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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 Clean Up Australia 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.

Schools Tree Day

Schools Tree Day is a day on which school students across Australia learn about planting and caring for trees. It is held on the last Friday in July each year.

Terrific Trees!

Trees are incredibly important to the environment. Not only do they look beautiful, they also produce oxygen and help remove **carbon dioxide** from the air. Carbon dioxide is believed to contribute to **global warming**, so trees do us a great service each day. Trees also provide food and shelter for all sorts of wildlife.

Schools Tree Day aims to teach young people about the benefits provided by trees. It also aims to teach school students about environmental problems, and about the ways that tree planting can help solve them.

Schools Tree Day Fact File

When? Last Friday in July

Why? To encourage the planting and care of trees, and awareness of the environment

Where? All states and territories



Tree planting is one of many activities that students enjoy on Schools Tree Day.

Other Ways to Support Trees

Schools Tree Day is not just about encouraging students to plant trees – there are many other activities students can do to show their support for trees. Some schools invite park rangers and other bush care workers to speak to students, particularly about plants of the local area. Other schools arrange mobile zoos to visit, so students can learn about native wildlife and the best ways to look after it. Other schools take their students on bush walks or set up a vegetable garden.

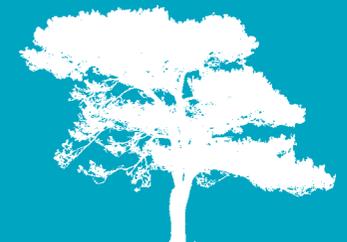
Tree Troopers

To support the trees in their local area, some schools participate in the Tree Troopers program. In this program, small groups of students (known as Tree Troopers) attend a training session run by environmental workers. They learn all about native trees and the best conditions for them to grow. Students can then share this knowledge with their fellow students. They can lead programs in their schools to encourage the planting of more native trees and to look after the trees they already have in their school grounds.

The Wonders of Trees

Trees provide all sorts of benefits. Here are some you may not be aware of:

- Trees help keep cities cool by providing shade, and by the water **vapour** they release through their leaves.
- Trees act as an air filter, absorbing polluting gases from the air.
- The trunks of old trees act as time capsules, telling us about the changes in climate and environment in the area.
- The shade from trees helps to protect city roads and footpaths, making repairs needed less often.
- Children who live in tree-lined streets are less likely to develop **asthma**.



National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day

National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day is a day to support and celebrate the Indigenous children of Australia. It has been held on 4 August each year since 1988.

National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day Fact File

When? 4 August

What is celebrated? The lives of Australia's Indigenous children

Where? All states and territories

First held? 1988

Australia's Indigenous Children

Australia's Indigenous children are a link to some of the world's oldest surviving cultures. Indigenous communities have a younger **median** age than the general population. This means that there are generally more younger people than older people in Indigenous communities.

The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day is run by the **Secretariat** of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care. The secretariat is an organisation that was formed in 1981 to protect the welfare of Aboriginal and Islander children and families, and to speak on their behalf. Its main goals are to ensure that children are kept safe from harm, that they enjoy their identity as Indigenous Australians and are proud of their identity. It aims to keep children speaking their traditional languages and to learn about their culture.

