



Racial & Religious Harmony Circle

Engagement Toolkit



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WWW.HARMONYCIRCLE.SG



VISION

To be networks of trust that unite people regardless of race and religion.

MISSION

TO BUILD

Build familiarity and strengthen relationships among and between ethnic, religious and community leaders.

TO PROMOTE

Promote mutual understanding and appreciation of the different religions, cultures, and practices among Singaporeans.

TO FACILITATE

Facilitate collaborations among and between ethnic, religion, and community groups for social and community causes.

TO MAINTAIN

Maintain social cohesion and instil solidarity in times of racial and religious tensions and conflicts.

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CORE VALUES

To accomplish our mission, the following core values and beliefs will guide our actions and decisions.

COOPERATION

We will work with each other to serve the larger community. In doing so, we will strengthen trust and friendship amongst ourselves and our communities through more interactions and shared experiences.

.....

HARMONY

We are amicable and comfortable in each other's company and will work towards enlarging our common space.

.....

RESPECT

We are considerate and sensitive towards each other, and respect each other's religion, culture, and practices. We will also strive to inculcate this value in our respective communities.

.....

TRUST

We value our friendship and will stand by each other in times of need. We place confidence in each other to act responsibly in the best interest of the larger community, regardless of race or religion.



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Racial & Religious Harmony Circle

The Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circle (IRCC), renamed to the Racial and Religious Harmony Circle on 30 July 2022, was formed in 2002 against the backdrop of the September 11 attacks. It serves as a local-level platform to promote racial and religious harmony in Singapore, with presence in every constituency.

The Harmony Circle also acts as the bridge between religious, ethnic and community groups by organising inter-faith and inter-ethnic activities. Through these activities, we seek to deepen Singaporeans' understanding of the various faith, beliefs, and practices.

To date, the Harmony Circle has more than 1,700 active members and alumni comprising religious leaders and community partners and has reached out to an estimated 1,400 religious and community organisations.

2002

Announced the establishment of Inter-Racial Confidence Circle (IRCC) by then-Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong with the first IRCC formed on 3 March 2002 in Joo Chiat.

2006

IRCC was repositioned under MCYS Cluster.

2007

Renamed to "Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circle" to reflect the new role as important bridges between religious groups and local constituencies.

2008

Launch of the IRCC logo to reflect values of trust, respect, harmony and cooperation among different races and religions in Singapore.



2009

Unveiled the IRCC Vision, Mission and Core Values.

2012

IRCC shifted from MCYS to MCCY on 1 Nov 2012 and launched IRCC Cares.

2022

Celebrated IRCC's 20th anniversary and rebranded to "Racial & Religious Harmony Circle" to reflect the broader mission to promote racial and religious harmony in Singapore.



2023

Official launch of the Racial & Religious Harmony Circle logo.



Racial & Religious
**HARMONY
CIRCLE**

Different Races. Many Beliefs. One Singapore.

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Section 2

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Message From Minister



Dear Harmony Circle Leaders,

More than 20 years on, our Harmony Circle's mission continues to be relevant and critical to Singapore as we face new challenges that threaten to weaken the threads of our social fabric. Your role in the Harmony Circle remains crucial in guiding our society through this rapidly changing environment, such that Singapore and Singaporeans remain united in building our future together.

With evolving security threats and social attitudes, we must refresh our Harmony Circle with programmes that strengthen racial and religious harmony, enabled by greater outreach, more partnerships and diverse membership, structured training, and new capabilities.

This toolkit is designed to help our Harmony Circle leaders grow their Harmony Circle as important champions of social cohesion in our communities, both during peacetime and in crisis. It contains practical tools and relevant knowledge for our Harmony Circles to perform their roles effectively.

I hope that you will find this toolkit to be a useful guide for your Harmony Circle. Do share with MCCY any feedback or suggestions you may have about this toolkit, as we want it to capture your experience and make this relevant for Harmony Circle leaders in the years ahead.

I would like to thank you for your commitment to serve in our Harmony Circle, and I look forward to our continued partnership in promoting racial and religious harmony in Singapore.

Yours Sincerely,

MR EDWIN TONG

Minister for Culture, Community and Youth
and Second Minister for Law

Section 1

Role & Responsibilities

The Harmony Circle play a critical role in building trust, understanding and confidence among the various communities in peacetime and in times of crisis or occasional conflicts that may arise.

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ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

community networks
champions who
inter-ethnic
inter-faith
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community leaders
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Dear Harmony Circle,

More than 20 years ago, I was a young and critical to Singapore. I saw the threads of our nation in guiding our social Singapore and Singapore.

With evolving social Harmony Circle was enabled by greater structured training.

This toolkit is designed for Harmony Circle as important both during peace and knowledge for our.

I hope that you will use Harmony Circle. Do share with this toolkit, as we Harmony Circle learn.

I would like to thank and I look forward to religious harmony.

Yours Sincerely,

MR EDWIN TONG
Minister for Culture and Second Minister



Key Roles of The Harmony Circle



Community outreach platforms to strengthen resilience and unity by gathering communities to forge shared experiences and build mutual trust and crisis preparedness.

Community touch points to conduct ground sensing to pre-empt, advise and amicably resolve racial and religious issues on the ground.

Community networks of champions who foster inter-ethnic and inter-faith understanding and goodwill among community leaders and influencers.

Duties of The Executive Committee (EXCO)

Each Harmony Circle will be led by an Exco comprising members holding the positions of Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson(s), Secretary and Assistant Secretary.





Key duties of respective Exco members:

CHAIRPERSON AND VICE-CHAIRPERSON

- Preside all meetings
- Monitor progress of workplans and ensure plans are implemented
- Disseminate information related to race and religion matters at the community level
- Regular engagements with religious and community leaders involving members

SECRETARY AND ASSISTANT SECRETARY

- Assist in the liaising of communications where necessary between Harmony Circle and stakeholders
- Document notes of meetings and all records pertaining to office

Roles of The Harmony Circle During A Crisis

Crisis incidents can be defined as unplanned, undesired events, which have the potential to result in death, ill health, injury, property damage or other losses.



BEFORE CRISIS

- Foster relationships, partnerships, and trust between communities.
- Maintain awareness of racial, religious, and social issues.
- Leverage and strengthen social infrastructures, networks, and resources.



DURING CRISIS

Activation

- Manage operations of the GRC Harmony Circle Operations Centre (GHOC)*, if activated.

Community Outreach

- Disseminate key messages and accurate information.
- Plan and implement actions to diffuse religious or racial tensions.
- Monitor, analyse and feedback ground sentiments to support the return to normalcy.

Crises vary by their nature and the level of response required. Whilst not all crises will originate from an issue relating to racial or religious harmony, they may have the potential to threaten communal harmony in Singapore.

In times of crises, especially when incidents involve racial and religious overtones, the Harmony Circle shall be prompt to communicate with their ground networks and assist to respond in a timely manner. Messages conveyed must be consistent while ensuring that racial and religious sensitivities are observed. The role of our Harmony Circle is critical in the recovery process for various communities and the nation to return to normalcy.

* The Harmony Circle crisis response model has been reviewed and the operations structure has been revamped from divisional-level to GRC-level operations for better sustainability and synergies. Each of the GHOCs will be expected to complete a Tabletop Exercise (TTX) and Crisis Response Exercise (CRX) during their term of appointment to build up their capabilities to deal with crises and be familiar with their roles.



POST CRISIS

- Plan, organise and implement trust and confidence re-building programmes to facilitate a return to normalcy.
- Monitor ground sentiments



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Report Suspected Cases of Self-radicalisation

Cases of self-radicalisation are not new nor unprecedented in Singapore. As part of the national SGSecure movement, we encourage members to report early and allow relevant authorities to intervene in time.



SOME BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS INCLUDE:

- Frequent accessing of extremist content (online)
- Displaying signs/ symbols in support of violent extremists
- Sharing of extremist views

Further information on signs and tell-tale indicators of self-radicalisation can be found by scanning the QR code.



