

# Chinese New Year - January

Based on a lunar calendar as opposed to the western Gregorian calendar. Each year is symbolised by a different animal - 2005 was the year of the Rooster (otherwise known as the Green Chicken). Legend dictates that before leaving earth, Buddha requested a meeting with all the animals. Only 12 animals came to meet him. Buddha named a year after each animal who came. Traditional preparations include cleaning houses and buying new clothes. Red clothes are worn and children are given "lucky" money in red envelopes. According to the Chinese, red symbolises fire and is believed to drive away bad luck.

# Shrove Tuesday – February

This means to confess to a punishable or reprehensible deed. It is the last day before the Christian period of Lent, a time of abstinence when people give things up. It is therefore an opportunity to indulge in and use up foods which are banned during Lent, such as eggs, butter, and fat. Consequently, pancakes are normally eaten. It is otherwise known as Pancake Day in the UK, and Mardis Gras in France (which translates into Grease or Fat Tuesday).

# Vaisakhi - April

This is one of the most important festivals in the Sikh calendar and celebrates the Sikh New Year and the founding of the Khalsa. The story of the Khalsa begins with Guru Teg Behadur who disagreed with many of the Hindu teachings and was publicly beheaded by the Mughal leaders.

The festival is marked with street processions where the Sikh holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib, is carried in his honour and is led by five men traditionally dressed as Panj Piores. There are also religious ceremonies involving singing and chanting

# Wesak - May

This celebration is usually held on the full moon in May. It celebrates the birth, enlightenment and in some traditions, death of Buddha. He is the most important figure in the Buddhist religion.

It is a colourful festival. Celebrations include chanting, singing and praying, cleaning and decorating the home. Often, water is poured over the shoulders of the Buddha to serve as a reminder to purify the mind from evil. Gifts are taken to an altar to be offered to the Buddha to show respect to him and to his teachings.

# Glastonbury Festival - June

The first festival took place on a farm in a small village called Pilton. It was held in September of 1970 and was called Pilton Festival. The man who created the festival, Michael Eavis, was inspired by a nearby festival he had visited. The following year, a man named Andrew Kerr wanted to organize a "fair in the medieval tradition" around the summer solstice. Michael Eavis was happy to host the event. A stage shaped like a pyramid was built and 12,000 people attended. There was not another festival until 1979.

# American Day of Independence - July

This is considered to be the birthday of the United States of America and is celebrated each year with fireworks displays, parades, family gatherings and concerts.

# Notting Hill Carnival - August

Groups of people from all over the world emigrated to the UK after the second world war. Included in this were immigrants from the Caribbean. The carnival tradition was very strong in this part of the world, especially in Trinidad.

In 1958 a group of West Indian locals organized a Caribbean-style carnival through the streets of London. The first Carnival actually took place inside the St Pancras Town Hall.

# Ramadan – September - October

The month of fasting for Muslims. It is the ninth month of the Muslim calendar. In the evening and in the morning before the sun comes up, they eat small meals. During this month, they take extra time for family and spiritual growth.

# Oktoberfest - October

The mother of all beer drinking festivals held in Munich every year. Six million litres of beer are consumed in huge beer tents. That is quite a lot of beer so the locals generously host a few million tourists to help celebrate.

# Hanukkah - December

This is the Jewish festival of light which begins on the 25th day of the Jewish month Kislev, at sundown, and lasts for 8 days. Celebrations include lighting candles in a special holder called a 'Menorah'. Each night another candle is added. Nine candles are lit by the eighth day, including the central candle

# Eid ul Fitr – October

This festival follows the month of Ramadan (the month of fasting) in the Islamic calendar. It is a celebration at the end of fasting and to thank Allah for the strength he gave them throughout fasting