



Hari Raya Aidilfitri (Eid ul Fitr)

Each year, during the holy month of Ramadhan, Muslims in Malaysia prepare for one of the holiest celebrations in the Islamic calendar, the Hari Raya Aidilfitri. Hari Raya, as it is locally known, means a 'day of celebration,' while 'Aidilfitri' gives meaning to 'festival of fast-breaking.' Muslims usher in Hari Raya with morning prayers followed by visits to the graves of the departed. They also gather to bake cakes and cookies.

Festivities begin a month before, during the Ramadan or the fasting month. As the fasting draws to an end, the feasting mood looms large. Shopping frenzies take place during this festive time as well. With new clothes to buy, homes to be decorated and cookies to be made, the country gets caught up in a cheerful mood. Sales and promotions sweep through stores and shopping complexes are decorated in Aidilfitri trimmings. There is a rush to have traditional clothes like 'Baju Kurung,' 'Kebaya' and 'Baju Melayu' tailored; others find easy alternatives in ready-made outfits. Family members gather to bake cakes, while those who opt for convenience buy these goodies from vendors.

As the fasting draws to an end, the feasting mood looms large. As with other festivals in Malaysia, friends from other ethnicities offer their good wishes and partake in the festivities. Open houses are held all over the country, with hosts opening their doors to one and all.

Chinese New Year in Malaysia

Chinese New Year is celebrated over a period of 15 days, beginning from the 1st day of the Chinese lunar calendar. It is a joyous occasion marked by family reunions, giving of red packets, or 'ang pows,' by parents to children

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or among relatives. This practice, coupled with the giving away of mandarin oranges, is a symbol of prosperity and good luck for the recipients. Another highlight is the traditional lion dance. As with most festivals in Malaysia, people of all races visit their Chinese friends during this season to convey their good wishes. Open houses are also held by many families, who open their homes to friends and loved ones.



Deepavali

For the Hindu community in Malaysia and around the world, the 'Deepavali' or 'Diwali' marks one of the most significant dates on the calendar. Molded by religion, mythology and culture, Hindus have celebrated this festival for thousands of years. It is celebrated during the seventh month of the Hindu calendar, a traditional oil bath precedes the the festivities. The celebration includes visits to temples and prayers at household alters.



Hari Raya Aidil Adha (Eid ul Adha)

Hari Raya Aidil Adha marks the conclusion of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. It is celebrated on the 10th day of Zulhijjah, the 12th month of the Muslim calendar. The day starts with prayers in mosques and is followed by the offering of cattle or goats to be slaughtered, so that the meat can be distributed to the needy.

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Thaipusam

This spectacular festival occurs in late January or early February and is a celebration of Lord Subramaniam. On the eve of the festival, a statue of the Lord is taken on procession in a chariot drawn by bullocks. The next day, devotees carry 'kavadis' through Hindu temples amidst chanting and drumming. A kavadi is a metal or wooden arch with elaborate decorations, which is placed on the devotee's shoulders. Hooks or spikes from the kavadi are pierced into parts of the devotee's body. The festival is celebrated on a large scale in Penang, Selangor and Perak.



Gawai Dayak

This annual Sarawak Dayak festival is celebrated in early June and marks the end of the rice-harvesting season. To prepare for the festival, Dayaks clean their homes and the graves of their ancestors.

On the festival's eve, family members attend a reunion during which the youngest member offers a plate of specially prepared food to his parents. Tuak, or rice wine, is served to all and dancing is part of the merry-making. Attired in their finest, the Dayaks offer sacrifices of livestock in return for a good harvest. Other events that take place are war dances, cockfights and blowpipe contests. Similar to the Tadau Ka'amatan, Gawai Dayak is Sarawak's version of the same festival. The Iban and Bidayuh, celebrate this festival at the beginning of June. It marks the end of the rice harvest and is a resting period from the toils of the fields as well as a thanksgiving ceremony to the gods for a bountiful harvest. The festival also seeks the blessings of the spirits to ensure a fruitful harvest the following year.

Pesta Ka'amatan

The best time to visit Sabah and experience this occasion is from May 30 - 31st, when the Kadazan and Dusun communities offer thanksgiving for a bountiful harvest. Highlights include a beauty pageant, cultural dances and rituals that culminate in the Thanksgiving ceremony performed by the 'Bobohizan,' or high priestess.

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The biggest ethnic group in Sabah, the Kadazan-Dusun, celebrates the padi harvesting festival (the Tadau Ka'amatan) in May. Tadau Ka'amatan is the most important celebration in the lives of this ancient tribe of Sabah. This festival, which spans the entire month of May, is an offer of thanksgiving to the rice spirits (Bambarayon) for a bountiful harvest. The highlight of this harvest festival is a dance performed by the high priestess (Bobolian) in search of the rice spirits, whose presence is vital for a fruitful harvest.

Prophet Mohammed's Birthday

The birthday of Prophet Muhammad, celebrated on the 12th of the month of Rabiulawal, is another important occasion in the Muslim calendar. It is marked by special prayers and sermons in mosques, followed by processions and feasts.



Christmas

Like Christians in other parts of the world, Malaysian Christians celebrate Christmas on December 25th each year. It is marked by midnight services at churches on the eve or attending church on the day itself.

The merriment usually begins a fortnight before the date, when shopping centers and hotels echo the revelry and Yuletide spirit with colorful decorations, Christmas trees and lights.

Lantern and Mooncake Festival

The Moon Cake Festival takes place on the 15th day in the eighth lunar month. Its popularity stems from the various reasons it is celebrated, which explains how the festival came to be known simultaneously as 'Zhong Qiu Jive' or Mid- Autumn Festival and Lantern Festival. The festival celebrates romance as the luminous light of the full, circular moon signifies lovers seeking unity. In addition, the festival is said to honor the birth of the Earth God, to whom the farming community gives thanks for the bounties reaped. In Malaysia a wide array of moon cakes can be found during this period in markets and bakeries. It's common in Malaysia to see children of all races joyfully participating in lantern competitions and processions. In the same tradition, moon cakes and goodies are shared around with non-Chinese friends in a spirit of unity and happiness synonymous with the Moon Cake Festival.

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Wesak Day

Lord Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death are celebrated through various events, including the release of caged birds to symbolize the freeing of captive souls. Most Buddhists observe a vegetarian diet on this day and in some towns, like Penang, a procession takes place at night.

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