

FESTIVALS IN ENGLISH-SPEAKING COUNTRIES

Martin Luther King Day

Martin Luther King Day is a **federal holiday** in the USA. It means that banks, schools, post offices and other governmental buildings are closed and **many people don't have to go to work**. It is celebrated on the **third Monday** in January. It honours the life and work of Martin Luther King, Jr. who used **non-violent tactics to end racial discrimination** and who was **assassinated in 1968**. The holiday is usually celebrated with parades and speeches about civil rights.

St Valentine's Day

St Valentine's Day is celebrated **on February 14** in many countries around the world. It is a **celebration of love**. People usually **send each other cards** with romantic messages. They don't write their name on the cards. The person who gets the card has to guess who sent it to him or her. People also **give presents to their boyfriends and girlfriends**. Typical Valentine's Day presents are **flowers and chocolate**. Couples also often have dinner at a restaurant together. A famous symbol of St Valentine's Day is a **heart**.

The origin of St Valentine's day is not clear. The most common story talks about **a priest called Valentine** who lived in the Roman Empire. The Roman emperor needed soldiers and he said that young men cannot get married. Valentine did not agree with the emperor and **he helped young couples to get married**. Unfortunately, the emperor found out and **Valentine was killed on 14 February**. That is why people celebrate the festival of love on this day. The tradition of exchanging Valentine cards is much later – it comes from the 19th century.

Washington's Birthday / Presidents' Day

The third Monday in February is called Washington's Birthday in the USA. People remember the first president of the USA, **George Washington**, who was born on 22 February. Some people think that it is a celebration of all American presidents and they prefer to call this day Presidents' Day.

St Patrick's Day

St Patrick's Day is a traditional **Irish holiday**. It is celebrated in Ireland and in countries where there are a lot of people from Ireland, for example in the United States. St Patrick's Day is celebrated **on 17 March**. People celebrate it with singing, dancing and drinking. They usually wear **green clothes**. People often drink traditional Irish beer called Guinness and sometimes also Irish whiskey. There are **parades with costumes** in many large cities. The biggest St Patrick's Day parade takes place in New York.

St Patrick was born in the 4th century and he is famous for **bringing Christianity to Ireland**. He was born in Britain and his parents were rich. When he was 16 years old, he was kidnapped and sold as a slave in Ireland. When he escaped, he moved to France where he studied religion. After 12 years, he returned to Ireland and made this country Christian. There is a legend that St Patrick drove all snakes out of Ireland.

Some famous symbols of St Patrick's Day are **shamrocks and leprechauns**. A shamrock is a kind of plant. It is the national symbol of Ireland. A typical shamrock has three leaves. If you find a shamrock with four leaves, it will bring you good luck. Leprechauns are little magic men who wear green clothes. If you catch one of them, they will tell you where they hid their pot of gold.

Easter

Easter is a movable feast. That means that it takes place on a different day each year. The calculation of the date of Easter is quite complicated. It takes place **on the first Sunday after the first full moon of spring**. It is always between March 22 and April 25.

Easter is a **Christian festival**. For Christians, it is the most important church festival of the year, even more important than Christmas. It is **a celebration of Jesus's return to life** on the third day after his death. Christians believe that by dying for us on the cross Jesus took all the bad things that we have done on himself and saved us from them. A lot of people go to church at Easter.

Easter is also a **celebration of spring**. Typical symbols of Easter are symbols of new life: **eggs and animal babies, especially young rabbits and chickens**. There are some interesting traditions connected with Easter. In Britain and in the USA, parents **hide chocolate eggs in their gardens** for children to find. If the children are

very young, they tell them that Easter Bunny put the eggs there. Chocolate Easter eggs are especially popular in Britain. The average British child gets 6 to 10 large chocolate eggs. Another typical Easter food in Britain are **hot cross buns**. They are special Easter cakes that have a cross shape on top.

In the **Czech Republic**, the tradition is different. Men go from door to door with **special Easter whips** made from willow branches. They whip all the women in the house with this special whip. If they are not idiots, they do it gently. It is said that the whipping brings the women **good luck and fertility**. They get **boiled eggs, chocolate eggs and other treats** for this service. If they are adults, they usually get alcohol. By noon, some of them are drunk. They lie on the ground, throw up and annoy everybody else.

