

A festive December: Honouring diverse celebrations

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The holiday season is a time to celebrate our diverse Seneca Polytechnic community, as well as many religious and cultural practices and traditions.

Recognizing the rich tapestry of our communities allows us to show respect and understanding for the different ways people find meaning, joy and connection. Learn more about different holidays occurring this month.

Shab-e Yalda – Dec. 20

Shab-e Yalda, also known as Yalda Night or Chelleh Night, is an ancient festival celebrated on the winter solstice, marking the longest and darkest night of the year. This celebration is deeply rooted in Iran and is also observed in Iraq, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan and other countries. Customs to emphasize warmth and togetherness are practised and include reading poetry, eating fruit and nuts, lighting candles and storytelling.

Winter Solstice – Dec. 21

The Winter Solstice, celebrated by many Indigenous cultures, marks the shortest day and longest night of the year in the Northern Hemisphere. It is a time for reflection, renewal and honouring the cycles of nature. Many Indigenous communities hold ceremonies that include storytelling, drumming and dancing to welcome the return of the light and to celebrate the resilience of their cultures.

Dongzhi Festival – Dec. 21

The Dongzhi Festival is a celebration of the winter solstice that brings families together to honour their ancestors, enjoy special foods and embrace the promise of longer, brighter days ahead. This ancient festival continues to hold cultural significance, reminding us of the enduring balance between darkness and light and the cyclical nature of life. Dongzhi is practised in China, Taiwan, Vietnam and other East and Southeast Asian countries.

Yule – Dec. 21

Yule marks the winter solstice and the return of longer days. Rooted in pagan traditions, this ancient festival involves lighting Yule logs, decorating trees and feasting. It symbolizes rebirth and renewal, bringing warmth and hope during the darkest time of the year.

Hanukkah – Dec. 25 to Jan. 2

Hanukkah (or Chanukah), also known as the Festival of Lights, is an eight-day Jewish holiday that celebrates the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. Each night, a candle is lit on the menorah, a nine-branched candelabrum. Festivities also include singing Hanukkah songs, playing dreidel and enjoying traditional foods such as latkes and sufganiyot. Hanukkah is a celebration of faith, resilience and the miracle of light.

Christmas – Dec. 25

Christmas commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ. It is celebrated religiously by Christians and culturally by many non-Christians. Customs may include a mix of Christian and secular traditions such as attending church services, exchanging gifts, decorating Christmas trees and sharing festive meals with family and friends. Christmas is a time of joy, generosity and goodwill.

Kwanzaa – Dec. 26 – Jan. 1

Kwanzaa is a week-long celebration honouring African heritage and culture, observed from Dec. 26 to Jan. 1. Created by Dr. Maulana Karenga in 1966, Kwanzaa focuses on seven principles, including unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity and faith. The holiday includes lighting the kinara, storytelling and cultural performances.

Zarathosht Diso – Dec. 26

Zarathosht Diso is a Zoroastrian holiday commemorating the death of the prophet Zoroaster. It is a day of mourning and reflection, observed with prayers and rituals at fire temples. Zoroastrians honour Zoroaster's teachings and his contributions to their faith, emphasizing the importance of good thoughts, words and deeds.

However you spend your winter break, we wish you all the very best. And while this is a festive season, the holidays can also be a challenging time for some. Seneca has an [Employee and Family Assistance Program \(EFAP\)](#) that offers confidential and voluntary support services. Students and employees can also access [24/7 supports and community resources](#).

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