

Major Religious Holidays/Observances and Suggested Accommodations Guidelines

The holidays/observances and accommodations guidelines are available to faculty, staff, and student leaders as an educational resource about the many religious holy days celebrated by community members at Thomas Jefferson University. Not only do these guidelines offer crucial information about dates and practices, we also hope the information about recommended academic and food accommodations will be valuable to those planning classroom activities and other academic and co-curricular events. These guidelines are not a policy statement, rather information to consider as you plan activities for the Jefferson community.

Points to Remember

- Dates are assembled from several calendars and begin with the academic year (August through July). Lunar calendars can vary based on region and practice.
- *Kosher restrictions apply*: refers to the dietary guidelines of Jewish law which apply daily throughout the year. Restrictions include: pork, shellfish (fish is allowed) and mixing meat with dairy. More information concerning Kosher food is included in the guidelines.
- *Halal dietary restrictions apply*: refers to the foods prohibited according to Islamic dietary law throughout the year. Restrictions include alcohol and pork. More information concerning Halal food is included in the guidelines.
- ***Community members planning events and activities in which it is an expectation that all community members attend and are not just “open” to all community members should seriously consider not planning these activities during holidays/observances indicated as “holidays with significant work and/or dietary restrictions”***

Holiday and Recommended Accommodations

Date(s) Observed

AUGUST

Lammas / Lughnasadh (Pagan, Wiccan, Druid)

A celebration of the beginning of the harvest. One of the eight major annual sabbats or festivals.

Aug. 1, 2018

General Practices: Making and consuming dishes with the first fruits of the harvest.

Eid al-Adha - *begins at sundown (Islamic)

Holiday with significant work restriction

***Aug. 21-22, 2018**

Eid al-Adha is a major festival that celebrates the willingness to make sacrifices in the name of one's faith. According to legend, the prophet Ibrahim was ordered to sacrifice his son in God's name. When Ibrahim was prepared to kill his son, God stepped in

and gave him a sheep to sacrifice instead. This holiday celebrates Ibrahim's total faith in God, and Muslims view this holiday as an important annual reminder.

General Practices: Prayers, gift giving, prayers, and sometimes slaughtering of sheep, with a portion of the meat gifted to the poor.

Date details: Lunar calendars can vary based on region and practice. Begins at sundown.

Recommended Accommodations: Avoid scheduling important academic deadlines, events, and activities on the first day. If planning an evening event, provide food accommodations if requested (Islamic dietary restrictions apply).

Raksha Bandhan (Hindu)

The Rakhi festivity falls in the holy month of Shraavan; The origin and history of Rakhi can be dated back to the mythological Pauranic times.

Aug. 25, 2018

General Practices: A day to acknowledge siblings and their relationships.

SEPTEMBER

Krishna Janmashtami (Hindu)

This two-day festival celebrates the birth of Krishna, a widely-worshiped Hindu god. Krishna is considered to be a warrior, hero, teacher, and philosopher.

General Practices: During this festival, Hindus are likely to forgo sleep in order to sing bhajans, traditional Hindu songs. Many Hindus also fast during the first day of the festival. Dances, songs, and plays depicting the life of Krishna are common.

Sept. 3, 2018

Date Details: The first day is called Krishan ashtami or Gokul ashtami. The second day is known as Kaal ashtami or more popularly Janam ashtami.

Recommended Accommodations: Avoid scheduling major academic deadlines on this day, since it is likely that students will be operating on very little sleep.

Rosh Hashanah - * begins at sundown (Jewish)

Holiday with significant work restriction

Start of the Jewish New Year, day of judgment and remembrance; the Jewish calendar celebrates the New Year in the seventh month (Tishrei) as a day of rest and celebration ten days before Yom Kippur

***Sept. 9-10, 2018**

General Practices: Prayer in synagogue and festive meals

Date details: Begins at sundown.

Recommended Accommodations: Avoid scheduling important academic deadlines, events, or activities on this date. If planning an event, provide food accommodation as requested (kosher restrictions apply).

