

Advanced English Lesson 3 – Holidays Around the World

Hanukkah – Jewish Holiday

Hanukkah is an important celebration for Jewish people. It means “the Festival of Lights.” It is an eight-day holiday in November or December. This festival celebrates a miracle that happened two thousand years ago. A group of Jewish people were protecting their temple from invaders. They lit a special candle holder called a Menorah. The Menorah was only supposed to stay lit for one day, but instead it stayed lit for eight days.

Today, the Jewish people celebrate this holiday to remember the miracle of the Menorah. Every Jewish family has a Menorah, and they light a new candle every day of Hanukkah. Other traditions on this holiday are saying prayers with the family, singing, and exchanging gifts. A traditional game is played with a dreidel, or a four-sided top. Some traditional Hanukkah foods are potato pancakes and fruit cakes.



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The Day of the Dead - Mexico

The Day of the Dead is celebrated on November 1st and 2nd every year in Mexico. This holiday is also called “All Souls Day.” Despite its name, the Day of the Dead is a lively and happy festival! Traditionally on this day, family members remember the deceased people in their family. The family gathers together to pray for them. Many people believe that it is easier for the souls of the dead to visit living people on this day.

One tradition for this holiday is family members build special altars in their homes to remember their loved ones. They decorate these altars with photographs, candy skulls, favorite foods and flowers. The special flowers for this holiday are orange and gold.



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Diwali – Hindu Festival

Diwali is an important festival celebrated in India and Nepal. It is also known as “the Festival of Lights.” This festival is five days long at the end of the Hindu calendar year. The fourth day of the holiday is the beginning of the Hindu New Year. It is the most important day of the festival. During this holiday, people pray to Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth, for prosperity in the next year.

During Diwali, people light lamps and pray for good health, peace and wisdom. They clean their homes and decorate with pictures made out of “rangoli,” or painted rice. Some traditions during this holiday are children light fireworks, adults buy new clothes and give gifts and sweets to their family and friends.



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Bastille Day – France

Bastille Day is a French holiday. It is celebrated on July 14th every year. The Bastille was a prison in France in the 1700s. This prison was a symbol of the king’s power. On July 14th, 1789, French citizens attacked the prison and freed the prisoners. This was the first day of the French Revolution. Today, France does not have a king. They remember their fight for independence on Bastille Day.

On Bastille Day, one tradition is a big military parade in the streets of Paris. French people celebrate by going on picnics, throwing parties and lighting fireworks.



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Thanksgiving – United States of America

Thanksgiving is an American harvest festival and family holiday. Thanksgiving is always celebrated on the fourth Thursday in November. Thanksgiving is a big family celebration. Americans celebrate Thanksgiving to remember the first meal that the Native Americans shared with the Europeans when they arrived in North America. On Thanksgiving, American families give thanks for everything they have and for being together.

On Thanksgiving, people travel from all over the country to be with their family. One tradition is many big cities hold parades and other special events on this day. The most important part of Thanksgiving is the big meal. Traditional Thanksgiving foods are turkey with stuffing, mashed potatoes, corn and cranberry sauce. For dessert, everyone eats pumpkin or apple pie.



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Mardi Gras- New Orleans, Louisiana

Mardi Gras, or “Fat Tuesday” is celebrated every year in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA. It is celebrated before the Christian month of Lent, either in March or April. It is a one day festival, but often people begin celebrating the week before!

During Mardi Gras, huge crowds fill the streets. People celebrate by eating, drinking, and dancing! One tradition on this holiday is the grand, colorful parade in the streets of the city. People wear beautiful costumes, strange masks and colorful masks. Spectators wear purple, green and yellow clothes. Another tradition is to eat a special dessert called King Cake. Music, especially jazz, is also very popular!



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St. Patrick's Day – Ireland

Saint Patrick's Day is a holiday celebrated in Ireland and by people of Irish descent all around the world. This holiday is to remember St. Patrick, the patron Saint of Ireland. He was a holy man who lived a long time ago. Irish people celebrate St. Patrick's Day on March 17th every year.

A big international festival is held every year in Dublin, the capital city of Ireland. There are also many festivals in other cities around the world. Traditionally, there is a parade and everyone dresses in green clothes. People cook the Irish meal of corned beef and cabbage. The symbol for this holiday is the shamrock, because many people believe the shamrock is lucky!



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Halloween – United States of America

Halloween is a fun fall festival that is celebrated in many countries around the world. It is also called “All Hallows’ Eve.” Every year, it is on October 31st. Halloween is based off an ancient festival called Samhain. On this day, ancient people believed that the spirits of the dead came back to Earth on this day. Today, Halloween celebrates everything spooky and scary!

On this day, adults and children traditionally wear costumes. In America, people carve pumpkin lanterns called “jack-o-lanterns” and tell scary stories. At night, children go “trick-or-treating” and go from house to house collecting sweets and candy.



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The Chinese New Year - China

The Chinese New Year is a very important festival for the Chinese people. It is celebrated in the month of January or February. This holiday is sometimes called “the Lunar New Year.” The festivities begin on the first day of the Chinese calendar, and the festival is fifteen days long. The last day, which is called “the Lantern Festival” is the most important day.

Some traditions during the Chinese New Year are visiting friends and relatives, shopping for new clothes, setting off fireworks, and giving children oranges and money in special red envelopes. Chinese people clean the house from top to bottom before New Year’s Day and open their windows and doors to bring in good luck. Some people believe that what happens on the first day of this holiday reflects the rest of the year to come! This includes eating sweets to have a “sweet” year!

