

Holidays

As an international student in America, you may spend some holidays in the United States. Holidays in the United States can be quite confusing. There are various types of holidays. On the 10 official "National" holidays, all government offices and most businesses close. State holidays affect state government offices and some schools. Some holidays are both religious and national. Some orthodox religions may have the religious observances on different days. Other holidays relate to famous events and people in United States history. Don't feel you have to forget about your celebrations. Just try to embrace some of these new and possibly different holidays.

January 1 (N)
New Year's Day

Celebrates the start of the New Year. This celebration actually begins the night before, Dec. 31st, on New Year's Eve. By its very nature of renewal and celebration New Year's Eve/Day are the most jubilant time of the entire year. People bid farewell to the ups and downs of the past and welcome the possibilities and potential for a new beginning at the stroke of 12 o'clock midnight. It is also common for people to sing "Auld Lang Syne" embrace and kiss one another as a way of wishing them well in the New Year. More champagne is consumed on New Year's Eve than any other day.

January 15 (N)
***Reverend Dr.
Martin Luther
King Jr's Birthday***

Dr. King (1929-1968) was an African American minister and Civil Rights Leader who received the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize. The official holiday began in 1986. Although King's birthday is the 15th the holiday is celebrated the third Monday in January.

**Month of
February**
***African American
or Black History
Month***

In 1926 Dr. Carter Woodson chose the week of Abraham Lincoln's birthday (February 12) to celebrate the contributions of African Americans to history. This observance has expanded to the entire month of February.

February 2
Groundhog Day

This is not an official holiday. The groundhog is a small burrowing animal that hibernates during the winter months. Legend has it that he emerges on February 2. If he sees his shadow (a sunny day) this is supposed to indicate six more weeks of winter. If he doesn't see his shadow spring is at hand. In Pittsburgh the groundhog who tells the future of winter is Punxsatany Phil. His counterpart in Atlanta is Stonewall Jackson.

February 1
***Abraham
Lincoln's Birthday***

Abraham Lincoln the 16th President of the United States was in office during the war between the states, (1861-1865). Believing that "A house divided against itself cannot stand" Lincoln tried to bring the seceded states back into the union.

February 14
Valentine's Day

Celebrated by friends and lovers by sending cards, giving candy, flowers, gifts, stuffed animals, rings, hearts and other signs of affection. It is

named for St. Valentine, an early Christian martyr. It is one of the most commercial holidays in America.

Third Monday in February
President's Day
(N)

Combines the celebration of the birthdays of Presidents Abraham Lincoln and George Washington.

February 22
George Washington's Birthday

The first President of the United States was the Commander-in-Chief of the Revolutionary Army that freed America from the colonial rule of England.

Week before Lent
Mardi Gras

Week of celebration in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Fat Tuesday

Day of celebration before Ash Wednesday

March or April
Ash Wednesday

The beginning of Lent, the forty-day period of penitence and fasting for many Christians that immediately precedes the Easter celebration. Some Christians attend a worship service where the sign of the cross is made on their foreheads with ashes.

March 17
St. Patrick's Day

St. Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland. This holiday was brought to America by Irish immigrants. St. Patrick's Day, although a Christian Feast Day honoring an Irish saint is a day of partying. Everyone becomes Irish for a day by wearing green, drinking green beer and eating corned beef, cabbage, Irish stew and potatoes, traditional Irish fare.

March or April
Palm Sunday

The beginning of the Holy Week. For Christians this week marks the last week of Jesus Christ's life.

March or April
Good Friday
Passover

Good Friday observes the day Christ died on the cross for Christians. The Jewish Passover begins at sundown.

March or April
Easter Sunday

The holiday falls on a different Sunday each spring. The date also depends on whether you are orthodox or not. For the Eastern Orthodox Christians this is Palm Sunday. For Christians this is a holy celebration of the resurrection of Christ after his crucifixion. Secular traditions now connect Easter with giving gifts to children, the Easter bunny, spring flowers, fancy clothes, bonnets, the Easter parades, decorating and hunting for eggs.

March 19
Last day of winter
March 20

Not observed holidays, but important for practitioners of Wicca and other nature based religions.

***First day of
spring***

April 1
April Fools Day

People play harmless practical jokes on each other.

**Second Sunday in
May**
Mother's Day

On this day people show their love and gratitude to their mothers and shower them with gifts for all they have done. It was suggested by Julia Ward Howe (founder of the Girl Scouts) in 1872. It became a reality in 1907 due to the efforts of Anna Jarvis, considered the founder of Mother's Day. Red and pink carnations indicate your mother is still alive. A white carnation means your mother is dead. On May 9, 1914 President Woodrow Wilson made Mother's Day a nationally observed holiday.