All Fools' Day

April Fools' Day takes place on **April 1**. People celebrate it by **playing tricks** on each other. For example, they point to a friend's shoe and say 'Your shoelace is untied.' What fun! Or they tell their classmates that school has been cancelled. Another popular trick is placing a bag of flour on top of a door. When somebody opens the door, the flour falls on their head. Most April jokes don't hurt anybody.

Mother's Day

Mother's Day started in North America and Europe but it is celebrated all over the world today. In the **Czech Republic and in the United States** it is celebrated on the **second Sunday of May**. In **the UK**, it is celebrated **three weeks before Easter Sunday**. The first Mother's Day was celebrated in the USA in 1914. It was an idea of Anna Jarvis, who is known as 'the mother of Mother's Day'.

Memorial Day

Memorial Day is celebrated **in the USA on the last Monday of May**. At first, it was a **commemoration of the soldiers who died in the American Civil War**. Today, Memorial Day **commemorates all Americans who died in war**. It is a federal holiday so banks, schools, post offices and other governmental buildings are closed and many people don't have to go to work.

People **give presents to their mothers** and young children **make special cards for them**. People often do housework for their mothers and invite them to a restaurant for dinner. In Sweden, people buy plastic flowers and the money is given to poor mothers and their children.

Independence Day

Probably the most famous American holiday is Independence Day. It is celebrated **on 4 July** every year. It is a federal holiday. Schools, banks, post offices, and government offices are closed on the Fourth of July. Independence Day celebrates **the Declaration of Independence**, which took place **on 4 July, 1776**. On this day, America declared its **independence from Britain**. For many Americans, this is the most important holiday of all. People often celebrate it with **parades and fireworks**. There are American flags everywhere. People often have **barbecues** in their gardens and eat hot dogs, hamburgers, and other typically American food.

Labor Day

Labor Day is an American holiday. It takes place on the **first Monday of September** every year and it **celebrates American workers**. It is a federal holiday so schools, banks, post offices, and government offices are closed.

Columbus Day

Columbus Day is celebrated in the USA on the **second Monday of October**. It is a federal holiday so schools, banks, post offices, and government offices are closed. It celebrates the day when **Christopher Columbus landed in America in 1492**. Columbus wanted to **find a quick way from Europe to Asia** and he didn't know that he landed in a new continent. He called the people he met there **Indians** because he thought that he was in India. Many of these "Indians" **were later killed by Europeans and by European diseases**. That is why some people do not like celebrating this holiday. They think that Columbus was just a robber.

Halloween

Halloween is celebrated on 31 October. It was originally a **Celtic holiday**. The Celts called it Samhain. They believed that on this day **the ghosts of dead people return to our world**. The Celts dressed up to look scary because they thought that if they looked like ghosts, the real ghosts would't hurt them. Irish immigrants brought Halloween traditions to America.

Today, Halloween is celebrated especially by **children**. They **put on scary costumes** and go from house to house. When they come to the door, they say **'trick or treat'**. The person who lives in the house opens the door and gives them **candy**. Some of the most popular Halloween costumes are zombies, vampires, ghosts, witches, mummies, and others. Adults often have office parties where they put on scary costumes too.

The most famous symbol of Halloween is the **jack-o'-lantern**. It is a monster made out of a pumpkin. It has a scary face and there is a candle inside.

Guy Fawkes Night

Guy Fawkes Night is a very British festival. It is sometimes also called **Bonfire Night**. It is celebrated on **5 November**. People **make models of Guy Fawkes and burn them**. There are **fireworks and bonfires** all over Britain. The biggest fireworks take place in Edenbridge in Kent. You have to be over 18 years old if you want to buy fireworks. In the past, children walked the streets with their model of Guy Fawkes and said: 'Penny for the Guy!' Traditional Guy Fawkes Night food is **hot baked potatoes**. They must taste delicious in the cold weather.

The celebration has its origin in the year **1605**. The English king, **James I**, was a Protestant. He was unfriendly to the Catholics and some of them **tried to kill him** and replace him with a Catholic king. Their leader was a man called Guy Fawkes. On 5 November, they placed **36 barrels of gunpowder** in the Houses of Parliament. The plan was unsuccessful. The king's supporters found the gunpowder and Guy Fawkes was **put in prison and killed**. King James then ordered the people of England to celebrate his survival.

