there.

Between 734 B.C.E. and 581 B.C.E., Israel came under Babylonian control, and six deportations of Israelites followed. Many fled voluntarily. The Babylonian empire was conquered by an alliance of Medes and Persians who, under Cyrus the Great, allowed the Jews to return to their homeland. But from that time to today, a majority of Jews have lived outside of Israel. After the Macedonian conqueror Alexander the Great drove out the Persians and occupied Israel in 332 B.C.E., Jewish culture was increasingly Hellenized, or influenced by Greek civilization. Then, in 63 B.C.E., the Roman Empire seized control of Israel.

Various Jewish sects emerged in the first century C.E., one of which ultimately developed into

the Christian religion. One adherent, later known as Saint Paul, deviated from Jewish traditional practice and took his prophetic message to the Gentiles, non-Jewish people.

Roman oppression and subsequent Jewish revolts resulted in the devastation of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., including the destruction of the Second Temple (which had been rebuilt in 515 B.C.E.). With this disaster, Jews were driven out of their ancient homeland, and Jews and Judaism spread further throughout the world. Since the Temple could no longer serve as the sacred site of Jewish religious practice, individual synagogues developed into new centers of Judaism, and power swung from a hereditary priesthood to diverse teachers and scholars—rabbis. Rabbinic Judaism was thus born.

Jews believe in one, unique God, whose shape and appearance are unknowable. There are no subordinate deities in this monotheistic religion. Orthodox Jews deem the words of their biblical Prophets (indeed, the entire Torah) to be authentic and God-inspired. The Jews view Moses as the greatest of their prophets and the recipient of the Torah (in both written and oral form) from God. Judaism teaches that there can be only one Torah.

Presently, there are several different main sects of Judaism. The more traditional forms, however, do not necessarily consider the most liberal as a part of the faith. The largest, oldest, and most conservative form is Orthodox Judaism. Though they vary in the rigor of their observance, ultra-Orthodox, modern-Orthodox, and Hasidim have a common belief in the origin and sanctity of *halacha* (Jewish law that supplements scriptural law) as established in the Torah and Talmud. They seek to practice Judaism in the most original form possible and revere every word in their religious texts as being inspired by God.

Kabbalah

The Kabbalah (meaning, in Hebrew, “the received”) is the Jewish oral tradition of mysticism and esoteric knowledge handed down through generations. Some of the Kabbalah's mysteries are conveyed in a late 13th-century book called the Zohar (illumination), a difficult Aramaic text sometimes called the Bible of Kabbalists. It deals with esoteric subjects not fully explored in other Jewish texts—spirituality, the mysteries of God and the universe, prophecies, angels, and the afterlife—and is judged by devotees to be too complex for ordinary practitioners of Judaism. Indeed, engaging in study of the Kabbalah can be dangerous, some have maintained,

and requires considerable maturity and worthiness of its students. Kabbalists stress the significance of supernatural symbols, formulas, and codes that they believe exist in the Bible. Studying Torah in light of such symbols and codes, kabbalists find meaning in the cosmos and even predict the future. In complex ways, kabbalists believe, people's impulses and actions can affect God's actions. The Kabbalah is not universally accepted, however. It has been regarded with indifference or even hostility by some of the greatest Jewish teachers, and for some its mysticism is little more than superstition. Recent revivals and “pop” Kabbalah fads have been viewed with suspicion by Jewish kabbalists and non-kabbalists alike.



Reform Judaism first emerged as a liberal movement among Jews in Germany in the 1790s, as they and other European Jews struggled to accommodate to a rapidly changing, modern world following emancipation (lifting of government restrictions on Jews, first in Revolutionary France in 1791 C.E.). They redefined Judaism and biblical law, seeking to realign it with their new circumstances and opportunities, and to diminish the distance between Jews and non-Jews, particularly by abandoning traditional rituals and laws, such as those governing food preparation and consumption (*kasbrus*, or kosher dietary restrictions). Reform Jews remain heirs to the Torah but believe that their sacred heritage should evolve and adapt. Reform Jews, for example, embrace pluralism and accept women as rabbis. Reform Judaism is well established today among North American Jews (some 38 percent of Jews in the United States).

Conservative Judaism started in the middle of the 19th century in response to the Reform movement. It is regarded as a major movement that is somewhere between Reform and Orthodox. Like Orthodox Judaism, Conservative Judaism is bound by Torah rituals and laws, but, like Reform Judaism, it is open to innovation and adjustment to the modern world, as long as doing so affirms essential Jewish values. Conservative Jews allow congregants to drive to synagogue on Sabbath. Modern Orthodox only reluctantly permit disabled worshippers or those who live at a distance to drive or discreetly ignore their cars. More stringent Orthodox are

The Torah

The name *Torah* has numerous meanings. In its most restricted sense, the Torah refers to the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, all attributed to Moses. At times, however, the word expands to embrace the full Jewish Bible (Old Testament to non-Jews; Tanakh or written Torah to the Jews), and, in the broadest sense, the entire body of Judaism's laws and teachings. There is considerable similarity with the Christian Bible, though the two differ somewhat with respect to verse numbering, as to which books are included, and in matters of translation.

careful to live within walking distance of their synagogues and hold services in their homes if they are not able to walk to synagogue. Similarly, Conservative Jews allow mixed seating of men and women in synagogue, while Orthodox Jews separate the sexes. Conservative Judaism, adheres exclusively to matrilineal descent as a definition of a Jew, unlike Reform Judaism's definition of a Jew as a child who has either a Jewish mother or father, who is raised in a Jewish home, and who is given a Jewish education.

Finally, Reconstructionist Judaism, perhaps the newest of all Judaic forms, is a small movement started in the early 20th century in an effort to unite and rejuvenate Judaism. Reconstructionism regards Judaism as an "evolving religious civilization." It is



As tradition dictates, a pointer, called *yad* (Hebrew, "hand"), is used to follow the Hebrew written passages in the Torah, the holy text of Judaism, in order not to handle and thus damage the document. (AP Photo/Rogelio Solis)



Jewish Baby-Naming Ceremony

Baby-naming ceremonies can take place at home or in the synagogue. The birth-naming ceremony for a boy child differs from that of a girl child. For Orthodox Jews the birth of girls is handled without great fanfare. The celebration for all sects on the occasion of the birth of female children is less formalized. For the naming of a boy child, friends and relatives are welcome to witness the occasion. Traditionally, one chair is kept empty so that the prophet Elijah can observe the event. The child's godmother (*kvaterin*) and godfather (*kvater*) are characteristically involved

in the occasion. Names are generally chosen to pay tribute to departed members of the family (Ashkenazi Jews generally avoid naming children after living relatives, but Sephardic Jews customarily do name children for living relatives). The child is often given a secular name as well as a Hebrew name. The naming ceremony for the male child (called a *bris* or *brit milah*) occurs on the eighth day after his birth. Prayers and blessings are a part of the naming ceremony; circumcision of the male child follows the event. The ceremony involves blessings and prayers. A celebratory meal follows the naming ceremonies.

committed both to tradition and to the search for contemporary meaning. According to Reconstructionist Judaism, each generation of Jews must reshape its faith and traditions. This form differs from Orthodox Judaism in its emphasis on the evolution (as opposed to immutability) of Judaism itself, and it diverges from Conservative Judaism in terms of its priorities, particularly with regard to the degree of continuity or change appropriate in ritual observance and law. Reconstructionist Judaism differs from Reform Judaism in its greater commitment to the preservation of tradition.

Holidays and Religious Observances

The rituals of Judaism are observed according to a calendar based on a combination of the lunar and solar cycles. It includes festivals required by the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Torah), others prescribed in later biblical books, and commemorating post-biblical or even modern events. The Hebrew year begins (in the seventh month, Tishri) with Rosh Hashanah in the fall (Jewish New Year), followed directly by Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), Sukkoth (a harvest festival), and Simchat Torah (completion and recommencement of the Torah reading cycle), all in the month of Tishri. Hanukkah (Festival of Lights) is observed in Kislev, near the Winter Solstice. Tu Bshvat, the Festival of Trees, follows in late winter, while Purim (a springtime, topsy-turvy festival) is celebrated in the month of Adar. Passover (Pesach) in the month of Nisan—the first Jewish month—is a seven-day festival that marks the beginning of the agricultural calendar and celebrates the Hebrews' liberation from bondage in Egypt. Beginning on Passover, 50 days are counted until the celebration of Shavuot, a first fruits festival

in Sivan (on the cusp of spring and summer). In between, Jews commemorate two modern events—Yom ha-Shoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day) and Yom ha-Atzmaut (Israeli Independence Day). Tisha Bav (the ninth of the month of Av) is a fast observed in midsummer in memory of the destruction of the First and Second Temples. The cycle continues through the month of Elul, beginning again with Rosh Hashanah (literally the “head of the year”) on the first of Tishri, in the new year.

The Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah, is a two-day festival observed during Tishri (“beginning” in Babylonian), the seventh month of the Jewish ecclesiastical calendar (September–October on the Gregorian calendar). Rosh Hashanah, the “head of the year” in Hebrew, is so named because Tishri is also the first month of the Hebrew civil calendar. In the Torah, Rosh Hashanah is referred to by many names: Yom Teruah (“the day of sounding the shofar,” Feast of the Trumpets); and Yom Hazikaron (“the day of remembering”). Rosh Hashanah marks the beginning of the 10-day period called Yamim Noraim (Days of Awe), a time for repentance that ends with Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. This period is also called Ben Kesseh LeAssor; Kesseh and Assor refer to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, respectively. Thus, it refers to the period between the two festivals. While this observance is a time for deep introspection, it is also a time for friends and family to come together and for people to forgive each other. Most significantly, Rosh Hashanah is the time to recognize God as the supreme judge of all living creatures.

Yom Kippur (“Day of Atonement”) is one of the most important holidays of the year for both Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews. Even Jews who are not otherwise strict in their observances make it a point to refrain from work, attend synagogue, and fast on this day. It is one of the Days of Awe (Yamim Noraim), which includes Rosh Hashanah, the first

two days of the Ten Days of Repentance, and Yom Kippur, the last of the 10 days. It falls on the 10th day of Tishri, the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar (September–October), and ends the 10-day period of penitence that Rosh Hashanah (the New Year) begins. Yom Kippur is a total Sabbath (day of rest), when work of any kind is prohibited, and the devout abstain from eating and drinking water. Yom Kippur is the last chance to show regret and make amends so as to ameliorate God's judgment relating to those sins. One atones only for the sins between oneself and the Creator, not for sins committed against another human being. To seek forgiveness for the sins against another person, a compromise with that person must be arrived at and, if possible, the trespass forgiven; this harmonious conclusion must be accomplished before Yom Kippur begins because this is the day when God closes the books and one's fate, for better or worse, is sealed.

Hanukkah, "dedication" in Hebrew, is celebrated for eight days, usually beginning around mid to late December. Also known as the Festival of Lights, the observance recalls the Jews' struggle for religious freedom and celebrates their triumph against the Hellenistic Syrians. In 165 B.C.E., after the Temple had been taken back and the Syrians repulsed, Judah Maccabee and his forces entered the Holy Temple and found it a shambles. When they had finished cleaning it up, they decided to rededicate it. But, when they searched for oil to light the *hanukkiab* for the celebrations, all they could find was a flask with only enough oil to last a day. The oil, however, lasted for eight days, giving the Maccabees time to procure new oil. On the festival's first night, one light of the nine-branched *hanukkiab* is lit. Each night after that, another light is lit until the eighth and final night, when all of them are lit. The gradual addition of lights reminds the Jews of the miracle's magnitude and growth. There are recitations of blessings every night prior to the lighting of the candles: As they burn the eight lights of the *hanukkiab*, Jews narrate the triumph of their ancestors over depravity, the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem, as well as the miracle of one day's supply of oil that burned for eight days.

Pesach, or Passover, from Hebrew Peh-Samech-Chet, which means "to pass over, pass through, to exempt, or to spare," is an eight-day festival that commemorates the departure of the nation of Israel from Egypt and the origin of a Jewish state led by Moses (or Moshe) about 3,000 years ago. Though it is mainly celebrated to remember the exodus of the Jews from Egypt after centuries of slavery, the festival also marks the beginning of the harvest season in Israel. Pesach signifies both the physical as well as the spiritual freedom earned by

the Jews. The tale of the Jews' mass exodus is told in chapters 1–15 of Exodus in the Bible. The pharaoh, concerned about the Hebrews' population growth, decided to kill the first-born son in every Jewish family. Moses' mother, however, hid him in reeds along the Nile, where the pharaoh's daughter found him and saved his life. Sometime later, to free the enslaved Hebrews, God determined to send plagues. After each plague, Moses would remind the pharaoh of his promise to allow the Hebrews to leave, but every time the pharaoh reneged on his promise. Finally, after the 10th plague (and losing his own son), the pharaoh agreed to let the Israelites leave Egypt. The Jews believe that God, while slaying the firstborns in Egypt during the plague, spared their houses, hence the notion of "passing over." Jews consider the removal of *chametz* from their homes as the most important aspect of Pesach. *Chametz* refers to leaven and this act recalls that, during the exodus, the Jews were in such a hurry to leave Egypt that they did not have time to let their bread rise. Thus, they ate unleavened, or flat, bread. It is also symbolic of the removal of egotism and pride, the "puffiness," from our souls.

See also Volume I: ISRAEL

See also Volume II: UNITED STATES

See also Volume III: HANUKKAH; PESACH; PURIM; ROSH HASHANAH; YOM KIPPUR

Fun Fact

The Ark of the Covenant, which contains the clay tablets on which the Ten Commandments are inscribed, is believed by some researchers to rest in a small Ethiopian church, St. Mary's of Zion, in the town of Axum.

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❧ Labor Day ❧

FACT FILE

Observed in	Worldwide
Observed on	First Monday in September (United States and Canada); May 1 elsewhere
Observed by	General Public

Introduction

Labor Day is an internationally observed holiday that honors the workers of the world, collectively and individually, for their invaluable contributions to their societies and the well-being of others. Labor Day is celebrated in most parts of the world on May 1, but the United States and Australia celebrate it on different dates. (In Australia, the date of the holiday is set by the state or territory.) International Labor Day is alternatively known as Workers' Day or May Day. The American Labor Day, observed in early September, has always been politically more conservative than May Day, which can be quite radical. Both, however, are occasions not merely to honor labor but to build solidarity among workers and to campaign for workers' rights, better working conditions, and better wages.

Origins and History

If Labor Day is usually held around the world on May 1 and known as May Day, it is important to note that the original May Day observances had no connection with workers or labor activism. May Day festivities can be traced back to prehistoric pagan agricultural festivals that celebrated the vernal equinox. The beginning of May (Maius) was a popular feast time for the Romans, when they worshipped Flora, the goddess of flowers. In her honor a five-day celebration, the Floralia, was held from April 28 to May 1 every year.

The Romans brought the customs and celebration of Floralia to the British Isles when they invaded and finally conquered the region. Gradually, the rituals of the Floralia were merged with those of the Celtic Beltane ("bright fire") festival, the second most important holiday of the year for the Druids, the early inhabitants of the British Isles. It is a cross-quarter day, the halfway point of the sun's progress between the vernal equinox and summer solstice.

The festival of Beltane was held on May 1. The Druids believed that this day divided the year into two exact halves. The half-year that began on May Day ended with the festival of Samhain, the precursor of Halloween, on November 1. In those days the priests lit a new fire to symbolize the vibrant spring, and herds of cattle were driven through the fire to purify them. Young men and their sweethearts passed through the smoke to invite good luck.

At the symbolic and physical center of May Day rites was the maypole, a Germanic custom. Some see the Maypole as a phallic symbol and associate it with fertility. Others trace its origin to the Saxon Irminsul (an oak) said to connect heaven and earth. Trees have been worshipped as symbols of life since ancient times, and they played a major part in pagan rites to ensure the fertility of women, cattle, and crops. During the Middle Ages every English village held maypole dances. Fetching the maypole from the woods was an important occasion marked by rejoicing and gaiety. In earlier times it was erected in the center of the village; later it was usually placed in a cleared area, or wherever the celebration was to be held. Customarily the tree, after being stripped of its branches, was decorated with garlands of flowers and long ribbons attached to its crown. The ends of the ribbons were held by young men and women who would dance around the tree in opposite directions, braiding the ribbons over and under, singing all the while, until the tree was wrapped in ribbons. In the 16th century May Day celebrations in England were condemned by the Calvinists; the holiday was revived after the Restoration, but it lacked its original significance and vitality. Gradually, it became a secular day of joy and fun, particularly for children, rather than a religious occasion.

Opinions differ on the true origins of Labor Day, and the specifics cited depend on the country involved. Generally Labor Day as it is known today originated in the late 19th-century with demonstrations demanding better working conditions, includ-

ing an eight-hour workday. In a 24-hour day, according to labor activists of the time, workers should have “eight hours for work, eight hours for play, and eight hours for what you will.”

On April 21, 1856, stonemasons and building workers from construction sites around Melbourne, Australia, stopped working and marched from the University of Melbourne to the Parliament House to press their claims for an eight-hour workday. They are universally recognized as the first organized workers in the world to demand, and get, a fixed eight-hour work-schedule. Their heroic attempt was a source of inspiration for the American Labor Movement.

By the 1880s, labor struggles in the United States were escalating sharply, as was business and government repression of organized workers, particularly in the wake of the Great Strike of 1877. Union activism in America was at least 50 years old by then. In the increasingly antagonistic confrontations between capital and labor, in September of 1882 a new umbrella organization of trade unions, with the backing of the Knights of Labor (founded in 1869), organized a massive one-day general strike in New York City, which they conceived as a festive

as well as activist Labor Day. It consisted of a huge parade through the city complete with placards and colorful banners, and a mammoth picnic, punctuated with speeches, and seasoned with music and dancing as well as vast quantities of food and drink. The organizers repeated the affair in 1883 and 1884, which established a precedent for observing Labor Day on the first Monday in September in the United States. The Knights of Labor and the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions (the predecessor of the American Federation of Labor [AFL]) concurred, and soon state governments and then the federal government responded to their lobbying and recognized Labor Day as an official national public holiday in 1894. In part, this concession stemmed from efforts to respond to increasing violence in labor relations and to undermine the most radical elements in the U.S. labor movement, while supporting its most moderate or conservative elements.

In the midst of these turbulent years the Haymarket Massacre occurred. On May 1, 1886, nearly 300,000 strikers nationwide and 40,000 in the city of Chicago took part in demonstrations for the eight-hour working day. These May Day demon-



Dancers perform a traditional Maypole dance in Livingston, Montana, as part of a May Day celebration. Over the past 100 years, much of the world has come to celebrate May 1 as Labor Day. May Day celebrations of the vernal equinox on this day, however, date back to prehistoric pagan festivals. (AP Photo/The Livingston Enterprise, Erik Petersen)

strations contrasted with the more festive September Labor Day exercises. They were more militant and purposeful, an integral part of an ongoing international struggle for workers' rights. The hub of activities was Chicago, where socialists and anarchists of the International Working Peoples' Association (IWPA) played a key role in organizing the May Day strikes, which resulted in several clashes with the police.

On May 4 members of the IWPA organized a rally at Haymarket Square to protest police atrocities committed against striking workers on Chicago's South Side. As police attempted to break up the rally, a bomb exploded in the crowd, police opened fire, and a riot erupted. In the end, seven police officers and two protesters were killed, and several others were wounded. Police arrested eight anarchists on charges of conspiracy to commit murder. The trial and subsequent execution of four of the men (Albert Parsons, August Spies, Adolf Fischer, and George Engel) based on flimsy evidence has since become a cause célèbre in labor's continued struggle for justice.

The Pioneer Aid and Support Association, a group organized to support the families of the accused in the Haymarket case, inaugurated the Haymarket Martyrs' Monument on June 23, 1893. The monument is a 16-foot-high granite shaft atop a two-stepped base, on which are placed two bronze figures representing Justice placing a wreath on the head of a fallen worker. The monument embodies the ideals for which the victims died, a visible symbol of their works and deeds and an icon of the International Labor Movement.

There is an interesting story behind the origin of the Labor Day holiday in the United States, which still falls on the first Monday of September. Peter J. McGuire (the son of an Irish immigrant who had enlisted as a soldier in the Civil War) earned a meager sum of money as a shoeshine boy and a newspaper vendor, as well as an errand boy to support his mother and six siblings. His family, like those of other European immigrants, lived in nightmarish and appalling conditions in New York City. Often six families were crowded into a house made for just one. Thousands of immigrant men, women, and children worked 10 to 12 hours a day in unhealthy conditions in factories, with only a short break for lunch. They came to work in spite of fatigue and ill health, fearing that they might be fired otherwise.

At 17, Peter still worked long hours for low pay. He became a working carpenter, and at night he went to meetings and classes dealing with economics and social issues of the day. The main issues pertained to labor conditions. Tired of long hours, low pay, and lack of job security, in the spring of 1872 Peter McGuire and 100,000 workers went on strike. They marched through the streets, demanding a shorter workday. Convinced that an organized labor movement was the only way of ensuring a fair

deal for the workers, Peter devoted the next few years to creating and spreading awareness in the American workforce.

The idea of organizing and classifying the workers according to their trades quickly spread around the country. Factory workers, dockworkers, and toolmakers all began vociferously demanding their rights to an eight-hour workday, job security, and good future prospects in their respective trades. The same idea was endorsed by the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions and the Knights of Labor, a labor organization founded in secrecy in December 1869 by a group of Philadelphia tailors led by Uriah S. Stephens. Originally known as the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor, it aimed to protect all those who worked for a living.

Thus to a great extent, Labor Day celebrations in the United States can be traced to the workers' parades in New York City in 1882 and 1884, during which they vehemently demanded the amelioration of their working conditions. On September 5, 1882, the epoch-making first Labor Day parade was held in New York City. Twenty thousand workers marched down Broadway, carrying banners that read "Labor creates all wealth" and "Eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, and eight hours for recreation!" After the parade, picnics were organized all around the city; the workers ate Irish stew, homemade bread, and apple pie. At night there was a grand display of fireworks. Within the next few years, the idea of a national Labor Day holiday caught on rapidly across the United States. Finally the date of Labor Day in the United States was established as September 5.

America's Labor Day is, in a sense, a monument to the Haymarket Massacre. In the wake of Chicago's Haymarket riots, the general strikes that followed, and the American Federation of Labor's campaign for an eight-hour workday, a September Labor Day became an acceptable, virtually apolitical alternative to discourage more radical labor holidays or demonstrations. President Grover Cleveland believed that a May 1 holiday would become an opportunity to commemorate the Haymarket incident, for example, lending strength to socialist labor activists who continued to agitate on May Day. Over the years the United States made efforts to discourage the May 1 commemorations, going so far as to substitute other holidays—the conservative and nationalistic Loyalty Day, for example—for the radical May Day. In fact, if one visits the Web site of the U.S. Department of Labor, and reads the "official" history of Labor Day, there is no mention of the international workers' movement in the 19th century, nothing about the Second International, or the IWP, or socialism in general.

Although Labor Day was made an official national holiday in 1894, the eight-hour workday did not become a reality in the United States until

March 15, 1917, when the Supreme Court finally ruled that the Eight-Hour Act was constitutionally legal, under the threat of a national railway strike. In Canada the Labor Day holiday was adopted in 1894 by then Prime Minister John Thompson, although the concept had originated with marches held in Toronto and Ottawa as far back as 1872. While in the United States and Canada Labor Day continues to be observed on the first Monday in September, the rest of the world observes it on May 1 or on other dates.

The first international May Day/Labor Day occurred in 1890, set for May 1 by the Second Socialist International in 1889 (a worldwide consortium of socialist and labor parties founded in 1880) to coincide with an AFL general strike in the United States demanding an eight-hour workday. As the day approached the AFL limited its participation to a few American cities, but the international labor organization staged hugely successful festive demonstrations in cities throughout Europe as well as in Cuba, Peru, and Chile. As U.S. aversion to May Day grew, and as the United States promoted its Labor Day as a “classless” holiday, International Labor Day spread and entrenched itself worldwide as an occasion to celebrate the working class and promote its liberation.

Socialist countries are the most enthusiastic celebrants of May Day or Labor Day, staging massive rallies and parades of workers and peasants. In the Soviet Union, for example, May Day was a major holiday, featuring a huge parade in Moscow’s Red Square, and Russians continue to observe the occasion after the Soviet Union’s demise. But the holiday is much more widely celebrated, even by many nations (France and Germany, for example) considered to be moderate and well integrated into the global economy. Interestingly enough, Great Britain, where one of its two major political parties is called the Labor Party, does not observe the day.

See also Volume I: AFGHANISTAN; ALBANIA; ALGERIA; ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA; ARGENTINA; ARMENIA; ARUBA; AUSTRALIA; AUSTRIA; AZERBAIJAN; BAHAMAS; BAHRAIN; BANGLADESH; BARBADOS; BELARUS; BELGIUM; BELIZE; BENIN; BERMUDA; BHUTAN; BOLIVIA; BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA; BRAZIL; BRUNEI; BULGARIA; BURKINA FASO; BURUNDI; CAMBODIA; CAMEROON; CANADA; CAPE VERDE; CAYMAN ISLANDS; CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC; CHAD; CHILE; CHINA; COLOMBIA; COMOROS; CONGO, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE; COSTA RICA; CÔTE D’IVOIRE; CROATIA; CUBA; CYPRUS; CZECH REPUBLIC; DENMARK; DJIBOUTI; DOMINICAN REPUBLIC; EAST TIMOR; ECUADOR; EGYPT; EL SALVADOR; EQUATORIAL GUINEA; ERITREA; ESTONIA; ETHIOPIA; FIJI; FINLAND;

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See also Volume II: LAOS; LATVIA; LEBANON; LESOTHO; LIBERIA; LIBYA; LIECHTENSTEIN; LITHUANIA; LUXEMBOURG; MACAU; MACEDONIA; MADAGASCAR; MALAWI; MALAYSIA; MALDIVES; MALI; MALTA; MARTINIQUE; MAURITANIA; MAURITIUS; MEXICO; MICRONESIA, FEDERATED STATES OF; MOLDOVA; MONACO; MONGOLIA; MOROCCO; MOZAMBIQUE; MYANMAR; NAMIBIA; NAURU; NEPAL; NETHERLANDS ANTILLES; NETHERLANDS; NEW ZEALAND; NICARAGUA; NIGER; NIGERIA; NORWAY; OMAN; PAKISTAN; PALAU; PANAMA; PAPUA NEW GUINEA; PARAGUAY; PERU; PHILIPPINES; POLAND; PORTUGAL; QATAR; RÉUNION; ROMANIA; RUSSIA; RWANDA; ST. KITTS AND NEVIS; ST. LUCIA; ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES; SAN MARINO; SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE; SAUDI ARABIA; SENEGAL; SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO; SEYCHELLES; SINGAPORE; SLOVAKIA; SLOVENIA; SOLOMON ISLANDS; SOMALIA; SOUTH AFRICA; SPAIN; SRI LANKA; SUDAN; SURINAME; SWAZILAND; SWEDEN; SWITZERLAND; SYRIA; TAIWAN; TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO; TURKEY; UKRAINE; UNITED KINGDOM; UNITED STATES; URUGUAY; VENEZUELA; ZAMBIA; ZIMBABWE

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∞ Lent ∞

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Christian populations
Observed on	Forty days before Easter (Sundays excluded)
Observed by	Most Christians

Fun Fact

Eastern Orthodox Churches celebrate Great Lent, which begins for them on Clean Monday.

Introduction

In Western Christianity Lent refers to the 40-day period before Easter, excluding Sundays. Eastern Orthodox Christianity calls this period “Great Lent” to differentiate it from the Advent, or Winter Lent that precedes Christmas. The German meaning of the word *lent* actually meant “spring renewal.” It particularly symbolized the lengthening of days as seen in the Saxon term for the month of March, *Lenctenmonat*. The modern Dutch word for the spring season is *lente*; the Old Saxon and Middle Dutch term is *lentin*.

Whereas Easter commemorates the Resurrection of Jesus after his Crucifixion, Lent is regarded as preparation for Holy Week (also known as Passion Week), which observes the events that led up to his Crucifixion by the Romans. Historically this took place around 29 C.E. in Roman-occupied Jerusalem, in Judea (Palestine).

Origins and History

Traditionally, the 40 days of Lent are spent abstaining from certain types of food and festivities, as well

The Color Purple during Lent

The altar in Catholic and Anglican churches during Lent is covered by a purple cloth. Traditionally, purple is regarded as a royal color and a purple cloth on the altar acts as a reminder that Jesus is king and that he was resurrected on Easter. There are no other decorations in the church.

as indulging in different forms of penance (acts of self-mortification or devotion performed voluntarily to show sorrow for sins or wrongdoing). Traditionally, people forgo something they really enjoy and/or give the money or the time they usually spend in that activity to charities or organizations. Lent is a period of sad reflection that breaks the fast on Sundays (the day of Jesus’ Resurrection). Sundays are not included while counting the 40 days of Lent. Since Lent is a season of grief that ends with the celebration of Easter, the season is referred to in Eastern Orthodox Churches with an oxymoronic phrase, “Bright Sadness.”

Though actually belonging to a ritual tradition that predated the Christian era, the Carnival celebrations that precede the Lent season in various cultures have become linked with this season of fasting because they offset the last opportunity to indulge in excess before abstinence begins. The most celebrated of the pre-Lenten Carnivals is Fat Tuesday (or, in French, Mardi Gras).

In ancient times fasting during Lent was a good deal stricter than it is today. Fish, eggs, meat, and milk products were forbidden, and there was provision for only one meal each day. Today the practice is much less strict in the West, though in Eastern churches abstinence from those food products is still practiced. Lenten practices have also come to be more frequently observed in Protestant circles than previously.

The present fasting practice of the Catholic Church covers everyone over 17 and under 60. On Good Friday and Ash Wednesday Catholics generally eat only a single full meal but may resort to two smaller meals as a means of keeping up their strength. The combination of the two small meals should be of lesser quantity than the one full meal. There are also the laws governing abstinence, which pertain to those over 12 years of age. On abstinence days Catholics must not consume poultry or meat. According to Catholic dogma Ash Wednesday and all Fridays in the



A girl prays after receiving ashes during the Ash Wednesday Mass. Ash Wednesday commemorates the start of the Lenten season with a ritual sign of one's own mortality. Lent is a period of penitence, sacrifice, and reflection that leads up to Easter and is observed by many Christian Churches. (AP Photo/Daily News, Joe Imel)

year are days of abstinence, though in many countries the rather strict abstinence law has been limited by bishops to Lenten Fridays and Ash Wednesday. On the remaining abstinence days the faithful are invited to perform acts of penance.

Christians consider fasting during Lent a way to identify with Jesus in his suffering. Jesus spent 40 days fasting in the wilderness in preparation for his ministry.

There are numerous holy days within the Lenten season. The first day of Lent is Ash Wednesday, when ashes are placed on the foreheads of the faithful. It is common among Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Episcopalians, and many Lutherans; the practice was also adopted by some Methodists and Presbyterians in the 1990s. Ash is an old symbol of mourning that can be found mentioned throughout the Bible; ash also represents the dust God used to create humans and to which

humanity must return. The fourth Sunday of the Lenten season is sometimes referred to as Laetare Sunday, predominantly, though not exclusively, by Catholics. That day was initially called Passion Sunday, but that term has been restricted officially to the last (sixth) Sunday of Lent (also Palm Sunday), which was the day Jesus entered Jerusalem as the "King of the Jews." His coming generated celebrations among his followers and the citizens of Jerusalem, but it signified a big threat to the religious leaders as well as the civil authorities reporting to Rome. Jesus' method of entry, however, was symbolic of the real purpose of his time on Earth. He entered on a donkey, indicating that he would accomplish his mission through sacrifice rather than violence. Palm Sunday marks the start of Holy Week (the week of the suffering of Jesus).

This is the last week of the Lenten season, which ends on the evening of Maundy Thursday. The day of the Last Supper that Jesus shared with his disciples is called Maundy Thursday. It was there that Jesus gave his disciples the new commandment, to "love one another" as he loved them. Good Friday is the day of Jesus' death by crucifixion.

See also Volume III: CARNIVAL; CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; MAUNDY THURSDAY; PALM SUNDAY

Fun Fact

In medieval Europe, Christians found numerous ways to make their obligatory fasting easier to bear, including "fake fish," a fish-shaped pastry stuffed with a mixture of apples, sugar, ginger, cinnamon, saffron, and gingerbread.

Fun Fact

Lent is the Old English word for "spring," the season of the year during which the observance falls, but this is true only in Germanic languages. In almost all other languages the name is derived from the Latin term *quadragesima*, or "the 40 days."

Mothering Sunday

Mothering Sunday is observed on the fourth Sunday of Lent. During the Mothering Sunday service, wildflowers like primroses and daffodils are blessed in church and then presented by children to their mothers. It is also a day for making *simnel* cakes. *Simnel* cakes derive their name from the Latin word *simila*, which refers to the flour used in the cake's preparation. Traditionally, the French and the English baked *simnel* cakes on Sundays during Lent.

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❧ Maha Shivratri ❧

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Hindu populations, especially India, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka
Observed on	Thirteenth or 14th of the dark half of Phalguna, the 12th month of the Hindu calendar
Place of Origin	New Zealand

Introduction

The Maha Shivratri Festival honors Lord Shiva (the “Auspicious One”) and the third form of God as the Destroyer. Maha Shivratri falls on the 13th or 14th day of the month of Phalguna (February–March). The name Maha Shivratri means “the great night of Shiva,” and the celebrations of this festival occur mainly at night. Devotees observe a fast during the day and keep a vigil throughout the night. The Shiva lingam (the phallic symbol of Shiva, which depicts the creative force) is worshipped all through the night by bathing it with curd, milk, rosewater, and honey, and by ceremonially chanting “Om Namah Shivaya” (“Glory be to Shiva”). Bilva (“wood apple”) leaves are offered to the lingam. The leaves are considered sacred because it is believed that the goddess Lakshmi resides in them.

Hymns in honor of Lord Shiva are sung with great passion and dedication. It is said that people who utter the name of Shiva during the festival day with real dedication and fervor are liberated from all sins. It is believed that after death they will reach the heavenly dwelling of Shiva and live in bliss. Also they are freed from the otherwise endless cycle of births and deaths. Many pilgrims gather at places where there are temples dedicated to Lord Shiva.

Origins and History

There are numerous legends and folklore regarding the origins of Maha Shivratri. According to one, during the *samudra mathana* (“churning of the ocean”) by the demons and gods, a poison came out from the ocean. The poison was so deadly that it had the power to wipe out the entire world. After being entreated by the gods to save them, out of sympathy for living beings, Shiva consumed the poison and kept it in his throat by binding it with a snake. His throat turned blue as the poison took effect; thus Lord Shiva came to be known as Nee-

lakantha (“Blue-throated”). So that he might live the gods kept Shiva awake throughout the night by entertaining him with songs and dances, and this is why devotees keep a vigil.

Another legend connects Shivratri with the Hindu trinity. Once Lord Brahma and Lord Vishnu (the two other gods of the trinity) had an argument over the extent of each other’s powers. Lord Shiva, however, challenged both of them. Shiva appeared as a blazing lingam and challenged the other two gods to measure the same. Both Lord Vishnu and Lord Brahma were unable to measure the lingam. Lord Shiva came out of the lingam and proclaimed himself the most dominant.

According to yet another legend, King Daksha fervently opposed his daughter Sati’s marriage with Lord Shiva and did not even invite them to a *yagnya* (“holy sacrifice”) that he had organized at his palace. On the day of the *yagnya* King Daksha openly insulted his daughter, who had gone there uninvited. What is more he hurled indignities on her husband (Shiva), who was not present. Unable to bear the tirades a distraught Sati jumped into the sacrificial fire and killed herself. Lord Shiva unleashed his fury and grief at the death of Sati by performing Taandav, a violent dance. He obliterated Daksha’s kingdom, observed austere penance, and left for the Himalayas. The other gods, fearing that Shiva’s penance might end the world, brought back Sati in the incarnation of Parvati. Shiva and Parvati subsequently married, and their celestial union is commemorated on Maha Shivratri.

Shivratri for Women

Shivratri is deemed particularly favorable for women. Married women pray to Lord Shiva for the welfare of their sons and husbands, while young unmarried girls pray for a model husband like Shiva, who happens to be the spouse of Parvati and the goddesses Kali and Durga.



Om Namah Shivaya

Throughout the festival day of Maha Shivratri the devotees fast and chant the holy Panchakshara mantra, “Om Namah Shivaya.” They offer flowers and incense to Lord Shiva while the temple bells ring. They keep long night vigils, listening to stories, songs, and hymns. The fast can be broken only the following morning, after a night of worship.

The legends also tell of a hunter who ventured into a thick forest while chasing a deer and found himself by the river Kolidum. There he heard a tiger’s growl. To save himself he climbed a nearby tree. Showing no intentions of leaving, the tiger waited on the ground. The hunter stayed up in the tree all night and to keep from falling asleep he plucked one leaf after the other, throwing them down. Under the tree was a Shiva lingam, and the tree was in fact a bilva tree. Thus unwittingly the man had propitiated Shiva with bilva leaves. At dawn the hunter looked down from the tree hoping to find the tiger gone. Instead he had a vision of Lord Shiva there. He prostrated himself before the deity and achieved salvation from the endless cycle of birth and death.

On the day of Maha Shivratri, a three-tiered podium is erected around a fire. The highest plank symbolizes *swargaloka* (“heaven”) the middle plank stands for *antarikshaloka* (“space”), and the bottom plank represents *bhuloka* (“Earth”). Eleven urns (*kalash*) are placed on the *swargaloka* plank representing the 11 appearances of the Rudra Shiva. These are adorned with wood apple (“bilva”) and mango leaves on top of a coconut symbolizing Shiva’s head. The shank of the coconut is not cut; that represents his hair. The three spots of the coconut symbolize his three eyes.

See also Volume I: BANGLADESH; BHUTAN; FIJI; GUYANA; INDIA

See also Volume II: MALAYSIA; MAURITIUS; NEPAL; SRI LANKA; SURINAME

See also Volume III: HINDUISM

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Children dressed up as the Hindu gods Shiva and Parvati participate in a procession on the eve of the Hindu festival of Shivratri, or night of Shiva, in Jammu, India. (AP Photo/Channi Anand)

❧ Makar Sankranti ❧

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Hindu populations, especially India, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka
Observed on	January 14
Observed by	Hindus

Introduction

The Festival of Makar Sankranti traditionally refers to the start of the Sun's northward journey, when it moves from Sagittarius to Capricorn, changing its direction from one zodiacal constellation to the next. *Sankranti* means "to move from one place to another." Every time the Sun's direction moves from one zodiac constellation to the next is a *sankranti*. There are 12 signs of the zodiac, so there

are also 12 *sankrantis* in a year. Each *sankranti* is named on the basis of where the Sun is in relation to the zodiacal signs, and each one has its own significance. However, two *sankranti* are extremely important: Mesh (Aries) Sankranti and Makar (Capricorn) Sankranti. Mesh Sankranti is important because the solar year begins when the Sun moves into the sign of Aries, the Ram, at the vernal equinox, one of the two times in a year when day and night are equal in length. (The other is the autumnal equinox on September 21.)

Makar Sankranti is the Hindu celebration of the winter solstice, the time when the days start to become longer and the nights shorter. This festival has been observed since the Aryans came to the Indian subcontinent, and it is still considered a favorable day by Hindus because it marks the end of winter. In Sanskrit the Sun's change is known as Uttarayana ("north-coming" or "northward journey").

Makar Sankranti is possibly the only Indian festival celebrated on the same day every year because, unlike other Hindu festivals, its celebration is determined by the solar calendar. The other festivals in India are scheduled according to the Hindu lunar calendar.



A Hindu woman with her young son performs cleansing rituals in the Ganges River in observance of the annual festival of Makar Sankranti. Millions of Hindu pilgrims take a holy dip in the Ganges River on the occasion of the Hindu festival of Makar Sankranti. (AP Photo/Bikas Das)

Origins and History

During Makar Sankranti the Sun appears to enter the Northern Hemisphere. The Sun in Hindu

A Rice-centric Festival

Rice and *til* ("sesame seeds"), which are harvested during this season, are two essential ingredients of this festival. In the rice-eating belts of eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, as well as West Bengal, people enjoy a large variety of rice-based dishes on this festival day.



Fun Fact

Hindus believe that Makar Sankranti is the best day on which to die because the individual who does will go straight to heaven and escape the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

mythology is Pratyaksha Brahman, the manifest, all-perceiving God who symbolizes the singular, brilliant, glorious divinity that blesses one and all constantly. The Sun transcends the parameters of time and also moves the wheel of time. The Sun not only symbolizes divinity but is also considered a personification of wisdom and knowledge. The sacred Gayatri Mantra, which is recited by Hindu devotees everyday, asks the Sun god to grant wisdom and intelligence.

The Puranas say that on this day the Sun enters the house of Shani, who is his son and the swami (“lord”) of Makar Rashi (“Capricorn”). Father and son do not actually get along, but in spite of their differences, they make it a point to meet each other on this day. It is the father who visits the son for a month. This day emphasizes the significance of the father-son relationship.

Hindus believe that it was on Makar Sankranti that Lord Vishnu put an end to the growing menace of the Asuras (“Demons”) by destroying them and burying their heads under the Mandarin Parvat (a mountain located near Bhagalpur in Bihar, India). Thus, this occasion also symbolizes the end of evil and the start of an era of virtuous living.

According to Hindu mythology, in ancient times there lived a king named Sagar. When he was about to perform the Ashwamedh Yagna (horse sacrifice), the sacrificial horse got lost. The king’s 60,000 sons traveled to many places trying to find it. They finally spotted the missing horse at the ashram dwelling of a great sage named Kapil, and they accused him of theft. The furious sage reduced the princes to ashes.

When he heard what had happened to his sons, King Sagar begged the sage for mercy. The sage, after much coaxing, said that the dead souls would be allowed to attain salvation, only if their sins were washed away by the waters of the sacred Ganga (or Ganges). Things finally began to move when Bhagirath performed penance and managed to please the gods. With Lord Shiva’s aid Bhagirath, the grandson of King Sagar, managed to bring the goddess Ganga down to Earth incarnated as the river Ganges, and his ancestors were finally redeemed.

To commemorate this mythological event, a massive Ganga Sagar Mela, or fair, is organized where the river Ganges enters the Bay of Bengal, completing its long journey from its source high in the mountains. Thousands of devotees take a dip in the waters at this spot and perform *tarpan* (a ritual offering of water symbolizing peace) for their ancestors.

In India, where the festival is a major event, kites are traditionally flown. A contest is held in which the aim is to slash the threads of and capture as many kites as possible, thereby emerging as the winner. The windy weather at this time of year is ideal for flying kites.

See also Volume I: BANGLADESH; BHUTAN; FIJI; GUYANA; INDIA

See also Volume II: MALAYSIA; MAURITIUS; NEPAL; SRI LANKA; SURINAME

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Maori

FACT FILE

Located in	New Zealand
World Population	About 500,000 (2001 est.)
Place of Origin	New Zealand

Introduction

It was only around the middle of the 14th century that the Maoris of New Zealand emerged as a distinct race. Their traditional religion was polytheistic (worshipping many gods), and the deities worshipped by the Maori are also found among other Polynesian cultures. The social organization of the Maoris was based on the belief that they had descended from “those who came in a great fleet.” Membership in the Maori tribe is, by tradition, based on a common ancestry. The significance of being able to identify one’s ancestors is reflected in the Maori worldview, which connects everything to the deeds and lives of their ancestors.

Origins and History

The Maori, which means the “original” or “local people,” believe that their ancestors reached New Zealand from islands in the central Pacific Ocean in huge, oceangoing sailing canoes, approximately 1,000 years ago. Led by great explorers and seafarers, they named the country *Aotearoa* (“Land of the Long White Cloud”). (Both the method of their arrival and the dates are now topics being debated by researchers.) Archaeological evidence suggests that the first band of Maoris initially settled in the South Island and gradually inhabited the North Island. Here the Maori developed a culture of fishing, hunting, and gathering supplemented by settled agriculture, the main crop being *kumara* (“sweet potato”), which they had brought from their former home. (The sweet potato, however, originated in Central America, not Polynesia.) Elements of their culture, including oral traditions, religious faith, and customs, *waiata* (songs), crafts, and social systems are found nowhere else in the world.

Unlike other civilizations, the Maori had no basic concept or set of beliefs as far as the creation of the universe is concerned. The great mysterious

cause of all things existing in the cosmos was, as they conceived it, the generative power. Starting with emptiness, followed by a primitive state of darkness, they conceived Po (“night”) as a person capable of begetting a race of beings resembling itself. After a succession of several generations of the race of Po, Te Ata (“morning”) was born. Afterward came Ranginui (“sky”), Papatuanuku (“Earth”), the winds, and other sky powers.

There is an interesting Maori legend about the origins of heaven and Earth: Heaven and Earth were once joined as Ranginui, the Sky Father, and Papatuanuku, the Earth Mother. They remained locked tightly together in a passionate embrace. They had many children who all lived in the dark because the togetherness of their parents effectively blocked out the Sun. When these children grew up, they discussed among themselves what it would be like to live in the light. Tu-matauenga, the fiercest of them all, said: “Let us kill our parents and then we can live always in light.” But his brother Tane Mahuta disagreed: “No, there is no need to kill them, we can just push them apart, then our Father the Sky can be above us to watch over us and our Mother can remain below to nurture us.” The other children agreed to this except for Tawhiri-matea, (the deity of storm and wind); he was sad at the prospect of his parents being parted.

The plan was put into action: Rongo-ma-tane, the god of cultivated crops and food, tried to wrench the duo apart, then Tangaroa, the god of the sea, and Haumia-tikitiki, the god of food (which grows without being cultivated), joined him. In spite of their joint efforts, Ranginui and Papatuanuku remained close together. Finally, it was the turn of Tane Mahuta, the god of forests and insects. Instead of using his hands to separate them, he lay on his back and pushed with his strong legs. Tane pushed and pushed until, with cries of grief and surprise, Ranginui and Papatuanuku were torn apart. Tawhiri-matea was overwhelmed by the anguished cries of his parents and the tears of the



Ringatu and Ratana

The Maori religious movements that have survived longer than others and managed to attract the largest membership are Ringatu and Ratana, both of which are now regarded as Maori Christian churches.

Ringatu, which means “raised hand” (a gesture of protection used during warfare), was founded by the prophet Te Kooti Rikirangi Te Turuki (c. 1830–93) after he received divine revelations. From his reading of the Bible, Te Kooti saw himself as a Hebrew-style prophet and, like Moses, he wanted to lead his followers to liberation under the guidance of Jehovah.

While this movement originated as a protest against European colonialism, its theology has greatly changed, and the Ringatu Church is now an indigenous Christian denomination.

Ratana, named after its founder, Tahupotiki Wiremu Ratana (1873–1939), combined spiritual as well as political elements in a bid to unite the people under God. The main difference between this and other Christian sects is the substitution of a quintet of Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Faithful Angels, and the Mouthpiece of God, Ratana himself, for the traditional Christian Trinity.

Sky Father at the forceful separation; therefore he created violent storms and winds and warned his siblings that, henceforth, they would have to face his wrath. He joined his father in the sky from where he still periodically punishes earthlings by creating violent storms. Legends say that Ranginui and Papatuanku continue to grieve for each other to this day. When dew drops fall, these are the tears of Ranginui; when the mist rises from forests and the sea, Papatuanku is sighing (for her consort), while the warmth of her body continues to nurture humanity.

The traditional religion of the Maoris includes gods and goddesses for different spheres of life. These include Tane (trees, birds, and insects), Rongo (peace and agriculture), Tu (war), and Tangaroa (sea and fish). Maori gods were sometimes represented by carved godsticks bound with cord. A godstick was frequently used in the ritual acts sanctifying the planting, tending, and harvesting of sweet potatoes.

The Maori practices of worshipping images or gods are similar to those found in other civilizations and cultures of the ancient world. The major deities resembled real-life mortal human beings with extraordinary qualities and powers. The concept of *tapu* (“holy” or “forbidden” or “sacred”) is the most powerful force in Maori life, and permeates the religious lives of the Maoris, although it is not as absolute as it seems to have been earlier. The two primary kinds of *tapu* were public, having to do with the entire community, or private, touching only the individual. Objects and people could become *tapu* once they came in contact with supernatural beings or aspects of the supernatural. Anything *tapu* was to be totally segregated from any vessel or place where food was kept. This law was absolutely inviolable. (*Hara* means “violation of *tapu*.”) Those who broke this law invited the displeasure of the *atua* (deities) of their family.

