

Holidays and traditions in English-speaking countries date, origin/reason for celebrating, typical symbols, ways to spend the holiday

Christmas

In English-speaking countries, Christmas Day (25 December) is celebrated by Christians as the day that Jesus Christ was born. Christmas Eve is the day or evening before Christmas Day (24 December). Boxing Day is the first day after Christmas Day, which is a public holiday in the UK and Canada. The name comes from the old custom of giving servants a gift of money called a 'Christmas box'. In the United Kingdom Christmas decorations are put up in shops and town centres from early November. Many towns and cities have a public event involving a local or regional celebrity to mark the switching on of Christmas lights. Decorations in people's homes are commonly put up from early December, traditionally including a Christmas tree, cards, and lights both inside and outside the home. Every year, Norway donates a giant Christmas tree for the British to raise in Trafalgar Square as a thank you for helping during the Second World War. Christmas decorations are traditionally left up until the evening of January 5; it is considered bad luck to have Christmas decorations up after this date. Mince pies are traditionally sold and are a popular food for Christmas. It is common in many UK households for children and adults to put up advent calendars in their homes, which may contain chocolates. Midnight Mass is also celebrated by Anglicans and Catholics. On Christmas Eve, presents are supposedly delivered in stockings and under the Christmas tree by Father Christmas. Sometimes people call him Santa Claus. Many families tell their children stories about Father Christmas and his reindeer. One tradition is to put out a plate of carrots for the reindeer, and mince pies and sherry for Father Christmas to help him on his way. The majority of families open their presents on the morning of Christmas Day. Since the first commercial Christmas card was produced in London in 1843, cards are sent in the weeks leading up to Christmas, many of which contain the English festive greeting Merry Christmas. On Christmas Day, a public holiday in the United Kingdom, nearly the whole population has the day off to be with their family and friends, so they can gather round for a traditional Christmas dinner, traditionally comprising a turkey with cranberries, brussels sprouts, Yorkshire pudding and roast potatoes, followed by a Christmas pudding. The celebration of Boxing Day, on the day after Christmas Day, is a tradition practiced in the UK. It is a bank holiday. Other traditions include carol singing - many carols are sung by children on people's doorsteps and by professional choirs - and sending Christmas cards. In public, there are decorations and lights in most shops, especially in town centres, and even in Indian and Chinese restaurants. Churches and cathedrals across the country hold masses, with many people going to midnight mass or a service on Christmas morning. Church attendance has been falling over the decades. Television is widely watched; public transport and vital transport services are closed-down on Christmas day. Christmas is widely celebrated in the United States, and Christmas Day is officially recognized as a federal holiday by the US Government. Many schools and businesses are closed during the period between Christmas and the New Year's Day holiday, which is a time commonly used to spend time with family and close friends, return unwanted gifts at stores, and shop after-Christmas sales. The interior and exterior of houses are decorated during the weeks leading up to Christmas Eve. Christmas tree farms in the United States and Canada provide families with trees for their homes, many opting for artificial ones, but some for real ones. The Christmas tree usually stands centrally in the home, decorated with ornaments, and lights, with an angel or a star symbolizing the Star of Bethlehem at the top. Christmas Eve is popularly described as "the night before Christmas". Santa Claus is said to visit homes while children are sleeping during the night before Christmas morning. The fireplaces in many homes have been replaced by electric fireplaces. Christmas stockings are hung on the mantelpiece for Santa Claus to fill with little gifts. It is tradition throughout the United States for children to leave a glass of milk and

plate of Christmas cookies for Santa Claus nearby. Presents the family will exchange are wrapped and placed near the tree, including presents to be given to pets. Grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, siblings and occasionally guests from out of town are entertained in the home or else visited. Wrapped presents are most commonly opened on the morning of Christmas Day; however, some families choose to open all or some of their presents on Christmas Eve. The traditional Christmas dinner usually features either roasted turkey with stuffing (sometimes called dressing), ham, or roast beef. Potatoes, roasted vegetables and cranberry sauce are served along with tonics and sherries. Fruits, nuts, cheeses and chocolates are enjoyed as snacks.

