

Quick guide to Summer Solstice

We build an inclusive culture through learning and being curious, broadening our understanding of different cultures, and exploring different topics with our colleagues and friends.

In this quick guide we look at the summer solstice in more detail, exploring why and how it is recognised by our own colleagues at Greencore, and by cultures around the world. Our aim is to help deepen awareness, bring understanding and help allow more meaningful dialogue whilst at work.

What is the summer solstice?

In the Northern Hemisphere, the June solstice (aka summer solstice) occurs when the Sun reaches its highest and northernmost points in the sky. From an astronomical standpoint, this marks the start of summer in the northern half of the globe.

Due to Earth's tilted axis, the Sun doesn't rise and set at the same locations on the horizon each morning and evening; the June solstice is significant because the Sun reaches its northernmost point in the sky at this time, at which point the Sun's path does not change for a brief period of time - after the solstice, the Sun appears to reverse course and head back in the opposite direction.

Did you know?

- The word "solstice" comes from the Latin 'solstitium'—from sol (Sun) and sistere (still or stopped)
- In India, the summer solstice ends the six-month period when spiritual growth is supposedly easiest

Does it always occur on the same day?

The timing of the June solstice is not based on a specific calendar date or time; it all depends on when the Sun reaches its northernmost point from the celestial equator. Therefore, the solstice won't always occur on the same day. Currently, it shifts between June 20, 21, and 22.

The largest celebration in the UK now is probably at Stonehenge, each solstice hundreds of people gather together to watch the sun rise through the monument. It brings like minded people from many different backgrounds and religions together who all want to share the positive energy of the first summer sunrise.

– Helen Smith, Technical Manager, Northampton

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St. John the Baptist Day

At some point, Christian church authorities assigned June 24 as the birthday of St. John the Baptist, who foretold the birth of Christ (which would occur six months later in the calendar, during the darkest days) and later baptised Jesus in the Jordan River. Celebrations with bonfires, bathing in water, and watching the sunrise were traditional. In this way, the period took on both secular and religious symbolism, giving everyone reasons to celebrate.

Why do people celebrate it?

Many northern people celebrate a solstice holiday known as Midsummer Day, as the June solstice falls around the height or middle of summer. At this time growing of crops will be well underway and looking promising, so growers in the past would celebrate their anticipated harvests at Midsummer festivals. It's an ancient day that many people still enjoy because summer calls for celebration! Nature has burst into life, and it seems like the Sun never sets. In fact, in some places like the north of Sweden, it doesn't!

The night before Midsummer Day is called Midsummer Eve (June 23) which is on or near the shortest night of the year. Celebrations for Midsummer typically begin on Midsummer's Eve. Dancing, singing, feasting, and bonfires are hallmarks of the night.

I attended a festival called "Wianki" by the Vistula River in Krakow, Poland. There was lots of music and dancing, and we all threw flower wreaths into the river as is the tradition. At the end of the night there was a huge firework show, it was so much *fun* and it was great getting to spend time with my friends.

– Ewa Slobodzian, L&D Specialist, UKC

For ancient pagan Celtic people, who inhabited the British Isles, and modern Scandinavians, who experience almost continuous sunlight at this time of year (think "Land of the Midnight Sun"), the summer solstice is a magical time, one of new beginnings.

Many different cultures around the world still recognise this important day, let's take a look now at how they do so.



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How do people celebrate the solstice?

- In Sweden, "Midsommar" is a national holiday, second only to Christmas. All Swedes take to the countryside and make their own Midsummer flower garland. This is then followed by a lunch of pickled herring with potatoes, dill and chives, drinking nubbe (vodka schnapps), and dancing around a tall pole adored with fresh-picked flowers
- In Britain, folks surround the ancient Stonehenge monument and dance and play drums to mark the Sun's solstice peek—and peaking appearance—between slivers of rock

Michael Evans, Head of Media & Public Relations, Manton Wood

Having lived in Denmark for 15 years, the summer solstice (or 'Sankt Hans Aften' as the Danes call it) is an event, where people gather around a bonfire with an effigy of a witch on top, sing songs and enjoy the company of good friends with a few drinks. Sankt Hans Aften dates back to before Christianity came to Denmark, where Scandinavian people celebrated the longest day as a supernatural struggle between light and dark, heat and cold.



Brittany Glaves, T,D&I Coordinator, Kiveton

Back in 2019 I was on holiday and got to attend a Night of San Juan festival on the beach at Los Christianos. The beach was packed with people, and many of them lit bonfires and brought food and drink to share out. There was a real party atmosphere, and you could tell that it was an important day culturally. I was so happy to be a part of it!



- In Kraków, Poland, girls make flower-and-herb wreaths and float them down the Wisla River. If a boy takes up a girl's garland, the belief is that they will marry. (If the wreath sinks, it is believed that the girl will die young!) Wreaths that connect while afloat symbolize two girls' lifelong friendship
- In Spain, the night of June 23 is known as "The Night of San Juan" and across the country people gather to recognise Saint John. Massive bonfires are built on the beach representing the purification of the spirit, and at midnight people jump into the ocean in order to cleanse themselves and wash away evil spirits

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- In Greece, locals re-enact a 2,500-year solstice tradition: they hike to the peak of Mount Olympus, with an elevation of 9,573 feet
- In Estonia, this day is known as Jaanipäev ("Jaan's Day") and is celebrated on the night prior (June 23). On this evening, there is much dancing, singing, eating, and drinking, as well as the main event: jumping over the bonfire to dispel bad luck!

- Italy has regional midsummer traditions: In Rome, people eat snails. It is believed that these horned creatures will protect the consumer from devilry. In northern Italy, cooks prepare dishes with aged balsamic vinegar; this is the time when the year's grapes are entering a critical stage of development. Sprinkle balsamic vinegar on a salad
- In Latvia, folks feast on meat, Jani cheese and sweet beer, and, in the dark hours of the short night, search for a fern flower believed to be a lucky charm for lovers. Choose your lucky charm and organise a search party

Julija Nicipurova, Production Operative, Boston

We do it because it's fun and a tradition. Usually, Latvian women wear a special dress on the day, sing and dance throughout the day. The first day of celebration is Līgo day and then the second day is Jāņi. We also have a BBQ, Jāņi cheese and beer throughout the celebrations.

Ruta Bepalova, Coordinator, Warrington

"Līgo and Jāņi are summer solstice festivals in Latvia, and many people across the country recognise the tradition of celebrating them. We gather outside and try to connect more with nature, appreciating what we have and enjoying time together."