[SGSECURE.GOV.SG](https://sgsecure.gov.sg)

Section 2

Capability Development

To ensure that members are equipped with the right skillsets and knowledge, a series of programmes have been developed to facilitate the upskilling of all members.

1.
PROGRAMMES
(MEMBERS)

CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT



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ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

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Capability Development Roadmap

1.
BASELINE PROGRAMMES
(FOR ALL MEMBERS)

2.
ADVANCED PROGRAMMES
(FOR EXCO)

CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT

1. BASELINE

- Crisis Preparedness
- Race & Religion 101
- Mediation 101
- Public Engagement Techniques
- Social Media Engagement

2. ADVANCED

- Advanced Race & Religion, Mediation and Public Engagement
- Media Spokesperson
- Leadership Skills
- Creative Programming
- Minutes Writing



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HARMONYCIRCLE
TRAININGPROG

Activities of The Harmony Circle

Harmony Circles also organise various activities with the aim to engage the public on inter-racial and inter-faith issues, and promote deeper understanding and acceptance of all racial and religious groups among the community.



The following are examples of Cohesion, Cares and Education programmes:

SOCIAL COHESION

Encourage interaction among different communities through celebration of cultural festivals, sports, arts, etc

- **Racial and Religious Harmony Month (Compulsory)**
- Sports
- Arts and Culture (including racial and religious festivals)

Harmony Circles will be encouraged to organise at least 3 activities each year during their term of office. These activities should include:

- 1 activity in conjunction with racial and religious harmony month in July
- 2 other activities of the Harmony Circle's choice during the year

NOTE

MCCY encourages Harmony Circle to collaborate with one another, as well as, community and religious organisations, on local and GRC-level programmes.



HARMONY CIRCLE CARES

Provide support to the vulnerable community regardless of their background

- Community Service Projects (e.g. distribution of care packs/ meals/ collaborations with eldercare centres)



EDUCATIONAL

Promote knowledge sharing across different races and religions through interfaith dialogues, tours, and learning journeys

- Interfaith dialogues
- Learning Journeys

Crisis Preparedness

In addition to learning about the various commonly practiced religions, members are expected to learn relevant emergency preparedness skills and knowledge to help calm the public, maintain social cohesion, and manage potential ground conflicts when necessary.





➤ Harmony Circle Operations Centre Training



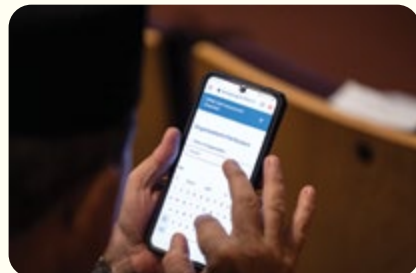
While it is important to prepare and involve the Harmony Circles before and during crisis, the work of our Harmony Circles in the aftermath of crisis is equally crucial. Preparations for recovery (post crisis) should start once ground tensions have eased and physical conflict has reduced or stopped. Harmony Circles should assess the ground sentiments within their constituencies and make recommendations on appropriate recovery activities which aid the community to return to normalcy and potentially repair ties that were strained due to the crisis incidents.



↗ Counter Terrorism Seminar

With those considerations in mind, MCCY will provide the resources required for Harmony Circles to maintain a high level of crisis-readiness. At the basic level, MCCY will organise:

- Table-top Exercise (TTX) and Crisis Response Exercise (CRX) to support the operations of GHOC
- Counter-Terrorism Seminars to facilitate understanding on the security landscape, psychological first aid and countering online radicalization



↗ CPRO Checklist

Section 3

Situational Guides & Resource Directory

Introduction to commonly faced situations and background information on the various faith and festivals in Singapore.

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➤ Counter Terrorism

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- Table-top Exercise (CR)
- Counter-Terr understanding psychological radicalization



Situational Guides

ENGAGEMENTS WITH RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS

One of Harmony Circles' key roles is to engage religious leaders within their division to foster close ties and promote understanding of different faiths within the community. Hence, members are expected to conduct regular visits to the religious organisations.

CONSIDERATIONS PRIOR TO ENGAGEMENTS

- Level of understanding of the religion and religious organisation
- Any known sensitivities

COMMUNITY DISPUTES

Harmony Circles may occasionally be requested to support mediation of R&R community disputes as subject-matter experts on the various faith practices and sensitivities.

Examples of disputes include:

- Incense / noise pollution from neighbouring units / nearby religious organisations
- Parking spillover from religious organisation premises

HOW TO RESOLVE

- Harmony Circle Chairperson and/or representatives from the religious organisations may attend to such cases together with community stakeholders (e.g. Grassroots Adviser and leaders).
- Understand the concerns and explain the context for such religious practices.
- Propose possible solutions to mitigate future occurrence.

Harmony Circle Resources

The guide below outline the processes to (i) onboard new members into the Harmony Circle during the term and (ii) request to use the Harmony Circle's funds.

ONBOARDING OF NEW MEMBERS

New members can be appointed into the Harmony Circle throughout the term subjected to Adviser's endorsement. Refer to below steps for an overview of the process:

- i. Chairperson and/or members may identify new potential members through their engagement with the community or through their affiliated organisations.
- ii. Chairperson and/or members to inform MCCY Engagement Officer (EO) on the status of the prospective member (i.e. to participate as observer or to be officially appointed as member).
- iii. Prospective member to submit the Harmony Circle membership form. Chairperson to seek Adviser's endorsement over email with MCCY (EO) in the loop.

HARMONY CIRCLE FUNDING REQUEST

Each Harmony Circle is provided \$10,000 per financial year to support the organisation of R&R programmes. These activities can be held in collaboration with community partners and should meet the objectives below:

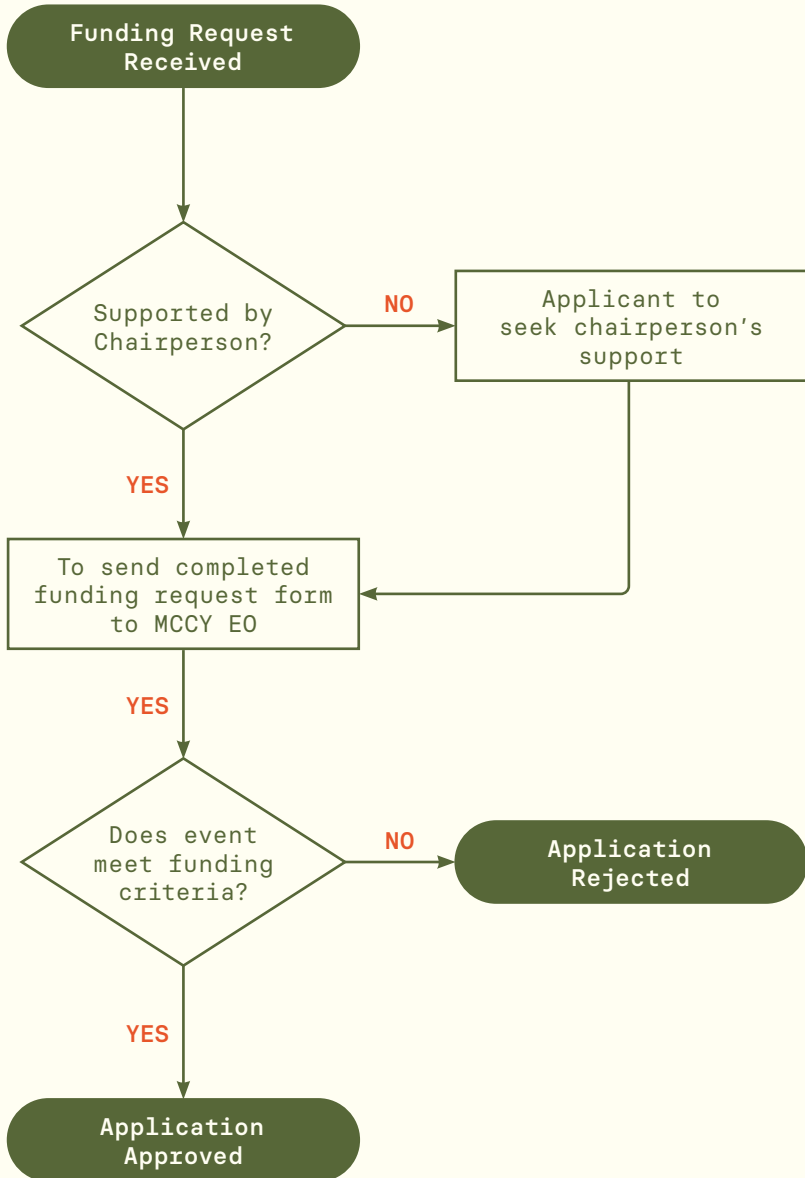
- i. Build familiarity and strengthen relationship among and between ethnic, religious and community leaders;
- ii. Promote mutual understanding and appreciation of the different religions, cultures and practices among Singaporeans;
- iii. Facilitate collaboration among and between ethnic, religious and community groups for social and community causes

