

# CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

## Spirituality

Throughout the world, religion and spirituality are linked with reverence for all creation – making forests a natural setting for worship. Buddhist monks in procession, Thailand. FAO/FO-5979/UMNAJ JAREARNIN



Forest chapel in Lázně Kynžvart,  
Czech Republic. VOJTA SREJBER





The Mijikenda people of Kenya regard the kaya (meaning "home" or "village") forests as the abodes of their ancestors and revere them as sacred sites – which also contributes to their conservation. In one traditional rite, women dance before memorial grave posts after dressing them with ribbons. UNESCO/S. OKOKO ASHIKOYE

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## Spirituality



Many cultures mythologize a “tree of life”. This image made from glass chips decorates the outside wall of the sixteenth century Wat Xieng Thong temple in Luang Prabang, Lao People’s Democratic Republic.

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Many northern European countries have a folk tradition of dancing and celebrating around a maypole on May Day or at midsummer. Although the origin of the maypole is uncertain, one theory holds that it is a remnant of a pagan (pre-Christian) reverence for sacred trees (the tree of life or the centre of the universe).

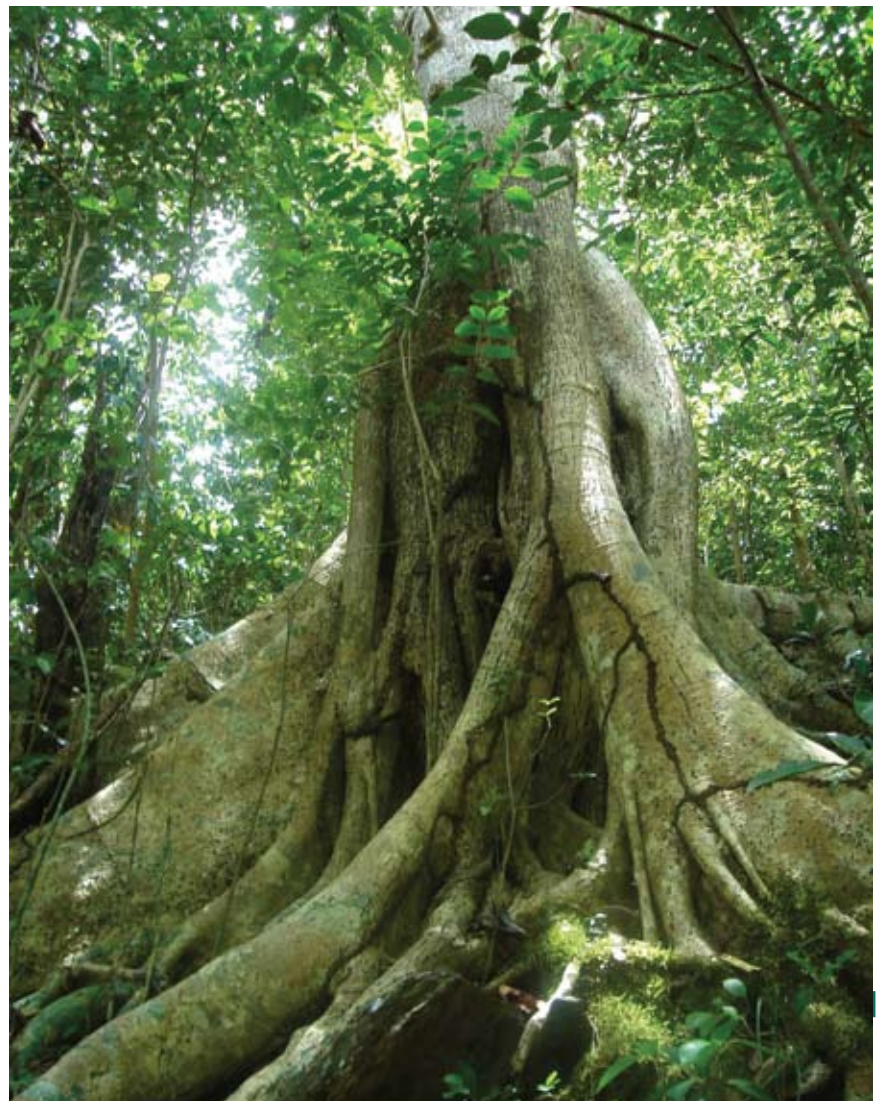
ASIO OTUS





Votive horses in a sacred grove, Tamil Nadu, India. The ancient Tamils considered trees the abode of spirits and gods, and set aside sanctified land for the worship of the tree spirits. Taboos, rituals and beliefs associated with the sacred groves continue to provide motivation for conserving them in as pristine a condition as possible, and these groves now function not only as spiritual havens, but as genetic reservoirs of wild species.

The indigenous Maya peoples of Mexico and Central America considered the kapok tree (*Ceiba pentandra*) sacred. They believed that the souls of the dead climbed a mythical kapok whose roots extended to the underworld and whose branches reached into heaven.



# CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

## Culture

21 APRIL  
World Creativity and Innovation  
Day



The Forest of Oma in the Urdaibai Natural Reserve, Spain is a creative work by sculptor and painter Agustín Ibarrola – a *Pinus radiata* forest with a difference. Individual tree trunks painted with people, animals and geometric shapes combine to form a complete image when viewed from certain positions. More tree art can be seen at: [landscapeandurbanism.blogspot.com/2008/12/tree-art.html](http://landscapeandurbanism.blogspot.com/2008/12/tree-art.html) SIMONCIO



