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Special Days

Throughout the year, Australians pause to **commemorate** a wide range of special days. Many of these days have become an important part of the way we see ourselves as Australians. They often help us to understand each other better.

All Sorts of Special Days

Some of these days have cultural importance, while others have religious meaning. A few days, such as Christmas Day and Easter Sunday, are both religious and cultural events, and can mean different things to different people. Some days mark important historical events, while others are simply about fun and relaxation.



Special days are sometimes public holidays, which means that most people are given a day off from work or school to enjoy them. Some public holidays are for the entire nation, while others are just for particular states, territories or regions.

The many different religious and cultural backgrounds of Australians mean that there are plenty of interesting days throughout the year. This book explores many of the most important days celebrated and commemorated by Australians. It looks at why and how these days are celebrated in Australia.

Christmas Day is a special day that has both religious and cultural importance. It is celebrated in all sorts of different ways by different people, even by people who have no religious beliefs.

Where We Have Been, and Where We Are Going

Special days help us remember what makes our society special. They remind us of important events that have shaped our nation and the way we see ourselves. They can be days of celebration, or serious days when we remember sad events.

Some special days encourage us to take action to improve our society. For example, International Volunteer Day and Clean Up Australia Day offer people the chance to make a contribution to the community.

Other special days remind us that life should be about fun and relaxation as well as work and study. For example, each year the people of the Northern Territory enjoy a public holiday called Picnic Day – a day to enjoy a picnic with friends or family. The people of Melbourne have a day off every November to enjoy a horse race – the Melbourne Cup.



Special days such as Clean Up Australia Day give people the chance to help the community in a practical way.

Most importantly, special days bring people together and remind us of all that we have in common, and all that we can achieve.

Easter Sunday

Easter is the most important religious festival of the year for **Christians**. It celebrates the resurrection (return from death) of Jesus Christ, who Christians believe to be the son of God. Christians believe that Jesus suffered and died so that their wrongdoings could be forgiven, and that he was raised from death by God after he died. For Christians, Jesus' resurrection is a powerful symbol of rebirth. It gives them hope of eternal life, and belief in God's forgiveness.

Varying Dates

The dates of Easter vary from year to year. No one knows the exact date when Jesus is believed to have been resurrected, so the dates are decided according to the cycle of the moon. Easter Sunday is the Sunday that follows the first full moon after 20 March. This system has been used since 1583. **Orthodox Christians** use a different calendar, called the Julian calendar, to decide Easter dates. The Orthodox Easter occurs at least a week later than the Western Easter.

Easter Eggs

Eggs are seen as a symbol of new life in many cultures, and are used by Christians as a symbol of Jesus' resurrection. Eggs are dyed and decorated and given as gifts. Chocolate eggs are particularly popular in westernised countries such as Australia.



The Lead-up to Easter

There is a long build-up to Easter. In the 40 days before Easter Sunday, known as Lent, many Christians give up something they enjoy, such as eating chocolate. This is a way of preparing for Easter and acknowledging the 40 days that Jesus spent meditating and praying in the desert.

Two days before Easter Sunday, Christians attend Good Friday church services to mark the day that Jesus was crucified. This is a day to reflect on Jesus' death. In many churches, the events leading up to Jesus' crucifixion are acted out. These performances are known as Passion Plays. In Australia, Good Friday is a public holiday.

Easter Sunday

Christians are expected to attend church services on Easter Sunday. At these services, the Bible story of Jesus' resurrection is read and celebrated. Churches are decorated with flowers and candles and songs are sung. People give each other Easter eggs as a symbol of the new life given to Jesus after his death.

Easter Sunday Fact File

When? March/April

What is commemorated? The resurrection of Jesus Christ

Where? In many countries

First celebrated? About 33 CE

Even non-Christians celebrate Easter. They enjoy Easter traditions such as giving and receiving Easter eggs, and decorating hats to wear in Easter bonnet parades.

Many Christians attend Easter Sunday church services.



Anzac Day

On Anzac Day, the people of Australia and New Zealand honour the soldiers who took part in the Gallipoli campaign in World War I (1914–1918). As well, all Australians and New Zealanders who have fought or died for their countries are honoured.

