

HOLIDAYS, CELEBRATIONS AND FEAST DAYS

Do you know anyone who doesn't like to laugh, enjoy himself, have a good time and celebrate? If so, he's one of a small minority. Some of us really do try to seek out quiet, calm places without noise of people. But that doesn't mean that they don't take part in celebrations from time to time.

Individual celebrations

In the course of the year we have many opportunities for celebrations. You celebrate some events that happened on a particular date, like your wedding anniversary, your birthday, name day etc. These celebrations take place once a year. On these occasions the guest of honour receives presents, flowers, candies and other gifts.



An anniversary is the date on which an event took place in a previous year, so, for example, if your parents married on 1 August 1980, the anniversary of their wedding will be on 1 August each year. Some events that you celebrate are events that usually only happen to you once in a lifetime, like the day you were christened, the day you got married, or the day you graduated from the college or university. The way of celebrating can be different according to local traditions.

Christian holidays

The most important and popular holidays are Christmas and Easter.

We celebrate **Easter** in early spring. Its date is different every year (the Christian Church appoints it according to the first spring full moon). Easter celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In most countries on Easter **Sunday** children (but not only children) receive eggs, often with sweets or toys in them, or chocolate animals, usually rabbits. Sometimes the parents hide these sweet things in the house or garden and the children have to look for them. Some people also paint real eggs and hang them up as decorations. Eggs are a symbol of new life and the start of spring.



In the Czech Republic children have a few-days vacation. On Easter **Monday** morning boys go around with rod woven out of willow branches, juniper or wooden spoon to spank the girls and splash them with water of perfume (to be healthy, young and beautiful for the next year). They are rewarded with coloured eggs, ribbons, sweets, sometimes money.

The symbols of Easter are also the symbols of spring and new life – a lamb, rabbit, egg or yellow chick.

Christmas is celebrated in honour of the birth of Jesus.

In the *Czech Republic* we celebrate Christmas on the **Christmas Eve** (24th December). We start to prepare for Christmas four weeks before. This period is called "Advent". To mark the days before Christmas, people make or buy an Advent wreath with four candles. On each of the four Sundays during Advent, a new candle is lit. Children have a special calendar which is usually made out of paper and it has twenty-four windows. Every day, the children open a window to find a picture or piece of chocolate.

INVESTICE DO ROZVOJE VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ

Traditionally, during the time of Advent, women are very busy cleaning the house, cooking and baking Christmas cookies and cakes. The baked goods usually contain plenty of raisins, nuts, and chocolate. People often attend the Christmas markets on Saturdays and Sundays. The third Sunday before Christmas is called Bronze Sunday, the second one Silver Sunday and the first is Golden Sunday. The markets are full of traditional things made out of straw, wooden toys, sweet gingerbread and other sweets. You can see the nativity scene, listen to the carols etc.



In most families, Christmas Eve starts with decorating the Christmas tree. It can be real spruce, pine or fir tree or the artificial one. According to tradition, those who abstain from eating meat on the day of Christmas Eve will see the “golden pig” later in the evening as a reward.

Christmas dinner starts around 6 p.m. We usually have fish or pea soup, deep fried carp with potato salad and for dessert we have apples as a symbol of health. After dinner the best part of the day comes: opening the presents under the Christmas tree while listening to the carols. Children believe that little Jesus gives them the presents. At midnight both believers and unbelievers like going to Midnight Mass. In most of the *other countries* they celebrate Christmas on **Christmas Day** (25th December). They open their presents in the morning. Small ones can be found in the stockings near the fireplace (because the Santa Claus or Father Christmas brought them through the chimney). Christmas dinner starts in the lunch time. The whole family gets together around the table, eats the roast turkey with chestnut stuffing and roast potatoes and Christmas pudding (dried fruit, eggs) and has a nice time. The houses are decorated with holly and mistletoe.



In the Czech Republic Christmas Day is a day dedicated to visiting family members or friends. The **Boxing Day** (26th December) has its name according to this tradition: in the past the dustmen, postmen, milkmen and newspaper boys were going around with Christmas boxes where they were given small amounts of money. This activity was called “koleda” in Czech. Nowadays people visit friends or have parties on this day.

Non-religious holidays

New Year's Day – January 1st

People start celebrating on New Year's Eve (December 31st). They have parties and stay up until midnight when they make resolutions and watch the fireworks.



St. Valentine's Day – February 14th

It is lovers' day. On this day people in love send Valentine cards to beloved person and exchange gifts. Originally this day commemorated the Roman priest who gave aid and comfort to the persecuted Christians before he was put to death.



INVESTICE DO ROZVOJE VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ

All Fools' Day – April 1st

There is a custom of playing practical jokes and tricks on people and then you can shout "April Fool!"

May Day – May 1st

Labour Day – political parties of the left hold processions and public meetings.

Mothers' Day – 2nd Sunday in May

It honours all mothers.

Fathers' Day – 3rd Sunday in June

It honours all fathers.