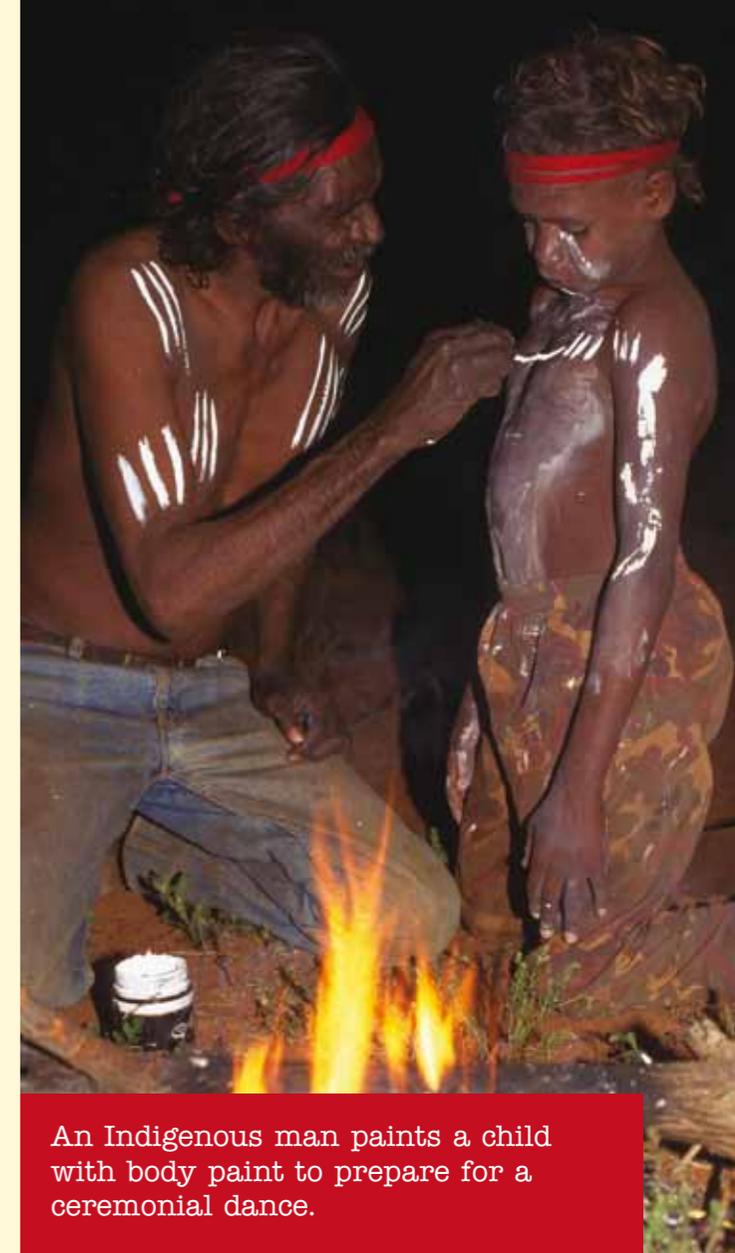
Celebrating the Day

The day is celebrated in several ways by schools and community organisations. Some of the most popular ways include lunches and morning teas, art exhibitions, award presentations and arts and craft activities. Games and sports are popular too, as well as storytelling by local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander elders. The Bunjun Aboriginal cooperative in New South Wales organises rainforest walks and games. Children are taught to make wall hangings from items found in the bush, as well as methods of traditional weaving.

The day has a different theme each year. In 2011, the theme was "From Small to Big: Growing Stronger Every Day". The 2010 theme was "Value My Culture, Value Me".

Young Indigenous People

Young Indigenous Australians face more problems than most other young Australians. About a quarter of Indigenous young people (aged up to 24 years) live in remote areas, where access to education and health services is more limited. Indigenous **infant mortality** rates are about twice as high as for the general population. Indigenous children also suffer infectious diseases and **respiratory** problems at about twice the rate of other Australian children.



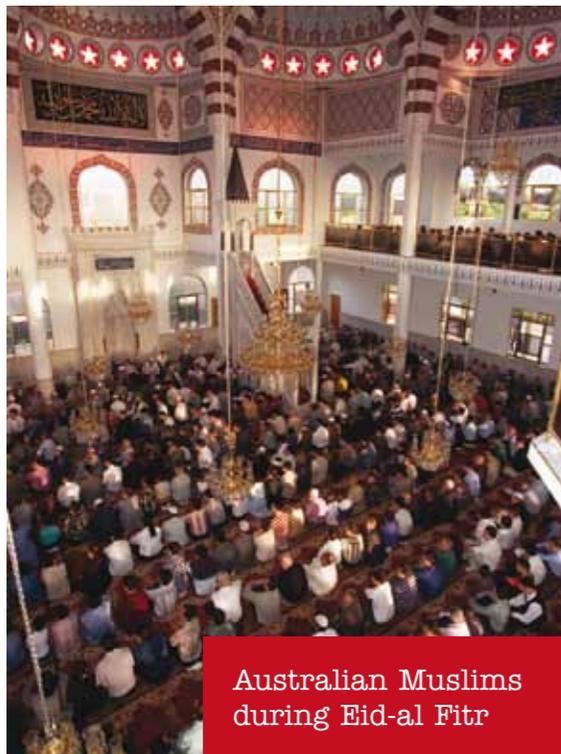
An Indigenous man paints a child with body paint to prepare for a ceremonial dance.

Eid al-Fitr

Eid al-Fitr (the Festival of **Fast-Breaking**) is an **Islamic** festival that celebrates the end of the holy month of Ramadan. It is a happy time for **Muslims**, as most of them have been fasting during the month of Ramadan.

Ramadan

Ramadan is the holiest month of the year for Muslims around the world. It is the ninth month on the Islamic calendar, and is a time for spiritual reflection and fasting. During this time, Muslims spend a lot of time reading their holy book, the Koran, and focusing on helping other people in need.



Australian Muslims during Eid-al Fitr

Eid al-Fitr Fact File

When? Varying dates (August in 2012–2013, July in 2014–2015)

What is celebrated? The end of the month of Ramadan

Where? All states and territories; Islamic communities around the world

Fasting

Muslims fast during the **sacred** month of Ramadan. This means they give up food and drink during daylight hours for the entire month. Children and elderly or sick people are not required to fast during Ramadan. While fasting, Muslims aim to develop spiritually. They try to avoid bad thoughts, actions and words and focus on prayer and meditation.

Festival Time

Muslims celebrate the end of Ramadan with the Eid al-Fitr festival. They exchange greeting cards and wish each other well. They also celebrate with a special meal and give money to the poor. It is important for Muslims to help less fortunate Muslims celebrate the festival as well. In Australia, many Muslims donate to Muslims in poorer countries to help them enjoy the festival too.

On the first day of the Eid, people wear clean clothes and pray at the **mosque** together. They wish each other well as they leave the mosque, and when they return home, they enjoy a special meal with their families. During the festival, they also visit family and friends and exchange gifts. The festival continues for three days.

Muslims in Australia

Muslim people have been a part of Australian society since the earliest fleets of settlers and convicts arrived in the late 1700s. Muslims were among the passengers on these ships, mostly coming from British territories in coastal Africa. In the 1800s, Muslims from Afghanistan arrived with camels and helped open up the vast Australian continent to explorers, and communication links such as the **overland telegraph line** from Adelaide to Darwin. In the 20th century, immigration from Muslim countries grew, particularly after World War II (1939–1945). Muslim Australians contribute to Australian life in many fields, such as business, sport and technology.

Muslim people exchange greeting cards at the end of Ramadan.