Easter is a holiday celebrating the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, described in the New Testament. Good Friday commemorates the crucifixion and death of Jesus. Easter Season begins on Easter Sunday and lasts seven weeks. Easter is a moveable feast: it does not fall on a fixed date. Easter customs vary across the Christian world, and include sunrise services and decorating Easter eggs (symbols of the empty tomb). The Easter lily, a symbol of the resurrection, traditionally decorates churches on this day. The egg is an ancient symbol of new life and rebirth. In Christianity it became associated with Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. For Christians, the Easter egg is a symbol of the empty tomb. The Easter Bunny is a popular legendary gift-giving character analogous to Santa Claus in American culture. Many Americans follow the tradition of coloring hard-boiled eggs and giving baskets of candy. Throughout the English-speaking world, many Easter traditions are similar. Saturday is traditionally spent decorating Easter eggs and hunting for them with children on Sunday morning, by which time they have been mysteriously hidden all over the house and garden. Other traditions involve parents telling their children that eggs and other treats, such as chocolate eggs or rabbits have been delivered by the Easter Bunny in an Easter basket, which children find waiting for them when they wake up. Many families observe the religious aspects of Easter by attending Sunday Mass or services in the morning and then participating in a party in the afternoon. Some families have a traditional Sunday roast, often of either roast lamb or ham. Easter breads such as Simnel cake, a fruit cake with eleven marzipan balls representing the eleven faithful apostles, or nut breads are traditionally served. Hot cross buns, spiced buns with a cross on top, are traditionally associated with Good Friday.

Saint Patrick's Day is a cultural and religious celebration held on 17 March, the traditional death date of Saint Patrick (c. AD 385–461), the foremost patron saint of Ireland. Saint Patrick's Day was made an official Christian feast day in the early 17th century and is observed by the Catholic Church and especially by the Church of Ireland. The day commemorates Saint Patrick and the arrival of Christianity in Ireland, and celebrates the heritage and culture of the Irish in general. Celebrations generally involve public parades (slavnostní průvod) and festivals, and the wearing of green attire (oděv) or shamrocks. Christians also attend church services. Saint Patrick's Day is a public holiday in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland. Saint Patrick's Day is celebrated in more countries than any other national festival. The Irish Guards still wear shamrock on this day. Birmingham holds the largest St Patrick's Day parade in Britain with a city centre parade over a two-mile (3 km) route through the city centre. The organisers describe it as the third biggest parade in the world after Dublin and New York. London, since 2002, has had an annual St Patrick's Day parade which takes place on weekends around the 17th, usually in Trafalgar Square. Liverpool has the highest proportion of residents with Irish ancestry of any English city. This has led to a long-standing celebration on St Patrick's Day in terms of music, cultural events and the parade.

Halloween

The word Halloween or Hallowe'en dates to about 1745 and is of Christian origin. It means "Saints' evening". It is a celebration observed in several countries on 31 October. It is connected with remembering the dead, including saints and martyrs. It is widely believed that many Halloween traditions originated from ancient Celtic harvest festivals. Halloween activities include trick-or-treating, attending Halloween costume parties, carving pumpkins into jack-o'-lanterns (vydlabaná tykev s prostorem pro svíci), lighting bonfires, playing pranks, visiting haunted attractions, telling scary stories, as well as watching horror films. In many parts of the world, Christians attend church services and light candles on the graves of the dead.

Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving Day is a national holiday celebrated in Canada and in the United States. It began as a day of giving thanks for the blessing of the harvest and of the preceding year. Thanksgiving is celebrated on the second Monday of October in Canada and on the fourth Thursday of November in the United States. Pilgrims and Puritans who emigrated from England in the 1620s and 1630s carried the tradition of Days of Fasting and Days of Thanksgiving with them to New England. The modern Thanksgiving holiday tradition is traced to a well-recorded 1619 event in Virginia. The 1619 arrival of 38 English settlers at Berkeley Hundred in Charles City County, Virginia, concluded with a religious celebration as dictated by the group's charter from the London Company, which specifically required "that the day of our ships arrival at the place assigned ... in the land of Virginia shall be yearly and perpetually kept holy as a day of thanksgiving to Almighty God." The 1621 Plymouth feast and thanksgiving was prompted by a good harvest. Several days of Thanksgiving were held in early New England history that have been identified as the "First Thanksgiving", including Pilgrim holidays in Plymouth in 1621 and 1623, and a Puritan holiday in Boston in 1631. The practice of holding an annual harvest festival did not become a regular affair in New England until the late 1660s.

USA: Independence Day on July 4th. Declaration of Independence from the Kingdom of Great Britain in 1776.

Canada: Canada Day is the national day of Canada. It is celebrated on 1 July. What are the major holidays and traditions in the English speaking countries and how are they celebrated?