Sept. 23, 2018

Mabon / Alban Elfed / Autumnal Equinox (Pagan, Wiccan, Druid)

Also referred to as Harvest Home, the Feast of the Ingathering, and Meán Fómhair. Mabon is the second celebration of the harvest, a ritual of thanksgiving for the fruits of the earth, and a recognition of the need to share them to secure the blessings of the Goddess and the God during the coming winter months. One of the eight major annual sabbats or festivals.

General Practices: At Mabon, day and night are in equal balance. It is a time to offer gratitude for the blessings of the harvest and also to begin to prepare for turning inward. Making dishes with apples, squash and pumpkins as part of ritual celebration is customary.

Yom Kippur - *begins at sundown (Jewish)

Holiday with significant work restriction

Yom Kippur is often considered the holiest day of the year for Jews, and the day is dedicated to atonement and abstinence.

***Sept. 18-19, 2018**

General Practices: During Yom Kippur, Jews fast from before sundown until after sunset, and light a Yahrzeit memorial candle at sundown on the night of Yom Kippur.

Date details: Begins at sundown.

Recommended Accommodations: Avoid scheduling important academic deadlines, events, or activities on this date and after a day of fasting.

Sukkot - *begins at sundown (Jewish)

Holiday with significant work restriction

A week-long celebration which begins with the building of Sukkah for sleep and meals; Sukkot is named for the huts Moses and the Israelites lived in as they wandered the desert before reaching the promised land.

***Sept. 23-24, 2018**

General Practices: Families in the United States commonly decorate the sukkah with produce and artwork.

Date details: Begins at sundown. Work holiday varies by denomination.

Recommended Accommodations: Avoid scheduling important academic deadlines, events, or activities on the first two days. If planning an event, provide food accommodation as requested (kosher restrictions apply).

OCTOBER

Shemini Atzeret - begins at sundown (Jewish)

Holiday with significant work restriction

Also known as Atzereth, this is a fall festival, which includes a memorial service for the dead and features prayers for rain in Israel.

General Practices: Jews light a Yahrzeit memorial candle at sundown on Shemini Atzereth (the 8th night of Sukkot).

Date details: Begins at sundown.

***Sept. 30-Oct. 1,
2018**

Recommended Accommodations: Avoid scheduling important academic deadlines, events, or activities on this date. If planning an event, provide food accommodation as requested (kosher restrictions apply).

Simchat Torah - begins at sundown (Jewish)

Holiday with significant work restriction

Simchat Torah marks the completion of the annual cycle of the reading of the Torah in the synagogue and the beginning of the new cycle.

General Practices: Practitioners dance in synagogues as all the Torah scrolls are carried around in seven circuits.

***Oct. 1-2, 2018**

Recommended Accommodations: Avoid scheduling important academic deadlines, events, and activities on this date. Kosher restrictions apply.

Navaratri (Hindu)

Navarati is one of the greatest Hindu festivals, and celebrates the triumph of good over evil. During this time, Hindus worship Durga, Lakshmi, and Saraswati.

General Practices: Durga is the mother goddess, and so Hindus try to visit their mothers and other relatives during this time. Some Hindus will pray and fast, and there are often feasts and dances.

Oct. 9, 2018

Samhain (Pagan, Wiccan, Druid)

One of the four "greater Sabbats" and considered by some to be the Wiccan New Year. A time to celebrate the lives of those who have passed on, welcome those born during the past year into the community, and reflecting on past relationships, events and other significant changes in life.

General Practices: Paying respect to ancestors, family members, elders of the faith, friends, pets and other loved ones who have died.

**Oct. 31–Nov. 1,
2018**

NOVEMBER

Diwali (Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Jain)

Holiday with significant work restriction

Diwali—the Hindu “festival of lights”—is an extremely popular holiday for multiple religions throughout Southern Asia. Diwali extends over five days, and celebrates the victory of good over evil. The Times of India described Diwali as “a reaffirmation of hope, a renewed commitment to friendship and goodwill, and a religiously sanctioned celebration of the simple.” Fireworks, oil lamps, and sweets are common, making this a favorite holiday for children. The lamps are lit to help the goddess Lakshmi find her way into people’s homes.

Nov. 1, 2018

General Practices: Lighting oil lamps and candles, setting off fireworks, and prayer.

Recommended Accommodations: Avoid scheduling important academic deadlines, events, and activities on this date. Hindu employees will likely request a vacation day on this date.

