

Saint Valentine's Day

- Saint Valentine's Day is a celebration of love and lovers. People celebrate this festival on the 14th February.
- This festival is named after Saint Valentine who was a Catholic priest. As one of the legends says, Saint Valentine lived in the 3rd century and died on the 14th February 269 by order of Emperor Claudius II because he performed weddings for soldiers who were banned to have a wedding and for Christian people who were persecuted during the times of Roman Empire. It is also believed that Saint Valentine could heal seriously ill people - for example he returned sight to a blind girl. Christian people celebrated him while Catholics hated him, attacked him and finally he was executed. When Saint Valentine was in prison, he wrote a letter to the cured blind girl and the letter was ended by these words: „From your Valentine“. This phrase is still used in cards lovers sent to each other.
- People usually send cards to their beloved ones, they give flowers, chocolates, candy, sparkling wine, jewellery or lingerie to their partners. They can also arrange a romantic meal somewhere in a restaurant or they can spend a romantic night in a hotel or a spa. Sometimes people send anonymous love cards to their chosen ones.
- The main symbols are hearts, red roses and models of Cupid. Cupid is portrayed as a little boy with a bow and arrow.
- A lot of people in the Czech Republic celebrate this day the same way as in English speaking countries - they give their partners flowers, chocolates, jewellery, lingerie, wine and they celebrate this day for example at home, in a restaurant, in the cinema...but there are also many people in the Czech Republic who do not celebrate this day because they consider this holiday not to be a traditional Czech festival. This festival came to the Czech Republic after the Velvet Revolution in the 1990s. A lot of people say that this celebration is more about spending money and commercialism and not about pure love.

Easter

- Easter is the biggest Christian celebration which celebrates the resurrection (rebirth) of Jesus Christ.
- According to Christian beliefs, Jesus Christ rose from the dead the third day after his crucifixion. According to Western Christian traditions, resurrection of Christ is celebrated the first Sunday after the first spring full moon.
- We celebrate Easter in spring. The date of this celebration is not fixed. In general Easter is celebrated the first Sunday after the first spring full moon.
- People celebrate Easter in different ways. For example families from the USA usually get together, paint eggs and prepare them for Easter hunt. It is believed that on Saturday night (the day before Easter Sunday) the Easter Bunny hides all eggs somewhere in the garden and children must find them on Sunday morning. Another game connected with Easter is Easter Egg Roll which is a kind of a race where people use a spoon or a piece of wood to roll a painted hard boiled egg usually on a lawn. A well-known Easter Egg Roll race is held in front of the White House every year on Easter Monday.
- In New Orleans there is a festival called „Mardi gras“ during Easter, which includes parades, jazz music and a lot of funny games.
- In England there is a popular celebration of Easter called Morris Dance. Men dressed in colourful costumes dance in the streets. According to traditions this dance should send evil winter spirits away. Easter Hunt and Egg Rolling are also very popular celebrations of Easter.
- People in the Czech Republic celebrate Easter in different ways. Usually it depends whether they are believers or atheists or whether they live in cities or in the country. Believers or people living in the country usually keep more traditions – for example so called Lent which means that 40 days before Easter Sunday people stop eating meat, cheese, milk, eggs and instead they eat various vegetable soups and meatless meals. Before Lent there is a celebration called „masopust – meat fasting“ during which

pig slaughtering and fancy dress parades take place. People dressed in fancy dresses go from house to house where they usually get something to eat and more often something to drink.

- People living in cities usually do not keep the tradition of Lent and „masopust“. They paint eggs, sometimes they hide them somewhere and their children must find them or they go from house to house saying a carol to get painted eggs, chocolate, some alcohol or even some money. Men (not only in the cities, but also in the country) often make (or they can buy it) a plaited willow from twigs and they use it to spank women with it again saying a carol. It is believed that if a woman is spanked with a plaited willow she will stay healthy and fertile the whole year. Women give painted eggs, chocolates or alcohol to men. In some parts of the Czech Republic women and men change their role in the afternoon and women spank men with plaited willows. In other regions women pour water on men who spanked them with plaited willows the day before.
- The symbols of Easter are: a lamb, an egg, an Easter bunny, willow catkins, a cross.
- Christian people in the United States and the United Kingdom keep the Lent tradition (a period of fasting). During Easter people in the USA usually eat baked ham, potatoes and vegetables or hot cross buns. Hot cross buns are sweet yeast buns with raisins. Before people bake them, they create a shape of cross on their tops and after baking these buns they put sugar icing into the cross. People in the United Kingdom usually eat lamb (for example roasted lamb leg) with potatoes, cabbage, carrots and other types of vegetables. They also like hot cross buns and another cake which is connected with Easter is so called Simnel Cake. It is a sweet cake which contains a lot of fruit, spices, raisins and marzipan that are banned to be eaten during Lent. They also eat chocolate and sweets made of chocolate.
- People in the Czech Republic eat lamb or goat meat with potatoes, potato pancakes, spring soups usually with spinach, parsley, nettles and other spring herbs. They make Easter stuffing with nettles, spring herbs and smoked meat and eat a lot of meals made of eggs. They also bake cross buns (sweet buns with a shape of cross on the top, the cross symbolizes crucifixion of Christ) and a sweet pastry in the shape of a lamb.