The Hill of Witches near Juodkrantė, Lithuania, is an outdoor sculpture gallery on a forested sand dune. Begun in 1979, it now contains about 80 wooden sculptures along a series of trails. The artists drew on a long tradition of woodcarving in the region, and on the equally long tradition of Midsummer Night's Eve celebrations on the hill. The statues depict characters from Lithuanian folklore and pagan traditions. THOMAS PUSCH



21 MAY  
**World Day for Cultural Diversity for  
 Dialogue and Development**

A Native Alaskan totem pole on display at Sitka National Historical Park, Alaska. The indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest Coast of North America carve these monumental sculptures from large trees, mostly western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*). Totem poles may recount clan lineages (the word totem is derived from the Ojibwe word odoodem, meaning "his kinship group"), legends or notable events. ©ROBERT A. ESTREMO

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18 MAY  
International Museum Day

An arboretum is like a tree museum: a collection of woody plants intended at least partly for scientific study. The botanical garden at Padua, Italy (one of the first, created in 1545) has an arboretum of many historic trees, including a gigantic hollow-trunked oriental plane (*Platanus orientalis*) from 1680. The garden still preserves its original layout – a circular central plot, symbolizing the world, surrounded by a ring of water – in which many other historic trees are found, such as a ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*) dated 1750 and a southern magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*) which was probably planted in 1786 and is considered to be the oldest in Europe. ©UNESCO/30208691/YVON FRUENAU

Great representations of forests and trees in art are so numerous they could never be catalogued. One example is Gian Lorenzo Bernini's famous marble statue (in the Borghese Gallery, Rome, Italy) of the nymph Daphne being transformed into a laurel tree (*Laurus nobilis*) to avoid the pursuit of the god Apollo. The sculptor captures Daphne's skin turning to bark, her arms to branches, her hair to leaves and her feet to roots. In Ovid's myth, Apollo makes a wreath from Daphne's branches and proclaims the laurel as a sacred tree.

WITH KIND PERMISSION OF THE SPECIAL SUPERINTENDENCE P.S.A.E. AND MUSEUM COMPLEX OF THE CITY OF ROME





A window at I.M. Pei's modern Suzhou Museum in Suzhou, China, offers a view of bamboo forest for visitors to admire as if it were a painting in its own right.