Birth of Bahá'u'lláh (Baha'i)

Holiday with significant work restriction

This holiday celebrates the birthday of Bahá'u'lláh, one of the Baha'i faith's most important figures. For Bahá'ís, the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh is a Holy Day celebrating the rebirth of the world through the love of God, just as Christmas is for Christians.

Nov. 12, 2018

Recommended Accommodations: Avoid scheduling important academic deadlines, events, or activities on this date. (Baha'i employees will likely request to have this day off.)

DECEMBER

Hanukkah / Chanukah - *begins at sundown (Jewish)

Hanukkah is the Jewish festival of lights, and lasts for eight days. Hanukkah commemorates the Jewish struggle for religious freedom. The history of the holiday involves a historic military victory in which a Jewish sect called the Maccabees defeated the Syrian Greeks. The celebration commemorates a miracle in which a sacred temple flame burned for eight days on only one day's worth of oil.

***Dec. 2–10, 2018**

General Practices: On each of the eight nights of Hanukkah, Jewish families light an additional candle of the menorah candelabrum until all eight candles are lit. Jews celebrate with food and song, as well as exchanging gifts for eight days.

Date details: Hanukkah begins at sundown on the first day.

Recommended Accommodations: Academics and work permitted, not a work holiday. Provide food accommodation as requested (kosher restrictions apply—potato pancakes, doughnuts or other fried food is customary).

Yule / Midwinter / Alban Arthan / Winter Solstice (Pagan, Wiccan, Druid)

The longest night of the year followed by the sun's "rebirth" and lengthening of days. In most traditions, Yule is celebrated as the rebirth of the Great God, who is viewed as the newborn solstice sun. Some pagans consider Yule to be the beginning of the new year. One of the eight major annual sabbats or festivals.

**Dec. 20–Jan. 1,
2018**

General Practices: Burning the yule log (which was traditionally part of last year's yule tree) is an act of faith and renewal that, indeed, the light, and the warmth will return.

Christmas - *begins at sundown (Christian / Roman Catholic and Protestant)

Holiday with significant work restriction

Christmas is an annual celebration commemorating the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah whose message and self-sacrifice began the Christian religion.

***Dec. 24-25, 2015**

General Practices: Many celebrate this holiday by giving gifts, attending church services, decorating Christmas trees, and visiting family.

Date details: Begins at sundown on Dec. 24 annually and continues with all day celebration on Dec. 25.

Recommended Accommodations: This is a national holiday in the United States, so special accommodations are likely not required.

JANUARY

Gantan-sai (Shinto)

Holiday with significant work restriction

Gantan-sai is the annual New Year festival of the Shinto religion.

Jan. 1, 2019

General Practices: Practitioners pray for inner renewal, prosperity, and health, as well as visiting shrines and visiting friends and family.

Recommended Accommodations: Avoid scheduling important academic deadlines, events and activities on this date (work holiday)

Epiphany / Twelfth Night / Three Kings Day (Christian / Roman Catholic and Protestant)

This date is also known as Befana Day; commemorates the revelation of God through Jesus Christ and marks the time the three wise men arrived in Bethlehem and presented gifts to the baby Jesus.

Jan. 6, 2019

General Practices: Prayer, festive meals, offerings, gifts

Christmas (Eastern Orthodox Christian)

Holiday with significant work restriction

Christmas is an annual celebration commemorating the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah whose message and self-sacrifice began the Christian religion.

General Practices: Many celebrate this holiday by attending church services, holding celebratory meals, and visiting family.

Jan. 7, 2019

Date details: Eastern Orthodox Christmas is determined by the Julian calendar which regulates ceremonial cycle of the Eastern Orthodox Christian churches.

Recommended Accommodations: Because this holiday typically falls during winter break, academic accommodations may not be required. However many Eastern Orthodox employees will probably request this day off.

FEBRUARY

Imbolc / Candlemas (Pagan, Wiccan, Druid)

Also referred to as the Feast of Pan, Feast of Torches, Feast of Waxing Lights, and Oimele. Celebrates the coming of spring and recovery of the Earth Goddess after giving birth to the Sun God at Yule. For many traditions, a time for initiations, re-dedication and pledges for the coming year. One of the four "greater Sabbats."

