First International Day of the Mediterranean Diet – 16 November

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News

The first 'International Day of the Mediterranean Diet' was observed on 16 November 2026. The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution moved by Italy on behalf of Mediterranean countries on 18 December 2025, without a vote (resolution A/RES/80/174), naming 16 November as the annual day; the 44th FAO Conference had approved the idea earlier in 2025. Co-sponsors included Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Lebanon, Morocco, Portugal, San Marino, Spain and Tunisia; FAO's list also names Armenia, Malta and Montenegro among the core sponsors. The date recalls 16 November 2010, when the Mediterranean diet was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The Rome-based Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) leads the observance. No official theme has been announced for 2026.

Key facts for the exam

Point	Details
Date	16 November – first observed in 2026
Declared by	UN General Assembly, December 2025 (Italy's proposal)
Lead agency	FAO, Rome
UNESCO inscription	16 Nov 2010 – 5th session, Nairobi: Spain, Greece, Italy, Morocco
Extension	2013 – Baku session: Cyprus, Croatia, Portugal added (7 States)

Point	Details
Word origin	Greek 'diaita' – 'way of life'
Core foods	Olive oil, grains, pulses, fruit and vegetables, fish; little meat
Scientific basis	Ancel Keys – 'Seven Countries Study' (heart disease, 1950s–60s)
2026 theme	None officially announced

Background

- UNESCO intangible heritage: On 17 October 2003 the UNESCO General Conference in Paris adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (in force 2006). Its domains are oral traditions, performing arts, rituals and festive events, knowledge of nature, and traditional craftsmanship. The 1972 Convention (World Heritage) protects monuments and natural sites; the 2003 Convention protects 'living heritage'.
- India: At the 20th session of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee, held at Delhi's Red Fort on 8–13 December 2025, 'Deepavali' was added to the Representative List; Italian cooking was inscribed at the same session. India's other elements include Kutiyattam, Vedic chanting and Ramlila (2008), Chhau, Kalbelia and Mudiyettu (2010), Yoga (2016), Kumbh Mela (2017), Durga Puja in Kolkata (2021) and Garba of Gujarat (2023). The Sangeet Natak Akademi is India's nodal body for it.
- Food and health: Olive oil, the main fat of the Mediterranean diet, is rich in monounsaturated fatty acid (oleic acid), which helps lower 'bad' LDL cholesterol. Ancel Keys's research in the 1960s linked the diet to less heart disease; FAO says it is also linked to lower rates of diabetes, certain cancers and depression. FAO warns that this heritage is eroding due to globalisation, urbanisation and new consumption patterns.

Tamil Nadu link: Like the Mediterranean diet, Tamil food tradition is a way of life – 'food is medicine'. Tamil Nadu's traditional foods are protected through Geographical Indication (GI) tags – in 2019 'Palani Panchamirtham' became the first temple prasadam from Tamil Nadu to get a GI tag; it is made of five natural ingredients – banana, jaggery, cow ghee, honey and cardamom – without preservatives, and is a main offering in the abhishekam at the Arulmigu Dhandayuthapani Swamy temple, Palani. No element exclusive to Tamil Nadu is yet on UNESCO's intangible list; Deepavali, added in 2025, is widely celebrated in the State.

Frequently asked questions

What is this news about?

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What are the key facts to remember for the exam?

Date: 16 November – first observed in 2026; Declared by: UN General Assembly, December 2025 (Italy's proposal); Lead agency: FAO, Rome; UNESCO inscription: 16 Nov 2010 – 5th session, Nairobi: Spain, Greece, Italy, Morocco.

What is the background to this news?

UNESCO intangible heritage: On 17 October 2003 the UNESCO General Conference in Paris adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (in force 2006).

Practice questions (with answers)

1. In 2010 the Mediterranean diet was inscribed by UNESCO jointly for Spain, Greece, Italy and which African country?

A) Egypt

B) Tunisia

C) Algeria

D) Morocco

Answer: D – Explanation: Morocco (Nairobi session, 2010). Cyprus, Croatia and Portugal joined at the 2013 Baku session, making seven States.

2. In which year was the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage adopted?

A) 2003

B) 1972

C) 1992

D) 2005

Answer: A – Explanation: 2003 (Paris, 17 Oct; in force 2006). 1972 is the World Heritage Convention; 2005 the Convention on Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

3. At the UNESCO committee session held at Delhi's Red Fort in Dec 2025, which Indian festival joined the intangible heritage list?

A) Pongal

B) Holi

C) Onam

D) Deepavali

Answer: D – Explanation: Deepavali – at the 20th session (8–13 Dec 2025). Earlier Indian festivals listed: Kumbh Mela (2017), Durga Puja (2021), Garba (2023).

4. Olive oil, the main fat of the Mediterranean diet, is richest in which type of fatty acid?

A) Saturated

B) Monounsaturated

C) Trans fat

D) Omega-3 polyunsaturated

Answer: B – Explanation: Monounsaturated – mainly oleic acid; helps lower LDL. Omega-3 is rich in fish and flaxseed; trans fats occur in vanaspati.

5. Which became the first temple prasadam from Tamil Nadu to receive a Geographical Indication (GI) tag, in 2019?

A) Palani Panchamirtham

B) Srivilliputtur Palkova

C) Tirupati Laddu

D) Manapparai Murukku

Answer: A – Explanation: Palani Panchamirtham – banana, jaggery, ghee, honey, cardamom. Srivilliputtur Palkova has GI but is no prasadam; Tirupati Laddu is Andhra's.

Sources: FAO newsroom, 19 Dec 2025 – fao.org/newsroom; Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dec 2025 – esteri.it; Permanent Mission of Italy to the UN, 2 Dec 2025 – italyun.esteri.it; UNESCO ICH – Mediterranean diet – ich.unesco.org; News On AIR, 10 Dec 2025 – newsonair.gov.in; Geographical Indications Registry – ipindia.gov.in (Palani Panchamirtham, 2019). © Shanmugam IAS Academy.