©KEREN SU/CORBIS



The 65 m<sup>2</sup> Liaoning Forest Diorama at the American Museum of Natural History in New York is a detailed recreation of how the Jehol Forest in China looked 130 million years ago. It depicts the rich biodiversity of the Mesozoic forest, with life-size models of more than 35 different species of dinosaurs, reptiles, early birds, insects and plants.

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29 APRIL  
International Dance Day

Members of the Talaandig tribe from the forests of Mindanao, the Philippines, dance in the annual Kaamulan festival in the city of Malaybalay. Their dance shows their way of life, with representation of shifting cultivation, weaving and hunting.

ANY MARSIANI

The dance company Fevered Sleep in the United Kingdom created "The Forest", a dance piece aimed at children aged 3 to 7 years, to explore imagery of real forests, the forests of myth and fairytales, and the forests of the imagination. Like a forest, the dance is full of movement, rhythm, sound and texture.

FEVERED SLEEP





In Finland, the annual open-air forest festival known as "Konemetsä" promotes an alternative lifestyle of peace, love, unity and respect.



The Parque Nacional Bosque de Pedregal, an urban forest in Mexico City, has its own cultural centre, the Casa de Cultura, which among its activities sponsors workshops for dance and other arts.

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27 MARCH  
World Theatre Day

William Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is performed in the arboretum at the University of Michigan, United States of America. Outdoor theatre offers a special way to enjoy the urban forest, and is especially effective for plays set in nature. In this play, as often in literature and drama, the forest is portrayed as a setting for enchantment and mystery.



The Forest Theater in Carmel-by-the-Sea, California, originally founded in 1910 as the first outdoor proscenium theatre on the West Coast of the United States, was rebuilt in 1939 with funds from the Work Projects Administration (WPA), which provided jobs and income to the unemployed during the Great Depression.

In Italy, a collaborative project of the "Zompo Lo Schioppo" Nature Reserve and the Cooperative Theatre "Il Lanciavicchio" combines theatre with nature to help children learn about the environment. In an itinerant performance called "Tales of the wood", actor-guides lead the children on an excursion through the forest, where the young spectators interact with the creatures they encounter and hear their stories.





21 MARCH  
World Poetry Day

THIRD THURSDAY IN NOVEMBER  
World Philosophy Day

*Be content with your natural beauty  
Drink plenty of water  
Let your limbs sway and dance in the breezes  
Be flexible  
Remember your roots*

From "Advice from a Tree", Ilan Shamir

United States author, poet and storyteller Ilan Shamir adopted a name meaning "protector of the trees" to reflect his passion for trees and the inspiring messages they bring. In 1990 he co-founded a community forestry organization that has planted or sponsored the planting of over 30 000 trees involving thousands of volunteers.

©IFAD/13249/SAHAR NIMEH (KENYA)

*I wonder about the trees.  
Why do we wish to bear  
Forever the noise of these  
More than another noise  
So close to our dwelling place?*

From "The Sound of Trees",  
Robert Frost (1915)

©IFAD/16236/MASY ANDRIANTSOA (MADAGASCAR)



# CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

## Education and literacy



5 OCTOBER  
World Teacher's Day

A forest ranger in Slovenia teaches schoolchildren about the joys of the forest. FAO/FO-6858/ANDREA PERLIS



Trees make an outdoor classroom: children attend classes under a tree in a village in Southern Sudan.  
IRIN/2007070510/©M. DEGHATI

The modern trend towards electronic publishing notwithstanding, for centuries books and newspapers have depended on the existence of paper. Import of newsprint at Port Canaveral, Florida, United States of America. CANAVERAL PORT AUTHORITY



21 FEBRUARY  
International Mother Language Day

23 APRIL  
World Book and Copyright Day

3 MAY  
World Press Freedom Day

8 SEPTEMBER  
International Literacy Day

Two young mothers learning to write in a literacy class at a village near Lucknow, India. UN PHOTO/497

An elderly person reads a newspaper in a public park in Rome, Italy. UN PHOTO/104032/JOHN ISAAC