Everything not categorized as *tapu* was *noa*, meaning “free” or “common.” Things and persons *tapu* could be made *noa* by certain ceremonies, the object of which was to extract the *tapu* essence and restore it to its original source. Every tribe and each family had (or still has) its own especial *atua* (a medium of the local gods). Maori priests were known to have very strong *tapu*, which also gave them *mana*, power over fate. (*Mana* roughly translates as an individual’s or group’s influence, prestige, pride, and dignity.) *Mana* is a concept that merges power and sacredness. The *tobunga* (“priest”) was a specialist in art, knowledge, magic, and healing who could identify the sources of adverse events (which were due to either witchcraft or violation of a *tapu*). In his capacity as a healer, he often became an *atua* and relayed messages from these deities to the common people.

After Christianity intruded into Maori religious life, several syncretic (an attempted blending of irreconcilable principles, as in religion or philosophy) cults have arisen. Nevertheless, kinship and the concept of *tapu* remain central as forces in Maori religious life.

For the early Maori the scarcity of food sources, brought about by various environmental factors, led to a need to define greater land areas for growing crops. This led to feuds and wars, which necessitated the fortification of principal villages into *pa* (“hill forts with ditches and ramparts”). Within a *pa* was the *wharenui* (“meeting house”) and *marae* (“the courtyard” of the meeting house, which provides the forum for community life). *Wharenui*, symbols of tribal ancestors, reflect the tradition, spirit, and history of *iwi* (“tribes”) and *hapu* (“subtribes”); they are usually intricately carved with the images and figures of legendary *tupuna* (“ancestors”), spirits, and gods.

Taniwha were the Maori version of dragons (their real-life inspiration were probably the salt-

water crocodiles of the Pacific). *Taniwha* were known to range from a few feet to several hundred feet in size and vary in temperament from friendly playmates to terrible monsters. The body parts of the large *taniwha*, when dismembered, would take on their own lives as eels, fish, river plants, and lizards. No *tobunga* was ever really successful in taming a *taniwha*, and sections of rivers believed to be a *taniwha*'s hideout were either avoided or sacrificial offerings of food were sent ahead of the *waka* ("canoes") that would pass that way.

Before the arrival of the Europeans in the early 1800s, there were two distinct schools of understanding in the country. The majority of people deified, idolized, worshipped, or prayed to their dead ancestors. The other group was more aware of a supreme being or creator.

Christianity became the predominant religion of many Maoris during the 19th century; some became members of the Maori-founded Ratana or Ringatu Churches. *Karakia* ("prayers") are an important part of Maori ceremonies, including the welcoming of guests and visitors to the local *marae*. The traditional welcome involves dance, song, speeches, and a formal challenge; after it is over the *manuhiri* ("visitors") and *tangata whenua* ("host tribe") *hongi* ("greet" with traditional pressing of noses) and move in to the *whareniui*.

Maori Childbirth Rituals

In the old days, Maori women enjoyed full control over the birth process. With the help of the *Tobunga* and midwives, they controlled conception, abortion, birth, and parenting. Female attendants, appointed to care for the mother during her lying-in period after the birth, also assisted the other female relatives present during the birth; her parents and her husband were also usually present. Maori women went through labor in a squatting or standing position, often held in front by an assistant who would help with bearing down by exerting pressure on the mother's abdomen with her knees. *Karakia* to Hineteiwaiwa, goddess of childbirth, were recited to ease the birth. There was generally no interference on the part of the people around, but, in case any problems arose, the most competent *tobunga* who specialized in that particular situation was called upon to resolve the problem. The placenta was buried, and when the *pito* (umbilical cord) had fallen off the infant, it, too, was appropriately buried or planted in a rock crevice or tree. It was a *tapu* process; hence childbirth could not take place within the ordinary dwelling house. Instead, women gave birth either in the open or in a temporary shel-



A Maori warrior calls across Auckland, New Zealand's misty bay with a traditional Maori trumpet as the Sun rises. (AP Photo/David Guttenfelder)

ter that was erected for the purpose and later burnt. This was called the *whare kohanga*, the “nest house.”

Maori Marriage Rituals

By and large marriage and betrothal arrangements were carried out by elders in the family rather than the parents of the couple to be married. In some tribes young men and women were allowed to express their choices regarding spouses, and in many tribes courtship was allowed. If a woman spurned the advances of a male, he often resorted to use of white magic, known as *atabu*, to make her change her mind. Another way of convincing a potential bride that accepting the marriage proposal was a good thing was to attack her clan and capture her. Adultery in the Maori culture was always severely punished. Polygamy, however, was (and still is) common and considered a prestigious act, especially in the upper classes of Maori tribes. Divorce is also acceptable in the Maori culture.

Tangihanga: Death and Burial Rituals

In the Maori culture the mourning period lasts for three days, when the body, or *tupapaku*, is laid in the *marae*, the meeting place of the Maori people. There it will remain until burial, and it is believed that the body should never be left alone. Because the *marae* is used for both marriage and death rituals, it often happens that a wedding party will be going on while a body lies in the *marae*. The Maori have no problem with this situation, because they believe that life and death are inextricably linked. The burial place, or *urupa*, is generally located quite close to the *marae*; this makes it convenient for the

deceased individual's family members to care for the place of the burial. Plots for other members of the family are reserved within range of the dead person so that the family can be buried together, just as they were together in life. When families visit the *urupa*, it is mandatory for them to wash their hands while leaving, and there are water containers at the gates for the purpose; however, in the absence of water, people can use breadcrumbs (*rewena*) to remove the *tapu* from their hands.

See also Volume II: NEW ZEALAND

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Maundy Thursday

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Christian populations
Observed on	Thursday before Easter
Observed by	Christians

Introduction

Maundy Thursday is a Christian observance and part of the religious calendar that is variously referred to as Holy Week, Passion Week, or Great Week. This was the last week of the mortal life of Jesus. Christians believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the embodiment of the second person in a Holy Trinity comprising the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Christians also believe that Thursday was the day Jesus had his last meal with his Apostles, the “Last Supper.” The Last Supper that Jesus and his Apostles shared is thought to have been a ritual meal called a Seder, a ritual meal that is part of the Jewish feast of Passover (Pesach).

The rituals observed on Maundy Thursday are based on a sequence of events that are supposed to have occurred during this meal. First, Jesus washed the feet of his Apostles; then he announced that he had been betrayed by one of them. The traitor

Judas left the table. Finally Jesus instituted the Eucharist—a ritual of consuming bread and wine as symbols of his body and blood, also referred to as Communion in Christian Churches. In the Roman Catholic Church, Maundy Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist, the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week, and gives priests an opportunity to prepare for the many rites associated with Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter.

Fun Fact

On Maundy Thursday the bells of Catholic churches stop ringing.

Origins and History

Maundy Thursday became part of the Easter Biduum that began in the second century. The word *biduum* refers to the two days before a Christian holiday that are observed with prayers and specific services. The Easter Biduum was expanded to an

A German Maundy Thursday Soup

Gründonnerstagsuppe
(Maundy Thursday Soup)

Ingredients:

- 1/2-c. spinach leaves, fresh or frozen
- 1 c. sprouts (bean or another sweet sprout)
- 1 c. parsley
- 1/2 c. white wine or grape juice
- 1 spring onion (use green portion)
- 1 c. peeled, chopped cucumber
- 1 Tbs. butter
- 3 c. chicken or veal stock

fresh dill, chopped
salt and pepper to taste

Preparation:

Process spinach, sprouts, parsley, and wine (or grape juice) in blender until a smooth paste. Set aside. In a skillet, melt butter. Sauté the spring onion and cucumber together. Set aside. Bring the stock to a simmer. Add the paste and sautéed mixture to the stock, heating for 2 or 3 minutes. *Do not allow stock to boil.* Season with salt and pepper. Garnish with sour cream and a sprinkling of chopped fresh dill. Serve immediately



A cardinal kisses the feet of a priest during the Roman Catholic Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's supper known as the rite of the washing of the feet, in St. Peter's basilica at the Vatican. The rite evokes Jesus' washing of the apostles' feet the day before his Crucifixion, and is observed by the Catholic Church as a symbol of humility. (AP Photo/Osservatore Romano)

Easter Triduum (three days) in the fifth and sixth centuries. The Easter Triduum officially begins after the Communion at the Maundy Thursday evening service and concludes with the evening service on Easter Sunday, the day on which Jesus is believed to have risen from the dead.

Maundy Thursday has also been known as *Shere* Thursday, although its origin is uncertain. One theory suggests that, because men shaved and cut their hair in preparation for Easter day in the Middle Ages, *shere* ("pure" or "guilt-free") came to be associated

with Holy Week. *Shere* is also related to shearing, and monks used to shave their heads at this time. The day is also known as *In Coena Domini* ("upon the Lord's supper") because a papal bull listing censures of excommunication against those guilty of various offenses was read on this day in Rome.

The traditional Maundy Thursday rituals involve both mourning and celebration: Observants mourn the betrayal, abandonment, and subsequent death of Jesus but celebrate the opportunity to share with him in the Eucharist. In early Christianity the day began with a predawn service (also held on the Friday and Saturday of Holy Week) called *Tenebrae* (meaning "darkness"). This service was later shifted to the evening so that more people could attend. It consists of a collection of prayers and readings specific to the last week of Jesus' life, his suffering, and death, which are referred to collectively as the *Passion of Christ*. As the readings continue lights are gradually dimmed and candles extinguished until only one candle remains. The darkness symbolizes a world without God and the one lit candle represents Jesus, also called the "light of the world." This candle is removed from its holder and placed behind the altar, while a loud sound resembling the closing of a tomb can be heard. Worshippers leave in silence, and the candle is replaced in the holder.

The Church of the Apostles

The house where Jesus had his last meal is believed to have belonged to one of the disciples, either Nicodemus, or Joseph of Arimathea, or possibly even the mother of James and John. After Jesus' death, the house came to be known as the Church of the Apostles. It was taken care of by many religious orders, finally coming into the care of the Franciscans. They were forced to leave in 1561, and it is presently used as a mosque.

The other four rites practiced in Catholic churches on Maundy Thursday are: pedilavium, or washing of feet; the olei exorcizati, the consecration of oils (done during a special morning Mass); the exomologesis, the reconciliation of penitents (their confession and absolution), and redditi Symboli, recital of the creed by new converts prior to baptism.

The 40-day fast Christians observe during Lent is broken on Maundy Thursday. This is because, in ancient times, it was customary to bathe before receiving Communion, and fasting was considered incompatible with bathing and receiving the Holy Sacrament. But there was a problem: In Rome, people broke the fast in the morning so that they could receive Communion then, while in Africa people chose to conform to the timing of the Last Supper and receive Communion in the evening. In addition, they engaged in nighttime celebrations. Church officials frowned on the practice of a double Communion and the nocturnal revelry, and finally in 692 the Council of Trullo prohibited them. After that the Eucharist would be celebrated only in the morning.

Originally, the Communion cup was not always offered to members of the congregation. This practice drew the censure of popes Leo I (r. 440–61) and Gelasius (r. 492–96) and was reversed in the 12th century. In 1415, however, the Catholic Council of Constance once again approved the withholding of the cup.

As Christianity diversified, the Maundy Thursday practices were modified. In Catholic churches: holy oils are consecrated, including the chrism (oils consecrated by a bishop) for the baptism of new converts, and the sacrament for Communion is prepared at the special Mass held in the morning. Neophytes (new converts) are required to recite the creed from memory before being baptized. (The baptism may also take place during Mass on the Easter Vigil.) Penitents listen to the Missa pro reconciliatione and are given absolution, sometimes receiving a traditional green branch.

In Protestant churches, the service focuses on the events of the Last Supper, and there is often a biblical session later in the day when the story of the Passion is retold. Altar and other coverings are usually removed after Communion and replaced, either on Friday with black covers or with white covers before sunrise on Easter morning. Pedilavium is not necessarily observed.

In some denominations of the Eastern Orthodox Church, Holy Week begins after Easter has been observed in the Western churches and those Eastern churches affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church. In a ritual unique to the Orthodox Church, the clergy prepare the Amnos—the

Communion items to be given to the sick throughout the year—on Maundy Thursday.

See also Volume I: ANGOLA; ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA; ARGENTINA; ARMENIA; AUSTRALIA; AUSTRIA; BELARUS; BELGIUM; BELIZE; BOLIVIA; BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA; BRAZIL; BULGARIA; BURUNDI; CANADA; CAPE VERDE; CHILE; COLOMBIA; CONGO, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE; COSTA RICA; CROATIA; CYPRUS; CZECH REPUBLIC; DOMINICA; DOMINICAN REPUBLIC; ECUADOR; EL SALVADOR; EQUATORIAL GUINEA; FRANCE; GEORGIA; GERMANY; GREECE; GRENADA; GUATEMALA; HAITI; HONDURAS; HUNGARY; IRELAND; ITALY

See also Volume II: LIECHTENSTEIN; LITHUANIA; LUXEMBOURG; MACEDONIA; MALTA; MEXICO; MICRONESIA, FEDERATED STATES OF; MOLDOVA; MONACO; NEW ZEALAND; NICARAGUA; PALAU; PANAMA; PARAGUAY; PERU; PHILIPPINES; POLAND; PORTUGAL; ROMANIA; RUSSIA; RWANDA; ST. LUCIA; SAN MARINO; SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO; SEYCHELLES; SLOVAKIA; SLOVENIA; SPAIN; SWITZERLAND; TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO; UGANDA; UKRAINE; UNITED KINGDOM; URUGUAY; VATICAN CITY; VENEZUELA

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY; PENTECOST

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Fun Fact

The name Maundy Thursday may be linked to the Latin word *mandatum*, “command,” via the French *mandé*, because Jesus commanded his Apostles to observe the ritual now called the Eucharist.

Fun Fact

The color associated with Maundy Thursday—royal purple—is the color of Lent. Some churches, however, prefer red, which is symbolic of the blood of Jesus.

~ Mouloud ~

FACT FILE

Observed in	Most but not all countries with Muslim populations
Observed on	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Observed by	Muslims

Introduction

Mouloud is celebrated by most Muslims to mark the birth of Muhammad in 570. The actual date of his birth, however, is disputed. Sunni Muslims celebrate it on the 12th day of Rabbi al-Awwal, whereas the Shia Muslims celebrate it on the 17th. But this day also marks the death anniversary of Muhammad—Barah Wafat, which means “12 days before death”—referring to the 12 days of Muhammad’s illness. This dual observance causes the celebrations to be somewhat somber.

Throughout the month of Rabbi al-Awwal, and especially on this day, Muslims organize Milad-al-Nabi (“Birth of Muhammad”) functions and Mehfil-e-Milad (“gatherings”). The main purpose of these gatherings is to celebrate Muhammad’s birth and teachings, and learned men deliver ser-

mons on his life and noble teachings. Stories are told about different aspects of Muhammad’s life—his birth, childhood, youth, and adulthood.

Milad is derived from the word *mawlid*, which means “the time, date, or place of birth,” or “the celebration of an individual’s birthday,” especially that of Muhammad. A typical Mehfil-e-Milad consists of the following events:

- Recitation of the Koran
- Hamd-e-Allah Taala
- Naat-e-Rasul
- Speeches on the life of Muhammad
- Salat (darood)-o-Salam
- Dua
- Distribution of sweets or dinner

The gathering begins with recitations from the Koran. Hamd-e-Allah Taala refers to praising Allah or God, who, according to the Koran, resides in the heart of every *momīn*, or believer. Naat-e-Rasul is the way to praise Allah, using poems or rhymes. The Koran says, “Allah did confer a great favor on the believers when he sent among them an apostle from among themselves, rehearsing unto them the signs of Allah, sanctifying them, and instructing them in scripture and wisdom, while, before that, they had been in manifest error” (verse 164).

Thus Muhammad is an intrinsic part of the worship of Allah, and no one can ignore him. Remembering his teachings and his eventful life constitutes the main part of Mehfil-e-Milad. Muslims believe that if Muhammad had not come into this world, there would have been no Islam, no *namaz* (required daily prayers), no hajj, and no Ramadan. Salat (darood)-o-Salam refers to crying out to Muhammad while standing. Dua is offering prayers to Muhammad. The prayers and readings are often followed by sweets or dinner, but food is not required.

In some countries, streets and mosques are decorated for Muhammad’s birthday and illuminated at night. Muslims also donate to charity to show their



Sufi Muslims utter the name of Allah while celebrating Prophet Muhammad’s birthday outside the Tamim Ansar shrine in Kabul, Afghanistan. The birthday of the prophet Muhammad is celebrated annually throughout the Islamic world. (AP Photo/Tomas Munita)

respect for Muhammad. Families gather, large meals are arranged, and food is served to the poor as well as guests and family. Apart from these gatherings, there are other aspects of this day. One of them is a representation of Buraq, the horse on which Muhammad is believed to have ascended to heaven, which is anointed with sandalwood paste and scented powder and beautifully decorated. The essence of celebrating Muhammad's birthday is remembering the favors bestowed on one's *ummah*, or community, by Muhammad, the most important of which was the revelation of the Koran with its instructions.

Origins and History

Muhammad belonged to the Quraysh tribe, one of the richest and most powerful tribes in Mecca. He was born in 570, 53 years before the Hijrah (Hegira). Controversy about the exact date of his birth continues, but most scholars agree that he was born on a Monday. This fact is mentioned in an authentic Hadith—the narration of events in Muhammad's life—approved by Muhammad himself. Muhammad served a wealthy widow named Khadijah whom he eventually married. This union proved to be happy, and they remained together for 26 years. After Khadijah's death Muhammad took other wives.

It is said that from about 610, Muhammad began to receive divine revelations through the angel Gabriel (Jibril). After he began to spread the word of Islam he gathered a few followers around him, but the Meccans became hostile and persecuted Muhammad and his followers. To escape the violence of the Meccans Muhammad and his followers fled to the city of Medina in 622. From being the leader of a religious minority, Muhammad went on to rule Medina.

Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina is known as the Hegira and marks the beginning of the Islamic era. The religion started spreading, and more and more Arabian tribes accepted Islam as their faith and Muhammad as their leader. So powerful was Muhammad's influence that even the Meccans relented and embraced Islam in 630. In 632 Muhammad led a pilgrimage to Mecca, where he preached his farewell sermon. Soon after, he fell ill and died at the age of 63.

Not all Muslims believe that Muhammad's birthday should be celebrated or recognized in any way. It is generally believed that the celebration of Milad al-Nabi was first observed around the 13th century, but some conservative sects, such as the Wahhabi, centered in Saudi Arabia, consider the celebration to be idolatrous. Neither Muhammad nor his companions or early followers celebrated or observed his birthday. In fact, Muhammad warned his followers against mimicking other faiths, whose adherents believe their prophets are divine and, by so doing, drift away from the original teachings and values of the religion. The Sunnah does not say anything about the celebration of Muhammad's "assumed" birthday, and conservative

Sarajevo Mosque

The Ghasi Husrev Begova Madrassa in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, named after the famous Bosnian leader Ghazi Husrev-Beg (1480–1541), played an important part in the Islamic and Sufi resurgence of the late 1980s. The mosque organized a chorus that became very popular for its Mouloud (Mevlud) performances and created mass appeal for the festival in Bosnia. Beg stipulated in the registers of his Waqf trusts that 300 dirhams (about US\$34.00) be kept aside every year for Mevlud celebrations in the Sarajevo mosque that bears his name. Although heavily damaged during the Serbian attacks on Sarajevo, the mosque was renovated in 1996. Critics of the renovation observe that the rebuilt mosque is now more Wahhabist than it is Sufist.

Muslims denounce the celebration of Mouloud as an imitation of Christianity and, therefore, idolatry. Muhammad himself commanded all his people to live differently from Jews and Christians, warning them that whoever imitates them will become one of them. Those opposed to the celebration of Mouloud say that the Mehfil-e-Milad functions involve evils like mixing the sexes and using music and musical instruments.

Muslims who support celebrating Mouloud, however, disagree with this and argue that, even though Muhammad's birthday was not observed before the 13th century, celebrating it is a "good innovation." They argue that it is a perfect day to remember his life and teachings and read the Koran. So most Muslims celebrate Mouloud with great enthusiasm.

See also Volume I: ALGERIA; BENIN; BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA; BURKINA FASO; CAMEROON; CHAD; COMOROS; CÔTE D'IVOIRE; DJIBOUTI; EGYPT; ETHIOPIA; GAMBIA, THE; GUINEA; INDIA; INDONESIA; IRAQ; KUWAIT

See also Volume II: LEBANON; LIBYA; MALAYSIA; MALI; MAURITANIA; MOROCCO; NIGER; NIGERIA; OMAN; PAKISTAN; SAUDI ARABIA; SENEGAL; SIERRA LEONE; SOMALIA; SUDAN; SYRIA; TUNISIA; UNITED ARAB EMIRATES; UZBEKISTAN; YEMEN

See also Volume III: ISLAM

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Navruz

FACT FILE

Observed in	Central Asian countries, especially Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Iran, Turkey, and parts of Russia
Observed on	March 21
Observed by	General Public

Introduction

Navruz is a celebration of the spring or vernal equinox and the most treasured of all Iranian festivals. For nearly 3,000 years Navruz has been celebrated in one form or another—by Sumerians (the people who inhabited the southern parts of Mesopotamia, or modern-day Iraq), Elamites (who belonged to the ancient Elamite Empire east of Sumer and Akkad, in what is now southwestern Iran), Babylonians (who lived in the ancient Mesopotamian state of Babylon in what is now modern Iraq, combining the territories of Sumer and Akkad, and whose capital was Babylon), Akaddians (a Semitic people living on the Arabic peninsula during the period of the great Sumerian city-states), Chaldeans, and Persians. The

observance of Navruz originated in Zoroastrianism, the oldest of all monotheistic religions. Zoroastrians consider Navruz the last of the seven days of Creation. Throughout the history of the world, however, many cultures have observed the advent of the spring equinox because agriculture and a good harvest were critical to their survival. Muslims and Christians in Egypt observe this occasion on the Monday following Coptic Easter. This holiday, called Sham el Nessim, is believed to have its roots in ancient Egypt. Ancient Slavs, the Aztecs in Latin America, most Native American tribes, and the Japanese have also had celebrations related to the vernal equinox. Since antiquity, the first day of spring was celebrated by early European pagan groups, and by the American pilgrims of the early 18th century as the “common” New Year. The long-held tradition of Navruz and the number of cultures with similar celebrations indicates the importance that people attach to the end of winter and the beginning of the new agricultural year.

Sea Buckthorn: A Navruz Tradition

Common sea buckthorn (*Hippophae rhamnoides*) ranges from the Atlantic coasts of Europe to the mountainous regions of China and Russia. In Europe the plant is found along seacoasts because the salt spray discourages the growth of larger plants that would compete with it. In Central Asia, however, sea buckthorn grows equally well in semi-arid desert regions and at altitudes from 3,900 to 14,800 feet in cold climates, though it can be cultivated at lower altitudes and in temperate zones. Aside from its usefulness for controlling soil erosion, the plant is valued for its golden-orange fruit, which provides vitamins C and E, as well as flavonoid and oils rich in essential fatty acids. Although it has a bitter taste, it is a popular ingredient in jams, jellies, and preserves when mixed with sweeter juices, such as grape and apple.

Origins and History

Originating in the ancient land of Persia and long connected with the old Zoroastrian religion, Navruz means “new day” in Farsi (the language of the Persians). Originally on this day, kings would wear crowns with icons of the annual solar cycle on their heads and take part in the divine ceremony that was held in the Temple of Fire. They also made it a point to give their subjects gifts.

Notwithstanding the differences in calendars, people in antiquity closely studied the course of the Moon and the Sun and could calculate the exact day on which the season would change. As Turks and other wandering peoples ventured into Central Asia and areas around old Persia, they took up the Navruz celebration. Navruz traditions became

deeply rooted in the lives of Eurasian farmers and other people, and it survived the arrival of Islam in the area some 1,400 years ago.

This holiday continues to be widely celebrated in Muslim countries such as Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan as well as the western parts of China. It is also celebrated among the Kurds in Syria, Turkey, and Iraq, and by the Bashkirs and Tatars in the southern parts of Russia. During the late 20th century, many central Asian republics made Navruz an official holiday.

Today Navruz is celebrated each year on March 21 in the Northern Hemisphere, when the Sun enters the astrological sign of Aries. This date regularly corresponds with the spring equinox. In the Gregorian calendar, the spring equinox fluctuates between March 19 and 21.

In most countries located along the legendary Silk Road, Navruz is seen as the harbinger of nature's joyful awakening after the cold winter months and the start of planting, cultivating, and harvesting of crops. Navruz traditions are more or less similar in all parts of the region and have changed little over the ages.

Navruz is observed during the daytime, and celebrations are kept within the family. Navruz is traditionally a time to "clean up" lives. People clean their homes, wash draperies and rugs, adorn the house with flowers, and purchase new clothes. On Navruz day all housekeeping duties, including meal preparation and the cleaning of the house, should be complete before the morning star Venus appears in the sky (Venus is visible early in the morning during certain periods of the year). Children particularly look forward to Navruz because they get gifts, money, and blessings from their elders.

On Navruz people congratulate each other, saying "*Nowruz-e-tan Mubarak*" ("Happy Navruz") or "*Sal-e-Now-e-tan Mubarak*" ("Happy New Year"), shake hands, and embrace each other. The religious ceremonies begin in the morning with a "Jashan," or prayer of thanksgiving to God, and the sacred fire is lit, while sandalwood and incense are burned. Wearing the *padam* (the cloth covering the mouth and the nose to prevent contamination of the fire), the priest recites excerpts from the Avesta (the sacred book of the Parsee) while making symbolic offerings of fruit, water, and flowers.

This festival is consecrated to the seventh creation—fire—and its guardian angel is Amesha Spenta (holy immortal spirit) Asha, the personification of truth. Tokens represent all the natural elements that are cared for by Amesha Spenta: ritual implements (the sky), the vessel with the water (water), fruits and flowers (plants), milk (animals), the priests themselves (human beings), and, of course, fire.

Zoroastrian customs require that the celebratory table (also known as Haft Sheen) be displayed during Navruz. It must have seven essential items whose names begin with the letter *s* (*sheen* in Per-



Uzbek women puppeteers perform during a celebration of Navruz in the Uzbek capital of Tashkent. Navruz, known also as the Persian New Year, which comes on March 21, the vernal equinox, is observed across Central Asia and in Iran on the first day of spring as a celebration of harvest and rebirth. (AP Photo/Anvar Ilyasov)

sian). These include *seeb* (apples), which represent beauty and aesthetic appeal; *seer* (garlic), which is used to ward off ill-health; *sabzeh* (wheat sprouts), which symbolize the rebirth of nature; *sekkeh* (coins), which represent wealth; *serkeh* (vinegar),



Happy Foot

Whatever occurs during the first 13 days of Navruz is considered to be filled with omens and portents for the remainder of the year. Consequently it has become something of a tradition to end quarrels, clear debts, and put aside insults and enmity. Like some of the traditions associated with the Chinese New Year, there are Navruz customs concerning the first visitor to one's house. To guarantee good luck for the year to come, the first guest should have a "happy foot." Put simply, the visitor should be gentle, kind, pious, witty, and have a good reputation.

Navruz and Marriage

In some Central Asian nations before Navruz, young men will secretly try to empty the cattle shed of a rich man who has a daughter of marriageable age. If they succeed the owner must be generous and give his daughters' hand to one of the men. Should the young men fail, however, they must treat the owner extravagantly.



which signifies old age, maturity, and patience; *senjed* (fruit of the lotus plant), a token of love; and *sonbol* (hyacinth), which stands for general well-being. A mirror, which reflects the past and reveals the future for individuals, and painted eggs, tokens of fertility and the sprouting of life, should also be placed on the table. Because fire is sacred to Zoroastrians, and characteristic of the energy and strength of a virtuous life, there should be lighted candles, whose flames symbolize fire. The table must also have burning incense (the fumes are meant to ward off evil spirits), a bowl of rosewater, known for its magical cleansing powers, and a sacred book of scripture beside a vessel filled with water in which a live goldfish swims. The water and the fish represent a contented life full of action and development. The other items commonly present include sea buckthorn berries, sugar, wine, honey, syrup, sweets, rice, and milk. Over the celebratory table a portrait or image of Zarathustra, the founder of Zoroastrianism, must be displayed.

Around Navruz, families pay homage to their deceased relatives and pray for them. They also go

to shrines of saints and holy men and place lighted candles in niches dug in the walls in their honor. It is a common practice to visit relatives and friends for the 13 days following Navruz, plant seedlings of fruit trees, and have joyful gatherings.

During ancient times in Central Asia, the holiday was observed in agricultural oases with bazaars, horse racing, festivals, and cockfights. The Uzbeks zealously adhere to the custom of consuming the traditional dish *sumalyak*. It tastes like molasses-flavored cream of wheat and is prepared with flour and sprouted wheat grains. *Sumalyak* is cooked rather slowly on a wood fire; sometimes spices are added gradually. Sprouted grain is the symbol of life, abundance, and health.

Tajiks, who are closer to Persians than Turks in their lifestyle and habits, have a unique custom. In a Tajik home, the head of the household or the eldest son must prepare a sweet pilaf and fried shish kebab that consists of chunks of lamb or chicken grilled on a skewer. It is usually served with Persian *polo* (long-grained rice). These savory dishes symbolize the aspirations of the people who pray and hope that the rest of the year will be happy and fulfilling.

See also Volume I: AFGHANISTAN; AZERBAIJAN; IRAN; KAZAKHSTAN; KYRGYZSTAN

See also Volume II: TAJIKISTAN; TURKEY; TURKMENISTAN; UZBEKISTAN

See also Volume III: ZOROASTRIANISM

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~ Palm Sunday ~

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Christian populations
Observed on	Last Sunday of Lent
Observed by	Christians

Introduction

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of Holy Week, commemorating the last week of Jesus' mortal life. Jesus was the prophet of Christianity, and Christians believe he was the Son of God incarnate and the second personage of the Holy Trinity, which is made up of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The day is as much about Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem as it is about the beginning of his journey to the Cross. His arrival in Jerusalem was indeed the way to the Cross.

Origins and History

In Western churches (the Roman Catholic Church, Protestant Churches, and the Eastern churches affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church) Palm Sunday was originally known as the Second Sunday of the Passion, since the fifth Sunday of Lent is Passion Sunday (or the First Sunday of the Passion). The Armenian churches observe another Palm Sunday on the seventh Sunday after Easter to celebrate Jesus' Ascension into heaven. The Armenian Church is an Eastern Orthodox Church, and it follows a different schedule, one based on the Julian calendar, while Western churches follow the Gregorian calendar. There the Ascension is celebrated on the 40th day after Easter Sunday.

Jesus had already foretold his betrayal and Resurrection to his disciples on the way to Jerusalem from Judea. The day was April 10, 30 C.E., according to some calculations. They stopped at the Mount of Olives near Bethany, and Jesus sent two disciples to the village of Bethphage to bring him the donkey and its foal tied at the crossway of two roads. They did so and placed their clothes on the foal to provide a comfortable seat. The disciples then cut branches to cover the path Jesus took, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the words of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. People wel-

comed him by waving palm and olive branches, and strewing garments and branches on the road. There were different perceptions at work: Jesus rode in on a donkey, a humble entry of a peaceful nature for a spiritual king; but the people of Jerusalem welcomed him with palm and olive branches and the laying of garments in his path, because they wanted a worldly king to defeat the Romans.

Palm Sunday was first celebrated in Jerusalem, and the practice spread to Egypt, Syria, and Asia Minor, reaching Constantinople in the fifth century.



A man shares a moment with his granddaughter during the traditional Palm Sunday Mass in Caracas, Venezuela. Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week, leading up to Good Friday, which for Christians recalls the Crucifixion of Jesus, and Easter Sunday, celebrating the Resurrection. (AP Photo/Fernando Llano)

Fun Fact

Popularly the day was also called Willow Sunday (Verbna Nedilja) because pussy willows were blessed in Europe instead of palms. It is also known as Flower Sunday (Cvitna Nedilja), since in and near Constantinople the churches used to distribute early spring flowers, such as branches of lilac or elder, to the faithful.

The emperor took part in the Palm Sunday procession and gave palm and lilac branches to his nobles and staff. The processions were accompanied by the singing of the *stycheras*, hymns composed by Saints Andrew of Crete, John Damascene, Theodore Studite, and Joseph. Gradually, the holiday reached the West and received its present name Palm Sunday.

The day was observed in the Holy Land as early as the fourth century, as is evident from the “Peregrinato Artheriae” (“Pilgrimage of Aetheria”), the nun Aetheria’s letter recording her pilgrimage to the Holy Land during Holy Week celebra-

tions. Church services originally took place in the evening at 5 P.M. but were shifted to the morning in the sixth and seventh centuries.

The reconciliation of sinners was restricted to Holy Saturday in the first few centuries of the church but was later administered on Palm Sunday and Maundy Thursday as well. New converts were baptized on Easter but began preparing on the Sunday before. People washed and shaved their hair—this practice was known as *capitalavium* (“shampoo”)—as a prerequisite to baptism. All these customs were observed with great piety, particularly in Spain, Gaul (France), and Milan (Italy).

In Jerusalem, the whole day was spent in observance of rites: Worshippers would assemble at the Martyrion Church (behind the Cross at Golgotha). After the service, all would proceed at 1 P.M. to the Mount of Olives, to the cave where Jesus taught.

After two hours of prayers and hymns, the worshippers went to Imbomon (the place of Jesus’ Ascension to heaven). There they would gather for readings from the Bible. The passage about the children of Jerusalem carrying palm and olive branches and greeting Jesus with the words, “Blessed is He that Cometh in the Name of the Lord,” was the signal for all to begin the journey back to Jerusalem, repeating the words all the while. The children would carry palm or olive branches. Vespers (evening prayers) at the Anastasis (the Church of the Resurrection) and prayers at the Church of the Holy Cross were the finale of Palm Sunday observances.

The blessing of the palms was not originally part of Palm Sunday observances. The ritual originated in Jerusalem, and in 397 Peter, Bishop of Edessa, ordered the benediction of palms in all Mesopotamian churches. It was not until the eighth and ninth centuries that it became a widely observed practice in Roman churches.

In the Middle Ages, people assembled at the cross in the churchyard and would then proceed into church carrying palm branches to be blessed. Their path through the churchyard would be strewn with flowers and branches of willow and yew trees. In Germany and France, the gathering would decorate the cross in the churchyard with flowers and green branches and carry it into the church. This cross was known as the Palm Cross. Another popular custom was to carry a wooden figure of Jesus riding a donkey in a Palm Sunday procession, which often entered the church itself. Such pieces can be seen at the Museums of Zurich, Munich, Basel, and Nurnberg. Occasionally the Blessed Sacrament (in a covered box), uncovered crucifixes, or holy books would be carried in the procession. Whatever the practice, the blessing of the palms and the entry into church was followed by the Mass

Palm Sunday by Any Other Name

The Lenten observance that English speakers call Palm Sunday has many other names, depending on the country in which it is celebrated. In Greece, for example, it is known as Kyriake, Heorte ton baion, or Lazarus Sunday. In Latin liturgical books written to instruct the priesthood, it is called *Dominica in Palmis* or *Dies Palmarum*. Because every Christian celebration is a remembrance of Easter, Palm Sunday becomes *Pascha floridum* in Latin, *Paques fleuries* in French, *Pascua florida* in Spanish, and *Flower Sunday* in England.

Other names used among English speakers include *Olive or Branch Sunday*, *Sunday of the Willow Boughs*, and *Fig Sunday*. In German Palm Sunday is referred to as *Blumensonntag* or *Blumentag*, and in Welsh, it is called *Sul y Blodau*. Because the reconciliation of sinners came to be conferred on Palm Sunday, the Roman Catholic Church also calls it *Dominica indulgentioe*. In 1985 after meeting with 250,000 young people in Rome on Palm Sunday, Pope John Paul II announced in his annual Easter message his wish that the experience be repeated every year. On Palm Sunday in 1986 the first official World Youth Day was celebrated.



and the singing of the Passion. The hymn “Gloria Laus” was always sung before Mass; it is believed to have been composed by Theodolphus of Orleans (d. 821) around 810.

Palm Sunday is one of the 12 major festivals of the Byzantine Church, where it is also known as Vaj Sunday. In the sixth and seventh centuries there were morning processions, and the palms were blessed after readings from the Gospels. The two prayers used to bless palms in the Byzantine Rite church are most probably the original prayers for the occasion because they are found in the oldest book of rituals, the *Euchologion of Barberini* dating from the ninth century. The first of these two prayers focuses on Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, and the second is about the olive branch brought to Noah by a dove after the great flood. That branch symbolized peace and God’s protection, and the prayer calls for God’s peace for the households that will keep the palms respectfully. Holy water is sprinkled on the palms, after which they are distributed among the faithful. Present-day prayers speak of branches in general (palm branches are the only ones mentioned by name), but in the 10th century palm, olive, myrtle, and laurel branches were all mentioned by name, along with seasonal flowers.

In Lower Bavaria boys would roam the streets singing hymns or carols, particularly the “Pueri Hebraeorum.” The boys were soon named the Pueribuben. In the regions of the Lower Rhine, the blessed branches were placed on graves, but in most other regions these were stored safely, and burned to provide ash for the next year’s Ash Wednesday rite.

Palms are an ancient symbol of peace and victory, and their symbolism probably originated in the Jewish custom of carrying palm branches on special occasions. The word for date palms, *loinix*, was easily conflated with the phoenix, the bird that rose from its ashes time and again, and palms became a symbol of resurrection and even immortality. Christian martyrs are usually depicted holding palm branches, and ancient art has Jesus in a heaven verdant with palms.

In a world increasingly concerned about ecological balance, the use of palm fronds has raised concerns about the viability of their continued use in Palm Sunday observances worldwide. The

demand can often exceed a million fronds in a single country where Palm Sunday is observed, and worldwide the figure is staggering. Sustainable cultivation is clearly the only means to a continued supply and a healthy environment, and the identification of such cultivators and suppliers has become a necessity. Collecting palm fronds is an important means of livelihood in some countries. In Guatemala, for instance, over 25 percent of the population relies on this for a living.

See also Volume I: ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA; ARGENTINA; ARMENIA; AUSTRALIA; AUSTRIA; BELARUS; BELGIUM; BELIZE; BOLIVIA; BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA; BRAZIL; BULGARIA; BURUNDI; CANADA; CAPE VERDE; CHILE; COLOMBIA; CONGO; DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE; COSTA RICA; CROATIA; CYPRUS; CZECH REPUBLIC; DOMINICA; DOMINICAN REPUBLIC; ECUADOR; EL SALVADOR; EQUATORIAL GUINEA; FRANCE; GEORGIA; GERMANY; GREECE; GRENADA; GUATEMALA; HAITI; HONDURAS; HUNGARY; IRELAND; ITALY; KIRIBATI

See also Volume II: LIECHTENSTEIN; LITHUANIA; LUXEMBOURG; MACEDONIA; MEXICO; MICRONESIA, FEDERATED STATES OF; MOLDOVA; MONACO; NEW ZEALAND; NICARAGUA; PANAMA; PARAGUAY; PERU; PHILIPPINES; POLAND; PORTUGAL; ROMANIA; RUSSIA; RWANDA; ST. LUCIA; SLOVAKIA; SLOVENIA; SPAIN; SWITZERLAND; TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO; UGANDA; UKRAINE; UNITED KINGDOM; URUGUAY; VATICAN CITY; VENEZUELA

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; MAUNDY THURSDAY

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~ Pentecost ~

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Christian populations
Observed on	Fiftieth day after Easter
Observed by	Christians

Introduction

Pentecost is the Christian holiday that observes the descent of the Holy Spirit (of the Christian Trinity—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) upon Jesus’ Apostles and the early Christians about 50 days (seven weeks) after Easter and 10 days following Ascension Thursday (the day Christians believe Jesus rose into heaven). Pentecost is derived from the Greek word *pentekoste*, which means “fiftieth,” and actually referred to the Jewish festival of Shavuot, observed on the 50th day after Passover (Pesach). This Hebrew festival celebrated the first fruits of the harvest reaped in spring; but the festival assumed a new significance after the incident involving the Holy Spirit.

Some Christians regard this event as the beginning of the Christian Church and the starting point in the spread of Christianity. Christian Pentecostal churches are so named because they emphasize the Holy Spirit within each individual.

In England this festival is known as Whitsun because of the traditional white robes worn by those who have been baptized the previous Easter. The week starting on Whitsunday (particularly the first three days) is referred to as Whitsuntide or Whit Week. In Old English it was called Hwita Sunnandæg.

Whitsuntide in Old England

Whitsuntide (the week starting from Pentecost) was the period for May games, primarily for the youth who, after the traditional dance around the maypole, would test their skills and strength in archery and wrestling contests. There were other games, including foot races, mimicking and caricature, and climbing a greased pole, to name but a few.

Origins and History

Pentecost is a joyful festival. Among the symbols of the festival are wind and flames. These refer to the fact that the Spirit’s arrival in a room in which the Apostles were gathered was marked by strong gusts of wind and quivering tongues of fire. Those present at the spot unconsciously began speaking in different languages (evidently stirred by the Holy Spirit). Onlookers felt as if they were intoxicated, but Peter (Jesus’ first Apostle) explained to them that they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Imbued with the Holy Spirit, the Apostles took it upon themselves to spread Jesus’ teachings far and wide.

The Feast of Pentecost has also been represented for almost two millennia by the figure of a dove (representing the Holy Spirit) hovering in the air. Church services re-create the moment of the Holy Spirit, through a round window, called Heiliggeistloch, in the church’s center. During the ceremony of *veni creator spiritus* (“inviting the Holy Spirit”), a fake dove, tied to a golden wheel, is lowered through the hole and is brought down on a slowly rotating wheel until it is hovering just above the heads of the praying assembly.

In many churches ministers wear red robes to symbolize the flames in which the Holy Spirit descended to Earth. The hymns sung at Pentecost services have the Holy Spirit as the main theme. However, Pentecost has been observed in many different ways around the world.

In Italy, for instance, it was a custom to shower rose petals from church ceilings to remember the miracle of the tongues of fire; therefore in Sicily and some other places in Italy, Whitsunday is referred to as Pascha rosatum. The Italian name, Pascha rosatum or Pascha rossa, is derived from the red colors of the vestments of Pentecost. In France it used to be a tradition to blow trumpets during the service to symbolize the wind that accompanied the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost is also a holiday in Austria, Germany, Switzerland, and various Scandinavian countries. There are many local customs and traditions attached to this day. For most pastoral regions in Europe, for example, Pentecost was the day to take the livestock out to pasture for the first time in the year. The first or the final animal would be decorated with a garland of flowers and was called the Pfingstochse or “the Whitsunday Ox.” In Tyrol (Austria), young men of the village, or *Goalschnalzer* would use their whips in an exhibition of strength and skill, all done in a particular rhythm, without tangling the whips.

In Silesia (a region in Central Europe, bordered by Poland, Germany, and the Czech Republic), the spring maypole was not put up until the day of Pentecost. As the greenery was brought in from wooded areas to decorate buildings and streets, a creature from the woods, dressed in the most fantastic fashion (usually it would be a young man, with green branches and reeds covering his body and tree bark covering his face) was brought into the village amidst much jubilation and fanfare. Once in the village, the creature would be customarily cleansed. It was also customary to guess the identity of the person in disguise. In southern Germany this individual is called *Pfingstl*; in Thuringia province he is known as the “wild man.” The water, the green leaves, and flowers in this tradition symbolize renewal and fruitfulness, the gifts of spring.

In Thuringia, young girls enjoyed the day with a game known as *Topfschlagen*, or “strike the pot.” A girl with her eyes covered had to locate and hit a pot



Patriarch Maxim, left, the head of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church holds walnut leaves as he leaves St. Alexander Nevsky Church in Sofia, after a solemn liturgy marking the Orthodox Pentecost (Descent of the Holy Spirit). (AP Photo/Srdjan Ilic)

Stilton Cheese Rolling, Stilton, and Cambridgeshire

During the annual Whitmonday Fair, teams divided into four and wearing strange costumes roll cheese along a 50-yard course. Kicking or throwing the cheese is prohibited. The winner's prize is a whole 16-pound Stilton cheese and port, the wine traditionally drunk with this pungent cheese. In Ide Hill, Kent, women run after a lump of cheese thrown down the undulating village green.

(turned upside down) with a long-handled wooden spoon or stick. The prize was a *pfingsthabn* (a rooster). This game, now popular in Germany, is no longer restricted to Pentecost. It is enjoyed by children, and a small gift such as candy is generally kept under the pot.

See also Volume I: ANDORRA; ANGOLA; ARGENTINA; AUSTRALIA; AUSTRIA; BELGIUM; BELIZE; BOLIVIA; BRAZIL; BURUNDI; CANADA; CAPE VERDE; CHILE; COLOMBIA; CONGO, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE; COSTA RICA; CROATIA; CZECH REPUBLIC; DOMINICA; DOMINICAN REPUBLIC; ECUADOR; EL SALVADOR; EQUATORIAL GUINEA; FRANCE; GERMANY; GRENADA; GUATEMALA; HAITI; HONDURAS; HUNGARY; IRELAND; ITALY; KIRIBATI

See also Volume II: LIECHTENSTEIN; LITHUANIA; LUXEMBOURG; MALTA; MEXICO; MICRONESIA, FEDERATED STATES OF; MONACO; NICARAGUA; PALAU; PANAMA; PARAGUAY; PERU; PHILIPPINES; POLAND; PORTUGAL; RWANDA; ST. LUCIA; SAN MARINO; SEYCHELLES; SLOVAKIA; SLOVENIA; SPAIN; SWITZERLAND; TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO; UGANDA; URUGUAY; UNITED KINGDOM; UNITED STATES; VATICAN CITY; VENEZUELA

See also Volume III: CHRISTIANITY; EASTER; GOOD FRIDAY; HOLY SATURDAY; HOLY WEEK; LENT; PALM SUNDAY

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~ Pesach ~

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Jewish populations
Observed on	Begins on the 15th of Nisan, the first month in the Jewish calendar, and continues for eight days
Observed by	Jews

Introduction

Pesach, or Passover, commemorates the departure of the nation of Israel from Egypt and the origin of a Jewish state led by Moses (or Moshe) about 3,000 years ago. Pesach signifies both the physical as well as the spiritual freedom earned by the Jews. The tale of the Jews' mass exodus is told in Chapters 1–15 of the book of Exodus in the Bible. Many of the Pesach customs are provided in Chapters 12–15. Though it is mainly celebrated to remember the exodus of the Jews from Egypt after centuries of slavery, the festival also marks the beginning of the harvest season in Israel.

The name Pesach is derived from the Hebrew *peh-samech-chet*, which means “to pass over,” “pass through,” “exempt,” or “spare.” Jews believe that God, while slaying the firstborn children in Egypt during the plague, spared their houses. Jews consider the removal of *chametz* from their homes as the most important aspect of Pesach. *Chametz* refers to leavened bread, and this act recalls that, during the exodus, the Jews were in such a hurry to leave Egypt that they did not have time to let their bread rise.

Thus, they ate unleavened or flat bread. It is also symbolic of the removal of egotism and pride, or “puffiness,” from our souls.

Chametz is any food that is made of grains like wheat, barley, oats, rye, and spelt (a subspecies of common wheat, a hardy wheat grown mostly in Europe for livestock feed) that has not been completely cooked within 18 minutes of being mixed with water, or food that has been allowed to rise or become fermented with yeast. This includes food items like bread, cake, cereals, cookies, pizza, pasta, and beer. Jews believe that any food that contains grain or its derivatives can be called *chametz*.

Jews eat matzo (or matzah) during Passover. This is an unleavened bread symbolic of the strong faith that enabled them to gain their freedom. Matzo is the very essence of the exodus, the main ingredient of seder rituals, and an inseparable component of Passover, or the Festival of Matzah, as it is called in the Torah. It is believed that, by eating matzo, one can get rid of the egotism that emanates from eating *chametz*.

