

Winter festivals!

Pre reading

Look at the pictures below. Do you know what these festivals are called?
Do you know what happens during the celebrations?



Glossary

a pagan *n*

a person who does not believe in any religion

a wiccan *n*

a person who practices Wicca (or witchcraft)

a chamber *n*

a windowless room

an uprising *n*

an "uprising" happens when a group of people start fighting against their country's government

because they want to bring about political change

a Menorah *n*

a ceremonial candleholder

to last *vb*

to endure

Swahili *n*

a widely-spoken language in Africa

to bring out *phr vb*

to provoke a positive or negative reaction from a person or animal

Reading I

Read the article to check your ideas.

Reading II

According to the article, which celebration(s)...

1. ...involves worshipping the moon and sun?
2. ...involves hanging up a big sock?
3. ...began within the last 50 years?
4. ...involves lighting candles?
5. ...is celebrated by pagans and wiccans?

WINTER FESTIVALS

Well, it's Christmas time again, one of the most widely celebrated holidays in the world. There are lots of customs associated with Christmas, such as opening presents and hanging stockings. But, there are many other winter holidays throughout the world that people celebrate with their own traditions as well. Here are three of them.

1. The Winter Solstice – *(The shortest day of the year)*

The Winter Solstice is an important pagan festival. It takes place on the shortest day of the year. This usually happens between the 20th and 23rd December in the northern hemisphere (June in the southern hemisphere). Part of the holiday is for worshipping the sun, moon and zodiac. Many people celebrate The Winter Solstice, including **Pagans** and **Wiccans**.

People around the world celebrate the solstice in unique ways. One special event takes place in an Irish temple that was built for a celebration called Newgrange. Newgrange is a 5,500-year-old grave. During the solstice, the grave lights up in its inner **chamber** for about fifteen minutes, and only a set amount of people are admitted inside to see the spectacular event.

2. Hanukkah – (The Festival of Lights)

Hanukkah is a Jewish festival that lasts for eight days. It is celebrated sometime between late November and late December. Hanukkah honours the memory of the Maccabean revolt of the 2nd century BC, a Jewish **uprising** against Syrian rule.

Jewish people celebrate Hanukkah with several traditions. Each night, they light a new candle and place it on the **Menorah**.

Ross from the television programme *Friends* explained the miracle of Hanukkah, “The miracle was that the little bit of oil [from the Menorah candles] that should’ve **lasted** only one day burned for eight days.” During Hanukkah, family members exchange gifts, and the strict rules of the Bible are more relaxed.

3. Kwanzaa – (The Pride of Africa)

Kwanzaa began in the 1960s, so it is a relatively new festival. It is a celebration of African culture. Kwanzaa was made official by Maulana Karenga, an African-American political activist. It is celebrated in many countries, including the US, Canada, the Caribbean and Africa. It lasts seven days, from 26th December until 1st January. The holiday name comes from *matunda ya kwanza*, which means “first fruits” in **Swahili**.

Kwanzaa has several customs.

Firstly, it is based on seven principles that value family, community and culture.

A common Kwanzaa gift is something inexpensive, such as a book or a candle holder. A typical ritual during Kwanzaa is to decorate houses with objects of African culture and light a *kinara*. A *kinara* is a traditional candleholder that holds red, black and green candles – the colours of black liberation in America.

The holiday season is for having fun and **bringing out** the charitable spirit in people. So, celebrate the way you want, and have a happy holiday!

Discussion

1. Which of the festivals mentioned in the article are celebrated by communities in your country?
2. What holidays do people in your country typically celebrate? Which of the customs mentioned in the article do you practise in your country?
 - A) Hanging up a stocking
 - B) Lighting candles
 - C) Exchanging presents

