

# Alternative celebrations

Christmas undoubtedly takes centre stage when it comes to festive celebrations at this time of year, but Aconia van Hildon takes a look at some other traditions during the year.

With all the focus on Christmas traditions, food and gifts, it is always nice to take a few minutes breather and reflect on some of the other religious celebrations that happen throughout the year and what they mean.

## Ramadan

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Muslim calendar and its start is based on the sighting of the new moon. It is during this month that Muslims observe



the Fast of Ramadan. Lasting for the entire month, Muslims fast during the daylight hours, and in the evening, eat small meals and visit friends and family. It is a time of worship, contemplation and a time to strengthen family and community ties. Ramadan is also intended to increase self-control in all areas, including eating, sleeping and the use of time.

## The festival of light

Hanukkah's origins relate to an event that happened over 2,000



years ago when Judea was ruled by Antiochus, a Syrian king. Antiochus attempted to assimilate the Jews into Greek culture but was met by a small group of Jews called Maccabees, who, risking their lives to prevent the desecration of their Temple, rebelled.

Although the Maccabees won, the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. The Jews had to clean and repair the Temple, and when they were finished, they rededicated it to God by rekindling the sacred Menorah

(a seven-stemmed candelabrum) of the temple. Only one small jar of sanctified oil was found and yet the lamp stayed alight miraculously for eight days. For that reason, Hanukkah is an eight-day celebration of light with the lighting of the Menorah being an important focus.

## Hindu celebrations

Diwali is a five-day Hindu celebration which usually takes place during October or November. Also known as the festival of lights due to the sheer number of candles, lights, fireworks and lanterns that are



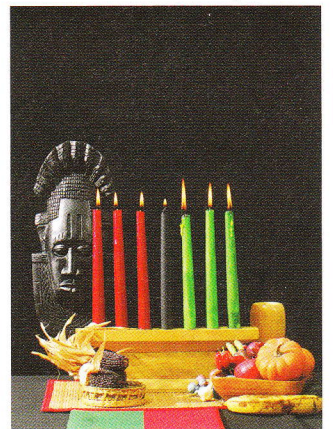
on display, it has many different mythological stories and beliefs unique to specific regions and groups associated with it.

However, whichever mythological explanation you prefer, the main focus is on the triumph of good over evil, a reaffirmation of hope and a renewed commitment to friendship and goodwill

## Kwanza

Kwanza is an African-American celebration that focuses on the traditional African values of family, community responsibility, commerce and self-development.

Established in 1966 by



Dr. Maulana Karenga, the celebration, which lasts from December 26th until January 1st, is based on the Nguzo Saba (Seven Guiding Principles) of Umoja (Unity), Kujichagulia (Self-Determination), Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility), Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics), Nia (Purpose), Kuumba (Creativity) and Imanu (Faith).

The celebration has many activities associated with it, including candle lighting, pouring of libations, eating and gift-giving.

## Did You Know?

Many Westerners think of Hanukkah as the Jewish equivalent of Christmas, but in fact, the holy days of Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah are more important.

## Fact

In 1997 the first Kwanzaa stamp was issued by the United States Postal Service.