

Feast and Family



Source: <https://www.texasmonthly.com/feast-around-the-world/>

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Background Information

Have you ever wondered where our most important family feasts come from? Have you ever thought about the origins of our most traditional banquets? Why do we eat certain types of food at special celebrations? And how do these traditions affect the environment?

The truth is that families have been eating feasts since ancient times. Those traditional melas have given families the opportunity to gather together, to create memorable moments, and to share special meals with loved ones. Recipes passed down through generations are a vital part of our most important family gatherings.



Source: https://www.abc.es/familia/padres-hijos/abci-fase-1-desescalada-pueden-hacer-familias-202005100212_noticia.html

Every year we wait eagerly for those special dates. Some countries have big celebrations with gifts and huge banquets, and others have only a simple family gathering, with little more than a modest meal. The reasons to celebrate vary from continent to continent, and they often have different cultural and religious meanings. The different cultural traditions, beliefs, and ingredients determine the types of dishes served at those feasts.

Celebrations in the Middle East



Feast of the breaking of the fast, ending Ramadan

Source: <https://www.concordmonitor.com/A-Ramadan-letter-to-my-friends-25303212>

In the Middle East, different religious groups—Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, and Christianity—have their own beliefs and customs that inspire important feasts and celebrations.

One of those celebrations is the Al-hijrah, which marks the end of Mohammad's journey from Mecca to Medina and represents the beginning of the Islamic New Year.

Other main festivities include Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, the major Islamic celebrations. TEid al-Fitr marks the breaking of the fast at the end of the Ramadan month of fasting, and the Eid al-Adha is a “festival of sacrifice” that commemorates the Prophet Ibrahim's devotion to God.

The food that people eat during these celebrations is directly attached to the important milestones of Islamic history. Eid al-Adha, for example, requires the sacrifice of an animal to honor Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son in obedience to Allah's command. That's why most of the dishes are made with lamb and mutton, contrary to Eid al-Fitr, where sweet foods are predominant. Those sweet foods symbolize the happiness people feel at the end of Ramadan.



Dates, part of the Eid al-Fitr cuisine

Source: <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/muslim-eid-ramadan-coronavirus-2021-b1845557.html>

Celebrations in Asia

In Asia, people gather to celebrate a popular Hindu festival called Holi, an ancient celebration also known as the festival of colors. It commemorates the triumph of good over evil and the transition from winter to spring. But the meaning of the festival has changed over the centuries. Holi used to be a ceremony performed by married women to show their devotion to Raka, the goddess of the full moon, to promote their families' wellbeing.



Holi, the festival of colors

Source: <https://www.trafalgar.com/real-word/festivals-in-asia-travel-bucket-list/>

Holi has become popular among non-Hindus in many countries of South Asia and in other parts of the world. People in India, Nepal, and other places with Hindu populations celebrate Holi, as do people in some parts of Europe and North America, where its main purpose is to celebrate love and life.

Holi traditional foods include a wide variety of sweet dishes. The most popular are sweet dumplings called gujyas, which are stuffed with dry fruits or chocolates. Another traditional recipe is the Indian version of ice cream, known as kulfi, a very popular dessert and a big hit at Holi celebrations because it provides relief from the heat.



Gujiyas, traditional Holi foods

Source: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/food-news/10-surprising-holi-food-facts-you-should-know/articleshow/68464782.cms>

Chinese New Year, one of the most popular celebrations around the world, primarily takes place in China, but people in Korea and Vietnam also celebrate the holiday. People of Chinese descent in countries around the world have made this New Year celebration mainstream.

The origin of this important day involves many myths that can be traced back to about 3,500 years ago. The most common legend is about the mythical monster Nian ("New Year" in Chinese), which terrorized villages by eating livestock, crops, and people on the eve of a new year. The beast was afraid of loud noises, bright lights, and the color red, so people used these irritants to keep him away.



Chinese New Year costumes

Source: <https://www.miscw.com/pm-greets-people-of-china-korea-mongolia-and-vietnam-on-the-lunar-new-year-celebrations-3087.html>

It isn't a coincidence that bright red costumes are common features of this celebration. The Chinese people believed that the color brings fortune in the coming year. The celebration also includes presents. Family and friends usually exchange gifts of money wrapped in red envelopes, and children and adults alike put on new red clothing.

Banquets include many special kinds of foods with lucky meanings. One of the most indispensable dishes is noodles, which symbolize longevity. Fish, which is believed to bring prosperity to the new year, is another popular dish.



Traditional red envelopes called "hong bao"

Source: <https://www.gmanetwork.com/entertainment/celebritylife/hobbies/58616/chinese-new-year-traditions-and-superstitions-you-need-to-know/story>

Celebrations in Africa

Africa also has its religious and cultural celebrations. Across the continent, Muslim communities make Eid Al-fir one of the biggest traditional celebrations. This festival is similar to the Holi celebration in India. Prayer, feasting, and family gatherings are the main features. Acts of charity are habitual, and strangers often give one another baked goods and other treats.

The Timkat festival is another common religious celebration in Africa. Its origins are Christian. Because Ethiopia has a sizable Christian population, Timkat is the country's most important celebration.