Mah Nishtanah

It is said that, in obedience to the biblical injunction, “And thou shalt tell thy son,” children are an important part of the seder celebration. It is the youngest member who asks the four questions, or Mah Nishtanah. These read as follows:

- Why do we eat only matzo during Pesach?
- Why do we eat bitter herbs, maror, at our seder?
- Why do we dip our foods twice tonight?
- Why do we lean on a pillow tonight?

Origins and History

The Jewish people were originally known as Hebrews or Israelites. Generally the term Hebrew refers to someone who has passed to the other side, but in the rabbinic sense it refers to the first Hebrew patriarch Abraham. The term Israelites and the phrase Children of Israel collectively refer to the descendants of Jacob, who was the third Hebrew patriarch and was also known as Israel. The word Jew is derived from the region of Judea, which today lies in southern Israel. Judea, in turn, is derived from the name of the tribe of Judah, named after one of Jacob's 12 sons.

Pesach celebrates the mass departure and subsequent freedom of the Jews from Egypt almost 3,300 years ago to escape from centuries of

Keeping Kosher

Kosher food is food prepared in accordance with Jewish dietary guidelines or *kashruth*, which means “proper.” Almost any food can be called kosher if it follows the proper guidelines. According to the Torah cloven-hoofed, cud-chewing mammals are kosher. Deer, sheep, and goats are all considered kosher meats. Only certain birds are considered kosher, however. These include chicken, duck, goose, and turkey (in the United States). Fish and meat cannot be served together, nor can milk and meat. For a fish to be kosher, it must have fins and easily removable scales. In most cases, scales must still be on the fish when it is bought.

If it is to be considered kosher, food must be prepared with kosher equipment. For example, a fishmonger’s cutting implements and machines must be kosher. Poultry and meat must be slaughtered under strict guidelines called *shechita*; that is, the animals must be killed without pain. The lungs, in particular, must be pure. In addition, all blood and most fat must be removed. Only those who are trained and qualified are allowed to slaughter kosher animals.

Families must use two separate sets of utensils, pots, pans, and dishes. One set is reserved for poultry or meat, and the other is used for everything else. In addition these dishes and utensils cannot be washed together. Dishes and utensils must be dried using separate racks or dishtowels.

bondage. It is said that the Hebrews entered Egypt as a group of tribes and left as one nation. The exodus population has been estimated at 600,000 men above the age of 20; their wives and children constituted the rest of the three million people.

This story was told in the first 15 chapters of the biblical book of Exodus. According to this account, Jacob, with his 70 family members, traveled to Egypt to live a better life and escape a massive famine in Canaan (today’s Palestine). Jacob’s son Joseph also lived in Egypt, where he had won the heart of the pharaoh of Egypt with his wisdom and had been appointed the viceroy of the kingdom. Over the next 430 years the Hebrews prospered in Egypt, and their strength increased to three million. Their growing numbers and power became a cause of worry for pharaoh, who thought that the Hebrews might side with his enemies to dethrone him. So he commanded that the Hebrews should work as slaves, engaged in building roads and cities for him. He thought that this hardship would make the Hebrews so exhausted at the end of the day that they would have no time or energy to beget children. The Israelites were also confined to an area known as Goshen (the fertile land lying east of the Nile Delta and west of the Palestinian border).

When even this step did not help to slow the population growth of the Israelites, pharaoh ordered that all Israeli male babies be killed at birth. However, the Hebrew midwives Shifra and Puah, who were appointed by pharaoh to kill the male babies, feared the wrath of God and did not follow pharaoh’s orders. Moses, who would become the leader of the Hebrews, was born around the time when this decree was issued. To save her son from being murdered, Moses’ mother Jochebed placed

the infant in a basket in the Nile as Moses’ sister Miriam watched from a distance to see who would spot the child. The infant was ultimately found by pharaoh’s daughter, who decided to raise him like any other royal child. She named the child Moses and also unknowingly appointed Jochebed as his



A father helps his seven-year-old son recite from the Haggadah, a special Pesach text recounting the Jews’ exodus from Egypt and explaining the holiday’s rituals, during a seder in Queens, New York. (AP Photo/Stuart Ramson)

Charoset Recipe

Ingredients:

- 4 medium apples, 2 tart and 2 sweet
- 1/2 c. almonds, finely chopped
- 1/4 c. sweet wine
- 1/4 c. dry wine
- 1 Tbs. cinnamon

Preparation:

Shred the apples and mix with all the remaining ingredients. Leave it for three to six hours, until the wine is absorbed by the other ingredients. Serve on matzo.

nurse. Thus, Moses' real mother was able to make certain he knew his Hebrew heritage.

Once on a visit to his fellow Israelites, Moses saw a Hebrew slave being mercilessly flogged by his Egyptian master. Infuriated, Moses killed the Egyptian. However, fearing prosecution from the Egyptian authorities, Moses fled Egypt. He took the desert route and finally reached Midian, an area situated in present-day Saudi Arabia along the eastern shores of the Red Sea. There he met a local priest named Jethro and married his daughter Zipporah. Moses lived in Midian for the next few years as a shepherd.

Sometime later Moses had a vision from God (the incident of the burning bush), who told him that he and his brother Aaron were the chosen ones to lead the Hebrews out of

Egypt into the Promised Land. Hesitating initially, Moses and Aaron eventually returned to Egypt.

Finally during the reign of Pharaoh Thutmose III (1500–1426) in 1476, Moses, under the guidance of God, led his people out of Egypt after God had sent a series of 10 plagues. These plagues were meant to warn pharaoh that if he did not let the Hebrews go then various diseases would kill the Egyptians. But, for the first two plagues the court magicians devised antidotes so the plagues could not harm the Egyptians. This made pharaoh consider himself greater than God. However, his magicians

failed to work their magic on the third plague. But the smug pharaoh still did not change his mind about letting the Hebrews go. On being reminded by Moses after each plague about the imminent devastation of the Egyptians, pharaoh would agree to let them go but would again take back his word. It was only after the 10th plague (and losing his own son) that pharaoh finally agreed to let the Hebrews go.

Since the Hebrews left in haste, they had no time to bake their daily bread in the usual way for their trip to Canaan; therefore, they baked unleavened bread called matzo. By the time the Hebrews reached the shores of the Red Sea, pharaoh changed his mind again and sent the Egyptian army to bring them back. When the Hebrews saw pharaoh's army approaching, they panicked. God then commanded Moses to use his staff to strike the waters, which then parted, making a path for the Hebrews to pass through. When all the Hebrews had left the water, God commanded Moses to touch the sea with his staff again. This done, the waters closed again, drowning the pursuing Egyptian army.

It took the Hebrews 42 days to reach Mount Sinai, where Moses received the Ten Commandments from God. This event is celebrated by the Jews as Shavuot or Feast of Weeks, referring to the timing of the festival, which occurs exactly seven weeks after Passover. The Hebrews wandered for 40 years before they finally reached the land of Canaan, the "Promised Land."

See also Volume I: ISRAEL

See also Volume II: UNITED STATES

See also Volume III: JUDAISM; SPRING FESTIVALS

Fun Fact

At a seder, participants are supposed to lean on pillows or recline in their chairs. In the ancient world reclining while eating was a sign of freedom.

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~ Purim ~

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Jewish populations
Observed on	Fourteenth of Adar, the 12th month of the Jewish calendar
Observed by	Jews

Introduction

The Jewish festival of Purim commemorates the deliverance of Persian Jews from the cruel schemes and plotting of the evil Persian noble Haman (sixth century B.C.E.), who wished to exterminate them. It is a joyous festival marked with singing, dancing, feasting, and dressing in costumes. The story behind this festival is written in the Megillah, a scroll that recounts the biblical story of Esther, the Persian king's brave Jewish queen. The word *purim* means "lots" and is a reference to a lottery that Haman used to select the date on which to kill all the Jews.

The 13th day of Adar was chosen by Haman for the massacre of the Jews. This was a crucial day for the Jewish community, because it was a matter of life and death for them. In cities that were walled during the reign of Joshua, Purim is celebrated on the 15th of the month because, according to the book of Esther, in Shushan (an ancient city of the

Elamite, Persian, and Parthian Empires of Iran and today called Shush), the fierce encounters between the Jews and Haman's forces ended on the 14th of Adar. Hence, the celebration of Purim on the 15th day is known as Shushan Purim. As with almost all Jewish festivals, Purim starts at sundown on the previous day

Esther made sure that Haman and his 10 sons were hanged on the gallows he had built to hang Mordechai and all the Jews.

Fun Fact

A special noise-maker called a *grogger* is used on Purim to show scorn for Haman

Origins and History

The festival of Purim is the celebration of Jewish deliverance from extermination as recounted in the book of Esther, which dates back to the third or fourth century B.C.E. Though these dates are sometimes disputed, they are largely accepted by modern scholars.

Amalek

Amalek was supposedly the grandson of Esau (Amalek is only known from the Bible). The names Amalek and Amalekite are used interchangeably; both refer to a people rather than an individual. Each of their kings was called Agag, a hereditary name. The Amalekites and the Hebrews were bitter enemies. The Amaleks were nomads who, like all groups living marginally, threatened the well-being and political stability of the people living inside the borders. If they actually existed they were probably exterminated by the time of King

David. By the time of the rabbis in the first century C.E., Amalek had come to represent pure evil. The struggle between Israel and Amalek, therefore, was a struggle between good and evil.

In the book of Esther, the vile Haman is called the Agagite, which is interpreted as accusing him of being a descendant of the Amalek king Agag, which may sound to modern ears like name-calling. The reference might also be metaphorical, not literal. Indeed, the reference to Amalek has been used symbolically to refer to enemies of Judaism throughout history, for example, Hitler and the Nazis.

Fun Fact

The phrase to “hang higher than Haman” is used of someone who has committed an act so evil that he or she is going to be punished in a terrible manner.

During the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon (605–562), the Jews belonging to the kingdom of Judah were forced to leave their land and deported to Babylon. This epoch of Jewish history is known as the Babylonian Captivity or Babylonian Exile. Nebuchadnezzar II is known to have conquered Judah and Jerusalem; he also destroyed the First Temple of Jerusalem. Eventually the Persians took over the kingdom of Babylon.

According to the book of Esther, King Ahasuerus was the ruler of Persia at that time (this was probably a reference to Xerxes I, r. 485–65.) The other central characters in this tale of intrigue and reversal of fortune are: Esther, Ahasuerus’s beautiful Jewish queen; her cousin Mordechai, who raised her; and the king’s scheming Persian advisor Haman. King Ahasuerus did not know that Esther was a Jew; Mordechai had told her to conceal this fact. Haman hated Mordechai because Mordechai had refused to bow down to him, so Haman convinced the king to let him to decide the fate of the Jewish people. When he plotted to massacre them Mordechai asked Esther to beg the king to spare the Jewish people. In those times no one could approach the king unless summoned by him and risked death if they did so without permission. Esther fasted

for three days and then visited the king, who welcomed her. She told the king about Haman’s plans to exterminate the Jews and pleaded with him to save them. As a result the king withdrew the decree against the Jews, Haman was sentenced to death on the gallows, and the Jews became the king’s favored people.

Esther’s brave act prevented the massacre of the Jewish people, so this event is celebrated by Jews all over the world.

While some scholars believe the book of Esther to be a historical work, many others dismiss it as fiction. The criticism stems from the fact that there are descriptions given in the book of Esther that contradict the accounts of Persian history recorded by Greek historians. For example, King Ahasuerus has been identified with different Persian rulers, and there are conflicting views about his identity.

Fun Fact

Pastries called *hamantaschen* are traditionally eaten on Purim.

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Young Israelis dance in the street in the Tel Aviv suburb of Holon during the annual Purim parade. The Jewish holiday of Purim commemorates the rescue of the Jews from genocide in Persia. (AP Photo/Pier Paolo Cito)

❧ Ramadan ❧

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Muslim populations
Observed on	Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar
Observed by	Muslims

Introduction

Ramadan, the most sacred month of the year for more than one billion Muslims, is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Muslims believe that Allah began to reveal the Koran (their sacred book) to Muhammad on the 27th day of Ramadan many centuries ago. This process continued for 23 years, until Muhammad's death in 632 C.E. The much awaited commencement of the month is based on sightings of the new Moon as well as astronomical calculations. Ramadan is frequently used as a synonym for Sawm, the sacred fasting festival that runs throughout the month.

During Ramadan Muslims observe a stringent, dawn-to-dusk fast. The consumption of food and water during the day is strictly forbidden. This period is a time for introspection, devotion to God, and self-control. Muslims consider it as a necessary period for revitalizing their spiritual lives.

Fasting did not originate with Islam; it is perhaps as old as Adam, who was the first Muslim to submit to Allah. It is not quite clear when fasting began among Adam's descendants, but all the prophets practiced it and considered it to be a good discipline for others.

The Koran mentions that Musa (Moses) fasted for 40 days; Dawud (David, the legendary king of Israel) used to fast for half of the year (fasting every other day); Issa (Jesus) was also known to have fasted for 40 days (during what is now called Lent, usually observed before Easter by Christian churches). Modern-day Muslims firmly believe that Allah intends to draw the attention of ordinary mortals to the deeds and practices of those noble souls who attained piety through fasting.

The third religious obligation, or pillar, of Islam's Five Pillars, fasting has many other benefits. Among these, the most important is that it is a means of learning self-restraint. Because fasting draws attention away from satisfying bodily

appetites during the daylight hours, one's spiritual nature achieves a measure of ascendancy, bringing one closer to God. Ramadan is thus a time of intense worship, reading of the Koran, practicing charity, purifying one's behavior, and performing good deeds.

As a secondary goal, fasting is a way of experiencing hunger and developing empathy with the less fortunate (who often are underfed and may even starve), in addition to expressing gratitude and appreciation for all of God's gifts. From a medical point of view, fasting is also beneficial to health and provides a suitable break in the cycle of overindulgence.

Throughout the Islamic world all restaurants are closed during the day during Ramadan. Families



Indonesian Muslim girls read the Koran, the Muslim holy book, on the second day of Ramadan at a mosque in Jakarta, Indonesia. Ramadan, a month-long period of fasting and purification, celebrates God's revelation of the Koran to the prophet Muhammad. During Ramadan Muslims are forbidden to eat, drink, smoke, or have sexual relations during daylight hours. (AP Photo/Dita Alangkara)

Suhoor and Iftar

Suhoor is a small meal usually eaten before sunrise during the month of Ramadan; it is the last meal before the commencement of the fast. *Iftar* is a meal offered at the end of each day during Ramadan to break the fast. It literally means “breakfast.”

usually wake up early for the *suhoor*, a predawn meal. After sunset, the fast is broken by a small meal known as the *iftar* (which generally comprises dates and beverages that boost energy quickly). Evening prayers and dinner follow. Since Ramadan stresses communal harmony (with everyone dining at almost the same time), it is a common practice among Muslims to invite others to share the evening meal, giving rise to *iftar* parties.

Origins and History

Muhammad, though only an illiterate trader from Arabia, was unlike other people of his time. He had a reflective bent of mind and routinely spent his nights in a cave (near Mecca, his home), in meditation and introspection. Around the year 610 on the 27th of Ramadan, while meditating, Muhammad had a vision of the archangel Gabriel (Jibril) and heard a voice saying to him: “Read in the name of your Lord the Creator. He created man from something which clings.” Gabriel went on to tell Muhammad that he had been chosen to receive the word of Allah. In subsequent days Muhammad uttered the first verses that would be recorded as the Koran. (In Arabic, Quran, from *quran* meaning “to read” or “to utter.”)

What is now a compulsory annual event to be observed by all able-bodied Muslims started in the early years of Muhammad’s stay in Medina. Prior to his flight to Medina, he was in the habit of fasting three times a month, and he ordered his companions to fast along with him. The fast and its accompanying restrictions were meant to teach Muslims the virtues of self-control, patience, and serenity, as well as charity and compassion for the less fortunate. Observance of the fast is believed to make up for personal misdeeds and faults and to secure a place in paradise for the devout. It is a time for devotion, meditation, and reaffirmation of one’s faith in Allah and in Islam.

Ramadan also became a period of abstention and of practicing different types of austerities. Dur-

ing this month, feasting, drinking, smoking, gambling, and sexual relationships are forbidden. Devotees are also expected to abstain from emotional vices like anger, violence, greed, envy, backbiting, and lust. These prohibitions are to be practiced only during the daylight hours. Customarily, they start at dawn, from the time a white line is visible on the horizon, and end at dusk, when the Sun sinks below the horizon. These hours are called *fajr* and *maghrib*, respectively.

When the fast ends (on the first day of Shawwal, the following month), Eid al-Fitr is observed for three days. Gifts are exchanged, and Muslims rejoice for having endured the fast, thus having come closer to Allah. Eid al-Fitr is a time for friends and families to worship and enjoy being together. In some places, fairs are organized to celebrate the end of Ramadan.

During Ramadan, it is customary for Muslims to visit the *masjid* (“mosque”) and spend many hours there praying, meditating, and studying the Koran. Apart from the habitual five daily prayers, Muslims chant a special prayer known as the “Taraweeh” (“Night Prayer”) during Ramadan. The prayer’s length is generally twice or three times the length of the daily prayers. In fact, devout Muslims routinely spend the whole night in prayer.

See also Volume I: AFGHANISTAN; ALBANIA; ALGERIA; AZERBAIJAN; BAHRAIN; BANGLADESH; BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA; BRUNEI; BURKINA FASO; CHAD; COMOROS; CÔTE D’IVOIRE; DJIBOUTI; EGYPT; ERITREA; ETHIOPIA; GAMBIA, THE; GHANA; GUINEA; GUINEA-BISSEAU; INDIA; INDONESIA; IRAN; IRAQ; JORDAN; KAZAKHSTAN; KUWAIT; KYRGYZSTAN

See also Volume II: LEBANON; LIBERIA; LIBYA; MACEDONIA; MALAYSIA; MALDIVES; MALI; MAURITANIA; MOROCCO; NIGER; NIGERIA; OMAN; PAKISTAN; QATAR; SAUDI ARABIA; SENEGAL; SIERRA LEONE; SOMALIA; SUDAN; SYRIA; TAJIKISTAN; TANZANIA; TUNISIA; TURKEY; TURKMENISTAN; UNITED ARAB EMIRATES; UZBEKISTAN; YEMEN

See also Volume III: ISLAM

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❧ Ram Navami ❧

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Hindu populations, especially India, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka
Observed on	Ninth of Shukla Paksh (the bright fortnight) in Chaitra, the first month of the Hindu calendar
Observed by	Hindus

Introduction

According to legends and myths connected with Hinduism, Vishnu (who is the second deity of the sacred Hindu trinity—with Brahma and Shiva—and the Preserver of the universe) made his appearance on Earth at various times, in diverse forms and manifestations (avatars), to restore righteousness, noble virtues, and peace to the world. The legends further narrate that during the Tretayuga (the second subperiod in a *caturyuga* and the second age of the Earth, calculated at around 3000 B.C.E.) Ravana, the demon king of Lanka (modern Sri Lanka), had been creating havoc on Earth. Because of a boon that Brahma had given him Ravana could not be killed by any god or goddess. So Vishnu assumed a human form in order to redeem humanity and was born into this world as the son of King Dasharatha and his first queen Kaushalya, who ruled over the kingdom of Ayodhya. Lord Rama is regarded as the seventh incarnation of Vishnu. As was preordained, Rama annihilated Ravana.

All Indians, regardless of creed, caste, or religion are well versed in the legend of Lord Rama, the hero of the great Sanskrit epic the *Ramayana*. Lord Rama is a celebrated figure, the epitome of all noble virtues and lofty ideals. He is also known as Maryada Purushottam, and his life exemplifies the ideal Hindu man: a dutiful son, perfect husband, and compassionate though idealistic ruler. Because of his excellence in all spheres, Lord Rama's birth is commemorated annually with great pomp and splendor. It is observed on the ninth day following the new Moon in the *shukla paksh* (the bright fortnight) of the Indian lunar month of Chaitra, which falls sometime in the month of April on the Gregorian calendar. The festival of Ram Navami serves as a reminder of the noble principles for which Lord Rama, the principal character of the *Ramayana*, stood.

On the day of Ram Navami thousands of pilgrims congregate in two locations: the temples of Rameshwaram on the eastern coast of India (where Rama and his army of monkeys built a bridge of rocks so they could reach Lanka) and Ayodhya (his birthplace). Here they participate in colorful and elaborate ceremonies that include processions, with dazzling floats depicting the royal trio (Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana), as well as the faithful and loyal Hanuman, Lord Rama's monkey-general.

In India the eight days preceding the festival of Ram Navami is observed as Nava Ratri (nine nights). During these days the mother goddess (Durga, or Shakti, who epitomizes the creative power of the divine female) is worshipped. As representatives of the deity prepubescent girls are clothed in finery and ornaments and worshipped in the temples. Many devout Hindus observe a fast for the nine consecutive days (though some do it for a fewer), consuming frugal meals of milk and fruit.

Ram Navami Puja

This ceremony begins when the youngest female member in the family applies a *tika* (a large red sacred mark) to each male member in the family. A red *bindi* (dot or round spot) is marked on the forehead of every female member. Everyone takes part in the *puja* by chanting sacred Sanskrit verses. All then stand while the Aarti ("worshipping with lamps") is performed, after which *Ganga jal* ("holy water of the river Ganges") is sprinkled over all those who are present. *Bhajans* ("devotional songs") accompany the rites and rituals. Finally, *prasadam* ("blessed food") is distributed to everyone.



Rama and the Sun

There may be a connection between Sun worship and Lord Rama. The Sun is believed to be the progenitor of his dynasty, which is known as the Raghuvamsa, or Raghukula: *raghu* means “Sun” and *vamsa* (or *kula*) means “family line.” The stipulated hour for the celebration of Rama’s birth is when the Sun is directly overhead and at the acme of its brilliance. Rama is variously called Raghupati, Raghunatha, or Raghavendra.

For at least a week before the festival, temples dedicated to Rama are adorned with lights and flowers. The images of Rama and his family members are also richly decorated. Usually the worship starts with the reciting of Vedic mantras devoted to Vishnu, followed by offerings of fruit and flowers to the deity. *Satsangs*, or public gatherings, are organized to celebrate the occasion. Excerpts from the *Ramacharitamanas* (*The Lake That Is the Story of Rama*), written by the well-loved Hindi poet Goswami Tulsidas (1532–1623), in which Lord Rama’s many virtues are extolled, are recited. People of all creeds and castes

eagerly participate in all such events and functions. In Ayodhya a huge fair goes on for two days. *Rath yatras*, or chariot processions, of Rama, his wife, brother, and Hanuman are taken out from various temples. Hanuman, who is revered for his unflinching loyalty to Lord Rama, enjoys a position of esteem and prestige in the celebrations.

Origins and History

According to the Ramayana Lord Vishnu was born as Rama in the seventh of his 10 incarnations, the son of King Dasharatha and his first queen Kaushalya. Dasharatha had three other sons—Lakshmana, Bharata, and Shatrughna—from his two other wives, Kaikeyi and Sumitra. Rama married Sita.

Dasharatha decided to crown Rama (his eldest son) as the king of Ayodhya, but his second queen Kaikeyi (egged on by her handmaid Manthara) asked King Dasharatha for the two boons that he had promised her because they were long overdue. As a result of the first one she persuaded Dasharatha to send Rama into exile for 14 years; with the second one she claimed the throne for her son Bharata.



An actress in Allahabad, India, performs during Ram Navami, the festival that celebrates the birth of the Hindu god Ram. (AP Photo/Rajesh Kumar Singh)

In obedience to his father's command Rama gave up his claim to the throne and went into exile. Sita and Rama's third brother Lakshmana accompanied him into exile. The grief-stricken King Dasharatha died shortly afterward.

During their sojourn in the forest Sita was kidnapped by Ravana. This resulted in a fierce battle between Ravana and Rama. Helped by a band of monkeys led by Hanuman, Rama slew Ravana. When his 14-year exile ended Rama returned to Ayodhya, claimed his throne, and ruled the kingdom.

To Hindus Rama's life, as portrayed in the Ramayana, provides an example of an obedient and honorable life for an Indian. Lord Rama's story is often mentioned to prove how he lived a life of virtue (dharma). He is seen as the true personification of ideal human values. The celebration of his

birthday Ram Navami reminds Hindus of the noble principles that Lord Rama stood for.

See also Volume I: BANGLADESH; BHUTAN; FIJI; GUYANA; INDIA

See also Volume II: MALAYSIA; MAURITIUS; NEPAL; SRI LANKA; SURINAME

See also Volume III: HINDUISM

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❧ Rosh Hashanah ❧

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Jewish populations, especially Israel, United States, and Canada
Observed on	First two days of Tishri, the seventh month of the Jewish calendar
Observed by	Jews

Introduction

The Jewish New Year is called Rosh Hashanah. It falls on the first and second days of the month of Tishri (which means “beginning” in Babylonian), the seventh month of the Jewish ecclesiastical calendar (September–October on the Gregorian calendar). Meaning the “head of the year” in Hebrew, Rosh Hashanah is so named because Tishri is also the first month of the Hebrew civil calendar; in ancient times this date also coincided with the start of the economic year. In the widely followed Gregorian calendar, the festival generally occurs between September 5 and October 5.

In the Torah, Rosh Hashanah is referred to by many names. It is called Yom Tervah (“Day of Blasting”) or Feast of the Trumpets. This refers to the

practice of blowing a shofar to announce this day. A shofar (usually a ram’s horn) was used as a trumpet in ancient times to declare the sighting of the new Moon as well as to announce a time for war. The observance is also known as Yom HaZikaron (“Day of Remembering”), a reference to Abraham, who was willing to sacrifice Isaac, his only son, because God ordered him to. When God saw Abraham’s unquestioning obedience, he told Abraham not to sacrifice Isaac. The Jews believe this occurred on the first of Tishri and remember the occasion reverentially.

Rosh Hashanah marks the beginning of the 10-day period called Yamim Noraim (“Days of Awe”), a time for repentance that ends with Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. This period is also called Ben Kesseh Le’Assor; *kesseh* and *assor* refer to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, respectively. Thus, the name describes the period between the two festivals.

The Shofar

Originally, the shofar was used for military purposes, but in the biblical era it was an instrument of the priests. There were two kinds of shofar—one made of a ram’s horn, used to signal days of fasting, and one made of ibex (or kudu) horn, used to announce Rosh Hashanah and the Yovel Days. In order to be suitable for ritual use, a shofar must be three handbreadths in length. It is the only ancient Hebrew “musical” instrument that remains, and its sound is not musical.

The primary use of the shofar is to announce something about to happen: to assemble people, especially as a call to worship; to assemble troops in preparation for battle; to alert people to danger;

to announce the presence of God; to proclaim an oath sworn before God; to announce the beginning of a festival; or to signal the arrival of the Messiah.

The shofar announces the movements of history. There are four shofar calls: The *tekiah*, a long clear blast that calls the people to community; the *shevarim*, a broken, despondent sound of three short calls that reminds the people that the world is a broken place of hurt and pain; the *teruah*, a rapid series of nine short notes that tells the people it is time to move forward; the *tekiah gedolah*, or great tekiah, one long, unbroken blast, held as long as possible, that calls the people to the future, hope, and triumph of goodness.





A man blows his shofar, a ram's horn, from his backyard in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, as part of his religious observance of the beginning of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. A blown horn originally signified alarm but now represents a call to spiritual renewal. (*AP Photo/Jackson Hole News, Jim Evans*)

The festival is widely celebrated by Jews around the world. While it is a time for deep introspection, it is also a time for friends and family to come together and for people to forgive each other. Most significantly Rosh Hashanah is the time to recognize God as the supreme judge of all living creatures.

Origins and History

There is no mention of Rosh Hashanah as a two-day holiday in the Torah. In fact, the first two days of the month of Tishri were not recognized as Rosh Hashanah until Talmudic times. The leaders of the day were perhaps unwilling to encourage large celebrations around the time of the year when there were numerous pagan harvest festivals. However, in ancient times witnesses who observed the skies in Jerusalem set the date by determining when the new Moon first appeared. This system made it difficult for people living far from Jerusalem; they were unable to learn the precise date of the festival falling on the first day of the year. Even the people living relatively close to the city missed the festival at times. It all depended on whether the witnesses arrived in time. So, to give everyone a chance to join

in the observances, two days were set aside for the festival. Today Reform Jews observe Rosh Hashanah for only one day.

Jews associate Rosh Hashanah with many incidents in their religious history. It is believed that on Rosh Hashanah God created humanity. On Rosh Hashanah Isaac was born to Abraham, as promised by God, when Sarah was 90, and Abraham was well over 100 years old. In another story from the



The Samaritans

The origins of the Samaritans are disputed to this day. Some historians claim that the Samaritans are descendants of mixed ancestry, both of Israelite lineage and of deportees brought into the region of Samaria by the Assyrians from other lands they had conquered, including Cuthah. On the other hand the Samaritans consider themselves the descendants of Israelites of the Northern Kingdom who remained behind during the Babylonian Captivity and so introduced none of the religious changes brought about among the Jews during this time.



Challah Bread

Challah bread, served on the Sabbath and all Hebrew holidays except Passover (Pesach), is a rich, leavened bread made with several eggs (which gives it its deep yellow color). Challah is actually not the bread itself, but a small piece of the dough torn off before the bread is baked. The small piece, the *challah*, is burned to symbolize the destruction of the Temple, and then it is thrown away after saying a special prayer. There are many recipes for making challah, depending on the cook's ethnic tradition. Between the first and second risings, the dough is divided and braided to make the characteristic "ladder," symbolizing life's ladder, which everyone must climb.

Ingredients:

2 c. milk
 1/3 c. butter
 1/4 c. water
 6–7 1/2 c. unsifted flour
 2 packages dry yeast
 1/4 c. sugar
 1 Tbs. salt
 4–6 large eggs
 1 Tbs. cold water (optional)
 1/2 tsp. poppy seeds (optional)

Preparation:

Heat the milk, butter, and water in a saucepan until blended. In a large bowl,

combine 3 1/2 cups of the flour with the yeast, sugar, salt, and blended milk mixture and beat for 2 minutes with an electric mixer at medium speed. Separate 1 egg, reserving the yolk, and blend the white with four or five remaining eggs into the batter. Add enough flour to make a soft dough. Turn the dough out onto a floured surface and knead until the texture is satiny. Place the kneaded dough in a greased bowl; turn it over once to grease the top. Cover and allow to rise until the dough has doubled in bulk.

Punch the dough down and turn it out onto a floured surface. Divide the dough into two pieces, one twice the size of the other. Divide the larger piece again, into three pieces of equal size, then roll them into 15-inch ropes. Braid them tightly, and seal each end by pinching. Divide the smaller piece into three pieces, and roll them into 13-inch ropes. Braid them tightly. Place the smaller braids on top of the larger and pinch to seal the ends. Place the dough diagonally on a greased baking sheet.

If desired, beat the reserved egg yolk with the cold water and brush the mixture on top of the challah. Let rise until doubled. Preheat oven to 375°. Before baking, sprinkle the poppy seeds on top of the challah.

Bake at 375° for 25–30 minutes.

Torah—that of Joseph, who was made captive by the Egyptians—the Jews believe that he regained his freedom on this day. Rosh Hashanah is also the day on which the events that would lead to the Israelites' exodus from Egypt under Moses began; and it was also on this day that God stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son.

The signal that Rosh Hashanah has begun is the sound of the shofar being blown. The shofar is mentioned in many famous stories in the Torah. The blowing of trumpets symbolized the return of the Israelites to their homeland. Joshua, the

man who succeeded Moses as the leader of the Israelites, brought down the walls of Jericho by the force of blowing trumpets. Isaiah and Zechariah, two of the great prophets in Judaism and Christianity, prophesied the time when the Jews will gather under the Messiah, who will be announced by the blast of trumpets.

According to Jewish beliefs, this festival represents the most important judgment day, when all people still living on Earth, as well as those who have already died, are judged by God. It is written in the Talmud (another Jewish holy scripture) that this day will see the opening of three books in which the deeds of the wicked, the righteous, and those not belonging to either category are recorded. The righteous will be extolled in the book of life, while the wicked will be erased from it. Those occupying the middle ground are granted 10 days until Yom Kippur

Fun Fact

The Yovel days mark a 50-year agricultural cycle. The Torah commanded that the land of Israel lie fallow every seventh (*shemita*) year. After seven *shemita* years comes the 50th "jubilee" year, called *yovel*.

(“the Day of Atonement”) to repent their sins so their names will be inscribed in the book of life

The festival’s observances vary among the different Jewish sects. Whereas Orthodox and Conservative Jews observe Rosh Hashanah for two days, some communities celebrate only the first day. The Samaritans, in keeping with their version of the Torah, celebrate Rosh Hashanah on the first day of the month of Nisan (the first month of the Jewish ecclesiastical calendar, which falls in the March–April period of the Western calendar) in the springtime.

No work at all can be done on Rosh Hashanah. The day is generally spent in a synagogue, where the everyday liturgy is somewhat altered. A prayer book called a *machzor* is used on this day. The *machzor* is used by Jews exclusively during the High Holy Days (Yamim Noraim, “the Days of Awe”), which include Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkoth. It is a specific version of the *siddur*, the prayer book commonly used by Jews worldwide.

All Jewish religious traditions are inextricably linked with their dietary customs, and Rosh Hashanah is no exception. During Rosh Hashanah apples dipped in honey, representing the wish for a sweet year ahead, are traditionally eaten. It is also the custom to recite a blessing over two loaves of bread called challah. The round shape of challah signifies a crown, a reminder of God’s power. Challah also represents life’s full circle, the hope for the people that their lives will endure without end. The challah is made with a ladder on top to acknowledge that only God can determine who goes up or comes down life’s ladder. Sometimes the challah loaf is shaped like a bird because according to the Torah God will defend Jerusalem just as a bird hovers in the sky and looks down on Earth.

Many people visit the graves of their loved ones during Rosh Hashanah because they believe that the dead can intercede with God on behalf of those still alive on Earth. Another popular tradition associated with the festival is *tashlich*, which involves throwing either stones or bread crumbs into a flowing body of water, like a creek or a river, to rid oneself of sin. It is a custom of long standing that is still practiced.

Another important tradition of this holiday is the *tzedakah*. In rural eastern Europe it was customary for a messenger to visit houses carrying a sack. People who could afford to put money into the sack

did so, while the poor took money out of the sack. Nobody could be embarrassed since it was impossible to know who gave and who took out money. Giving *tzedakah* is seen as a significant *mitzvah* (good deed) among Jews.

While Tishri 1 (Rosh Hashanah) is recognized as the spiritual new year, and the one most widely celebrated by Jews, Judaism is unique in that it has numerous other new years. Shevat 15, which falls in the Gregorian month of February, is the new year for trees, a time when new fruits can be consumed.

Elul 1, which falls in the Gregorian month of August, is the new year for the tithing of animals. Nisan 1 is the new year for the months of the calendar. The new “school year” starts sometime in the Gregorian month of September, while the fiscal new year may take place at different times in the Gregorian calendar.

See also Volume I: ISRAEL

See also Volume II: UNITED STATES

See also Volume III: JUDAISM; YOM KIPPUR

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Fun Fact

Nuts are not consumed during Rosh Hashanah. There are some good reasons for this custom. First, eating nuts generates extra phlegm in the throat, something that can hinder one’s ability to recite prayers. Second, the *gematria* (numeric value) of the Hebrew word for “nut,” *egoz*, is the same as that for the Hebrew word for “sin,” *chet*.

Fun Fact

Sephardic Jews (Jews of Middle Eastern or Mediterranean origin) serve a whole, uncut fish, to symbolize fertility, prosperity, and good luck for the new year.

Shinto

FACT FILE

Observed in	Japan
World Population	About 3 million
Place of Origin	Siberia

Introduction

Shinto, like Confucianism, is not a “religion” in the usual sense. Rather, it is an ancient and sophisticated form of animism closely linked to the worship of nature in the form of *kamis*, the spirits of nature, and the agricultural cycles of the year. Its beliefs and ways of thinking are deeply embedded in the subconscious of the Japanese people. There is no binding dogma to which everyone must adhere, nor are there defined prayers that must be repeated verbatim, as in Catholicism. There is no “holiest” place for worshippers, as there is in Islam (Mecca) and Judaism (Jerusalem). No person or *kami* is deemed holiest, as are Jesus in Christianity and Muhammad in Islam. There are no established services at all. Instead, there are festival rites (*matsuri*), open to everyone—not only confirmed members—that differ from shrine to shrine, with only a few exceptions like Shogatsu (or Shogetsu, New Year’s Day).

Unlike Buddhism, Japan’s other major religion, the afterlife is not a primary concern in Shinto. The emphasis is on living well in this world, not preparing for the next. While Shinto has thousands of fascinating rituals, they have one thing in common: Their purpose is to purify and make the participants prosperous in the here and now, not in some heavenly hereafter. The rituals of Shinto are methods of mediating the relations of human beings to *kami*, people and things of the world that inspire awe.

During festivals, there are public rituals that are performed with great enthusiasm. Before New Year’s Day in Tokyo, for example, the Hie Jinja shrine has a public cleansing ritual in which the *kami*—represented in shrines by stylized folded paper or metal treelike images—are brought out to bless everyone present. Small paper dolls are handed out and, after prayers and long periods of “shrine music,” all the bad spiritual impurities accumulated by each person during the year are rubbed into the dolls, which are collected and then burned.

Origins and History

The origin of the Shinto faith goes back to ancient times and is probably connected to the animist religions of early Siberia. It is likely that, when the earliest ancestors of the Japanese reached the island, each tribe brought with it its own gods and rituals. Whatever its initial impetus, Shinto seems to have established itself by the late Jomon period, between 10,000 and 300 B.C.E. Wherever or whenever it began, it is the primary faith of this nation of more than 100 million inhabitants, most of whom practice both Shinto and Buddhism.

Shinto’s approach to the world is to be found in ancient Japanese mythology and history. This history was orally transmitted between generations of Japanese people prior to the introduction of Buddhism in the sixth century C.E. For this reason it does not make sense to seek Shinto’s “founding” in a specific year or era. For much of its history it was a loose collection of local rituals and customs practiced in Japan during prehistoric times. However, the introduction of both Buddhism and Confucianism to Japan in 552 prompted the adoption of the term Shinto as an umbrella to encompass the religious history of Japan.

From a religious or philosophic perspective, the religion is complex. Shinto is unique in the way that it gives commensurate spiritual status to forces of nature, animals, and celebrated human beings. These are known as *kamis* in Japanese. Some can be thought of as “gods,” the spirits of nature, or spiritual presences, but others clearly represent natural processes and objects. The word Shinto combines two *kanji* (characters in a Japanese writing system adapted from Chinese writing): *shin* means “god” in Chinese and *to* means “way” or “method” (Tao). Thus, the word *shinto* means “the way of the gods.”

Shinto philosophy does not include belief in a single all-knowing god or the notion of heaven as a place inhabited by the souls of the dead. The *kamis*

Amaterasu

Amaterasu (which means “she who shines in the heavens”) is the Shinto Sun goddess. The Japanese imperial family claims to be her descendants. According to Shinto belief the goddess was so sparkling that her parents transported her to heaven. When the storm-god Susanowo, her brother, ravaged the earth, Amaterasu ran away to a cave because of the noise he was making. She subsequently closed the cave with a massive boulder. The world was thus deprived of light, and demons ruled the Earth. When the other gods failed in their attempts to lure her out, it was Uzume who succeeded. (Uzume is the god-

dess of joy and happiness; she is called the Daughter of Heaven and Heaven’s Forthright Female. Her name means “whirling.”)

When Amaterasu emerged from the cave, a band of light escaped (that streak of light is called dawn). Amaterasu then saw her own sparkling manifestation in a mirror that Uzume had placed in a tree nearby. As she approached the mirror for a closer look, the gods grabbed her. After her return to the sky she brought light back to Earth. She later created rice fields (*inada*) and cultivated rice. Also Amaterasu is believed to have invented weaving and taught the people how to farm silkworms and wheat.

are deemed to be essentially good, but there are some exceptions. Prayers are offered to the *kamis* for different purposes and occasions, like rain, crops, and the emperor’s coronation. In fact, the Shinto religion has no dogma, no credo, and no “sins” that must be punished in prescribed ways. Rather, its practice involves a mixture of rituals and beliefs that initially differed significantly from one village to the next.

The primary *kami* in the Shinto religion is the Sun goddess Amaterasu. This perhaps explains the Sun symbol on the Japanese flag. Japan’s other name “Nippon” is written in the kanji letters *ni*, which means “Sun,” and *pan*, which means “root,” resulting in the name commonly given to the country, land of the rising Sun. The modern name is a derivative of the Chinese intonation of the letters *je-ben*. Yet, the Sun does not command a loftier place among Shinto divinities; each *kami* has its place. *Kamis* do, however, command respectful fear and awe. Among other *kamis* are the mountains; animals like the tiger, snake, and wolf; and the emperor himself. One imperial minister of the ninth century is regarded as the *kami* of calligraphy. With over 800 million *kamis* in the Shinto faith, Japan earned the nickname *shinkoku*, or “country of the gods.” The shrines managed by the Shinto priesthood in Japan number 100,000.

According to Japanese folklore, the country’s islands were formed by Izanagi and Izanami, brother and sister gods in the Japanese creation myth, and their sexual union of Izanami and Izanagi created the Japanese race. In giving birth to the fire god Izanami was burned to death and went to the land of darkness. Izanagi tried to rescue her, but she had eaten the food of the place and could not leave; in disgust he left her rotting corpse and divorced her. As he bathed to purify himself afterward, other

deities were born from him, including the Sun goddess Amaterasu, the Moon god Tsukiyomi, and the storm god Susanoo (impetuous male), the younger brother of the Sun goddess. Izanagi’s cleansing is the basis for Shinto purification rites.

The notion of evil does not exist in the faith. The religion does have the concept of immortality, which can be achieved by pacifying the gods. To free oneself from the evils of the world requires following the different physical and social rituals of the Shinto faith. The most significant way in which other religions have influenced Shinto is the presence of a moral system based on Confucianism.

Presently there are about 150 or more sects of Shinto. Many of them have developed an aggressive outlook in an attempt to spread the faith beyond Japanese shores. Shinto can be found outside Japan, especially in places where big Japanese communities are present, as in South America and the United States. The more modern sects see brotherhood and world peace as being part of their values.

Until the fifth century C.E. when Japan first came into contact with Chinese culture, Shinto was merely a mixture of beliefs, practices, and myths. During this phase, Japan had no scripts, painting, or cultures, possibly explaining the complete lack of idols. The arrival of Buddhism and the introduction of a writing system a bit earlier combined to make the development of a systematic compilation of Shinto beliefs a practical necessity. For one thing the Japanese were intimidated by the superior culture of the Chinese. By incorporating themes from Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, the Japanese hoped to show the Chinese that the culture of Japan was on a footing with theirs. It was also hoped that, by tracing the lineage of Japan’s imperial house to the Sun goddess, Amaterasu, the divinity of the



Fun Fact

As they approach shrines, the conscientious walk on the left- or right-hand sides of the *sando*, the center, leaving it clear, because that is where the *kami* walk. During New Year's festivities, the *sando* may be roped off in some shrines.

emperor would be unquestionable. Thus within a very short span of time, in the early Nara period (710–84), two accounts regarding Shinto appeared: the *Kojiki* (The Record of Ancient Things) in 712 and the *Nihonshoki* (The Chronicles of Japan) in 720. These mythological collections were intended to demonstrate the worth of the imperial family and its divine right to rule Japan. The compilation of Japan's ancient traditions and mythology had a third effect as well: the number of priests, rituals, and temples proliferated.

From that time on the history of Japan has seen a spate of opposing movements, sometimes favoring Buddhism, sometimes Shinto. There was a concerted effort to mix the two religions, which produced clear defensive reactions on Shinto's part, around the 13th and 18th centuries. In the last phase, the state religion was Buddhism, and Shinto was there as the opposition against the central authority.

In 1868 during the Meiji period (1868–1912), when Japan was opening its doors to Western civilization, the government compelled Buddhism and Shinto to separate. It was then that Shinto took on four different shapes. These four different varieties of the religion are intermixed in accordance with the cultural universe of every Japanese individual. They comprise the foundation of Japan's value system.

The first form, a result of the end of the shogun era and the return of the Meiji Dynasty, was the Shinto of the imperial house, which emphasized the worship of Amaterasu, the Sun goddess and the emperor's divinity. When Japan

lost World War II, this type of Shinto was banished, and the emperor was, once again, shorn of his divinity. Once of a public nature, this religious cult is now strictly private.

The second form was the Shinto of the temples, the oldest and the most familiar. These are the rites performed in scores of Japanese temples that are members of an association called *jinja boncho*.

Shinto of the sects is the third of the Shinto groups. This movement is the sum of the 13 diverse movements that came into being in the 19th century. The most celebrated of these movements Tenrikyo was started by a woman in 1838 Miki Nakayama (1789–1887), who wrote the holy scripture called *Ofudesaki* between 1869 and 1882; it is made up of almost 12,000 verses. It is the revelation of God the Parent and teaches the positive way of salvation; its adherents number more than three million. Other sects include the Confucian sects, the revival sects, and the faith-healing communities.

Popular Shinto, the fourth type, is based on the ancient folk traditions, but it also contains elements borrowed from Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Its adherents engage in a variety of magic practices including divination and spirit possession.

Unlike most religions Shintoism has no specific commandments for its followers, apart from wanting its adherents to live a simple life in harmony with each other and nature. There are four affirmations of the spirit of Shinto. The first affirmation is that of the Shinto tradition and the family. The family is deemed to be the most important factor in preserving traditions. A family's chief celebrations concern those relating to marriage and birth. The second Shinto declaration is the love of nature. Nature is sacred; to be in touch with nature is to be in close contact with the *kami*. Shintoists worship natural objects, since they believe the objects have sacred spirits. The third Shinto affirmation is phys-

Shinto Wedding

The traditional Japanese wedding ceremony is generally held in a Shinto shrine. The wedding ceremonies are private, with only family, close relatives, and friends in attendance. The woman wears the customary white wedding kimono known as *shiro-maku* (*shiro* means “white” and *maku* means “pure”). The hair of the bride is fashioned in the traditional wedding manner called *bunkin-takashimada* decked with striking *kanzashi* (“hair pins”). Ornaments, and other accessories. The wedding hood, called a *tsuno kakushi*, is white. The bridegroom wears a *montsuki kimono* with a *haori*

jacket and pleated *hakama* pants. Classical Japanese court music is performed by artists known as *gagaku*. A Shinto priest performs the ceremony. He starts by cleansing the couple. After the cleansing and the vows are finished, the very old wedding ritual of sharing sake (“rice wine”), called *san kudo* (“three sets of three sips equals nine”), is performed; it symbolizes a formal bond between the bride and groom. As the wedding ceremony comes to an end, the *kami* is offered small tree twigs called *sakaki*. In some ceremonies, the wedding rings are exchanged at this point.



ical hygiene. Followers of the Shinto faith wash their hands, take regular baths, and rinse out their mouths frequently. The last Shinto affirmation is *matsuri*. It is any festival set aside for the *kamis*; there are many of these festivals each year.

The influence of Shinto on Japanese culture can never be overstated. It is practically impossible for Shinto to free itself from the influence of Buddhism; however, it is obvious that the notion of being one with nature gave rise to Japanese arts like *ikebana* (flower arranging), as well as traditional Japanese garden designing and the country's unique architecture. An even clearer connection to Shinto is seen in the national sport of sumo wrestling. The cleansing of the wrestling area before the bout, which is performed by sprinkling salt, is doubtless Shinto in origin. Japanese people generally say, "*Itadakimasu*," which means "I humbly partake," before consuming food, and the Japanese citizen's stress on proper greetings can be linked to the Shinto belief in *kotodama* ("words that magically affect the world"). Japanese customs like eating with wooden chopsticks and removing footwear before entering a house or a building are Shinto in origin. Also various other minor Japanese religions, including Tenrikyo, have been greatly influenced by Shinto.

Holidays and Religious Observances

Although Shinto has numerous festivals throughout the year, many of them connected to the seasonal cycle, among the largest and most enthusiastically celebrated ones are Shogatsu (Shogetsu), New Year's Day; Setsubin, Welcoming Spring; Shichi-Go-San, Children's Coming of Age; Hina Matsuri, Girls' Day; Hana Matsuri and Ohanami, Celebrating Buddha and Blossom Viewing; Tango-no-sekku, Boys' Day; Tanabata, the Star Festival; Obon, Festival of the Dead; Tsukimi, Autumn Moon; and Omisoka, Ringing Out the Old.