Feb. 1-2, 2019

General Practices: Activities might include making candles, reading poetry and telling stories.

Setsubum-sai (Shinto)

Setsubum-sai marks the beginning of spring, and is known as the "bean-throwing festival. The faithful scatter roasted beans to bring good luck to the new season.

Feb. 3, 2019

Chinese New Year (Confucian, Taoist, Buddhist)

Holiday with significant work restriction

Feb. 5, 2019

This is the most important of traditional Chinese holidays.

General Practices: Families gather together to spend the evening preparing boiled dumplings and festive meals and giving of money to children in red envelopes.

Date details: Corresponds to the New Moon in Aquarius, which can fall from late January to mid-February

Recommended Accommodations: Avoid scheduling important academic deadlines, events, and activities on this date. Many Chinese employees will probably request this day off.

MARCH

Ash Wednesday (Christian / Roman Catholic and Protestant)

This is the first day of Lent, the period of forty days before Easter in which many Christians sacrifice ordinary pleasures to reflect on Christ's sacrifice.

March 6, 2019

General Practices: On this day, there are special church services, and the faithful wear a cross of ashes marked on foreheads. Most Christians abstain from meat on this day.

Recommended Accommodations: Provide food accommodation as requested—prohibitions include animal products.

Purim - *begins at sundown (Jewish)

Purim commemorates the time when the Jews were living in Persia and were saved by the courage of a young Jewish woman called Esther.

***March 21, 2019**

General Practices: Many Jews hold carnival-like celebrations on Purim, dressing in costumes, and read the Book of Esther. Triangular, fruit-filled pastries are eaten in opposition to the villain Haman, who wore a three-cornered hat.

Recommended Accommodations: Purim is not subject to the restrictions on work that affect some other holidays; however, some sources indicate that Jews should not go about their ordinary business at Purim out of respect for the festival. If planning an evening event, provide food accommodations if requested (kosher restrictions apply).

Magha Puja Day (Buddhist)

March 21, 2019

Magha Puja Day commemorates an important event in the life of the Buddha, in which the four disciples traveled to join the Buddha.

Ostara / Alban Eilir / Spring Equinox (Pagan, Wiccan, Druid)

March 20, 2019

Also known as Eostre. Regarded as a time of fertility and conception. In some Wiccan traditions, it is marked as the time when the Goddess conceives the God's child, which will be born at the winter solstice. One of eight major annual sabbats or festivals.

General Practices: Lighting fires to commemorate the return of light in the spring and to honor the God and Goddess. Coloring eggs as a way of honoring fertility is also practiced.

Naw Ruz - *begins at sundown (Baha'i)

***March 21-21, 2019**

This is the Baha'i New Year, a traditional celebration in Iran adopted as a holy day associated with Baha'i. It is a celebration of spring and new life.

General Practices: Festive music dancing, prayers, meetings, meals

Holi (Hindu)

Also known as the "Festival of Colors," this holiday can be traced to Hindu scriptures commemorating good over evil. This date is also a celebration of the colorful spring and a farewell to the dull winter.

March 19, 2019

General Practices: Hindus often sprinkle colored water and powder on others and celebrate with bonfires and lights, signifying victory of good over evil.

Date details: Celebrated at the end of the winter season on the last full moon day of the lunar moon in late February or early March.

Maundy Thursday (Christian / Roman Catholic and Protestant)

Thursday before Easter, commemorates the Last Supper of Jesus with the Apostles.

April 18, 2019

General Practices: Prayer, Communion (Eucharist), meals, and foot-washing ceremonies among some Christian denominations

Date details: Always falls on the Thursday before Easter Sunday.

Good Friday (Christian / Roman Catholic and Protestant)

Friday before Easter, commemorates the crucifixion of Jesus Christ; among some sects of Christianity and in many countries marks a day of fasting.

April 19, 2019

General Practices: Prayer, fasting, and noon or afternoon services in some Christian denominations.

Date details: Always falls on the Friday before Easter Sunday.

Recommended Accommodations: Provide food accommodation as requested—meat (fish is not considered meat) is prohibited during meals for some.

