

# 2019 December Holidays

## Christmas – December 25th

Celebrated on December 25<sup>th</sup>, Christmas commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem who is worshipped worldwide as the Son of God. Traditionally, Christmas is also celebrated as the season of Santa Claus and includes the exchanging of gifts between families and friends, accented by colorful lights and decorations.

## Hanukkah – December 22 – December 30<sup>th</sup>

Also known as the Festival of Lights, this eight-day holiday of Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of God's Holy Temple following a military victory, to include the miracle of the menorah's oil lasting eight nights when they only had enough oil for one night.

## Kwanzaa – December 26<sup>th</sup> – January 1st

Celebrated December 26<sup>th</sup> – January 1<sup>st</sup>, Kwanzaa is an African-American celebration focusing on the traditional African values of family, community responsibility, commerce, and self-improvement. It is a time of reaffirming African-American people, their ancestors, and culture. There are seven guiding principles of Kwanzaa, and a different principle is focused upon during each day of the seven-day observance.

## Saint Nicholas Day – December 6th

This day, typically December 6<sup>th</sup>, highlights a feast that has been popular for centuries in Christian countries, especially in Northern Europe. It focuses on Saint Nicholas, a fourth century bishop of the City of Myra in what is now Turkey. Saint Nicholas was renowned for his great kindness and his generous aid to those in distress. Traditional celebrations of Saint Nicholas Day in Northern Europe included gifts left in children's shoes (*the origin of our American Christmas stockings*).

### Fiesta of Our Lady of Guadalupe (Mexican) – December 12th

Mexicans join together for the festivities of Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 12. This is one of the most important dates in the Mexican calendar, and thousands of the faithful from around the country make the most important pilgrimage taken during the year to the Basílica of Guadalupe, in Mexico City, where the miraculous image of *la Virgen Morena* is kept. Some of the pilgrims arrive on their knees as a sign of their enormous devotion and gratitude for a favor received. There are many groups of dancers and musicians who have come to offer their art to the virgin. People of all ages and of all regions gather together, physically as well as spiritually. Rituals and celebrations regarded as the most important occur in the Basílica de Guadalupe, although fiestas occur all over the country in honor of Mexico's patron saint.

### St. Lucia Day (Swedish) – December 13th

Throughout Sweden, the Feast of Lucia, or Lucy, is celebrated as a Festival of Lights. Usually on December 13<sup>th</sup>, a young woman dressed in a white gown and wearing a red sash with a crown of lingo berry twigs and blazing candles would go from farm to farm carrying a torch to light her way, bringing baked goods, stopping to visit at each home, and returning home by day break. Every village had its own Lucia. The custom is thought to have begun in some of the richer farming districts of Sweden and still persists, although the crowns are now electric lights.

### Las Posadas (Mexico) – December 16<sup>th</sup> – 24th

Celebrated December 16 – 24<sup>th</sup>, this traditional Mexican festival re-enacts the Biblical Joseph's search for a room at the inn. Each Christmas season, a processional carrying a doll representing the Christ Child and images of Joseph and Mary riding a burro goes through community streets. The processional stops at a previously selected home & asks for lodging for the night. People are invited to read Scriptures and sing Christmas carols called *villancicos*. The doll is left at the chosen home & picked up on the next night when the processional begins again. This continues for eight nights in commemoration of the journey of Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

**Boxing Day (Australian, Canadian, English & Irish)**  
**December 26th**

Boxing Day is a public holiday celebrated in the United Kingdom and most other Commonwealth countries on December 26<sup>th</sup>, the day after Christmas or alternatively on the next weekday after Christmas. There are many theories as to the origins of Boxing Day. One theory is that in England many years ago, it was common practice for the servants to carry boxes to their employers when they arrived for their day's work on the day after Christmas. Their employers would then put coins in the boxes as special end-of-year gifts. This can be compared with the modern day concept of Christmas bonuses. The servants carried boxes for the coins, hence the name Boxing Day.

**Omisoka (Japanese) – December 31st**

Omisoka—the day of New Year's Eve—is the second most important day in Japanese tradition because it is the final day of the old year and the eve of New Year's Day— likewise the most important day of the year. A great deal of cleaning occurs on Omisoka with the purpose of getting ready to welcome in the new year with everything in a fresh, clean state.

**Bodhi Day – December 8th**

Bodhi Day is a Buddhist holiday that commemorates when the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, experienced enlightenment. According to tradition, Siddhartha meditated under a Pipul tree to discover the root of suffering and how to liberate one's self from it. Individuals may choose to commemorate the event through meditation, study of the Dharma, chanting of Buddhist texts, or performing kind acts towards others. Some Buddhists celebrate with a traditional meal of tea, cake, and readings.