Halloween

- Halloween is a celebration that takes place on the 31st of October every year. The night of the 31st of October is the eve of All Saints Day when people remember all dead people (relatives, friends, but also various martyrs and saints).
- Halloween is a celebration that started in Ireland at Celtic times. Celtic people celebrated the New Year on the 1st of November and the 31st of October meant the end of summer and beginning of cold and hard winter. Winter also symbolized death because a lot of people usually died during winter. At that time Celts believed that during the night from the 31st of October ghosts of dead people appear. People made big fires, gathered together around the fire and usually wore costumes and masks so that the ghosts of dead people could not recognize them. At that time they also tried to foretell each other their future, many people believed in superstitions. People also started to go from house to house and asked for food and money (originally these people were usually poor). When the people who went from house to house got something to eat or some money, they promised to pray for dead people from the family who gave them something to eat. The idea of celebrating Halloween came also to America thanks to Irish immigrants. Halloween is celebrated in many countries all around the world.
- People in English speaking countries usually carve pumpkins into various shapes (the more horrible, the better), they decorate their homes with pumpkins and things with pumpkin motives, they put a bowl of fruit or other food in front of their houses to keep ghosts away. Children usually dress up as ghosts and witches (again the more horrible costume, the better) and go from house to house to get some sweets saying „trick-or-treat“, which means that if people give them some sweets or money, they won't do anything bad to them, but if people do not want to give them anything, they play a trick on them (for

example they knock on the door or ring the doorbell and escape before someone opens the door). There are also some games that are popular at Halloween – bobbing the apples or snapping the apples.

- Bobbing the apples is a game played at Halloween. You need a washbasin or a large bucket filled with water. You put some apples into the washbasin or bucket and people try to bite the apples with their mouths and teeth without using their hands.
- For Snapping the apple you need strings and apples. You tie apples to the strings and then you tie the strings to doorframes, chandeliers or branches of trees and players try to bite the apples on the string without touching them with their hands.
- In the Czech Republic a lot of people do not celebrate Halloween because it is not a traditional Czech celebration. Some people in the Czech Republic celebrate Halloween but usually not the same way as people in English speaking countries. Some people like the custom of carving pumpkins and decorating their houses and flats with pumpkin motives.
- The symbols of Halloween are ghosts, witches, pumpkins (originally people did not use pumpkins, they used potatoes, turnips), jack-o-lanterns.
- People in English speaking countries usually eat something that is made from pumpkins. They also eat barnbrack which is a kind of cake made from fruit. People usually hide a wrapped treat inside and they believe that it will foretell the person who finds it his or her future.
- In the Czech republic we do not have any traditional meals to eat to celebrate this day. Some people prepare meals made from pumpkins (e. g. pumpkin soup).

Christmas

- Christmas is a celebration that commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ. People in English speaking countries celebrate Christmas on the 25th of December. People in the Czech Republic celebrate Christmas Day on the 24th of December. 4 weeks before there is a period of Advent which means the preparation for the celebration of Jesus Christ's birth.
- People celebrate this festival on the 25th of December. Before that they decorate Christmas tree with decorations and lights and their houses or flats with wreaths, candles, mistletoe. Little children believe in Father Christmas (in Great Britain) or Santa Claus (in the USA). In the evening of the 24th of December children hang socks on their beds or around a mantelpiece (if they have a fireplace) and believe that during the night Father Christmas or Santa Claus brings them the presents through the chimney. In the morning they have little presents in their socks and bigger presents are under the Christmas tree. People open their presents on the 25th of December in the morning. They usually have Christmas dinner early in the afternoon. The next day (26th of December) is called the Boxing Day. In the past people had to go to work on the 26th of December and some employers gave their employees little boxes with food or small presents. Since then this day is called the Boxing Day.
- People in the Czech Republic celebrate Christmas on the 24th of December. Little children believe that a little Jesus gives them their presents when they were good the whole year. People decorate the Christmas tree with decorations and electrical lights, they also decorate their houses and flats with things with Christmas motives. They prepare Christmas dinner and usually go to the graves of their relatives and lit a candle there. It is said that if you do not eat the whole day on Christmas Day, you will see a golden pig. In the evening after the Christmas dinner people get together around their Christmas tree, they sing carols and open their presents. During Christmas people usually visit their relatives and friends, they go for walks, they go to churches and watch TV a lot because there are many fairy tales on.
- People in English speaking countries usually eat turkey or they can replace it with goose, hen, chicken or a duck, roast beef or ham. They eat potatoes and many kinds of other vegetables and a Christmas (or plum) pudding. The traditional Christmas pudding takes a long time to prepare and as it contains a lot of

alcohol, it cannot get spoilt. It also contains a lot of fruit and spices (for example raisins, cinnamon, ginger, cloves).

- People in the Czech republic usually eat fish soup and fried carp with potato salad. Some prefer not to eat fish, they have chicken, duck, goose or a pork or chicken schnitzel. They drink beer, wine or some non-alcoholic drinks. Before Christmas women bake cookies and a sweet yeast pastry called sweet bread.
- The symbols of Christmas are: mistletoe and holly (plants), Poinsettias (plants), Christmas tree, Candy Cane (sweet candy in the shape of a stick), Santa Claus/ Father Christmas, Christmas stockings, Christmas wreath, candles, little Jesus