NOTE

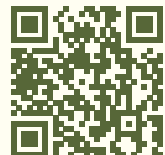
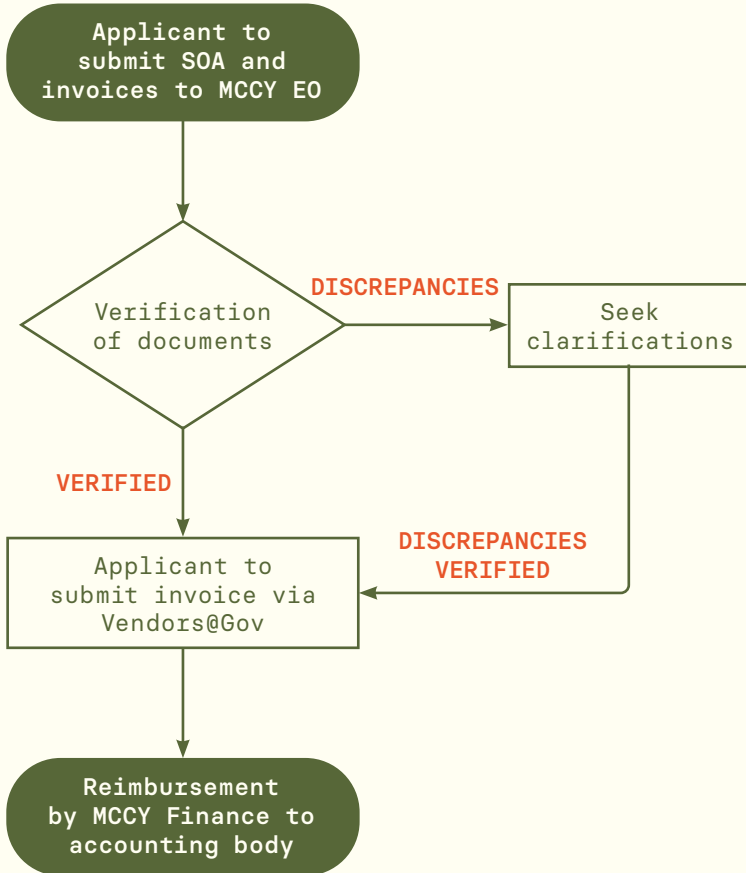
The accounting body should be an organisation and payments cannot be made to individuals.



PRE-EVENT FUNDING REQUEST PROCESS



POST EVENT REIMBURSEMENT PROCESS



GOV.SG/
HARMONYCIRCLE
MATERIALS

Bahá'í

Faith

Throughout history, God has sent to humanity a series of divine educators—known as Manifestations of God—whose teachings have provided the basis for the advancement of civilization. Bahá'u'lláh, the latest of these Messengers, explained that the religions of the world come from the same source and are in essence successive chapters of one religion from God. Bahá'ís believe the crucial need facing humanity is to find a unifying vision of the future of society and of the nature and purpose of life. Such a vision unfolds in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh.

WORSHIP

Bahá'ís believe that the core of religious faith is the mystic feeling that unites humankind with God. This spiritual communion is renewed daily through prayer and meditation. The founder, Bahá'u'lláh has revealed hundreds of prayers and followers are urged to spend time in meditation each day. Bahá'ís gather as a community every 19 days to celebrate

FESTIVALS

Ridván, also known as the Most Great Festival is celebrated over 12-days from 21st April to 2nd May. Festivities are held on the 1st, 9th and 12th days which marks the episode prior to the departure of Bahá'u'lláh from Baghdad when He made His public declaration to be the Manifestation of God. Bahá'ís all over the world will elect their local and council for the festival.

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Under Bahá'u'lláh November. Bahá'ís work or school and their friends of ipate in their holy



Bahá'í

BAHÁ'Í HOUSE OF WORSHIP

There are currently 7 Bahá'í Houses of Worship in the world, at least one in each continent. There is no Bahá'í House of Worship locally. Followers gather for prayers and activities at the Bahá'í Centre, which is the administrative centre of the Bahá'í Faith in Singapore.

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WORSHIP

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DIET

Bahá'ís are forbidden to consume alcohol and hallucinogenic drugs unless it is prescribed as a form of medical treatment.

FESTIVALS

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Naw~Rúz (New Year) is celebrated on 21st March annually. Prior to this day, Bahá'ís will fast for 19 days starting from 2nd March.

Birthday of the founder Bahá'u'lláh is observed on 12th November. Bahá'ís will abstain from work or school and will typically invite their friends of other faiths to participate in their holy day celebrations.

Buddhism

The Buddha Sakyamuni, or the Awakened One, was the founder of Buddhism. After bearing witness to human suffering and hardship, The Buddha went into self-exile to search for the way for humans to attain true happiness. Buddha's teachings are referred to as the *Tripitaka*, and it consists of three sections; (i) *sutras* or discourses on how to lead a noble life, (ii) *vinaya* or the framework on conduct for the monastic community, and (iii) *abhidharma* or the philosophy behind the nature of the human mind. There are three branches of Buddhism, namely Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana Buddhism.

WORSHIP

Buddhism emphasizes cultivating an enlightened way of living through the practice of right conduct, mental development, and perfection of our wisdom. Shrines with statues of Buddha, stupas and Bodhi trees are places where Buddhists offer fresh flowers, lights, lamps, and burn fragrant incense as acts of paying homage to Buddha, recollecting his

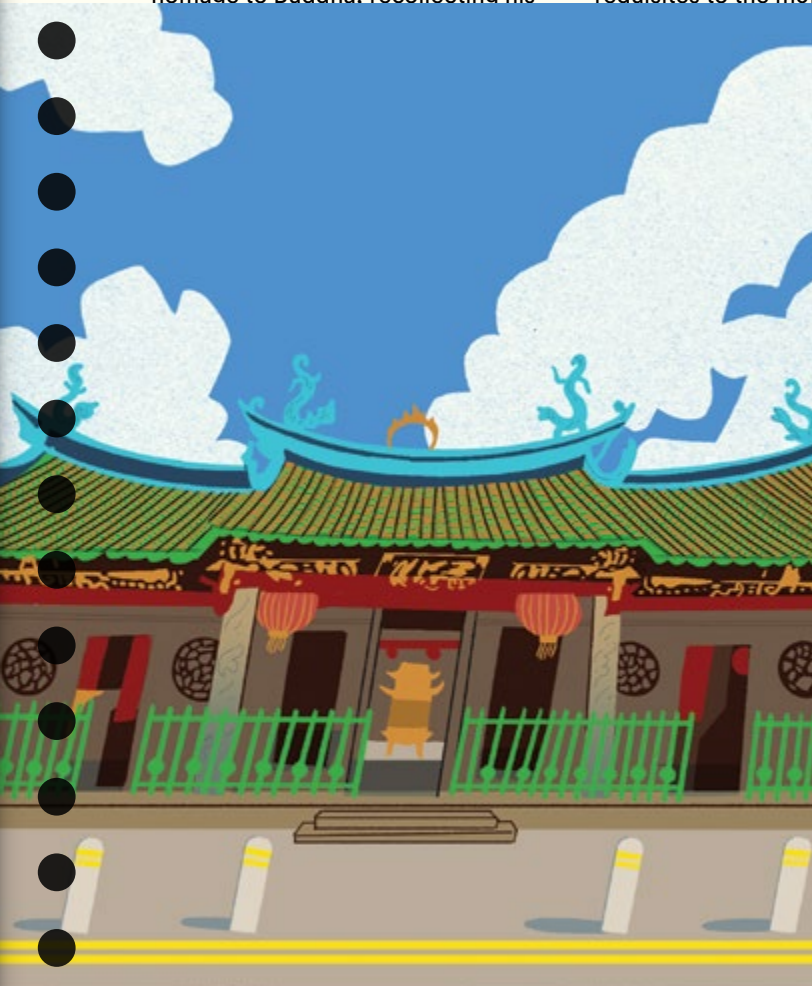
FESTIVALS

Vesak Day is a major Buddhist festival, as it celebrates the Birth, Enlightenment and *Para nirvana* (passing away) of the Buddha on the day of the first full moon in May.