Timkat translates to "baptism" and commemorates the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in the River Jordan. This is a very colorful festival. The areas of the path to the baptismal pool are adorned with flags of Ethiopia, and women wear clothes with green, yellow, and red, the colors of the country's flag, which represent the pact between man and God.

The most popular food of the Timkat festival is the Ethiopian flatbread called injera, which is filled with a variety of meat and vegetables. Doro wat is also very common. This spicy chicken recipe is the Ethiopian national dish.



Injera, Ethiopian flatbread

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/feb/01/injera-the-bike-wheel-sized-base-of-ethiopian-cuisine>

Celebrations in Central and South America

Many well-known celebrations around the world have a religious feel, but some are more festive, like Rio Carnival, one of the biggest festivals in the world. This festival, which is celebrated every year in Brazil, has Roman Catholic origins, and it takes place before Lent, a 40-day period of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

Carnival started in Italy and spread to France, Spain, and other European countries. When it reached South America, the Brazilians added the parade and samba music, turning it into an extravagant and flamboyant festivity.



Garota (Rio de Janeiro Carnival)

Source: <https://elperiodico.com.uy/2018/02/01/ocho-conjuntos-participaran-en-el-concurso-departamental-de-escolas-de-samba/>

Carnival is known for its costume parades, blocos (street parties), and bandas (street bands). The garotas, the most important part of Carnival, are very attractive women who wear bright and colorful costumes. Carnival usually showcases the remarkable influence of African cultures.

The main dish of Carnival is feijoada, which is usually accompanied with citrus fruits and made with slow-cooked pork, beans, and rice. The festival food is varied, and there are plenty of sweet street treats such as quindim, a dessert made from egg yolks, sugar, and ground coconut.



Brazilian Feijoada

Source: <https://foodandroad.com/typical-dishes-of-brazil/>

In South America, we also find other festivities that have significant religious importance. Palm Sunday is one example. This celebration has Christian origins and commemorates the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, where he was met by a crowd that received him with palms and olive branches.

Some parts of South America (Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Peru, Argentina, Brasil, Cuba), Central America (Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras), and Europe (Spain, Italy, and France) also celebrate this important day.

Palm Sunday also marks the beginning of Holy Week, when Passover, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday celebrations take place.

The food traditions associated with Palm Sunday depend on the cultural traditions and ingredients available in each country.



Palm Sunday – Chiquinquirá,, Colombia

Source: <https://www.elheraldo.co/entretenimiento/familias-celebraron-el-domingo-de-ramos-474994>

In Central America, el Día de los Muertos (the Day of the Dead) is one of the most important festivities. It's mainly celebrated in Mexico, but other Central American countries such as Honduras and Guatemala also observe the day.



Mexican Catrina, one of the most representative icons of Mexican culture and the central character of the Day of the Dead

Source: https://mexico.as.com/mexico/2021/10/31/actualidad/1635698617_558120.html

This holiday originated in the pre-Spanish era, and it's influenced by indigenous cultures such as the Aztecs and the Mexicans. It's a celebration that pays tribute to death, which the Aztecs saw as a temporary journey to eternal rest.

During the two days of the festivity, participants decorate graves with flowers, hold picnics in the cemetery (featuring bread baked as an offering to honor the dead), remember and feed deceased family members, and take part in celebratory parades, where people dress up in elaborate costumes and makeup that alludes to death.

Christmas Celebrations



Traditional British Christmas dinner

Source: <https://www.emucoupon.com/insights/how-australians-celebrate-christmas>

Christianity's broad influence in many regions is the reason that some celebrations are known worldwide. Christmas is celebrated in the U.S., Canada, South America, and parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa. People in more than 160 countries celebrate Christmas, although in countries like Angola and Uruguay, the holiday is relatively simple. Some countries like Jordan and Pakistan take December 25 as an official holiday only for Christians.

Undoubtedly, Christmas is one of the most important holidays of the year. This is a perfect time to get together with family and friends, to make special meals, and to exchange gifts.

Many believe that Christmas celebrates the date on which Jesus was born, but the exact date of his birth is unknown. Historians believe that the origins of Christmas include the mighty Roman Empire and pagan rites and rituals that have little to do with the birth of Jesus.

People celebrate Christmas in many ways around the world. In the United States, many people decorate their homes with lights, a Christmas tree, and other symbols of the festival in the weeks before December 25. Most people prepare a special meal, which often includes turkey and other side dishes. Family and friends exchange gifts and cards. Children, in particular, receive a lot of gifts from their parents and the mythical Santa Claus.

Around the world, the celebration of Christmas involves dishes and treats that are particular to this day. In some places, gifts are important, and some carry a special meaning. Decorations and lights are common in a variety of places.



Ecological manger Christmas scene made with plastic bottles

Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/409264684866918570/>

Parades, festivals, and parties are common, especially in South America. People in countries such as Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador recreate the nativity scene of the birth of Jesus, which is also known as the “Christmas manger scene” or “Creche.” They are often part of Christmas decorations at home.

Many people also participate in the Christmas novena, a prayer done for nine consecutive days in preparation for a liturgical feast like Christmas. People also gather around the manger in churches and houses to recite a series of prayers specially written for the time. Some people accompany those prayers with “joys” or special songs to praise Jesus' birth.