Halloween – October 31st

Among the old Celts it was the last day of the year and the beginning of winter when witches and ghosts were supposed to celebrate their rites. When the pagans were Christianized, the holiday was converted to the Eve of All Saints' Day when the Christian Church honours the memory of the dead. In Britain it is celebrated only in the North of England and in Scotland, but it is generally celebrated in the USA and Canada. Children celebrate it by dressing up in Halloween costumes with masks over their faces. Carrying baskets or bags they go to their friends' and neighbours' houses and they knock at the door or ring the bell. When people come to the door, children say "Trick or treat" which means "Give us a treat or we will play a trick on you". The people treat the children with sweets, fruit or money. The most common trick is soaping the windows of houses and cars (i.e.

drawing pictures on the windows with soap). A favourite custom is to make a jack-o'-lantern from a pumpkin which is scraped out and in which eyes, a nose and a mouth are cut and then a candle is lit inside. People sometimes give parties on Halloween. The guests wear fancy costumes and masks and the rooms are decorated with paper moons, witches and ghosts.



Remembrance Day – November 11th

It is a special day to remember, honour, and commemorate the soldiers who lost their lives especially during WWI and WWII. It is important to understand that Remembrance Day is not a celebration of victory, but rather a day for solemn reflection on the sacrifices made during the two World Wars. The armistice of WWI became effective in 1918, on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month. Every year on this date, in most towns and cities, people gather at WWI and WWII memorials, where decorative wreaths are placed by special representatives. At 11:00 "The Last Post" (in military life marking the end of the day and the final farewell to soldiers killed in a war) is usually played by a trumpeter, and then a silence of one or two minutes is observed. The silence is broken by the trumpeter again, playing the traditional song "Reveille" (signalling the start of

a soldier's day). The motto of Remembrance Day is simply three words: "Lest We Forget". People worldwide wear real and artificial red poppies over their left breast (just above the heart) in honour of Remembrance Day.



INVESTICE DO ROZVOJE VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ

British Holidays

The British are said to be conservative. They still use their traditional system of weights and measures, the currency. They drive on the left, wear school uniforms etc. Some of their holidays have roots hundreds of years ago. Britain has fewer public holidays than most European countries and fewer events to celebrate. But there are series of Bank Holidays – days when almost no-one goes to work – and a few popular celebrations. The main holidays are the same ones that other Western countries have. However, there are two British celebrations that the rest of Europe doesn't have. In Scotland, Burns' Night is almost as important as Christmas. November 5 (Bonfire Night) isn't a holiday, but it's very popular across the whole of Britain.

Burns' Night – January 25th

This is the date when the Scottish poet Robert Burns was born in 1759. He is Scotland's best-known poet and the festival is mainly Scottish. There is a Burns' night dinner, where a poem by Burns is recited, speeches are made and haggis is eaten. Haggis is a sheep's stomach stuffed with offal. A lot of Scottish people like it, but not many other people do! 😊

**Bonfire Night / Guy Fawkes Day / Firework Night** – November 5th

Bonfire night has its origins on November 5th, 1605, when Guy Fawkes failed to blow up the Houses of Parliament. At that time there were religious tensions in England between Catholics and Protestants. In 1605, a Protestant king was on the throne and Catholics were persecuted for practising their faith. A group of Catholics placed gunpowder in the cellars of the Houses of Parliament, planning to destroy the parliament and put a Catholic monarch in power. The plot was soon discovered and Guy Fawkes was arrested and executed along with the other plotters. To mark the foiling of the plot, people light bonfires on November 5th. Chestnuts and potatoes are roasted in a bonfire. For a long time it was traditional for people to make figures of Guy Fawkes and place them on the bonfire to burn. Recently, people have started to make models of any people they don't like. So many figures of politicians are burnt. There are firework displays and sparklers, too.

**American Holidays****Martin Luther King Day** – the third Monday in January.

He was a black clergyman who fought for civil rights for his people. He tried not to consider the Afro-american as second-class citizens. He was assassinated in 1968.

Memorial Day – the last Monday in May

The summer season begins on this day, when Americans honour their fallen soldiers. Military veterans parade in the streets and special ceremonies are held in Military cemeteries. Most Americans enjoy a barbecue in the backyard on this day.



INVESTICE DO ROZVOJE VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ

Independence Day – July 4th

This celebrates the day in 1776 when America declared its independence from England. It is an occasion for showing patriotism like wearing colours of the American flag. Since it is in the summer, there are lots of outdoor activities, such as parades, baseball games, and fireworks in the evening. It is traditional to have a backyard barbecue, with hotdogs, hamburgers and steaks prepared on the grill.



Labor Day – the first Monday in September

It signals the end of the summer. This day, to honour workers, is celebrated in the traditional American way, which means a backyard cookout and lots of baseball games.

Columbus Day – the second Monday in October

This day commemorates Columbus' landing in the New World on October 12th, 1492.

Thanksgiving Day – the fourth Thursday in November

According to tradition, the first Thanksgiving in America was celebrated in 1621 by the English Pilgrims. The Pilgrims marked the occasion by feasting with Native American Indian guests who brought gifts of food as a gesture of friendship.

