**Customs and traditions**

**Martin Luther King’s Day** (3rd Monday in January) is a festival on honest of M.L.King, black leader and civil and human rights campaigner. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 and 4 years after was assassinated.

**President’s Day** (on the 3rd Monday in February) is a legal holiday in every state of the USA, commemorating all the past presidents of the USA.

**St.Patrick’s Day** (17th March) was originally an Irish holiday. St.Patrick is the patron of the Irish people. Everything turns green color on this day – green food, green clothes. The symbol of the day is shamrock (representing the Holy Trinity).

**Memorial Day** is celebrated 4th Monday in May. The American honors the dead of all wars. Flowers and flags are placed on the graves of the war dead. It marks the beginning of the summer. **Independence Day** is celebrated on the 4th of July. It commemorates the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, which was the official founding of the United States of America. In every town (even smaller ones) there are parades and also every town organizes the firework displays at night. People are dressed in national colours and houses are decorated by national flags. People also set off their own fireworks.

**Columbus Day** on the second Monday in October commemorates the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus in 1492.

**Veteran’s Day** (11th November) is a day in honor of those Americans who have served and given their lives in WW II. There is a official ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery outside Washington D.C. Most people spend that day quietly at home and keep two minutes of silence at 11a.m.

**Thanksgiving Day** is one of the most popular holidays of the year that the adults look forward to more than Christmas. Thanksgiving Day is celebrated every fourth Thursday in November.  
The first time, it was celebrated in 1621 by the religious group of Puritans known as Pilgrim Father, who left England and settled on the America continent in the area called New England. During the first year a lot of pilgrims died because of cold and hunger, but in 1621 they had a good harvest with helping of the Indians. In honor they made a feast and thanked God. In modern times it is mainly the family holiday. Whole family get together and enjoy themselves and enjoy a traditional dinner with roast turkey. They usually say prayers, similar to prayers said by the immigrants in 1621, before dinner. This is also the day of gifts, charities and food for poor and homeless people.

**St.Valentine’s Day** (14th February) is the day of love and lovers. People try to express their love for each other by sending Valentine’s cards. Cards usually have a lots of red hearts and pink flowers on the cover and a romantic message inside. Lovers exchange the small gifts like plush animals.  
Universities, high schools and community clubs usually organize a Sweetheart ball with decorations, refreshment and entertainment based on traditional Valentine motifs, hearts and cupids armed with bows and arrows. Boys and girls in elementary school put their Valentine greetings in a special box, and than anxiously await the last lesson when the teacher draws the greetings out of the box and reads the names of the recipients.

**Halloween** (October 31st). In Britain it is celebrated only in the North of England and Scotland, but is generally celebrated in the USA and Canada. Old Celts celebrated this day as a last day of the year and the beginning of winter, when witches and ghosts were supposed to celebrate their rites. After christianisation, it was converted to the Eve of All Saint’s Day, when we honor the memory of the dead. People decorates their houses with spiders webs, coffins, bats and pumpkins. Pumpkins have a cut out faces and people put the candles into them (pumpkins called „jack-o-lantern“). Children dress up in Halloween costumes of ghosts, witches, wizards animals or fairy tale heroes. They carry bags and go to their friend’s and neighbor’s houses, knock at the door and when people come to open the door, children say: „Trick or treat“, which means: Give us a treat or we will play a trick on you. People usually say „Treat“ and then give the children sweets, fruit or some even money.

**Easter**, celebrated on the 1st Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox, is a holiday, which combines the pagan rites with Christian aspects.  
Of all the symbols of Easter, the egg and the bunny, which are considered to represent fertility and new life, are the most popular. While older children like to decorate dyed eggs themselves, small children find baskets of egg in a coloured straw nest on Easter morning and believe that the Easter Bunny has brought them. As a salute to spring, almost everybody wears something new on Easter Sunday. After the church services people stroll in their new clothes through parks, before they go home to have Easter dinner, which consist of young lamb, spring peas, tiny new potatoes and eggs in all forms.  
  
On Easter Monday egg-rolling is held on the White House lawn. Ever First Ladies have been hostess to hundreds of children, who roll colored eggs down the lawn. A similar Easter egg hunt is held in practically every public park. The children fill their baskets with colored eggs that have been hidden in the grass, in the shrubs or in the branches of trees.

**Christmas** is the most-loved holiday in America. At the beginning of December streets are decorated with bells, garlands of evergreens and various glittering decorations. Trees and shrubs in front of the houses are also decorated with electrical lights, and on almost every front door there is wreath of green holly with red berries and the inscription of Merry Christmas.  
At that time children write letters to Santa Claus. Christmas in the USA is a family festival. Schools and colleges are closed for two weeks. On Christmas Day all family members meet for Christmas dinner. Some of the dishes, such as roast turkey, corn pudding, cranberry sauce and pumpkin pie, are typically American, but many others were brought by the settlers of various nationalities. Santa Claus always comes at night on the 24th of December, when the children are asleep. In the morning they find the presents they had asked for under the tree in exchange for some food prepared for Santa Claus

**New Year’s Eve** and Day are celebrated either at home or with friends, because on New Year’s Eve there are usually parties, which are very merry. A favorite place to see the old year out is New York City’s Times Square, where thousands of New Yorkers and tourists watch for the words Happy New Year to flash on the Allied Chemical Tower. This scene is repeated in public squares throughout the country, but not at the same moment. There are four time zones in the USA. It is a day of new resolution.