What is National Aboriginal Day?

June 21 is National Aboriginal Day. National Aboriginal Day often coincides with the summer solstice, which is a significant time in many aboriginal societies. This year, the summer solstice falls on June 20. This is a day for all Canadians to recognize and celebrate the unique heritage, diverse cultures and outstanding contributions First Nations, Inuit, and Metis peoples. The Canadian Constitution recognizes these three groups as Aboriginal peoples, also known as Indigenous Peoples. In cooperation with Indigenous organizations, the Government of Canada chose June 21, the summer solstice, for National Aboriginal Day. For generations, many aboriginal people have celebrated their culture and heritage on or near this day due to the significance of the summer solstice as the longest day of the year.

It was created in 1996 by Roméo LeBlanc, governor general at the time, after many consultations with First Nation, Inuit, and Métis people. The idea for a nationwide day to celebrate Indigenous culture and contributions was introduced in 1982, by the Assembly of First Nations, formerly the National Indian Brotherhood.

It isn’t recognized as a federal statutory holiday; however The Northwest Territories has celebrated National Aboriginal Day as a statutory holiday since 2001, and in 2015 the Yukon government moved to follow suit, but is first consulting with Yukoners before making it official.