

Holidays in America

Every month of the year has something special to celebrate in the U.S. Throughout the years, the U.S. Congress has passed laws declaring special days as official observances known as *federal holidays*. Each federal holiday represents a day when federal employees and many other workers have a paid day off from their jobs. There are some holidays we celebrate that are not federal holidays but are very *popular holidays* to celebrate.

JANUARY

The first day of January is New Year's Day. This *federal holiday* celebrates the beginning of each New Year. People in the U.S. sometimes spend this day watching college football games and parades. On the third Monday in January, we celebrate Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday as a federal holiday. Martin Luther King, Jr. worked to change laws so that all people in the U.S. would be treated fairly. He worked for change in the 1950s and 60s when many states had laws separating black and white people. Martin Luther King taught people to use peaceful demonstrations to change laws, instead of violence. Many laws were changed because of his work. Many people worked with him in the hope that the U.S. could be a fair country for all people.

In January or February many people in the U.S. celebrate the Chinese New Year. The Chinese New Year falls between January 10th and February 19th. The date changes because it is from a calendar based on the moon, not the sun. On this day, many families clean their homes of all the "old" and get ready for the New Year. They wear new clothes and share delicious food. They give each other red envelopes with money for good luck in the coming year. They also light firecrackers to chase away bad luck.

FEBRUARY

February 14th is Saint Valentine's Day. Saint Valentine's Day began in Europe and has been celebrated for hundreds of years. In the U.S. today, we remember friends and sweethearts with cards called valentines, flowers, chocolates or small gifts. We celebrate Presidents' Day on the 3rd Monday of February as a federal holiday commemorating the birthdays of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. We call George Washington "the father of our country" because he was the American general in the Revolutionary War who led us to victory against England. He was elected our first president. Abraham Lincoln was our 16th president. He kept our country together during the Civil War when the Southern states wanted to form a separate country. Lincoln freed the slaves with the Emancipation Proclamation.

MARCH

March 17th is St. Patrick's Day. This holiday comes from Ireland. People wear 3-leaf shamrocks because St. Patrick used them to explain the Christian Trinity. Many people celebrate this holiday by wearing shamrocks or green clothing in honor of St. Patrick. Some people even drink green beer!

APRIL

Holidays in the spring are celebrations of the rebirth of life. Passover is a Jewish holiday celebrated between March 13th and April 11th. Easter is a Christian holiday that is celebrated on a Sunday between March 22nd and April 25th. Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the U.S., people attend religious services and family gatherings like picnics. They hide colored eggs for children to find. Many children wake up to baskets filled with candy that the "Easter Bunny" has left for them.

MAY

Mother's Day is observed in the United States in honor of mothers on the second Sunday in May. Julia Ward Howe wrote a Mother's Day proclamation in 1870. She wanted to have an international day when all mothers of the world would stand up and speak for peace, so their sons would not have to die in war. In 1907, Anna Jarvis proposed a day to remember all mothers. Today, Mother's Day is a holiday to remember mothers with cards, flowers and presents. Many people in the U.S. celebrate "el cinco de mayo". This means the 5th of May in Spanish. This holiday celebrates a battle won by Mexicans against the French. In some areas of the U.S., there are parades on this day. Many people eat Mexican food and listen to Mexican Music. The last Monday in May is Memorial Day. Since 1868, this federal holiday has honored the Union Civil War soldiers who died. Now, we remember all soldiers who died for this country. People decorate soldiers' graves. Many people also decorate the graves of their families.

JUNE

Flag Day on June 14th is the anniversary of the adoption of the American flag in 1777. It is not a federal holiday, although many people display flags outside their homes and in their communities. The third Sunday in June is Father's Day in the United States. Father's Day was first observed in 1910 in Spokane, Washington. This is a day when people remember their fathers with presents and cards. People celebrate with family gatherings, picnics and sports activities.

JULY

The Fourth of July is a very important holiday in the U.S. We celebrate the signing of the Declaration of Independence by representatives of the thirteen American Colonies. On July 4, 1776, John Hancock, Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, well-known patriots, declared the independence of the thirteen American colonies from Great Britain. This holiday is considered the 'birthday of the United States of America.' It is the greatest non-religious holiday on the U.S. We celebrate this day with fireworks and parades.

AUGUST

During the month of August there are no major holidays to celebrate. Many families go on vacation or have picnics or go to the beach. August 26th is a day that is recognized and celebrated as Equality Day by individuals or groups because of the adoption of the 19th amendment to the Constitution in 1920. This amendment granted women the right to vote.

SEPTEMBER

September has one federal holiday, Labor Day. It honors all working people in the U.S. and Canada. It began with a New York City parade in 1882 and is now celebrated on the first Monday in September. National Grandparents Day, which honors grandparents and the love they show to their children's children, is celebrated the first Sunday after Labor Day.

OCTOBER

The 2nd Monday of October is Columbus Day, celebrating the historic trip of Christopher Columbus to the Americas in 1492. Because Columbus was Italian, this federal holiday is especially important to Italian-Americans but may not be celebrated in all states. October 31st is Halloween. During the 19th century, immigrants to the United States brought Halloween customs. These customs have changed over the years. Children in costumes go from house to house saying "trick or treat." The treat usually given is candy and tricks are rarely done. A common symbol of Halloween is the jack-o-lantern, which is carved out of a pumpkin.

NOVEMBER

November 11th is Veteran's Day. This federal holiday honors the soldiers who fought in World War I and those who fought for the U.S. in all wars. We celebrate by displaying the American flag from our homes, having parades and decorating graves with flowers and flags. Thanksgiving Day is the 4th Thursday in November and a federal holiday. On this day we remember how the Indians helped the Pilgrims by teaching them how to farm and hunt. On this day, we give thanks for food, our country, and our families.

DECEMBER

In December we celebrate holidays of light and hope in the dark winter. There is an eight-day Jewish holiday known as Chanukah during which candles are lit on each day. December 12th is the holiday of the Virgin of Guadalupe, who appeared to a poor Indian in Mexico among winter flowers.

December 25th is Christmas, celebrating the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Many people decorate their houses with Christmas trees and lights and give presents to family members. Children hang stockings for Santa Claus (St. Nicholas) to fill with gifts. Christmas is a federal holiday. The African-American holiday of Kwanzaa is the last week of December. Candles are lit to represent the virtues of the African-American people.

As you can see, we have much to celebrate in the U.S. Many holidays are uniquely our own and many have been borrowed from other countries. We are a country of many cultures and many holidays!

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