Easter (Christian / Roman Catholic and Protestant)

Holiday with significant work restriction

Annual commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ

April 21, 2019

General Practices: Celebratory meals, family gatherings, distribution of colored eggs, baskets and chocolate bunnies. It is a celebration of renewal.

Date details: Easter Sunday is determined by the Gregorian calendar (Gregorian calendar regulates ceremonial cycle of the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches).

APRIL

Vaisakhi (Sikh)

Vaisakhi is the Sikh new year festival and commemorates 1699, the year Sikhism was born. Vaisakhi is also a long-established harvest festival.

April 13, 2019

General Practices: There are often parades, dancing, and singing throughout the day. These celebrations involve music, singing, and chanting of scriptures and hymns.

Pesach / Passover - *begins at sundown (Jewish)

Holiday with significant work restriction

Pesach is a week-long observance commemorating the freedom and exodus of the Israelites (Jewish slaves) from Egypt during the reign of the Pharaoh Ramses II (one of three pilgrimage festivals).

General Practices: Family gatherings, ritualized meals called Seders, reading of the Haggadah, lighting of Yahrzeit memorial candle at sundown on the last night of Passover.

***April 19–27, 2019**

Date details: Begins at sundown.

Recommended Accommodations: Avoid scheduling important academic deadlines, events and activities on the first two and last two days of the holiday, provide food accommodation as requested (kosher restrictions apply—the use of leavening is prohibited so, for example, matzah is eaten in place of bread.)

Palm Sunday (Christian / Roman Catholic and Protestant / Eastern Orthodox Christianity)

April 14, 2019

A commemoration of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem as crowds lined his path with palm fronds

General Practices: Prayer, distribution of palm leaves commemorating Jesus' entry into Jerusalem prior to his crucifixion.

Holy Friday / Good Friday (Eastern Orthodox Christian)

Friday before Easter, commemorates the crucifixion of Jesus Christ; among some sects of Christianity and in many countries marks a day of fasting.

General Practices: Prayer, fasting, confession, and church services as well as the wrapping or dyeing of eggs (often red) in preparation for Easter Sunday.

April 26, 2019

Date details: Orthodox Good Friday is determined by the Julian calendar which regulates ceremonial cycle of the Eastern Orthodox Christian churches.

Recommended Accommodations: Avoid scheduling important academic deadlines, events and activities on the date.

MAY

Beltane (Pagan, Wiccan, Druid)

The fire festival that celebrates the coming of summer and the fertility of the coming year. One of the eight major annual sabbats or festivals.

May 1, 2019

General Practices: Jumping the balefire, dancing the MayPole.

Yom HaSho'ah - *begins at sundown (Jewish)

Holocaust Remembrance Day; a day to remember the lives and names of Jewish victims and activists of the Holocaust.

General Practices: Ceremonies or events to remember Holocaust victims who died during World War II; activities may include lighting memorial candles and reciting the Kaddish, which is a prayer for the departed.

***May 2, 2019**

Date details: Begins at sundown.

Recommended Accommodations: This is not a work holiday—academics and work are permitted. Provide food accommodation as requested (kosher restrictions apply).

Ramadan - *begins at sundown (Islamic)

Ramadan is an occasion to focus on faith through fasting and prayer, and is one of the most important Muslim holidays. Ramadan is notable because the Qur'an was first revealed during this month, and Muslims see the Qur'an as the ultimate form of guidance for mankind. The night that the Qur'an was revealed to Muhammad is called

***May 5-June 4, 2019**

Lailat ul Oadr, and standing in prayer this one night is thought to eclipse months of worship.

General Practices: Fasting is required during the entire month of Ramadan. Muslims refrain from food and beverages during the daylight hours, and smoking and sexual relations are forbidden. Worshipers break the fasting each night with prayer, reading of the Qu'ran, and a meal called the iftar. In addition, many Muslims also attend night prayers at Mosques. Muslims also believe that their good actions bring a greater reward during this month than any other time of the year, so almost all Muslims try to give up bad habits during Ramadan.

Date Details: Dates are determined by the lunar calendar. Lunar calendars can vary based on region and practice. The observed date marks the beginning of a 30 day observation.