Shogatsu, the Japanese New Year festival is probably the most important, and popular, festival of the year. The holiday runs from December 31 to January 7, with New Year's Eve and New Year's Day the most important celebrations. Although it is true that many of the traditions and customs associated with Shogatsu are Chinese in origin, many more are uniquely Japanese. As in other cultures, the beginning of a new year also means a new beginning in one's life.

Although it falls at the end of the old year (December 31), Omisoka, which involves all the preparations for Shogatsu, the New Year's festival, is an equally important celebration in Japan. Purification of oneself and home and getting rid of evil influences are crucial during this period. Before January 1, houses and businesses are thoroughly cleaned: the old is thrown out and debts, obligations, and relationship problems must be resolved.



A Japanese couple under a red umbrella is led by a Shinto priest and a maiden as their relatives follow during a traditional Shinto wedding procession. (AP Photo/Koji Sasahara)

Kadomatsu (boughs of pine, bamboo, and plum) are found at the door of most homes and businesses, and beautiful arrangements are also placed inside to bless the dwelling.

As New Year's Day approaches, an amazing assortment of special foods is prepared. These are called *osechi* and require great time and effort to make. Special balls of *kanami mochi*, a kind of rice paste, are placed on the family shrine or in a prominent place in the house. (On the 7th day of January, the dried *mochi* is broken into pieces, fried, and then eaten.) Before January 1, all the *nengajou*, New Year's Day cards, must also be sent so that they will arrive on time. On New Year's Eve, families often eat a special *soba* (buckwheat noodles) on their best dinnerware. Other people may spend the last hours of the old year in a bath or with thousands of other people, mobbing a shrine or temple. A special sake, full of flecks of gold-leaf, is often served.

One ancient *Omisoka* tradition that originated in China is the ritual performed at the moment that ends the old year, destroys all "sins," and announces

Fun Fact

The ringing of the bell to signal the end of an old year and the start of a new one is over a thousand years old in Japan, and even older in China, where the ritual was performed on the Chinese New Year. Because of differences between calendars, the bells ring in the new year in China about a month after they do in Japan.

the renewal of the world: the midnight ringing of temple bells. At midnight on December 31, temples and shrines herald the new year with the *joyanokane*, the ringing of a bell 108 times.

The source of the ritual of ringing the New Year bell exactly 108 times goes back to the origins of Japanese Buddhism, as well as other cultural traditions. Buddhism, various pagan gods, mathematics, and a number of other things originally came to China from India. One of these was the goddess Benten-sama, originally the Hindu goddess Sarasvati, a consort of

Brahma and the goddess of the river waters and of fertility and wealth. Sarasvati is the patron of speech, writing, and learning, and of the arts and sciences as well. Buddhist sutras and the so-called magical language used on memorials is a variant form of Sanskrit, and the prayer beads (*juzu*) that Japanese Buddhists use are also from India where they are called *mala* (“circle”). *Juzus*, which symbolize the world and the circle of the heavens, always have 108 beads.

In Indian astrology, the circle of the heavens was divided into twelve areas with specific meanings. Each area was ruled by a constellation of the Zodiac. The passage of time was conceived of as a journey through the influence of the twelve powers, each represented by an animal. This system was used to determine the exact moment when such things as the new year would occur. Each zodiac sign was further divided into nine “digits,” just as a circle is divided into 360 degrees. This last division brought the numerical total of the heavenly circle to 108, and this number became sacred and symbolized the cycles of life and time in India, China, and Japan.

It is traditional to stay up all night to see the sunrise of the first morning of the new year. In earlier days, people went to the top of a mountain to watch the sunrise, but any skyscraper will do.

New Year’s Day, Shogatsu, is the big festival day. Almost everyone dresses in their finest clothes and visits a temple or shrine to pray for good luck in the coming year (*hatsumode*). Many leave their old *omamori* (charms) at the shrine to be destroyed and buy new ones. The most important is the *hamaya*, a charm in the shape of an arrow hung somewhere in the house to protect it and the family for the coming year. Families then visit relatives and children are given *otoshidama*, small envelopes of gift-money.

After this, the children play any of several traditional games such as is *hayoeta*, a badmintonlike game, *karutatori*, an ancient card game once played only among the nobility, or *sugoroku*, a game played with dice. Traditional Shogatsu toys are the *koma* (top) and *takoage* (kite).

The Obon festival season, celebrated in the last half of August, is a “twilight time” in Japan, when the veil separating the worlds of the living and the dead is temporarily parted and one’s ancestors return to Earth to commune with their living relatives. Obon originated so long ago that it is impossible to know just how old the festival is. In this it is similar to the ancient Western festival of Samhain, the pagan festival still celebrated as Halloween. But, while Halloween observances have lost virtually all of their original meaning and force, the modern Japanese celebration of Obon still welcomes the return of the spirits of the dead with elaborate dances and rituals.

The most famous is the circular dance called Bon Odori, a lively dance that conceals an ancient and spooky ritual. Originally, the purpose of Bon Odori was to summon the spirits of departed relatives so the living could dance with them, so in practice, everyone dances alone. During Obon families visit their ancestral *baka* (“grave”) to clean it and leave the ancestors’ favorite sake, cigarettes, or food along with common flowers, incense, and *mochi* (“rice”) sweets. Families that continue to honor older traditions also make a small horse doll out of eggplants and leave this on the grave as well. The spirits of the dead can use the “horse” to return again to the world of the living for a visit.

Although the Japanese enjoy their visit with their long-gone relatives—keeping them up-to-date on family affairs and, perhaps, getting some help—they don’t want them to stay too long. Japanese culture is full of stories of spirits that decided they would rather stay than go back to the land of the dead. To make this a less likely outcome of Obon, people build huge bonfires to help their ghostly ancestors return whence they came.

Regional Influences

Hokkaido: Hokkaido, situated in the northeast corner of the country, is the second largest of Japan’s four islands. The island is about the size of Denmark and Switzerland combined. In contrast with the rest of Japan, Hokkaido’s culture is not tied to a conservative history, and it is receptive to Western influence. It is the Hokkaido shrine, however, where the enormous influence of the nationalistic tenet of Shinto is felt. In addition, the renewal of Shinto traditions can be witnessed across the island.

Honshu: Shinto’s most holy shrine is at Ise, in the southeastern part of the island of Honshu. In

the temple of the Sun goddess is the mirror that the goddess is supposed to have given to the celebrated first emperor, Jimmu (r. 660–585 B.C.E.), in the seventh century. The oldest shrine (perhaps from about the fourth century C.E.) and next in order of significance is Izumo Taisha Jinja near Izumo, in western Honshu. The *kamis* are believed to gather there every October.

Kyushu: Kyushu is the southernmost island and claims to have some of the most ancient historical sites in Japan. Kyushu is famous for being the geographical base of the Shinto-inspired rise of imperial might during the mid-19th century, when the military hold in Edo (now known as Tokyo) ended about 250 years of uninterrupted rule.

Shikoku: Shikoku is famous for being the island where the well-known Pilgrimage of the 88 Temples takes place. In the northeastern region of the island of Shikoku lies Kawaga. Out of the 88 temples in the famed pilgrimage of Shikoku, 22 are situated in Kagawa. Though the pilgrimage is mainly Buddhist in inspiration, there are some

exceptions. In the Kotohiragu shrine, we see a stark example of the coming together of Buddhism and Shinto. Here Kompira, a god with origins from Indian Buddhism, is revered as the guarding divinity of seafarers.

See also Volume I: JAPAN

See also Volume III: BUDDHISM; CONFUCIANISM; TAOISM

Further Reading

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~ Sikhism ~

FACT FILE

Observed in	Northern India (Punjab), as well as parts of North America, the United Kingdom, and East Africa
World Population	About 20 million
Place of Origin	Pakistan

Introduction

Guru Nanak Dev Ji (1469–1539) is the founder of Sikhism. His teachings, as well as those of the subsequent nine gurus, form the base of the faith. Sri Guru Nanak Dev was born in the Punjab area of present-day Pakistan, in a small village named Talwandi Sabo, near Lahore. At Sultanpur he had a revelation that it was his mission to preach the path to God and enlightenment. Guru Nanak Dev taught that there was only one God and preached the equality of all people. He discarded the concept of worshipping idols and the notion of caste that was fundamental to the cultures of India and Pak-

istan. In one of his more famous remarks, he said that there was no Muslim or Hindu. This comment became one of the foundations of Sikhism.

At Kartarpur, Guru Nanak Dev and his *panth* (“followers”) constructed the first Sikh temple (*gurdwara*). His followers came to be known as Sikhs, meaning “students or “disciples.” Currently there are over 20 million adherents of this faith scattered around the world; about 18 million live in India. The male members of the faith can be identified by their turbans and their beards. These are both external signs of their religious devotion, even though Sikhism considers one’s internal being to be more important than external appearances. Sikhism



Baptized Sikhs lead a religious procession in Anandpur Sahib, India. (AP Photo/Aman Sharma)

teaches that religion should be carried out by experiencing the real world and its problems. Thus, the notion of being a monk or a hermit has no place in Sikhism. Sikhs avoid any kind of mysticism. Also, they tend to avoid religious statues, pilgrimages, and abstract rituals.

Sikhism emphasizes performing honorable actions rather than rote rituals. Sikhs believe that keeping God in one's mind and heart at all times is the way to live a better life. The faith instructs its adherents to work hard and live honestly. Sikhism also teaches people to treat everyone equally and to be generous to the less fortunate.

Sikhism's place of devotion is called a *gurdwara* (temple), a Punjabi word that means "gateway to the guru." The Sikh holy scripture is called the Guru Granth Sahib (or Adi Granth). It is Sikhism's most important holy text. The 10th and the last of the Sikh human gurus ruled that the teachings of the book would be the spiritual guide for the Sikh people after his death. Guru Granth Sahib has the status of a human guru and is treated as such by the Sikhs.

Located in the beautiful city of Amritsar in Punjab, the Harmandir Sahib, or Hari Mandir, (also known as the Golden Temple) is the holiest temple for the people of the Sikh faith. The Harimandir Sahib is a sign of the splendor and might of the Sikh people, who are scattered all over the planet. It must be noted that the architecture of the temple is inclusive of symbols linked with other religions. That is an illustration of the spirit of forbearance and approval of other faiths propounded by Sikhism.

The third guru, Guru, Amar Das Ji (1479–1574), began building the temple by enlarging a pool of sacred water. This pool was referred to as the "pool of nectar," and it is from this name that the name *amritsar* is derived. Guru Amar Das Ji's son-in-law Guru Ram Das Ji (1534–81) built the city of Amritsar around the pool. Guru Ram Das Ji's son Guru Arjan Dev Ji (1563–1606) then constructed the temple right in the middle of the pool. The temple originally had four entrances—west, east, north, and south—symbolizing that people were welcome to come to the temple from any direction. Many come to the temple to immerse themselves in the pool, and people volunteer to clean the pool when needed.

Origins and History

Authorities and historians of Eastern religions regard Sikhism as connected to the Sufi sect of Islam and the Bhakti movement in Hinduism, although it is supplemented by numerous unique practices and beliefs. There are those Sikhs who believe that Sikhism is Hinduism repurified, viewing their own faith as part of the religious tradition of the Hindus. A good number of Sikhs disagree with the notion, however, claiming that Sikhism is a direct revelation from God and a unique religion unto itself.

Sikh Funerals

Sikhs believe that the soul of the dead person goes on to meet God. Sikh prayers recognize that death is God's will. Sikh scripture instructs the family of the deceased to refrain from crying or wailing in sorrow. Hymns are sung as preparation for the cremation. The family of the deceased either recites the holy book incessantly for 48 hours, or in phases that must be finished on the day of the funeral. The latter should not take more than one week. After the body is cleaned with water and dressed in new clothes, including the five *k's*, hymns that give a feeling of detachment are at times sung while going to the cremation ground. There, "Kirtan Sohila," a special prayer, is recited. General prayers are also said before the cremation. These prayers seek blessings for the deceased soul. A member of the family then lights the pyre with an uncovered flame. The mourning phase continues for two to five weeks.

After the death of Guru Nanak Dev, a series of nine gurus, all regarded as reincarnations of the first guru, led the movement until 1708. After that the role of guru went to the followers and the sacred text, which is considered the 11th guru.

Beginning in the 16th century Mughal rulers occupied a vast portion of South Asia for more than 200 years. In India their attempts at converting the Sikhs to Islam were met with resistance and were generally unsuccessful. During those times the Sikhs came forward to save Hindus from persecution and forced conversions by the Muslim Mughals. They became the defenders of faith, any faith, so to speak. It is often said that, without the presence of Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708, considered by many to be the final human guru), the entire nation would have been forced to convert to Islam.

In 1801 Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780–39) founded the Sikh state of Punjab in northern India. Later, the invasion of the British set off the Sikh Wars (1845–49). In the 20th century this region of India was divided into Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan. When the territory became independent in 1947, Sikhs migrated to India from Pakistan and, conversely, Muslims moved to Pakistan from India. During this upheaval there was an enormous loss of human life.

The primary goal of the follower of Sikhism is to build a loving relationship with God. Sikhs believe that there is only one God with many names and that meditation is the best way to get to know God. Also Sikhs believe in *samsara* (the recurring

Fun Fact

The dome and sides of the Golden Temple are covered with 200 pounds of gold plate donated by Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Fun Fact

The Golden Temple has four entrances, signifying the importance of acceptance and openness. Anyone who wants to enter temple may do so, regardless of religion, color, creed, or sex. All Sikh temples in the world follow this tradition.

Fun Fact

Every Sikh temple has a kitchen where food is served. The kitchen of the Golden Temple serves cooked food to all visitors 24 hours a day.

Fun Fact

The *gurmukhi* script, modeled on the Landa alphabet, was devised in the 16th century by Guru Nanak Dev, the first Sikh guru. The name means “from the mouth of the guru.” *Gurmukhi* is used to write Punjabi, an Indo-Aryan language.

phase of birth, life, and death), reincarnation (the rebirth of the soul), and karma (the collected sum of a human being’s good and bad actions in his or her time on Earth). These ideas are the same as in Hinduism. Sikhism has no room for the Hindu caste system, however. It maintains that everyone has equal status in God’s eyes, including women. This is a vital principle that pervades Sikh behaviors, beliefs, and rituals. The Sikhs rejected specific manifestations of women’s treatment within Hinduism and Islam, for example, female infanticide and sati, the Hindu custom of a wife throwing herself on her husband’s funeral pyre, were forbidden by Guru Nanak Dev. Women share both privileges and responsibilities in Sikhism and participate in every social endeavor with men, including warfare, with one exception: Their primary “function” is still defined as reproduction.

Sikhs pray several times each day. The lay Sikh is forbidden to worship idols and icons. There is also a stricter element within the Sikh community called the *khalsa* saints, who believe in the clothing practice of the five *k’s*: *kes* (uncut hair); *kanga* (the comb that holds up the hair); *kachcha* (short pants); *kara* (metal bracelet); and *kirpan* (a dagger). The five *k’s* together demonstrate that the person wearing them has devoted himself to a life of loyalty to the guru. That it is the guru’s instruction to observe this clothing practice is reason enough for a Sikh to do so. The significance of the symbols has steadily grown. Every Sikh knows that warriors, martyrs, and saints of the faith since 1699, as well as the present members of the *khalsa*, have adhered to the same clothing rules. *Khalsa* men generally take the surname of Singh, which means “lion,” whereas *khalsa* women take the surname of *kaur*, which means “princess” or “lioness.” Women also take the *khalsa* baptism, and the five *K’s* apply to their appearance.

The Guru Granth Sahib is more than just a holy book in Sikhism. Adherents of the religion see Granth as a living, humanlike guru. The text contains 1,430 pages and holds the original words spoken by the creators of Sikhism (the ten gurus of Sikhism) and by a variety of saints from other religions, including Islam and

Hinduism. The Guru Granth Sahib was developed from the *Adi Granth*, which was written in 1604. *Adi Granth* known as “the first book” is seen by many to be similar to the *Guru Granth Sahib*. It was the last of the Sikh gurus *Guru Gobind Singh*, who instructed the Sikhs to view the *Guru Granth Sahib* as the next *Guru*.

If one visits a *gurdwara*, or a Sikh temple, the *Guru Granth Sahib* forms the chief part of the main hall (the *darbar sahib*). The holy book is positioned on the foremost platform and is covered in a vibrantly colored, high-quality cloth. The platform is perpetually sheltered by a canopy, which is also decked in costly and strikingly colored materials. The text used in the *gurdwara* is written in *gurmukhi*, the standard script of Sikhism.

Holidays and Religious Observances

Because of its original geographical proximity to India and Pakistan, some of the religious observances of Sikhism are closely related to those of Hinduism and Islam. For example, Sikhs observe *Diwali*, the Hindu Festival of Lights, the 12 *Sangrand* (Hindu *Sankranti*), the days that signal the beginning of each month, and the day following *Holi*, which they call *Hola Mohalla*, celebrated every year around March 17. Thousands gather to watch mock battles and displays of military skills such as swordsmanship and horseback riding, followed by poetry and musical competitions. *Hola Mohalla* ends with a huge parade led by the flags of each temple.

Other significant Sikh festivals celebrate anniversaries connected with the lives of the *Gurpurbs* (the birthdays of the gurus), which are Sikh festivals that commemorate the lives of the 10 human gurus. Sikhs celebrate *gurpurbs* with the *akband path*, a ceaseless recitation of the sacred text, the *Guru Granth Sahib*, from start to finish. The reading is done by a group of men and women. Each person reads from two to three hours for 48 hours, commencing two days prior to and concluding early on the morning of the guru’s birthday. The *gurdwaras* are decorated with vibrant flowers and posters portraying various features of the Sikh religion. Adherents pray, sing, and eat together. On the day of the *gurpurb*, celebrations begin early in the morning with musical recitals of hymns in the holy book. Singing devotional hymns from the *Granth Sahib* is called *kirtan* (or *bhajan*), and it is a practice Sikhs are required to perform often. Then there are lectures on the faith called *katha*. These celebrations go on until early afternoon.

There are also specific rituals performed to celebrate rites of passage including birth, naming, puberty, baptism (*Baisakhi*), marriage, and death. When a child is born, Sikhs read a special prayer

The Sikh Wedding Ritual

Anand karaj or “blissful union” is the approved type of Sikh marriage. It is an informal marriage in which the eventual choice of life partners lies with the couple getting married in consultation with both sets of parents. The official code of conduct in Sikhism (the Reht Maryada) states that the notion of any form of discrimination must be banished. If a couple professes the Sikh faith, then they can be legally married using the *anand karaj* ritual, regardless of their caste or creed. Horoscopes and dowries are forbidden. Although it is not wholly necessary an engagement ritual called the *kurmai* may be performed a week before the wedding. If the wedding is to take place at home the bride’s family makes a trip to the groom’s house a short time beforehand.

At the beginning of a Sikh wedding, the *baraat* (people from the groom’s side) go to the bride’s home in the evening. After being

thoroughly entertained, they spend the night at the bride’s house. The marriage ceremony takes place the next day at the local *gurdwara* or in the bride’s home. It involves *ardas* (the standard Sikh prayers); *kirtan* (“hymns,” found in the Guru Granth Sahib), and a common meal called *langars*, if it takes place in the *gurdwara*.

Anand karaj consists of the couple walking around Guru Granth Sahib four times as the *lavans* (“marriage hymns”) are being recited. Walking in a circle symbolizes the couple’s commitment, with the Guru as their witness. In addition, it also signifies that Granth Sahib is the center of the couple’s life. In the marriage ceremony, Guru Granth Sahib represents the heart of the marriage, while the congregation (*sadh sangat*), the community, is the support.

Dancing and singing follow the religious ritual and continue all night. The groom and the bride leave the next day.

and place a drop of *amrit* (holy water) on the baby’s tongue. When the mother and child are able to travel, they go to the local temple for the naming of the baby. The baby’s name is selected by opening the Guru Granth Sahib to any page, and the name has to begin with the first letter of the first word of the hymn found on the left-hand side of the page. Singh (“lion”) is added to boys’ names to emphasize that they must be brave, and Kaur (“princess”) is added to girls’ names to emphasize dignity. After the baby’s name has been decided, it is announced to those gathered in the temple.

When a male child reaches puberty, between 14 and 16, he is initiated in a ceremony called the *Das-taar Bandi* (wearing of the first turban). *Amrit*, a mixture of sugar and water, is prepared in an iron bowl as the five *Banis* (special prayers) are recited by five Sikhs in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book. During the ceremony the *amrit* is blessed and sprinkled on the hair and eyes of the youths, a prayer is said, followed by a shared meal. Baisakhi is the day on which young Sikhs can join the Khalsa brotherhood, which requires that they observe the Five *k’s*; April 13 is regarded as the birth of the order and many Sikhs choose to be baptized into the

Khalsa brotherhood on this day. The ceremony itself is called Amrit Sanskar.

See also Volume I: INDIA

See also Volume II: PAKISTAN

See also Volume III: HINDUISM; ISLAM

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Spring Festivals

FACT FILE

Observed in	Worldwide
Observed on	Between February and April, often around the spring equinox (March 20–22 in the Northern Hemisphere, September 20–22 in the Southern Hemisphere)
Observed by	General Public

Introduction

From the beginning, human survival and sustenance were strongly and directly dependent on the pattern of the seasons and the elements that played such a vital role in their definition. It is amply evident that the earliest festivals originated in response to the changes in seasons and from the desire to propitiate the deities thought to control the elements. Around the world a variety of festivities mark the seasons of the year, bringing pleasure and excitement to everyday life. Festivals are joyous occasions meant to be celebrated with the community at large. The origins of many of these festivals are lost in the unrecorded histories of antiquity, but the observances marking the spring (or vernal) equinox are still very much a part of our lives.

In order to ensure that the seasons would be favorable and allow humans to survive whatever they brought, they devised rites and ceremonies dedicated to different gods. Vestiges of these celebrations remain in modern cultural festivities. For example Zoroastrians and numerous societies in Asia and the Near East still celebrate Navruz, the new day or New Year, arguably the oldest celebration in the world.

In early times these events almost always coincided with the beginning of a new year, and the earliest calendars were lists of festivals celebrating the natural changes of seasons. According to this natural cycle of events, the year began with spring.

Origins and History

The earliest spring festivals were celebrations of natural wonders, many of which puzzled early humans. In every community, age, and country, the spring equinox ensures the coming end of the long, cold,

harsh winter. Occurring every year on March 20, 21, or 22 in the Northern Hemisphere, spring brings fertility, the throb of life, the resurgence of hope, and the long days of summer sunshine. Spring holiday customs express this exuberance with singing and dancing, a profusion of flowers, gift-giving, and general playfulness. Spring festivals are joyous occasions that welcome the return of green to the earth.

Spring festivals were rituals performed to guarantee the fecundity of the land, animals, and people. The earliest societies were agricultural, and survival was largely dependent on the fertility of the soil and the benevolence of the weather. So spring rituals were taken very seriously. The people feared that if the deities believed to control these factors were not suitably propitiated, then the Sun would not shine, or there might be excessive rain or no rain, and then plants would not grow.

The vernal equinox is probably one of the oldest seasonal observances in civilization. The earliest reference to a spring holiday is from Babylon, around 2400 B.C.E., where we learn of a celebration during the modern months of March or April in the city of Ur dedicated to the Moon and the spring equinox. The Babylonians were among the first, if not the first, civilization to institutionalize both equinoxes as the pivotal points in their year. Ultimately the Jewish spring equinox celebrations, the Feast of Weeks and Passover, may be derived to some extent from the Babylonian celebration (in spite of biblical stories offering other explanations), acquired between 597 and 538 during the Babylonian Captivity.

In fact most of the cultures found around the Mediterranean probably had their own spring festivals, although their focus would have been slightly different. Whereas in the north the vernal equinox is a time to begin planting, for societies farther south the summer crops have already begun to sprout. Whether celebrating the time for sowing or the sprouting of new life, spring celebrations have always welcomed the arrival or promise of new life.

Fun Fact

Modern pagans celebrate eight religious festivals marking phases of the changing seasons during the year.

Some of the earliest records of celebrations of the rites of spring are found in ancient Rome. Every year in March the ancient Romans celebrated a festival in honor of Mars, the god of agriculture and war, after whom the month of March is named. Priests of Mars, called *salii*, or leapers, marched around the city dancing and clanging their swords and shields. This dancing was believed to help the newly planted grain grow. High leaps would make the grain grow taller, it was believed. Moreover Ceres, the goddess of grain, was offered cakes and a sacrificial sow, so that she would protect the newly planted seeds.

The beginning of May was also a popular festival time in Roman communities. In honor of Flora, the goddess of flowers, the Romans held a five-day celebration every year called the Floralia, which began around April 28 and lasted until May 2. During the festival children wound garlands of spring flowers around columns in the temple of Flora as offerings to her.

The Lupercalia, which involved purification rituals in addition to fertility rites, is another Roman spring festival. Celebrated on February 15 the *dies februatus*, meaning “day of atonement,” honored the god Lupercus, a fertility god. It was one of the most ancient Roman festivals; its crude, bizarre rites and traditions belong to the early days when Romans were still a half-savage group of shepherds. The festival was named for the naked male priests called *luperci*, but no one, including the Roman celebrants, seems to have known much about the deity worshipped. (Faunus, the Roman pastoral god, was also worshipped during this festival.) The *luperci* traditionally sacrificed two goats and a dog on this day. At a subsequent time the *luperci* clothed themselves in goatskins and ran through the streets of Rome, symbolically swatting at people with strips of goat hide so they would be fertile. At a much later date, Pope Gelasius I (d. 496 C.E.) converted the Lupercalia purification festival into the festival of the Purification of the Virgin Mary.

Spring festivals are found in other ancient civilizations as well. Ancient Greece celebrated the Olympieia in the spring, a festival that honored Zeus (the king of Gods) and combined religious festivities with athletic events. In ancient Mesopotamia in Babylon, where the king was considered god’s agent on Earth, Akitu, the New Year’s festival, was held during spring, in the month of Nisan.

Most spring religious festivals, regardless of the culture, were centered on a god whose own death and subsequent rebirth symbolized the death and rebirth of life. In some societies the king (sometimes called the Corn King, or Corn God) represented the god and was sacrificed to ensure fertility and a good harvest. Whether the sacrifice was the king, another individual, or an animal (typically a bull), it was important that the sacrifice go willingly to its death, without a struggle. In some stories the god, for example Osiris (Egyptian), Orpheus and

Dionysus (Greek), Attis (Phrygian), Adonis (originally Syrian), or Tammuz (Babylonian), descended into the underworld, often to bring a goddess back. Certainly the Christian savior Jesus belongs in this company: He was sacrificed to redeem humanity (although maybe not on the vernal equinox); he went willingly, and he was reborn.

Originally Cybele was the Phrygian great mother goddess, and Attis was her consort. By 200 B.C.E., worship of Cybele had reached Rome, and a temple dedicated to her was located on what is now known as Vatican Hill. Apparently when early Christians moved into pagan territories, both groups worshipped their respective deities at the same time—the pagans worshipping Attis (or Orpheus or Osiris), and the Christians, Jesus. Of course both groups were equally convinced that their god was the true god.



Vietnamese take part in a traditional spring festival procession in Tan Trieu village near Hanoi, Vietnam. Celebration of the advent of spring and the end of the dreary winter months is an ancient tradition common across cultures. (AP Photo/Richard Vogel)



An Ancient Springtime Celebration

The name Pesach (Passover) goes back to the actions (or nonactions) of the angel of death as described in the book of Exodus. The Jews' exodus from Egypt is believed to have occurred around 1445 B.C.E. The Israelites were living in slavery in Egypt, and pharaoh had begun to fear the strength of their growing numbers. Moses (a foundling, though actually a Jew), who had been raised in pharaoh's court, was living as a shepherd in the desert. God visited Moses in a burning bush and exhorted him to take the Israelites out of Egypt to the Promised Land. In spite of repeated pleadings, pharaoh refused to

liberate the Israelites. To punish pharaoh for his misdeeds, God told Moses that he would take the firstborn of all Egyptians as well as the firstborn of all their animals. Led by Moses, who acted at God's behest, every Israelite family sacrificed a lamb, prepared a special meal, and marked the doorpost with the lamb's blood. As promised by God, his angel "passed over" the homes of the Jews, marked with the blood of the slaughtered lamb, leaving them unaffected. Conversely, the firstborn sons, as well as the firstborn offspring of the Egyptians' domestic animals, whose doorways were not marked, were all exterminated. The meal prepared that night became the seder meal of Passover.

With the advent of Christianity radical changes took place in these ancient spring rites and ceremonies, especially with respect to how their purposes were understood. In order to eradicate religious competition for the people's allegiance, the early church fathers outlawed all pagan rites and ceremonies. But the people would not entirely give them up because these rituals and their attendant festivities had been a way of life for thousands of years—as long as anyone could remember. Consequently the Christian Church changed its strategy; instead of forbidding the performance of pagan rituals where it had encroached, it grafted Christian purposes and meanings onto the old pagan rituals and festivals. Many of the most popular and enduring observances, thought of as being Christian, are really the reinterpreted rituals and ceremonies of a pagan past.

The pagan origins of contemporary Christian celebrations of Easter provide a good example of how aggressively the early church used pagan ceremonies, symbols, and their sacred religious sites. The name of the Christian festival Easter, for example, was taken from the name of the German goddess of fertility Eostre. Her feast day occurred on the first full Moon following the vernal equinox, and a similar calculation for scheduling Easter observations is used by Western Christians. On that first full Moon Eostre is believed to mate

with the solar god. She will conceive a child who will be born nine months later on Yule (December 21, the winter solstice) around the time when Christmas festivities are on many people's calendars.

Two of the symbols most frequently chosen by Christians for Easter are the hare, or rabbit, and the egg, both important symbols associated with Eostre's fertility rituals. And these symbols figure prominently in Easter celebrations.

In their present form spring celebrations include water and fire festivals, feasts and pageants, complete with traditional foods, costumes, and music. Flowers are to be found decorating everything, and gifts and good wishes are exchanged during this time of merrymaking. People wear new clothes as if imitating Mother Earth, who is also adorned with fresh leaves, flowers, and grass. And the worship of Eostre goes on. Modern Wiccans and neo-pagans celebrate Ostara, which has a different spelling of Eostre's name, with a lesser Sabbath on the vernal equinox. Some believe that this name is ultimately a variation on the names of other prominent goddesses, like Ishtar, Astarte, and Isis.

See also Volume I: AUSTRIA; AZERBAIJAN; BURKINA FASO; BURUNDI; CAMBODIA; CAMEROON; CHINA; CZECH REPUBLIC; DENMARK; ESTONIA; FINLAND; FRANCE; FRENCH GUIANA; GABON; GAMBIA, THE; GEORGIA; GERMANY; GHANA; GREECE; HAITI; HONG KONG; HUNGARY; INDIA; INDONESIA; IRAN; IRAQ; ISRAEL; ITALY; JAPAN; JORDAN; KAZAKHSTAN; KENYA; KIRIBATI; KOREA, NORTH; KOREA, SOUTH; KYRGYZSTAN

See also Volume II: LAOS; LATVIA; LITHUANIA; LUXEMBOURG; MALAYSIA; MALDIVES; MALI; MALTA; MONGOLIA; MOROCCO; PERU; RUSSIA; SINGAPORE; SLOVAKIA; SLOVENIA; SWEDEN; TAIWAN; TURKEY; UKRAINE; UNITED STATES

Fun Fact

Goddesses, as well as gods, descended into the underworld to rescue loved ones. The Greek Goddess Demeter went down every year to rescue her daughter Persephone from Hades, the God of the underworld. For the six months Persephone was allowed to spend on Earth, the world was warm and fertile.

See also Volume III: EASTER; LABOR DAY; NAVRUZ; PESACH

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∞ Taoism ∞

FACT FILE

Observed in	China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam
World Population	About 20 million
Place of Origin	China

Introduction

Tao (which is pronounced “dow”) means “the path” or “the way,” roughly translated. It is essentially indescribable but something that is to be experienced. Taoism’s founder is thought by a majority to be Lao Tzu, who is believed to have lived around the same time as Confucius, the founder of Confucianism, in the sixth century C.E. Modern scholars posit that he lived during the fourth century, producing the Tao Te Ching during the Warring States and Hundred Schools of Thought eras. Others, however, believe him to be a mythical character, although he is a favorite deity of the Taoist pantheon.

Lao Tzu was looking for a path that would steer clear of the continual feudal conflicts and other clashes that typified Chinese society at the time. The result of his search was the Tao Te Ching (also called Daodejing), which means “the book of the way” or “the way of power.” It is the most documented text of Taoism. Though the book is widely believed to be Lao Tzu’s work, there is some controversy surrounding its authorship. Modern scholars contend that the Tao Te Ching was not written until sometime between 300 and

250 B.C.E. Recent research even hints that the text could have been written by a group of learned men. The Tao Te Ching describes the state and nature of life, the path to peace, and the way a ruler should live his life. The book is rather short, with about 1,000 words spread over 81 chapters and divided into two sections, the Te Ching and the Tao Ching.

Since the Tao tradition is so old and is strongly connected with Confucianism, it is hard to distinguish among individual beliefs. Many consider themselves both Taoists and Confucians. The only clear principle of Taoism is belief in the tao. Depending on the individual, however, this word can have different meanings. Scholars use the word *tao* in widely divergent contexts. It is also difficult to explain the word *tao* in English. The result is difficulty identifying precisely the beliefs of Taoists.

Generally, tao is interpreted as “the way” or “the path,” the course that one should take in life, suggesting that it is primarily a code of behavior. The tao is also said to be the natural arrangement of everything; central to this conceptualization are the values of yin and yang.

Above all Taoism is seen as the fundamental nature or the universal life force of everything in the world. Yin and yang are considered to be complementary features of the tao, always in flux, never static. Westerners might be tempted to treat these elements as absolutes, but one cannot exist without the other. Yin and yang create the world’s natural order. *Yin* means “shady,” and corresponds to the night and less active functions. It is said to be the breath that created the Earth. *Yang* is thought of as the more masculine, “sunny” functions. It is believed to be the breath that created the heavens. *Yang* is characterized by warmth, light, good, and positive values. Everything in nature has, and is, both yin and yang.

Yin and yang can be characterized as a process of transformation, expressions of the changes between the phases of a cycle. In order to understand how yin and yang are complementary functions,

Tai Chi

Taoists are famous for exercise and movement techniques. Tai chi is one such system that works on every part of the body. It stimulates the central nervous system, lowers blood pressure, tones muscles without straining them, and relieves stress. It also aids digestion and blood circulation. Conventional Chinese medicine teaches that illnesses result from obstructions or imbalance in the human body’s chi (or intrinsic energy), and tai chi is believed to balance this flow of energy.

each is always in the process of becoming the other without being it at any point. Consider the movement of time. Noon is momentarily all yang but moving toward sunset, which is yang becoming yin; midnight is at one moment all yin but then already becoming yang, and sunrise is yin becoming yang. At another level, time's motion can be seen in seasonal changes. Summer is full yang; autumn is yang becoming yin; winter is full yin, and spring is yin becoming yang.

That opposites are always becoming the other is the philosophical base of Lao Tzu's methods. It is also an aspect of *wu wei* (nonaction). The notion of nonaction as the natural course of life is a basic belief of Taoism. Nonaction does not mean that Taoists believe in passivity. *Nonaction* is not *inaction*. The highest moral of Taoism states that one should not ever act but leave nothing undone. *Wu wei* is one of the major precepts of Taoism. It means to do things in a way that makes it look as though accomplishing one's goal involves no expended effort. By sticking to the code of *wu wei*, the individual is seen as ardently following "the way." People living by the concept of *wu wei* are deemed to be in their original nature, before they were spoiled by knowledge. This state is compared to an uncarved block and is called *pu*. Lao Tzu believed that *wu wei* could lead to a society that is harmonious and peaceful. People, according to Taoism, are a microcosm of the universe. Taoists believe that the human body corresponds to the universe's plan. The human body's five organs correspond to the five holy mountains, the five directions, the seasons, the sections of the sky, and the elements of nature. Taoists think that through an understanding of what humanity is, one can appreciate the definitive structure of this universe. Also, Taoists believe in the necessity of having the three jewels in their lives. The Tao Te Ching defines the three jewels as kindness, moderation, and humility. Kindness eventually leads to bravery, moderation leads to munificence, and humility to leadership.

Taoists strive to be one with the tao, which means living a simple and natural life. Thoughts from outside obstruct a person's ability to perceive the tao. If people live in harmony with the tao, they can return to their original state and become the tao. Taoism's cycle is that of being born, then maturing, and then decaying and eventually returning to the tao. Everything passes through this cycle. Taoism teaches that all things have their own destiny, or *te*. When there is no opposition to this *te*, it manifests itself naturally in life. The Tao Te Ching says that the major problem that a human being faces is not knowing who he or she truly is. Taoism teaches that each one of us is a part of a cosmic course called the tao. One's basic choice lies in accepting this reality and becoming one with the tao or trying to oppose one's true being and setting up one's individual identity outside the tao, which is clearly impossible.

Yin-Yang Symbol

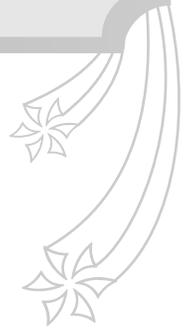
The yin-yang symbol—a circle divided into two equal swirls, one black, the other white—is Taoism's most familiar symbol. Some say that it was derived from astronomical studies. The two swirls symbolize the constancy of change, the only stable feature of our world. According to one tradition, yin (the black side) symbolizes the breath that created the Earth, and yang (the white side) represents the breath that created the heavens. Since there is no such thing in nature as anything wholly black or wholly white, the symbol has a small black spot inside the white swirl and a small white spot inside the black swirl. The black seed enclosed within the white will regenerate the white, and the white seed enclosed within the black will regenerate it. Taoists think that humans interfere in nature and disturb the balance between yin and yang.

Taoism is polytheistic in nature; its followers believe in the existence of multiple gods. Each god is held to be a manifestation of a feature of the tao. Taoists do not pray to these gods, nor do they do think any god can solve their problems. In fact, Taoists look for solutions to life's challenges in individual meditation and observation. Most major Taoist religious festivals commemorate the birth of gods or the solstices.

The Chinese New Year is the first significant festival in the Taoist year, celebrated on the first day of the first lunar month, corresponding to February in the Gregorian calendar. Rituals in temples and in homes worship the Three Pure Ones with sweet offerings, a feast, and exchanging gifts with friends and family. On the festival's first day, the Dragon (Lion) Dance is carried out to celebrate immortality, long life, and union with spirits. Firecrackers are set off to scare evil forces away.

For followers of Taoism Lao Tzu's birthday is the most important festival. It is observed on the 15th day of the second lunar month. Other festival days celebrate the birth of the Three Officials: the Water Official (Xia Yuan), the Earth Official (Zhong Yuan), and the Heavenly Official (the mortal Shang Yuan). Of these festivals, Zhong Yuan is probably the most popular and is celebrated as Ghost Day. On this day the Earth Official is believed to pardon the transgressions of the dead. Departed souls can gain redemption through the kind and charitable actions of the living.

Before the beginning of a new year, the Kitchen God, Zao Jun (literally, "stove master"), symbolized by paper hung on the wall of the kitchen, is speedily sent to heaven to report on the behavior of the household to the jade emperor. At the start of the New Year, the Kitchen God is welcomed back into the home.



Deities of Taoism

Jade Emperor Yu Huang, known formally as the Pure August Jade Emperor (Yu Huang Shangdi) or August Personage of Jade (Yu Huang Dadi), is the ruler of heaven and Earth according to Chinese mythology, as mortal emperors used to rule China. Yu Huang is one of the most important gods of the Taoist pantheon, and he was the patron deity of the imperial family from the ninth century on. And like the Chinese imperial court Yu Huang and his retinue are conceived of as a large heavenly bureaucracy that controls every aspect of life on Earth. He is the leading god of popular Taoism, and all of the other gods report to him. Yu Huang's main purpose is managing the administration of heaven. He watches the performance of

every god and rewards, promotes, or demotes them based on his observations.

Yuan-shih Tien-tsun existed long before the universe was created and will exist long after the universe has ended. Unlike the world in which humans live, one that is forever being destroyed and created, he is everlasting and enduring. When something new is created, Yuan-shih Tien-tsun comes down to Earth to tell humankind the Tao's secrets.

San-ching, the Three Pure Ones—Yü-ching (the Jade Pure), Shang-ching (the Higher Pure), and Tai-ching (the Grand Pure), are Taoism's most revered deities. *Pure* refers to the three heavens where they reside. The Three Pure Ones are thought to be unique manifestations of Lao Tzu, and their main objective is saving humankind by teaching compassion.

Taoism does have monks and nuns who prefer to live their lives in seclusion rather than in the open. They are well known for bringing the martial arts culture to China, tai chi, perhaps, being the most famous.

Origins and History

The religious and philosophical origins can be found deep in China's past, in pantheism, shamanism, and observation of the regularity of seasonal

cycles. Early Taoism, like Confucianism, developed during the Warring States and Hundred Schools of Thought periods, when Chinese civil society went through one of its extremely turbulent periods, and it developed as a workable response to the bitter philosophical debates that raged.

Taoism began as a combination of philosophy and psychology, but over time it developed into a religion. During the Han dynasty (202 B.C.E.–220 C.E.) Taoism gained a wider audience among the Chinese people, finding converts as well as defenders, and from the general ferment many sects arose, with hierarchies of gods and established rituals. By the fifth century Taoism had become a successful and popular religious system, including elements it had incorporated from Mahayana Buddhism. It established an extensive pantheon of deities, many of them probably local gods from various regions of China, diverse monastic orders, and lay masters. In 440 C.E. it became a state religion. During that period Lao Tzu (the founder of Taoism) was popularly recognized as a divinity. Taoism, together with Confucianism and Buddhism, became one of China's three chief spiritual practices. Following the Han dynasty Confucianism became the official doctrine of the state. Some rulers of the Tang dynasty (618–907), a period thought by many to be the “golden age” of Chinese art and literature, declared Taoism the state religion, while others preferred Buddhism.

The Chuang-tzu (named after its author), after the Tao Te Ching, is the next most documented text in Taoism. The Chuang-tzu contains additional teachings relevant to Taoism. In addition to passing



Taoist priests in ceremonial robes pray for world peace and prosperity at a ceremony celebrating the Chinese lunar New Year. (AP Photo/Lee Chuan-hsien)

on stories of Taoism's masters and followers, its 33 chapters describe the mystical philosophy of Taoism in greater detail and provides information crucial to right living such as a proper diet, efficient breathing, meditation, and sexual activity. It has three separate sections. Though it is not clear when the text was produced—it was written after the *Tao Te Ching*—it is thought to have been somewhere around the middle of the fourth century B.C.E. The *Pao Pu Tzu* (or Master Embracing Simplicity) and the *Tai-Ping Ching* (Classic of the Great Peace) are two other texts closely associated with Taoist philosophy: The *Pao Pu Tzu* was written by Ko Hung (288–343 C.E.), while *Tai-Ping Ching* was probably written sometime during the Han dynasty.

When the Ching dynasty collapsed in 1911 government support for Taoism also ceased. A lot of Taoism's legacy was destroyed in the subsequent period of the warlords. After the Communists came to power in 1949 religious freedom was strictly limited. It is said that by 1960 monks were forced to perform manual labor, temples were seized, and the population of monks drastically reduced. In the period of the Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1976, a great portion of the surviving Taoist heritage in China was destroyed. There has been some religious forbearance since 1982, however.

Taoism adherents number about 20 million, most of whom live in Taiwan. There has been some Tao influence in the West, and a small number of Taoists are to be found in North America and Canada.

Holidays and Religious Observances

The Taoist religious pantheon has so many gods that some have likened it to a hierarchical “bureaucracy” that consists of numerous gods, immortals, and ancestors. For every occasion and every purpose there are probably several gods or ancestors to be called on for help. The *jiao*, making an offering for a specific reason, is central to Taoist ritual. Early in its history, the *jiao* required a priest, or “libationer,” who decided which deities should be summoned to accomplish the petitioner's purpose. After the priest had made the offering, the community shared a meal. Although Taoist temples and shrines are still available for such rituals, nowadays, many Taoists have shrines in their homes and perform their own rituals seeking the help of ancestors and deities.

Most major Taoist religious festivals commemorate the birth of gods or the solstices. The Chinese New Year, celebrated on the first day of the first lunar month (February in the Gregorian calendar), is the earliest festival of the Taoist year. Before the beginning of the new year, the Kitchen God, Zao Jun (literally, “stove master”), symbolized by paper hung on the wall of the kitchen, is speedily sent to heaven to report on the behavior of the household to the Jade Emperor. When the New Year begins, the Kitchen God is welcomed back into the home. Rituals in temples and in homes worship the Three Pure Ones with sweet offerings, a feast, and exchanging gifts with friends and family. On the festival's first day, the Dragon (Lion) Dance is performed to celebrate immortality, long life, and union with spirits, and fireworks are set off to drive evil away.

For followers of Taoism Lao Tzu's birthday is the most important festival. It is observed on the 15th day of the second lunar month. Other festival days celebrate the birth of the Three Officials: the Water Official (Xia Yuan), the Earth Official (Zhong Yuan), and the Heavenly Official (the mortal Shang Yuan). Of these festivals, Zhong Yuan is probably the most popular and is celebrated as Ghost Day. On this day, the Earth Official is believed to pardon the transgressions of the dead. Departed souls can gain redemption through the kind and charitable actions of the living.

See also Volume I: CHINA; JAPAN; KOREA, SOUTH

See also Volume II: TAIWAN; VIETNAM

See also Volume III: CONFUCIANISM

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Thanksgiving

FACT FILE

Observed in	United States and Canada, as well as some island countries in the Pacific
Observed on	Fourth Thursday in November (United States); second Monday in October (Canada)
Observed by	General Public

Introduction

Thanksgiving, with its roots in the pagan celebrations of the autumn harvest, is a holiday observed throughout North America. In the United States Thanksgiving is commemorated on the fourth Thursday of November. In Canada, since the harvest takes place a little earlier, the holiday is observed on the second Monday of October.

The celebration of Thanksgiving in the United States was possibly a derivative of England's harvest-home rituals. These were days set aside to thank God for healthy crops and an abundant harvest. This holiday accordingly takes place in late autumn, after the crops have been harvested. In the recent past Thanksgiving has become a family affair in the United States, complete with elaborate dinners and joyful reunions; however, it is also conventionally a time for church services, religious contemplation, and prayer.

Origins and History

Thanksgiving traditions draw on ancient pagan harvest festivals. These were already European traditions before Europeans stumbled into the Western

Hemisphere. So it is perhaps natural that they brought the festivities with them as remembered "good times." The first Thanksgiving in North America was not, however, celebrated by Pilgrims; rather it was held in Newfoundland, Canada, in 1578 by the Frobisher Expedition. The first "thanksgiving" observance in the territory that would become the United States was held in Florida, not Massachusetts, as is commonly believed, and the people who sat down to dine with their new friends, the Amerindians, were Spanish, not English. The feast was held on September 8, 1565, in St. Augustine, Florida, when Pedro Menéndez and his men shared a sumptuous meal with the indigenous people.

Yet another "thanksgiving" was wholly religious in nature but did not involve feasting at all, and was in fact not even voluntary. In 1619, 38 English settlers arrived at Berkeley Plantation on the James River, at a place now known as Charles City, Virginia. The contract of the group made it mandatory that the day of arrival be observed as a day of giving thanks to God. As far as anyone knows, no food was served.

However, most people are inappropriately taught and believe that the real "first" Thanksgiving was held on a date that no one thought to record in 1621, sometime in the fall, when the Pilgrims held a three-day feast to celebrate their first harvest in North America. Joining them in the three-day festivities was Massasoit and 90 of his men, who contributed five deer to the meal. The Pilgrims had come from Plymouth, England, on a ship named the *Mayflower*; a small ship packed with men, women, and children, in addition to the sailors. Aboard the ship were passengers consisting of the separatists, who preferred to call themselves the Saints, and the rest, whom they called the Strangers. All had come seeking the riches of the "new" world.

The Pilgrims were ill-prepared for the starvation and illnesses of a cruel New England winter, and nearly half of them died before spring arrived.

