

## 4 Holidays and celebrations in the Czech Republic and in English speaking countries

- Christmas and Easter in the CR vs. in English speaking countries, typical habits and traditions
- Halloween, St. Valentine's Day
- National/public holidays in the CR: September 28, October 28, November 17, May 8, August 21 (The Day of Memory)
- The UK: Guy Fawkes Night, St. Patrick's Day, Remembrance Day
- The USA: Thanksgiving, Independence Day, Veterans Day, Memorial Day

**What is a public holiday?** A public holiday is a special day when we observe a significant historical or religious event. People have a paid day off work, schools and shops are closed. Public holidays are also called bank holidays in the UK and Canada.

### Public holidays in the Czech Republic

There are 13 public holidays in the Czech Republic.

**January 1**, besides being **New Year's Day**, is also the date the independent Czech Republic was founded in 1993, after the break-up of Czechoslovakia.

**Easter** is the most important Christian holiday, celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is celebrated in either March or April, and is full of traditions. Popular folk customs include hand-painting eggs and lashing girls with willow sticks.

There are two holidays in May. **May 1** is **Labour Day (May Day)**, which is also celebrated in many other countries. It commemorates an 1886 strike by workers in Chicago who demanded an eight-hour workday. **May 8** is **Liberation Day** and recalls the end of World War II. In July there are two public holidays.

On **July 5**, we remember **Saints Cyril and Methodius**, who brought Christianity to Great Moravia in the 9th century. **July 6** is Jan Hus Day. This is the day the church reformer **Jan Hus** was burned at the stake in 1415.

**St. Wenceslas Day** is celebrated on **September 28** (the day when St. Wenceslas was murdered) and is also called Czech Statehood Day.

One month later, on **October 28**, is **Independent Czechoslovak State Day**. We remember the day Czechoslovakia was created in 1918. On this day the Czechoslovak state declared independence at the end of the First World War (WW I) in 1918. Until that time Czech and Slovak countries had been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

**November 17** is the **Struggle for Freedom and Democracy Day**. This commemorates the student protests against the Nazis in 1938 and the demonstration in 1989 that started the Velvet Revolution. In 1939, Nazis invaded Czechoslovakia and proclaimed it the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Czech students demonstrated against the occupation and the demonstration was brutally suppressed. In 1989 the Velvet Revolution started as a student demonstration against the communist regime. This day commemorates the struggle and fight for freedom. This day is little more than a day off for most people. Some bring flowers and light candles on Národní třída in Prague and other places connected with the Velvet Revolution.

In December, the holidays are all about **Christmas**. Christmas Eve (December 24) is the most important feast day of all the Czech holidays. In the morning a Christmas tree is decorated. Vegetable soup is usually served for lunch as Christmas is a fasting time. In the evening the family gathers together to have a traditional dinner that consists of fish soup and carp fillet with potato salad. After dinner children await the ringing of the bell that announces that little baby Jesus has come to visit them and left presents under the Christmas tree. People often go to a midnight mass on Christmas Eve. December 25 and 26 are two other Christmas holidays and a time for family visits.

## American and British federal/national holidays

Due to their shared history, Great Britain and the United States celebrate a lot of similar holidays.

**Christmas** is the annual holiday to commemorate the day Jesus Christ was born, celebrated on December 25. Father Christmas (in the UK) or Santa Claus (in the US) brings gifts for children in the morning, and families traditionally eat a roast turkey meal. Boxing Day (December 26) is also a public holiday in the UK.

**Easter** is in March or April and commemorates the death of Jesus Christ and the start of spring. It is another big family holiday, and children often paint and decorate eggs, and eat chocolate eggs.

**Halloween**, on **October 31**, is another shared holiday. Although it started in the UK, it became more popular in America. Typically people dress up in scary costumes like ghosts, devils and witches, and go 'trick or treating' – knocking on doors and asking for sweets. They also carve pumpkins to create jack-o'-lanterns and decorate their houses.

**Guy Fawkes Night or Bonfire Night** is a uniquely British celebration held on **November 5** to commemorate the failed plot by the Catholic rebel Guy Fawkes to blow up parliament in 1605. It is celebrated with fireworks, bonfires and parties.

**Thanksgiving** is a special American holiday, always on **the fourth Thursday in November**. Originally the first Pilgrims gave thanks to God with a feast to celebrate their successful first harvest. Now it is an important family holiday with a roast turkey meal. Turkey, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce, corn and pumpkin pie are traditionally served at Thanksgiving. These dishes are native to America and were introduced as a new food source to the Europeans when they arrived.

**Independence Day**, or **the Fourth of July**, is an important day for the USA. It is the anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the day the country announced its independence from Great Britain in 1776. Today it is celebrated with fireworks, parades, barbecues, picnics and family get-togethers.

On **November 11** (the date when WWI ended in 1918) soldiers who have died in wars and war veterans are remembered. In the UK, it is called **Remembrance Day** and in the US **Veterans Day**.

## Ireland

The most typical Irish holiday is **St. Patrick's Day** (March 17), which remembers St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland. The celebrations include parades, concerts, theatre productions, fireworks, and of course drinking and feasting. Today the holiday is celebrated worldwide and not only by Irish people.