

**MEETING IN A BOX**



**April 2022**

# **Respecting Different Faiths in the Workplace**

**The Holidays You May Not Know**

**World Religion Handbook**

**5 Workplace Policies That Drive Inclusion of Different Faiths**

This Meeting in a Box is designed to help you understand other religious traditions, shape a calendar and time off policies that are more inclusive and create a workplace environment where employees feel comfortable being themselves.



# The Holidays You May Not Know

The month of April often means Easter celebrations and spring festivals. For different faiths, this is an important time of renewal and celebration as well, but the federal calendar does not guarantee time off for people with different religious traditions the way it often does for Christian traditions.



## Editors Note

While Christianity may currently be the predominant religion in the U.S., around 5% of the population identifies with a non-Christian religion, according to the Public Religion Research Institute. That equates to more than 16 million people across the country whose traditions may not be reflected on the corporate calendar. To create truly inclusive workplaces and cultures, companies should look to accommodate the needs of different faiths and cultural traditions.

It's important to understand as you read this that ethnicity and religion may be intertwined at times, but they are not the same thing. Around the world, there are Latino Jews, Black Buddhists and Asian Christians. It's important not to make assumptions about one's faith based on their ethnicity and provide a safe space where they feel the practice of their religion doesn't interfere with or isn't interfered with by their work. There are numerous religious faiths and sects to consider when looking at the demographics of your workforce, particularly if you're operating on a global scale.

While there are different sects of every religion and several less populated faiths, we will narrow our focus to four religious faiths that the majority of the global population of people who identify with a religion will fall into. Even when simplifying this view, there are still a great many factors to consider. While there are varying Christian traditions, for the purposes of this piece we will focus primarily on non-Christian traditions.

It's worth noting that these traditions often do not go by the typical 12-month calendar as they were formed before its creation or have their own calendars. Therefore, it will require HR and diversity teams to engage with these cultures on a regular basis to keep their own calendars up to date.

This list is not meant to be exhaustive, but a view into the variety of holidays that one may need to consider to be truly inclusive of employees from other cultures and countries. Some of these holidays may require employees of non-Christian faiths to dig into their paid time off if the company does not allow them to observe their holidays as part of their benefits, having a negative impact on a culture of inclusion.

More research into complete calendars should be done before consulting with employees on times they will need off, should they identify a desire or need to do so.

## Judaism

While many are well acquainted with Hannukah and some of the traditions that come along with that, other Jewish holidays often go unnoticed. For example, Purim is a holiday that celebrates the defeat of the Persian emperor Haman's plot to kill all the Jews within his empire, a story depicted in the book of Esther. The observance lasts only for one day, but traditionally requires Jewish people to avoid doing any work. This year, Purim began on a Wednesday night and ended the following evening.

### Other Jewish holidays where work is traditionally not permitted include:

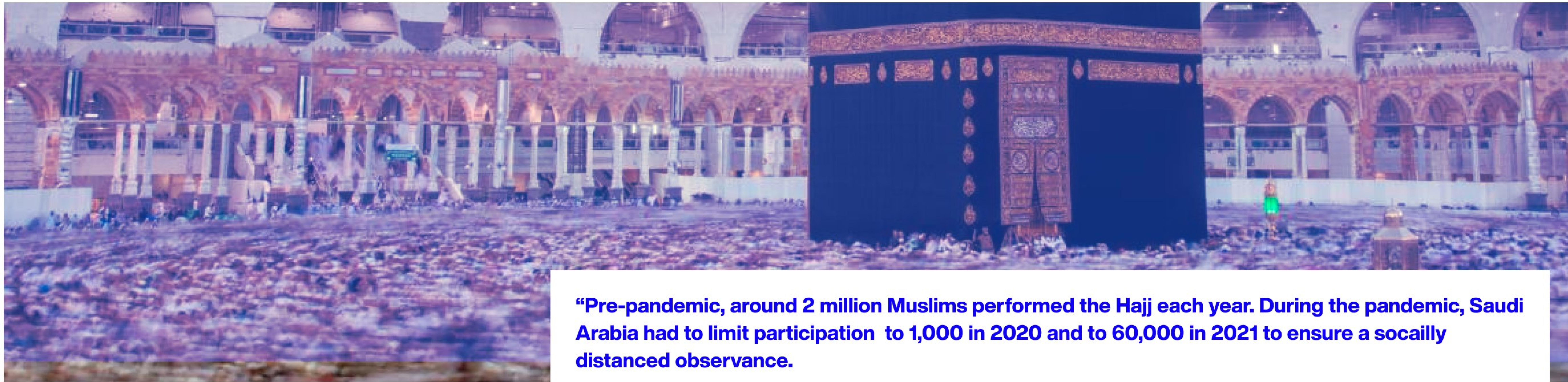
- **Passover** – celebrates the freeing of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt (work permitted on certain days with restrictions).
- **Shavuot** – marks the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai.
- **Rosh Hashanah** – celebration of the Jewish New Year.
- **Sukkot** – celebrates God sheltering the Jews on their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. This period lasts for seven days.
- **Shemini Atzeret & Simchat Torah** – marks the conclusion of the annual cycle of weekly Torah reading and the beginning of a new cycle.
- **Hannukah** – marks the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem following the Maccabean revolt.
- **Yom Kippur** – a day of atonement and one of the holiest days of the year in the Jewish tradition.