Other Thanksgiving Traditions

Apart from the traditions of European harvest festivals brought by settlers to North America, some link the U.S. Thanksgiving with Sukkot, an early Jewish observance, which gives thanks to God for the Earth's bounty. In fact all the foremost world religions—including Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity—have rituals and observances that express gratitude to a higher power for the blessings of life.

Also the Pilgrims' biggest concern was the possibility of aggression by local Indians. The Patuxets (the name of the tribe) were, however, a gentle group and were not a threat. Then on March 16, 1621, something significant happened. A Native American brave marched into the Pilgrims' settlement. The visitors were initially frightened, until he greeted them by saying "Welcome" (in English). His name was Samoset, and he had learned the English language from captains of fishing boats that used to sail off the coast. He was to return to the Pilgrims with Squanto, who happened to be more fluent in English because he had already visited Spain and England.

Squanto's value to the Pilgrims was incalculable, and the Pilgrims would probably not have survived without his knowledge and help. He taught them to tap maple trees for sap. He taught them about plants that had medicinal qualities and those that were poisonous. He taught them the trick of planting Indian corn by piling the earth into several low mounds with fish and seeds in each one so that the decaying fish would fertilize the corn. Squanto also taught them to plant different crops with the corn, with the result that the Pilgrims reaped an abundant harvest in the fall.

The Pilgrims announced a three-day feast, beginning on December 13, 1621, to offer their thanks to God and to enjoy the fruits of their labors with their Indian friends. This may not have been



A reenactment of the Thanksgiving feast held in Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1621. (AP Photo/Plimoth Plantation, Ted Curtin)

Thanksgiving Turkey

There is no concrete evidence that turkey was a part of the Pilgrims' first Thanksgiving. Over time, however, it has become a vital part of the Thanksgiving custom. The tradition of turkey has its roots in William Bradford's *History of Plymouth Plantation*, written some 22 years after the first celebration in 1621. The Bradford document was lost during the United States' War of Independence, but it was rediscovered in 1854. Since then the turkey has become the most popular symbol of the Thanksgiving holiday.

the first Thanksgiving in the country—thanksgiving services were routine in the state of Virginia as early as 1607—but it was certainly the most splendid festival. Immediately after their first harvest, the Pilgrims set aside a day for Thanksgiving. In the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Thanksgiving was first celebrated in 1631 and often thereafter, until around 1680, when it was made an annual festival. In Connecticut Thanksgiving was celebrated as early as 1639 and annually after 1647, with the exception of the year 1675. The Dutch of New Netherlands were more dilatory, first establishing a day for giving thanks in 1644, and only sporadically after that.

The Continental Congress assigned one or more Thanksgiving Days during the American Revolutionary War, with the exception of 1777, each time suggesting to the governors of the various states the dates on which these holidays should be observed. George Washington declared a Thanksgiving in December 1777 to celebrate the defeat of the British by his troops at Saratoga, New York, and the Continental Congress followed his lead, proclaiming annual December Thanksgiving day from 1778 to 1783, except for the year 1782.

After the American Revolution the first national Thanksgiving, proclaimed by President George Washington, was November 26, 1789. He declared November 26 as a day to give "humble and sincere" thanks to God. There was, however, no national concurrence on a day for the holiday. After a five-year sabbatical with no celebration, George Washington's announcement thus rejuvenated the holiday and moved it to November, a month earlier. Some of the subsequent presidents declared different days of Thanksgiving, with James Madison actually proclaiming two in 1815, but none of these occasions fell in autumn.

Fun Fact

The date for Canada's Thanksgiving holiday, the second Monday in October, was not established until 1957. Prior to that year Parliament had to decide on a date every year.

Fun Fact

Since 1970 Native Americans and supporters have held a National Day of Mourning at Plymouth Rock in Plymouth, Massachusetts, to protest the nearly successful attempt at genocide carried out by the U.S. government and military.

Fun Fact

There may not have been turkeys at the 1621 Thanksgiving feast, but in 2003, of the 269 million turkeys raised in the United States, 45 million were killed and cooked as part of the Thanksgiving festivities.

The notion of a national day of Thanksgiving did not come up again until 1863, when Abraham Lincoln revived the custom, fixing the date as the last Thursday of November. Lincoln, following crucial wins by the Union forces at Vicksburg and Gettysburg during that year's summer, issued a statement that made the fourth Thursday of November a national Thanksgiving Day. Even then the holiday was not commonly accepted, mainly in the South, on the ground that it was a relic of Puritanical bigotry. The year 1863 was also the year that the Pilgrims got their capital *P*.

The Separatists who founded the Plymouth colony were one among several predecessors, and they had on occasion called themselves "pilgrims" as a means of connecting their colonizing experience with that of the Hebrews and managing in the process to identify themselves as God's "chosen people." Until the late 18th century they were called either "Old Comers" or "First Comers"; later they acquired the epithet "forefathers," an idea that appealed to men's organizations like the Old Colony Club, whose members were determined that Landing Day or Forefathers' Day, observances intended to memorialize and masculinize the day of the *Mayflower's* landing, might replace or, at least, compete with the Thanksgiving holiday.

From 1939 to 1941 Franklin D. Roosevelt designated the third Thursday in November as Thanksgiving to give merchants additional time to profit

from the approach of the December season of gift exchanges. Some of the states approved, some did not, and others, like Texas, could not make a decision and so took both weeks as holidays. In the end the two houses of the U.S. Congress passed a joint resolution in 1941, decreeing that Thanksgiving should fall on the fourth Thursday of November.

Today Thanksgiving is a feast celebrated with family and friends. In the United States it is a major family holiday, and people often travel the breadth of the country to be with their loved ones. The Thanksgiving holiday is usually a four-day weekend, with both Thursday and Friday set aside as holidays. In Canada Thanksgiving is a three-day holiday; otherwise it is very similar to the U.S. version. Thanksgiving is celebrated almost exclusively at home, unlike the Independence Day (Fourth of July) or Christmas, which are connected with a spectrum of festivities (fireworks, caroling, and so on).

See also Volume I: CANADA

See also Volume II: UNITED STATES

See also Volume III: HARVEST FESTIVALS

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∞ Vesak ∞

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Buddhist populations, especially India, Tibet, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka
Observed on	Full Moon day of fifth or sixth month of the Buddhist calendar
Observed by	Buddhists

Introduction

Vesak is the most important festival for Buddhists around the world. Buddhism enjoys a significant following in Southeast Asia, as well as other parts of Asia. By a strange coincidence, the birth, enlightenment (Moksha, or Nirvana), and death of Lord Buddha all took place on the same date, although necessarily in different years, making this date the most sacred day of the year for his followers.

This three-in-one festival takes place in the month of Vesak on the Buddhist lunar calendar and during the second half of May on the Gregorian cal-

endar. For Buddhists, it is a day for rejoicing and contemplation. Celebrations can be elaborate affairs, with lots of festivities and feasting. Silent walks or evening meditations end the Vesak celebration.

Buddhists venerate the Buddha because he understood how to free his mind from the crass realities of the world and practiced the sim-

Fun Fact

A Buddha is anyone who understands the nature of reality, the sadness of the human condition, and the path to liberation by enlightenment, achieved after good karma (action) is maintained and desire for the material things of this world has been abandoned.



Buddhist monks participate in a ceremony commemorating Vesak in Magelang, Indonesia. The Buddhist holiday of Vesak celebrates the birth, enlightenment, and death of Lord Buddha.

(AP Photo/Purwowiyoto)

Buddha's Birthplace

Gautama Buddha was born in Lumbini, now in the southern part of Nepal, one of the four sacred places of Buddhism. It is said that the place should be visited by all Buddhist practitioners. In the Parinibbana Sutta, it is written that the Buddha himself recognized four places of pilgrimage: the place of his birth (Lumbini, Nepal); the site where he delivered his first discourse (Sar-

nath, Uttarpradesh, India); the place where he achieved enlightenment (Bodhgaya, Bihar, India); and the place where he died (Kushinagara, India). Each of these epoch-making incidents occurred in natural surroundings and under shady trees. While there may not be any need to speculate on what may be coincidences, they may explain why Buddhists have always valued the environment and natural law.

ple methods that would bring tranquility, equanimity, and peace of mind. Vesak for the Buddhists is a day to remember his life and teachings and to contemplate what is achievable and what is worth attempting. It is an occasion to focus one's mind on the Buddha's pious life, his remarkable deeds, the Four Noble Truths, the doctrine of the Middle Path, and the Eight Precepts that he taught would lead human beings away from their sorrows and sufferings.

The association with Vesak is particularly strong in the countries that adhere to the Theravada school, namely Malaysia, Burma, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, where the temples are adorned with lanterns representing the Buddha's achievement of Nirvana. In Thailand, where the festival is called Visakha Bucha, multitudes of caged birds are released, and the devout spend the festival chanting, fasting, and joining in other religious observances. At the Sakya Muni Buddha Gaya Temple in Singapore, in exchange for donating money Buddhists receive a small piece of gold leaf that they can attach to the Buddha's statue. By the end of the day, the statue has a new covering of gold leaf. At the Borobudur Temple in Indonesia, where the celebration is called Waisak, elaborate festivities are planned. Around the world devout Buddhists spend the entire day in contemplation, meditation, and piety, and perform acts of charity and

compassion toward the less fortunate, thereby actively following the lofty ideals of Buddhism.

Origins and History

Vesak commemorates the birth of an extraordinary being who propounded the practice of Buddhism. The Buddha, whose the birth name was Gautama Siddhartha (c. 563–c. 483 B.C.E.) was a member of the Shakya dynasty—a warrior clan that ruled Kapilavastu (modern Nepal). He was born into a life of luxury and privilege, surrounded by unlimited material wealth. His mother died soon after his birth, but he was brought up lovingly by his family. His father wanted Gautama to succeed him as the head of the clan, but something was always bothering the boy in spite of his sheltered existence: He was curious to know about the end of human life. Gradually he was exposed to, and became aware of, the harsh realities of life—sickness, old age, and death. He was so shaken by these revelations and so disillusioned that he left his wife and newborn son behind and, renouncing his easy life, became an ascetic.

Following six years of adversity, extreme penance, and endless endeavor the Buddha eventually attained enlightenment. (Vesak also commemorates the Buddha's enlightenment.) The depth of his experience made him certain that he had found the ultimate knowledge and that there was hope beyond the seemingly eternal cycle of sickness, old age, and death. The Buddha understood that this suffering could be ended. While he was meditating beneath the Bodhi tree, the Buddha had a revelation, and it became clear to him that he had been through many births; he understood that all living beings were reborn in circumstances, good or bad, depending on their actions in their previous life (or lives). The Buddha realized that suffering was a result of desire and attachment to the things of this world, and that there was a sure way of escaping suffering. Buddhist scriptures offer ample proof of the fact of Buddha's ultimate understanding and that he knew how others could gain the same. The Buddha's experience holds out hope for humanity: anyone can achieve enlightenment.

Theravada Buddhism

In Pali, *thera* means “elders” and *vada* means “word” or “doctrine,” so Theravada, the doctrine of the elders, is the name of the school of Buddhism that draws its scriptural inspiration from the Tipitaka (the Buddhist canon written in Pali), which scholars generally accept as the oldest record of the Buddha's teachings. For many centuries Theravada Buddhism has been the predominant religion of South Asian countries like Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand. Theravada Buddhists number over 100 million worldwide.

Thirdly, Vesak commemorates the Buddha's achievement of Nirvana (also called his *parinibbana*). As the Buddha lay dying, no miraculous transformation took place; there was no supernatural ascent into heaven, no implausible escape. The Buddha's death was normal. (He had consumed soft pork, or *sukaramaddava*, which probably led to food poisoning.) It was like that of any ordinary human being. In many ways, his was an extraordinary death, because he was liberated from the cycle of life, death, and suffering, and got total release, or Nirvana. His last words were plain and clear: "All things are impermanent," he said, "strive on with diligence."

On Vesak, devout Buddhists assemble in temples to pray and offer alms to the monks. A number of people spend the entire day at the temple, listening to recitations of Buddha's precepts and anecdotes about his life. Others invite monks to their homes to share their discourses. On this sacred day the followers reaffirm their pledge to live an ethical and virtuous life.

See also Volume I: BHUTAN; CAMBODIA; JAPAN; INDIA; KOREA, SOUTH

See also Volume II: LAOS; MALAYSIA; MONGOLIA; MYANMAR; SINGAPORE; SRI LANKA; THAILAND; TIBET; VIETNAM

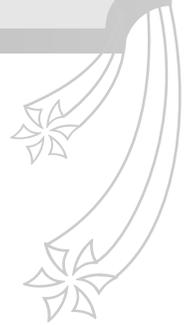
See also Volume III: BUDDHISM

Buddha's Birth

Legend has it that the Buddha was born fully awake, that he could actually talk, and that he told his mother he had come to liberate humanity from all suffering. It is also believed that he could stand and managed to walk short distances in all four directions. They called him Siddhartha, meaning "he who has attained his goals." Unfortunately, Mahamaya (his mother) died just seven days after Gautama was born. Buddha was brought up by Mahaprajapati (also known as Gautami), his mother's sister.

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Yom Kippur

FACT FILE

Observed in	Countries with Jewish populations, especially Israel, United States, and Canada
Observed on	Tenth of Tishri, the seventh month of the Jewish calendar
Observed by	Jews

Introduction

Yom Kippur is one of the most important holidays of the year for Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews. Even those Jews who do not adhere to most traditions and customs make it a point to refrain from work, attend synagogue, and fast on this day. It is one of the Days of Awe (Yamim Noraim), which includes Rosh Hashanah, the first two days of the ten days of repentance, and Yom Kippur, the last of the ten days. It falls on the tenth day of Tishri, the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar (September–October). It closes the 10-day period of penitence that Rosh Hashanah (the New Year) began. Yom Kippur is a total Sabbath (day of rest), when work of any kind is prohibited, and the devout abstain from eating; they do not even drink water on this day. According to research, about 75 percent of the Jews in Israel fast on Yom Kippur, including those who do not think of themselves as being religious.

Yom Kippur means “day of atonement,” a day set aside at the end of Rosh Hashanah to repent for one’s sins of the past year. This day is basically the last chance to show regret and make amends so as to ameliorate God’s judgment relating to those sins.

The Yom Kippur War

The Yom Kippur War is also called the October War, the Ramadan War, or the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. It had far-reaching consequences for the political climate of the Middle East. This war, which pitted Israel against a Syrian and Egyptian coalition, took place between October 6 (the date of Yom Kippur that year) and October 24. It began when Syria and Egypt attacked the Golan Heights and Sinai, both of which Israel had controlled since the Six-Day War in 1967.

On Yom Kippur one atones only for the sins committed against oneself and the Creator, not for sins committed against another human being. To seek forgiveness for the sins against another person, a compromise with that person must be arrived at, and if possible the trespass, forgiven. This return to harmony must be accomplished before Yom Kippur begins, because this is the day when God closes the books, and one’s fate, for better or worse, is sealed. Even the deceased are included in the category of those forgiven on the Day of Atonement. Children must make a public mention of their deceased parents at the synagogue and donate to various charities on behalf of their departed souls.

Before sunset on Yom Kippur, the Kol Nidre is recited. This prayer is well known for its beautiful melody; Kol Nidre (meaning “All Vows”) annuls all vows that the individual may make to God in the year to come before they are uttered; the annulment voids only those vows made between oneself and God, especially the frivolous vows one makes to God when seeking help or religious vows made under duress (for example, coerced conversion to another religion). The recitation of the Kol Nidre does not change the fact that obligations toward other people must be upheld. In fact the eve of Yom Kippur is considered one of the best times to seek and grant forgiveness. God will forgive sins committed against him; but if one has wronged another person, then he or she must seek forgiveness from that person and try to make amends.

The *viddui*, or confession, is recited as part of the afternoon prayers the day before the holiday begins. Even though *viddui* is repeated throughout Yom Kippur, it is repeated because, were someone to die later in the day, he or she would at least have already chanted the confessional and sought forgiveness.

Most of Yom Kippur is spent praying in synagogue. Services begin early in the morning in Orthodox synagogues and continue until the afternoon. People then go home, returning soon afterward for the evening service that continues until

nightfall. The services conclude with the blowing of *tekiah gedolah*, an extended blast on the *shofar* (a Jewish musical instrument originally carved out of a ram's horn).

There are numerous traditions concerning how the fast of Yom Kippur is to be broken. Some break it with a potato, some with an egg (symbolizing the renewal of life in the new year). While there is no correct menu to serve, it is certainly desirable to invite friends, relatives, and family members to share it. Traditionally people are supposed to eat only enough to revive their strength and then proceed to the next *mitzvah* (holy action or festival).

Origins and History

Yom Kippur was first set forth in the Bible, chapter 16 of Leviticus, where the rituals are described. Yom Kippur is called *Shabbat Shabbaton* (Sabbath of Sabbaths), because it is on Yom Kippur that abstinence from work and the solemnity that characterize the Sabbath are most important. The fast of Yom Kippur is strict: Taking a bath, using cosmetics, perfumes, or deodorant, engaging in sexual intercourse, wearing leather (including shoes), eating or drinking, and working are forbidden. Yom Kippur is a full, 25-hour fast starting before sunset on the evening

Memorial Lights

In memory of parents who have died, special candles are lit that burn throughout Yom Kippur. Then two holiday candles are lit and blessed. These candles signal the start of Yom Kippur, and a 25-hour fast must be observed from that point on.

preceding the festival day, and culminating after nightfall on Yom Kippur. These restrictions may be waived in case of any ailment, health hazard, or terminal disease. Children under nine years of age and pregnant women are exempted from fasting. Older children, as well as new mothers (defined as those who have given birth between three and seven days following previous), are expected to fast but are permitted to break the fast if they need to do so.

During the days of the Second Temple in Jerusalem (516 B.C.E.–70 C.E.), the high priest conducted an elaborate sacrificial ceremony on Yom Kippur. Clad in white linen, he successively confessed his own sins, the sins of the other priests, and lastly the sins of the people; then he entered the Sanctum Sanctorum (Holy of Holies) to sprinkle



A rabbi reads from the Torah at Temple B'Nai Israel in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Yom Kippur, Judaism's Day of Atonement, is the most solemn event on the Jewish calendar. (AP Photo/Hattiesburg American, Joe Lovett)



The Hebrew Bible

The name Hebrew Bible refers to the common portions of the Jewish and Christian canons, the Tanakh. It does not include the deuterocanonical books, added to the Old Testament by the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches. *Tanakh* is an acronym (TNK) for the Hebrew Bible, from the names of its three major divisions: Torah (also called the Pentateuch, or the Five Books of Moses), Neviim (Prophets), and Kethuvim (Writings).

The word “deuterocanonical” comes from Greek and means second canon. Canonization is the official acceptance of authority and standardization of a text. In Catholicism deuterocanonical means that the canonicity of the books was definitively settled at a later date than the rest of

the canon. Like the Tanakh, most Protestant Bible versions exclude these books, although they were initially included in the King James Version.

The large majority of Old Testament references in the New Testament are taken from the Greek Septuagint, which includes the deuterocanonical books. The Septuagint (LXX) is the name commonly given to the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, produced in the third century B.C.E. The Septuagint Bible includes additional books beyond those used in today’s Jewish Tanakh. The additional books were composed in Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic, but in most cases only the Greek version has survived. It is the oldest and most important complete translation of the Hebrew Bible.

the blood of the sacrifice and offer incense. The priest would then send a goat (the scapegoat) into the wilderness, where it was driven to its death, symbolically carrying away the sins of the people of Israel. Some commentators believe that the killing of the goat was a misinterpretation and that the goat was set free.

The old custom of *kapparot*, or atonement, was formerly practiced on the afternoon before the holiday. The custom involved swinging a live chicken around one’s head and saying a specific prayer. Later the chicken was killed, and its meat given to the poor. Nowadays, money is tied up in a handkerchief and used instead of the chicken. It is eventually donated to charity.

See also Volume I: ISRAEL

See also Volume II: UNITED STATES

See also Volume III: JUDAISM; ROSH HASHANAH

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Yoruba

FACT FILE

Located in	Countries with Yoruba populations, especially Nigeria, Cuba, Brazil, Sierra Leone, and Benin
World Population	About 10 million
Place of Origin	Sub-Saharan Africa

Introduction

There are nearly 50 million people spread across West Africa. The Yoruba, the second largest ethnic group in Nigeria after the Hausa-Fulani, account for nearly 21 percent of the total population of that part of the continent. While most Yoruba are settled in southwestern Nigeria, some communities exist outside the West African country, in countries like Sierra Leone, Brazil, and Cuba.

The Yoruba are the chief ethnic group in the Nigerian states of Kwara, Ekiti, Lagos, Ondo, Ogun, Kogi, Osun, and Oyo, and they also comprise a significant portion of the population of the Republic of Benin. The people of the Yoruba tribe practice numerous religions. Presently, the majority of Yoruba people say they are Christian. They belong primarily to the Church of Nigeria (Anglican), Catholic, Methodist, and Pentecostal Churches. Muslims make up about a quarter of the Yoruba population, and the rest practice their native Yoruba religion.

Yoruba mythology is possibly one of the oldest in the world, and various religions of the Western Hemisphere such as Candomblé in Brazil and Santería in Cuba have sprung from it. The Yoruba's own native deities are called *orishas*. The primary *orishas* are Obatala, his sister Oduduwa, and their father Olorun. The Yoruba say that Obatala created humanity, and Olorun breathed life into the hollow shells made by Obatala.

The Yoruban religion has an extensive pantheon of *orishas*. There is an all-knowing deity, some primeval divinities, and some deified spirits. Olodumare (the one with the completeness of all things) and Olorun (the lord whose dwelling is in the heavens) are the names given to the all-knowing God. The Yoruba believe that Olorun not only created the heavens and the earth, but he also created a number of divinities and spirits (Eborá and Orisa, or Imole). Many celebrated figures of history, including kings and heroes, have also been given

divine status by the Yoruba, and they are summoned along with the forces of nature such as Earth, trees, river, mountains, storms, and so on during rituals. The religion also believes that deceased ancestors continue to exist.

Some Yorubans believe in only two major divinities, Obatala and his sister Oduduwa. Both are worshipped independently of their father Olorun and, in some city-states, even precede him. According to one Yoruba legend Olorun created the world and left Obatala and Oduduwa to complete the details. A different interpretation avers that Obatala and Olorun are the same god, with different names. Obatala is regarded as a sculptor god, assigned the task of shaping human bodies. The Yoruba believe that the physically handicapped have been the victims of wrath, but it is Olorun who decides whether or not to infuse these bodies with life. Although he is still secondary to almighty Olorun, Obatala has power over the minor *orishas*, all 401 of them. There are also numerous other deities in the Yoruban pantheon: Oya, the river goddess; Ifa, the god of divination; Eleda, the goddess of destiny; Ibeji, the twins; Osanyin, Ifa's companion; and Osun, the goddess of fertility.

Some deities existed deep in the past, before Oduduwa created Earth, while others were mortals,

Fun Fact

The Oyo-Yoruba trace the source of their political power back to Shango.

The Engungun

The 24-day *engungun* festival honors the ancestors. Each day an *engungun*, manifested as a masked dancer, goes through the town dancing, possessed by an ancestor. There is a different dancer for each day of the festival. On the final day of the festivities, a priest sacrifices animals in the ancestors' shrine and pours the sacrificial blood all over the shrine.

Shokpona, the God of Smallpox

Shokpona, it appears, became a significant god during the time when there was a smallpox epidemic in West Africa. The native Yoruba blamed Shokpona's wrath for carbuncles, high temperatures, boils, or anything that looked like it might be smallpox. The Yoruba were so terrified by Shokpona that at times they were afraid to say his name aloud. Because of this fear Shokpona's priests exercised enormous power; the people believed that they could bring a plague on their enemies. In fact the priests sometimes concocted a potion from the dry skin and powdered scabs of deceased smallpox victims. They would place the potion on the desired target to spread the disease. Smallpox has been more or less wiped out, the Shokpona priests have lost credibility, and the cult no longer exists.

heroes, or heroines who performed some act that impressed the people around them. One minor *orisha* Shango, the god of thunder, occupies a lofty position in the pantheon of Yoruba deities. Shango, according to Yoruban belief, fashioned thunder and lightning by throwing "thunderstones" to Earth; so anywhere that lightning strikes, Yoruba priests search the nearby areas for stones. This deity's popularity was probably a direct result of efforts to ward off the numerous tornadoes that perpetually plague western Africa.

Ogun is another of the minor *orishas* who is widely revered. The god of war, ironworking, and hunting, Ogun is considered the benefactor of warriors, blacksmiths, and those who use metal in some way in their occupation. The Yoruba believe Ogun can be terrifying in his revenge; if someone dishonors a contract made in his name, they believe swift vengeance will follow.

The Yoruba do not worship Olorun with the kind of reverence normally reserved for a deity of his status. Unlike Shango, who has numerous shrines erected in his honor, Olorun does not have any. Furthermore neither do the Yoruba offer sacrifices to him, nor does he have a priest in his name. Olorun has the same dimensions

as the supreme powers of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as the Creator of everything. Still, the Yoruba appear to ignore him in their daily lives. One plausible theory is that Olorun, as a divine persona, developed out of the influences of early Christian or Islamic missionaries. So it may be that the Yoruba find the notion of venerating him as an omnipotent god too overwhelming.

Ifa, the oracle of divination, figures prominently in Yoruban cosmology and functions as a mediator between gods and humans. When a child is born, for example, the parents will call in a *babalawo* (priest) to identify the spiritual forces that will influence the child and to find out which *orisha* the child should follow. Cowrie shells and palm nuts are frequently the instruments for the *babalawo's* reading. The *babalawo* gets Ifa's attention with a cone-shaped "tapper" and uses a carved cup to toss the 16 shells onto a powdered board used for divination (*opon Ifa*). Eshu (or Elegba) is the messenger of the gods; he is also known as the trickster, much like Hermes of the Greeks and the Roman's Mercury.

Eshu is the youngest, fastest, and most quick-witted of all the gods, and he finds ways to punish those who neglect the other gods. Eshu brings the sacrifices called for by the Ifa priest to Olorun, the high god, so Ifa and Eshu work together to control humanity's affairs. Eshu is also the only Yoruba deity whose face is seen in Yoruba art, and his figure is usually decorated with cowrie shells and beads.

The Yoruba treat their ancestors with deference. Some groups think that ancestors become demi-gods after death, assuming the character of deities. This resembles another aspect of the traditional Yoruban faith, a belief that gods can manifest themselves by taking possession of mediums.

Yams are significant thanksgiving symbols to the Yoruba, whose main vocation is farming. As a consequence, even communities that rely principally on fishing present freshly gathered yams to the deities before eating any themselves. The Eje Festival, for example, is a yearly event in Itebu-Manuwa, where the Yoruba leader offers yams to their god of the sea, Malokum, to the ancestors, and to local spirits and divinities believed to control the harvest and the productivity of the land.

Origins and History

The Yoruba tribe was known to be the most developed sub-Saharan African community before the era of British dominance began. The tribe had become affluent because they controlled major trade routes. The Yoruba were, however, not a strong confederacy, with differences often leading to wars between the city-states. The territory was subdivided into 25 centralized, more or less autonomous states ruled by hereditary kings. In theory the Yoruba consider the old city of Ife-Ife as the oldest city with primary authority in religious mat-

Fun Fact

The Ikwerre, Kalabari, and Okrika festivals honor the water spirits of the Niger Delta. The masqueraders wear carved headdresses that imitate the heads of fish or water birds. The festivals begin with a divination by the priest of the deity being addressed, then ritual sacrifices are performed, followed by singing and dancing portraying various characteristics of the deity. The climax of the festival is the appearance of a masquerader who embodies the deity.

ters; at the same time they also acknowledge the political authority of the rulers of the rival city of Oyo. Oyo's ruler once held sway over the leaders of other cities, though this privilege could not always be exercised. The Oni of Ife-Ife and the Alafin of Oyo remain the most respected rulers in Nigeria.

The majority of the states were in the hands of hereditary monarchs and councils made up of guild leaders, nobles, and merchants. The power exercised by the two civil authorities was different from one city-state to the next. Some had a monarch with more or less total sovereignty, while in others the councils were dominant, and the king was simply a nominal head. Each city-state has its own version of history, religious observances, and artistic style; still, all agree that Ife-Ife retains ritual authority, all worship the Yoruba gods, and all look for solutions to problems in their lives to the god Ifa. All the major Yoruba kingdoms trace descent from a single ancestor, the first king of Ife-Ife, usually called Oduduwa. While Oduduwa was still alive, his sons and grandsons spread out from the city to establish their own kingdoms.

It is no surprise that the cultural influence of the Yoruba extended beyond the African continent to the Americas. Europeans in search of slaves captured millions of Africans, stuffed them into crowded ships, and brought them across the Atlantic Ocean. It was not a pleasant journey, and many people died during the crossing. Yoruba slaves were transported to French, British, Portuguese, and Spanish colonies. In most of these places Yoruba traditions endured in spite of the Catholic Church's aggressive, often cruel, techniques for making converts. In Brazil, Haiti, Trinidad, and Cuba, Yoruba rites and rituals, dance, music, and myths are popular. In Haiti the people of the Yoruba tribe were called Anagos. In Afro-Haitian spiritual activities Yoruba rites enjoy a high place, and numerous deities that originated in Yoruba are still worshipped. In South America's biggest country Brazil, Yoruba spiritual activities are called Shango or Anago. In Cuba, these practices are called Lucumi.

Holidays and Religious Observances

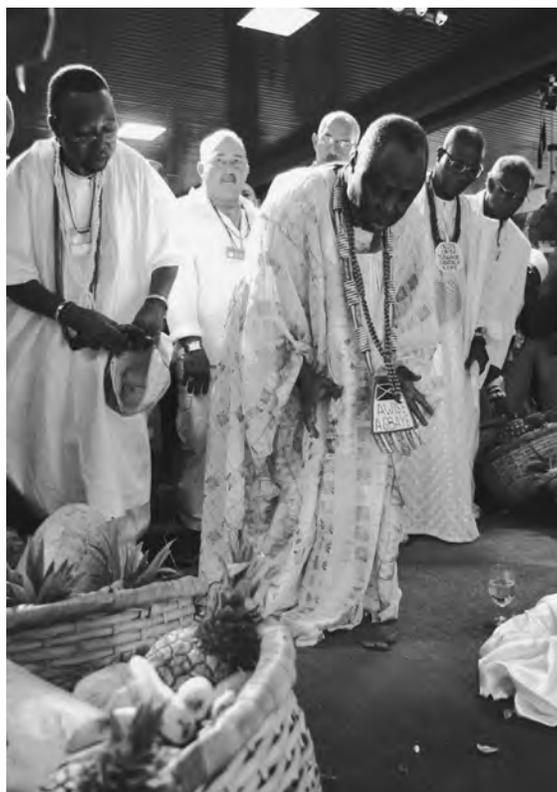
Although most of the peoples who trace their heritage to the Yoruban past have since nominally, at least, become Muslims or Christians, their ancestral spiritual roots remain strong and viable, and they continue to observe ancient festivals with dancing, drumming, and elaborately carved masks. The masks, rituals, and mythologies may differ from one tribe or nation to another, but the focus and purposes of contemporary observances reflect those of ancient Yoruban spiritual beliefs. Among the most important of these are the Shango Festival, the New

A Legend of the Deity Shango

According to native Yoruba belief the deity Shango has four wives. Each one is represented by a well-known Nigerian river: His main wife, Oya, is personified by the River Niger. According to Yoruba legend, Shango was once a mortal and the fourth king of Oyo, the old Yoruba capital. His charm could cause lightning, and one day Shango was so charming that he unintentionally killed his whole family. In remorse he killed himself and became a deity.

Yam Festival, Egungun observances, and a variety of initiation and harvest festivals. The Yoruba spiritual system reflects a practical approach to relations between those who inhabit the spirit world and the world of mortals.

The Shango festival honors the *orisha* of thunder and lightning (energy), an ancestor who hanged himself, according to legend. The festival, celebrated



The president of the Yoruba Congress, center, presides over the religious closing ceremony of the Yoruba Global Congress, celebrated in the Conventions Palace in Havana, Cuba. The Yoruba religion has roots in Africa, but it has spread throughout the world. (AP Photo/Cristobal Herrera)

Fun Fact

Ife-Ife is thought to have been established around 850 C.E., Oyo around 1350.

toward the end of July on the Gregorian calendar, generally goes on for 20 days, with a hereditary priest offering numerous sacrifices at Shango's shrine. The last day of the festival Shango takes possession of the priest, who acquires magical powers as a consequence. After he has eaten fire and gunpowder, the ritual procession heads to the Oba's palace where a great feast is held, accompanied by palm wine, roast meat, and more dancing. Because many people have abandoned traditional spiritual practices, Shango's priests are no longer as rich or powerful as they were in the past.

The ancestral spirits of the Yoruba peoples, called *egungun* (which translates as something like "powers concealed"), are invoked during annual or biennial festivals. According to legend, the *egungun* ritual originated because the dead body of an Ologbin father, of the lineage of King Oyo's griots ("praise-singers"), had just been left atop an ant hill. To appease his anger at such careless neglect, the *egungun* ritual, with its complex dance and elaborate costume, was first performed.

During these observances, dancers don multicolored, layered costumes. The object of both dance and dancer is to enliven the costume and enable the mask he wears to change his mortal flesh so that he sheds his identity and becomes ethereal, taking on the qualities of the ancestral spirit he celebrates in the dance. Only the spirits, however, can imbue the costume with power.

With the exception of a few titled women, *egungun* is an exclusively male cult. Not only are women generally forbidden to appear when an *egungun* such as Oro performs, it is also believed that a woman who sees the ceremony will die soon.

The New Yam Festival (called Iri-ji), certainly one of the largest and most important Yoruba obser-

vances, is a New Year's celebration that takes place in August of the Gregorian calendar, although the specific day is locally determined. The Yam Festival marks the end of one agricultural cycle and the start of a new one. On the eve of the festival, the yams left over from the previous harvest are disposed of because only fresh yams can welcome the new year. Before the festivities begin, either the eldest male of the community or the king offers the new yams to gods and ancestors to show appreciation to them for the yam harvest. Then the prepared yams can be given out to the gathered villagers.

Among the Yoruba people elderly women, addressed as "our mothers," are respected and feared because they possess spiritual powers that can be used to help or harm the community. The purpose of the annual Gelede festival is celebration of the creative powers of women elders, female ancestors, and goddesses. The Gelede festival resolves the distress caused by drought or not having enough children by paying tribute to women's power and asking that they use their extraordinary powers to ensure the fertility of the people and the land.

See also Volume I: BENIN; BRAZIL; CUBA

See also Volume II: NIGERIA; SIERRA LEONE

Fun Fact

The Yoruban religion has 401 minor *orishas*; Shango, the god of thunder, is the most popular.

Further Reading

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∞ Zoroastrianism ∞

FACT FILE

Observed in	Mainly India and Iran
World Population	About 250,000
Place of Origin	Persia

Introduction

Zoroaster (the Greek spelling of his name) lived in Persia, the name then used for the territory that is modern-day Iran. According to legend, the prophet's birth was foretold, and the forces of evil tried to kill him when he was still a child. He preached monotheism (belief in one God) in a land with a history of aboriginal polytheism. Initially ridiculed and targeted for his teachings, Zoroaster eventually won over the king of Persia, and Zoroastrianism was the state religion of many Persian empires until the seventh century C.E.

Members of the faith are devoted to a threefold path: "good thoughts, good words, good deeds." The Zoroastrian sacred text is the Zend Avesta. The Avesta includes the original teachings of Zoroaster; the Zend is the commentaries on his words. Zoroaster's thought is preserved in a sequence of five hymns known as the "Gathas," the core of the religion's text. Written in what is called the Gathic dialect of Farsi, they are abstract poetry regarding the worship of one god, morality, social justice, and the choice between good and evil. Today, the religious community is divided into those who adhere (generally or exclusively) to the teachings of the original "Gathas" and those who accept later traditions as also divinely inspired.

The remaining sections of the Avesta were added long after the "Gathas" were written. These portions deal with ritual and practice and the customs of the faith. Although Zoroastrianism is monotheistic, it is a dualist religion. Ahura-Mazda was the ultimate force for good (in old Persian the word was *Aura-Mazda*, since *aura* meant "lord," and *mazda*, "wisdom"; in modern Persian, it is called Ormazd), and Angra Mainyu (or Ahriman), the evil force, who are forever locked in struggle for supremacy. Ahura-Mazda was the supreme deity of both the Zoroastrian and Mazdean religions. (The Mazdeans were ancient Persian nobles who worshipped Ahura-Mazda and believed that the deity

should never be concretely represented since he is forever unknowable. It is possible that the Mazdeans inspired the Jews with the same horror for attempts to represent Yahweh concretely.) He communicates with humans through a number of aspects, called Amesha Spentas (Bounteous Immortals); in the "Gathas" these Immortals are sometimes described as ideas; at other times they are spoken of as though they are embodied individuals.

The cosmic conflict between Ahura-Mazda and Angra Mainyu engages the entire universe, humanity included, who are required to choose whether to follow good or evil. Zoroastrians believe that in the end dualism will be destroyed, and goodness will reign once again. Another strain of Zoroastrianism believes that the war between good and evil is an abstract moral dualism to be fought within the human mind.

Zoroastrians segment time into three ages: creation, the present age of good and evil, and the future. During the third and last era Ahura-Mazda will prevail, sinners will be punished, and the good will enter heaven. This view is similar to that favored by Christianity, except for the concept of hell. Among Zoroastrians, hell is a momentary, not a permanent, eternal abode, where evildoers are purified by fire.

Zoroastrianism and Fire

Fire is important in Zoroastrian belief, because it is the symbol of the one supreme, all-knowing Zoroastrian God, Ahura-Mazda. Though it is only the symbol of Ahura-Mazda, some Zoroastrians worship the element itself. According to Zoroastrianism, fire purifies everything it touches: The universe was fashioned by fire, is preserved by fire, and will be destroyed by fire.



Fun Fact

Zoroastrians have three different calendars, each with a different start for the new year: the Qadimi (ancient) calendar, used in Iran; the Shahanshahi, or Shenshai, (imperial) calendar, used by the Parsis in India, which is exactly 30 days behind the Qadimi calendar; and the newer Fasli (seasonal) solar calendar, which always starts the new year at the vernal equinox (March 21). Because the Parsis neglected to add an extra month to the year every 120 years, their new year now falls in August.

Following death Zoroastrians believe that the *urvan* (“soul”) is allowed three days to contemplate on its just-terminated life. The soul is then evaluated by the trinity of Sraosha, Mithra, and Rashnu. If there are more good thoughts and actions than bad thoughts and actions, the soul will be taken into heaven. If, however, the bad predominates, the soul is sent to hell to be purified by fire. The four elements—water, fire, air, and earth—are regarded as pure elements that must be preserved. For this reason Zoroastrians do not burn or bury the deceased but leave their bodies on high ground, built to serve this purpose, to be eaten by crows and hawks.

The coming of the *sayoshant* (“savior”) is expected to coincide with humanity’s final judgment, where the faithful will be resurrected, and evil defeated for eternity. This savior, who is expected to be of Zoroaster’s lineage, would be born of a virgin, just as Jesus was said to have been born.

Zoroastrian worship includes symbolic ceremonies and prayers. Ahura-Mazda is revered through consecrated fire, which is believed to contain the prophet’s presence. This is not to say that Zoroastrians worship fire. Rather, fire is their God’s symbol.

Funeral Ceremony

In Zoroastrianism belief, death symbolizes the worst form of pollution and impurity. They have special rites before death, as preparation for the next life. According to Zoroastrianism beliefs, the spirit of decay enters the body about three hours after death. There are particular purification rituals for the corpse bearers, the only people permitted to touch the dead body. For the funeral ceremony, some special clothes are put on the corpse. A fire circles around the dead body to keep the bad spirits at bay, and the fire is given sandalwood and frankincense. After certain prayers from the priests, relatives can look at the body without touching it. After that, the body is brought outside, and a dog looks at it. In Zoroastrianism, a dog can verify death and drives away bad spirits.

Origins and History

The precise date Zoroastrianism was founded is uncertain, and speculations range wildly between 10,000 and 600. Some scholars suggest the religion was founded in Persia (now Iran) sometime between 1500–1200 by the prophet Zoroaster, while others date the religion’s beginnings earlier, around the sixth century. Any dates suggested for the beginnings of Zoroastrianism depend on when it is thought Zoroaster (in modern Farsi, Zartosht) lived, which is much disputed. Plato placed him back in the sixth century, a time close to the claims of the Zoroastrian conservatives. Using his style of writing as a basis for speculation, religious scholars and historians generally date Zoroaster’s life as contemporary with the Sanskrit Rig Veda, between 1500 and 1000. In spite of this lack of agreement, some claim that Zoroastrianism is the world’s oldest monotheistic religion, and that its central concepts—heaven and hell, the eternal struggle between good and evil, and a messiah who will save humanity—profoundly influenced the better known faiths Judaism and Christianity.

The “Gathas,” the poetic heart of the Zend Avesta, were written in Gathic, a dialect of Persian belonging to the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European languages, which is similar to the language of the Rig Veda, (in Sanskrit *rig* means “praise” and *veda*, “knowledge”). The Rig Veda is the earliest of the four Hindu scriptures the Vedas.

Scholars date the Rig Veda to the second millennium based primarily on its references to late Bronze Age culture (for example, horse-drawn chariots), so it is commonly held to have been completed between 1500 and 1200.

When he was 15, Zoroaster decided to devote his life to religious pursuits and, when he was 20, he withdrew to a cave where he meditated for seven years. When he was 30, during a ritual purification rite Zoroaster had a vision of God. The vision drastically changed his view on the world, and he set out to teach the same perspective to others. Zoroaster taught that there was only one creator God and only he was worthy of being revered. Of the deities worshipped by ancient religions, especially those that appeared to enjoy war and discord, Zoroaster declared them to be evil spirits and the servants of Angra Mainyu, one of God’s adversaries.

In 549 Cyrus the Great (c. 585–c. 529) of the Archaemenian family led the Persians to overthrow the Median Court in western Iran. Cyrus was thus responsible for creating the first Persian Empire. The Archaemenian kings were devout Zoroastrians and attempted to rule the land justly and in accord with Asha, the virtuous, all-inclusive law of nature. When Alexander the Great of Macedonia (356–23) overcame Darius III (c. 380–30), the last king of the Achaemenid Dynasty, in 331 the faith suffered greatly. In a span of merely five years, Alexander conquered most of the Persian territory, many

Zoroastrian priests died, and the sacred texts were destroyed. Most of Zoroastrian literature was lost forever, but the heart of the doctrine—contained in the “Gathas”—was untouched.

When the Arabs attacked Persia in 650 a number of Zoroastrians escaped to India. Those who remained were subjected to centuries of harassment, slaughter, forced conversion, unbearable taxes, and other persecutions. By the beginning of the 21st century, they numbered fewer than 20,000 and resided primarily in Tehran, Yazd, and Kernan.

Holidays and Religious Observances

Zoroastrianism has a well-earned reputation as a joyous religion, and its calendars (there are three in use) are full of holy days and festivals. Many of the festivals associated with the religion are connected with the cycle of the seasons, while the origin of others, like the six *gabanbars*, which go back to pre-Zoroastrian times, are unknown; some festivals, Navruz, for example, the Iranian New Year, have found their way into other cultures. In addition to special rituals, such as marriage and funerals, there is the daily ritual of Kusti, which must be performed each time an individual washes his or her hands, there are seven obligatory festival observances: the six *gabanbars* and Navruz.

The *gabanbars*, the six major seasonal festivals, originated among the farmers of the Iranian Plateau: Maidyozarem is the mid-spring festival; Maidyoshahem is the mid-summer observance; Paitishahem is a harvest festival, celebrating the bringing in of the corn; Ayathrem is the time when cattle are brought back to the homestead; Maidyarem is the mid-winter festival; and Hamaspath-maidyem celebrates the gathering of all the *farobars*. (*Farobars* are guardian angels who look after the living and the dead.) These religious observances are happy festivals celebrated with much feasting and merriment. Navruz, or Noruz, the seventh required feast, is observed on the vernal equinox. Although not a required religious observance, Zoroaster's birthday, called the “Greater Navruz” because it is celebrated six days after that holiday, is still an important holiday. Zoroastrians go to their temple for prayer and then gather for huge feasts. (Like December 25, celebrated in Western Christian churches as Jesus' birthday, Zoroaster was probably not born at this time.)

Mihragan (Jashan-e Mihragan), among the most ancient festivals known, goes back at least to the earliest Indo-Europeans, was connected with the worship of one of the oldest Aryan deities (Baga-Mithra, the Sun god), and traces related to this deity have been found as far back as the 14th century B.C.E. Mihragan may be the survival of an earlier Iranian New Year's festival from some pre-

Zoroaster and the Greeks

Zoroaster was the name given by the Greeks to Zarathustra (Zartosht), and it is the one most familiar to non-Zoroastrians. The Greeks respected the Persian prophet so much that his doctrines were mentioned by celebrated Greek philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates. During the Archaemenian period (549–331 B.C.E.), a large number of books and texts spread through the Greek world in Zoroaster's name, which gave authority to his ideas.

historic phase of the Indo-Iranian calendar, when the year began at the autumnal equinox. The month was called Bagayadi or Bagayadish, probably the first month of the Old Persian year, and has its parallel in the seventh Babylonian month, Tishritu, the patron of which was also Shamash, the Babylonian Sun god. Nowadays Mihragan retains its place in the Zoroastrian calendar, and is observed on the 16th day of the seventh month, the name day of Mithra, October 1 in the Gregorian calendar.

With Navruz and Mihragan, the festival of Tiragan (Jashan-e Tiragan) is one of the most widely observed feasts of ancient Iran (Persia). Tiragan is celebrated on July 1 and is primarily a rain festival. Tir, or more properly Teshtar (Avestan Tishtrya), is the Yazad (“spiritual being”) who governs the Star Sirius, the brightest star in the night sky, and controls the rain. Teshtar Yazad is invoked to guarantee a bountiful harvest and to protect the crops against drought.



A Parsi woman smiles as she greets others at a fire temple on the occasion of the Parsi New Year, in Bombay, India, on August 20. Zoroastrians celebrate the New Year by offering prayers at fire temples. (AP Photo/Rajesh Nirgude)

Fun Fact

Mithra, or Mitra, an important deity in both Zoroastrianism and Hinduism, was probably a proto-Indo-Iranian deity whose name is reconstructed as Mitra. As Mitra, he appears in the Vedas as one of the Adityas, a solar deity and the god of honesty, friendship, and contracts. In Persian civilization where his name was rendered as Mithra, he came into increased prominence as a major deity of Zoroastrianism, one of the trinity that judges the soul after death.

their closest relatives.

The bridegroom is the first to take his seat in the room where the marriage is to be celebrated, while the bride comes in after him. The bridegroom sits on the right hand of the bride, a place of respect. On each side of the couple two trays of rice sit on two stands. The stand by the bride has a small metal pot containing ghee (clarified butter) and molasses. Two candles also burn on the stands near the bride and the bridegroom. An attendant holds a censer with a burning fire in one hand and a little frankincense in the other.

The ceremony starts when the bride and the groom are seated opposite each other, separated by a piece of cloth between them held up by two people, so that they are unable to see each other. Their

Among Zoroastrians, marriage is an event that must be celebrated publicly before an assembly (Anjoman), which can bear witness to the event. The bridegroom's ceremonial dress is the *Jama-pichori*, or *sayah*, a loose, flowing dress that is always white. The bride's sari is also white. The groom's forehead has a long vertical mark in red, and the bride has a circle of red pigment on hers. Both wear garlands of flowers around their necks. The bridegroom is called *var-rajā*, "husband king," and the bride is called *kanya*. The bride and the bridegroom each have a marriage witness, usually

Fun Fact

The Rig Veda is historically important because it records an early phase in the development of Hinduism (the Vedic, or Aryan, stage), which is closely related to what is thought to have been a pre-Zoroastrian Persian religion. The linguistic evidence indicates that both Zoroastrianism and Vedic Hinduism developed from the same, earlier, cultural source,

hands are joined and the cloth is held over the hands. It is dropped after the hand-fastening ceremony, which means that they are no longer separate and have become one in matrimony. As long as the cloth is held up between them, they sit opposite each other; once it has been removed, they are made to sit side by side, which also signifies that they are now united.