Kathina or Robe Offering Ceremony is the time of the year when lay people offer new robes and other requisites to the monks.

Kitesvara/ Birthday is a festival celebrated every year, on the 19th lunar month, marking the birthday of Lord Kitesvara. This Mahayana deity originated from Tibet and is a popular attraction of the festival, and overall

is another festival celebrated on the 15th lunar month where devotees perform filial piety to repay their parents.



Buddhism

BUDDHIST TEMPLE/ MONASTERY

In a Buddhist temple or monastery, there is an image or a statue of Buddha. Buddhist temples are designed to symbolise 5 elements, namely wisdom, air, fire, wind, and earth.

Common practices when entering the temple or monastery includes the removal of footwears and women should wear clothing with sleeves and dresses should extend below the knees.

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WORSHIP

Buddhism emphasizes cultivating an enlightened way of living through the practice of right conduct, mental development, and perfection of our wisdom. Shrines with statues of Buddha, stupas and Bodhi trees are places where Buddhists offer fresh flowers, lights, lamps, and burn fragrant incense as acts of paying homage to Buddha, recollecting his supreme qualities of wisdom and compassion. There is chanting of teachings known as *Tri-pitaka* in Pali. The discourses of Buddha and other prayers are also recited in Chinese, Tibetan and English.

DIET

A vegetarian diet is promoted especially on the 1st and 15th days of the lunar month for Buddhists. Monks and nuns as well as lay people who have taken the Five Precepts abstain from intoxicants. Monks and nuns in the Chinese Mahayana traditions are vegetarians and the diet is free from garlic, onion, spring onions, leeks, shallots and eggs.

FESTIVALS

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Kathina or Robe Offering Ceremony is the time of the year when lay people offer new robes and other requisites to the monks.

Guan Yin's (Or Avalokitesvara/ Goddess of Mercy) Birthday is celebrated 3 times a year, on the 19th of the 2nd, 6th and 9th lunar months, with each bearing a different symbolism. This Mahayana tradition originating from Tibet and China celebrates the attraction of compassion, tenacity, and overall good fortune.

Ullambana Offering is another important festival held on the 15th day of the 7th lunar month where Buddhists practice filial piety to repay the kindness of their parents.

Christianity

Christians believe that there is only one God who reveals himself to them as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit whom they call the *Trinity*. Christians believe that Jesus is God who took human form to show man the way to salvation and by his death and resurrection, save mankind from death and sin. They also believe that God is present today through the work of the Holy Spirit and is evidenced in the actions of believers. The Love of God is expressed in love, justice and compassion for their neighbours. The Bible is the primary source of knowing about Jesus and about the communities which gathered in his name.

WORSHIP

Sunday is the day of worship for most Christians. The form of worship is varied according to which Christian tradition is followed. Catholic worship centres on the celebration of the Mass or Eucharist, also known as Holy Communion in other Christian churches. This service commemorates the Last Supper Jesus Christ had with his disciples

FESTIVALS

Good Friday commemorates the suffering, crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ. Christians believe that Jesus died on this day for the salvation of the world.

Easter Sunday commemorates the resurrection of Jesus. Christians celebrate Jesus' victory over death and proclaim his promise of life after

ly celebrate
December, to
birth of Jesus



Christianity

CHURCH

Christians can gather in almost any place to worship God. They usually assemble in a place specially dedicated for this purpose, which is a church. A smaller church is sometimes called a chapel. The church in which a bishop's chair (cathedra) is located is called a cathedral.

Christians believe that God who created the world is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit who are one. They believe that Jesus Christ died for them and that he will come back to life again. They believe that God is present in the world through the Holy Spirit and that the Holy Spirit guides them. They believe that all people are created in the image of God and that all people should love one another. They believe that the church is the body of Christ and that the church is the community of believers who are united by the Holy Spirit.

WORSHIP

Sunday is the day of worship for most Christians. The form of worship is varied according to which Christian tradition is followed. Catholic worship centres on the celebration of the Mass or Eucharist, also known as Holy Communion in other Christian churches. This service commemorates the Last Supper Jesus Christ had with his disciples the evening before he died.

A typical worship includes the singing of hymns or religious songs, readings from the Bible, prayers and preaching. Christians generally have their regular Sunday Worship services at different times on Sunday. Catholic Christians begin their worship on Saturday evening.

DIET

On Fridays, Catholics usually abstain from eating meat (this does not include fish and seafood), as an act of penance to remember Christ's sacrificial death on the cross for their sins. Most members of other Christian denominations do not have dietary laws, although some abstain from alcoholic beverages.

FESTIVALS

Good Friday commemorates the suffering, crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ. Christians believe that Jesus died on this day for the salvation of the world.

Easter Sunday commemorates the resurrection of Jesus. Christians celebrate Jesus' victory over death and proclaim his promise of life after death.

Christians traditionally celebrate **Christmas** on 25th December, to commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ.

Islam

Islam means peace and submission to the will of God. Islam enjoins respect for all Prophets beginning with Prophet Adam and ending with Prophet Muhammad. Muslims accept the *Holy Qur'an* as the Message of God and a standing miracle that never ceases to provide wonders to the reader. Prophet Muhammad's deeds and communications which are termed *Sunnah* are recorded in the *Hadith*, which is the second source of Islamic teachings.

WORSHIP

Muslims follow the Five Pillars of Islam, which is the basic framework of the Muslim way of life. The first, known as *Shahada*, is a formal declaration of faith where the Muslim professes there is only one God, Allah, and that Muhammad was God's messenger or prophet. The second pillar of Islam is praying five times a day. The third pillar is fasting.

FESTIVALS

Aidil Adha (Hari Raya Haji) reminds Muslims of the sacrifice of the son to Abraham, Ishmael (Ismail). To commemorate this event, Muslims sacrifice goats, sheep, cattle or camel and distribute the meat to the poor, friends and family. *Eidil Fitri* (Hari Raya Puasa) marks the end of Ramadan, the Muslim fasting month where there is abstinence from food, drink and marital sex from

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Islam

MOSQUE

Mosques are places for Muslims to gather and worship God. The mosque has no idols, nor images and no visual representations of Allah – which is the Arabic name for the One God – nor of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Before entering the prayer hall of a mosque, footwear must be removed. Men and woman are allocated separate prayer areas and should dress modestly.

Some mosques provide temporary scarves and cloaks to non-Muslim women. Guest can sit or stand along the side of the prayer halls but should not walk in front of a person who is praying. Photography is allowed with prior permission obtained.

Islam means the will of God. Prophets like Muhammad and ending the Message of that never reader. Pro communic are record second so

WORSHIP

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DIET

Ideally halal food has to be *tayyib* (wholesome and healthy) and prepared with utensils that have not been in contact with haram (forbidden foods), which could include pork and blood, and with drinks containing alcohol.