## Buddhism

Buddhism is a religion based on teachings from Siddhartha Gautama, commonly known as the Buddha. The faith was formed by the Buddha more than 2,500 years ago and has nearly 470 million followers today.

### Some Common Buddhist holidays include:

- **Vesak (Buddha Day)** – a festival that celebrates the birth, enlightenment and death Siddhartha Gautama and offers a time to reflect on his teachings. This year, it occurs on May 6.
- **Dharma Day** – one of the most important holidays in the Theravada Buddhist (the dominant sect throughout much of southeast Asia) tradition, this holiday celebrates Buddha's first sermon.
- **Mahāyāna and Theravada New Year** – Mahāyāna is the prevalent form of Buddhism in Northeast Asia and has absorbed many of the local customs. Mahāyāna New Year is different in each country, with some celebrating it in line with the traditional new year and others at different times. Theravada Buddhism is more prevalent in Southeast Asia and celebrates its new year in April.
- **Nirvana Day** – a celebration of the death of Buddha when he reached Nirvana at the age of 80. It is celebrated in early to mid-February with the actual date varying by which tradition is observing it.
- **Bodhi Day** – a celebration of the day that Buddha experienced enlightenment, this holiday is celebrated in December and involves additional meditation, chanting of Buddhist texts and performing kind acts toward others for those who observe it.
- **Obon** – also known simply as “Bon” and specific to Japan, this two-day period in August is observed to honor one's ancestors and has evolved into a time for family reunions in some places.
- **Kathina** – occurring at the end of rainy season in the Theravada tradition, Kathina is a month-long celebration ending on a full moon that marks a period in which Buddhist monks and nuns are given new robes. Common observers may visit temples and give offerings of cloth used to make the robes. This year, Kathina starts on October 9 and ends on November 9.



**“Pre-pandemic, around 2 million Muslims performed the Hajj each year. During the pandemic, Saudi Arabia had to limit participation to 1,000 in 2020 and to 60,000 in 2021 to ensure a socially distanced observance.**

## Islam

A sometimes maligned and often misunderstood religion, Islam's traditions are not represented well in Western popular culture. Islam, however, has been a tradition that has contributed significantly to the arts, sciences and innovation throughout history and its traditions are rich, stemming back centuries and reaching into all corners of human civilization.

You may be familiar with a holiday such as Ramadan, although unfamiliar with the practices that accompany it. For Ramadan specifically, which begins in April and ends in May this year, it does not require Muslims to abstain from work as it lasts for the entire 30 days of the ninth month in the Islamic calendar. However, Muslims observing Ramadan may fast from sunrise to sunset, meaning they may desire to change their work hours to times where they are more likely to feel productive. Lunch meetings are something to reconsider and it's worth understanding the intention of the holy month, which is to provide an opportunity to reduce consumption, reflect on improvements a person can make in their life and appreciate the little things in life.

