

Cultural Celebrations: *December*



What's on in *December*?

December is full of cultural celebrations & holidays. In the W̱SÁNEĆ Calendar, the Elder Moon (SIS,ET) is a time of winter teachings, ceremony, and gathering. Bodhi Day encourages mindful, simple meals, while Yule traditions celebrate the return of the light with warming seasonal foods. The Dongzhi Festival, Hanukkah and Christmas are all celebrated with food, tradition and community and Kwanzaa with dishes that honour African heritage and community.

Cultural Celebrations

- **December** - SIS,ET – THE Elder Moon
- **December 8th** – Bodhi Day
- **Winter Solstice** – Yule
- **Winter Solstice** – Dongzhi Festival
- **December 25th** – Christmas
- **December 25th** – Hanukkah
- **December 26th - January 1st** – Kwanzaa

SIS,ET – THE ELDER MOON *December*

In the W̱SÁNEĆ 13 moons calendar, December is SIS,ET — the Elder Moon.

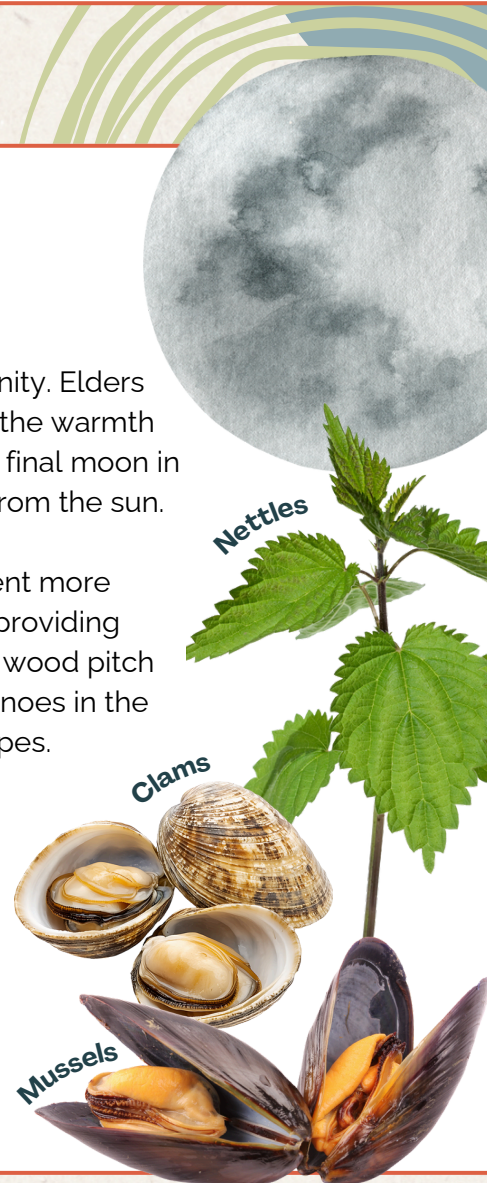
This moon honours the Elders whose hair, or wisdom, shelters the community. Elders share teachings, stories, beliefs, and history with children gathered around the warmth of winter fires. Though it aligns with December, SIS,ET is understood as the final moon in the yearly cycle, marked by the Winter Solstice when the earth is farthest from the sun.

With short days and frequent storms making sea travel unsafe, families spent more time indoors. Winter sloughs around Saanich filled with ducks and geese, providing important food sources. People prepared for the seasons ahead: gathering wood pitch for torches, harvesting shellfish during night tides, finishing roughed-out canoes in the longhouse, and twisting earlier-harvested nettles into twine for nets and ropes.

SIS,ET is also the most important time for cultural and spiritual practices. The community gathered in the longhouse for winter ceremonies, where new dancers were initiated and stories were told to guide young people in the right way to live. This moon is a time of reflection, learning, and honouring the Elders who hold and pass on W̱SÁNEĆ knowledge.

Learn More 

- [The 13 Moons of the W̱SÁNEĆ](#)



Cultural Celebrations: *December*

Bodhi Day *December 8th*

What is Bodhi Day?

Bodhi Day, celebrated on December 8th by Buddhists, commemorates Siddhartha Gautama's enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, marking the origin of Buddhism.

Observances include meditation, chanting, and studying Buddhist teachings. Some hang Bodhi tree decorations or light candles to symbolize enlightenment.

Food & Bodhi Day

Simplicity and mindfulness are key, with vegetarian meals reflecting Buddhist values. Foods like rice and milk pay homage to the meal said to have sustained Siddhartha before his enlightenment.

Learn More

- [Bodi Day: The Day of Awakening](#)
- [Buddhism Dietary Practices](#)



Yule *Winter Solstice*

What is Yule?

Yule, observed at the winter solstice (around December 21), has roots in ancient Germanic and Norse pagan traditions. It celebrates the return of light as days begin to grow longer.

Practices include burning a Yule log, decorating with evergreens, and honoring the sun through rituals. Modern celebrations often incorporate music, feasting, and gift-giving.

Food & Christmas

Yule feasts include hearty, warming dishes like roasted meats, root vegetables, and mulled cider. The communal meals symbolize abundance and the nurturing of community during the darkest time of the year.

