

Festivals of Pakistan

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Culture: Pakistani

Main Celebrations: Eid, Basant, Urs, Independence Day, Defence Day

Regions: Nationwide

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Culture & Celebration

Pakistan is a land of vibrant cultures and rich traditions. The nation celebrates a variety of religious and cultural festivals throughout the year, reflecting its diverse heritage and deep-rooted customs.

Eid-ul-Fitr

Eid-ul-Fitr, often called the "Festival of Breaking the Fast," marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan — a time of intense spiritual reflection, self-discipline, and fasting from dawn to dusk. It is one of the most joyous occasions in the Islamic calendar and is celebrated with great enthusiasm across Pakistan.

The festival begins with the sighting of the new moon, which is announced with celebratory gunfire and public declarations. The next morning, Muslims gather in large numbers at mosques, open fields, and Eidgahs to perform the special Eid prayer known as Salat al-Eid. Before this prayer, it is obligatory to give Zakat al-Fitr — a charitable donation intended to purify those who fast from any impurities and sins committed during the month of Ramadan.

Eid-ul-Fitr is a public holiday in Pakistan, and preparations for it begin during the last few days of Ramadan. Markets bustle with activity as people buy new clothes, accessories, shoes, and gifts. Women often decorate their hands with henna, and houses are cleaned and decorated for welcoming guests. Special attention is given to preparing traditional sweets, with 'Sheer Khurma' — a sweet vermicelli milk dessert — being a staple in most homes.

On Eid morning, people wear their finest clothes, often new and in festive colors, and greet one another with hugs and the phrase "Eid Mubarak." Visiting family, friends, and neighbors is a vital part of the celebration, as is sharing meals and sweets. Children eagerly anticipate receiving 'Eidi' — money or gifts given by elders — which adds to the festive spirit.

Beyond the festivities, Eid-ul-Fitr carries a strong message of compassion, gratitude, and community. It reinforces the values of caring for the less fortunate, renewing social bonds, and expressing thanks to Allah for the strength and guidance received during Ramadan. Many also take the occasion to resolve conflicts, seek forgiveness, and rebuild relationships.

In Pakistan, Eid-ul-Fitr celebrations often continue for several days. Television channels air special Eid programs, cities and homes are decorated with lights, and public places host events for families. It is a time when the nation collectively embraces the spirit of joy, unity, and spiritual renewal.

Eid-ul-Adha

Eid-ul-Adha, also known as the "Festival of Sacrifice," is one of the most significant religious festivals in Pakistan and the Muslim world. It commemorates the unwavering faith and obedience of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), who was willing to sacrifice his son, Ismail, in submission to Allah's command. However, Allah intervened and provided a ram to sacrifice instead, symbolizing divine mercy and faithfulness.

This festival falls on the 10th day of the Islamic month of Dhul-Hijjah, following the completion of Hajj—the annual pilgrimage to Makkah, which is one of the five pillars of Islam. Eid-ul-Adha begins with a special congregational prayer held in open fields, mosques, and Eid grounds. The sermon emphasizes the values of sacrifice, piety, and social justice. Worshipers dress in their finest clothes, typically new or freshly cleaned traditional attire, and join together in prayer and celebration.

The central ritual of Eid-ul-Adha is the Qurbani, or animal sacrifice, which is performed after the Eid prayer. Animals such as goats, sheep, cows, or camels are sacrificed in remembrance of Prophet Ibrahim's devotion. This act of sacrifice is deeply symbolic, representing the willingness to give up one's personal interests for the greater good and to obey God's commands without hesitation.

The meat from the sacrifice is divided into three equal parts: one-third is kept for the family, one-third is shared with relatives and friends, and one-third is distributed to the poor and needy. This distribution underscores the importance of charity, empathy, and communal responsibility in Islam.

In Pakistan, Eid-ul-Adha is a public holiday marked by vibrant traditions and social gatherings. Families come together for festive meals that include dishes such as kebabs, biryani, and other meat-based delicacies. Children receive Eidi (gifts or money) and enjoy playing with their cousins and friends. People visit relatives and neighbors to exchange greetings of "Eid Mubarak" and to strengthen social bonds.

The festival also has a strong community aspect, with many people arranging collective sacrifices and distributing meat on a larger scale to ensure that the underprivileged can share in the joy of Eid. Social welfare organizations and individuals alike participate in Qurbani drives to feed those in need across the country.

Eid-ul-Adha serves as a reminder of the virtues of faith, selflessness, and compassion. It inspires Muslims to reflect on their spiritual commitments and to foster unity, generosity, and gratitude in their daily lives.

Basant

Basant, the spring festival of kite flying, is celebrated with enthusiasm especially in Lahore. It marks the arrival of spring and symbolizes hope and renewal. The sky is filled with colorful kites, and rooftops become festive grounds for parties with music, food, and competitions. People wear bright yellow outfits to reflect the spring theme. Though the festival has faced restrictions, its cultural legacy remains cherished.