Oplatek, the Polish tradition of breaking bread on Christmas Eve

Source: <https://www.dreamstime.com/photos-images/christmas-eve-poland-wafer.html>

In other places like Poland, people used to have some Christmas traditions particular to their culture. Many Polish people who live outside of Poland begin Christmas Eve dinner by sharing the oplatek, a paper-thin square wafer—made of flour—with a nativity image on it. The oplatek is meant to remind families of the Eucharistic bread at mass, and it makes a further connection between Christmas and the gift of the Eucharist, reminding celebrants of the presence of God among them.

Humanity at Its Best

We all celebrate and commemorate important dates passed down through the generations. They help us keep connected with our roots and culture, and they are very important to preserve.



Source: <https://saberespoder.com/articles/education/como-celebrar-ano-nuevo-en-casa>

When we commemorate a special occasion, we are essentially celebrating life, which is reflected in physical and mental health, community and family relationships, and a healthy self-concept. Festivities bring joy and excitement, making us remember what's really important in life.

They also have a positive impact on the global and local economies. They create jobs, attract foreigners, permit cultural exchanges, develop a country's infrastructure, and preserve cultural heritage.

Although festivities are a very important part of our lives, they can have a significant impact on the environment. Finding ways to make important celebrations sustainable is crucial for preserving our world.

We should seek to make intelligent choices like using less wrapping paper, avoiding products with extra packaging, using eco-friendly recipes, reusing items we have in our homes, and buying an appropriate amount of food when preparing for banquets, family gatherings, and festivities. Those environmentally responsible decisions will conserve resources and energy and prevent the pollution of land, air, and water.

Challenges/Opportunities

Making family gatherings, cultural celebrations, and festivals more sustainable can be hard. But we all need to be conscious of our individual contributions in order to reduce the environmental impact of festivities.



Source: <https://blueandgreentomorrow.com/sustainability/celebrating-impressive-shift-towards-sustainable-festivals/>

If all 7.8 billion inhabitants of our planet made small, sustainable changes to our approach to holidays, birthday parties, anniversaries, and festivities, we would collectively make a huge difference. We need to remind ourselves that the little decisions we make as individuals every day can have a profound impact on the future of our planet.

Here are some of the most relevant challenges to make celebrations around the world sustainable and eco-friendly:

1. Creating environmental awareness: We can't make changes unless everyone commits to becoming more environmentally aware.

2. Making eco-friendly markets more convenient: We should work to expand eco-friendly markets to make these products available to all. That involves replacing or phasing out polluting options.
3. Changing the marketing strategies: Social media and marketing strategies could influence customers' decisions by making planet friendly ideas for holidays or special occasions trendy. Let's make eco the new black.
4. Changing Individual and collective mindsets: The little choices we make every day can significantly decrease environmental damage. We need to get into the habit of being conscious about what we use every day and bring that consciousness to celebrations.
5. Reducing waste: Every small family gathering, celebration, festival, or holiday generates waste. Don't go cheap and buy wasteful products for a big gathering. Lead by example!

To change our perspective about these challenges, it's important to discuss the elements of our special events, including traditional foods and cultural practices. Although each one impacts the environment differently, they are all part of the problem. Let's talk about ways to make them part of the solution.

Thanksgiving Can Be a Fun and Sustainable Celebration



Source: <https://www.cute-calendar.com/event/thanksgiving/40550.html>

Thanksgiving is an ancient tradition celebrated around the world. It's more than four centuries old, and it has different meanings and takes various forms in the 17 countries that celebrate the holiday. It has a number of names, but giving thanks is always at the root of the celebration.

According to U.S. history, Thanksgiving was a tradition marked by religious services to give thanks to God and to celebrate an abundant harvest. During the Civil War, this tradition was declared a national holiday by President Abraham Lincoln as a way to camouflage the divisions created by the war and to homogenize an American identity.

Thanksgiving usually takes place on the last Thursday in November, but when the Great Depression hit, President Franklin Roosevelt moved it up a week to stimulate the economy by allowing more time for Christmas shopping. This is how this holiday lost his religious and civil associations and became a commercial holiday.



Source: <https://www.redmond-reporter.com/opinion/black-friday-sale-and-we-give-thanks-for-being-first-in-line-cartoon/>

Another interesting aspect of Thanksgiving is the menu, which for decades has included turkey as the main dish. This tradition can be traced back to the first Thanksgiving, when the Pilgrims and Native Americans hunted wild fowl like duck, geese, or turkey. Native Americans likely served turkey because it was a large bird that was relatively easy to capture. The tradition became popular. Around the 19th century, the banquet included three or four kinds of meat, but after World War II, marketing campaigns gave a boost to turkey, and it returned to centerstage.



Source: <https://www.haultail.com/news/the-environmental-impact-of-your-thanksgiving-dinner/>

In the U.S., the tradition of eating turkey is still preserved, and nowadays it's the center of a huge, delicious banquet that has a significant environmental impact that we can't ignore. Poultry is a major contributor to greenhouse gasses (GHG), particularly carbon dioxide (CO₂), nitrous oxide (N₂O), and methane (CH₄). In the same way, the manure produced at an intensive poultry farm is one of the biggest polluters of water and air.