Let's look at a few other Muslim holidays and traditions that require followers of this faith to observe certain practices or perform acts that may impact their ability to work and should be accommodated or supported by companies looking to be more inclusive of this community. It's worth noting that due to different traditions and interpretations, the actual day of an event may vary from one practitioner to another.

- **Lailat al-Miraj** – celebrates the prophet Muhammad's journey from Mecca to Jerusalem where he ascended into the heavens.
- **Lailat al-Bara'ah** – called the night of forgiveness or night of destiny, it is believed that this is the night the prophet writes a person's destiny for the year to come. Some Muslims observe it by staying up all night in prayer, while others fast, give to charity or celebrate in their own ways.
- **Laylat al-Qadr** – translated to the “Night of Power,” this holiday celebrates the night that God revealed the Quran to the Prophet Muhammad.
- **Eid al-Adha – Hajj** – this day marks the beginning of the Hajj (pilgrimage) and is typically noted as a work restricted holiday.
- **Waqf al Arafa – Hajj** – one of the most famous Muslim holidays, this translates to the “Day of Standing” and occurs on the second day of the Hajj. For those performing the traditional Hajj (a pilgrimage to Mecca), something all able Muslims are expected to do in their lifetime, they must “stand before God” from around noon until sunset. For those not making the pilgrimage, fasting is encouraged. It is the holiest day of the Islamic lunar New Year .
- **Hijri** – recognized as the Islamic New Year or the Arabic New Year, this day celebrates the journey of the prophet and his followers from Mecca to Medina.
- **Milad-un-Nabi** – this translates to “the birth of the prophet.” It is celebrated by people wearing green as a symbol of Islam and paradise, consuming communal meals in mosques and in some cases accompanied by festivals and all-night prayers.