Recommended Accommodations: If possible, avoid scheduling major academic deadlines during this time. Be sensitive to the fact that students and employees celebrating Ramadan will be fasting during the day (continuously for 30 days) and will likely have less stamina as a result. If planning an evening event, provide food accommodations if requested (Islamic dietary restrictions apply).

Buddha Day / Visakha Puja (Buddhist)

This holiday is traditionally known as Buddha's birthday. It is the major Buddhist festival, commemorating the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha.

General Practices: Buddhists often decorate their homes and visit their local temples. Observers are encouraged to refrain from slaughtering and to avoid eating meat on this date.

May 18, 2019

Recommended Accommodations: Provide food accommodation as requested, and offer vegetarian options when planning menus for events on this date.

Ascension of the Baha'ullah (Baha'i)

Commemorates the death of the founder of the Baha'i faith; Baha'llah died on May 29, 1892.

May 29, 2019

General Practices: Devotional programs and reading from the scriptures

JUNE

***June 5-7, 2019**

Eid al-Fitr - *begins at sundown (Islamic)

Holiday with significant work restriction

Eid al-Fitr means "break the fast", and is the last day of Ramadan, marking the end of a month of fasting.

General Practices: Muslims often pray, exchange gifts, give money to children, feast, and celebrate with friends and family.

Date Details: Dates are determined by the lunar calendar. Lunar calendars can vary based on region and practice. Eid al Fitr is a three day celebration and begins at sundown.

Recommended Accommodations: Avoid scheduling important academic deadlines, events, or activities on this date. Employees will likely ask to take a vacation day on this day, and that request should be granted if at all possible. If planning an evening event, provide food accommodations if requested (Islamic dietary restrictions apply).

Litha / Midsomer / Alban Hefin / Summer Solstice / (Pagan, Wiccan, Druid)

A celebration of the longest day of the year and the beginning of summer. Celebration of the the Goddess manifesting as Mother Earth and the God as the Sun King. For some Pagans the Summer Solstice marks the marriage of the God and Goddess and see their union as the force that creates the harvest's fruits. One of the eight major annual sabbats or festivals.

June 21, 2019

General Practices: Lighting to bonfires and watching the sun rise

AUGUST

Tisha B'Av - *begins at sundown (Jewish)

Commemorates a series of Jewish tragedies including the destruction of the first and second temples in Jerusalem.

***Aug. 10-11, 2019**

General practices: Fasting and mourning.

Date details: Begins at sundown on first day, fast deferred because of the Sabbath.

Recommended accommodations: Plan limited activities after a fast.

General Dietary Considerations for Religious Groups & Other Community Members

HALAL VS. KOSHER

	<i>HALAL</i>	<i>KOSHER</i>
INTRODUCTION	Halal is anything that is permissible according to Islamic law. The term covers and designates not only food and drink as permissible according to Islamic law, but also all matters of daily life.	Kosher foods are those that conform to the regulations of kashrut, the Jewish dietary law.
GUIDELINES	Follows Islamic dietary law	Follows Jewish dietary law
ETYMOLOGY	“Halal” in Arabic means permissible or lawful.	Derived from the Hebrew word “Kashrut,” which means proper or fit.
ROOTS	Quran	Torah
FORBIDDEN MEATS (<i>lists are not comprehensive, just offered as a guide</i>)	Meat not slaughtered according to Islamic Law. Animals whose blood is not fully drained. Pig and other by products. Any marine animals except for fish.	Animals not slaughtered according to Jewish law. Animals whose blood is not fully drained. Pig. Rabbit/hare. Shellfish
FRUIT & VEGETABLES	Considered Halal	Considered Kosher only if there are no bugs in them.
MEAT & DAIRY	Can be consumed together	Cannot be consumed together
ALCOHOL	Prohibited	Yes, except for alcohol made from grapes or contain cream. These need to have a kosher certification
OTHER	Dairy, yogurt, & cheese products should be produced from halal certified animals.	Meat & dairy products need to be cooked in separate containers; using separate utensils.

Other Points to Remember

- Consideration should be made for some of the more common food allergies – ***nuts, shellfish, eggs, soy, milk, & wheat.***
- When possible it is a good practice to list ingredients/contents of food offerings.
- **Vegan/Vegetarian menu items can be a safe option for all dietary needs.**