Can You Say "Merry Christmas?"

Of course you can! Despite this common sense advice, every year I hear from readers or clients who are mad because they've heard about some sort of contrary directive. Some have even tried to convince me that "they" have created new laws about this.

There are, of course, retail establishments or other businesses who direct their employees otherwise, advising them to use "happy holidays" instead. These businesses are sensitive to the reality that we live in a diverse culture, and that not everyone celebrates this particular holiday. There are Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Kwanzaa-celebrators, and the like, who observe different holidays.
(Although I must say, my experience of Hindus in this country - as well as those in Indonesia - is that they like to celebrate most holidays!)

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If you want a great description of this, read one of my favorite books, City of Joy, by Dominique Lapierre. Despite the fact that it is set in a Calcutta slum, no one could be jollier than the people therein when it comes to holidays, celebrating both their own and other religions'.
http://religion.answers.wikia.com/wiki/What_holidays_do_hindus_celebrate

But I digress. When it comes to saying "Merry Christmas" many businesses recognize that they want to keep their loyal customers who are not celebrating Christmas so they have settled on requesting that their employees say "Happy Holidays" instead. If you work for some other entity that does not make that suggestion, you can probably say whatever you like, although a personal policy of being sensitive to others' feelings is always a good idea.

"What are your plans for the holidays?" or "Are you taking any time off at the end of the year?" is always a good bet if you don't know someone well. And, of course, disrespecting, denigrating or harassing based on someone's religion is probably a violation of your employer's policy, not to mention that it's just plain rude.

So...ho, ho, ho, Merry Christmas, Happy Kwanzaa, belated Hanukkah greetings, or Happy New Year to you all!!