There's another environmental impact associated with Thanksgiving: the food that we throw away after Thanksgiving contributes to GHG emissions. According to ReFed, a food waste think tank and nonprofit, global food waste generates 8% of the total anthropogenic GHG annually, which has massive environmental consequences. Thanksgiving should be about giving thanks and not about polluting and generating waste.

Thanksgiving celebrations around the world are marked by feasts and cultural traditions that vary from place to place. Some countries have traditional ways of celebrating, and others are implementing new practices that are sustainable and eco-friendly. They can serve as an example to us all.

Asia



Labor Thanksgiving in Japan

Source: <https://ameblo.jp/alive-english/entry-12424029234.html>

"Labor Thanksgiving" day in Japan is a good example of a sustainable holiday. This celebration recognizes the workers and their contribution to Japanese society. Unlike well-known Thanksgiving traditions, this holiday involves a small banquet without turkey. The Japanese prepare a traditional meal of fish, rice, and tea, and they have modest gatherings with close family.



Traditional Japanese dinner

Source: <https://www.japancentre.com/en/recipes/801-home-style-japanese-meal>

A remarkable feature of Labor Thanksgiving is that school children make cards and gifts to say thanks to workers like police officers, firefighters, and hospital staff. Local labor organizations also sponsor events to encourage people to think about peace, human rights, and the environment. One of the most important events is the Nagaro labor festival.

Europe



Erntedank festival Germany

Source: https://issuu.com/heimatabroad/docs/2018_ha_q3_issuu/s/34177

In Germany, Thanksgiving takes place over several days, and it's known as "Erntedank." Germans use loads of freshly harvested produce, have multiple church services, and fill baskets with grains, bread, vegetables, and fruits to feed the poor. Many communities have parades with lanterns that children make to teach them gratitude for the harvest.

Africa

In Africa, a continent with some of the world's least developed countries, some people celebrate a joyous festival called Homowo. It's a celebration full of music, singing, and traditional dancing. Homowo is celebrated in remembrance of the famine that struck pre-colonial Ghana. The chanting is mainly improvised and includes references to budget cuts and government corruption. The community uses the celebration to express grievances and general concerns.

Music and dancing—and an array of other sounds—play a vital role in African communities' celebrations and ceremonies. This cultural practice gives the community an opportunity to spread messages.



Kpokpoi, traditional food of the Homowo festival. It's made from maize and palm oil.

Source: <http://publish.illinois.edu/iaslibrary/tag/kpokpoi/>

This festival begins with the planting of maize, which is used to prepare kpokpoi, a traditional food. The Ga people sprinkle it on the ground to remember those who died during the famine.

The traditions of the Homowo festival have ancient roots. The celebrants use artistic expressions such as dance and singing to communicate the joy and the concerns of the community. This African thanksgiving is a great example of a celebration that doesn't pollute the environment.

North America

The U.S. has a variety of thanksgiving traditions. In some cities, footraces commonly known as "turkey trots" are becoming popular. This tradition began in Buffalo, New York, in 1896. That race only included six participants, but it has grown significantly over the decades.

On average, there are more than 250 turkey trots across the country every year. Besides burning some calories the morning of Thanksgiving, runners also support local nonprofit organizations and small businesses. At the Dallas YMCA, one of the largest races in the country, around 20,000 people participate each year.



Turkey Day Run in Chicago

Source: <https://mybestruns.com/YMCABuffaloNiagaraTurkey?b=reat&details=Y>

Eco Is the New Black

Thanksgiving is an old tradition that has evolved dramatically over the centuries, but some people work hard to preserve customs that have no connection with the excessive consumerism that is part of modern celebrations.

In countries all over the world, people are finding ways to celebrate and preserve traditions that don't harm the environment. Creating an eco-friendly feast with small portions and local ingredients can reduce the environmental impact of Thanksgiving celebrations. Promoting environmental responsibility in family gatherings and at local events is an opportunity to express gratitude for nature's bounty.

Making New Year's Eve More Sustainable



Fireworks display on New Year's Eve in Sydney Australia

<https://news.sky.com/story/new-years-eve-around-the-world-how-countries-are-celebrating-with-widespread-covid-restrictions-12506928>

New Year's Eve is historically one of the year's biggest celebrations. Civilizations around the world have participated in the celebration of the new year for at least four millennia.

The earliest recorded New Year's celebration took place in ancient Babylon, where the celebration began with the new moon after the spring equinox (mid-March). For Egyptians, Phoenicians, and Persians, the year began with the autumn equinox, on September 21. For early Greeks, it began on the winter solstice, on December 21.



Persian New Year's Eve – Nowruz

Source: <https://www.ancientpages.com/2017/12/31/ancient-history-new-years-celebrations-traditions-around-world/>

In 46 B.C.E., Roman Emperor Julius Caesar introduced the Julian calendar, which began the year on January 1. Romans celebrated the new year by offering sacrifices, decorating their homes, exchanging gifts, and attending parties. Centuries later, Christian leaders of medieval Europe moved the beginning of the year to days with more religious significance, including December 25 (the birth of Jesus) and March 25 (the Feast of the Annunciation).

In most countries today, New Year's Eve is celebrated on December 31. To celebrate, people usually attend parties, prepare special meals, make resolutions, watch fireworks, and sing songs to welcome the new year.



