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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.

Pink Ribbon Day

Pink Ribbon Day is a day when people wear pink ribbons to show their support for people with breast cancer and to raise awareness about the disease. It is also an important fundraising day. On Pink Ribbon Day, money is raised to support women with breast cancer and to fund research into finding a cure.

A Disease that Touches Everyone

Breast cancer is a disease that touches most people's lives, either directly or through friends or relatives. Each year, more than 12 000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer and more than 2500 women lose their lives to the disease. One in every nine Australian women will be diagnosed with breast cancer by the age of 85.

Pink Ribbon Day is organised by the Cancer Council, a national organisation that works to advance the treatment and prevention of cancer, and to support people who are fighting the disease. The day is a way of spreading awareness about the disease and of encouraging women to have regular check-ups.

Pink Ribbon Day Fact File

When? Fourth Monday in October

Why? To raise awareness of breast cancer; to raise money to support those who have the disease and to find a cure

Where? All states and territories



The pink ribbon is a powerful symbol of hope in the fight against breast cancer.



This boat race is one of many events held on Pink Ribbon Day.

The Cancer Council encourages everyone to organise their own events to raise funds to fight breast cancer. These could be morning teas, lunches, raffles or sporting events.

Not Just Ribbons

For people who do not want to wear a ribbon, there are plenty of other ways to show support for the cause. Other Pink Ribbon Day products include t-shirts, pens, lapel pins, cookie cutters and teddy bears.

Supporting Women with Breast Cancer

The Cancer Council offers support services for women with breast cancer. These include:

- meditation DVDs to help women who are going through treatment
- telephone support groups, which allow women with the disease to support each other
- phone counselling services
- research into causes and possible cures for breast cancer
- accommodation for women who have to travel far from home for cancer treatment
- financial help for women with cancer who are unable to work and pay their bills.



The Pink Ribbon

The pink ribbon was first used as a symbol for breast cancer awareness in the USA in 1991. Two women, Alexandra Penney and Evelyn Lauder, decided that the ribbon would be an ideal symbol for breast cancer awareness. Penney, a magazine editor, and Lauder, from the Estée Lauder cosmetic company, joined forces to distribute thousands of ribbons and spread awareness about breast cancer.

Eid al-Ad ha

Eid al-Ad ha is one of the most important days on the **Islamic** calendar. It begins a four-day festival that **commemorates** the strong faith of Ibrahim (Abraham), a **prophet** who was willing to sacrifice his own son to prove his obedience to God.

Ibrahim's Test of Faith

Eid al-Ad ha is Arabic for "Festival of the Sacrifice". The sacrifice it commemorates is found in the Islamic holy book, the Koran.

Muslims believe that Allah (God) put the prophet Ibrahim's faith to the test in a very difficult way – by asking him to sacrifice his own son, Ishmael. Ibrahim prepared to carry out the sacrifice, proving that he was willing to obey Allah. Before Ibrahim carried out the sacrifice, Allah stopped him and gave him a sheep to sacrifice instead.

Eid al-Ad ha Fact File

When? Different dates each year (October in 2012–2014)

What is commemorated? Ibrahim's faith and willingness to make a difficult sacrifice

Where? All states and territories; other countries where Muslims live

For Muslims, Ibrahim's willingness to make such a sacrifice is an inspiring example of his love for Allah, and of **submission** to Allah's will. The story of Ibrahim's sacrifice is also found in the Jewish and Christian holy book, the Bible. In this version of the story, the child to be sacrificed by Abraham (Ibrahim) is Ishmael's brother, Isaac.

The Festival

Eid al-Ad ha is a time of peace, respect, giving and receiving. The day begins with prayer at the **mosque**. When prayer is finished, families and friends at the mosque hug and kiss and often share a meal together.

Later, they exchange gifts and meet other friends and family. At Eid al-Ad ha, many Muslims also make donations to the poor and needy.



Members of the Sydney Muslim community celebrating Eid al-Ad ha at the Lakemba Mosque.

Another part of Eid al-Ad ha is the sacrifice of an animal such as a lamb. This is done as an act of thanksgiving for God's mercy. Some of the meat from the animal is donated to charity.

The Hajj

Eid al-Ad ha occurs on the tenth day of the yearly Muslim **pilgrimage** to Mecca, in Saudi Arabia. The pilgrimage is called the Hajj. All Muslims are required to perform the Hajj once in their lives if they are able. Many Australian Muslims travel to Mecca before Eid al-Ad ha.



The Star and the Crescent

Although there are no official symbols of Islam, over the years certain symbols have become associated with the religion. Best known is the star and the crescent, seen on the flag of Pakistan. Some Muslims object to the use of this symbol, as it is thought to have come from religions that believed in many different gods.

Diwali

Diwali, also known as Deepavali or the Festival of Lights, is a **Hindu** celebration of the victory of good over evil. Homes and buildings are lit up with lamps or coloured lights, and firecrackers are set off. It is an important festival for many people of Indian background, and spreads over five days. It is also celebrated by people of the **Sikh** faith as well as Hindus.

Festival of Lights

Diwali is the year's most important festival for Hindus. The word Diwali is short for "Deepavali", which means "rows of lamps" in Sanskrit – an ancient language of India. People wear new clothes and light clay lamps, called *diya*, which they place in their homes to encourage the goddess Lakshmi to visit and bring prosperity and good luck. People also welcome Lakshmi with chalk or sand drawings on their doorsteps. These drawings are known as *rangoli*.

The *diya* lamps are also lit in honour of the Lord Rama and his wife Sita, in the tradition of lighting their way and welcoming them back from 14 years in **exile**. Colourful paper lanterns are lit, too. These are called *kandils*.

Diwali Fact File

When? Between late October and mid-November

What is celebrated? The triumph of good over evil and the blessings given by Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and beauty

Where? India and other countries to which Indians have migrated



Diya lamps

In Australia and other countries outside of India, Diwali is both a religious festival and a celebration of national identity. In recent years, it has been celebrated with large events for the whole community at Federation Square in Melbourne and Parramatta Stadium in Sydney.

The Five Days of Diwali

Diwali is a five-day festival. Each day has its own significance. For example, the first and third days of the festival are dedicated to the worship of Lakshmi. On the final day of the festival, the relationship between brothers and sisters is honoured.

Diwali is also a time of generosity. People give each other gifts and make donations to charity. Throughout the festival, firecrackers are set off, gifts are exchanged and time is spent with friends and family.

The Spiritual Meanings of Light

Diwali is all about light. For Hindus, the festival of light also has a deeper meaning – it is about each person's inner light of goodness and wisdom. The lights of Diwali symbolise the victory of good over evil, but also the light of a higher knowledge that brings peace, joy and **compassion**.



Performers taking part in Diwali celebrations