Many of the things we associate with Thanksgiving come from much older traditions of celebrating the autumn harvest. Symbols and customs that characterise Thanksgiving today originally come from ancient harvest festivals. In keeping with the idea of celebrating a full harvest, preparing and eating a large meal is a central part of most Thanksgiving celebrations. The meal includes turkey, mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes, and pumpkin pie. Most of these foods are native to North America, and emphasise the natural richness that early colonists found in their new homeland. Later groups of immigrants to North America often adapted the traditional holiday menu to fit their own tastes (e.g. Italian Thanksgiving meals include pasta and wine).



During the 20th century, as the population of the USA became increasingly urban, new Thanksgiving traditions emerged that catered to city dwellers. The day after Thanksgiving gradually became known as the first day of the Christmas shopping season. To attract customers, large shops began to sponsor huge parades. The custom of watching football games on Thanksgiving Day also started during the early decades of the 20th century. As football became increasingly popular in the 1920s and 1930s, many people began to enjoy the holiday at a football stadium. Teams in the National Football League eventually established traditions of playing televised games on Thanksgiving afternoon.

Although the Friday after Thanksgiving is not an official holiday, most people have the day off and there are many college games, featuring the best university teams in the country. Men love Thanksgiving! 😊

Czech holidays

May Day – May 1st

Labor Day – political parties of the left wing held meetings.

Lovers' Day – people in love kiss each other under the blossoming cherry tree.

INVESTICE DO ROZVOJE VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ

Victory Day – May 8th

People commemorate the end of the World War II. The celebration is similar to the Remembrance Day in Great Britain.

Day of Cyril and Methodius – July 5th

They were two Greek brothers born in Thessaloniki in the 9th century. They became missionaries of Christianity among the Slavic peoples of Great Moravia and Pannonia. Through their work they influenced the cultural development of all Slavs, for which they received the title “Apostles to the Slavs”. They are credited with devising the Glagolitic alphabet, the first alphabet used to transcribe the Old Church Slavonic language.



Day of Jan Hus – July 6th

John Huss was a Czech priest, philosopher, reformer and master at Charles University in Prague in the 14th and 15th centuries. He is famed for having been burned at the stake by civil authorities for the conflict with the Catholic Church. Hus was a key predecessor to the Protestant movement of the 16th century, and his teachings had a strong influence on the states of Europe.



Czech Statehood Day – September 28th

This is the day of the martyr's death of St. Wenceslaus, the patron saint of the Czech people and the Czech Republic.

Independent Czechoslovakia Day – October 28th

The independence of Czechoslovakia was proclaimed on October 28th, 1918. Several ethnic groups and territories had to be blended into a new state structure. It was composed of Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia. Nowadays, its celebrations are similar to the Victory Day.

International Students' Day – November 17th

Jan Opletal was a student of the Medical Faculty of the Charles University in Prague, who was killed in an anti-Nazi demonstration during the German occupation. His funeral turned into another anti-Nazi demonstration. As a result, all Czech universities and colleges were closed, over 1200 students were sent to concentration camps, and nine students were executed (on November 17th).

This day commemorates the Velvet Revolution in 1989 – the protest against the communistic rule which led to the democracy in Czechoslovakia.



Day of Liberty and Democracy – November 17th

celebrate
guest of honour
event
resurrection

slavit
oslavenec
událost
vzkříšení

Vocabulary

rod woven out of
willow branches
juniper
spank

pomlázka
jalovec
šlehat



INVESTICE DO ROZVOJE VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ

ribbon	stuha	pagans	pohané
wreath	věnec	solemn reflection	vážné zamyšlení
raisin	rozinka	armistice	příměří
straw	sláma	offal	droby
nativity scene	betlém	blow up	vyhodit do povětří
carol	koleda	foiling	zmaření
mass	mše	plot	spiknutí
fireplace	krb	sparklers	prskavky
chimney	komín	harvest	sklizeň
stuffing	nádivka	blossoming	rozkvetlý
holly	cesmína	priest	kazatel, kněz
mistletoe	jmelí	martyr	mučedník
rites	obřady		

Tasks

1. Describe Christmas in your family.
2. How does your ideal birthday party look like?
3. Match the holidays to the dates:

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|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Christmas Day | a. January 25th |
| 2. Remembrance Day | b. July 6th |
| 3. Labor Day | c. October 31st |
| 4. Independence Day | d. July 4th |
| 5. Easter | e. December 26th |
| 6. International Students' Day | f. November 17th |
| 7. Halloween | g. November 11th |
| 8. Thanksgiving Day | h. December 25th |
| 9. Boxing Day | i. February 14th |
| 10. Burns' Night | j. 4th Thursday in November |
| 11. Day of Jan Hus | k. May 1st |
| 12. St. Valentine' s Day | l. appointed by the Catholic Church |

Sources of Information

Časopis Bridge
Wikipedia
Maturitní otázky z angličtiny, 2005, vydavatelství Jiří Mrákota

Solutions

- 1., 2. – students' own answers
3. 1h, 2g, 3k, 4d, 5l, 6f, 7c, 8j, 9e, 10a, 11b, 12i