Source: <https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/new-years-resolution-ideas>

One of the most popular traditions on New Year's Eve is watching fireworks, but a couple of decades ago, countries around the world put restrictions on fireworks due to the potential harm to human health and the environment. Australia, Ireland, Argentina, Chile, and Colombia have bans on the sale of fireworks to the public, and in the U.S., most states have strict laws governing them.

The Chinese invented fireworks during the second century B.C.E. They used them in to celebrate the new year because they believed that the noise of the explosion could dispel evil spirits and bring good luck. This tradition became popular all over the world, but it's one of the biggest contributors to air pollution because it releases a huge amount of CO₂, and the oxidizers and perchlorates used to produce the explosion cause water pollution.

Eco-Friendly Alternatives to Fireworks



Source: <https://theargyros.org/calendar/drone-light-show/>

To minimize the environmental impact of fireworks, we can adopt alternatives that reduce the use of pyrotechnics but to entertain kids and adults. Sophisticated alternatives can replace traditional New Year's Eve fireworks shows, and some of them promise a greater spectacle with a minimal environmental impact.

- One of the best alternatives at home is the use of bubbles, sparklers, balloons, or candles. They have a smaller environmental impact, but they are creative ways to celebrate the new year.
- Laser light shows are another alternative. Even though they don't offer a show as striking as fireworks, they are a safer choice. They can display colors and shapes without the loud noises and chemicals of fireworks.
- Perhaps the best alternative to fireworks is a drone display show. The first drone show occurred in 2012 in Linz, Australia. Since then, they have grown in popularity. Combined with music, they can create an impressive, entertaining experience.



"Drone100" performed by Ars Electronica Futurelab for Intel in 2015

(Credit: Preetam Choudhury / CC BY-SA 4.0) Preetam Choudhury via a creative commons license

Source: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/grrlscientist/2020/06/30/drone-light-shows-way-cooler-than-fireworks/?sh=537b5f3d42f1>

China is a pioneer in shows that replace fireworks during big holidays like the lunar new year. Sidney, Australia is also considering replacing pyrotechnics with drones to reduce bushfires and other environmental damage.

New Year's Eve Meals

Traditional New Year's Eve meals are generally linked to ancient beliefs and customs. In many countries, people believe that eating certain foods brings prosperity in the new year.



<https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2014/12/31/374243365/luck-be-a-lentil-tonight-what-the-world-eats-to-welcome-the-new-year>

Although the ingredients for New Year's Eve meals vary by culture, the meals universally symbolize happiness, health, and prosperity. In Spain, people eat 12 green grapes at midnight while making 12 wishes for happiness and luck for every month in the coming year. This tradition has passed to Latin American countries such as Colombia, Brazil, Chile, and Ecuador.



Source: <https://www.italymagazine.com/featured-story/new-years-eve-italian-traditions>

Before midnight in Italy, people serve a plate of lentils with cotechino, a spiced pork sausage, and zamponone. Italians believe that eating pork sausage is a good omen for the new year because of the high fat content, which symbolizes abundance. Lentils are said to bring fortune and prosperity.

Sauerkraut and pork are the centerpiece of a traditional New Year's Eve dinner in Germany, and it's also popular in parts of Pennsylvania, Ohio, and other nearby states. In Italy, people believe that eating pork brings good luck and wealth.

The dish is said to bring luck because people once believed that pigs only moved forward. Sauerkraut is made with long strands of fermented cabbage, which symbolizes abundance, prosperity, and long life.



Traditional German New Year's Eve dinner

Source: <https://anaffairfromtheheart.com/pork-roast-sauerkraut/>

In the Southeast of the U.S., especially in the Carolinas, it's traditional to eat black-eyed peas on New Year's Eve. The dish was said to have been introduced to the South by Africans, where there is evidence of people eating black eyed peas with rice dishes for good luck as early as 500 C.E. When black-eyed peas were added to the pilau, it became known as "Hoppin' John."



Hoppin' John, traditional southern dish for New Year's Day

Source: <https://www.almanac.com/content/hoppin-john-good-luck-food-new-year>

Every ingredient in the traditional Hoppin' John symbolizes fortune and prosperity. Black-eyed peas represent coins, collard greens represent cash, pork represents wealth, and tomatoes, if included, represent health. Sometimes the cook slips a dime into the dish before serving it. Whoever gets the dime is supposed to have wealth in the coming year.

In Japan, people usually eat soba noodles or toshikoshi soba at midnight on New Year's Eve because the Japanese believe that the dish symbolizes longevity and prosperity.



"Sledzie Marynowane," a special Polish New Year's Eve dish

Source: <https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/new-years-food-traditions/index.html>

Poland has another interesting food tradition. Polish people eat a dish called sledzie marynowane, made from rolled herring in vinegar with onions and pickles. Scandinavians believe that the dish brings prosperity and bounty in the new year. They often include herring in a larger midnight smorgasbord that includes smoked and pickled fish, pate, and meatballs. This dish is commonly found in countries like Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Germany.

Traditional New Year's meals represent different meanings in countries all over the world. The ingredients in those meals also symbolize good fortune, wealth, longevity, and health in the new year.