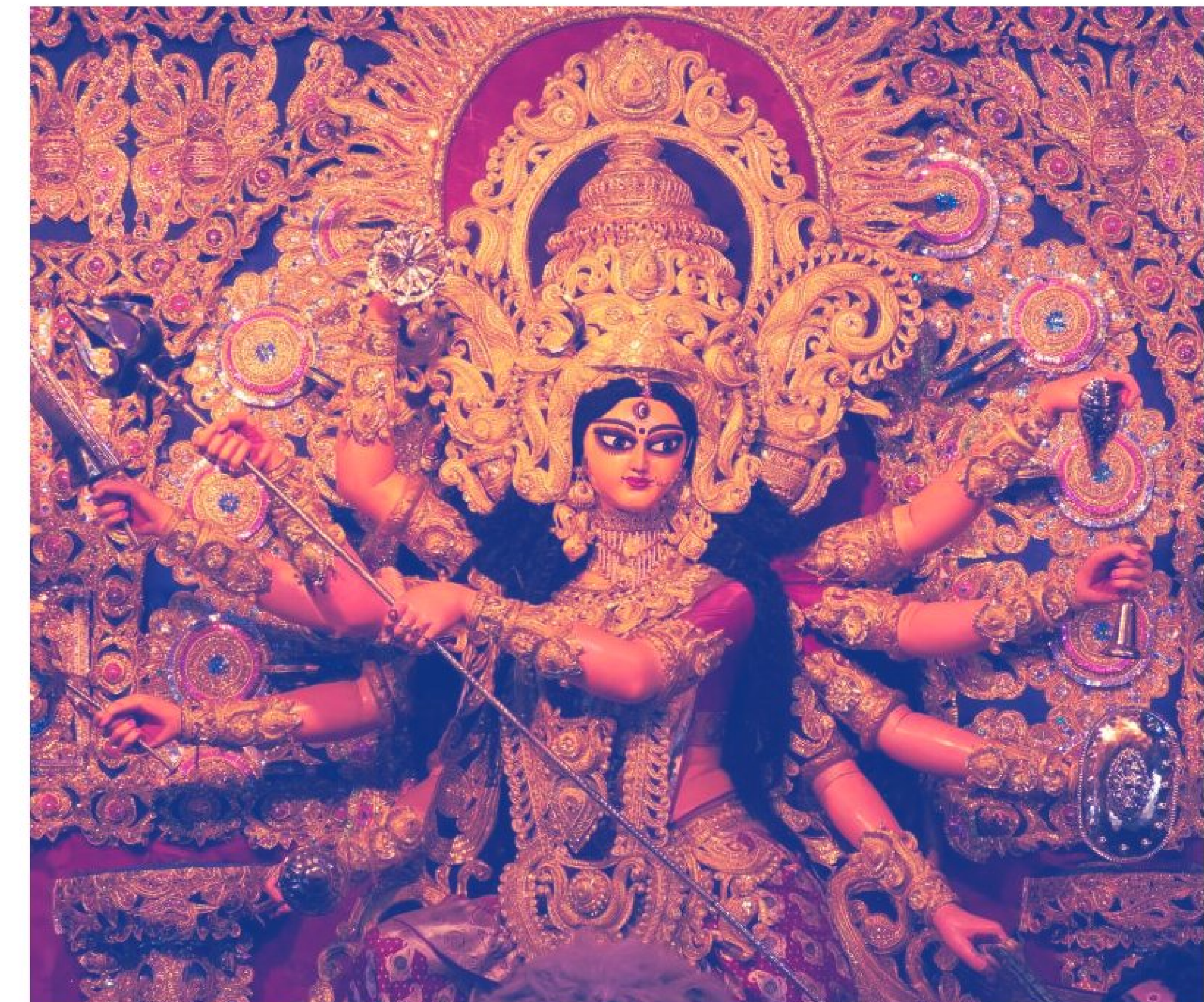
## Hinduism

A rich and eclectic religion and culture, Hinduism has a large number of holidays across the four major denominations of Saivism, Shaktism, Vaishnavism and Smartism. They vary in the Gods they view as supreme, their scriptures, saints, ideologies and teachings.

While some holidays include work restrictions, observance of this is often not universal and employees should be consulted to help shape flexible work and time off policies that best suit their needs. Here are some of the key holidays celebrated by many Hindu people regardless of where they are in the world.

- **Makar Sankranti** – the first Hindu holiday of the year on a Western calendar is a celebration of the days becoming longer.
- **Maha Shivaratri** – a celebration of Shiva, the destroyer of the universe, this holiday occurs on the day and night before a new moon, typically in March.
- **Rama Navami** – taking place in April, this holiday celebrates the birth of the Lord Rama. Observers decorate their homes with fruits and flowers and the youngest girl in a family leads them in a prayer known as “puja”.
- **Holi** – known as the “festival of colors,” “festival of love” and “festival of spring,” this holiday celebrates the divine love of the god Krishna and typically takes place in March.
- **Krishna Janmashtami** – a two-day celebration of the birth of Krishna, one of the most commonly worshipped Hindu gods. Many do not sleep for these two days and will fast for the first day.

■ **Diwali** – a five-day celebration of good harvests, the triumph of good over evil and the goddess of wealth, Diwali is perhaps the most well-known Hindu and Sikh holiday. Over the course of five days, observers will eat a variety of sweets, set off fireworks and decorate using lights.



# Calendar of Remaining Religious Holidays for 2022

To provide you with the best tools and resources we can, we've created the following calendar to mark important dates across the major religious faiths to show when employees may have observances that could affect their ability or desire to work. Here are some of the key holidays for 2022 with letters indicating the faith each holiday belongs to.

## KEY

**J = Judaism**  
**I = Islam**  
**H = Hinduism**  
**B = Buddhism**

### APRIL 2022

|             |                    |   |
|-------------|--------------------|---|
| APRIL 2     | Ramadan            | I |
| APRIL 10    | Rama Navami        | H |
| APRIL 15-23 | Passover           | J |
| APRIL 16    | Theravada New Year | B |
| APRIL 28    | Laylat al Qadr     | I |

### MAY 2022

|        |             |   |
|--------|-------------|---|
| MAY 2  | Eid al-Fitr | I |
| MAY 16 | Vesak       | B |

### JUNE 2022

|          |         |   |
|----------|---------|---|
| JUNE 4-6 | Shavuot | J |
|----------|---------|---|

### JULY 2022

|         |                      |   |
|---------|----------------------|---|
| JULY 8  | Waqf al-Arafa (Hajj) | I |
| JULY 9  | Eid al-Adha          | I |
| JULY 13 | Dharma Day           | B |
| JULY 30 | Hijri                | I |

