Late Fall and Around

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Winter Holidays
the World

www.du.edu/cme
Japanese New Year

New Year’s Day is known as Shogatsu in Japan. The Japanese decorate their houses and give their children gifts, usually toys or money, and greeting cards to friends and family. Fish cakes, boiled seaweed, mashed sweet potato with chestnut and soybean preparation are just a few delicacies served during this celebration. At midnight of the 31st of December, bells ring in the Buddhist temples a total of 108 times. Once the ringing ceases, everyone partakes in a feast of soba noodles.
Diwali

Also known as the festival of light, Diwali is celebrated at the start of winter in India, Nepal, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, and Fiji. It is one of the most important Hindu festivals, celebrated over a period of five days - Dhanteras, Narak Chaturdashi, Lakshmi Puja, Padava, and Bhai Dooj. ‘Spring’ cleaning is undertaken in order to welcome Goddess Lakshmi (the Goddess of Wealth) before the festival begins. Rows of clay lamps filled with oil are lit, which stands for good triumphing over evil. Firecrackers form an important part of the Diwali celebrations because it is said that bursting of firecrackers helps drive the evil spirits away.

kids.nationalgeographic.com/kids/stories/peopleplaces/diwali/
Hanukkah

The Festival of Lights chronicles a history the Jewish people celebrating a revolution against the suppression and assimilation of the Jewish religion. It is an eight night and day long holiday that begins on 25th day of Kislev, according to the Hebrew calendar, with the menorah candles being lit. Only one candle is lit on the first day and the number increases with each passing day. A 9th light, Shamash, which is placed above the eight lights. The light is available for use, as the other lights cannot be used. For some Jewish traditions, Hanukkah is a ‘minor’ holiday as compared to the ‘High Holidays’ (Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashana).
Christmas

Christians all over the world celebrate this holiday on December 25th, to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. Preparations for Christmas can begin early, by cleaning the house and decorating with such things as lights, garlands, candles, and an ornamented Christmas tree. Other traditions including attending a church service, giving gifts, and sharing a meal as families spend the day together. This holiday is also well known for the story of Santa Claus, a person who brings gifts on Christmas morning all across the world.

Boxing Day or St. Stephen’s Day
Celebrated on the day after Christmas. On this day it is common to give gifts to the poor and needy. In some places, there is also the tradition of gifting people in service positions. The traditions followed in various parts of the world are different. In countries like New Zealand, Canada, Australia, Britain, etc., it is jokingly often referred to as ‘Shopping Day’, for there are great items for grab at discounted prices. Hunting has also been a tradition, although this practice is less common today in most parts of the world.
Las Posadas

This is a traditional winter holiday celebrated in Mexico, Guatemala, and southern parts of the United States, between December 16 and December 24. The nine day celebration symbolically represents the months of pregnancy (and more specifically Mary’s pregnancy with Jesus). “La Posada” translates to ‘the Inn’ in English, referencing the Biblical figure of Joseph searching for a room at the inn as part of the Christmas story. The celebrations often include a procession carrying a doll representing Christ as a child, and the images of Mary and Joseph riding a small donkey, going through the streets. Many houses have a nativity scene, where the hosts enact the roles of innkeepers.

www3.kumc.edu/diversity/ethnic_relig/laspsds.html
Hogmanay

This is a Scottish word, which means the last day of the year and is basically celebrating the New Year, according to the Gregorian calendar, in the Scottish way. It begins on the night of December 31, lasting all through the night and carrying on until the ‘Ne’erday’ or January 1, and sometimes even to January 2, a bank holiday in Scotland. The customs associated with Hogmanay are different for different parts of Scotland. There is a fireball swinging custom in Stonehaven and in the northeastern part of Scotland, while burning of the *clavie* is common to Burghead in Moray.

www.rampantscotland.com/know/blknow12.htm
St. Nicholas Day

The day is especially celebrated in Northern Europe on December 6th. St. Nicholas was a protector of the weak against the rich and the strong. He was known for his kindness and for helping people in distress. He is often said to be the patron saint of unmarried girls, children and sailors. St. Nicholas is treated like Santa Claus, and in fact is thought to be Santa Claus’ original name. Children place boots on their windowsills or at the fireplace so that St. Nicholas can fill them with candy. However, the boots of naughty children was filled with coal, so that they can learn from their mistakes.

www.stnicksday.com
St. Lucias Day
This is a winter holiday celebrated on December 13th in Sweden in honor of St. Lucia, who lived in the third century and is regarded as the patron of light. In Sweden, St. Lucia’s day is seen as the start of the Christmas celebrations, although it is not a part of Advent. On this day, young girls bedeck themselves in white colored long dresses with red sashes, and wear a wreath made of lit candles on their heads. They sing songs in order to wake their families up and bring them twisted saffron buns, known as ‘Lucia cats’ and coffee.

www.whychristmas.com/cultures/sweden.shtml
Bodhi Day

Considered to be the most important holiday in Buddhism, it is celebrated on December 8th in commemoration of the enlightenment of the Buddha. Before the enlightenment, Siddhartha Gautama is said to have undergone extreme ascetic practices and yet continued his meditation under the Pipal tree. He continued with his meditation until he was able to find the cause of suffering and how to liberate a person from it.
Eid-al-Adha
Celebrated by Muslims around the world, to commemorate Ibrahim’s willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael, at the behest of God. It is said to be a ‘Festival of Sacrifice’ or ‘Greater Eid’. This festival is celebrated on the 10th day of the 12th month of the Islamic calendar and lasts for four days. The celebrations start after the annual pilgrimage to Mecca.
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Lunar New Year

This is a two-week holiday celebrated in the latter part of January or early part of February, or during the first lunar moon, by the Vietnamese, Koreans, and Chinese. In China this celebration is called Spring Festival, where it marks the end of the winter season and starts on the first day of the Chinese New Year and ends after the fifteenth day, when the Lantern Festival is celebrated. The Korean New Year falls on the second new moon following the winter solstice. This celebration lasts for three days and is primarily a family oriented celebration. In Vietnam, like in China, it heralds the arrival of spring. Practices that are common to this celebration are visiting friends and family, worshipping the ancestors, exchanging gifts, etc.
Kwanzaa

Literally meaning ‘First Fruits’, Kwanza was created in the US, with roots in ancient African harvest festivals, that celebrates ideals like collective responsibility and work, self-determination, co-operation, purpose, creativity, faith, and unity. The celebration starts on December 26 and ends on January 1, during which time celebrants bedeck their homes with vegetables and fruits, may don traditional African clothes, pay their respects to their ancestors, and light the ‘kinara’, a special candleholder. Corn and other crops, gifts, a poster of the seven principles, a black, red and green flag, and a communal cup for pouring wine (or other beverage) are some symbols of the holidays.

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Have a fun and safe Winter Break!

See you in 2015!