Muslims are forbidden to eat meats that have been ritually dedicated to things, or beings. Most Muslims are concerned that any meat served must be prepared in accordance with Islamic slaughter rites. Pure vegetarian food can be considered as halal.

FESTIVALS

***Aidil Adha* (Hari Raya Haji)** reminds Muslims of the sacrifice of the son to Abraham, Ishmael (Ismail). To commemorate this event, Muslims sacrifice goats, sheep, cattle or camel and distribute the meat to the poor, friends and family. *Eidil Fitri* (Hari Raya Puasa) marks the end of Ramadan, the Muslim fasting month where there is abstinence from food, drink, smoking and martial sex from dawn to dusk.

Mawlid Al-Nabi, the anniversary of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad on the 12th month of *Rabiul Awwal* is one of the important events in the Muslim world.

Jainism

Jainism, traditionally known as Jain Dharma, is an ancient Indian Religion originating from India. Jains trace their spiritual ideas and history through a succession of twenty-four victorious teachers known as *Tirthankaras*. Jains believe that Jainism is an eternal Dharma with the Tirthankaras guiding every cycle of the Jain Cosmology.

The main religious premises of Jainism are *Ahiṃsā* (non-violence), *Anekāntavāda* (many sidedness), *Aparigraha* (non-attachment) and asceticism. Devout Jains take five main vows: *Ahiṃsā* (non-violence), *Satya* (truth), *Asteya* (not stealing), *Brahmacharya* (celibacy), and *Aparigraha* (non-attachment).

WORSHIP

Jains believe that souls are under the influence of their karmas (actions), both past and present. The ultimate goal of Jains is to rid the soul of all karmas and attain liberation by observing the rules and methods mentioned in the Agams (holy books of Jainism).

Jains worship the 24 Tirthankars

FESTIVALS

The festival of Mahavir Jayanti marks the birth of Lord Mahavir, the 24th Tirthankar and founder of modern Jainism. On this day (13th of the 6th month of the Jain calendar), religious programmes such as songs, dances and dramas are held.

Paryushan is the most religious eight days of the year in the Jain calendar.

During this period, strict vows of non-violence, abstinence and other Jain principles are observed. Scriptures are recited from all living Jains. Devotees observe a fast or pose to fast in Paryushan, for however long. The festival of Paryushan (8th of the month of Ashwin) is a detailed, 8-day period of spiritual reflection and fast. The fast is known as Paryushan, which ends.

Deepavali marks the birth of Lord Mahavir attained liberation and the day after (New Year).

A period of 8 days in the month of the Jain calendar is known as Paryushan. During this period, strict vows of non-violence and abstinence are observed. Devotees observe a fast or pose to fast in Paryushan, for however long. The festival of Paryushan (8th of the month of Ashwin) is a detailed, 8-day period of spiritual reflection and fast. The fast is known as Paryushan, which ends.



Jainism

STHANAKS/ DERASARS

Jains congregate at *Sthanaks* or *Derasars* for prayers and religious discourses. Jains must be *shudh* (pure) before worshipping, thus one must bath, wear clean clothes, and rinse the mouth before entering the place of worship.

No footwear, food or drinks are allowed in the prayer halls. Smoking, consumption of alcohol or non-vegetarian food (including root vegetables) are forbidden in the premises.

Jainism, the oldest religion in the world, is an ancient Indian religion. Jainism has a long history through the centuries, and it is a victorious religion. Jains believe in the Dharma of the cycle of the universe.

The main principle of Jainism is *Ahimsā* (non-violence, non-sidedness), and asceticism. The main vows of Jainism are (truth), *Asteya* (celibacy),

WORSHIP

Jains believe that souls are under the influence of their karmas (actions), both past and present. The ultimate goal of Jains is to rid the soul of all karmas and attain liberation by observing the rules and methods mentioned in the Agams (holy books of Jainism).

Jains worship the 24 Tirthankars (liberated souls), who show the path of purification (liberation) to their followers. Prayers are made in the form of reciting scriptures, chanting and singing holy songs. These prayers can be performed at home or at Jain places of worship.

DIET

Jains are strict vegetarians. On auspicious religious days, Jains also abstain from the consumption of roots of plants.

Consumption of alcohol, drugs and cigarettes are also forbidden. The basis of such a diet is the strong belief of Jains in *Ahimsā* (non-violence).

FESTIVALS

The festival of Mahavir Jayanti marks the birth of Lord Mahavir, the 24th Tirthankar and founder of modern Jainism. On this day (13th of the 6th month of the Jain calendar), religious programmes such as songs, dances and dramas are held.

Paryushan is the most religious eight days of the year in the Jain calendar. It is a period of fasting, abstinence and introspection. Jain principles are reviewed, and prayers are recited to seek forgiveness from all living beings. Jains can choose to fast in whichever way and for however long they wish for. On the Savantsari (8th day), Jains take part in a detailed, three-hour ceremony of spiritual review and forgiveness. The fast is broken jointly on Samu-Parna, which is held the day after Paryushan ends.

Diwali (Festival of Lights) marks the day when Lord Mahavir attained complete liberation, and the day after Diwali is Bestu-Varas (New Year).

Ayambil Oil is a religious period in the 6th and 12th month of the Jain calendar, where abstinence and simplicity in food consumption is observed. Jains take one meal a day at noon, refraining from consuming oil, dairy products, vegetable spices and drinks (except boiled water) for up to nine days during this festival.

Judaism

Judaism is an ancient Abrahamic religion with the *Torah* or Hebrew Bible being the faith's sacred text. The Torah consists of 613 Commandments which every Jew is expected to observe, encompassing every aspect of Jewish living. It began almost four thousand years ago with the Hebrew people of the Middle East. Abraham is regarded as the Father of the Jewish nation as he advocated and spread monotheism.

WORSHIP

A central tenet of Judaism is the adherence of the *Sabbath*, which begins at sunset on Friday and lasts until Saturday night. It is a day of rest with no work and Jewish families devote their time to prayer and Torah study.

Three daily services are conducted in the synagogue: Morning prayer.

FESTIVALS

Rosh Hashanah (New Year) observes the birthday of the human race and is a day of judgement for all mankind while *Yom Kippur* is the Day of Atonement ten days after the New Year. Sukkot, the Feast of the Tabernacles, is celebrated five days thereafter, culminating with *Simchat Torah*, which celebrates the completion of the yearly cycle of the Torah.

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Judaism

SYNAGOGUE

On entering a synagogue, all males, including visitors, are expected to wear *kippah* (skullcaps) or at least cover their heads. Women usually do not offer a handshake to a rabbi. One is expected to dress modestly.

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WORSHIP

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Three daily services are conducted in the synagogue; Morning prayer, Afternoon prayer, and Evening prayer. These times coincide with the times when sacrifices were offered in the ancient Temple.

During the morning services, *Tefilin* (phylacteries) and the *Tallit* (prayer shawl) are worn. The Torah (first five books of Moses) is read on the Sabbath, festival days as well as on Monday and Thursday morning services.

DIET

Food that conforms to the Jewish dietary law is called Kosher. Only meals, which have been prepared in accordance with the kosher dietary laws, should be served. All processed foods such as wine, bread and cheese as well as meats must be strictly kosher. Such food is marked with a hechsher (Kosher supervision seal), which certifies it as kosher.

FESTIVALS

***Rosh Hashanah* (New Year)** observes the birthday of the human race and is a day of judgement for all mankind while *Yom Kippur* is the Day of Atonement ten days after the New Year. Sukkot, the Feast of the Tabernacles, is celebrated five days thereafter, culminating with *Simchat Torah*, which celebrates the completion of the yearly cycle through the reading of the Torah.

Hannukah is the victory celebration over the Syrian Greek oppression and *Purim* celebrates the victory over Haman and deliverance from extermination. The Passover is the seventh- or eighth-day celebration of freedom from bondage in Egypt and *Shavuot* commemorates the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai.

