



ZOOM

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CELEBRATE! Holidays in the USA



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White House photo

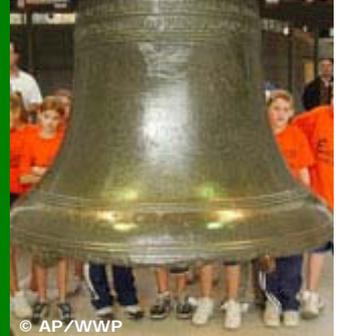


People in every culture celebrate holidays. Although the word "holiday" literally means "holy day," most American holidays are not religious, but commemorative in nature and origin. Because the nation is blessed with rich ethnic heritage it is possible to trace some of the American holidays to diverse cultural sources and traditions, but all holidays have taken on a distinctively American flavor. In the United States, the word "holiday" is synonymous with "celebration!"

In the strict sense, there are no federal (national) holidays in the United States. Each of the 50 states has jurisdiction over its holidays. In practice, however, most states observe the federal ("legal or public") holidays, even though the President and Congress can legally designate holidays only for federal government employees.

Ten holidays per year are proclaimed by the federal government. They are as follows:

- New Year's Day**—January 1
- Martin Luther King Day**—third Monday in January (traditional: January 15)
- Presidents' Day**—third Monday in February (traditional: February 12 & February 22)
- Memorial Day**—last Monday in May (traditional: May 30)
- Independence Day**—July 4
- Labor Day**—first Monday in September
- Columbus Day**—second Monday in October (traditional: October 12)
- Veterans' Day**—November 11
- Thanksgiving Day**—fourth Thursday in November
- Christmas Day**—December 25



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■ Thanksgiving



Almost every culture in the world has held celebrations of thanks for a plentiful harvest. The American Thanksgiving holiday began as a feast of thanksgiving in the early days of the American colonies almost four hundred years ago.

Thanksgiving is a time for tradition and sharing. Even if they live far away, family members gather for a reunion at the house of an older relative. All give thanks together for the good things that they have. In this spirit of sharing, civic groups and charitable organizations offer a traditional meal to those in need, particularly the homeless. On most tables throughout the United States, foods eaten at the first thanksgiving have become traditional.

Symbols of Thanksgiving

Turkey, corn (or maize), pumpkins and cranberry sauce are symbols which represent the first Thanksgiving.

The use of corn meant the survival of the colonies. "Indian corn" as a table or door decoration represents the harvest and the fall season.



Sweet-sour cranberry sauce, or cranberry jelly, was on the first Thanksgiving table, and is still served today. The cranberry is a small, sour berry. The Indians used the fruit to treat infections. They used the juice to dye their rugs and blankets. They taught the colonists how to cook the sweetener a sauce. The berries with and water to make a sauce. The berries are still grown in New England. Very few people know, however, that berries are put in bags to be sent to the rest of the country, each individual berry must bounce at least four inches high to make sure they are not too ripe!



Did You Know...

that each year, the President of the United States pardons the Thanksgiving turkey from the dinner table?



President George W. Bush invites children to pet Liberty, the freed bird. (White House photo by Susan Sterner)

■ Christmas



Immigrant settlers brought Father Christmas to the United States. Father Christmas's name was gradually changed to Santa Claus, from the Dutch name for Father Christmas, which is Sinter Claas. Although he has origins in

Norse and pre-Christian mythology, Santa Claus took shape in the United States. Americans gave Santa Claus a white beard, dressed him in a red suit and made him a cheery old gentleman with red cheeks and a twinkle in his eye.

Several American towns maintain the spirit of Santa Claus. The New England state of Connecticut has a Christmas village where "Santa" and his elves give out gifts. In New York, a small town called the North Pole was designed for Santa Claus. There is a post office, a church and a blacksmith shop, to repair the shoes of the reindeer.

On December 24, Christmas Eve, Santa hitches his eight reindeer to a sleigh, and loads it with presents. The reindeer pull him and his sleigh through the sky to deliver presents to children all around the world, that is, if they had been good all year.



In anticipation of Santa's visit, American children listen to their parents read "The Night Before Christmas" before they go to bed on Christmas Eve.

**'Twas the night before Christmas when all through the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there;**
(by Clement Moore, 1823)

Each year, the President lights the National Christmas Tree, a tradition Americans have been celebrating since 1923. The National Christmas Tree is a living tree, a Colorado blue spruce from York, Pennsylvania, planted on the Ellipse (the park area south of the White House) in 1978.

The Tree with the White House in the background. (White House photo)



■ Fourth of July: Independence Day

By the middle of the 1700s, the thirteen colonies that made up part of England's empire in the New World were finding it difficult to be ruled by a king 3,000 miles across the Atlantic Ocean. But independence was a gradual and painful process. Independence Day is celebrated on July 4 because that is the day when the Continental Congress approved the Declaration of Independence.



Every July fourth, Americans have a holiday from work and celebrations take place all over the country. The National Parade in Washington, D.C., consists of invited bands, military and specialty units, floats, and is a patriotic, flag waving, red white and blue celebration of America's birthday. In Philadelphia, where the Declaration of Independence was first read, costumed Americans re-enact historical scenes at the Freedom Festival at Independence Hall.



Communities have day-long picnics with favorite foods like hot dogs, hamburgers, potato salad, baked beans, and all the fixings. The afternoon activities would not be complete without lively music, a friendly baseball game, three-legged races, and a pie-eating or watermelon-eating contests. Some cities have parades with people dressed as the original founding fathers who march in parades to the music of high school bands. At dusk, people in towns and cities gather to watch the fireworks display. Wherever Americans are around the globe, they will get together for a traditional 4th of July celebration!

