



Turkey Day

What's Thanksgiving all about?

- A. Every year at the end of November, millions of Americans are on the move, heading back home to their families for a long weekend to celebrate Thanksgiving. This national holiday always takes place on the fourth Thursday of November, with schools and offices closed on this day and the next. The main event is a big meal and the focus, as the name suggests, is being thankful for the good things in life: food, family and friends.
- B. The celebration dates back several hundred years. The story goes that in 1620, a hundred men, women and children travelled across the Atlantic Ocean from England to the east coast of North America, looking for religious freedom. This group, called the Pilgrims, were not well prepared for survival in this new land and they nearly starved during their first winter. The local Native American people, the Wampanoag, helped the Pilgrims by giving them food and teaching them how to grow corn and hunt and fish. Eventually, this friendship became a political alliance, and the relationship was celebrated with a three-day feast, featuring turkey, corn on the cob, cranberries and pumpkins. These typical American foods still feature on the Thanksgiving menu today, 400 years later, although every family has its own preferences and recipes, which nowadays include stuffing, gravy, mashed potato, sweet potato or yams, and pumpkin pie.
- C. Because autumn is a natural time to celebrate the harvest, many people who came to North America, as well as those already living here, marked this occasion in their own ways, or not at all. Thanksgiving didn't become a national holiday until 1863 when President Abraham Lincoln invited all Americans to join in a country-wide celebration on the last Thursday in November. Lincoln was hoping to heal the nation's divisions during the terrible 1861-1865 Civil War between the north and the south. In fact, he was also responding to a campaign which had begun in 1827, when a magazine editor called Sarah Josepha Hale called for support from her many readers to make Thanksgiving a national holiday.
- D. The spirit of togetherness that Lincoln was hoping to promote continues today. Many organizations in America prepare and distribute turkey dinners to the homeless in their local area. Many Americans also make a point of including a friend or neighbour around an already crowded table so that no one is alone at this special time.
- E. The four-day weekend also typically includes a range of other events. Macy's department store in New York City holds a huge parade which is televised nationally. Retailers everywhere open the Christmas shopping season with sales on Black Friday. The National Football league schedules important games over this period and many people hold viewing parties around the TV if they can't attend a game in person, or at least play a game in their backyard to run off the huge meal. And perhaps strangest of all, the White House holds a yearly ceremony where the president pardons a turkey to save it from the dinner table, following the example of President George Bush senior in 1989.
- F. Canadians also celebrate Thanksgiving but on the second Monday in October. The earlier date is linked to the traditional English harvest festival celebrations. Their festive menu is very similar to the American celebration, but the weather tends to be warmer which allows for easier travel before the winter sets in.
- G. Thanksgiving has some similarities with traditional Christmas celebrations: a big meal, family time and fun with friends. However, many Americans enjoy the fact that, unlike Christmas, Thanksgiving has no religious associations, and better yet, there is no need to give or receive gifts! However, the holiday is not without controversy and recent years have seen people consider how Native Americans view the holiday, as well as the impact on the environment of modern Thanksgiving celebrations.



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Reading for detail

Read the article again and find the answers to these questions. Be ready to explain the answers in your own words without reading directly from the article.

1. How long does the modern Thanksgiving holiday last?

2. Who took part in the first Thanksgiving celebrations, according to the article?

3. Why did President Lincoln think it was important to make Thanksgiving a national holiday?

4. What are two examples of how Americans show a feeling of togetherness during Thanksgiving today?

5. What four other types of events do Americans enjoy at Thanksgiving?

6. What are the similarities and differences between Thanksgiving in the US and in Canada?

7. What are two positive things about Thanksgiving compared to Christmas? Why do you think these are advantages?