After the senior officiating priest has fastened their right hands together, both are given a few grains of

rice in their left hands, and the attendant places some frankincense on the fire in the censer, a sign for the couple to throw their rice over one another. This process is often watched with great interest by the couple's friends because the one who throws rice first over the other "wins." "Who won, the bridegroom or the bride?" is a question often asked at this point. The one who throws rice first indicates that he or she will be foremost in loving and respecting the other. Throwing the rice is followed by applause from the gathered friends, expressing their approval and goodwill for the union. Then follows the marriage ceremony proper (*Asirvad*), when each is asked whether he or she has consented to the marriage. To be certain, the question (and answers) must be repeated three times. The priests then offer practical advice about life, ask God to give the couple moral and social virtues, and call upon renowned spirits of the dead of ancient Iran to bless them. The ceremony ends with a benediction.

Although there is no mention of rites or ceremonies to be performed during pregnancy, allusions to women's prayers for an easy delivery and a good supply of milk for breast-feeding her child, suggest that there may once have been such rituals that have since been lost. After a woman becomes pregnant, a small fire can be kept inside the house to ward off evil spirits, and she must be carefully attended to. She must not touch anything dead or decomposing, lest she catch a disease, and her husband is forbidden to have intercourse with her after the fourth month.

While the woman is pregnant, two days are celebrated, *Panch masiun* and *Agharni*, the days of the fifth and seventh months, respectively, when both the woman and her husband are given new clothes by both families and the husband's relatives send sweets to the bride's parents and other friends and relations.

After the child is born, a lamp is lit and kept burning for at least three days to protect the child from harm and evil influences. In some cases, the lamp remains lit for 10, or even 40 days; the latter is the length of time a woman must remain in isolation after giving birth. First deliveries often take place in the home of the woman's parents.

During her required 40 days of confinement, the woman is forbidden to leave her place of confinement, and she cannot come into contact with other people, fire, water, or the furnishings in the home, especially wood and linens. Others must bring her her food. Also, looking at a hill is supposed to be bad for the menstrual cycle.

Zoroastrianism does not accept converts; to be a member of the religion, one must be born into it. *Navjote* is the initiation of a child into the Zoroastrian religion. Children are deemed to be old enough for initiation and the responsibility of offering prayers when they turn seven. During *Navjote*, "new one who offers prayers," the child is given two symbols of the religion, the *sudre*, a sacred shirt, and the *kusti*, the sacred thread-girdle, a string long

enough to pass three times around the waist, to be tied twice in a double knot, and to leave the short ends hanging behind. It is made of 72 fine, white, woollen threads.

See also Volume I: INDIA; IRAN

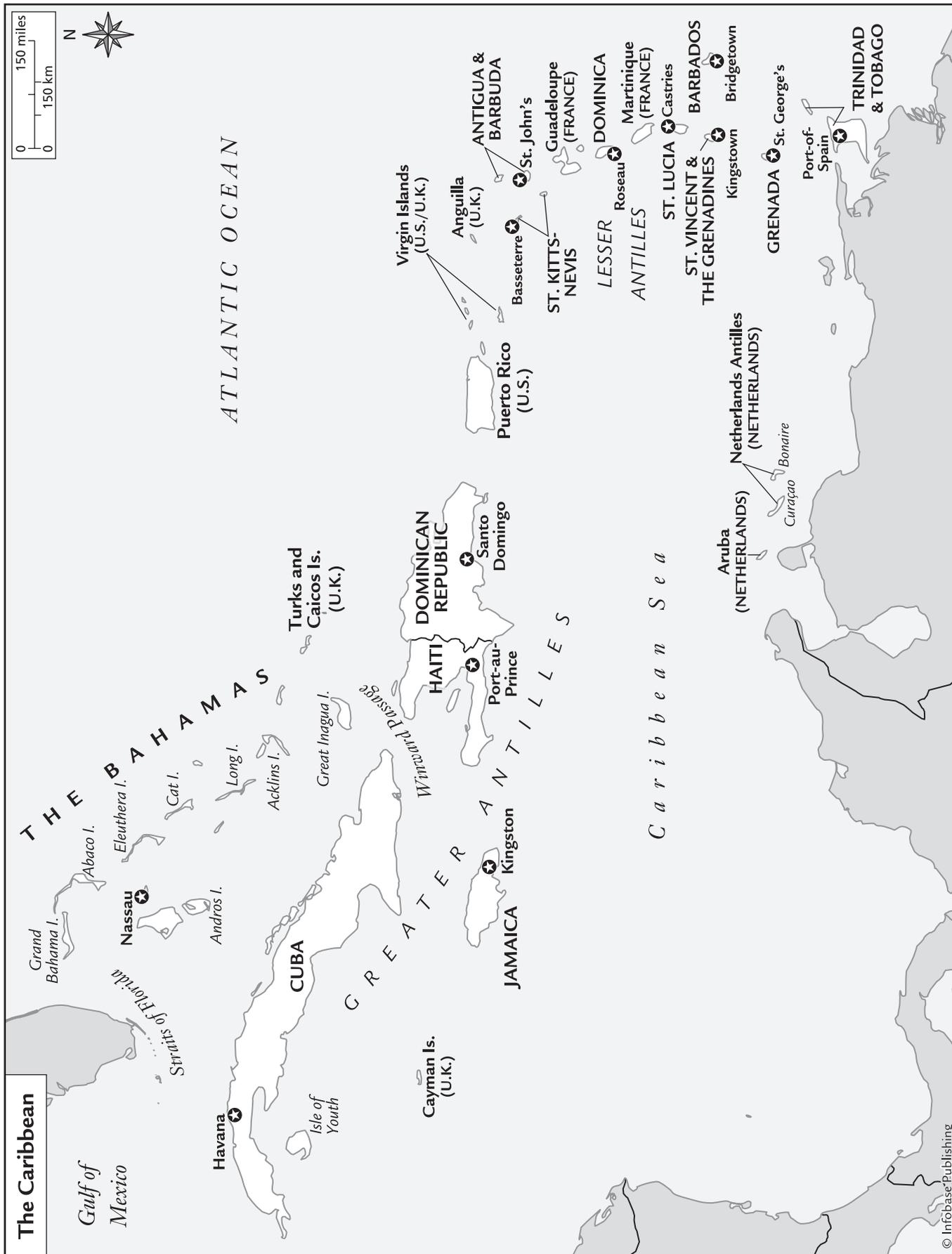
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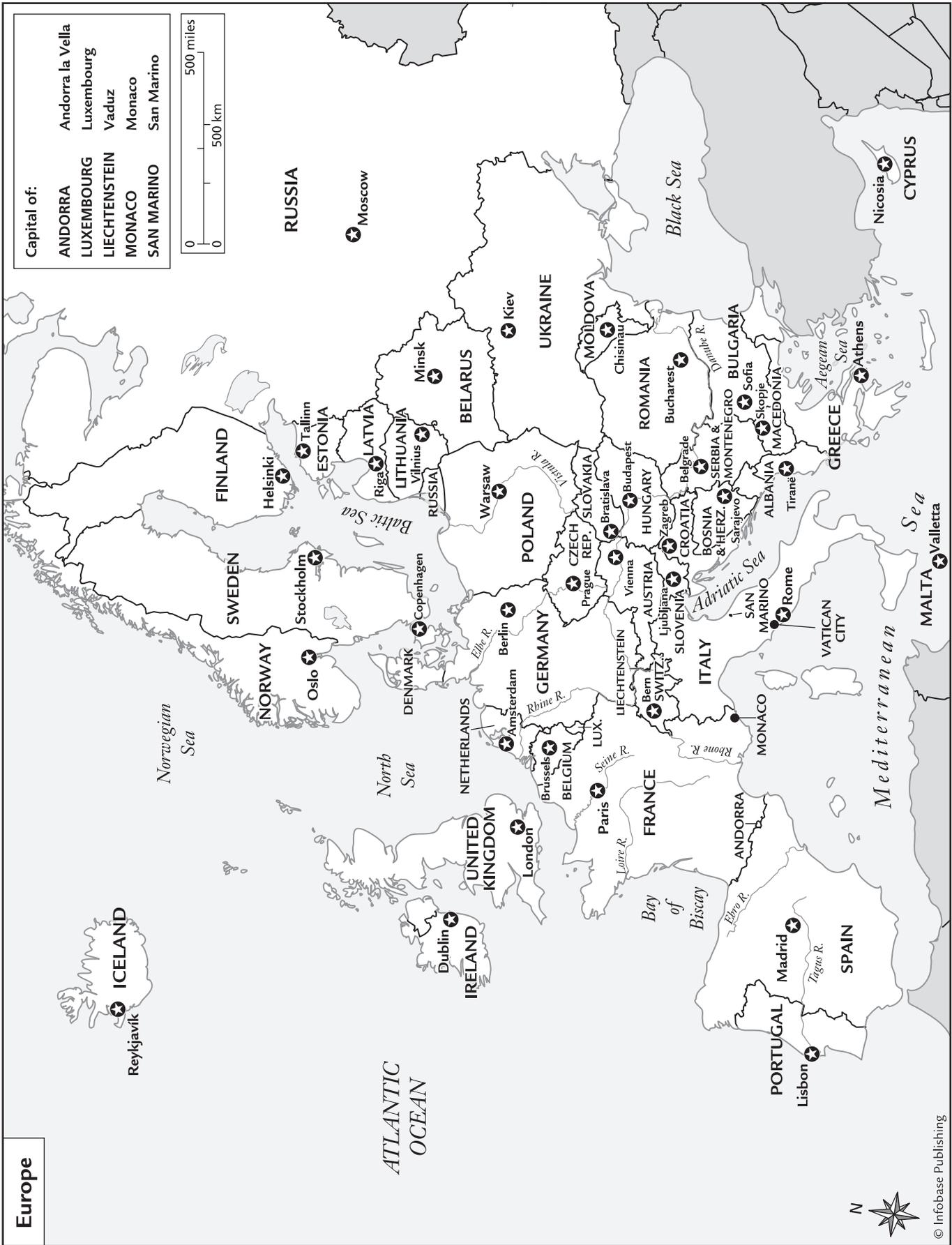
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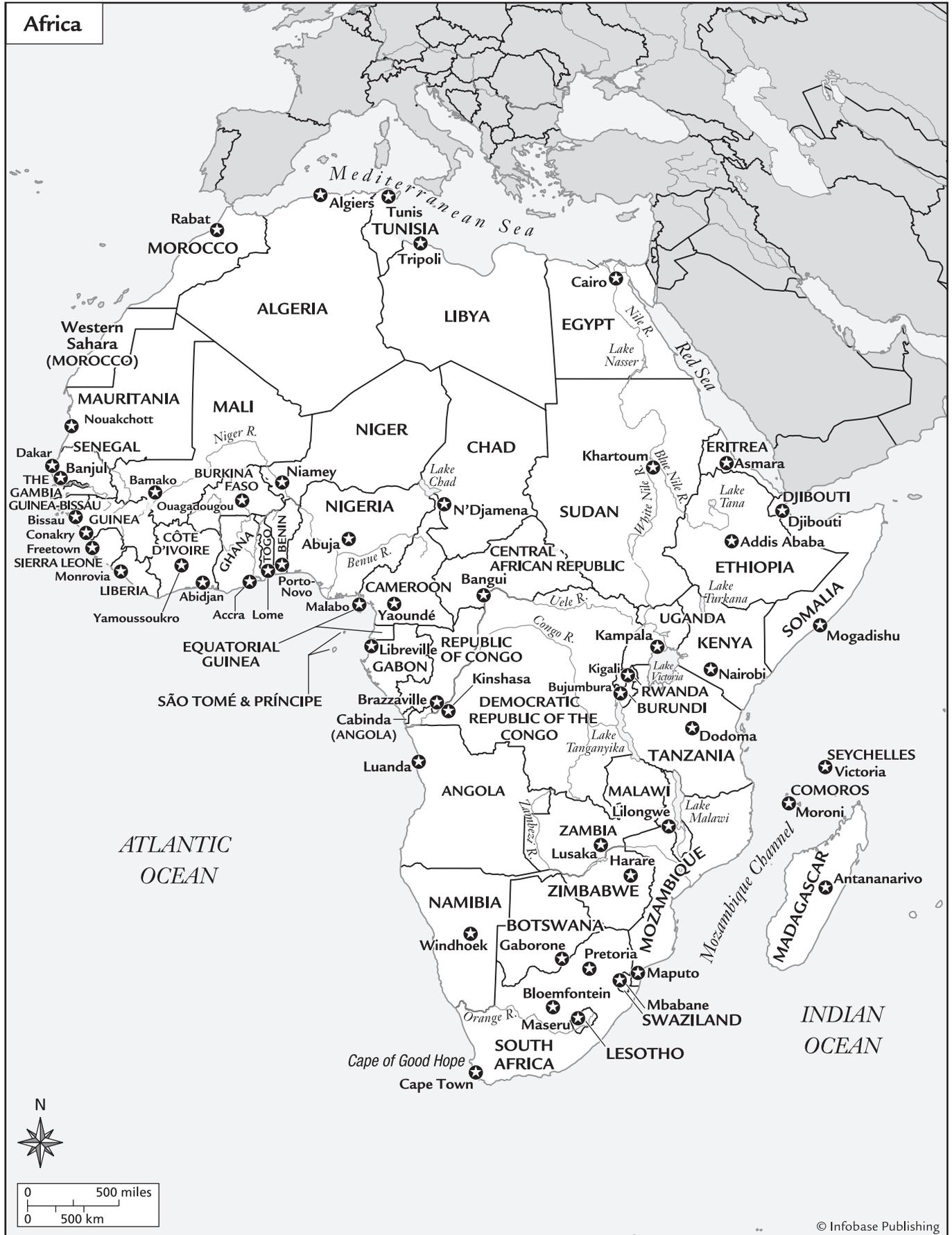
 *Appendix I* 
*Regional Maps
of the World*

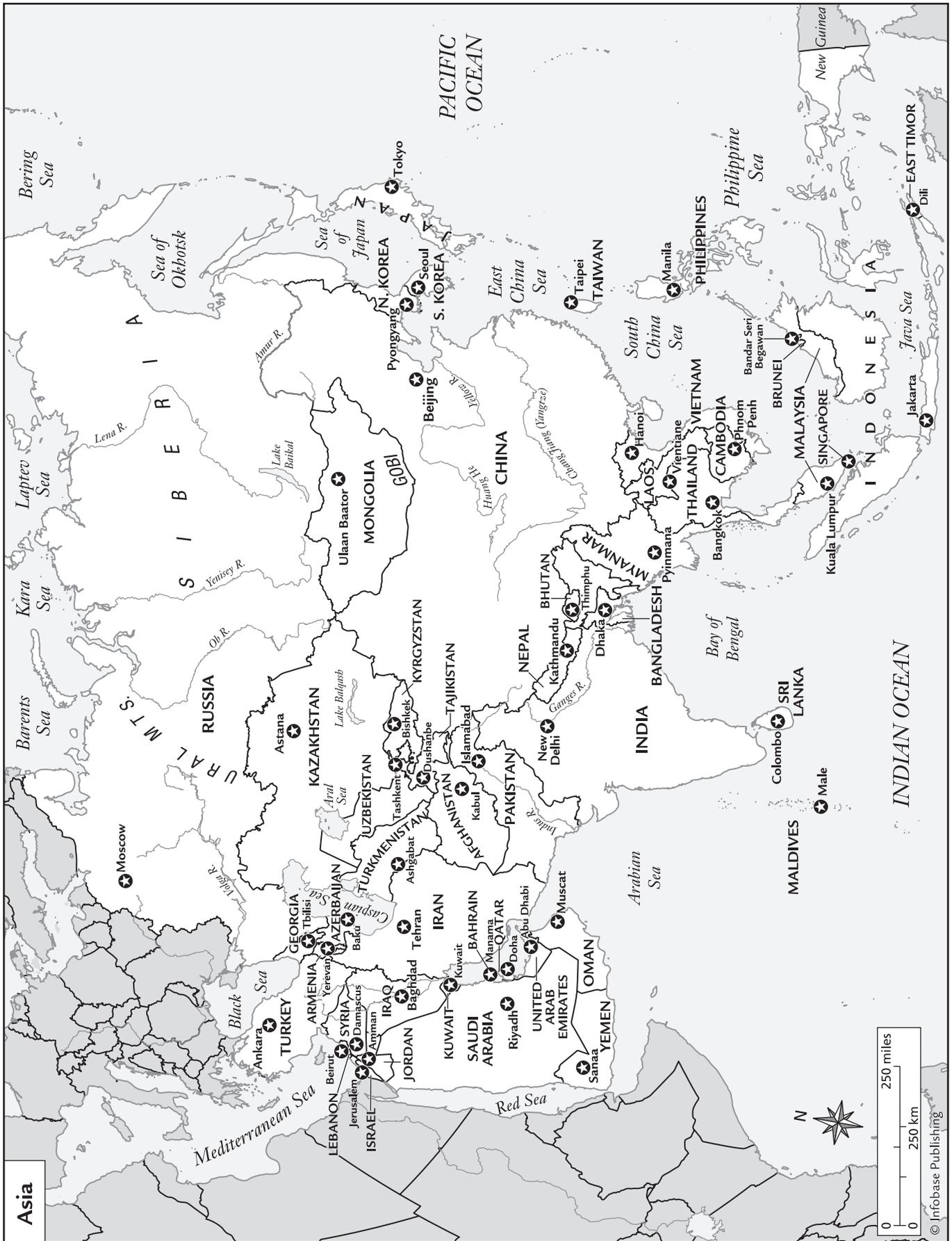


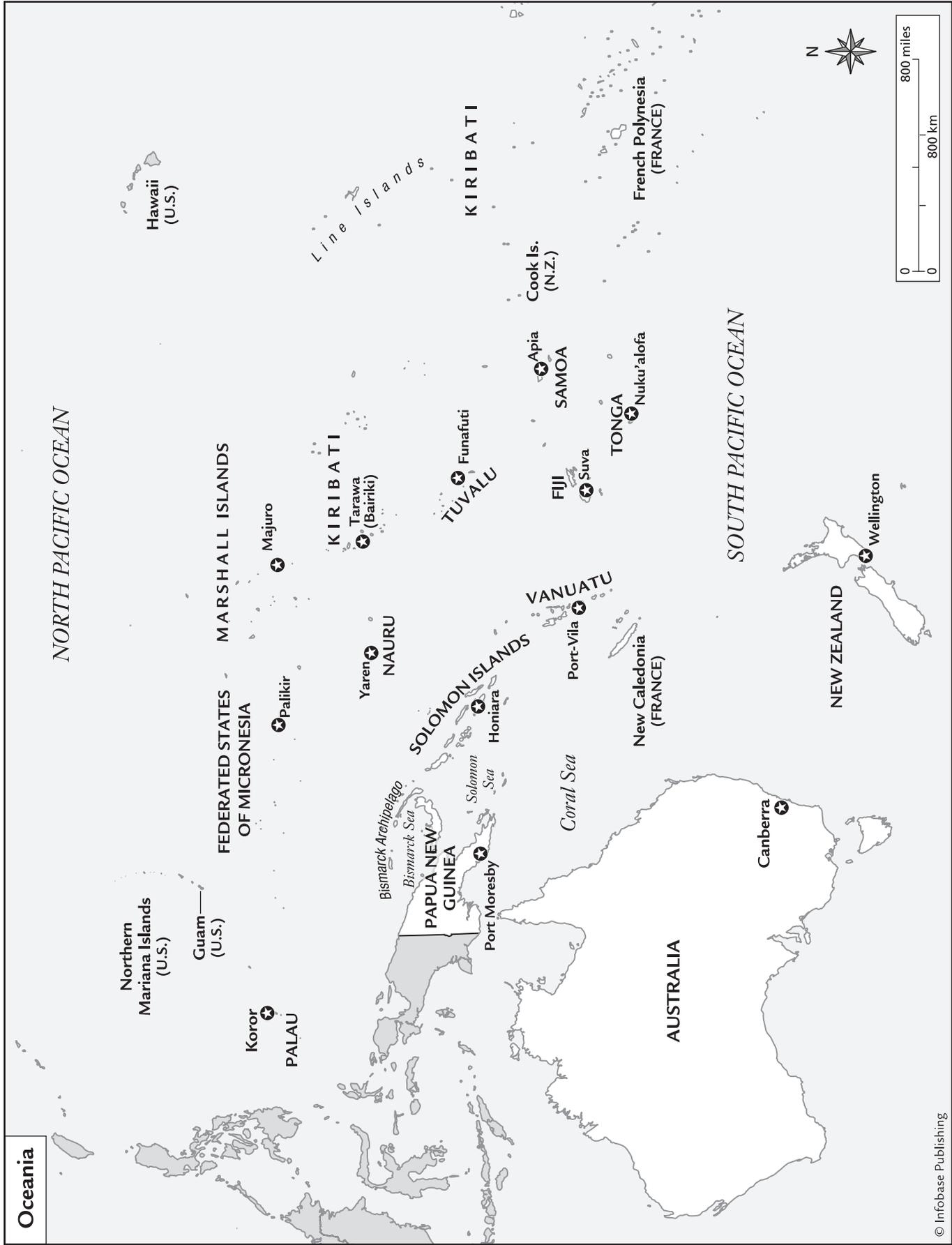












 *Appendix II* 
*Overview of World
Calendar Systems*

Introduction

Humanity's fascination with celestial events goes far back into prehistoric eras, and it is thought that people first constructed calendars in order to determine the dates on which religious observances were to be held. A calendar is a method used more or less consistently to mark the passage of time. There are three basic types of calendars—solar, lunar, and lunisolar—as well numerous variations of them. The relative importance of the Sun or Moon in the culture of ancient civilizations determined the type of calendar they chose. There are more than 40 calendars currently in use around the world, and some groups use more than one kind of calendar. Of the current calendars, however, only five or six are extensively used by major socioreligious communities.

Calendars are based on systems used to demarcate and track the passage of time. Most calendars are structured according to three principal astronomical cycles: the day (the length of time required for the Earth to rotate on its axis), the year (the length of time it takes the Earth to complete an orbit around the Sun), and the month (the length of time required for the Moon to complete its orbit around the Earth). Subdivisions of the day (hours, minutes, seconds) are used for timekeeping. Although this may seem straightforward enough, calendrical computations can become quite complex, and calendars inaccurate, because these cycles of revolution do not comprise an integral number of days and astronomical cycles are not constant.

The word *calendar* is derived from the Latin *calendarium*, meaning “account book;” it is related to *calendae*, “the calends,” the first day of all months of the old Roman calendar.

Origins and History

In earlier days, although the number of days in a week was arbitrary, the duration of a month was based on the cycles of the Moon. The number of days and months in a year was determined by the length of time between the two solar equinoxes and solstices, respectively. Since people were ignorant about the Earth's revolution, there were no parameters for fixing the length of a year; so the major predictable factor was the change of seasons. During those times the only celestial constant was probably the waxing and waning phases of the Moon, so the number of days and months in a year varied from culture to culture.

Some cultures built monuments to detect and study the natural occurrences. In Britain the famous Stonehenge *sarsens* (sandstone blocks) were used to detect the zenith positions of both the Sun and the Moon. Vestiges of similar structures are found throughout the world. The origins of Stonehenge may be traced back to 10,000 B.C.E. With the passage of years, these massive sundials were modified to detect the changes (if any) in the paths of the Sun and the Moon.

History reveals that all the ancient civilizations of the world developed around a productive agricultural base. In those areas where plenty of food was available or could be produced, commerce began with the trading of food for other services or commodities. As the agricultural societies developed, great importance was attached to the solar equinoxes as a means of determining the ideal time for planting and harvesting crops. As the societies grew, rituals, political events, and holidays needed to be set at specific times in a calendar that was in tune with the seasons. As trade developed between different cultures, a more universal reckoning of time became essential. All of these influences mandated the need to make the solar cycles (the equinoxes) the foundation of all calendar systems.

Around the third millennium B.C.E., Egyptian astronomers calculated the solar cycle exactly enough to devise a yearly calendar of 365 days (12 months of 30 days each, plus five extra days added as festival days at the end of the year).

Advancements in commerce and politics in early Roman civilization required the seasons to coincide with specific months of the year. Eventually the Romans adopted the frame of the Greek calendar, which, by 100 B.C.E., was based on a 12-month, 365-day year.

The Mayans are believed to have been the first to accurately account for the duration of a year as it is understood today. The year began when the Sun crossed the zenith on July 16 and consisted of 365 days. Three hundred sixty-four of the days were divided into 28 weeks of 13 days each, and the new year began on the 365th day. In addi-

Fun Fact

Lunar calendars were probably the first method devised for marking the passage of time. The Cro-Magnons are said to have devised such a calendar around 32,000 B.C.E.

Fun Fact

Scholars have found calendars that are apparently luni-stellar: the Egyptian calendar, one used by the Loango, a West African tribe (Sirius), and another used by tribes along the Mexican coast in the early 16th century (the Pleiades).

Fun Fact

The early Roman calendar did not distinguish the days during the winter months. Because they were all lumped together as winter, the Roman calendar was what is called an incomplete calendar.

tion 360 days of the year were divided into 18 months of 20 days each. The series of weeks and the series of months both ran consecutively and independently of each other. The Mayan calendar, although highly complex, was the most accurate one known until the introduction of the Gregorian calendar in 1582.

The ancient Egyptians used water clocks to keep track of periods of time during the day. Most of these clocks measured the subdivisions of a 24-hour period. Others ran for around 30 hours. These water clocks were probably used to calcu-

late the length of a year based on the changing length of a day.

The Sumerians were probably the first people to make a calendar. Ancient Sumerian astronomers recognized and cataloged the brightest stars, outlined a rudimentary set of zodiacal constellations, and noted the movements of the five visible planets (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn), as well as those of the Sun and Moon.

The Sumerians also developed a rudimentary system of astrological divination to forecast the future of city-states and battles. The month in their lunar calendar began at sunset, with the first glimpse of the crescent of the new Moon. They used the phases of the Moon, counting 12 lunar months as a year. To make up for the difference between this year and the year of the seasons, they inserted an extra month in the calendar about every four years.

The first pages of the Bible explain how God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. This seventh day became the Jewish day of rest, the Sabbath (Saturday). The seven-day week was established as the imperial calendar in the late Roman Empire and perpetuated by the early Christian church. The British Empire used the seven-day week and spread it worldwide during their period of colonialism. Most Latin-based languages connect each day of the week with one of the so-called seven planets of ancient times: Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and the

Sun and Moon. The days of the week were named after the planets according to either their approximate distance from Earth (assuming Earth to be the center of the universe) or their period of revolution around the Earth. The English language has retained the original planetary names for Saturday, Sunday, and Monday (named after Saturn, the Sun, and the Moon, respectively). For the rest of the days, the names of Anglo-Saxon or Nordic gods replaced the names of the Roman gods. Tuesday is named after Tiw (a god of war), Wednesday is named after Woden (the god of wisdom and war), Thursday is named after Thor (god of thunder and lightning), and Friday is named after Freya (goddess of love and fertility).

There are several categories of calendars in use in the world, but three types predominate: the solar, lunar, and lunisolar. There are also solilunar calendars—solar-count lunar calendars—others that use neither the Sun nor Moon cycles as the basis of their calculations, and some based on other astronomical cycles, such as the one linked to the planet Venus.

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Fun Fact

Calends was the day on which accounts were due and on which the Roman priests called the people together to proclaim (*calare*) that the new Moon had been sighted.

COMPARISON OF MAJOR WORLD CALENDARS					
	Gregorian	Islamic	Chinese	Jewish	Hindu
Months in a year	12	12	12	12	12
Names of the months <i>(Months are given in order of their calendars; calendars begin at different times)</i>	January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November, December	Muharram, Safar, Rabbi al-Awwal, Rabi al-Thani, Jumada al-Awwal, Jumada al-Thani, Rajab, Shaban, Ramadan, Shawwal, Dhul al-Qidah, Dhu al-Hijjah	The months are numbered.	Nisan, Iyyar, Sivan, Tammuz, Av, Elul, Tishri, Cheshvan, Kislev, Tevet, Shevat, Adar	Chaitra, Vaisakha, Jyaishta, Asadha, Sravana, Bhadrapada, Asvina, Kartika, Margasirsa, Pausa, Magha, Phalgun
Number of days in a month	30–31 (28 days in February, with 29 days in leap years)	Alternately 29 and 30 days. A month with 29 days will be followed by one with 30 days, which will be followed by one with 29 days, and so forth.	Longer months have 30 days; shorter months have 29 days.	29–30 days	30–31 days
Number of days in a year	365, with one extra day every leap year (every 4th year) in February	354 (11 days fewer than the Gregorian Calendar)	353, 354, or 355 days; leap years have 383, 384, or 385 days	354–384 days, depending on the addition of extra days to various months	360 days, with a leap month every 60 months (five years)
Day starts at	Midnight	Sunset	11:00 p.m.	Sundown/dusk	Sunrise/dawn/morning
Special features/highlights	There are exactly 365 days each year, except for leap years	The festival dates are determined by the sighting of the new Moon. An Islamic calendar cannot be printed in advance because of the high chance of error.	The years are named after animals: dragon, sheep, rooster, pig, rat, ox, tiger, hare, horse, monkey, dog, and snake. A leap year has 13 months.	The new year commences in Tishri, the 7th month	A day has a number of smaller subdivisions. Sometimes there is an extra month in the calendar, which is considered inauspicious. No ceremonies or new ventures are to be performed or started during this month.

Note: All of these calendars have seven-day weeks.

 *Appendix III* 
Solar Calendar Systems

Introduction

A solar calendar's dates are derived from the position of the Earth during its annual revolution around the Sun. The solar year consists of approximately 365.2564 mean solar days, with an extra day added every fourth or leap year to make up for the fractional portion. Solar calendars assign a date to each solar day. A day may be taken to be the time between sunrise and sunset and the night immediately following, or the period between two sunsets, or, as in the case of the Gregorian calendar, be calculated from one midnight to the next. The length of months in solar calendars is arbitrary. There are numerous solar calendars currently in use including the Gregorian, Julian, Badi (Bahai), Thai, Zoroastrian, and the Persian (or Jalali).

There are two types of solar calendars: the tropical and the sidereal. A tropical solar calendar takes into account the position of the Earth (or the Sun) in relation to the equinox. The dates in such a calendar indicate the seasons. A tropical year is calculated using the movement of the Sun from south to north and back again. The Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn mark the extreme north and south latitudes the Sun reaches during this cycle; the word *tropical* is derived from the Greek *tropikos*, which means "turn."

The calculation of dates in a sidereal solar calendar, on the other hand, is based on the position of the Earth according to the fixed stars,

thereby indicating where the Sun can be found on a particular date, that is, near which zodiacal constellation. A sidereal year is the time required for the Sun to return to the same position relative to the fixed stars.

In ancient times the civilizations evolving in various regions of the Earth were heavily dependent on the heavenly bodies for the calculation of the various denominations of time, from a moment to an entire year. Back then the scholars and astronomers calculated the year based on the movement of the Sun (as they viewed it from their part of the globe), with the help of instruments they had devised and also based on their concepts of the units of time, from the smallest to the largest. Hence, though all these were based on the movements of the Sun, the calculation of time varied a great deal, as it continues to do among contemporary cultures. That is why there are so many solar calendars that differ so strikingly from each other.

Gregorian Calendar

In modern times, the most popular, globally accepted solar calendar, the Gregorian, was first introduced by Aloysius Lilius (c.1510–76), an Italian doctor, philosopher, and chronologist as an improvement on the Julian calendar. Following his death, his brother gave the calendar to Pope Gregory XIII (r. 1572–85), who passed it on to

JULIAN CALENDAR

Julian Month	Days	Gregorian Start Date	Gregorian Equivalent
January	31	January 14	January–February
February	28/29	February 14	February–March
March	31	March 14	March–April
April	30	April 14	April–May
May	31	May 14	May–June
June	30	June 14	June–July
July	31	July 14	July–August
August	31	August 14	August–September
September	30	September 14	September–October
October	31	October 14	October–November
November	30	November 14	November–December
December	31	December 14	December–January

the calendar reform commission. In 1582 Pope Gregory decreed that it was the official calendar in the West. This is the calendar in common use throughout the West today. The Gregorian calendar is remarkably versatile and accurate with a periodic one-day correction known as leap year in which the month of February has 29 days instead of the usual 28. This additional day is designed to keep the calendar aligned with the Earth's orbit around the Sun. The Gregorian calendar completes its cycle every 400 years. There are 97 leap years in every 400-year cycle.

Julian Calendar

The Julian calendar was introduced by Julius Caesar (100–44 B.C.E.) in 45 B.C.E. Julius Caesar had planned to start the new year on the spring equinox or winter solstice, but the Senate, which tra-

ditionally took office on January 1, the start of the Roman civil calendar year, wanted January 1 to remain the beginning of the year. Caesar finally yielded to the Senate's wishes. The calendar he introduced has 365 days, divided into 12 months, beginning on January 1. A leap day, February 29, is added every four years, so that the years average 365.25 days each, a figure very close to the true value of 365.242 days for the time it takes the Earth to complete an orbit around the Sun. It was used until 1582, when it was discovered that the little error of .008 days every year had added up to 10 full days, so that the first day of spring on this calendar was getting too close to being in the summer. The Julian calendar eventually settled on March 21 as the date of the vernal equinox. In spite of its problems, the Julian calendar and variations of it are still used by the Eastern Orthodox Churches to set the dates for liturgical events.

The 12 months of the Julian calendar and their Gregorian equivalents are on the previous page.

BADI (BAHAI) CALENDAR

Badi Month	Days	Gregorian Start Date	Gregorian Equivalent
Baha	19	March 21	March–April
Jalal	19	April 9	April
Jamal	19	April 28	April–May
Azamat	19	May 17	May–June
Nur	19	June 5	June
Rahmat	19	June 24	June–July
Kalimat	19	July 13	July–August
Kamal	19	August 1	August
Asma	19	August 20	August–September
Izzat	19	September 8	September
Mashiyat	19	September 27	September–October
Ilm	19	October 16	October–November
Qudrat	19	November 4	November
Qawl	19	November 23	November–December
Masail	19	December 12	December
Sharaf	19	December 31	December–January
Sultan	19	January 19	January–February
Mulk	19	February 7	February
Ala	19	March 2	March

Badi Calendar

The Bahai follow the Badi calendar, which has 19 months, each of which are 19 days. In order to adjust this calendar to the Gregorian year, days must be added between the 18th and 19th months, four in a regular year and five in a leap year. The influence of Islam can be seen in the Bahai manner of reckoning time. The Bahai era began when the Bab declared his mission to Mulla Husayn in 1844 C.E. (1260 A.H. in the Muslim calendar). The Bahai day, like the Muslim day, begins and ends at sunset, and New Years, or Navruz, like the Persian, is celebrated on the vernal equinox, March 21.

Using the Arabic alphabet, the Bab named the Bahai months for attributes of God. Those attributes and the Gregorian equivalents of the Bahai months are above.

Thai Solar Calendar

Thailand has two calendars, one solar, the other lunisolar. The lunisolar calendar is used by Buddhist countries throughout mainland Southeast Asia, including Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand. The Thai solar calendar (or Suriyakati), however, is unique to Thailand. It has largely replaced the lunisolar calendar and is used in traditional and official contexts in Thailand, although the Western calendar is sometimes used in business. The lunisolar calendar (Chantarakati) is still

used, however, to schedule most Buddhist feasts and holy days, as well as the day of the Loy Krathong Festival. The months and days of the week of the Thai solar calendar are the same as those used in the Western Gregorian calendar, only their names differ. The year, however, is counted from the Buddhist Era (B.E.), which begins 543 years earlier than the Common Era (C.E.). The Thai era begins in the year Gautama Buddha (c. 563–c. 483) achieved Nirvana (Parinibbana).

Zoroastrian (Fasli) Calendar

The Zoroastrian calendar has a year that is 365 days long, composed of 12 months of 30 days each, plus an additional period of 5 days at the end of the year. There are three versions of this calendar with different starting dates for the year. The Qadimi (ancient) calendar is used in Iran. The Shahanshahi (or Shenshai, imperial) calendar, also known as Yazdgirdi, is used by the Parsees in India, and dates from the year 641 C.E., when the last Sassanid king, Yazdegerd III (d. 651) of Persia, ascended the throne. It was based on an older religious calendar that was supposed to be kept seasonally accurate by adding a month every 120 years. Unfortunately, this was not consistently done, with the result that Navruz, the Persian New Year, ended up being celebrated on August 23 in 1995 instead of March 21.

The newer Fasli (seasonal) calendar has leap years that are 366 days long, and the new year (Navruz) always begins at the vernal equinox, and some effort is being made to convince Zoroastrians to follow the same calendar. The leap years in the Fasli calendar occur in the same years as they do in the Gregorian calendar. The Fasli months and their Gregorian equivalents are on the next page.

Persian Calendar

The Persian, or Jalali, calendar is the official calendar used in Iran and some surrounding nations, including Afghanistan and other Central Asian countries. Like the Gregorian and Julian calendars, the Persian calendar is solar; that is, it is based on the Earth's rotation around the Sun. It corresponds to the seasons, better, in fact, than its Gregorian and Julian solar counterparts although, like them, it has 12 months per year. The months in this calendar, whose names are

THAI SOLAR CALENDAR

Thai Solar Month	Days	Gregorian Start Date	Gregorian Equivalent
Mogga-raa-khom	31	January 1	January
Goomphaaphan	28/29	February 1	February
Meenaa-khom	31	March 1	March
May-saa-yon	30	April 1	April
Prues-saphaa-khom	31	May 1	May
Mithu-naa-yon	30	June 1	June
Garagadaa-khom	31	July 1	July
Singhaa-khom	31	August 1	August
Gan-yaa-yon	30	September 1	September
Tulaa-khom	31	October 1	October
Prues-sajigaa-yon	30	November 1	November
Thanwaa-khom	31	December 1	December

quite similar to those used in the Persian calendar, are on the next page.

The year begins on the spring equinox, around March 20–22 of the Gregorian calendar. If that instant is before midday, Teheran time, then that day is Farvardin 1; otherwise, the next day is Farvardin 1. This can result in either 365 or 366 days per year. In the former (usual) case, the last month of Esfand has 29 days; otherwise, it has 30 days.

Note that the first six months have 31 days; these summer and autumn months also correspond to the half of the year when the Earth is farthest from the Sun and moves most slowly. Spring and summer have close to 93 days each, and fall and winter have close to 90 days each. So Tir 1 will be close to the date of the summer solstice, Mehr 1 will be close to the autumnal equinox, and Dey 1 will be close to the winter solstice. It should also be noted that the current situation is only temporary; in 2,000 years, spring and autumn will both be about 91.5 days long.

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ZOROASTRIAN (FASLI) CALENDAR

Zoroastrian Month	Days	Gregorian Start Date	Gregorian Equivalent
Farvadin	30	March 21	March–April
Ardibehest	30	April 21	April–May
Khordad	30	May 22	May–June
Tir	30	June 22	June–July
Amardad	30	July 23	July–August
Shehrevar	30	August 23	August–September
Meher	30	September 23	September–October
Avan	30	October 23	October–November
Adar	30	November 22	November–December
Dae	30	December 22	December–January
Bahman	30	January 21	January–February
Aspandard	30	February 20	February–March

PERSIAN CALENDAR

Persian Month	Days	Gregorian Start Date	Gregorian Equivalent
Farvardin	31	March 21	March–April
Ordibehesht	31	April 21	April–May
Khordad	31	May 22	May–June
Tir	31	June 22	June–July
Mordad	31	July 23	July–August
Shahrivar	31	August 23	August–September
Mehr	30	September 23	September–October
Aban	30	October 23	October–November
Azar	30	November 22	November–December
Dey	30	December 22	December–January
Bahman	30	January 21	January–February
Esfand	29/30	February 20	February–March

❁ *Appendix IV* ❁
*Lunar and Lunisolar
Calendar Systems*

Introduction

Lunar and lunisolar calendars differ markedly from those based on solar calendars. The Western (Gregorian) calendar is a solar calendar and is based on the length of time required for the Earth to complete one orbit around the Sun. In contrast, a lunar calendar is based on the phases of the Moon. The length of a month usually corresponds to a lunation (the time between two new Moons) so that the day of the month indicates the Moon phase. The Islamic calendar is an example of a purely lunar calendar.

Lunisolar calendars are basically lunar calendars that incorporate solar data, with years that correspond to the seasonal cycles created by the Earth's rotation around the Sun and months that correspond to natural lunar cycles. The calendars of several cultures and religions are lunisolar, including the Hindu, Hebrew, and Chinese. As with lunar calendars, most lunisolar calendars have important differences. Lunisolar calendars may well be considered the most ideal among all the calendar systems because they indicate seasons as well as Moon phases, a feature that makes them particularly useful for tracking festivals and celebrations.

Islamic Calendar

The Islamic (Hijri) calendar abbreviated as A.H. (Latin *Anno Hegirae*), or After Hegira, in English, has 12 lunar months in a year of about 354 days. It is used to date events in predominantly Islamic countries and used by Muslims everywhere to determine the proper days on which to celebrate Muslim holy days. Since the lunar year is 11 days shorter than the solar year, Muslim holy days, although celebrated on fixed dates of the Islamic calendar, usually occur 11 days earlier according to the Gregorian calendar for the same year. The number of days each month is adjusted according to the lunar cycle, beginning about two days after the new Moon. The months drift backward over the seasons, beginning again on the same day every 32 years.

The seasons and months have no connection, and there are about 33 Islamic years to every 32 Gregorian years. The Islamic lunar calendar starts from the Gregorian year 622

Fun Fact

The Coligny Calendar, found in a temple of Apollo near Lyons, France in 1897, is thought to be fragments of a pagan Celtic lunar calendar. Engraved on a bronze tablet it is speculated that Druids, in an effort to preserve their tradition of time-keeping, created it when the Julian calendar had been imposed throughout the Roman Empire.

ISLAMIC (HIJRI) CALENDAR

Islamic Month	Days	Gregorian Start Date	Gregorian Equivalent
Muharram	30 days	January 31, 2006	January–February
Safar	29 days	March 2, 2006	March
Rabbi al-Awwal	30 days	March 31, 2006	March–April
Rabi al-Thani	29 days	April 30, 2006	April–May
Jumada al-Awwal	30 days	May 29, 2006	May–June
Jumada al-Thani	29 days	June 28, 2006	June–July
Rajab	30 days	July 27, 2006	July–August
Shaban	29 days	August 26, 2006	August–September
Ramadan	30 days	September 24, 2006	September–October
Shawwal	29 days	October 24, 2006	October–November
Dhul al-Qidah	30 days	November 22, 2006	November–December
Dhu al-Hijjah	29/30 days	December 22, 2006	December–January

BUDDHIST CALENDAR

Buddhist Month	Days	Gregorian Equivalent
1st Month/Moon	29	December–January
2nd Month/Moon	30	January–February
3rd Month/Moon	29	February–March
4th Month/Moon	30	March–April
5th Month/Moon	29	April–May
6th Month/Moon	30	May–June
7th Month/Moon	29	June–July
8th Month/Moon	30	July–August
9th Month/Moon	29	August–September
10th Month/Moon	30	September–October
11th Month/Moon	29	October–November
12th Month/Moon	30	November–December

C.E., the year in which the Hegira (Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina) took place. This was chosen as the first year of the Islamic Era in 638 C.E. by Umar ibn al-Khattab (the second caliph of Islam, 581–644). It is important to know, however, that Hegira did not occur on the first day of Muharram (the first month of the Islamic calendar), but during the third month of the Islamic calendar, Rabbi al-Awwal.

Fun Fact

Other lunar calendars include the Sumerian, Babylonian, Balinese, Lufkan, Japanese, Thai, and Indonesian. In Nepal religious festivals are scheduled according to a lunar calendar.

To Muslims, the Hijri calendar is not just a sentimental system of time reckoning and dating important religious events, such as *siyaam* (fasting) and hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca). It has a much deeper religious and historical significance. The earliest date of the Islamic calendar that coincides with a date on the Julian calendar is 9th Dhu al-Hijjah, 10 A.H., which corresponds to March 6, 632 C.E. (Friday), when the prophet Muhammad performed his last and farewell pilgrimage to Mecca.

The lunar calendar, based as it is on the phases or appearances of the Moon as seen from the Earth, depends on the relative positions of the Earth, the Moon, and the Sun and their visibility to the human eye. Hence the percentage of error in computations of the year is slightly higher compared to other types of calendars. Much of that potential error, however, is reduced

because the official sighting of the new Moon is determined by astronomers located in Saudi Arabia, although the accurate time for religious observances must still be corrected for the time zone in which a Muslim lives.

Buddhist Calendar

The Buddhist calendar, similar to the Hindu calendar, is used primarily in Southeast Asia in the countries of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Myanmar. It has 12 months per year and three four-month-long seasons (hot, rainy, and wintry). The length of months alternates between 29 and 30 days. The Buddhist calendar begins counting at year one with the death of Buddha in 543 B.C.E. Years in the Buddhist calendar are referred to as BE, or Buddhist Era. There are numerous national variations in the Buddhist calendar, however, in recent years several of these countries have adopted the Gregorian calendar for civic use as well as to designate some Buddhist holidays as fixed dates.

Chinese Calendar

The Chinese calendar can be traced back to the legendary Yellow Emperor Huangdi, who it is thought invented the calendar in 2637 B.C.E. Astronomical calculations involving the longitude of the Sun and the phases of the Moon form the basis of the Chinese calendar. It is a true lunisolar calendar as it combines a pure solar calendar with a pure lunar calendar. The Chinese calendar with variations, is used in Korea and Tibet, as well as China itself.

While most other calendars count years in terms of infinity, the Chinese calendar uses a set of names for a 12-year cycle of years that is repeated for a fixed period of 60 years. (Traditionally the computation of the years relating to the Chinese Calendar used to begin with the accession of an emperor, but this practice was abolished after the 1911 revolution.)

The name of each year is composed of two components. The first component is one of 10 celestial (heavenly) stems, namely, *jia*, *yi*, *bing*, *ding*, *wu*, *ji*, *geng*, *xyin*, *ren*, and *gui*. To this is added one of 12 terrestrial (earthly) branches, which correspond to names of animals in the zodiac cycle. These are *zi* (rat), *chou* (ox), *yin* (tiger), *mao* (rabbit), *chen* (dragon), *si* (snake), *wu* (horse), *wei* (sheep), *shen* (monkey), *you* (rooster), *xu* (dog) and *bai* (pig).

CHINESE CALENDAR						
Lunar Month	Longitude of the Sun	Names for <i>jieqi</i> (Weather Nodes)	Translation	Days	Gregorian Start Date	Gregorian Equivalent
	315°	<i>lizhun</i>	spring begins		February 5	
1	330°	<i>youshui</i>	rain water	29	February 19	February–March
	345°	<i>qyizhe (jingzhe)</i>	insects awake		March 5	
2	0°	<i>zhunfen</i>	vernal equinox	30	March 20	March–April
	15°	<i>yingming</i>	clear and bright		April 5	
3	30°	<i>guyou</i>	grain rains	29	April 20	April–May
	45°	<i>lixia</i>	summer begins		May 5	
4	60°	<i>xyiaman</i>	grain full	30	May 21	May–June
	75°	<i>mangzheng</i>	grain in ear		June 6	
5	90°	<i>xyiazhi</i>	summer solstice	29	June 21	June–July
	105°	<i>xyiaoshu</i>	minor heat		July 7	
6	120°	<i>dashu</i>	major heat	30	July 23	July–August
	135°	<i>liqiyu</i>	autumn begins		August 7	
7	150°	<i>zhushu</i>	limit of heat	29	August 23	August–September
	165°	<i>bailu</i>	white dew		September 8	
8	180°	<i>qiyufen</i>	autumnal equinox	30	September 23	September–October
	195°	<i>hanlu</i>	cold dew		October 8	
9	210°	<i>shuangjiang</i>	frost descends	29	October 24	October–November
	225°	<i>lidong</i>	winter begins		November 8	
10	240°	<i>xyiaoxue</i>	minor snow	30	November 22	November–December
	255°	<i>daxue</i>	major snow		December 7	
11	270°	<i>dongzhi</i>	winter solstice	29	December 22	December–January
	285°	<i>xyiaohan</i>	minor cold		January 6	
12	300°	<i>dahan</i>	major cold	30	January 20	January–February

The two elements from the celestial stem and terrestrial branch are combined sequentially. The two lists are not congruent, and when conjoined, they produce unique combinations. In a 12-year cycle, the 1st year is *jie-zyi*, the 2nd year is *yi-zhou*, and the 3rd year is *bing-zyi*, and so it continues. When the end of a component is reached, the name of the next year comes from the beginning of the list: The 10th year is *guyi-you*, the 11th is *jia-xu* (restarting the celestial

stem), the 12th is *yi-hai*, and the 13th is *bing-zyi* (restarting the terrestrial branch). Finally the 60th year would be *guyi-hai*. This method of naming of years within a 60-year cycle goes back approximately 2,000 years.