Remembrance Day / Veterans Day

Remembrance Day is celebrated on **11 November** each year. It is the day when **World War One ended in 1918**. At 11 o'clock, people in Britain keep a two-minute silence. They remember all the people who have died in wars. The first two-minute silence in Britain was held on 11 November 1919 – one year after the end of World War One.

People usually wear **red poppies** on this day. These flowers are a symbol of those who died in war. The money that people pay for these poppies is used to help war veterans. In the USA, November 11 is called **Veterans Day**. It is a federal holiday which means that schools, banks, post offices and other government buildings are closed and people don't have to go to work.

Thanksgiving / Thanksgiving Day

Thanksgiving Day is a very American holiday. It is celebrated **on the fourth Thursday in November**. People usually celebrate Thanksgiving by **getting together with their family and eating a big dinner**. Typical Thanksgiving food includes **roast turkey**, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce, gravy, and pumpkin pie. It is a federal holiday so schools, banks, post offices and other government buildings are closed and people don't have to go to work.

The **first Thanksgiving** was celebrated in 1621. A year before, in 1620, a ship called **Mayflower** arrived in America. The people who travelled on this ship were called **Pilgrims**. They were **English Protestants** who didn't want to be part of the Church of England. They sailed to America to find **religious freedom** (for themselves, not for everybody). The first winter in America was very difficult for them. They worked very hard but they could not finish building their houses and find enough food. **Almost half of them died**. In the spring, they got **help from the Indians**. A man called Squanto taught them how to grow American plants and a lot of other things. In the autumn, the Pilgrims had enough food to survive the winter. They were very happy and invited the Indians to a three-day celebration.

Christmas

At Christmas, people remember **the birth of Jesus Christ**. It is celebrated on **25 December**. Around this time, non-Christian people celebrated light and the return of the sun. For Christians, the only true light is Jesus Christ so they decided to celebrate his birth on this day. Nobody actually knows when Jesus was born.

According to the Bible, **Jesus was born in Bethlehem**. His parents were poor people. They couldn't find a place to stay. Every house was full. They had to sleep in **the room where the animals slept**. Mary gave birth to Jesus that evening and the baby was put in a **manger**. At this moment, a **bright star** appeared in the sky. **Three wise men** far away from Bethlehem saw it and followed it. They arrived in Bethlehem and **gave Jesus their presents**: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

There are many different ways to celebrate Christmas. In many countries, people **exchange presents**. The presents are wrapped and put under the Christmas tree or in the stockings. In the UK and in the USA, these presents are opened **on the morning of Christmas Day** (25 December). They also eat traditional Christmas dinner – **turkey and stuffing**. Another typical Christmas food is **Christmas pudding**. It is a plum pudding and people often put a silver coin in it. The person who finds the coin is going to be very lucky next year. Plum pudding is usually eaten only in the UK, not in the US.

Children **in the USA** believe that it is **Santa Claus** who brings them the presents. He lives at the **North Pole** where he has a huge toy factory. Thousands of **elves work in this factory** all year round and make Christmas presents for children. They don't get any money for it. They are basically slaves. Santa travels in a **sleigh pulled by eight reindeer**. On Christmas Day, he enters people's houses **through the chimney** and leaves the presents there. **In Britain**, Santa Claus is called **Father Christmas**.

In the Czech Republic, there are different Christmas traditions. People put the presents under the Christmas tree and open them **on Christmas Eve** (24 December). Very young children believe that it was **Baby Jesus** who put them there. Traditional Christmas dinner is also different. People usually eat **fried carp and potato salad** and they eat it in the evening on 24 December.

New Year

People all over the world celebrate **the end of the old year and the beginning of the new year**. 31 December, the last day of the old year, is called **New Year's Eve**. People usually celebrate it with their friends. They play games, sing, dance, and **drink champagne at midnight**. There is always a big celebration in Trafalgar Square in London. The 1st of January is called **New Year's Day**. It is a public holiday and people don't have to go to work so they can recover from all the partying. In Scotland, New Year celebrations are called **Hogmanay**. They last for three days. When the bells ring midnight, people usually sing a song called **Auld Lang Syne** /ould laen zájñ/. The name of the song means something like "the old times".

The overview is largely based on the following sources:

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