Environmental Impacts of New Year's Eve



<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7842931/Clean-crews-descend-Times-Square-clear-colorful-aftermath-New-Yorks-NYE-celebrations.html>

Traditions like fireworks are harmful to the environment. The waste that we create during the holiday also has a significant ecological impact. It's estimated that in Times Square alone, over 3,000 pounds of confetti litter the streets, much of which can't be recycled. Food waste is another important source of environmental pollution. Big parties are also a major source of trash, and we can do so much good by making more sustainable choices when celebrating.

In South American countries like Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, and Argentina, people celebrate the New Year's Eve by burning dolls (momos or monigotes). The dolls are usually filled with sawdust or old clothes and sometimes fireworks. They usually resemble a famous national or international figure. The bonfires in which the dolls are burned emit significant amounts of CO₂.



The traditional “Muñecos de Año Viejo” in Colombia

Source: <https://www.eltiempo.com/colombia/california/munecos-de-ano-viejo-con-covid-19-los-mas-vendidos-en-cali-557992>

Sustainable Ideas for New Year's Eve

For those hoping to reduce the environmental impact of their New Year's Eve celebrations, there are sustainable alternatives to make our celebrations fun and eco-friendly. From decorations to outfits, we can make more intelligent choices to minimize the harm we do to our communities.



Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/12525705203130174/>

1. *Decorations:* Long-lasting and homemade decorations are in. A variety of fabulous and creative crafts can be made plastic free. Horns, shakers, and noisemakers can be made at home. For example, we can celebrate with maracas made with raw beans and raw rice in wood containers or old plastic water bottles.

Using paper confetti is a better choice than balloons and glitter, and holiday wrapping paper repurposed as decorative garland can add shine and color to the holiday. That same paper can be used to make party hats. With a little bit of creativity, you can upcycle many household items that you are no longer using.



Creative New Year's Eve party hat, made from a used paper bag

Source: <https://www.manualidadesinfantiles.org/gorro-fin-ano-bolsa-papel>

2. *Food*: Choosing organic and local ingredients over frozen food with extra packages not only makes for a healthier dinner but also reduces waste.

Replacing pork and meat with more sustainable choices like tempeh, tofu, or soy burger could make our tables more ecological. Recipes that include vegetables, fruits, and grains can make up a sustainable and appetizing New Year's Eve banquet, worthy of being posted on social media.

Preparing food to feed the people on a guest list can significantly reduce food waste, and reusable or biodegradable utensils reduce plastic and unnecessary extra waste.



BBQ tempeh, a substitute for pork, made from slightly fermented soybeans

Source: <https://www.yummymummykitchen.com/2017/04/easy-baked-bbq-tempeh.html>

3. *Outfits*: It's common for people to dress up in sparkly and shiny outfits on the last night of the year. But before choosing an eye-catching, polluting outfit, we should try to find eco-friendly alternatives. Fast-fashion is one of the most polluting industries. Buying cheap clothes that we only wear once or that fall apart after a couple of washes are terrible for the environment.

Consider buying clothes from ethical and sustainable brands that use high-quality materials that last longer. Supporting local thrift shops and buying, selling, and trading clothes online can help us save money and reduce the amount of clothing that ends up in landfills every year.

Let's Make Sustainable Christmas a New Trend



Sustainable Christmas decoration made with dried oranges

Source: <https://planetprotein.com/blogs/blog/10-sustainable-christmas-decorations> Important big Festivals

Christmas Origins

Christmas is a Christian celebration that commemorates the birth of Jesus, but some historians believe that it was originally a pagan celebration rooted in ancient Roman traditions.

Pagan cultures like the Romans and the Greeks used to decorate their homes with greens as part of the solstice celebration, in anticipation of the spring to come. As Christianity spread across Europe, the Christian clergy couldn't change the pagan customs and celebrations, so they overlaid the celebration of Jesus' birth on pagan celebrations.

The traditional Christmas tree was adopted from Germany during the 1500s. The Germans decorated trees in their homes with sweets, lights, and toys.



Source: <https://www.christmas-day.org/christmas-celebrations.html>

Christmas became a holiday in America after the Civil War, when the country was looking for ways to put aside differences and unite. President Ulysses S. Grant declared it a federal holiday in 1870.



Source: <https://zerowasteurope.eu/2013/12/zero-waste-christmas-rethinking-consumption/>

Over the centuries, the celebration has evolved to become a festivity full of gifts and huge banquets, which increase food waste and trash. During the holiday season, global waste increases by an estimated 25% to 30%, thanks to the packaging, wrapping paper, cards, and food.

Christmas Meals Around the World



Source: https://www.toonpool.com/cartoons/Christmas%20turkey_98775

The people of the world eat a variety of Christmas dishes. Some are savory, and others are sweet or spicy. Some food traditions are common to several continents.

One of the most ancient traditional Christmas dishes is the roasted pig, which is the center of Christmas dinner in many Northern European countries, the Philippines, many South American countries, Spain, Portugal, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. This tradition comes from ancient Rome, where people celebrated the mid-winter by sacrificing a suckling pig to the gods and throwing huge banquets that involved much drinking and singing.



The suckling pig is part of the traditional Christmas dinner in European countries, the Philippines, many South American countries, Spain, Portugal, Cuba, and Puerto Rico.

Source: <https://www.shutterstock.com/search/christmas+roasted+pig>

The roasted pig is usually a piglet two to six weeks old. It's called a "lechona" or "lechón" in Spanish. The suckling pig is roasted for several hours in an outdoor brick or charcoal oven. In countries like Colombia, it's stuffed with yellow peas, green onion, rice, and spices.