Since the Chinese calendar combines a lunar and a solar calendar, the year is divided in two ways. The solar calendar used by farmers to know when to plant and when to harvest is based on the longitudinal position of the Sun and is divided

into 24 units called *jieqi*, or “weather nodes.” The Chinese lunar year consists of 12 months; leap years, however, have 13. As in other calendars, such as the Jewish calendar, the months are commonly referred to by numbers. The lunar and solar monthly divisions in the Chinese calendar and their approximate Gregorian start dates are on the previous page

Hindu Calendar

The Hindu lunisolar calendar is similar to the Buddhist calendar although unlike the Buddhist calendar, it adds or subtracts days or months each year in order to correct for astronomical deviations. The structure of the Hindu lunisolar calendar is composed of days and nights made up of *prabars*. Four *prabars* make a night and eight *prabars* an entire day. Each *prabara* is further subdivided into six *danda*. Each *danda* is about half an hour in duration. *Dandas* are further divided into 25 *laghu*; each *laghu* has 10 *kastha*; each *kastha* has 5 *ksana*; each *ksana* has 3 *nimesa*; each *nimesa* has 3 *lava*; each *lava* has 3 *vedha*, and each *vedha* has 100 *truti* (a *truti* is equal to a 300th of a second).

According to the Hindu calendar a day has five properties (*panchanga*):

1. *Tithi*: The angular distance measured anticlockwise between the Sun and Moon as measured from the Earth; *tithi* can vary between 0° and 360°;
2. A name: The 7 days of the week are named after planets, the Sun, and the Moon;
3. The elliptic: The ecliptic is the geometric plane that contains the orbit of Earth. The orbits of most planets in the solar system lie very close to it. The elliptic is divided into 27 *nakshatras* (stars and other heavenly bodies), which are known as lunar houses or asterisms (constellationlike groups);
4. *Yoga*: *Yoga* are the longitudes of the Sun and the Moon;
5. *Karana*: A *karana* is half of a *tithi*.

The Hindu calendar has 12 months with varying lengths of 29 to 32 days. This variation in length is due to the fact that the path of the Earth around the Sun is elliptical in shape. The 12 *rashis* or zodiac signs of the Hindu calendar are identical with the Western zodiac system. The New Year's Day of the Hindu calendar is the first day of the month of Vaishakha, which roughly corresponds to mid-April on the Gregorian calendar.

HINDU CALENDAR			
Hindu Month	Days	Gregorian Start Date	Gregorian Equivalent
Chaitra	30	March 21	March–April
Vaisakha	31	April 21	April–May
Jyaishtha	31	May 22	May–June
Asadha	31	June 22	June–July
Sravana	31	July 23	July–August
Bhadrapada	31	August 23	August–September
Asvina	30	September 23	September–October
Karttika	30	October 23	October–November
Margasirsa	30	November 22	November–December
Pausa	30	December 22	December–January
Magha	30	January 21	January–February
Phalguna	30	February 20	February–March

Jewish Calendar

Jews have used a lunisolar calendar since biblical times, but they referred to the months by number rather than name. The Torah mentions only four names for months, and they are not Hebrew but Canaanite words for numbers: Abib (first), Ziv (second), Ethanin (seventh), and Bul (eighth). It is possible that all of the months were identifiable using either native Hebrew numbers or (foreign) Canaanite/Phoenician names, but the names for the remaining months of the year were not mentioned in the Bible. Jews began to use Babylonian names for the months after 586 B.C.E., during the Babylonian exile.

Judaism is organized by a complex ritual calendar based on two yearly cycles—one solar, the other lunar—that are blended together. It includes festivals mandated by the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Tanakh) as well as those prescribed in later biblical books or commemorating post-biblical or even modern events. The year begins with Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year), followed directly by Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), Sukkoth (a harvest festival), and Simchat Torah (completion and recommencement of the Torah reading cycle), all in the month of Tishri, the seventh month of the Jewish calendar, mid-September to mid-October in the Gregorian calendar. Hanukkah (Festival of Lights) occurs in Kislev, near the winter solstice. Tu B

Shvat, the Festival of Trees, follows in late winter; when nature begins to reawaken, and the sap starts to run in trees. Purim (a springtime, topsy-turvy festival) is celebrated in the month of Adar. Passover (Pesach) in the month of Nisan—the first Jewish month—is a seven-day festival that marks the beginning of the agricultural calendar and celebrates the Hebrews' liberation from bondage in Egypt. Beginning on Passover, 50 days are counted until the celebration of Shavuot, a first fruits festival in Sivan (on the cusp of spring and summer). In between Jews commemorate two modern events—Yom ha-Shoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day) and Yom ha-Atzmaut (Israeli Independence Day). Tisha B Av (the ninth of the month of Av) is a fast observed in midsummer in memory of the destruction of the First and Second Temples. The cycle continues through the month of Elul, beginning again with Rosh Hashanah (literally the “head of the year”) on the first of Tishri, in the new year.

Jews employ a lunar calendar of 12 months. A lunar year, however, is only 354 days, while a solar year contains 365 days (and an additional day each leap year). In order to adjust—and to align the seasons and holidays of the Jewish lunar months with the solar year—the Jewish calendar adds an additional lunar month, a second month of Adar, every two or three years during each 19-year cycle

Fun Fact

During the last two centuries B.C.E., the Essenes, a Jewish sect, used a solar calendar.

JEWISH CALENDAR

Jewish Month	Days	Gregorian Start Date	Gregorian Equivalent
Nisan	30	March 30, 2006	March–April
Iyyar	29	April 29, 2006	April–May
Sivan	30	May 28, 2006	May–June
Tammuz	29	June 27, 2006	June–July
Av	30	July 26, 2006	July–August
Elul	29	August 25, 2006	August–September
Tishri	30	September 23, 2006	September–October
Cheshvan	29/30	October 23, 2006	October–November
Kislev	30/29	November 22, 2006	November–December
Tevet	29	December 22, 2006	December–January
Shevat	30	January 30, 2006	January–February
Adar	29/30	March 1, 2006	February–March

Fun Fact

The Babylonian calendar can be traced back to the Sumerian lunar calendar (3000–2500 B.C.E.). The

Sumerian year began following the harvest, in September–October, but the Babylonians moved the beginning of the year to spring.

of 235 lunar months. Note that the Islamic lunar calendar makes no such correction—it does not stay in alignment with the Western solar calendar—thus Muslim festivals move, over the years, through each season. Eid al-Fitr (the end of Ramadan), for example, can occur, depending on the year, in fall, winter, spring, or summer, whereas Passover can occur only in the spring. A significant Jewish holiday (holy day) occurs every week: Shabbat (or the Sabbath), on Saturday. It is a day of rest and worship.

Mayan Calendars

The Maya, known as the “keepers of time” to other Mesoamerican peoples, used several different calendars in a complex system by extending and fine-tuning an earlier system used by other peoples, including the Zapotec, Olmec, and Mixtec cultures and, after the sixth century B.C.E., by the Aztecs. Some of these calendars were capable of tracking the solar year, the lunar year, and the phases of the planet Venus, while others were used for divinatory or ritualistic purposes apparently not associated with natural cycles. In various combinations these calendars could be synchronized and combined in complex ways to measure longer cycles.

The most important calendar in Mesoamerican societies was the Tzolkin, which measured a period of 260 days; it is also probably the oldest. The calendar round, which combined the Tzolkin and 365-day Haab calendars, measured a synchronized cycle of 52 *haabs*. Thirteen-day cycles, called *trecena*, were important smaller cycles in the Tzolkin, and 20-day cycles (called *veintena*) fig-

ured prominently in the Haab cycle. The Haab cycle correlates to the 365 days it takes the Earth to revolve around the Sun.

For measuring extended periods of time and figuring out when an event had taken place relative to others, the Maya used a calendar known as the Long Count. Like the Islamic and Gregorian calendars, the Long Count measured time by the number of days that had passed since an arbitrary, if culturally significant, starting point, and could measure any date, however far in the future. The Mayan counting system was based on the number 20, not 10, and the Long Count calendar used a positional notation system, in which each position signified an increasing multiple of the number of days; each unit of a given position represented 20 times the unit of the position that preceded it. In addition Long Count inscriptions could be supplemented by the Lunar Series, a half-year calendar that measured time in terms of lunar phases and positions of the Moon.

The Maya also calculated the motions and conjunctions of the planet Venus, a 584-day cycle. Because events in the Venusian cycle could be interpreted as dire or catastrophic, the best or worst times for waging war were sometimes determined on the basis of this cycle.

Fun Fact

According to the Mayan calendrical system the current Great Cycle will end on December 12, 2012, when a new cycle is supposed to start.

Further Reading

Ahmad Birashk, *A Comparative Calendar of the Iranian, Muslim Lunar, and Christian Eras for Three Thousand Years: 1260 B.H., 2000 A.H./639 B.C., 2621 A.D.* (Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers, 1993); Michael Chyutin, *The Role of the Solar and Lunar Calendars in the Redaction of the Psalms* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002); Leo Depuydt, *Civil Calendar and Lunar Calendar in Ancient Egypt* (Leuven, Belgium: Peters Department Oosterse Studies, 1997); Robert Hannah, *Greek and Roman Calendars: Constructions of Time in the Classical World* (London: Duckworth, 2005); Michael Judge, *The Dance of Time, The Origins of the Calendar: A Miscellany of History and Myth, Religion and Astronomy, Festivals and Feast Days* (New York: Arcade Publishers, 2004).

 *Appendix V* 
Holidays by Country

❁ AFGHANISTAN

Public/Legal Holidays

Navruz	March 21
Remembrance Day for Martyrs and Disabled	May 4
Independence Day	August 19
Pashtunistan	August 30

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Ramadan	Late September–early October	First Friday of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October calendar	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Regional Holidays

Red Flower Festival	March 21
Takht-e-Safar Festival	July–August

❁ ALBANIA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Republic Day	January 11
Navruz	March 21
May Day	May 1
Mother Teresa Day	October 19
Independence Day	November 28
Liberation Day	November 29

Religious Holidays

Orthodox Christmas	January 7	
Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Orthodox Easter	Late April–early May	Sunday and Monday after Easter
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October calendar	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

❁ ALGERIA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
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Labor Day	May 1
Commemoration Day	June 19
Independence Day	July 5
Revolution Day	November 1

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Ashura	Early February	Tenth of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Regional Holidays

Tafsit	April
Sbiba	May

ANDORRA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Constitution Day	March 14
Labor Day	May 1
National Day or Our Lady of Meritxell Day	September 8

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Saturday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Easter Monday	March–April	First Monday after Easter
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
St. John's Day	June 24	
Assumption	August 15	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Immaculate Conception	December 8	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Sant Julià de Lòria	July
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✿ ANGOLA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Memorial Day	January 4
Liberation Day	February 4
International Women's Day	March 8
Peace Day	April 4
Labor Day	May 1
Organization of African Unity Day	May 25
World Children's Day	June 5
National Heroes' Day	September 17
Independence Day	November 11

Religious Holidays

Carnival	February–March	Last Tuesday before Lent
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
All Souls' Day	November 2	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Luanda City Day	January 25
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✿ ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
CARICOM Day	First Monday of July
Carnival	First Week of August
Heritage Day	October 29
Independence Day	November 1

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Easter Monday	March–April	First Monday after Easter
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
Christmas Eve/Day	December 24–25	
Boxing Day	December 26	

Regional Holidays

International Sailing Week	Late April or early May	
Caribana	August	Month of Carnival

❁ ARGENTINA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Malvinas Day	April 1
Revolution Day	May 25
Flag Day	June 20
Independence Day	July 9
Anniversary of the Death of General San Martín	August 12
August 12	
Columbus Day	October 12

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Christmas Eve/Day	December 24–25	

Regional Holidays

Carnival	February–March	First Sunday Before Lent
La Fiesta de la Vendimia	March–April	
Festival of Pachamama	July	
Batalia de Tucumán	September 24	

❁ ARMENIA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
International Women's Day	March 8
Motherhood and Beauty Day	April 7
Armenian Genocide Memorial Day	April 24
Peace Day	May 9
Restoration of Armenia's Statehood Day	May 28
Constitution Day	July 5
Independence Day	September 21
Earthquake Victims' Memorial Day	December 7

Religious Holidays

Christmas	January 6	
Palm Sunday	March–April	Sunday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Vardavar Festival	April–May	Fourteen weeks after Easter
Holiday of St. Mary	Sunday between August 12 and 18	

Holy Cross	Sunday nearest September 14
Holy Translators Day	September 14

Regional Holidays

Tiarndaraj	February 13
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✿ ARUBA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Day	January 1
Birthday of G. B. Croes	January 25
National Anthem and Flag Day	March 18
Queen's Day	April 30
Labor Day	May 1

Religious Holidays

Carnival	February–March	Last three days before Lent
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday and Monday after Lent
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
St. John's Day	June 24	
St. Nicholas's Day	December 5	
Christmas Eve/Day	December 24–25	
Boxing Day	December 26	

✿ AUSTRALIA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Australia Day	January 26
ANZAC Day	April 25
Queen's Birthday	Second Monday in June, except in Western Australia, where it is celebrated in September or early October
Labor Day	Different dates in different states and territories

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Christmas	December 25	
Boxing Day	December 26	

Regional Holidays

Sydney Festival	January
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Brisbane Medieval Fayre	Mid-May
National Celtic Festival	June 10–13

❁ AUSTRIA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
National Day	October 26

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday and Monday after Lent
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty and fifty-one days after Easter
Corpus Christi	May–June	Sixty days after Easter
Assumption	August 15	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
All Souls' Day	November 2	
Immaculate Conception	December 8	
Christmas	December 25	
St. Stephen's Day	December 26	

Regional Holidays

Bregenz Festival	July 21–August 22
Austrian Harvest Festivals	September
Salzburger Jazz Herbst	November

❁ AZERBAIJAN

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Martyrs' Day	January 20
International Women's Day	March 8
Navruz	March 21
Labor Day	May 1
Victory Day	May 9
Republic Day	May 28
Salvation Day	June 15
Army and Navy Day	October 9
Independence Day	October 18
Constitution Day	November 12
Revival Day	November 17
Day of Azeri Solidarity	December 31

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

✿ BAHAMAS, THE

The Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Junkanoo	January 1
Martin Luther King Day	Third Monday in January
Labor Day	First Friday in June
Caricom Day	July 4
National Day	July 10
Emancipation Day	First Monday in August
Discovery Day	Second Monday in October
Veterans' Day	November 11

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
Christmas	December 25	
Boxing Day	December 26	

Regional Holidays

Kadooment	August 2	
Mini-Junkanoo Parade	August 2	
Fox Hill Day	August	One week after Emancipation Day

✿ BAHRAIN

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Day	January 1
Labor Day	May 1
Independence Day	August 15
National Day	December 16–17

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Ashura	Early February	Tenth of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

❁ BANGLADESH

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
International Mother Tongue Day	February 21
Birthday of Bangabandhu	March 17
Independence Day and National Day	March 26
Bengali Solar New Year	Mid-April
Labor Day	May 1
Victory Day	December 16

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
El am Hejir	Late January–early February	First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Shab-e-Barat	Early September	Fifteenth of Shaban, the eighth month of the Islamic calendar
Shab-e-Qadr	October	Twenty-seventh of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Regional Holidays

Nabanno	October–November
Lalon Utsab	October
Chiyachot	December–January

❁ BARBADOS

Public/Legal Holidays

Errol Barrow Day	January 21
National Heroes Day	April 28
Emancipation Day	August 1
Independence Day	November 30

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
Christmas	December 25	
Boxing Day	December 26	

Regional Holidays

Holetown Festival	Mid-February	
Oistins Fish Festival	March–April	Easter weekend
De Congaline Street Festival	Late April	
Kadooment Day	First Monday in August	

❁ **BELARUS****Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
International Women's Day	March 8
Constitution Day	March 15
Labor Day	May 1
Victory Day	May 9
Independence Day	August 25
October Revolution Day	November 7

Religious Holidays

Christmas	January 7	
Holy Week	March–April	Last week of Lent
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Radounitsa	April	Nine days after Easter
Remembrance Day	November 2	

Regional Holidays

Navahrudak	June
International Youth Singing Festival	October

❁ **BELGIUM****Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
National Day	July 21
French Community Holiday	September 27
Armistice Day	November 11
King's Feast/Dynasty Day	November 15

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
St. Nicholas Day	December 6	
Christmas	December 25	
Boxing Day	December 26	

Regional Holidays

Carnival of Binche	February–March	Three days before Lent
Ommegang Pageant	July 7	

 **BELIZE****Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Baron Bliss Day	March 9
Commonwealth Day	Second Monday in March
Labor Day	May 1
St. George's Caye Day	September 10
Independence Day	September 21
Pan-American Day	October 13
Garifuna Day	November 19

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Last Saturday in Lent
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Las Posadas	December 16–24	
Christmas Eve/Day	December 24–25	
Boxing Day	December 26	

Regional Holidays

San Pedro Carnival	February
Deer Dance Festival	August

 **BENIN****Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Traditional Day	January 10
Martyrs' Day	January 16
Labor Day	May 1
Independence Day	August 1
National Day	November 30

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday and Monday after Lent
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
Assumption	August 15	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

National Voodoo Day	January 10	
The Yam Festival	Mid-August	
Igue Festival	December	Thirteenth month in Edo calendar

✿ BERMUDA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Bermuda Day	May 24
Queen's Birthday	June 14
Emancipation Day	Last Thursday in July
Labor Day	First Monday in September
Armistice Day	November 11

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Christmas	December 25	
Boxing Day	December 26	

Regional Holidays

Bermuda Kite Festival	March
Peppercorn Ceremony	April

✿ BHUTAN

Public/Legal Holidays

Losar	February
Birthday of the Third King	May 2
Coronation of the Fourth King	June 2
Death of the Third King	July 16
Birthday of the Fourth King	November 11
National Day	December 17
Winter Solstice	December 21

Religious Holidays

Shabdrung Kuchoe	April–May
Vesak	Full Moon day in May

Guru Rinpoche Birthday	July	Tenth of the fifth month of the Buddhist calendar
First Sermon of Lord Buddha	Full Moon day in July	
Blessed Rainy Day	Late September	
Dashain	October	
Descent of Lord Buddha from Heaven	October–November	

Regional Holidays

Thimpu Drupchen	September 9	
Thimpu Tsechu	September 13–15	

BOLIVIA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
Labor Day	May 1	
Independence Day	August 6	

Religious Holidays

Carnival	February–March	Last Thursday before Lent
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Christmas Eve/Day	December 24–25	

Regional Holidays

Alasitas Festival	January	
Festival of the First Equinox	September 21	
San Miguel Festival	September 29	

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
National Independence Day	March 1	
Labor Day	May 1	
National Day	November 25	

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
New Year's Eve/Day	January 13–14	
El am Hejir	Late January–early February	First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent

Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Vidovdan	June 28	
Petrovdan	July 12	
St. Elijah's Day	August 2	
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Regional Holidays

Sarajevo Film Festival	August	
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🌸 BOTSWANA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
Labor Day	May 1	
Sir Seretse Khama Day	July 1	
President's Day	July 19	
Botswana Day	September 30	

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Christmas	December 25	
Boxing Day	December 26	

Regional Holidays

Kuru Traditional and Music Festival	First week of August	
Maun Carnival	August–September	

🌸 BRAZIL

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
Tiradentes Day	April 12	
Labor Day	May 1	
Independence Day	September 7	
Republic Day	November 15	

Religious Holidays

Carnival	February–March	
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Corpus Christi	May–June	Eighth Sunday after Easter

Our Lady of Aparecida	October 12
All Souls' Day	November 2
Christmas	December 25

Regional Holidays

Yemanjá Festival	January 1
Lavagem do Bonfim	Second Thursday in January
Festa de São Lazaro	January 25–28

BRUNEI

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
National Day	February 23
Armed Forces Day	May 31
Birthday of the Sultan	July 15

Religious Holidays

Chinese New Year	January–February	
El am Hejir	Late January–early February	First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Shab-e-Miraj	August	Twenty-seventh of Rajab, the seventh month of the Islamic calendar
Shab-e-Qadr	October	Twenty-seventh of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
Christmas	December 25	

BULGARIA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Martenitsa	March 1
Liberation Day	March 3
Labor Day	May 1
Snake's Day	May 1
Bulgarian Army Day	May 6
Education and Culture Day	May 24
Botev Day	June 2
Unification Day	September 6
Independence Day	September 22
Revival Leaders' Day	November 1

Religious Holidays

St. Basil's Day	January 1	
Epiphany	January 6	
St. Jordan's Day	January 6	
St. John's Day	January 7	
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	Sunday after Lent
St. Peter's Day	June 29	
St. Paul's Day	June 29	
St. Elijah's Day	July 20	
The Transfiguration	August 6	
Assumption	August 15	
St. Demetrius Day	October 26	
St. Michael's Day	November 8	
St. Nicholas Day	December 6	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Festival of Roses	First week in June	
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 **BURKINA FASO**

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
International Women's Day	March 8	
Labor Day	May 1	
Independence Day	August 5	
Republic Day	December 11	

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Assumption	August 15	
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
Christmas Eve/Day	December 24–25	

 **BURUNDI**

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
Day of Unity	February 5	

Labor Day	May 1
Independence Day/National Day	July 1
Victory of the UPRONA Party	September 18
Anniversary of Prince Rwagasore's Assassination	October 13
Ndadaye Day	October 21
Republic Day	November 28

Religious Holidays

Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Assumption	August 15	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Christmas Eve/Day	December 24–25	

CAMBODIA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
National Day	January 7
International Women's Day	March 8
Chaul Chnam	Mid-April
Labor Day	May 1
Chrat Preah Nengkal	Early May
International Children's Day	June 1
Queen's Birthday	June 18
Paris Peace Agreement	October 23
Birthday of King Norodom Sihanouk	October 30–November 1
Independence Day	November 9
Bon Om Tuk	Early November
UN Human Rights Day	December 10

Religious Holidays

Makka Bucha	February
Vesak	Last two weeks in May
Bonn Dak Ben	September–October

Regional Holidays

Angkor Wat Festival	November–December
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CAMEROON

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Youth Day	February 11

Labor Day	May 1
Republic Day/National Day	May 20

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Easter and Easter Monday	March–April	First Sunday and Monday following the month of Lent
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Assumption	August 15	
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
Christmas Eve/Day	December 24–25	

Regional Holidays

Mount Cameroon Race	January 2
Gbaya Annual Fishing Festival	March
Cameroon International Theatre Festival	November
Lela Festival	December
Ngondo Festival	December

🌸 CANADA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Victoria Day	Monday on or before May 25
Canada Day	July 1
Labor Day	First Monday in September
Thanksgiving	Second Monday in October
Remembrance Day	November 11
Boxing Day	December 26

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Rosh Hashana	September or October	
Yom Kippur	September or October	
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Quebec Winter Carnival	January–February
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Family Day	Third Monday in February
Discovery Day (Newfoundland and Labrador)	Monday closest to June 24
Quebec National Day (Fête National)	Monday closest to June 24
Calgary Stampede	July
Civic Holiday	First Monday in August
Regatta Day	First Wednesday in August
Discovery Day (Yukon Territory)	Third Monday in August

CAPE VERDE

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
Independence Day	July 5

Religious Holidays

Carnival	February–March	Tuesday before Lent
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Assumption	August 15	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Tabanka	May
Feast of St. Philip (São Filipe)	May 1
Feast of São Joao	Usually midyear

CAYMAN ISLANDS

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Discovery Day	May 16
Queen's Birthday	Monday on or before May 25
Constitution Day	July 4
Annual Pirates Week	October
Remembrance Day	November 11

Religious Holidays

Ash Wednesday	February–March	First day of Lent
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter and Easter Monday	March–April	First Sunday and Monday after Lent
Christmas	December 25	
Boxing Day	December 26	

Regional Holidays

Batabano	April
Cayman Festival of the Arts—Cayfest	April
Taste of Cayman	July Bank Holiday Weekend

 **CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC**

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Boganda Day	March 29
Labor Day	May 1
Independence Day	August 13
Anniversary of the Proclamation of the Republic	December 1

Religious Holidays

Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Christmas	December 25	

 **CHAD**

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Independence Day	January 11
Labor Day	May 1
Africa Day	May 25
Republic Day	November 28

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Assumption	August 15	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
Christmas	December 25	

 **CHILE**

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1

Navy Day	May 21
Reconciliation Day	First Monday in September
Independence Day	September 18
Armed Forces Day	September 19
Columbus Day	October 12

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Cuasimodo Festival	March–April	First Sunday after Easter
St. Peter's and St. Paul's Day	Late June/Early July	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Festival of the Virgin of the Song	July
Festival de la Virgen del Rosario	December 22–24

CHINA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Day	January 1–2
Labor Day	May 1
CCPS Birthday	July 1
National Day	October 1

Religious Holidays

Chinese New Year	Between January 21 and February 19	First of the first month of the Lunar Calendar
Lantern Festival	February	Fifteenth of the first month of the Chinese Calendar
Duan Wu Festival	June–July	Fifth of the fifth month of Chinese Calendar

COLOMBIA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
Independence Day	July 20
Battle of Bocoyá	August 7
Columbus Day	October 12
Cartagena Independence Day	November 14

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent

Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Corpus Christi	May–June	Sixty days after Easter
Sagrado Corazon (Sacred Heart) Day	June 21	
St. Peter's and St. Paul's Day	June 29	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Immaculate Conception	December 8	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Day of the Blacks and Day of the Whites	January 3–5	
Barranquilla Carnival	February/March	
Medellín Flower Fair	August 11	

❁ COMOROS

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
Labor Day	May 1	
Anniversary of Organization of African Unity	May 25	
Death Anniversary of President Ali Soilih	May 29	
Independence Day	July 6	
Death Anniversary of President Ahmed Abdallah	November 26	

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Ashura	Early February	Tenth of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Shab-e-Miraj	August	Twenty-seventh of Rajab, the seventh month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

❁ CONGO, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
Martyr's Day	January 4	
International Women's Day	March 8	
Labor Day	May 1	
Independence Day	June 30	

Religious Holidays

Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Christmas	December 25	

 **CONGO, REPUBLIC OF THE****Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
President's Day	February 5
International Women's Day	March 8
Marien Ngouabi Day	March 18
Independence Day	August 13–16
Children's Day	December 25
Republic Day	December 31

Religious Holidays

Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Christmas	December 25	

 **COSTA RICA****Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Rivas Battle Day	April 11
Labor Day	May 1
Guanacaste Annexion	July 25
Independence Day	September 15
Columbus Day	October 12

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
St. Joseph's Day	March 19	
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Corpus Christi	May–June	Thursday after Trinity Sunday
St. Peter and St. Paul's Day	June 29	
Virgin of Los Angeles	August 2	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

San Isidro Labrador's Day	May 15
Carrera de San Juan	May 17

❁ CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
Independence Day	August 7
Day of Peace	November 15
Félix Houphouët-Boigny Remembrance Day	December 7

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
El am Hejir	Late January–early February	First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar
Palm Sunday	March–April	Last Sunday of Lent
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Easter Monday	March–April	First Monday after Easter
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
Assumption	August 15	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Carnival in Bouak	March
Fête Du Dipri	April

❁ CROATIA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
Antifascism Day	June 22
National State Day	June 25
Homeland Thanksgiving Day	August 5
Independence Day	October 8

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6
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Palm Sunday	March–April	Sunday before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Corpus Christi	May–June	Sixty days after Easter
Assumption	August 15	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Split Summer	July–August
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CUBA

Public/Legal Holidays

Liberation Day	January 1
Labor Day	May 1
National Revolution Day	July 26
Independence War Day	October 10

Religious Holidays

Christmas	December 25
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Regional Holidays

Fiestas Sanjuaneras	End of June
Fiesta del Fuego	July
Havana Carnival	July–August

CYPRUS

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Greek National Day	March 25
Greek Cypriot National Day	April 1
Labor Day	May 1
Independence Day	October 1
Ochi Day	October 28

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
Green Monday	March–April	Last Monday before Lent
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Easter Monday	March–April	First Monday after Easter
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter

Assumption	August 15
Christmas	December 25
Boxing Day	December 26

Regional Holidays

Procession of St. Lazarus	April
Kypria Wine Festival	September–October

❁ CZECH REPUBLIC

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Restoration of Czech Independence Day	January 1
Labor Day	May 1
Victory Day	May 8
Jan Hus Day	July 6
Czech Statehood Day	September 28
Czech Founding Day	October 28
Struggle for Liberty and Democracy Day	November 17

Religious Holidays

Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Easter Monday	March–April	First Monday after Easter
St. Cyril and St. Methodius Day	July 5	
Christmas	December 25	
Boxing Day	December 26	

Regional Holidays

BookWorld Prague	May
International Festival of Advent and Christmas Music	November

❁ DENMARK

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Queen Margrethe's Day	April 16
Dybbøldagen	April 18
Prince Fredrik's Birthday	May 26
Constitution Day	June 5

Religious Holidays

Holy Week	March–April	Week before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Common Prayer Day	April–May	Fourth Friday after Easter
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
St. Martin's Day	November 11	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Tonder Festival	August
Natfilm Festival	November

❁ DJIBOUTI

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
Independence Day	June 27

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

❁ DOMINICA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
Commonwealth Day	Second Monday in March	
Labor Day	May 1	
CARICOM Day	First Monday in July	
Emancipation Day	August 1	
Creole Day	Late October–early November	Friday before Independence Day
Independence Day	November 3	
Community Service Day	November 4	

Religious Holidays

Carnival	February–March	Ten-day period before the start of Lent
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter

Christmas	December 25
Boxing Day	December 26

Regional Holidays

Band Splash	Late January, early February
Vaval	February 25

❁ DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Duarte's Birthday	January 26
Independence Day	February 27
Battle of March	March 19
Labor Day	May 1
Restoration Day	August 16
Columbus Day	October 12
Constitution Day	November 6
Discovery of Hispaniola	December 6

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
Day of Our Lady of Altagracia	January 21	
Carnival	February–March	Week before Lent
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Corpus Christi	May–June	Sixty days after Easter
Our Lady of Las Mercedes	September 24	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Azual Carnival	March 19
Dominican Gastronomic Festival	June

❁ EAST TIMOR

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
Independence Day (from Indonesia)	May 20
Consultation Day	August 30
Liberation Day	September 20
Santa Cruz Massacre Day	November 12
Independence Day (from Portugal)	November 28

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Assumption	August 15	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Immaculate Conception	December 8	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Tara Bandu Ceremony	Determined by village chief
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 **ECUADOR**

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Anniversary of the Discovery of the Amazon River	February 12
National Community Spirit Day	February 27
Labor Day	May 1
Battle of Pichincha	May 24
Simón Bolívar Day	July 24
Independence Day	August 10
Columbus Day	October 12

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
Carnival	February–March	Three days before Lent
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Corpus Christi	May–June	Sixty days after Easter
All Saints' Day	November 1	
All Souls' Day	November 2	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Fiesta del Yamor	September 1–15
Our Lady of Mercy Festival	September 23–24
Foundation of Quito	December 6

 **EGYPT**

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Sinai Liberation Day	April 25

Labor Day	May 1
Liberation Day	June 18
Revolution Day	July 23
Armed Forces Day	October 6

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
El am Hejir	Early February	First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Sham El Nessim	April–May	First Monday after Coptic Easter
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Regional Holidays

Festival of the Fertility God Min	March–April
Abu Simbel Sun Festival	February 22 and October 22

🌸 EL SALVADOR

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
Independence Day	September 15
Columbus Day	October 12
First Cry of Independence	November 5

Religious Holidays

Ash Wednesday	March–April	First day of Lent
Holy Week	March–April	Last week of Lent
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Feast of San Salvador	First week of August	
All Souls' Day	November 2	
Virgen de Guadalupe	December 12	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

San Miguel's Carnival	November 13–31
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🌸 EQUATORIAL GUINEA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
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Labor Day	May 1
Africa Day	May 25
President's Day	June 5
Armed Forces Day	August 3
Constitution Day	August 15
Independence Day	October 12

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Christmas	December 25	

ERITREA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
International Women's Day	March 8
Independence Day	May 24
Martyr's Day	June 20
Beginning of the Armed Uprising	September 1

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Christmas	January 6–7	
Epiphany	January 19	
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Orthodox New Year's Eve/Day	September 11	
Meskel	September 27	
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Regional Holidays

Fenkil	Mid-February
Festival Eritrea	Ten days bridging the last week of August and the first week of September

ESTONIA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Independence Day	February 24
Labor Day	May 1

Victory Day	June 23
Midsummer's Day	June 24
Independence Restoration Day	August 20

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
Christmas	December 25	

❁ ETHIOPIA

Public/Legal Holidays

Adwa Victory Day	March 1
Derg Downfall Day	May 28
New Year's Day	September 11

Religious Holidays

Christmas	January	
Epiphany	January	
Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Meskel	September	
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

❁ FIJI

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna Day	Last Monday in May
Queen's Birthday	Second Saturday in June
Fiji Day	October 10

Religious Holidays

Chinese New Year	January–February	Twenty-fourth of the 12th month of the Chinese calendar
Holi	February or March	Full Moon day of the Hindu month of Phalguna
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

Diwali	October or November
Christmas	December 25

Regional Holidays

Fire Walking	Ten days around the full Moon day in July or August
Hibiscus Festival	First week of August
Sugar Festival	September

FINLAND

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
St. Urho's Day	March 16
Mikael Agricola Day	April 9
Labor Day	May 1
Midsummer's Eve/Midsummer's Day	June 25–26
Independence Day	December 6

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
Holy Week	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Christmas Eve	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Tango Festival	July
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FRANCE

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
Liberation Day	May 8
Bastille Day	July 14
Armistice Day	November 11

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
Palm Sunday	March–April	Sunday before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter

Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
Assumption	August 15	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Lemon Festival	February
Cannes Film Festival	May
La Fête de la Magdalene	July 11
St. Catherine's Day	November 25

❁ FRENCH GUIANA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
Victory Day	May 8
Abolition Day	June 10
Bastille Day	July 14
Remembrance Day	November 11

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
Carnival	February–March	Last two weeks before Lent
Palm Sunday	March–April	Sunday before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
Assumption	August 15	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
All Souls' Day	November 2	
Christmas	December 25	

❁ GABON

Public/Legal Holiday

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Renovation Day	March 12
Labor Day	May 1
Independence Day	August 17

Religious Holidays

Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Assumption	August 15	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Christmas	December 25	

 GAMBIA, THE**Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Independence Day	February 18
Labor Day	May 1
Liberation Day	July 22

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Assumption	August 15	
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

International Roots Festival	June–July
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 GEORGIA**Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Mother's Day	March 3
International Women's Day	March 8
Independence Day	May 26

Religious Holidays

Christmas	January 6–7	
Epiphany	January 19	
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Assumption	August 15	
St. George's Day	May 6 and November 23	

✿ GERMANY

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
National Day	October 3

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
Corpus Christi	May–June	Sixty days after Easter
Assumption	August 15	
Reformation Day	October 31	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
All Souls' Day	November 2	
Buss und Betttag	November	Wednesday before Totensonntag
Totensonntag	November	Last Sunday before Advent
St. Nicholas Day	December 6	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Bamberger Sandkerwa	August
Oktoberfest	Mid-September–early October
Oberammergau Passion Play	Every ten years for five months

✿ GHANA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Independence Day	March 6
Labor Day	May 1
1979 Coup Anniversary	June 4
Republic Day	July 1
Farmers' Day	December 2
Revolution Day	December 31

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Christmas	December 25
Boxing Day	December 26

Regional Holidays

Bugum Festival	January or February
Deer-Hunting Festival of Ghana	May
Elimina Bakatue Festival	First week in July
Rice Festival	Late November–early December

❁ GREECE

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Independence Day	March 25
Labor Day	May 1
Oxi Day	October 28

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
Shrove Monday	February–March	Last Monday before Lent
Annunciation	March 25	
Palm Sunday	March–April	Last Sunday before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
Transfiguration of Christ	August 6	
Assumption	August 15	
Finding of the True Cross	September 14	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Carnival	February–March	Three weeks before Ash Wednesday
Feast of Agnes Georgios	April 23	

❁ GREENLAND

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
National Day	June 21

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Great Prayer Day	April–May	Fourth Friday after Easter
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
Christmas	December 25	
Boxing Day	December 26	

Regional Holidays

Nuuk Snow Festival	March 19–22	
Greenlandic Viking/Inuit Festival	July	

❁ GRENADA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
Independence Day	February 7	
Labor Day	May 1	
Caricom Day	July 5	
Emancipation Day	August 1	
Thanksgiving Day	October 25	

Religious Holidays

Carnival	February–March	Week before Lent
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Easter Monday	March–April	Monday after Easter
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
Corpus Christi	May–June	Sixty days after Easter
Christmas	December 25	
Boxing Day	December 26	

Regional Holidays

Easter Monday Kite-Flying Competitions	March–April	Easter week
Carricou Maroon Music Festival	April 29	
Fisherman's Birthday Celebrations	June 29	

❁ GUADELOUPE

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
Labor Day	May 1	
Victory Day	May 8	
Abolition of Slavery Day	May 27	
Bastille Day	July 14	

Victor Schoelcher Day	July 21
Armistice Day	November 11

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
Carnival	February–March	Last Tuesday before Lent
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Easter Monday	March–April	Monday after Easter
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
Immaculate Conception	December 8	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Saint Patron's Day	May 5
Gwo Ka Festival	Early June
Festival of the Women Cooks	August

GUATEMALA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
Army Day	June 30
Independence Day	September 15
Revolution Day	October 20

Religious Holidays

Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Saturday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Assumption	August 15	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Festival of the Black Christ of Esquipulas	January 8–15
Virgen de la Candelaria	February 2
Day of the Dead	November 1
Garifuna Day	November 26

GUINEA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
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Second Republic Anniversary	April 13
Labor Day	May 1
Anniversary of Women's Revolt Day	August 27
Referendum Day	September 28
Republic Day	October 2
Invasion Day	November 22

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Easter Monday	March–April	Monday after Easter
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Ascension	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Assumption	August 15	
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Festival de Guinée	April
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🌸 GUINEA-BISSEAU

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
International Women's Day	March 8
Labor Day	May 1
Independence Day	September 24

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Guinea-Bissau Carnival	February–March	Monday and Tuesday before Lent
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🌸 GUYANA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
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Republic Day	February 23
Labor Day	May 1
Indian Heritage Day	May 5
Independence Day	May 26
CARICOM Day	July 4
Liberty Day	August 1

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Holi	March–April	Full Moon day of the Hindu month of Phalgun
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Easter Monday	March–April	Monday after Easter
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Diwali	October–November	Five days from the thirteenth day of the waning half (Krishna Paksha) of the lunar month Asvina to the second day of the waxing half (Shukla Paksha) of Kartika
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First day of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
Christmas	December 25	
Boxing Day	December 26	

Regional Holidays

Bartica Regatta	March–April	Easter Week
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HAITI

Public/Legal Holidays

Independence Day	January 1
Heroes Day	January 2
Flag Day	May 18
Battle of Vertières Day	November 8
Discovery of Haiti Day	December 5

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
Norriture Rituelle des Sources Têt d' l'Eau	February 25	
Carnival	February–March	Tuesday before Lent
St. Joseph Expression de la Jurisdiction Legba	March	
Legba Zaou	Mid-March	
Loco Davi	March 16	
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter

Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Danbala Wedo	April 27	
Casse Canarie	April 29	
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Grande Aloumandia	May 18	
Corpus Christi	May–June	Thursday after Trinity Sunday
Agou	August 30	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
All Souls' Day	November 2	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

St. Jean's Day	June 24	
Papa Ogou	July 25	
Gran Délai et Gran Aloumandia	July 26	
Mangé Yam	November 25	

❁ HONDURAS

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
Americas Day	April 14	
Labor Day	May 1	
José Trinidad Cabañas Day	June 9	
Independence Day	September 15	
Soldiers' Day	October 3	
Columbus Day	October 12	
Armed Forces Day	October 21	

Religious Holidays

Suyapa Day	February 3	
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Guanaco Festival	December–January	
Fiesta de San Isidro	Third week in May	

❁ HONG KONG

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
Labor Day	May 1	

Chinese Dragon Boat Festival	Mid-June	Fifth day of the fifth lunar month in the Chinese calendar
Establishment Day	July 1	
Mid-Autumn Festival	September	Fifteenth day of the eighth month of the Chinese lunar calendar
Zhong Yeung	October	Ninth day of the ninth lunar month of the Chinese calendar
National Day	October 1	
Religious Holidays		
Chinese New Year	Late January–early February	Starts with the second new Moon after the winter solstice and ends two weeks later with the full Moon, according to the Chinese calendar
Ching Ming Festival	Early April	One hundred and sixth day following winter solstice according to the Chinese calendar
Vesak	First full Moon day in May, except in a leap year when the festival is held in June, according to the Chinese lunisolar calendar	
Boxing Day	December 26	

HUNGARY

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Hungarian Revolution Anniversary	March 15
Labor Day	May 1
St. Stephen's Day	August 20
Republic Day	October 23

Religious Holidays

Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
Assumption	August 15	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Christmas	December 24–26	

ICELAND

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Sprengidagur	February 8
First Day of Summer	April 22
Labor Day	May 1
Independence Day	June 17
Labor Day Weekend	First weekend in August

Religious Holidays

Bolludagur	February–March	Monday before Lent
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Day of St. Þorlákur	December 23	
Christmas	December 25	
Boxing Day	December 26	

Regional Holidays

Thirteenth Day of Christmas	January 6	
Festival of Lights	February 17–20	
Seamen's Day	First Sunday in June	
Reykjavik Arts Festival	June of even-numbered years	
First Day of Summer	June 21	
Þjóðhatid	Early August	

❁ INDIA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
Republic Day	January 26	
Independence Day	August 15	
Mahatma Gandhi's Birthday	October 2	

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
El am Hejir	Early February	First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar
Holi	February–March	Full Moon day of the Hindu month of Phalgun
Maha Shivratri	February–March	Thirteenth or fourteenth day of the dark half of Phalgun in the Hindu calendar
Ram Navami	April	
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Janmashtami	August–September	Begins on the eighth day of the dark fortnight of Sravana, the fourth month of the Hindu calendar
Dussehra	September–October	First through 10th of the month of Asvina, the seventh month of the Hindu civil calendar
Diwali	October–November	Lasting for five days from the thirteenth day of the waning half (Krishna Paksha) of the lunar month Asvina to the second day of the waxing half (Shukla Paksha) of Karttika in the Hindu calendar

Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
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Regional Holidays

Pongal	January	Four days in Magha, the 10th month of the Hindu solar calendar
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Bikaner Camel Festival	January	
Float Festival	January–February	
Taj Mahotsav	February	
Goa Carnival	February–March	
Rath Yatra	June–July	
Onam	August–September	

INDONESIA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
Kartini Day	April 21	
Independence Day	August 17	

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Chinese New Year	Between January 21 and February 19	First day of the first Moon of the Chinese lunar calendar
El am Hejir	Early February	First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar
New Year's Eve/Day (Balinese)	March 21	Vernal Equinox
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Mesh Sankranti	Mid-April	Ninth day of Shukla Paksh (the bright fortnight) of Chaitra, the first month of the Hindu calendar
Vesak	First full Moon day in May, except in a leap year when the festival is held in June	
Shab-e-Miraj	August–September	Twenty-seventh of Rajab, the seventh month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

IRAN

Public/Legal Holidays

Magnificent Victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran	February 11	
Day of Oil Industry Nationalization	March 20	

Navruz	March 21	
Sizdah Bedar	Early April	Thirteenth of Farvardin, the first month of the Perisian calendar
Islamic Republic Day	April 1	
Death of Imam Khomeini (literally Heart-Rending Departure of the Great Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran)	June 4	
Religious Holidays		
Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
El am Hejir	Late January–early February	First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar
Ashura	Early February	Tenth of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar
Arba'een Al-Husseini	March	Forty days after Ashura
Martyrdom of Hassan	March–April	Twenty-eighth of Safar, the second month of the Islamic calendar
Martyrdom of Fatima	May–June	Third of Jumada al-Awwal, the fifth month of the Islamic calendar
Birth of Imam Ali	August	Thirteenth of Rajab, the seventh month of the Islamic calendar
Laylat Al-Isra wa Al-Miraj	August	Twenty-seventh of Rajab, the seventh month of the Islamic calendar
Birthday of Imam Mahdi	September	Twelfth of Shaban, the eighth month of the Islamic calendar
Martyrdom of Imam Ali Bin Abi Taleb	October	Twenty-first of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
Martyrdom of Imam Jafar Al-Sadiq	November	Twenty-fifth of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
Birthday of Imam Ali ibn Musa ar-Reza	December	Eleventh of Dhu al-Quidah, the 11th month of the Islamic calendar

🌸 IRAQ

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Army Day	January 6
Revolution Day	February 8
Day of Saddam Hussein's Downfall	April 9
Labor Day	May 1
Republic Day	July 14
Peace Day	August 8

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
El am Hejir	Late January–early February	First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar
Ashura	Early February	Tenth of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Navruz	March 21	
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

 **IRELAND****Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Saint Patrick's Day	March 17
Bank Holidays	May, June, August, October
Battle of the Boyne Day	July 12
Halloween	October 31

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
Holy Week	March–April	Palm Sunday through Good Friday
Palm Sunday	March–April	Sunday before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Easter Monday	March–April	The day after Easter
Assumption	August 15	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Christmas	December 25	
Boxing Day	December 26	

Regional Holidays

Pan-Celtic International Festival	April
Dublin Pride	June–July

 **ISRAEL****Public/Legal Holidays**

Holocaust Remembrance Day	March–April	Twenty-seventh of Nisan, the first month of the Jewish calendar
Memorial Day	April–May	Fourth of Iyar, the second month of the Jewish calendar

Independence Day	April–May	Fifth of Iyar, the second month of the Jewish calendar
Religious Holidays		
Pesach	March–April	Begins on the 15th of Nisan, the first month of the Jewish calendar, and continues for seven days
Lag b Omer	March–April	Begins on the 16th of Nisan, the first month of the Jewish calendar
Shavuot	May–June	Sixth of Sivan, the third month of the Jewish calendar, 50 days after Passover
Tisha Be-av	July–August	Ninth of Av, the fifth month of the Jewish calendar
Rosh Hashana	September–October	First and second of Tishri, the seventh month of the Jewish calendar
Yom Kippur	September–October	Tenth of Tishri, the seventh month of the Jewish calendar
Sukkot	September–October	Fifteenth through the 21st of Tishri, the seventh month of the Jewish calendar
Shemini Atzeret	September–October	Twenty-second and 23rd of Tishri, seventh month of the Jewish calendar
Simchat Torah	September–October	Twenty-third of Tishri, the seventh month of the Jewish calendar
Hanukkah	November–December	Twenty-fifth of Kislev, the ninth month of the Jewish calendar
Tu Bshevat	January–February	Fifteenth of Shevat, the 11th month of the Jewish calendar
Purim	February–March	Fourteenth of Adar, the 12th month of the Jewish calendar

🌸 ITALY

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Liberation Day	April 25
Labor Day	May 1
Republic Day	June 2

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Easter Monday	March–April	First Monday after Easter
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Immaculate Conception	December 8	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Carnevale	February–March	Ten days before Lent
Explosion of the Cart	March–April	Easter Sunday
Rome's Birthday Celebration	April 21	

❁ JAMAICA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 23
Emancipation Day	August 1
Independence Day	August 6
National Heroes' Day	Third Monday in October

Religious Holidays

Carnival	February	
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday and Monday after Lent
Christmas	December 25	
Boxing Day	December 26	

Regional Holidays

Accompong Maroon Festival	January 6
Rebel Salute	January 17
Bob Marley Day	February 6
Breadfruit Festival	August
Taino Day	November 18