Urs (Annual Sufi Festivals)

Urs, meaning "wedding" in Arabic, symbolizes the union of the Sufi saint with the Divine. In Pakistan, Urs festivals are vibrant spiritual events celebrated annually at the shrines of revered Sufi saints. These commemorations mark the death anniversaries of the saints, which are seen not as ends but as beginnings — moments of eternal spiritual union. Urs reflects the deep-rooted Sufi traditions and spiritual fabric of Pakistani society, attracting thousands of devotees from all walks of life and religious backgrounds.

Major Urs festivals are held for saints like **Lal Shahbaz Qalandar** in Sehwan Sharif, **Data Ganj Bakhsh** in Lahore, and **Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai** in Bhit Shah. These multi-day events are a blend of spiritual devotion, cultural celebration, and communal harmony. Activities typically include *Qawwali* performances (devotional Sufi music), recitations of poetry, *dhamaal* (a form of ecstatic dancing), and prayers offered by devotees who come to seek blessings, healing, and peace.

One of the most iconic elements of Urs festivals is the **langar**, where free meals are served to all visitors, regardless of faith or background, symbolizing equality and generosity. Shrines are adorned with lights, flowers, and banners, and the air is filled with the aroma of incense and the rhythm of devotional music that often continues throughout the night.

Urs festivals also serve as a melting pot of Pakistan's diverse cultural expressions. Artisans, folk musicians, mystics, and travelers converge to participate, creating a space where spiritual and cultural heritage is both preserved and celebrated. Local bazaars flourish with food, crafts, and religious items, transforming the shrine complexes into festive sanctuaries.

Beyond their religious significance, Urs celebrations promote messages of peace, love, tolerance, and unity — values that are at the core of Sufism. They provide a counter-narrative to extremism and offer a glimpse into the pluralistic traditions of Pakistan. Despite modern challenges, Urs festivals remain vital expressions of spiritual life and community resilience in the country.

Independence Day – 14 August

Independence Day, celebrated annually on 14th August, marks the historic moment in 1947 when Pakistan emerged as a sovereign nation after years of struggle against colonial rule. It is a day of immense pride and reflection for the people of Pakistan, commemorating the sacrifices made by countless individuals under the visionary leadership of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

The day begins with a 31-gun salute in the federal capital, Islamabad, and 21-gun salutes in provincial capitals, followed by a national flag-hoisting ceremony. Government officials, armed forces, and citizens gather to sing the national anthem and offer special prayers for the unity, prosperity, and security of Pakistan.

Cities and towns across the country are transformed with green and white lights, flags, and patriotic decorations adorning streets, buildings, and vehicles. Schools, colleges, and institutions hold special programs including debates, singing competitions, art exhibitions, and theatrical performances based on themes of freedom, history, and patriotism. Documentaries and films on the Pakistan Movement are broadcast on national media to educate the younger generation.

The highlight of the day is the grand parade and air show by the Pakistan Armed Forces, showcasing military discipline, national strength, and a tribute to the martyrs. Patriotic songs echo across the airwaves, evoking deep emotions and love for the homeland. People dress in green and white, participate in rallies, and release balloons, kites, and lanterns into the sky to express their joy.

Markets and public places are full of national flags, badges, bangles, and themed clothing. Fireworks displays are organized in major cities, lighting up the sky with the colors of the Pakistani flag. On this day, Pakistanis around the world unite in celebration, reaffirming their commitment to the country's ideals and vowing to build a stronger, more prosperous nation.

Defence Day – 6 September

Defence Day, observed every year on 6th September, is a day of national pride and remembrance in Pakistan. It commemorates the heroic defense of the country during the 1965 war with India, when Pakistan's armed forces, backed by the unity and resolve of its people, repelled enemy advances and safeguarded the nation's sovereignty. The day is a tribute to the gallantry, sacrifices, and unwavering spirit of the armed forces, especially those who laid down their lives defending the homeland.

The day begins with special prayers in mosques for the progress, prosperity, and security of the country, as well as for the souls of the martyrs. A 21-gun salute in major cities and the national flag hoisting mark the commencement of official events. Ceremonies are held at military cemeteries and memorials across the country, where wreaths are laid and tributes are paid to the shuhada (martyrs) by government officials, military officers, and civilians.

One of the key highlights of Defence Day is the military parade and exhibitions organized by the armed forces, which display Pakistan's military capabilities, including tanks, aircraft, weapons systems, and equipment. These events are open to the public and are aimed at fostering a strong bond between the military and the civilian population. Speeches and presentations shed light on the courage and stories of national heroes like Major Raja Aziz Bhatti Shaheed, Major Shabbir Sharif Shaheed, and others who received the Nishan-e-Haider, Pakistan's highest military award.