Turkey is also a staple in many Christmas dinners in the United States, Canada, and the U.K.



Traditional ghapama, a roasted pumpkin stuffed with rice, raisins, and nuts

Source: <https://old.hayernaysor.am/en/archives/269496>

In countries like Armenia, where people normally fast for six days before Christmas Day and avoid eating any kind of meat, people often make dishes made with rice, nevik (green chard and chickpeas), and fish. They also eat soups and walnuts glazed in jelly. Ghapama, another traditional dish served during holidays like New Year's Eve, can be a side dish, a dessert, or an entrée. Ingredients include pumpkins, dried fruit, and nuts.

In Montenegro, a Southern European country, people fast and enjoy meatless and dairy-free Christmas dinners. Kutia is a traditional dish on Montenegrin tables. It's also served by Eastern Orthodox and Byzantine Catholic Christians, predominantly in Belarus, Poland, Ukraine, and Russia. The dish, which symbolizes unity, is made with wheatberries, poppy seeds, and honey.



Kutia, a traditional European dish made with wheatberries, poppy seeds, and honey

Source: <https://www.rbc.ua/ukr/life/eda/kutya-rozhdestvo-samyepopulyarnyeretsepty-1545930602.html>

In South and Central America, it's not common for people to fast or to serve meatless Christmas dinners. Tamales are one of the most common traditional dishes. They are made from the paste of freshly ground corn or from nixtamalized and dried corn that's then mixed into a dough.

Most tamales are filled with meat, chicken, or vegetables. The filling varies, depending on the traditions of the country. Sometimes they contain rice, potatoes, and cooked eggs. They can be spicy, sweet, salty, or plain, with no filling at all. In some countries, sweet tamales are filled with raisins, guava paste (bocadillo), or cheese.



Traditional tamales with rice, chicken, and vegetables

Source: <https://www.recetavenezolana.com/tamales-colombianos/>



Traditional Mexican tamale

Source: <https://www.directopaladar.com.mx/comida-mexicana/tamales-mole-negro-hoja-platano-receta-tradicional-mexicana-para-disfrutar-este-dia-candelaria>



Sweet tamales filled with raspberries

Source: <https://24bite.com/sweet-tamale-recipe-raspberry-dessert/>

Many Christmas celebrations are marked by the consumption of poultry and pork, either as a main dish or as a side. But to make the holiday more sustainable, we should take lessons from the countries where people don't eat meat and dairy products as part of the holiday season (they might also have some interesting recipes). We can also learn from people who fast before Christmas in an effort to refocus on spiritual life.

Christmas dinner can be a sustainable meal if we make thoughtful choices. We can choose from a variety of recipes made with local ingredients, vegetables, and grains. By changing some of our traditions, we have an opportunity to become a consciously sustainable generation and to create traditions that preserve the environment for future generations. Let's make eco-friendly the new black!

Solutions



Source: <http://www.seppo.net/cartoons/displayimage.php?pid=715>

Contrary to what you might think about sustainable celebrations, the solutions are practical. Simple decisions like reusing materials you have at home to decorate our Christmas tree or to wrap gifts will allow you to make celebrations that are unique and sustainable.

Using eco-friendly practices in our family gatherings and celebrations is gaining popularity. Here are some ideas about how you can be part of this new ecological trend:

1. *Recycling, Reusing, Reducing:*

Making cards from recycled paper or reused materials can reduce waste and create original cards. You just need some markers, glue, and creativity. Other good options include electronic cards and invitations, which eliminate waste.

If you use your imagination while wrapping your Christmas gifts, you can create original, eye-catching decorations that are better than any traditional decorations you can find in the store. If you like drawing, you can sketch ribbons on plain wrapping paper or you can decorate with flowers, seeds, or leaves.

Old newspaper, magazines, pages from remaindered books, or recycled brown paper are a good way to make your Christmas present unique. If you want it to look more vintage, you can wrap it in clothing or use a container that can be part of the gift. A scarf, a bandana, or any other fabric will make it memorable.



Source: <https://www.lux-review.com/7-sustainable-gift-wrapping-ideas/>



Source: <http://pamemeanblog.com/creative-gift-wrapping-ideas-magazines-newspapers/>



Source: <https://www.etsy.com/ca/listing/84762805/finen-gift-wrapping-cloth-for-christmas>



Source: <https://oldalfarm.com/mason-jar-christmas-gift-idea/>

Reusable wrapping for presents reduces unnecessary paper and plastic waste. Using fabric wrapping is a lot like using a canvas bag when you go to the grocery store. If everyone made the decision to create less waste at every opportunity, the cumulative impact would be astounding.

2. *Responsible Consumption:*



Source: <https://amendo.com/5-small-steps-to-becoming-a-more-sustainable-consumer/>

Consuming responsibly means buying less junk and more high-quality products. Consumers have a responsibility to make choices that consider the environmental impacts of the products they purchase.

When buying for holidays or other special occasions, you can buy local and seasonal products, you can opt for fresh foods, and you can try plant-based recipes. You can also plan your menus ahead and prepare only enough for each invited guest to have their fill.

