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# Special Days

Throughout the year, Australians pause to **commemorate** a wide range of special days. Many of these days have become an important part of the way we see ourselves as Australians. They often help us to understand each other better.

## All Sorts of Special Days

Some of these days have cultural importance, while others have religious meaning. A few days, such as Christmas Day and Easter Sunday, are both religious and cultural events, and can mean different things to different people. Some days mark important historical events, while others are simply about fun and relaxation.



Special days are sometimes public holidays, which means that most people are given a day off from work or school to enjoy them. Some public holidays are for the entire nation, while others are just for particular states, territories or regions.

The many different religious and cultural backgrounds of Australians mean that there are plenty of interesting days throughout the year. This book explores many of the most important days celebrated and commemorated by Australians. It looks at why and how these days are celebrated in Australia.

Christmas Day is a special day that has both religious and cultural importance. It is celebrated in all sorts of different ways by different people, even by people who have no religious beliefs.

## Where We Have Been, and Where We Are Going

Special days help us remember what makes our society special. They remind us of important events that have shaped our nation and the way we see ourselves. They can be days of celebration, or serious days when we remember sad events.

Some special days encourage us to take action to improve our society. For example, International Volunteer Day and Clean Up Australia Day offer people the chance to make a contribution to the community.

Other special days remind us that life should be about fun and relaxation as well as work and study. For example, each year the people of the Northern Territory enjoy a public holiday called Picnic Day – a day to enjoy a picnic with friends or family. The people of Melbourne have a day off every November to enjoy a horse race – the Melbourne Cup.



Special days such as Volunteer Day give people the chance to help the community in a practical way.

Most importantly, special days bring people together and remind us of all that we have in common, and all that we can achieve.



# New Year's Day

New Year's Day is the first day of the year. It is a time for people to look forward and think about the year ahead. New Year's Day is a public holiday across Australia.

## Celebrating New Year's Day in Australia

The beginning of a new year is a time of celebration and reflection for people of all cultures in Australia. It is a time to think back on the year that has passed, and to welcome a new year.

For most people, New Year's Day begins at midnight, during New Year's Eve celebrations. After a "10, 9, 8 ..." countdown to midnight, fireworks are set off and people wish each other the best for the coming year. They often sing together and think about the things they want to achieve in the coming year.

### New Year's Day Fact File

**When?** 1 January

**What is celebrated?** The beginning of a new year

**Where?** All states and territories

Many places in Australia celebrate the new year with fireworks.



## Different Days, Different Calendars

The dates for New Year's Day vary around the world, but in most countries the date is based on the Gregorian calendar. The Gregorian calendar is based on the Julian calendar, which was established by Roman Emperor Julius Caesar in 45 BCE. Until then, the Romans used a calendar based on the sun and the seasons.

Caesar recognised the need for a new calendar. The Roman Empire had become so large that a calendar based on the seasons was no longer ideal, because at any time there would be different seasons in different parts of the empire. Caesar's new calendar established 1 January as the first day of the year, regardless of the season.

In 1582, Pope Gregory XIII made some adjustments to the Julian calendar. This new calendar became known as the Gregorian calendar.

## Auld Lang Syne

Traditionally, the new year has been celebrated by the singing of *Auld Lang Syne*, a poem by the Scottish poet Robert Burns. It is sung to the tune of an old folk song. "Auld lang syne" can be roughly translated as "days gone by" or "old times". The words are:

Should old acquaintance be forgot,  
and never brought to mind?  
Should old acquaintance be forgot,  
and auld lang syne?  
For auld lang syne, my dear,  
for auld lang syne,  
we'll take a cup of kindness yet,  
for auld lang syne.

## New Year's Resolutions

For many people, New Year's Day is a time to make plans for the new year, particularly about things in their lives that they wish to change. People may plan to do more exercise, study harder, eat healthier foods or give up an unhealthy habit. These plans are called resolutions. For many people, they are harder to keep than they first imagined!

# Australia Day



On 26 January 1788, Captain Arthur Phillip landed at Sydney Cove and raised the **Union Jack** – the flag of Great Britain. He brought with him 11 ships full of people. About half of the passengers were crew and half were **convicts**. It was the beginning of the first British colony in Australia, and the beginning of the Australian nation we know today.

## The First Australia Day

The beginning of European settlement in Australia was first celebrated officially in 1818, when the Governor of New South Wales, Lachlan Macquarie, declared a public holiday to mark the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the First Fleet's arrival. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the day was celebrated as Foundation Day or First Landing Day. In 1838, Foundation Day became a public holiday in New South Wales.



The First Fleet arrived in Sydney in 1788.

## Australia Day Fact File

**When?** 26 January

**What is commemorated?** The arrival of the First Fleet in 1788

**Where?** All states and territories

**First held?** 1818

The day was not called Australia Day until 1935, when all of the states and territories agreed to give the day this name. Until this time, each state had a celebration day for its own founding. In 1994, the day became a national public holiday.

## Australia Day Today

On Australia Day, many Australians join together to celebrate the good things about Australia and about being Australian.



The Australia Day Thong Challenge is held at five beaches around Australia. Participants celebrate the day by racing each other on inflatable thongs!

It is a day to reflect on what we have achieved and to think about ways we can all contribute to make Australia even better.

Many Australians attend an organised Australia Day community event, such as a parade or a community picnic. Others get together with family and friends to celebrate the day at their own picnics or barbecues.

Many migrants in Australia choose Australia Day to become Australian **citizens**. They do this at citizenship ceremonies in which they pledge their loyalty to Australia, its people and its laws. Another important Australia Day event is the presentation of Australia Day Honours. These are awards given to people who have made great achievements in particular fields, or have given outstanding service to the community.

## Should We Change the Date?

Many people argue that celebrating Australia's national day on 26 January is insensitive to Australia's Indigenous people. For many Indigenous Australians, this date represents the destruction of their way of life and loss of their traditional lands. Many Australians of all backgrounds think we should consider choosing a date that is not associated with painful events for the first Australians. Because of the date of the **commemoration**, many Australians – especially Indigenous Australians – refer to Australia Day as Invasion Day.



# Chinese New Year

Chinese New Year celebrates the beginning of a new year on the Chinese calendar. In China, New Year's Day is part of a 15-day celebration. It is thought to have been celebrated for about 5000 years.

## How Chinese New Year Is Celebrated

Chinese New Year is celebrated in many ways. Each day of the festival has a particular significance and is celebrated in a certain way. On New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, people reunite with their families, especially their older relatives. Red clothes are worn, as red represents fire and is believed to drive away bad luck. The last day of the festival is known as the Lantern Festival. In the evening, people parade on the streets with lanterns and light candles to help lost spirits find their way home.



## Chinese New Year Fact File

**When?** January/February

**What is celebrated?** The beginning of a new year on the Chinese calendar

**Where?** China and around the world

## Chinese New Year in Australia

In Australia, Chinese New Year is a colourful event for the whole community to enjoy. Fireworks are set off to scare away evil spirits, and dragon dances are performed with loud percussion music. These are believed to bring good luck in the new year, while scaring away evil spirits. The world's longest processional dragon, the Millennium Dragon, is used in celebrations in Melbourne. It takes 200 people to carry it in a procession.

## The Chinese Dragon

Dragons play an important role in Chinese New Year celebrations. Chinese dragons are a symbol of good luck rather than evil. They are a symbol of power, particularly of control over natural forces such as wind and water. The dragon is a symbol in Chinese **astrology**. It is thought to be very good luck to be born in the year of the dragon, which comes around every 12 years.