Television and radio channels air special documentaries, interviews, and war songs (milli naghmay) that recall the events of the 1965 war and highlight the bravery of Pakistani soldiers. Schools and colleges organize patriotic programs, including speeches, poetry recitations, poster-making competitions, and skits to instill the values of courage, sacrifice, and love for the country in young minds.

Defence Day is not only a reminder of military strength but also a reflection of national unity, resilience, and the unbreakable spirit of Pakistanis. It serves as a solemn reminder that peace comes with a price and must be preserved through vigilance, harmony, and collective resolve.

Pakistan Day – 23 March

Pakistan Day, celebrated annually on 23rd March, marks a defining moment in the history of the subcontinent—the passing of the Lahore Resolution in 1940. This resolution, also known as the Pakistan Resolution, was presented at the All-India Muslim League's session in Lahore and laid the foundation for the demand for a separate homeland for Muslims, ultimately leading to the creation of Pakistan in 1947. The day also commemorates the adoption of Pakistan's first constitution in 1956, when the country was officially declared an Islamic republic.

Pakistan Day is a national holiday and is observed with great patriotic fervor throughout the country. The centerpiece of the day's celebrations is the spectacular military parade held in Islamabad, attended by the President, Prime Minister, top civil and military officials, foreign dignitaries, and citizens. The parade features regiments of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, showcasing advanced weaponry, fighter jets, tanks, and cultural floats representing Pakistan's diverse provinces. It is a powerful display of unity, discipline, and national pride.

The day begins with special prayers for the nation's security, peace, and prosperity. A 21-gun salute is fired in major cities, and the national flag is hoisted at government buildings. Special documentaries and programs are broadcast on television and radio highlighting the struggle for independence, the sacrifices of freedom fighters, and the vision of leaders like Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Allama Iqbal, Liaquat Ali Khan, and other founding fathers of the nation.

Educational institutions organize seminars, debates, and quiz competitions focusing on the Pakistan Movement, constitutional development, and civic responsibility. Students actively participate in patriotic activities such as poetry recitation, plays, and art exhibitions, aiming to create awareness about the significance of the day and instill a sense of national identity.

Public spaces, streets, and buildings are decorated with national flags, banners, and portraits of national heroes. People dress in green and white, the colors of the Pakistani flag, and take part in rallies and parades. In major cities, cultural shows, fireworks, and musical performances further add to the festive spirit.

Pakistan Day is more than just a celebration; it is a day of remembrance and recommitment. It reminds Pakistanis of their roots, the sacrifices made for independence, and the ongoing responsibility to build a stronger, united, and prosperous nation for future generations.

Iqbal Day – 9 November

Iqbal Day is observed every year on 9th November to commemorate the birth anniversary of Dr. Allama Muhammad Iqbal, the national poet, philosopher, and visionary who played a pivotal role in conceptualizing the idea of a separate homeland for Muslims in the Indian subcontinent. Born in 1877 in Sialkot, Dr. Iqbal's poetry and philosophical thought awakened a sense of identity and purpose among Muslims, ultimately contributing to the foundation of Pakistan.

Although Iqbal Day is no longer a public holiday, it remains a significant day in Pakistan's national calendar, especially in academic and intellectual circles. The day is marked with ceremonies, speeches, and cultural activities in schools, colleges, and universities across the country. These events aim to revive Iqbal's ideals, promote his message of self-awareness (Khudi), and explore his vision of a spiritually and morally empowered Muslim community.

Educational institutions hold poetry recitations, where students passionately deliver some of Iqbal's most famous verses such as "Lab Pe Aati Hai Dua Ban Ke Tamanna Meri" and "Khudi Ko Kar Buland Itna." These poems not only reflect patriotism but also emphasize moral strength, dignity, and intellectual awakening. Speech competitions and essay writing contests are also organized to encourage youth to engage with Iqbal's philosophical ideas and political foresight.

Special television and radio programs are broadcast throughout the day, showcasing documentaries, interviews with scholars, and dramatic readings of his Urdu and Persian poetry. His concepts of Islamic revivalism, Pan-Islamism, and unity are discussed and analyzed for their relevance in today's world.

Iqbal Day also serves as an occasion to remember his influential Allahabad Address of 1930, where he first articulated the need for an independent Muslim state in the northwest of India—a dream later realized in the creation of Pakistan in 1947. His contributions as a poet, thinker, and statesman are honored not only for their historical significance but also for their enduring relevance in shaping the national ethos of Pakistan.

Dr. Iqbal's tomb, located near the Badshahi Mosque in Lahore, becomes a focal point on this day, where dignitaries and citizens lay wreaths and pay homage. His legacy continues to inspire introspection, national pride, and a call to action for self-betterment, unity, and devotion to the ideals on which Pakistan was founded.

Famous Quote

"Festivals are the soul of a nation — they remind us of our roots, unity, and resilience."