Anzac Day Fact File

When? 25 April

What is commemorated? The Anzacs' landing at Gallipoli in 1915

Where? All states and territories of Australia, and New Zealand

First held? 25 April 1916

Gallipoli

Anzac Day is a **commemoration** of the day Australian and New Zealand soldiers landed at Gallipoli, Turkey, during World War I. On 25 April 1915, the **Anzacs** landed in a cove at Gallipoli as part of an effort to knock Turkey out of the war. Turkey had taken sides with Germany, the biggest enemy of Australia and its **allies**.

The Gallipoli campaign was a disaster in many ways – more than 10 000 Anzacs were killed and

many more wounded. Although the Anzacs were eventually forced to retreat, their bravery and **comradeship** are remembered to this day.

How We Remember Them

Anzac Day commemorations begin each year with a dawn service. This is a special ceremony at which wreaths are laid at shrines and war memorials around Australia.

Dawn was chosen as the time for the service because it was just before dawn that the Anzacs landed at Gallipoli. It was also the time when soldiers would wake and wait to see if the enemy was going to attack.

As part of the service, “The Last Post” is played, and “The Ode of Remembrance” is read out. After the service, marches are held.

Servicemen and women who have served in wars march with others from the same military unit. Anzac Day is an important opportunity for servicemen and women to meet and share their memories and friendship.

Anzac Day in Gallipoli

Each Anzac Day, a dawn service is held at Gallipoli, at a site built to honour the Anzacs. Government representatives often attend and pay tribute to the bravery of the Anzacs.

In recent years, younger people have taken an increasing interest in Gallipoli commemorations. Thousands of young Australians travel to Gallipoli and spend a chilly night outside to be part of the dawn service.



The dawn service at Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance

The Ode of Remembrance

“The Ode of Remembrance” is one of the most famous poems written in honour of those who have lost their lives in wars. It was written by a British poet, Laurence Binyon (1869–1943).

They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,
We will remember them.

Yom HaShoah

Yom HaShoah – Holocaust Remembrance Day – is when people all over Australia, especially **Jewish** people, take time to remember and honour those who lost their lives in the Holocaust during World War II (1939–1945).

The Holocaust

The Holocaust is the name given to the imprisonment and murder of about six million people, mostly Jews, during World War II. The Jewish (Hebrew) word for “Holocaust” is Shoah. Yom is the Hebrew word for “day”.

The Nazi party, which ruled Germany in the 1930s and early 1940s, fought to establish an **empire** across Europe, and held **discriminatory** attitudes towards Jewish people. The Nazis tried to remove Jews from Germany, and from the countries Germany invaded during the war. Millions of Jews were sent to **concentration camps**, where many lost their lives.

The Nazis were eventually defeated, but by the end of the war about six million people had died at their hands.

Yom HaShoah Fact File

When? 27th day of the Jewish month of Nisan (April/May)

What is commemorated? The lives lost and the suffering experienced by Jewish people during the Holocaust

Where? Israel and around the world

First held? 1953

Yom HaShoah commemorations

Yom HaShoah was established in Israel, but is **commemorated** all around the world. It is observed on the 27th day of the Jewish month of Nisan, which falls in April or May on the Western calendar.

In Australia, Jewish people meet and hold Yom HaShoah services in **synagogues**. Candles are lit and prayers are recited.



School students at a Yom HaShoah commemoration in Australia

Survivors of the Holocaust share their painful stories with the community. They hope that educating people about the Holocaust will help prevent something similar from ever happening again.

Jewish People in Australia

Jewish people have lived in Australia since the earliest days of European settlement. There were Jews among the convicts who arrived in 1788 on the First Fleet, and many more arrived during the gold rushes in the 1850s and 1860s. Many Jewish people arrived as **refugees** after World War II.

Jewish people have made important contributions to life in Australia, in fields such as law, politics, business, arts and culture. In the 2006 Australian **census**, 88 834 people identified themselves as being Jewish.



The Star of David

The Star of David is a famous symbol of the Jewish people and their religion. It is a star made up of two overlapping triangles. It is not known to have a definite religious meaning but has been a symbol of the Jewish religion since the 17th century.

During the Holocaust, the Nazis forced Jewish people to wear the star to identify themselves. They could be severely punished if they were caught in public without wearing their star.