Major Religious Holidays and Observances for 2015-16

Points to Remember

- There are more than 12 major world religions. This list is far from exhaustive but is meant to highlight some of the most commonly observed by UND students, faculty and staff.
- 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.
- *Halal dietary restrictions apply:* refers to the foods prohibited according to Islamic dietary law throughout the year. Restrictions include alcohol and pork.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Holiday and Possible Accommodations</th>
<th>Date(s) Observed</th>
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<td><strong>AUGUST</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Raksha Bandhan (<em>Hindu</em>)</td>
<td>Aug. 29, 2015</td>
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The Rakhi festivity falls in the holy month of Shravan. The origin and history of Rakhi can be dated back to the mythological Pouranik times.

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

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<tr>
<th><strong>SEPTEMBER</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Krishna Janmashtami (<em>Hindu</em>)</td>
<td>Sept. 5, 2015</td>
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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.

*Possible 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)*** | *Sept. 13-14, 2015* |

*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

*General Practices:* Prayer in synagogue and festive meals.

*Date details:* Begins at sundown.
Possible Accommodations: Avoid scheduling important academic deadlines, events, or activities on this date. If planning an event, provide food accommodation as requested (kosher restrictions apply).

**Yom Kippur - *begins at sundown (Jewish)*  
*Sept. 22-23, 2015**  
*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.

*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.

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

**Eid al-Adha - *begins at sundown (Islamic)*  
*Sept. 23-24, 2015**  
*Holiday with significant work restriction*

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.

*Possible 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).

**Sukkot - *begins at sundown (Jewish)*  
*Sept. 27-28, 2015**  
*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.

*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.

Possible 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  
*Oct. 4-5, 2015

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.

Possible 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  
*Oct. 5-6, 2015

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.

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

Navaratri (Hindu)  
Oct. 13, 2015

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.
## NOVEMBER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Diwali (Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Jain)</td>
<td>Oct. 19, 2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Holiday with significant work restriction</td>
<td>Nov. 7, 2018</td>
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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.

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

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

<table>
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<td>Birth of Bahá'u'lláh (Baha'i)</td>
<td>Nov. 12, 2015</td>
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<td>Holiday with significant work restriction</td>
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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.

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

## DECEMBER

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Hanukkah/Chanukah - *begins at sundown (Jewish)</td>
<td>*Dec. 6-14, 2014</td>
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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.

*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.
Possible 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).

*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 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.

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

**JANUARY**

**Epiphany/Twelfth Night/Three Kings Day (Christian/Roman Catholic and Protestant) Jan. 6, 2016**

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.

*General Practices:* Prayer, festive meals, offerings, gifts.

**Christmas (Eastern Orthodox Christian) Jan. 7, 2016**  
*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.

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

*Possible 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**

**Chinese New Year (Confucian, Taoist, Buddhist)  Feb. 8, 2016**

*Holiday with significant work restriction*

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.

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

**Ash Wednesday (Christian/Roman Catholic and Protestant)  Feb. 10, 2016**

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.

*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.

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

**Magha Puja Day (Buddhist)  Feb. 22, 2016**

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

**MARCH**

**Palm Sunday (Christian/Roman Catholic and Protestant/Eastern Orthodox)  Mar. 20, 2016**

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.

**Naw Ruz - *begins at sundown (Baha’i)*  *Mar. 20-21, 2016, 2017, 2018**

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) 
Mar. 23, 2016
Apr. 13, 2017
Mar. 29, 2018

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.

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.

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.

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.

Possible 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).

Maundy Thursday (Christian/Roman Catholic and Protestant) 
Mar. 24, 2016
Apr. 13, 2017
Mar. 29, 2018

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

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) 
Mar. 25, 2016
Apr. 14, 2017
Mar. 29, 2018

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, and noon or afternoon services in some Christian denominations.
**Date details:** Always falls on the Friday before Easter Sunday.

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

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**Easter (Christian/Roman Catholic and Protestant)**

*Holiday with significant work restriction*

Mar. 27, 2016  
Apr. 16, 2017  
Apr. 1, 2018

Annual commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ

**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).

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**APRIL**

**Vaisakhi (Sikh)**

Apr. 13, 2016  
Apr. 13, 2017  
Apr. 13, 2018

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

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

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**Pesach / Passover - *begins at sundown (Jewish)**

*Holiday with significant work restriction*

*Apr. 22-30, 2016*  
*Apr. 10-18, 2017*  
*Mar. 30-Apr. 7, 2018*

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.

**Date details:** Begins at sundown.

**Possible 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.)

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**Holy Friday/Good Friday (Eastern Orthodox Christian)**

Apr. 29, 2016  
Apr. 14, 2017  
Apr. 6, 2018

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 dying of eggs (often red) in preparation for Easter Sunday.

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

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

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**MAY**

**Pascha/Easter (Eastern Orthodox Christian)**

May 1, 2016

Apr. 16, 2017

Apr. 8, 2018

Annual commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ

**General Practices:** Celebratory meals, family gatherings, distribution of colored eggs and baskets of breads, meats, eggs, cheeses and other foods. It is a celebration of renewal.

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

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

*May 4-5, 2016

*Apr. 23-24, 2017

*Apr. 11-12, 2018

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.

**Date details:** Begins at sundown.

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

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**Buddha Day/Visakha Puja (Buddhist)**

May 14, 2016

May 3, 2017

May 22, 2018

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.

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

JUNE

Shavuot - *begins at sundown (Jewish)
Holiday with significant work restriction
*June 11-13, 2016
*May 30-June 1, 2017
*May 19-21, 2018

Commemorates receipt of the Torah on Mount Sinai
(two of three pilgrimage festivals)

General Practices: Evening of devotional programs and studying the Torah, lighting of Yahrzeit memorial candle at sundown on the second night of Shavuot.

Date details: Begins at sundown.

Possible 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—although it is customary to eat dairy).

Ramadan - *begins at sundown (Islamic)
*June 17-July 17, 2015
*June 5-July 5, 2016
*May 26-June 25, 2017
*May 15-June 14, 2018

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 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.

Possible 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).
**JULY**

**Eid al-Fitr - *begins at sundown (Islamic)*  
*July 17-18, 2015*  
*July 4-5, 2016*  
*July 24-25, 2017*  
*June 14-15, 2018*

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.

*Possible 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).

**Tisha B’Av - *begins at sundown (Jewish)*  
*July 25-26, 2015*  
*July 13-14, 2016*  
*July 31-Aug. 1, 2017*  
*July 21-22, 2018*

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

*General practices*: Fasting and mourning.

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

*Possible Accommodations*: Plan limited activities after a fast.