Sikhism

The basic creed of Sikhism is its belief that there is one universal God and is present everywhere. Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak Dev Ji (1469 – 1539) and was the first of ten Gurus, over a period of 200 hundred years. The main teachings of Guru Nanak are to purge oneself of ego and pride, to serve people is to serve God, opposes distinctions of caste as all are equal, and restored women to equal status as men. The teachings of the Sikh Gurus are written in the Sikh Holy Book, the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

WORSHIP

In the daily Sikh prayer called *Ardaas*, apart from directing devotees to be respectful of all religions, devotees pray for the welfare and goodwill of all mankind; *Sarbat Da Bhalla*. Prayers are normally done before sunrise and sunset or prior to retiring at night although there are no specific timings. Sikhs may pray at home or in the Gurdwara. There

FESTIVALS

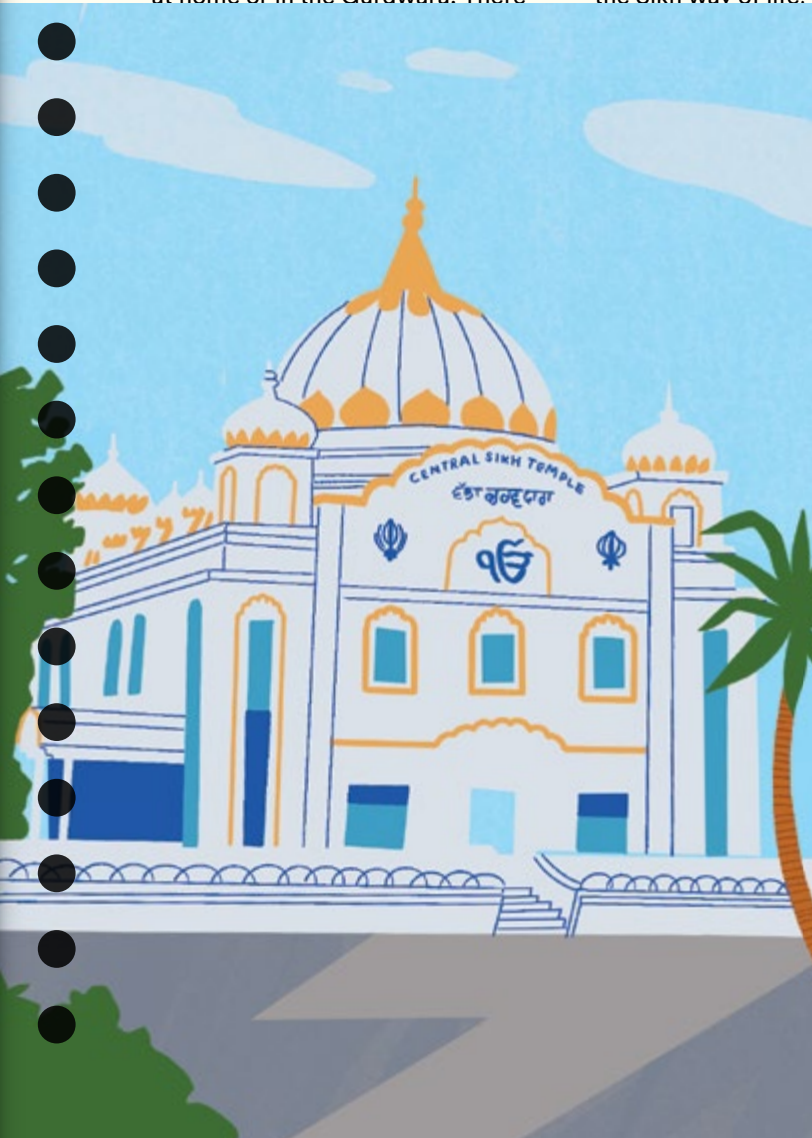
Guru Nanak's Birthday in October/ November.

Guru Gobind Singh's Birthday in December/January.

Vasakhi, (14th April) which commemorates the setting up of the order of the Khalsa brotherhood as the Sikh way of life.

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Sikhism

GURDWARA

The Gurdwara houses the sacred writings of the Sikh religion, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, thereafter called The Guru. The Sikh Gurus themselves compiled the Sikh scripture.

Men and women bow in front of the Guru sitting separately on the carpeted prayer hall. Shoes must be taken off and the head covered when entering the prayer hall and the community kitchen also known as *Guru Ka Langgar*.

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WORSHIP

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DIET

Only vegetarian meals are prepared and served for consumption in the gurdwara. Meat consumed is of an animal that has been killed instantly with one stroke.

Consumption of intoxicants, smoking tobacco and the use of drugs, alcohol and meat are forbidden in the temple precincts. Sikhs are not vegetarians, but Sikh teachings exhort that a Sikh must *“Avoid food and clothing which harm the body or provoke evil thoughts.”* (Sri Rag Ml, 16)

FESTIVALS

Guru Nanak’s Birthday in October/ November.

Guru Gobind Singh’s Birthday in December/January.

Vasakhi, (14th April) which commemorates the setting up of the order of the Khalsa brotherhood as the Sikh way of life.

Installation of the Sikh Scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, as the permanent Sikh guru.

Bandi-Chhor Divas to celebrate Guru Hargobind’s release from Gwalior Fort jail and triumphant return to Amritsar, the timing of which coincides with Diwali, the Indian festival of lights.

Taoism

Taoism or Daoism is the indigenous religion of ancient China. Taoism was named after the '*Dao*' which refers to the way or the path. It is regarded as the underlying force in the universe which governs the movements and changes in the Universe.

The key purpose of religion is to learn the '*Dao*'. *Yin and Yang*, complementary opposites, comprise the Taoist Taiji symbol and this is an allegory to the positive and negative happenings that often occur in tandem in our lives.

WORSHIP

Taoists are polytheistic and worship many deities. They draw their philosophy from the teachings of the sacred text, *Tao Te Ching*. Worship may be conducted in homes or the temples, where the sacred altar of the many deities are enshrined.

Taoists pay homage to their deities by cupping their left hand over their

FESTIVALS

The **Chinese Lunar New Year** is not strictly a religious festival, but devout Taoist may visit the temple during the first and last day of the Lunar New Year to thank the deities for the past year and to pray for blessings and prosperity for the new year.

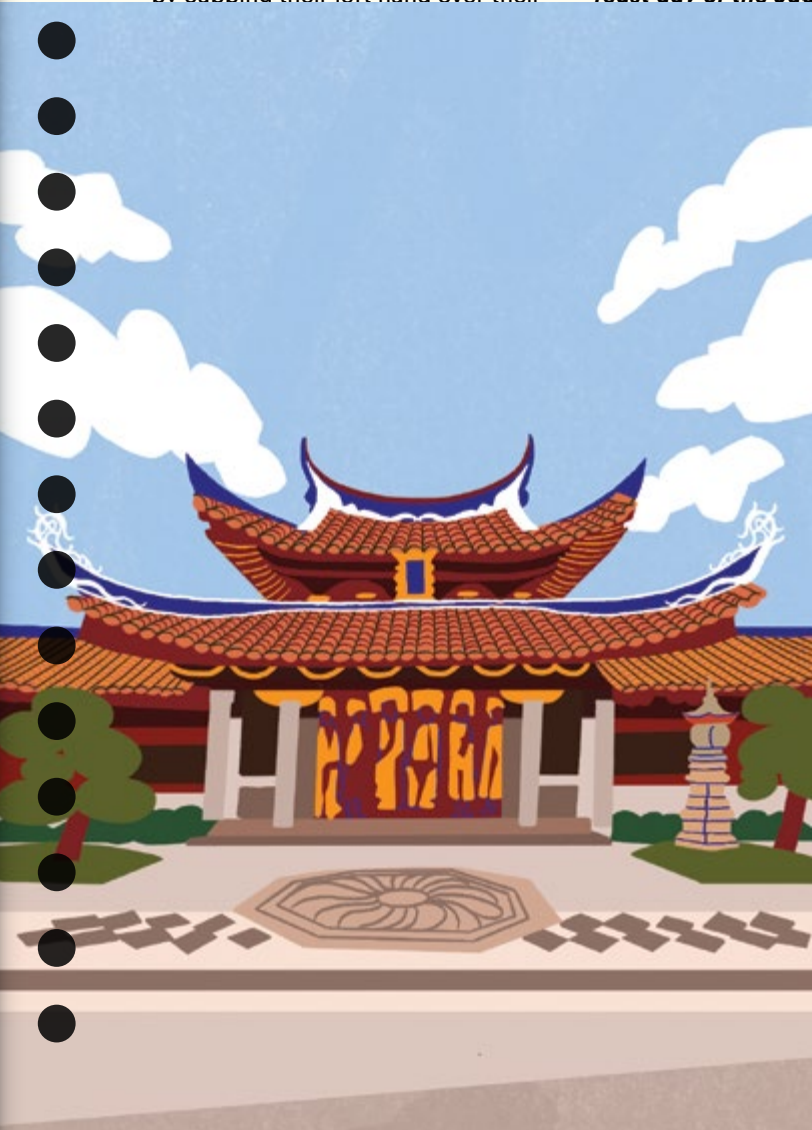
The 9th day of 1st lunar calendar is the **feast day of the Jade Emperor** while