To learn more about the Declaration of Independence and this holiday, please visit the following web sites:

National Archives: www.archives.gov/national_archives_experience/charters/declaration.html

Declaring Independence: Drafting the Documents (Library of Congress): www.loc.gov/exhibits/declara/declara1.html

Historic District of Philadelphia: www.ushistory.org/districts/historicdistrict/index.html

Boston's Fourth of July: www.july4th.org/

America's 2005 Independence Day Parade: <http://www.july4thparade.com/>



■ The Funny Side: Halloween and Groundhog Day



On October 31st, dozens of children dressed in costumes knock on their neighbors' doors and yell, "Trick or Treat" when the door opens. Pirates and princesses, ghosts and popular heroes of the day all hold bags open to catch the candy or other goodies that the neighbors drop in.

Halloween originated as a celebration connected with evil spirits. Witches flying on broomsticks with black cats, ghosts, goblins and skeletons have all evolved as symbols of Halloween.



Carving pumpkins into jack-o'-lanterns is a custom dating back to Ireland. A legend grew up about a man named Jack who was so stingy that he was not allowed into heaven when he died. His spirit to wander around the countryside, holding a lantern to light his way. The faces out of "Jack of the o'-lantern." their customs carved faces on pumpkins because they were more plentiful than turnips.



Groundhog Day, the second day of February, has its origins in an ancient celebration of a point mid-way between the Winter Solstice and the Spring Equinox (forty days after Christmas and forty days before Easter). According to the tradition, the groundhog comes out from its borrow on this day, and if it sees its shadow look for "At Least Six More Weeks of Winter," but if it does not see it "Spring Is Just Around the Corner."



This lore grew popular in the United States in the late 1800s due to the efforts of a newspaper editor and a congressman. They organized and popularized a yearly festival in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, in which a groundhog named "Punxsutawney Phil" would foretell how much longer winter would last.

The groundhog, also known as a woodchuck or whistle-pig, is a marmot, native to North America. It's a burrowing and hibernating mammal.



Activity Page

Win Booklets!

To take part in a drawing for colorful English language booklets about the United States e-mail us the answer to the following question:

How many federally proclaimed holidays are there in the United States?

Send your answer to:
zoom@usembassy.hu

Please state your name, address, and age.

The deadline is
December 15.

Winners will be notified by the end of December.

Good Luck!

ZOOM
in on america

Zoom is available online at

www.usembassy.hu/zoom.htm

Please send requests for subscription and comments to:
zoom@usembassy.hu

Regional English Language Office
relomail@usembassy.hu

Information Resource Center
infousa@usembassy.hu

Mailing address:
U.S. Embassy
Public Affairs Section
1054 Budapest
Szabadság tér 12.

What's Missing?

Can you put in the missing words (all related to holidays) in the American proverbs below? (The number of spaces corresponds to the number of missing letters.)

A white _____ brings forth a green Easter.

Every day is not a _____.

_____ took a chance. (Hint: a person's name is missing, and it happened in 1492)

A _____ with a kind word is a double gift.

Glossary (With reference to the page where the word appears.)

commemorative – in honor of a person or event (1)

evolve – to develop over a long period of time (3)

fixings – the sauces and extras that accompany a meal (3)

goblin – an evil or tricky spirit (3)

hitch – to connect (2)

re-enact – to perform again (3)

Spring Equinox – The spring equinox is on March 20 (March 21 in some years). It is the day when the hours of daylight start to be longer and longer. In other words, after this day the nights grow shorter and shorter. Ancient people celebrated the new year on the spring equinox. (3)

spruce – any trees or shrubs bearing cones and evergreen leaves (2)

stingy – unwilling to share (3)

"Trick or treat" – "Give us a treat, or we'll play a joke on you!" (3)

twinkle – sparkle; bright spot like a star (2)

Winter Solstice – Winter officially begins on the shortest day of the year December 21 (or December 22 in some years), the day of the solstice. Solstice means the sun stands still. It is often celebrated with parties and winter customs. (3)

Find Correct Answers at: www.usembassy.hu/zoom_key.htm

Spooky Word Search

B	N	I	K	P	M	U	P	S	L	L	T	E	R	H
E	P	N	R	R	L	W	S	B	H	A	R	C	C	G
D	B	O	B	F	O	R	A	P	P	L	E	S	N	S
C	L	B	S	K	C	D	E	T	S	S	S	I	B	N
W	P	M	Y	D	N	A	C	V	U	R	V	A	B	O
I	E	T	W	A	L	L	D	N	E	R	A	R	B	T
T	B	E	B	Q	P	C	A	G	A	E	M	R	O	E
C	C	L	D	U	M	H	S	C	Y	R	P	K	P	L
H	N	K	A	E	E	F	N	A	W	M	I	U	M	E
E	B	S	R	C	N	I	R	L	K	S	R	P	U	K
P	R	G	H	E	K	P	E	M	A	T	E	I	M	S
F	E	S	S	P	D	C	S	N	U	P	Z	Q	M	D
D	P	S	M	A	C	S	A	R	L	A	E	U	Y	N
A	R	U	M	M	E	E	S	T	K	Y	K	R	P	I
L	P	A	B	K	I	L	D	P	E	P	U	N	S	K

BOBFORAPPLES
MUMMY
PUMPKINCARVING
BLACKCAT
VAMPIRE
CANDY
SKELETON
WITCH
PUMPKIN

You can play this game, and many others, on-line at www.whitehouse.gov/holiday/halloween/