❁ JAPAN

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Coming of Age Day	Second Monday in January
National Foundation Day	February 11
Hina Matsuri	March 3
Spring Equinox	March 20–22
Nature Day	April 29
Labor Day	May 1
Constitution Memorial Day	May 3
People's Day	May 4
Children's Day	May 5
Day of the Sea	Third Monday in July
Respect for the Elders Day	Third Monday in September
Autumnal Equinox	September 23
Health and Sports Day	Second Monday in October
Culture Day	November 3
Labor Thanksgiving Day	November 23
Emperor's Birthday	December 23

Religious Holidays

Obon	Mid-August
Christmas	December 25

Regional Holidays

Setsubun Festival	February 3 or 4
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❁ JORDAN

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
King Abdullah's Birthday	January 30
Labor Day	May 1
Independence Day	May 25
Army Day/Arab Revolt Day	June 10
King Hussein's Birthday	November 14

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Shab-e-Miraj	August	Twenty-seventh of Rajab, the seventh month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Regional Holidays

Jordanian Song Festival	December
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❁ KAZAKHSTAN

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
International Women's Day	March 8
Navruz	March 21
Labor Day	May 1
Victory Day	May 9
Constitution Day	September 1
Republic Day	October 25
Independence Day	December 16

Religious Holidays

Christmas	January 6–7	
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent

Ramadan	Late September	First of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Regional Holidays

Khan Tengri Mountain Festival	July–August
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KENYA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Day	January 1
Madaraka Day	June 1
Moi Day	October 10
Kenyatta Day	October 20
Independence Day	December 12

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Eid al-Fitr	Late October calendar	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
Christmas	December 25	
Boxing Day	December 26	

Regional Holidays

Music and Food Festival	May, June, and July
Lamu Dugong Festival	May
Maralal International Camel Derby and Festival	Second week of August
Ferodo Concours d'elegance	September 27

KIRIBATI

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
National Health Day	April 8
Independence Day	July 12
National Youth Day	August 7
Human Rights Day	December 10

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Last Friday before Easter
Easter Sunday	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Christmas	December 25	
Boxing Day	December 26	

❁ KOREA, NORTH

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Kim Jong Il's Birthday	February 16–17
Kim Il-sung's Birthday	April 15
Labor Day	May 1
Fatherland Liberation War Day	June 25
Victory Day	July 27
Liberation Day	August 15
DPR Korea Foundation Day	September 9
Chusok	September 17–18
Party Foundation Day	October 10
Constitution Day	December 27

❁ KOREA, SOUTH

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Independence Movement Day	March 1
Arbor Day	April 5
Children's Day	May 5
Constitution Day	July 17
Liberation Day	August 15
National Foundation Day	October 3

Religious Holidays

Seollal/Seotdal Geumeum	February
Vesak	First full Moon day in May, except in a leap year when the festival is held in June
Chusok	September
Christmas	December 25

Regional Holidays

Muju Firefly Festival	June
Pusan Chagalchi Festival	October

❁ KUWAIT

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
National Day	February 25
Liberation Day	February 26

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
El am Hejir	Late January–early February	First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Ascension of the Prophet	August	Twenty-seventh of Rajab, the seventh month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Regional Holidays

Hala February	February
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 **KYRGYZSTAN****Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
International Women's Day	March 8
Navruz	March 21
Labor Day	May 1
Constitution Day	May 5
Independence Day	August 31

Religious Holidays

Christmas	January 6–7	
Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

LAOS**Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Pathet Lao Day	January 6
International Women's Day	March 8
Boun Pimai	April 13–16
Labor Day	May 1
International Children's Day	June 1
Lao National Day	December 2

Religious Holidays

Vesak	May	Fifteenth day of the sixth lunar month of the Buddhist calendar
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Bouk Khao Phansaa (beginning)	July–October	Full Moon of the eighth lunar month of the Buddhist calendar until the full Moon on the 11th lunar month of the Buddhist calendar
Bouk Khao Phansaa (culmination)	November	Full Moon in the 11th lunar month of the Buddhist calendar

Regional Holidays

Vietnamese Tet and Chinese New Year	February	Second new Moon after the winter solstice
That Luang Festival	December	Full Moon of the 12th month of the Buddhist calendar
Bun Pha Wet	December–January	

❁ LATVIA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Constitution Day	May 1
Labor Day	May 1
Proclamation of Independence	May 4
Līgo Day and Jāni	June 23–24
Commemoration Day of Genocide against the Jews	July 4
Lācplēsis Day	November 11
Proclamation of the Republic of Latvia	November 18

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
St. John's Day	June 24	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Christmas	December 25	
Boxing Day	December 26	

Regional Holidays

International Baltic Ballet Festival	April 21–25
Riga Opera Festival	May–June

❁ LEBANON

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
Martyrs' Day	May 6
Independence Day	November 22

Religious Holidays

Armenian Christmas	January 6	
Orthodox Christmas	January 7	
Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
El am Hejir	Late January–early February	First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar
Ashura	Early January	Tenth of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar
St. Maroun's Day	February 9	
Holy Week	March–April	Last week of Lent
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the fifth month of the Islamic calendar
Assumption	August 15	
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
All Saints' Day	November 1	

Regional Holidays

Baalbeck Musical Festival	July
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 **LESOTHO****Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Moshoeshoe Day	March 11
National Tree Planting Day	March 21
Labor Day	May 1
Family Day	July 4
King's Birthday	July 17
Independence Day	October 4

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Christmas	December 25	
Boxing Day	December 26	

Regional Holidays

Morija Arts and Cultural Festival	September or October
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 **LIBERIA****Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Armed Forces Day	February 11

Decoration Day	Second Wednesday in March
J. J. Roberts's Birth Anniversary	March 15
National Redemption Day	April 12
Samuel Kanyon Day	May 6
Unity Day	May 14
Africa Day	May 25
Independence Day	July 26
National Flag Day	August 24
Thanksgiving	First Thursday in November
Remembrance Day	November 11
President W. V. S. Tubman's Birthday	November 29

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Christmas	December 24–25	
Karamu Feast	December 31	

🌸 LIBYA

Public/Legal Holidays

People's Power Declaration	March 3
British Evacuation Day	April 28
Revolution Day	September 1
Italian Evacuation Day	October 7
Independence Day	December 24

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the fifth month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

🌸 LIECHTENSTEIN

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Day	January 1
Labor Day	May 1
National Day	August 15
Birthday of Prince Franz-Josef II	August 16

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6
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Candlemas	February 2	
St. Joseph's Day	March 19	
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
Corpus Christi	May–June	Sixty days after Easter
Assumption	August 15	
Nativity of Our Lady	September 8	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Immaculate Conception	December 8	
Christmas	December 25	

❁ LITHUANIA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Independence Day (1918)	February 16
Restoration of Lithuania's Statehood	March 11
Labor Day	May 1
Anniversary of the Coronation of King Mindaugas	July 6

Religious Holidays

St. Casimir Day	March 4	
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Assumption	August 15	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Christmas	December 25–26	

Regional Holidays

Kirmeline	January 25
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❁ LUXEMBOURG

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
Grand Duke's Birthday	June 23

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Oktave	April–May	Third through fifth Sundays after Easter

Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
Assumption	August 15	
All Saint's Day	November 1	
Christmas	December 24–25	
Boxing Day	December 26	

Regional Holidays

Dancing Procession	May–June	
Schueberfouer Fair	End of August–mid-September	

❁ MACAU

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
Chinese New Year	Between January 21 and February 19	First day of the First Moon of the Lunar Calendar
Tuen Yang	April	Fifth day of the fifth month of the Buddhist calendar
Anniversary of Portuguese Revolution Day	April 25	
Labor Day	May 1	
Camões Day	June 10	
Mid-Autumn Festival	August	Fifteenth day of the eighth month of the Buddhist calendar
National Day of the People's Republic of China	October 1–2	
Special Administrative Region Day	December 20	
Winter Solstice	December 21	

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Cheng Ming	April 5	
Vesak	April or May	
Procession of Our Lady of Fatima	May 13	
St. John the Baptist Day	June 24	
All Souls' Day	November 2	
Christmas	December 24–25	

Regional Holidays

Feast of the Drunken Dragon	May 13	
Chung Yeung	October 21	

❁ MACEDONIA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
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International Women's Day	March 8
Labor Day	May 1
Ilinden Uprising Day	August 2
Independence Day	September 8
Antifascist Uprising Day	October 11

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Christmas	January 6–7	
Orthodox New Year's Day	January 14	
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
St. Cyrilus and St. Methodius Day	May 24	
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Regional Holidays

Skopje International Jazz Festival	October
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MADAGASCAR

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Memorial Day	March 29
Labor Day	May 1
Africa Day	May 25
Independence Day	June 26

Religious Holidays

Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Christmas	December 24–25	

Regional Holidays

Alahamady Be	March
Donia	May
Famadihana	June–September

MALAWI

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
John Chilembwe Day	January 15

Martyrs' Day	March 3
Labor Day	May 1
Republic Day	July 6
National Tree Planting Day	December 13

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Christmas	December 24–25	

Regional Holidays

Lake of Stars Festival	September 10–12
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✿ MALAYSIA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
Chinese New Year	February	The second new Moon after the winter solstice
Labor Day	May 1	
National Day	August 31	

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
El am Hejir	Late January–early February	First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Vesak	May	Full Moon of the sixth month of the Buddhist calendar
Diwali	October or November	Five days from the thirteenth day of the waning half (Krishna Paksha) of the lunar month Asvina to the second day of the waxing half (Shukla Paksha) of Kartika
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Kuching Festival	July–August
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✿ MALDIVES

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
National Day	April 9
Huravee Day	July 8

Independence Day	July 26–27
Martyrs' Day	September 4
Victory Day	November 3
Republic Day	November 11–12

Religious Holidays

El am Hejir	Late January–early February	First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Ramadan	October	Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Hajj Day	January	Last day of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

MALI

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Day of Democracy	March 26
Labor Day	May 1
Africa Day	May 25
Independence Day	September 22
Army Coup Day	November 19

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Regional Holidays

Fête des Masques	April–May
Crossing of the Cattle	December

MALTA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Freedom Day	March 31
Labor Day	May 1

Sette Giugno	June 7
Independence Day	September 21
Republic Day	December 13

Religious Holidays

Feast of St. Paul's Shipwreck	February 10
St. Joseph's Day	March 19
Good Friday	March Friday before Easter
Easter	March First Sunday after Lent
Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul	June 29
Assumption	August 15
Our Lady of the Victories Day	September 8
Immaculate Conception	December 8
Christmas	December 25

Regional Holidays

Fireworks Festival	April 29–30
Malta International Choir Festival	November 8–12

❁ MARSHALL ISLANDS

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Memorial and Nuclear Victims' Day	March 1
Constitution Day	May 1
Fisherman's Day	July 4
Rijerba Day (Worker's Day)	First Friday in September
Manit Day	September 24
President's Day	November 17
Thanksgiving	Last Thursday in November
Gospel Day	First Friday in December

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Christmas	December 25	

❁ MARTINIQUE

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
Bastille Day	July 14
Armistice Day	November 11

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
Carnival	February	
Ash Wednesday	February–March	First day of Lent
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
All Saints' Day	November 1	
All Souls' Day	November 2	
Christmas	December 24–25	

Regional Holidays

Gommier Race	May 24	
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 MAURITANIA**Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
Labor Day	May 1	
Africa Day	May 25	
Independence Day	November 28	

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

 MAURITIUS**Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day	January 1–2	
Independence Day	March 12	
Labor Day	May 1	

Religious Holidays

Thaipooasam Cavadee	January–February	
Ashura	Early February	Tenth of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar
Maha Shivratri	February–March	Thirteenth or 14th of the dark half of Phalguna of the Hindu calendar
Holi	February–March	Full Moon day of Phalguna, the 12th month of the Hindu calendar
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Assumption	August 15	

Ganesh Chaturthi	August	Fourth of Bhadrapada, the sixth month of the Hindu lunar calendar
Father Laval Day	September 9	
Ganga Asnan	October–November	Karttika, the eighth month of the Hindu solar calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
Diwali	October–November	Lasting for five days from the 13th day of the waning half (Krishna Paksha) of the lunar month Asvina to the second day of the waxing half (Shukla Paksha) of Karttika
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Christmas	December 25	
Regional Holidays		
Chinese New Year	February	The second new Moon after the winter solstice

❁ MEXICO

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
Constitution Day	February 5	
Flag Day	February 24	
Birthday of Benito Juárez	March 21	
Labor Day	May 1	
Cinco de Mayo	May 5	
Independence Day	September 16	
Anniversary of the Revolution of 1910	November 20	

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
Día de la Candelaria	February 2	
Carnival	February–March	Week before Lent
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Day of the Dead	November 1	
Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe	December 12	
Las Posadas	December 16–24	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Three Kings Bread Fiesta	January 6	
Amaranth Festival	February 16–18	

Xochimilco Festival	March–April	Two weeks before Easter
Guadalajaras Fiestas de Octubre	October 1–31	
Night of the Radishes	December 23	

❁ MICRONESIA, FEDERATED STATES OF

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
FSM Constitution Day	May 10
Micronesia Day	July 12
Kosrae Liberation Day	September 8
Pohnpei Liberation Day	September 11
United Nations Day	October 24
National Day	November 3

Religious Holidays

Palm Sunday	March–April	Last Sunday before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Saturday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Kosrae Constitution Day	January 11
Yap Day	March 1
Pohnpei Culture Day	March 31
Kosrae Arts Festival	Early September
Yap Constitution Day	December 24

❁ MOLDOVA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
New Year's Eve/Day	January 14
International Women's Day	March 8
Labor Day	May 1
National Heroes' Day	May 9
Independence Day	August 27
Limba Noastra	August 31

Religious Holidays

Christmas	January 7	
Holy Week	March–April	Begins on Palm Sunday and ends on Easter
Palm Sunday	March–April	Last Sunday before Easter

Holy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Saturday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Rise of the Holy Cross	September 14	

Regional Holidays

Martisor Day	March 1
Wine Festival	October

❁ MONACO

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
National Day	November 18–19

Religious Holidays

St. Devote's Day	January 27	
Carnival	February–March	Last Tuesday before Lent
Mi-Carame	March–April	Middle Thursday of Lent
Palm Sunday	March–April	Sunday before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Saturday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
Corpus Christi	May–June	Sixty days after Easter
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Immaculate Conception	December 8	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

International Circus Festival	January or February
Monte Carlo International Fireworks Festival	July or August

❁ MONGOLIA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Tsagaan Tsar	End of January to early March (lunar calendar)
International Women's Day	March 8

Day of Children and Mothers	June 1
Independence Day	July 11–13
Celebration of the Revolution	July 21
Proclamation of Mongolia Day	November 26

Religious Holidays

Festival of Maidari	Various times
Tsaul-khural	Twenty days after the first winter Moon

MOROCCO

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
Throne Day	July 30
Revolution of the King and People Day	August 20
King's Birthday	August 21
Green March Day	November 6
Independence Day	November 18

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
El am Hejir	Early February	First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Regional Holidays

Almond Tree Blossom Festival	Second week of February
Wax Candle Feast	May
Imilchil	August

MOZAMBIQUE

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Heroes' Day	February 3
Labor Day	May 1
Independence Day	June 25
Lusaka Agreement Day	September 7
Armed Forces Day	September 25

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabi-al-awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Christmas	December 25	

❁ **MYANMAR****Public/Legal Holidays**

Independence Day	January 4	
Union Day	February 12	
Peasants' Day	March 2	
Armed Forces Day	March 27	
New Year's Eve/Day	Mid April	
Thingyan Water Festival	Mid April	
Labor Day	May 1	
Martyrs' Day	July 19	
National Day	Late November	
Karen New Year	December or January	

Religious Holidays

Vesak	Late April–early May	
Buddhist Lent	July	
Maha Dok Festival	August	
Festival of Lights	September–October	
Tazaungmon Full Moon Day	October–November	

Regional Holidays

Kachin Manao Festival	January 10	
Naga Traditional New Year's Festival	January 14–15	
Shwedagon Pagoda Festival	February–March	
Pindaya Cave Festivals	February–March	
Waso Chinlon Festival	June–July	Waso, the fourth month of the Myanmar calendar
Taungbyone Nat Festival	Late July–mid August	
Popa Ceremony in Yadanagu Pagoda	August	
Phaung-Taw-Oo Pagoda Festival	August	

❁ **NAMIBIA****Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
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Independence Day	March 21
Labor Day	May 1
Cassinga Day	May 4
Africa Day	May 25
Heroes' Day	August 26
Human Rights Day	December 10

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Windhoek Carnival	March–April
Maherero Day	Last week of August
Oktoberfest	October

NAURU

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Independence Day	January 31
Constitution Day	May 17
Angam Day	October 26

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Christmas	December 25	

NEPAL

Public/Legal Holidays

Sahid Divas	February	Sixteenth day of Magha, the 11th month of the Nepalese calendar
Prajatantra Divas	February	Seventh day of Phalgun, the 12th month of the Nepalese calendar
His Majesty King Gyanendra bir Bikram Shah Dev's Birthday	July	Twenty-third of Ashadh, the third month of the Nepalese calendar
Nepal Sambidhan Divas	November	Twenty-third day of Karttika, the eighth month of the Nepalese calendar

Religious Holidays

Maha Shivratri	March	Thirteenth or 14th day of the waning half of Phalgun, the 11th month of the Nepalese calendar
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Holi	March	Twenty-third of Phalgunā, the 11th month of the Nepalese calendar
Ram Navami	April	Twenty-eighth of Chaitra, the 12th month of the Nepalese calendar
New Year's Day	April	First of Baisakh, the first month of the Nepalese calendar
Vesak	May	Full Moon day of Jesthā, the second month of the Nepalese calendar
Janmashtami	August	Second of Bhādrā, the fifth month of the Nepalese calendar
Dashain	October	Tenth of Asoj, the sixth month of the Nepalese calendar
Diwali	November	Tenth of Karttika, the seventh month of the Nepalese calendar
Regional Holidays		
Mani Rimdu	November	Full Moon of Karttika, the seventh month of the Nepalese calendar or the full Moon of Mangsir, the eighth month of the Nepalese calendar

🌸 NETHERLANDS, THE

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Koninginnedag	April 30
Labor Day	May 1
Herdenkings Day	May 4
Liberation Day	May 5
Koninkrijksdag	December 15
Boxing Day	December 26

Religious Holidays

Palm Sunday	March–April	Sunday before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Saturday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
Feast of Sinterklaas	December 5	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Breda Jazz Festival	May
Internationaal Folkloristisch Dansfestival	June, July, or August

✿ NETHERLANDS ANTILLES

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Queen's Birthday	April 30
Labor Day	May 1
Antilles Day	October 21
Mini Winter Carnival	December

Religious Holidays

Carnival	February–early March	
Ash Wednesday	February–early March	
Palm Sunday	March–April	Sunday before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Saturday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
St. John's Day	June 24	
St. Peter's Day	June 29	
St. Nicholas Day	December 5	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Tumba Festival	February–March	Day before Carnival
Bonaire Spring Harvest Festival	First week of April	
Curacao Salsa Festival	Early August	

✿ NEW ZEALAND

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Waitangi Day	February 6
ANZAC Day	April 25
Queen's Birthday	First Monday in June
Labor Day	October 28
Boxing Day	December 26

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Southland Garden Festival	February
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❁ NICARAGUA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
Liberation Day	July 19
Battle of San Jacinto Day	September 14
Independence Day	September 15

Religious Holidays

Palm Sunday	March–April	Sunday before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Saturday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Immaculate Conception	December 7–8	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Santo Domingo Day	August 1
Las Fiestas de San Jeronimo	September–December
Torovenado del Pueblo	October 22

❁ NIGER

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
National Concord Day	April 24
Labor Day	May 1
Independence Day	August 3
Republic Day	December 18

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Regional Holidays

National Festival of Arts	Mid-April
Gerewol	September

 NIGERIA**Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
Democracy Day	May 29
National Day	October 1
Boxing Day	December 26

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
El am Hejir	Late January–early February	First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Durbar Festival	January and October	Dhu al-Hijjah and Shawwal
Argungu Fishing and Cultural Festival	February	
Shango Festival	July	

 NORWAY**Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
Constitution Day	May 17
Midsummer's Eve	June 21

Religious Holidays

Palm Sunday	March–April	Sunday before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Saturday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter

St. Olav's Day	July 29
Christmas	December 25

Regional Holidays

Northern Lights Festival	January 21–25
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❁ OMAN

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
National Day	November 18
Birthday of HM Sultan Quaboos	November 19

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Lailat al-Meiraj	September	
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Regional Holidays

Muscat Festival	December–January
Khareef Festival	July

❁ PAKISTAN

Public/Legal Holidays

Pakistan Day	March 23
Labor Day	May 1
Independence Day	August 14
Defense Day	September 6
Death Anniversary of Quaid-e-Azam, Muhammad Ali Jinnah	September 11

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Ashura	January–February	Ninth and 10th of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Regional Holidays

Pakistan's Basant Festival	Mid-February
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Lok Mela	First week of October
National Horse and Cattle Show	Third week of November

PALAU

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Youth Day	March 15
Earth Day	April 22
Senior Citizens Day	May 5
Constitution Day	July 9
Labor Day	First Monday in September
Independence Day	October 1
United Nations Day	October 24
Flag Day	November 4
Thanksgiving	Fourth Thursday in November

Religious Holidays

Christmas	December 26
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PANAMA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Martyrs' Day	January 9
Constitution Day	March 1
Labor Day	May 1
Revolution Day	October 11
National Anthem Day	November 1
Independence from Colombia	November 3
Flag Day	November 4
First Cry for Independence	November 10
Independence Day	November 28
Day of Mourning	December 20

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
Carnival	February–March	Four days preceding Ash Wednesday
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Saturday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
All Souls' Day	November 2	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Boquete Flower and Coffee Fair	January
Fair of the Orchids	April 8–11
Palo de Mayo	May 1
Foundation Day	August 15
Festival of the Black Christ	October 21
Colón	November 5

 **PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Queen's Birthday	June 12
Remembrance Day	July 23
Independence Day	September 16
Boxing Day	December 26

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Saturday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Goroka Show	Every other year in mid September
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 **PARAGUAY**

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Battle of Cerro Cora Day	March 1
Labor Day	May 1
Independence Day	May 15
Chaco Armistice Day	June 12
Foundation of Asunción Day	August 15
Battle of Boquerón Day	September 29

Religious Holidays

Palm Sunday	March–April	Sunday before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Saturday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Immaculate Conception	December 8	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Festival de San Juan June

 PERU**Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day December 31–January 1

Labor Day May 1

Independence Day July 28

Battle of Angamos Day October 8

Religious Holidays

Palm Sunday March–April Sunday before Easter

Maundy Thursday March–April Thursday before Easter

Good Friday March–April Friday before Easter

Holy Saturday March–April Saturday before Easter

Easter March–April First Sunday after Lent

Inti Raymi June 24

St. Peter's and St. Paul's Day June 29

St. Rose of Lima Day August 30

All Saints' Day November 1

Festivity of San Martín de Porres November 3

Immaculate Conception December 8

Christmas December 25

Regional Holidays

Carnival February

Wine Festival March

Puno Jubilee Week November

 PHILIPPINES**Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day December 31–January 1

Bataan and Corregidor Day April 9

Labor Day May 1

Independence Day June 12

Manila Day June 24

Day of the Heroes Last Sunday in August

Bonifacio Day November 30

José Rizal Day December 30

Religious Holidays

Palm Sunday March–April Sunday before Easter

Maundy Thursday March–April Thursday before Easter

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Saturday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Dinagyang	January	
Cutud Lenten Rites	March–April	Good Friday

✿ POLAND

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
International Women's Day	March 8	
Labor Day	May 1	
Constitution Day	May 3	
Independence Day	November 11	

Religious Holidays

Palm Sunday	March–April	Sunday before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Corpus Christi	May–June	Sixty days after Easter
Assumption	August 15	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

International Sacred Music Festival	May 1–6	
Lajkonik Festival	May–June	First Thursday after Corpus Christi

✿ PORTUGAL

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
Carnival	February–March	Day before Ash Wednesday
Liberation Day	April 25	
Labor Day	May 1	
National Day	June 10	
Republic Day	October 5	
Independence Day	December 1	

Religious Holidays

Palm Sunday	March–April	Sunday before Easter
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Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Saturday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Corpus Christi	May–June	Sixty days after Easter
Assumption	August 15	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Immaculate Conception	December 8	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

St. John's Day	June 24	
Estoril International Handicrafts Fair	July–August	
Festival do Sudoeste	August	

QATAR

Public/Legal Holidays

Anniversary of the Emir's Succession	June 27	
National Day	September 3–5	

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Regional Holidays

Doha Cultural Festival	March–April	
Qatar Athletic Grand Prix	May	
Qatar Summer Wonders Festival	July	

RÉUNION

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
Labor Day	May 1	
Victory Day	May 8	
Fête de la Musique	June 21	
Bastille Day	July 14	
Armistice Day	November 11	
Celebration of the Abolition of Slavery	December 20	

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
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Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
Vesak	May–June	
Assumption	August 15	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Fire-Walking	January
Fête de la Vanille	Mid-May

✿ ROMANIA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
International Women's Day	March 8
Labor Day	May 1
Union Day	December 1

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
Holy Week	March–April	Saturday of Lazarus–Easter
Saturday of Lazarus	March–April	Day before Palm Sunday
Palm Sunday	March–April	Sunday before Easter
Holy Monday	March–April	Monday before Easter
Holy Tuesday	March–April	Tuesday before Easter
Holy Wednesday	March–April	Wednesday before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

M[abreve]r[cedilla]i[scedilla]orul	March 1
International Jazz Festival	May
Sfantu Gheorghe	December

✿ RUSSIA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Old New Year's Day	January 13
Defender of the Motherland Day	February 23
International Women's Day	March 8

Labor Day	May 1–2
Victory Day	May 9
Independence Day	June 12
Accord and Reconciliation Day	November 7
Constitution Day	December 12

Religious Holidays

Christmas	January 7	
St. Tatiana Day	January 25	
Blini Day	February–March	One day before the beginning of Lent
Holy Week	March	
Palm Sunday	March–April	Sunday before Easter
Holy Monday	March–April	Monday before Easter
Holy Tuesday	March–April	Tuesday before Easter
Holy Wednesday	March–April	Wednesday before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Red Hill Day	March–April	First Sunday after Easter
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
Feast of St. John the Baptist	July 7	
Kolyadki	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Moscow's Day	September 19
Festival of the North	Late March or early April
Day of Memory and Grief	June 22

RWANDA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
National Mourning Day	April 7
Labor Day	May 1
Independence Day	July 1
Liberation Day	July 4
Kamarampaka Day	September 25

Religious Holidays

Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Assumption	August 15	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Christmas	December 25	

❁ ST. KITTS AND NEVIS

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Commonwealth Day	Second Monday in March
Labor Day	First Monday in May
Queen's Birthday	Second Monday in June
CARICOM Day	July 5
Emancipation Day	August 1, or first Monday in August
Independence Day	September 19
Carnival	December 24–early January
Boxing Day	December 26

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
Christmas	December 24–25	

Regional Holidays

Easter-Rama	March–April
Shak Shak Festival	Late June
Culturama	July–August

❁ ST. LUCIA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Independence Day	February 22
Commonwealth Day	March
Earth Day	April 1
Labor Day	May 1
Queen's Birthday	Early June
CARICOM Day	July 5
Carnival	July
Emancipation Day	Early August
Remembrance Day	November 11
National Day	December 13

Religious Holidays

Ash Wednesday	February	
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter

Corpus Christi	May–June	Sixty days after Easter
All Souls' Day	November 2	
Feast of St. Cecilia	November 22	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Fisherman's Feast	June 29	
Rose Festival	August 30	
Marguerite Festival	October 17	

ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
St. Vincent and the Grenadines Day	January 22	
Labor Day	May 1	
Carnival	Late June or early July	
Caricom Day	July 5	
Bastille Day	July 14	
Emancipation Day	First Monday of August	
Independence Day	October 27	
Boxing Day	December 26	

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Easterval	March–April	Easter weekend
Big Drum Festival	May	
Union Island Maroon Festival	May	
Breadfruit Festival	August	
Nine Mornings Celebrations	December	Nine days before Christmas

SAMOA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
National Waste Awareness Day	February 4	
Flag Day	April 17	
ANZAC Day	April 25	
Mothers of Samoa Day	First Monday in May	
Independence Day	June 1–3	

Children's Festival	Second Monday in October
Arbor Day	Second Friday in November

Religious Holidays

Palm Sunday	March–April	Last Sunday before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Saturday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
Christmas	December 24–25	
Boxing Day	December 26	

Regional Holidays

Rising of the Palolo	October–November
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🌸 SAN MARINO

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Liberation of the Republic	February 5
Anniversary of the Arengo	March 25
Regents Investiture Day	April 1 and October 1
Labor Day	May 1
Fall of Fascism Day	July 28
St. Marinus Day	September 3
St. Stephen's Day	December 26

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
Festival Day of St. Agatha	February 5	
St. Joseph's Day	March 19	
Palm Sunday	March–April	Last Sunday of Lent
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Saturday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Corpus Christi	May–June	Sixty days after Easter
Assumption	August 15	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
All Souls' Day	November 2	
Immaculate Conception	December 8	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

San Marco Etnofestival July

 **SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE****Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day December 31–January 1

Labor Day May 1

Independence Day July 12

Transitional Government Day November 21

Religious Holidays

Palm Sunday March–April Last Sunday of Lent

Maundy Thursday March–April Thursday before Easter

Good Friday March–April Friday before Easter

Holy Saturday March–April Saturday before Easter

Easter March–April First Sunday after Lent

São Tomé Day/St. Thomas's Day December 21

Christmas December 25

 **SAUDI ARABIA****Public/Legal Holidays**

Saudi National Day September 23

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha Early January Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar

Mouloud Early April Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar

Shab-e-Miraj August Twenty-seventh of Rajab, the seventh month of the Islamic calendar

Eid al-Fitr Late October First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Regional Holidays

Jenadriyah National Festival of Folklore and Culture February

Saudi International Trade Fair May

Jeddah's International Book Fair October–November

 **SENEGAL****Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day December 31–January 1

Independence Day April 4

Labor Day May 1

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Regional Holidays

Sagoni Festival	January or February
Magal of Touba	March–April
Kaay Fecc	First week in June

❁ SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
National Day	April 27
Labor Day	May 1
Victory Day	May 9
Republic Day	November 29

Religious Holidays

Christmas	January 6–7	
New Year's Eve/Day	January 14	
Feast of St. Sava	January 27	
Holy Week	March–April	Saturday of Lazarus–Easter
Saturday of Lazarus	March–April	Day before Palm Sunday
Palm Sunday	March–April	Sunday before Easter
Holy Monday	March–April	Monday before Easter
Holy Tuesday	March–April	Tuesday before Easter
Holy Wednesday	March–April	Wednesday before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Vidovan	June 28	

Regional Holidays

International Agricultural Fair	May
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❁ SEYCHELLES

Public/Legal Holidays

Labor Day	May 1
National Day	June 18
Independence Day	June 29

Religious Holidays

Palm Sunday	March–April	Sunday before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Saturday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Assumption	August 15	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
All Souls' Day	November 2	
Immaculate Conception	December 8	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

FetAfrik	End of May
Jazz Festival	July–August
Creole Festival	Last week of October

❁ SIERRA LEONE

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Republic Day	April 19
Independence Day	April 27
Labor Day	May 1
Boxing Day	December 26

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th or pilgrimage month of the Islamic calendar
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
Christmas	December 25	

❁ SINGAPORE

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
National Day	August 9

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
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Chinese New Year	January or February	
Palm Sunday	March–April	Sunday before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Saturday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Vesak	May	First full Moon day in Vesak, the second month in the Hindu lunar calendar
Diwali	October or November	
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
Christmas	December 25	
Regional Holidays		
Singapore Fashion Festival	March or April	
ZoukOut	April	
Singapore Dragon Boat Races Festival	May or June	Fifth day of the fifth lunar month of the Chinese calendar

❁ SLOVAKIA

Public/Legal Holidays

Slovak Republic Establishment Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
Liberation of the Republic	May 8
Slovak National Uprising Day	August 29
Freedom and Democracy Day	November 17

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
Palm Sunday	March–April	Sunday before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Saturday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Easter Monday	March–April	Monday after Easter
St. Cyril and St. Methodius Day	July 5	
Our Lady of Sorrows	September 15	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Folklore Festival	Second week of July
Hontianska Parada	August

❁ SLOVENIA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 2
Slovene Culture Day	February 8
Celebration of the Uprising Day	April 27
Labor Day	May 1–2
Proclamation Day	June 25
Independence Day	December 26

Religious Holidays

Palm Sunday	March–April	Sunday before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Saturday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
Assumption	August 15	
Reformation Day	October 31	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Carnival	February or March
Ljubljana Summer Festival	July–August

❁ SOLOMON ISLANDS

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Queen's Birthday	Second Monday in June
Independence Day	July 7

Religious Holidays

Palm Sunday	March–April	Sunday before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Saturday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Province Days	February, June, July, August, December
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❁ SOMALIA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
Independence Day (British Somaliland)	June 26
Independence Day (Italian Somaliland)/Foundation of Somali Republic	July 1
Revolution Day	October 21

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Ashura	Early February	Tenth of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

❁ SOUTH AFRICA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Human Rights Day	March 21
Freedom Day	April 27
Labor Day	May 1
National Women's Day	August 9

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Ascension Day	May–June	Fortieth Day after Easter
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Kavadi Festival of Penance	January–February
Cape Town Festival	March

❁ SPAIN

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
National Day	October 12
Constitution Day	December 6

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
Palm Sunday	March–April	Sunday before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Saturday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Feast of Corpus Christi	May–June	Sixty days after Easter
Assumption	August 15	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Immaculate Conception	December 8	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Carnival	February–March	Before Lent
April Fair	April	
San Fermin Festival	July	
La Tomatina	August	
Saffron Rose Festival	October	

❁ SRI LANKA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
National Day	February 4	
Labor Day	May 1	

Religious Holidays

Tamil Thai Pongal	January 13–14	
Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
El am Hejir	Late January–early February	First of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar
Maha Shivratra	February–March	Thirteenth or 14th of Phalgun, the 12th month of the Hindu calendar
Good Friday	March–April	Last Friday Lent
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Vesak	May–June	Full Moon day of the sixth month of the Buddhist calendar
Poson	June–July	Full Moon day of the seventh month of the Buddhist calendar
Diwali	October–November	Lasting for five days from the thirteenth day of the waning half (Krishna Paksha) of the lunar month Asvina to the second day of the waxing half (Shukla Paksha) of Karttika

Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
Christmas	December 24–25	

Regional Holidays

Kandy Esala Perahera	Mid-August	
Sinhala-Tamil Cultural Festival	October	

🌸 SUDAN

Public/Legal Holidays

Independence Day	January 1	
Uprising Day	April 6	
May Revolution Day	May 25	

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
Christmas	December 25	

🌸 SURINAME

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
Labor Day	May 1	
Emancipation Day	July 1	
Independence Day	November 25	
Boxing Day	December 26	

Religious Holidays

Holi	February–March	Full Moon day in Phalguna, the 12th month of the Hindu calendar
Palm Sunday	March–April	Sunday before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Saturday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Miss Alida Beauty Pageant	June 30	
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❁ SWAZILAND

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
National Flag Day	April 25
Labor Day	May 1
Birthday of King Sobhuza II	July 22
Reed Dance	August–September
Independence Day	September 6
Boxing Day	December 26

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Ascension Day	May–April	Forty days after Easter
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Siyavuka Arts Festival	December
Incwala	December–January

❁ SWEDEN

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
National Day	June 6
Midsummer's Eve/Day	June 24–25 and June 25–26
All Hallow's Eve	First Saturday of November
Boxing Day	December 26

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
Palm Sunday	March–April	Sunday before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Saturday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
St. Valborg's Eve	April 30	
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Feast of St. Martin of Tours	November 11	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Storsjöyran Festival	July
Nobel Prize Festivities	December 10
Lucia Day	December 13

 **SWITZERLAND**

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Instauration de la République	March 1
Confederation Day	August 1

Religious Holidays

St. Berchtold's Day	January 2	
Palm Sunday	March–April	Sunday before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Saturday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
All Souls' Day	November 2	
Immaculate Conception	December 8	
Christmas	December 24–25	

Regional Holidays

Homstrom	First Saturday in February
Carnival	March
Geneva Summer Festival	July
Traditional Onion Market Fair	Fourth Monday in November

 **SYRIA**

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Revolution Day	March 8
Mother's Day	March 21
National Day	April 17
Labor Day	May 1
Martyrs' Day	May 6
October Liberation War	October 6

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
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Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

International Leather Goods Fair	April	
Silk Road Festival	September	

TAIWAN

Public/Legal Holidays

January Celebrations	January 1–3	
Peace Memorial Day	February 28	
Youth Day	March 29	
Labor Day	May 1	
Teacher's Day	September 28	
Double Tenth Day	October 10	
Retrocession Day	October 25	
Jiang Jie Shi's (Chiang Kai-shek's) Birthday	October 31	
Constitution Day	December 25	

Religious Holidays

Chinese New Year	February	First day of the first month of the Chinese calendar
Lantern Festival	February–March	Fifteenth day of the first month of the Chinese calendar
Farmer's Day	February–March	Fifteenth day of the first month of the Chinese calendar
Tomb-Sweeping Day	April–May	One hundred sixth day after the winter solstice
Jiang Jie Shi Festival	June–July	Fifth day of the fifth month of the Chinese calendar
Ghost Festival	August–September	Fifteenth day of the seventh month of the Chinese calendar
Mid-Autumn Moon Festival	September–October	Fifteenth day of the eighth month of the Chinese calendar
Double Ninth Day	October–November	Ninth day of ninth lunar month of the Chinese calendar

Regional Holidays

Saisyat Festival	November–December	Fifteenth day of the 10th lunar month of the Chinese calendar
Chi Hsi	August–September	Seventh day of the seventh month of the Chinese calendar

❁ TAJIKISTAN

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
International Women's Day	March 8
Labor Day	May 1
Victory Day	May 9
Independence Day	September 9
Constitution Day	November 6
Reconciliation Day	November 9

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Regional Holidays

Gulgardoni	Spring
Sayri Guli Lola	Spring

❁ TANZANIA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Celebration of the Zanzibar Revolution	January 12
Union Day	April 26
Labor Day	May 1
Saba Saba Day	July 7
Nane Nane Day	August 8
Nyerere Day	October 14
Republic Day	December 9
Boxing Day	December 26

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Sauti za Busara	Mid-February
Mwaka Kogwa	July

❁ THAILAND

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Chakri Dynasty Day	April 6
Labor Day	May 1
Coronation Day	May 5
Queen's Birthday	August 12
Chulalongkorn Day	October 23
King's Birthday	December 5

Religious Holidays

Chinese New Year	February	Second new Moon after the winter solstice
Magha Puja Day	February	Full Moon day of Magha, the third month of the Buddhist calendar
Songkran Days	April 13–15	
Vesak	May	First full Moon day of Vesak, the sixth month of the Buddhist calendar
Asalha Bucha Day	July	
Buddhist Lent Day	July	First day of the waning Moon in the eighth month of the Buddhist calendar

Regional Holidays

Thailand International Kite-Flying Festival	March or April
Phi Ta Khon Festival	June or July

❁ TOGO

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Liberation Day	January 13
Independence Day	April 27
Labor Day	May 1
Anniversary of Attempted Disembarkment	September 24

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Assumption	August 15	
All Saints' Day	November 1	

Christmas	December 25
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Regional Holidays

Evala	July
Dzawuwu-Za	First Saturday of August
Ayiza	Second Saturday of August

❁ TONGA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
ANZAC Day	April 25
Crown Prince's Birthday	May 4
Emancipation Day	June 4
King Taufaahau Tupou IV's Birthday	July 5
Constitution Day	November 4
King George Tupou I's Birthday	December 4
Boxing Day	December 26

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Christmas	December 25	

❁ TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Spiritual Baptist Shouters Liberation Day	March 30
Labor Day	May 1
Indian Arrival Day	May 30
Emancipation Day	August 1
Independence Day	August 31
Boxing Day	December 26

Religious Holidays

Carnival	February–March	Five days before Ash Wednesday
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Holi	March–April	
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
Diwali	October or November	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

La Divina Pastora Festival	April–May	Fourth Sunday after Easter
Goat and Crab Races	April	
Fisherman's Festival	End of June	
Ganga Dashara Festival	Mid-June	
Santa Rosa Festival	August	

❁ TUNISIA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Independence Day	March 20
Martyrs' Day	April 9
Labor Day	May 1
Republic Day	July 25
Women's Day	August 13
Accession Day	November 7

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Regional Holidays

Sparrow Hawk Festival	May 28–30
International Carthage Festival	July–August

❁ TURKEY

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Navruz	March 21
National Sovereignty and Children's Day	April 23
Ataturk Commemoration and Youth and Sports Day	May 19
Victory Day	August 30
Republic Day	October 29

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Ashura	Late January–early February	Tenth of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar

Hidrellez Day	May 6	
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Regional Holidays

Camel Wrestling Festival	January	
Traditional Mesir Festival	March–April	
Marmaris International Maritime Festival	June	

❁ TURKMENISTAN

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
Remembrance Day	January 12	
National Flag Day	February 19	
International Women's Day	March 8	
Navruz	March 21	
Victory Day	May 9	
Constitution Day	May 18	
1948 Earthquake Remembrance Day	October 6	
Independence Day	October 27–28	
Neutrality Day	December 12	

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Regional Holidays

Holiday of Poetry of Makhtumkuli	May 19	
Carpet Day	Last Sunday of May	
Harvest Festival	Last Sunday of November	

❁ TUVALU

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1	
Commonwealth Day	Second Monday of March	
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Queen's Birthday	June 12	
International Children's Day	August 5	
Independence Day	October 1	
Prince of Wales' Birthday	November 13	
Christmas	December 25	

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
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 UGANDA**Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Anniversary of the Government NRM-NRA	January 26
International Women's Day	March 8
Labor Day	May 1
Martyrs of Uganda Day	June 3
Independence Day	October 9
Boxing Day	December 26

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

World Bird Festival	October, every two years
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 UKRAINE**Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
New Year's Eve/Day (Julian calendar)	January 13–14
Ukrainian Day	January 22
International Women's Day	March 8
Labor Day	May 1
Victory Day	May 9
Constitution Day	June 28
Independence Day	August 24

Religious Holidays

Christmas	January 6–7	
Feast of Jordan	January 19	
Holy Week	March or April	Begins on Lazarus Saturday
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter

Regional Holidays

St. Melania's Feast Day	January 13
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Taras Shevchenko Day	March 9
Kiev Days	Last weekend of May

❁ UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan Accession Day	August 6
National Day	December 2

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Shab-e-Miraj	August	Twenty-seventh of Rajab, the seventh month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Regional Holidays

Dubai Shopping Festival	January–February
Dubai Motor Show	December

❁ UNITED KINGDOM

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
May Day Bank Holiday	First Monday in May
Spring Bank Holiday	Last Monday in May
Summer Bank Holiday	Last Monday in August

Religious Holidays

Palm Sunday	March–April	Sunday before Easter
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Easter Monday	March–April	First Monday after Easter
Christmas	December 24–25	
Boxing Day	December 26	

Regional Holidays

St. George's Day	April 23
Guy Fawkes Night	November 5
Remembrance Day	November 11

❁ UNITED STATES

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday	Third Monday in January
Presidents' Day	Third Monday in February
Memorial Day	Last Monday in May
Independence Day	July 4
Labor Day	First Monday in September
Columbus Day	Second Monday in October
Veterans Day	November 11
Thanksgiving	Fourth Thursday in November

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Pesach	March–April	Begins on the 15th of Nisan, the first month of the Jewish calendar
Rosh Hashana	September–October	First two days of Tishri, the seventh month of the Jewish calendar
Yom Kippur	September–October	Tenth of Tishri, the seventh month of the Jewish calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar
Hanukkah	November–December	Twenty-fifth of Kislev, the ninth month of the Jewish calendar
Christmas	December 24–25	
Kwanzaa	December 26–January 1	

Regional Holidays

Valentine's Day	February 14	
Texas Independence Day	March 2	
Mardi Gras	March– April	Day before Lent
César Chávez Day	March 31	
Patriots Day	Third Monday in April	
Gathering of Nations Indian Powwow	Last weekend of April	
Cinco de Mayo	May 5	
King Kamehameha Day	June 11	
Juneteenth	June 19	
Halloween	October 31	

✿ URUGUAY

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Landing of the 33 Patriots	April 19
Labor Day	May 1
Battle of Las Piedras	May 17–18
Birthday of José Artigas	June 19
Constitution Day	July 18
Independence Day	August 25
Columbus Day	October 12

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
Carnival	Early February	
Palm Sunday	March–April	Last Sunday of Lent
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Saturday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
All Souls' Day	November 2	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Virgen de la Candelaria	February 2
Minnesota River Revival	September

✿ UZBEKISTAN

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
International Women's Day	March 8
Victory Day	May 9
Independence Day	September 1
Constitution Day	December 8

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Navruz	March 21	
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic year
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

Regional Holidays

Children's Peace and Disarmament Festival	October 23
Pakhta-Bairam Harvest Festival	December

 **VANUATU****Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Labor Day	May 1
Independence Day	July 30
Unity Day	November 29

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Assumption	August 15	
Christmas	December 25	
Boxing Day	December 26	

 **VATICAN CITY****Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Anniversary of Lateranensi Pacts	February 11
Anniversary of the Pope's Election	April 19
Labor Day	May 1

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
St. Joseph's Day	March 19	
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Pentecost	May–June	Fifty days after Easter
Corpus Christi	May–June	Sixty days after Easter
Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul	June 29	
Assumption	August 15	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
All Souls' Day	November 2	
Immaculate Conception	December 8	
Christmas	December 25	

❁ VENEZUELA

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Declaration of Independence Day	April 19
Labor Day	May 1
Battle of Carabobo Day	June 24
Independence Day	July 5
Birthday of Simón Bolívar	July 24
Columbus Day	October 12

Religious Holidays

Epiphany	January 6	
Carnival	Early February	
St. Joseph's Day	March 19	
Maundy Thursday	March–April	Thursday before Easter
Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Ascension Day	May–June	Forty days after Easter
Corpus Christi	May–June	Sixty days after Easter
Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul	June 29	
Assumption	August 15	
All Saints' Day	November 1	
Immaculate Conception	December 8	
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Devils of Yare	February
Festival Internacional de Teatro	April

❁ VIETNAM

Public/Legal Holidays

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Vietnam Day	January 27
Foundation of the Vietnamese Communist Party	February 3
Liberation Day	April 30
Labor Day	May 1
Ho Chi Minh's Birthday	May 19
Memorial Day for War Martyrs	June 27
Revolution of 1945	August 19
Independence Day	September 2

Religious Holidays

Tet Nguyen Dan	February	First day of the first month of the Chinese calendar
Vesak	May	Eighth day of the fourth month of the Chinese calendar

Regional Holidays

Ba Chua Kho Temple Festival	February	From the 15th to the 16th day of the first month of the Chinese calendar
Lim Festival	February	Thirteenth day of the first month of the Chinese calendar

 **YEMEN****Public/Legal Holidays**

Labor Day	May 1
National Unity Day	May 22
The September Revolution	September 26

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Adha	Early January	Tenth of Dhu al Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar
Mouloud	Early April	Twelfth of Rabbi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar
Eid al-Fitr	Late October	First of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar

 **ZAMBIA****Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Youth Day	Second Monday in March
Labor Day	May 1
Africa Day	May 25
Heroes' Day	First Monday in July
Unity Day	First Tuesday in July
Farmers' Day	First Monday in August
Independence Day	October 24

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Easter Monday	March–April	First Monday after Easter
Christmas	December 25	

Regional Holidays

Zambia Agricultural Show	July–August
Lusaka Music Festival	October

 ZIMBABWE**Public/Legal Holidays**

New Year's Eve/Day	December 31–January 1
Independence Day	April 18
Africa Day	May 25
Unity Day	December 22

Religious Holidays

Good Friday	March–April	Friday before Easter
Holy Saturday	March–April	Saturday before Easter
Easter	March–April	First Sunday after Lent
Christmas	December 25	
Boxing Day	December 26	