**Last Monday in
May**
Memorial Day (N)

This Monday after the last weekend in May Americans remember those who died in military service to their country. Many families visit graves and decorate them with flags and/or flowers. This day is marked with patriotic parades. It is also considered the beginning of the summer season.

**Third Sunday in
June**
Father's Day

A day to honor fathers was thought of by Sonora Smart Dodd in Spokane, Washington, in 1909. She was listening to a Mothers' Day sermon. Having been raised by her father, Henry Jackson, after her mother died she wanted him to know how special he was to her. In 1924, President Calvin Coolidge proclaimed the third Sunday in June Father's Day. Roses are the Father's Day flower.

June 19
Juneteenth

This is the oldest known African-American celebration of the ending of slavery. June 19, 1865, is when Galveston, Texas received word of the emancipation of the slaves. This is where the holiday originated.

June 20
Last day of spring
June 21
***First day of
summer***

Not observed holidays, but important for practitioners of Wicca and other nature based religions.

July 4
***Independence
Day***
4th of July (N)

On July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was signed in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. With this document, the 13 colonies declared their independence from England and became the United States. This holiday is typically celebrated with parades, picnics and fireworks.

**September or
October**
Rosh Hashanah

Begins the Jewish New Year. Rosh Hashanah begins the Days of Awe, a period of reflection about the past year and the year to come.

**September or
October**
Yom Kippur (10th)

The holiest Jewish holiday, it is also called "Day of Atonement."

day after Rosh Hashanah)

First Monday in September
Labor Day (N)

Established in recognition of the labor movement's contribution to the productivity of the country. This last holiday of the summer season is generally celebrated with picnics and outings.

September 21
Last day of summer
September 22
First day of autumn

Not observed holidays, but important for practitioners of Wicca and other nature based religions.

October 12
Columbus Day (N)

Birthday of Christopher Columbus, the man history credits with discovering America even though Native Americans were already here. He is a controversial figure.

October 31
Halloween

Originally a religious holiday. Hallow's Eve is the evening before All Saints Day - the feast day for all saints in Christianity. It is now a time for carved pumpkins, costumes, masquerade parties and going door to door asking for candy by saying "Trick or Treat."

November 1
All Saints Day

Honors all the saints in the world.

November 11
Veterans Day (N)

Honors veterans of the United States armed forces. On this day in 1945, the treaty was signed ending World War II in the Pacific.

Fourth Thursday in November
Thanksgiving Day

First celebrated in 1621, in Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts by the Pilgrims to give thanks for their survival because of the assistance of the Native Americans. It is a time for family and friends to get together and have a traditional Thanksgiving meal. The traditional meal consists of turkey, dressing, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes, gravy, string beans, sweet potatoes and pumpkin pie.

Late November or December
Hanukkah (also called Chanukah)

Eight day Jewish festival that commemorates the victory of the Maccabees over the Syrians in 165 BC and the rededication of the Temple at Jerusalem. It is celebrated with parties, games, gifts and the lighting of the nine candles of the menorah.

December 20
Last day of fall
December 21
First day of winter

Not observed holidays, but important for practitioners of Wicca and other nature based religions.

December 25

Major holiday in the US that began as a Christian celebration of the birth

Christmas (M)

of Jesus Christ. It is now also celebrated as a day of feasting and gift giving. Santa Claus, a legendary figure based on St. Nicholas, is said to visit children's homes on Christmas Eve to deliver gifts while they sleep. Christmas is celebrated according to a variety of traditions some old, others comparatively recent, some devout and some secular. National observance of the Christmas holiday usually begins immediately following Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day are the period known as "the holiday season"

**December 26-
January 1
*Kwanzaa***

Kwanzaa is a seven-day African American cultural holiday. It is a celebration to reaffirm traditional Afrikan social values. The word is derived from the Kiswahili phrase, "Matunda Ya Kwanza" meaning first fruits. In Africa, harvesting the first fruits or crops of the season was reason to celebrate. An extra "a" was added to Kwanzaa to distinguish the African American celebration. Each day one of the Seven Principles of Kwanzaa is discussed. They are:

1. Umoja-Unity
2. Kujichagulia-Self-determination
3. Ujima-Collective Work and Responsibility
4. Ujamaa-Cooperative Economic
5. Nia-Purpose
6. Kuumba-Creativity
7. Imani-Faith