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Taoism

TAOIST TEMPLE

Most Taoist temples in Singapore belong to the Taoist folk custom and are known as the traditional Chinese temples. These temples usually worship a myriad of deities that may include images of Buddha and Confucius. Nevertheless, they are still Taoist temples.

All devotees are strongly encouraged to wear proper attire when they enter the temple. Devotees are required to wear proper footwear and avoid the wearing of slippers when entering the prayer hall of the Taoist temple.

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WORSHIP

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Taoists pay homage to their deities by cupping their left hand over their right in front of the chest. In worship, they prostrate three times in front of the deities. Taoist devotees normally offer flowers, incense, candles or an oil lamp, water, fruits, tea, wine, cakes and other non-living food items to accord respect to the deities.

DIET

Taoists are encouraged to observe a vegetarian diet on festive occasions and feast days. Some priests are strict vegetarians and avoid even salt, vinegar, leeks, shallots, garlic and onions during special prayers to celebrate the occasion.

FESTIVALS

The **Chinese Lunar New Year** is not strictly a religious festival, but devout Taoist may visit the temple during the first and last day of the Lunar New Year to thank the deities for the past year and to pray for blessings and prosperity for the new year.

The 9th day of 1st lunar calendar is the **feast day of the Jade Emperor** while the 15th day is known as **Chap Goh Mei/ Yuan Xiao**, is the **feast day of the Official of Heaven**.

Taoist Day is held annually to celebrate the Birthday of Lao Tze on the 15th day of 2nd lunar month.

Qing Ming (Tomb Sweeping) festival falls on the first week of April and families will visit the graves and columbaria of their loved ones to tidy, pray and make offerings.

Zhong Yuan Jie (Hungry Ghost Festival) falls on the 15th day of the 7th lunar month. It is the birthday of the Earth Official and it is believed that the Gates of Hell open and the spirits of the dead seek “Nourishment and Salvation” rites in the mortal realm.

Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrianism is one of the oldest world religions and arguably the first monotheistic faith in the world. Zoroastrianism was founded by Prophet Zarathustra (or Zoroaster) in ancient Persia.

Zoroastrians believe that fire represents God's light or wisdom. They turn towards a source of light when they worship. The light can come from any source such as sun, oil lamp or wood fire.

WORSHIP

Zoroastrians believe that there is one universal, transcendent, all-good, and uncreated supreme creator deity, *Ahura Mazda* (the Almighty God), which revealed the religion to Lord Zarathustra. The basic religious tenets follow the *Threefold Path of Asha* revolving around Good Thoughts, Good Words, and Good Deeds. Prayers are to be performed

FESTIVALS

Ghambar translates to “full time” or “proper season”. These Parsi festivals honour the seasons, because they are responsible for the prosperity of humanity, and they occur six times a year. During these rituals, tribute is paid to the phases in the creation of the world. Each phase – heaven, water, earth, flora, fauna and man – is associated with one *Ghambar* and is

days. Those who are expected to recall the events of the world is bestowed with wisdom. It also the seven phases of the world and Parsi must observe the *dih* or to give tribute to the truthfulness; to observe the phases; to observe the phases after death; to build lodgings for everyone well. It is expected to observe the phases of brotherhood.

Navroz literally means the New Year from Zoroastrian and is celebrated as a New Year in India. The day is celebrated in March, which is the spring equinox. *Navroz* is celebrated on the day of the onset of the New Year. It is a day of making a new beginning and hope for the future.



Zoroastrianism

FIRE TEMPLE

The fire temple, also known as Agiary or Atash Behram, is consecrated for prayers and sacred ceremonies. In the innermost sanctum there is a fire on a central altar, symbolizing God's presence and radiant energy. The fire is kept burning day and night and the ashes of the fire are offered to the congregation and applied to the forehead.

Footwear is to be removed and the head covered with a cap or scarf.

Zoroastrianism is one of the oldest religions and a faith in the one God by Prophet Zoroaster in ancient Persia.

Zoroastrianism is a monotheistic religion. God's light is the source of all life and good. Evil can come from the darkness of the lamp or from the

WORSHIP

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Navjote (or *Sudreh Pushi*) is the ceremony through which a pre-puberty child is initiated into the Zoroastrian faith. The ceremony is traditionally the first time a Zoroastrian wears the *sudreh* and *kusti* (the holy vest and girdle), which they then continue to wear for the rest of their life. The sacred clothing signifies parental responsibility as well as responsibility for the one who is undergoing this ceremony.

DIET

Zoroastrians have no dietary restrictions. They also do not fast, as the religion teaches them that the body must be well nourished to be able to work and live a healthy life.

FESTIVALS

Ghambar translates to “full time” or “proper season”. These Parsi festivals honour the seasons, because they are responsible for the prosperity of humanity, and they occur six times a year. During these rituals, tribute is paid to the phases in the creation of the world. Each phase – heaven, water, earth, flora, fauna and man – is associated with one *Ghambar* and is celebrated over five days. Those who participate are expected to recall not only the blessings bestowed by the seasons, but also the seven main acts that a good Parsi must perform. They are *radih* or to give charity; *rastih* or to be truthful; to celebrate the *Ghambars*; to observe the three-day ceremony after death; to worship God; to build lodgings for the poor; and to wish everyone well. The *Ghambar* festival is expected to reinstil these feelings of brotherhood.

New Year or **Navroz** literally means “new day”. Inherited from Zoroastrian Persia, it is celebrated as a New Year feast by the Parsis of India. The day of celebration is 21st March, which coincides with the spring equinox and is called *Jamshedi Navroz*. It is a festival observed for the onset of spring. People join nature in making a fresh start, full of joy and hope for the coming year.

CHINESE



CHINESE NEW YEAR (CNY)

This is the most important festival for the Chinese. CNY eve (*Chu Xi*) has great significance for the Chinese as family members get together for a reunion dinner. Common CNY dishes include whole fish for abundance, chicken for prosperity and sticky rice cake (*Nian Gao*) for “climbing higher every year”

QING MING FESTIVAL

Also known as “All Souls Day” or “Tomb Sweeping Day”. During this period, Chinese will pay their respect to their ancestors by sweeping their tombs, making offerings of food, and burning joss paper. The festival is observed 10 days before and after the actual day.

CALENDAR

Also known as the lunar calendar, it is based on the phases of the moon. There are 12 months in a year and each month begins with a new moon. The full moon is on the 15th of every month. Each month is about 29 or 30 days long.



DUAN WU JIE

Also known as Dragon Boat Festival, this commemorates the death of Qu Yuan, a poet in the ancient Chinese state of Chu. Chu's emperor ignored Qu Yuan's advice to not seek alliance with the Qin state and this put him into exile. Disheartened by the progressive occupation of the Che land by the Qin state and the misery of his countrymen, Qu Yuan committed suicide by jumping into a river.

