

Holidays, special days of the year

Use your own ideas or talk about one of these:

- traditions, habits, special occasions - why we celebrate them, what they mean to me....
- Czech, British and American holidays (Christmas, New Year, Easter, Independence day, Thanksgiving.....) what they have in common, how they are different....

Example:

Christmas

In most of the countries with Christian traditions Christmas is the most popular holiday of the year. People usually decorate streets, shop windows, their houses and gardens with small twinkling bulbs arranged into the shapes of stars, trees, etc. On the front door they put wreaths and above the door some mistletoe. They believe that a kiss under the mistletoe brings good luck. Families decorate Christmas trees with candles, glass or straw decorations, sweets, fruits and many other things. You can hear Christmas carols on the radio, on TV and in the streets. There are Christmas markets in cities and towns. People send Christmas cards to their relatives and friends and try to be friendlier to each other than usual.

But there are some differences in Christmas customs and traditions in different countries. In Britain and the U.S. children believe that Santa Claus (or Father Christmas) brings them presents on the night of Christmas Eve (24th December). He is an old man with a white beard in a red suit who lives at the North Pole. He travels through the sky in a sleigh pulled by reindeer, comes down the chimney and leaves some small presents in the Christmas stockings which children hang up in their bedroom before going to bed. On Christmas day (25th December), children wake up very early and open the presents in their stockings. Then they hurry downstairs to the living room and open the larger presents under the Christmas tree.

At midday, Christmas dinner is eaten. It usually includes roast turkey and Christmas pudding with mince pies.

In Britain, December 26th is called Boxing Day. It's because many years ago, it was a tradition to leave "Christmas Boxes", or gifts of money, to servants and tradesmen on this day. Today many people still give some money to their milkmen, postmen and dustmen on Boxing Day.

In the Czech Republic, the tradition is quite different. The most important day of Christmas is Christmas Eve. We have a traditional evening dinner which consists of fried carp and potato salad. Some families have fish soup as a starter too.

After dinner, there is the time for presents. Czech children believe that Baby Jesus brings the Christmas tree and all the presents. He doesn't travel through the chimney with reindeer but just appears, leaves the presents under the tree, rings a bell and disappears. Nobody knows what he looks like or how he travels. I think this traditional idea is nicer because it's more mysterious.

Unfortunately, the original Czech Baby Jesus is now being pushed away by the red army of Santa Clauses from the West invading our homes through the globalized hypermarket chains. Let's hope that Czech parents will defend their children and won't allow these aliens to intrude on their children's minds. We should save our traditional Christmas family atmosphere.

Vocabulary:

decorate	/dekəreit/	(o)zdobit
twinkling bulbs	/twinklɪŋ balbz/	blikající žárovky
shape	/šeip/	tvár
wreath	/ri:ð/	věnec
mistletoe	/mislətəu/	jemelí
candle	/kændl/	svíčka
straw	/stro:/	sláma; slaměný
carol	/kærəl/	koleda
relatives	/relativz/	příbuzní
customs	/kastəmz/	zvyky
sleigh	/slei/	saně
reindeer	/reindi:ə/	sob, sobi (j. i mn. č.)
chimney	/čimni/	komín
stocking	/stokiŋ/	punčocha
include	/iŋ'klu:d/	zahrnovat, obsahovat
roast turkey	/rəust tɜ:ki/	pečený krocan/krůta
servant	/sə:vant/	sluha
tradesman	/treidzmən/	obchodník, kupec
dustman	/dastmən/	popelář