



Spring festivals



Passover

Passover – also known as *Pesach* – is a Hebrew or Jewish festival which celebrates new life. The festival lasts for eight days and, on each of those days, people can visit their local Synagogue to listen to special readings from a rabbi.

The origins of Passover lie back in the time of Moses, who led the Children of Israel from Egypt and freed them from slavery. The story is told in the Bible, in *Exodus*. God sent ten plagues upon the Egyptians to make the Pharaoh release the slaves. The last plague killed all their first-born children. The Hebrews were told to paint the blood of a spring lamb on their doorposts, so that God would know to spare (or pass over) any first-born children inside. This is why the festival is called Passover.

After they were freed, the Hebrews are said to have left in such a hurry that they did not have time to wait for their bread to rise and, for the first few days of their freedom, had only unleavened bread to eat. Unleavened bread is still part of the traditional Passover meals today – called *Seder* meals. People also dip their food in salty water, which is meant to represent the slaves' tears.

Easter

Easter is the most important festival in the Christian calendar because it remembers the time when Jesus was crucified and then rose from the dead before going up to Heaven. The three key days in the festival are:

Palm Sunday, which marks the start of Holy Week and is the Sunday before Easter Sunday. This was when Jesus came into Jerusalem from his 40 days in the Wilderness (the time Christians now call *Lent*).

Good Friday, when Jesus was crucified.

Easter Sunday, when Jesus rose from the dead.

Vaisakhi (Baisakhi)

Vaisakhi or Baisakhi is an ancient Sikh festival and, in the Punjab region of India, is essentially a harvest festival. The festival also celebrates the new Sikh and solar years and the beginning of the Sikh religion.

Vaisakhi celebrations are often very colourful. People decorate the Gurdwaras with flowers and they enjoy dancing and parading in the streets as well as singing hymns from the **Guru Granth Sahib**, praying and listening to readings.



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