Villages threw rice dumplings into the river for the fish to protect Qu Yuan's body while some paddled out to retrieve his body. Hence the origins of the festival was born.



CHAP GOH MEH

CNY begins at the start of a lunar cycle and ends on a full moon 15 days later. The last day of CNY is known as Chap Goh Meh (*Yuan Xiao*) which means fifteenth night. It is a night for family reunion and is also the Chinese Valentine's Day.



MID-AUTUMN FESTIVAL

Chinese celebrate this festival by carrying lanterns and eating mooncakes while admiring the full moon. Legend has it that Chang'e, wife of the archer, Houyi, flew up to the moon after swallowing his pill of immortality.



DONG ZHI

Also known as Winter Solstice, this is a time for family reunion for the Chinese. Families will get together to make and eat glutinous rice balls (*Tang Yuan*) as its name sounds like reunion (*Tuan Yuan*).



HUNGRY GHOST FESTIVAL

The seventh lunar month is celebrated as the Hungry Ghost Month, and it is believed that the Gate of Hell will open. Chinese will burn hell money and offer food to appease the wandering spirits. Getai, operas and auctions are common sights during the month-long festival.



VESAK DAY

Buddhists celebrate this festival in commemoration of Buddha's birth and enlightenment (*Nirvana*). Devotees will perform good deeds and will fast or go on a vegetarian diet on this day.

GREGORIAN

Mostly used by countries around the world. The Gregorian calendar has 12 months in a year with each month having 30 or 31 days except for February. In a leap year, which happens once every 4 years, there is an extra day in February.



GOOD FRIDAY & EASTER SUNDAY

Good Friday is the Friday preceding Easter Sunday. It commemorates the crucifixion and death of Jesus while concurrently celebrating his resurrection.

CHRISTMAS

Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus. This is a season of giving and sharing accompanied with a widespread of celebrations including gift exchanges, decorations of Christmas trees, lights and church celebrations.

CALENDAR

ISLAMIC

Known as the Hijrah calendar, this calendar has 12 months, and each month begins where the new crescent moon is sighted. Dates for festivals can vary around the world according to the sighting of the new moon. The Hijrah calendar is also 11 days shorter than the Gregorian calendar.

RESOURCE DIRECTORY & SITUATIONAL GUIDES



HARI RAYA HAJI (AIDILADHA)

Muslims perform a ritual sacrifice of sheep where the meat will be distributed to the poor. This also marks the completion of Hajj, the holy pilgrimage to Mecca.

RAMADHAN

During the Islamic month of Ramadhan, Muslims are required to fast. This means to endure hunger by not taking food or drink, and to rein in one's desire and urges by abstaining from acts like smoking and sex, from dawn to dusk. It is a time to practice self-restraint, patience, sacrifice and humility.

ISLAMIC NEW YEAR

The Islamic New Year falls on the first day of the Islamic year. Muslims usually celebrate this day quietly by gathering in the mosque for prayers while practicing self-reflection.



BIRTHDAY OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD

The Birthday of Prophet Muhammad is known as Milad-un Nabi or Maulud (Mawlud). He was born on the 12th of the third Islamic month. Muslims celebrate this day by attending religious lectures and reading the Koran.



HARI RAYA PUASA (AIDILFITRI)

Also known as Hari Raya Aidilfitri, this marks the end of Ramadhan. Muslims celebrate it with special prayers in the morning at the mosques and decorations at home. Hari Raya is also a time to strengthen relations and house-visiting will be conducted. Muslims will also seek forgiveness from each other for their past wrongdoings.

HINDU

A Hindu calendar is a religious calendar based on the phases of the moon. The year is divided into 12 months and each month is divided into 2 halves: light fortnight that begins with a full moon and a dark fortnight when the moon wanes and disappears.

DEEPAVALI

Also known as the Festival of Lights, it celebrates the triumph of good against evil. Hindus light up oil lamps at home on this day.



TAMIL NEW YEAR

Also known as Puthandu, it falls on the first day of the Tamil year according to the Hindu calendar. The day is celebrated by visiting the temple, donning new clothes and decorating home entrances with kolam (elaborated floor drawings made with rice flour)

CALENDAR

THEEMITHI

Also known as the Fire Walking Festival, it is celebrated by the Hindus in honour of Goddess Draupadi. The procession begins at Sri Srinivasa Perumal Temple along Serangoon Road and ends at the Sri Mariamman Temple where fire walking takes place.





THAIPUSAM

Thaipusam celebrates the day odes Parvati bestowed upon her son, Lord Murugan, the “vel” or lance to vanquish the evil demon, Soorapadman. Devotees who have requested favors, have had the favour granted or wish to atone for the previous year’s misdeeds carry the kavadi.



NAVARATHIRI

Navarathiri literally means “nine nights” and is a Hindu festival dedicated to the nine forms of Goddess Devi, the Divine Mother. The purpose of Navarathiri is to celebrate man’s riddance of nine types of darkness through practicing the three purities of thought, word and deed.

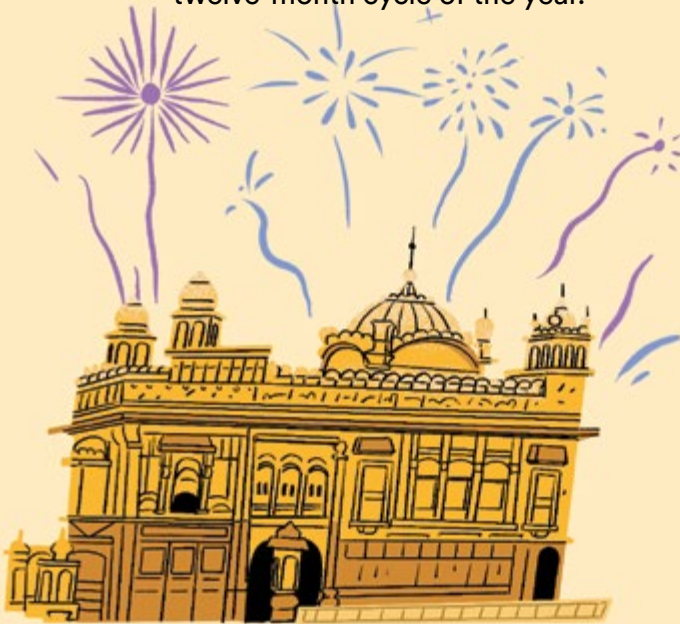


PONGAL FESTIVAL

Also known as the Harvest Festival, the Pongal festival is celebrated by the Tamil community. Pongal means the “boiling over” of milk and rice during the month of Thai mid-Jan, symbolising prosperity.

NANAKSHAHI

The Nanakshahi calendar is a tropical solar calendar used in Sikhism. It is based on the “Barah Maha” (Twelve Months), a composition composed by the Sikh gurus reflecting the changes in nature communicated in the twelve-month cycle of the year.



BANDI CHHOR DIVAS

A Sikh celebration that commemorates the day the sixth Sikh Guru, Guru Hargobind, released 52 prisoners from the Gwalior Fort. This day is celebrated by the lighting up of homes and Gurdwaras.

GURPURAB

Also known as the birthdays of the ten Sikh Gurus, it commemorates the birth of all ten Sikh Gurus throughout the year. These Gurus were instrumental in shaping the beliefs of Sikhs.

CALENDAR



HOLA MAHALLA

A three-day long Sikh festival that falls in March. During this festival, Sikhs camp out, enjoy displays of fighting prowess and bravery, listen to *kirtan* (devotional hymns), music and poetry.

Meals, an integral part of the Sikh faith, are consumed as individuals sit together to partake in *Langar* (community kitchen of a Gurdwara).

VAISAKHI FESTIVAL

Also known as Baisakhi festival that originally started as a harvest festival in Punjab but took greater significance for the Sikhs where it commemorates the establishment of Khalsa.

Khalsa refers to Sikhs who have undergone the sacred Amrit Ceremony initiated by the 10th Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh.





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Racial & Religious
**HARMONY
CIRCLE**
Different Races. Many Beliefs. One Singapore.