

**December Holidays**

Jewish festival of **Hanukkah** actually starts in November this year, as it’s celebrated on the 25th day of Kislev. The dates of Hanukkah vary slightly each year as this celebration is based on the Hebrew calendar and not the Gregorian Calendar. The word Hanukkah means “dedication” in Hebrew, which gives a clue to the origins of this eight-day festival. It’s also called Chanukah or the Festival of Lights.

This entire holiday is centered around the Maccabean revolt. In 165 BC, an army of Jewish rebels called the Maccabees defeated the Romans who had outlawed Jewish religious practices and occupied the holy second temple of Jerusalem. When the Maccabees won the temple back, they rededicated the holy building to God, and a miracle occurred: although they only had enough oil to light their lamps for one night, the oil lasted for eight days.

**Bodhi Day** is a Buddhist celebration that honors the day that Budhha (also known as Shakyamuni or Siddhartha Gautama) first experienced enlightenment (or “Bodhi”) through meditation

**Santa Lucia** Saint Lucy Day December 12th commemorates a 4th century Christian Martyr. According to tradition, Santa Lucia brought food to persecuted Christians hiding in the catacombs of Rome. She was said to wear a candle-lit wreath on her head to light her way and carry as much food as possible.

**Pancha Ganapati** is a modern-day Hindu festival in honor of the elephant-headed deity Ganesh, known as the remover of obstacles, lord of good fortune and patron of arts. The holiday was created by guru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami in 1985 as an alternative to Christmas for Hindus.

**The Winter Solstice** marks the shortest day and longest night of the year. From that day forward, each day grows proceedingly longer until the summer solstice on June 21st.

Since before the dawn of history, this darkest day of the year was considered extremely significant and has been celebrated by many cultures in different forms. Often thought to symbolize the death and rebirth of the sun, it is considered a time of new beginnings and the birth of light.

**Christmas** December 25th marks the birth of Jesus Christ. Here in America, we’re used to celebrating with Christmas trees, presents from Santa Claus delivered on Christmas Eve, parties and caroling. But it’s also interesting to look at some of the various Christmas traditions that take place around the world.