

# FESTIVALS

BY THE STUDENT VOICE COMMITTEE



## CHINESE NEW YEAR

It is the festival that celebrates the beginning of a new year on the traditional lunar Chinese calendar. It is centred around removing the bad and the old and welcoming the new and the good; it is a time to worship ancestors and expel evil spirits for a new start. This year it is being celebrated on Sunday, 22nd January which will last for 15 days and will end with a lantern festival on Sunday, 5th February. It is celebrated by lion and dragon dancing, temple fairs, flower market shopping, colourful lights, fireworks and more. Many people have a tradition to clean the house before New Year's Day as a fresh start to the year. They will redecorate with red couplets, lanterns, and furniture. Another tradition to celebrate the festival is that seniors give red envelopes with money inside to younger children and eating dinner with family on New Year's Eve. As well this, there is a range of commonly eaten food to celebrate Chinese New Year, many of them are hugely symbolic. This includes glutinous rice balls, tangerines which are considered a lucky fruit, sesame balls, sticky rice cake, a whole chicken to represent wholeness and prosperity, a whole fish to represent an increase in prosperity.

## HANUKKAH

Hanukkah (or Chanukah in Hebrew) is the Jewish festival of lights. The word 'Hanukkah' means 'dedication' in Hebrew. The festival lasts for eight days and traditionally starts on the 25th day of the month Kislev in the Hebrew calendar. This year it will fall on December 7th-15th.

Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem after the 167-160 BCE revolt against the Seleucid Empire. To celebrate the reclamation of the temple, a seven-pronged lamp was lit. However due to the war that had been raging for the past three years, they only had enough oil to keep the candle alight for one day. In spite of this, the candle miraculously managed to remain alight for eight days, giving the people enough time to make more oil.

This seven-pronged lamp is called a menorah and can be considered one of the best known symbols of the Jewish faith. Some menorahs often have an eighth candle called a shamash which is used to light the other candles, one on each night of Hanukkah.





## NIRVANA DAY

Nirvana Day is a special annual Buddhist festival that is celebrated to remember the death of the Buddha when he reached Nirvana at the age of 80. Nirvana Day is mostly celebrated on the 15th of February; however others celebrate it on the 8th of February. Nirvana day is also known as Parinirvana Day. Nirvana is believed to be the end of the cycle of death and rebirth and Buddhism teaches that Nirvana is reached when all want, and suffering is gone.

Nirvana Day celebrates how the Buddha attained Nirvana when he came to understand the Four Noble Truths. These are: Life involves suffering, suffering is due to having desires, suffering can be ended by overcoming desires and the way to end suffering is by following the Eightfold Path. The Eightfold Path

comprises of eight aspects which Buddhists can practise: including right views, intentions, speech, actions, livelihood, efforts, mindfulness, and concentration – practising these can lead to obtaining Nirvana.

Nirvana Day is celebrated by meditating or going to Buddhist temples or monasteries. In Buddhist monasteries, Nirvana Day is treated as a social occasion: food is prepared and some people bring in presents such as money, household goods or clothes. Buddhists take the time on Nirvana Day to think about their lives and how they can gain the perfect peace of Nirvana, remembering that loss and change are things to be accepted and to grow from rather than causes of sadness.

## RAMADAN AND EID

Ramadan is the 9th month of the Islamic calendar. To Muslims, it is considered the holiest month. It is believed that the Quran was revealed to the prophet Muhammad on Mount Hira during this month. Ramadan is the one month where shaytaan (satan) is locked up. Over the 30 days, muslims who are able to do so, fast. Fasting is the third pillar of Islam; it involves sacrifice and appreciation for what you have. The day starts at sunrise, the meal eaten at this time is called suhoor. During suhoor everyone who fasted during the day eats and drinks as much they need so that they will be able to fast until sunset. The meal that breaks the fast is called iftar. Traditionally, the fast is broken with a date as this was what the prophet Muhammad used to do.

Eid is the celebration that marks the end of Ramadan. On this day everyone dresses up in clean clothes and attends the morning and/or afternoon prayer. Family and friends are visited and gifts are often exchanged. Children receive 'eid' from elders and charity is collected in mosques. Eid is a joyful time where family and friends unite.



## EASTER

Easter is a Christian holiday that celebrates the belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the Bible, it is said to have occurred three days after Jesus was crucified by the Romans and died in roughly 30 A.D. The holiday concludes the "Passion of Christ", a series of events and holidays that begins with Lent which is a 40-day period of fasting, prayer and sacrifice and ends with Holy Week, which includes Holy Thursday (the celebration of Jesus' Last Supper with his 12 Apostles, also known as "Maundy Thursday"), Good Friday (on which Jesus' crucifixion is observed) and Easter Sunday. Although a holiday of high religious significance in the Christian faith, many traditions associated with Easter date back to pre-Christian, pagan times.





## HOLI

Holi is considered as one of the most revered and celebrated festivals of India and it is celebrated in almost every part of the country. It is also sometimes called as the “festival of love” as on this day people get to unite together forgetting all resentments and all types of bad feeling towards each other. The great Indian festival lasts for a day and a night, which starts in the evening of Purnima or the Full Moon Day in the month of Falgun. Holi is a famous Hindu festival that is celebrated in every part of India with utmost joy and enthusiasm. The ritual starts by lighting up the bonfire one day before the day of Holi and this process symbolizes the triumph of good over the bad. On the day of Holi people play with colours with their friends and families and in evening they show love and respect to their close ones with Abeer.

## PASSOVER

Passover is a celebration of the story of Exodus. It is a Jewish holiday that honours the freedom of the Israelites (Jewish slaves) from Egypt during the reign of the Pharaoh, Ramses II, by Moses. Before the ancient Jews fled Egypt, their firstborn children were "passed over" and spared from death, thus dubbing the holiday "Passover." Passover starts on the 5th of April this year and will last eight days which is the number of days the Israelites spent escaping the Egyptian army. Traditions during Passover are unique to each family but generally include storytelling from the Haggadah and the sharing of food especially around a Sedar plate.

