



# Life Lines

Improving your quality of life, one step at a time

## Issue #12:

### DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION: A BEGINNERS GUIDE TO THE HOLIDAYS



Whether it has been the COVID-19 pandemic, social unrest, prejudicial injustice, environmental events such as fires and floods, or dramatic politics, 2020 has been a year of unique challenges and one for the record books, worldwide. We've seen and experienced social tensions unfolding in real-time with protests focused on supporting equality and justice for those oppressed and the illumination of the work that remains undone or the concerns not yet addressed. We need to appreciate our differences to find harmony in our workplaces and our communities. We can live more inclusively, value multiculturalism and recognize diversity.

With colder weather, seasonal changes, and less daylight, people are accustomed to getting together with friends, family and the community to celebrate traditions, religious beliefs, culture and history. The continuing pandemic will impose and alter how we typically share and experience these celebrations, however applying the necessary safeguards and taking the time to pause is worth the effort. During this time of year, festivals and holidays are filled with rituals and practices to honour heritage, raising our spirits to find optimism and hope for the coming days and year ahead. While there are many celebrations worldwide, taking time to

learn about a few can enrich your understanding of the world and your community. We're going to share a few that are celebrated between November and February each year.

#### Diwali

Diwali is a five-day festival for Hindu, Jain, or Sikh faiths that celebrates "new beginnings and the triumph of good over evil and lightness over darkness."<sup>1</sup> In 2020, Diwali celebrations started on November 14<sup>th</sup>. The holiday is not fixed on the Gregorian calendar. Diwali can occur anywhere from late-October through to mid-November. While Diwali originated as a Hindu festival, it's become a national festival in India that is enjoyed by non-Hindu communities as well. Each day of the festival focuses on a different ritual related to family and home.

### Hanukkah

Hanukkah is an eight-day celebration in the Jewish faith known as the "Festival of Lights" or "Festival of Dedication." Each year commemorates a 2200 year miracle where sacred oil that should have lasted only one day ended up lasting for eight. Hanukkah's main ritual focusses on lighting the Hanukkah, a special candle holder with nine spots, two more than a menorah.<sup>2</sup> Families often celebrate with songs, prayers, games, foods fried in oil and gifts of coins. The dates for Hanukkah are not fixed. It can occur anywhere from late-November to late-December on the Gregorian calendar. This year, Hanukkah begins at sundown on December 10<sup>th</sup>.

### Kwanzaa

Kwanzaa is a week-long celebration honouring African heritage focused on people, the struggle and the future. The holiday is defined by seven core principles: unity, self-determination, collective responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity and faith. Each day, a candle representing one of the seven principles is lit on a kinara, a seven-branched candelabra.<sup>3</sup> The holiday was started in 1966 and is observed from December 26 to January 1 each year. People often decorate their homes with colourful art and woven African cloth as part of the celebrations. A Kwanzaa feast on December 31<sup>st</sup>, known as the karamu, includes different ritualistic steps such as a welcome, remembrance, rejoicing and a farewell. On the last day of Kwanzaa, homemade gifts are exchanged.

### Christmas Day and Boxing Day

Christmas Day and Boxing Day are national holidays in many countries that are observed on December 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> each year on the Gregorian calendar. Christians associate Christmas Day with the birth of Jesus. Boxing Day is a secular holiday. Decorations typically include displays of greenery, nativity scenes, emblems of winter (snowflakes and snowmen), and Christmas trees with lights and ornaments. Families and friends gather for meals and often exchange gifts.

**Orthodox Christmas**, which occurs approximately two weeks later using the Julian calendar, falls in early January. People who observe this holiday participate in a period of fasting in the 40 days before where meat and sometimes fish must be excluded from diets.<sup>4</sup> Families and friends gather after mass to feast and celebrate the end of their fast. Traditional dishes are served that represent each of the apostles.

### New Year Celebrations

While the Gregorian calendar is the most widely used in the world, many religions and cultures follow different schedules based on other calendars. They, therefore, have New Year celebrations that occur at different times of the year. We've focused on New Year festivals that occur during the Gregorian calendar months from November through February.

**New Year's Day**, January 1<sup>st</sup>, is a national holiday that celebrates the start of the next year on the Gregorian Calendar. Before the end of New Year's Eve, on December 31<sup>st</sup>, many people gather with friends and family to count down to midnight and welcome the new year and new beginnings.

**Lunar New Year** is a 15-day festival that marks the end of winter and transition to spring in Chinese culture. It falls at the end of January or mid-February on the lunisolar calendar. It is marked with celebrations and festivities meant to encourage good luck for the coming year. The holiday is also celebrated in Japan, Korea, Vietnam and Mongolia. Festivities celebrate ancestry, luck and good fortune with food, fireworks, parades and extended family gatherings.

**Orthodox New Year** falls mid-January aligned with the Julian calendar.

**Tet Nguyen Dan or Tet** is the Vietnamese Lunar New Year and the most important and popular holiday in Vietnam. Celebrations take place in late January or early February, and lead up to the first day of the Lunisolar calendar. People believe that what they do on the first day of the new year will "determine their fate" for the rest of the year.<sup>5</sup>

### Looking for trusted resources?

You may be busy preparing to celebrate your festivities. It's essential to recognize that not everyone in your workplace or circle of friends may be preparing for the same holiday. We shared a list of celebrations that typically occur during these months. It wasn't exhaustive, and we did not include many details about these celebrations. In sharing them, though, we hope that we may have raised your curiosity. We hope you will consider others who are celebrating with their traditions and customs and have conversations with them to learn more. You can often find information about different events and cultural organizations that plan celebrations within the community to showcase holiday activities, sights, sounds and customs. Learning about holidays celebrated in different cultures can be a lot of fun and help people appreciate diversity.

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At the same time, it's also important to respect others who do not celebrate during this time of year.

Focusing on understanding why people come together in harmony and celebration is an integral part of inclusive workplaces. We all have different viewpoints and are influenced by our cultural, religious and family traditions. Sharing insights with co-workers helps provide insight into how diverse our workplaces are. In the end, it helps us grow with pride, respect and diversity so that more knowledge is shared as we interact within our global population.

Finally, a reminder that if you will be gathering to celebrate and attend holiday festivals, it's equally important to respect Public Health Guidelines in place for groups of people. Always be adaptable and willing to make modifications to help everyone stay safe. It is also a measure of respect for co-worker family members, and other citizens and something that should remain top-of-mind as we continue to live with COVID-19.

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