### AUGUST 2022

|           |                     |   |
|-----------|---------------------|---|
| AUGUST 13 | Obon                | B |
| AUGUST 19 | Krishna Janmashtami | H |

### SEPTEMBER 2022

|                 |               |   |
|-----------------|---------------|---|
| SEPTEMBER 22-27 | Rosh Hashanah | J |
|-----------------|---------------|---|

### OCTOBER 2022

|                 |                                 |   |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|---|
| OCTOBER 4 and 5 | Yom Kippur                      | J |
| OCTOBER 8       | Milad-un-Nabi                   | I |
| OCTOBER 8       | Khatina Begins                  | B |
| OCTOBER 9-16    | Sukkot                          | J |
| OCTOBER 16-19   | Shemini Atzeret & Simchat Torah | J |
| OCTOBER 24      | Diwali                          | H |

### NOVEMBER 2022

|            |              |   |
|------------|--------------|---|
| NOVEMBER 9 | Khatina Ends | B |
|------------|--------------|---|

### DECEMBER 2022

|                |          |   |
|----------------|----------|---|
| DECEMBER 18-26 | Hannukah | J |
|----------------|----------|---|

# **Discussion Questions for Employees**

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- **How do we create an environment that respects different religions without promoting any one religious ideology?**
- **What more can be done to respect other cultural traditions and create a more inclusive environment for people of different faiths?**
- **Why do you think it's important that the majority recognize and respect these traditions?**
- **What changes do you think could be made to our work scheduling or PTO policies to create the culture of inclusion and belonging we want to have for all employees?**

# 5 Workplace Policies That Drive Inclusion of Different Faiths

As you look through this Meeting in a Box, it might occur to you that it's difficult to satisfy everyone and nearly impossible to develop PTO and work scheduling policies for specific personnel. However, there are workplace policies that can create the type of flexibility and understanding needed to be inclusive of all cultures. Here are five that have been proven to help make employees of different faiths feel seen and understood.

## 1. Ask Questions and Encourage Communication

Religion is a private matter, and some employees will not want to share their faith with you. Since you can't ask about a person's faith during the hiring process, the best thing to do is get to know them a bit once they start with the company and send out optional surveys regarding religious affiliation, being transparent that the purpose of the survey is to create inclusive holiday celebration and time off policies and practices.

If employees do engage around the issue of faith, involve them in the planning process for any workplace observances of a holiday. It's impossible to understand the details of every religious holiday on your own, so who better to consult than the people who are actively observing these days?

## 2. Floating Holidays

Providing a paid time off method that allows for employees to use a day designed specifically for holidays rather than digging into their standard paid vacation or sick days gives employees more options for taking the time they need for religious observances without taking the time they've been given to rest and recharge.

All employees can be granted floating holidays, typically one or two, which exist under a "use or lose it" policy, meaning those days cannot be carried over from one year to the next in the same way PTO or even sick time can. This is a benefit that all employees can appreciate and benefit from, but for those using them to observe religious holidays not common to the Western calendar, it's an opportunity to take the day without worry of ramifications to their work or other benefits.

## 3. Mindful Decoration

Decorating the office is fun and keeps morale high, but if not inclusive can leave people feeling as though they are a person without a country so to speak. Seeing symbols of Christmas, for example, without seeing any representation of one's own faith can leave someone feeling like an outsider. When decorating, be mindful of how traditions overlap or how they may actually share things in common.

In addition, try to remain consistent throughout the year, paying homage to other traditions and the most meaningful days in their calendar.

## 4. Tap Into Themes

An easy and effective way to observe and educate around the holidays of other cultures is to identify themes and play on those around any observance you might be having in the workplace. For example, the theme of Passover is liberation, which is similar to something such as the Fourth of July. Other holidays are festive in the way they use lights, such as Diwali and Christmas.

Finding commonality in the way cultures and religions express themselves reminds employees that they have as much in common as they do differences.

## 5. Holiday Education

Creating a public channel for holiday announcements and education can be helpful for those who want to learn about other cultures. Start a channel on your company's business communication platform that's dedicated to monthly holiday announcements or even include it in your company's internal communications once you have consulted with employees about how they hope to see the organization pay respect to their traditions.