Learn More

- [What is Yule?](#)
- [How to celebrate Yule](#)



Cultural Celebrations: *December*

Dongzhi Festival *Winter Solstice*

What is Dongzhi Festival?

Dongzhi, meaning "Winter Solstice," is a traditional East Asian festival celebrated in China, Korea, and Japan. It honors the balance of yin and yang as days begin to lengthen.

Traditionally, families gather to share meals, visit ancestors' graves, and celebrate the return of longer days.

Food & Dongzhi Festival

Foods like tangyuan (sweet rice balls) symbolize reunion and harmony. Dumplings and warm soups are also common, emphasizing family unity and nourishment during the coldest time of year.

Learn More

- [Dongzhi - Traditions & Foods](#)
- [What is Dongzhi Festival](#)



Dumplings

Rice Balls

Christmas *December 25th*

What is Christmas?

Christmas is a Christian holiday celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, traditionally observed on December 25. Rooted in ancient winter solstice celebrations, it became widely popular in Europe during the 4th century after being adopted by the Roman Empire.

Celebrations often include decorating Christmas trees, exchanging gifts, attending church services, singing carols, and spending time with family. The holiday also incorporates cultural elements like Santa Claus and festive lights.

Food & Christmas

Christmas meals vary by region but often include roasted meats (turkey, ham, or goose), root vegetables, and desserts like fruitcake, mince pies, or Yule logs. Food is central to bringing families together, symbolizing warmth, abundance, and generosity.

Learn More

- [The History of Christmas](#)



Roast Turkey

Mince Pie

Cultural Celebrations: *December*

Hanukkah *December 25th*

What is Hanukkah?

Hanukkah, or the Festival of Lights, is an eight-day Jewish holiday commemorating the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. It celebrates the miracle of a small amount of oil lasting eight days.

Traditionally, families light the menorah, exchange gifts, play dreidel games, and recite prayers.

Food & Hanukkah

Foods fried in oil, like latkes (potato pancakes) and sufganiyot (jelly donuts), honor the miracle of the oil. Dairy dishes are also traditional, symbolizing Judith's role in Jewish history.

Learn More

- [What is Hanukkah?](#)
- [Traditional Hanukkah Recipes](#)



Kwanzaa *December 26th–January 1st*

What is Kwanzaa?

Kwanzaa is an African American holiday created in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga to celebrate African heritage and culture. It runs 7 days; from the 26th December - 1st January, culminating in a feast, usually on the sixth day, called *Karamu*.

The holiday emphasizes seven principles (Nguzo Saba), including unity and creativity. Rituals include lighting the kinara (candleholder), storytelling, and cultural performances.

Food & Kwanzaa

Kwanzaa feasts (karamu) often feature dishes from the African diaspora, such as collard greens, yams, black-eyed peas, and fried plantains. Meals honor African heritage and provide a communal way to reflect on the principles of the holiday.

Learn More

- [What is Kwanzaa?](#)
- [The seven principles of Kwanzaa](#)



Cultural Celebrations: *January*



A Month to Learn and Celebrate!

January is full of important events and celebrations. It starts with **New Year's Day** on January 1, welcoming a fresh start. On January 7, many celebrate **Orthodox Christmas**, and **World Religion Day** on January 21 promotes understanding between different faiths.

We also honor civil rights with **Martin Luther King Jr. Day** on January 15. Later in the month, we reflect on education with the **International Day of Education** on January 24 and remember the victims of the Holocaust on **International Holocaust Remembrance Day** on January 27.

What is Tamil Heritage Month?

January is also **Tamil Heritage Month**, a time to celebrate Tamil culture, history, and contributions to the world. Tamil culture, rooted in South India and Sri Lanka, is one of the world's oldest, beginning over 2,000 years ago. Renowned for its art, music, dance, and festivals like Pongal, it thrives among vibrant global Tamil communities.

Tamil people have faced many challenges, such as war and displacement, but have worked hard to keep their culture alive.

Tamil Culture

Tamil culture is rich in art, music, dance, literature, and cuisine, with traditions like Bharatanatyam, Pongal celebrations, and temple architecture. It values family, community, and spirituality, thriving both in its South Indian roots and vibrant global diasporas.



Tamil diaspora

This month, Tamil Heritage Month offers an important opportunity to reflect on the challenges faced by the Tamil diaspora and to understand the resilience and strength that defines the community. Many Tamils have experienced displacement due to conflict, political instability, and systemic violence, leading to significant struggles in rebuilding their lives and preserving cultural identity.



Learn More

[Global Hindu Tamil Diaspora](#)
[Human Rights Action Group](#)

What can you do?

This month serves as a reminder of the importance of solidarity, empathy, and cultural preservation.

- Take this opportunity to **explore** Tamil music, dance, cuisine, and festivals. Engaging with these cultural practices can help you gain a deeper understanding of the Tamil community's resilience and traditions.
- **Share stories** and experiences from the Tamil diaspora with others. By amplifying these voices, we can help raise awareness about the challenges faced and the contributions made by Tamils worldwide.