**AMERICAN HOLIDAYS**

Throughout the year, Americans celebrate a large variety of **national, religious** and **other holidays**. Some of these holidays represent a day off from work/school while others are bank holidays, i.e. banks and government institutions remain closed and children do not have regular classes but watch educational programs orvisit national landmarks instead. Though most of the American holidays have **fixed dates**, some of them are **moveable** depending either on religious calendars ornumerological combinations.

So, let us follow the calendar and have a closer look at some typical holidays,

their origin and some ways of celebrating them.

**January:**

**January 1** – **New Year’s Day** – a day off from work

**3rd Monday in January** – **Martin Luther King’s Day** – a bank holiday

**February:**

**February 14** – **Valentine’s Day**

The tradition of celebrating this holiday was taken over from England. It commemorates an ancient Roman priest who secretly helped lovers, passed love letters and illegally married couples. Valentine’s Day is considered the day of all those who are in love.

**March:**

**March 17** – **St. Patrick’s Day**

This originally Irish holiday has become extremely popular and widely celebrated in the U.S.A. due to the large number of Irish immigrants living there. The usual decoration includes typically Irish symbols.

**April:**

**April 1** – **All Fool’s Day**

This day is famous for playing tricks on people and trying to frame them.

Two religious holidays usually fall on April but their dates are moveable.

The first of these two holidays is Passover.

**Passover** is celebrated by Jews and lasts 7 or 8 days. The holiday recalls the Jew’s escape from Egypt known as Exodus. Passover could be considered a kind of Jewish equivalent of Christian Easter.

**Easter** is the second important religious holiday celebrated usually in April. It commemorates Christ’s resurrection and is traditionally associated with symbols of a new life such as rabbits, eggs or baby chicken. American children dye eggs and get chocolate bunnies, baskets with jelly beans and candy. The typical Easter dinner should consist of lamb or ham.

**May:**

**2nd Sunday in May** – **Mother’s Day** People use this occasion to express their love and gratitude for their mothers by presenting them with flowers, chocolate or other gifts and sending cards to them.

**Last Monday in May** – **Memorial Day** – a day off from work

**June:**

**June 14** – **Flag Day**

This is the ‘birthday’ of the U.S. flag and citizens usually show their respect for their national symbol by flying it.

**3rd Sunday in June** – **Father’s Day** – a modification of Mother’s Day

**July:**

**July 4** – **Independence Day** – a day off from work

Independence Day is ‘THE’ American holiday. It honors the day the Declaration of Independence was signed by the 13 colonies and the United States of America was born. During the day, people take part in parades, go for picnics and barbecues and display flags while at night thousands of people gather to see fireworks and/or to enjoy parties.

**September:**

**1st Monday** – **Labor Day** – a day off from work

This day represents the official end of summer and signals the beginning of school. Like on many similar occasions, people again go picnicking or have barbecues.

**October:**

**2nd Monday** – **Columbus Day** – a bank holiday

Children watch educational programs about Columbus and the discovery of America.

**October 31** – **Halloween**

Halloween is one of the best-known and most popular holidays and it has spread all over the world. Typical of Halloween are pumpkins, especially those with carved faces and candles inside, which are called jack-o’-lanterns. Children love this holiday and especially the trick-ortreating ritual, i.e. they go from door to door in costumes and yell: “Trick or treat!” People give them candy. Otherwise children play some tricks on them.

**November:**

**1st Tuesday** – **Election Day**

**November 11** – **Veterans’ Day**

This day honors everyone who has done military service in war time.

**4th Thursday** – **Thanksgiving** – 2 days off

It celebrates the first harvest of the Pilgrims who came to Plymouth. Nowadays Thanksgiving is a big opportunity for families to meet and to have the traditional dinner together. This dinner consists of turkey, usually chestnut stuffing, vegetables (squash, corn, sweet potatoes, etc.), cranberries and pumpkin pie for dessert. Religious people also say prayers and thank God for all his blessings and the food they are about to enjoy.

**December:**

In December, the Jews celebrate **Hanukkah** – ‘festival of lights’ – which lasts 8 days and commemorates the Jewish victory over Syria in 165 B.C. when Jerusalem was recaptured.

**December 25** – **Christmas** – a day off from work

Christmas carols can be heard everywhere, people send cards to their friends and family, go to church, mothers bake Christmas cookies, and the whole family usually takes part in decorating the tree. At night Santa Claus comes with his sleigh pulled by nine reindeer and leaves presents for everybody.

**December 31** – **New Year**

The ways of celebrating are probably the same all over the world; people dance, sing, party, enjoy champagne and fireworks and at midnight usually sing ‘Auld Lang Syne’ and make New Year’s resolutions.

**Note**: Some holidays are similar to the Czech ones and also their particular ways of celebrating have many features in common. The most typical American holidays are Thanksgiving and Halloween, the latter becoming popular also in the Czech Republic.

**Použitá literatura**

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