It's also sensible to avoid disposable eating utensils, and you can serve food on reusable tableware.

Buying eco-friendly clothing is another way to reduce the environmental impact of your holidays. When choosing your attire for special dates, find out if your clothing brand is sustainable, and try to buy clothing made from organic materials.



Source: <http://www.sustainablelifestyleblog.com/home/why-fashion-revolution-is-important-to-weecos-2/>

Shopping at secondhand or local clothing stores is also an eco-friendly choice for the holidays. You can save money and help keep clothing out of landfills.

During the holidays, it's easy to find good prices on the latest fashions, but much of that "fast fashion" is made with cheap, low-quality materials. The production processes of the companies that make that clothing are often unethical because they harm workers and the environment.



Source: <https://sustainabilityillustrated.com/en/2018/11/20/clothes-sustainable-fashion-cartoon/>

Buying unnecessary clothing just because it's on sale is wasteful since we often throw it away shortly after purchasing it. Try to avoid buying in excess. It's ideal to shop for high-quality clothes that last longer. That saves money and protects the environment.

3. Involving Children:



Source: <https://wehearyou.acecqa.gov.au/2016/01/28/sustainability-in-childrens-education-and-care/>

Getting children Involved in the preparation for holidays is a good way to educate them about sustainable practices.

Allowing children to help with the grocery shopping is a perfect opportunity to show them which ingredients are more sustainable and why we use them to make Christmas dinner.

Christmas decorations are another good way to get children involved, They can use their creativity to make eco-friendly decorations with biodegradable materials found at home or even at the park.



Christmas decorations made with pinecones and corks

Source: <https://www.hellowonderful.co/post/pine-cone-christmas-tree-craft/>



Christmas tree ornament made with tree sticks and scrap ribbon

Source: <https://www.firefliesandmudpies.com/scrap-ribbon-tree-ornaments/> (Pinterest)

Making a list of gifts for family and friends with the little ones is also a good opportunity to get children involved. You can tell them the importance of giving useful, high-quality gifts.

Gift packaging can be biodegradable, and you can turn paper into something totally new and creative. Children can also help you make eco-friendly cards with old cards and materials like plastic packaging.



Puzzle cards made with popsicle sticks

Source: <https://www.gathered.how/arts-crafts/upcycling/recycling-christmas-cards/>

4. Choosing Useful Gifts:



Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/spa-and-facial-promotion-ideas-groupon-merchant--388998486549485554/>

Giving a useful Christmas present that lasts longer protects the environment. Giving gift certificates to a day spa or yoga studio, tickets to a theater show, or a gift card to a nice restaurant can create memories and reduce waste.

Refurbishing and upcycling old clothes into something new can make a unique present. Buying at a thrift shop or antique store is a great strategy for reducing consumerism. We don't really need to give the newest gadget. What really matters is the intention that you give your present with.

It doesn't take a lot of sewing and design skills to reinvent old clothes into new styles. Here are a few ideas that might give you some inspiration.



<https://weheartit.com/entry/206869342>



<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/439523244856953092/>



<https://co.pinterest.com/pin/914862417184356/>



<https://co.pinterest.com/pin/47710077292537069/>

5. *Using Biodegradable Decorations:*

Avoiding plastic decorations and opting for biodegradable materials reduces the impact of holiday waste. It's becoming more and more popular to create ornaments made with wood, paper, cardboard, dried fruit peels, seeds, or anything we find at home.

You can find many ideas for hand-made ornaments on the web. The latest trend is to avoid using materials that create any pollution. Much of the junk we throw away can be used to make stunning and eco-friendly decorations for any special date.



Christmas ornaments made from pasta

Source: <https://diy-enthusiasts.com/decorating-ideas/christmas/christmas-crafts-kids-ornaments-pasta/>

The Christmas tree is one of the most important Christmas decorations. In some places, people like to use a fake tree made from plastic. You can also make trees made from sticks, cupboard boxes, books, and bottles, just to name a few alternatives. You can create anything you can imagine.



<https://www.architecturedesign.net/magnificent-christmas-trees-you-can-make-this-holiday/>



<https://co.pinterest.com/pin/188799409352517003/>



<http://www.millennialgoingdown.com/alternative-christmas-trees/>



<https://co.pinterest.com/KelleyDSummer/alternative-christmas-trees/>

Conclusions

Family feasts, celebrations, and holidays are an essential part of human history. They are invaluable for preserving traditions and keeping us connected with our roots and culture. Family gatherings link new generations to the past and help children form their identities.

Every family gathering is an opportunity for adults to take a break from the monotony and stress of a job, and taking part in these celebrations can have a positive impact on every family member.

The same is true for festivals celebrated in the community. They help groups bond through shared beliefs and the commemoration of important dates.

Celebrations are an inherent part of our identity, but they can have a significant impact on the environment if we make poor choices. We need to take seriously sustainable alternatives that reduce the harm caused by the celebrations. We can all be part of the solution by making little changes.

Countries like Japan, Germany, and the U.S. have some sustainable practices and activities during holidays like Thanksgiving. They include educating children on sustainable practices, making small portions, and prioritizing artistic activities such as dancing and singing.

Besides collective action, we individuals can also commit to recycle, reduce, reuse; to be responsible consumers; to educate our children; to choose useful gifts; and to use biodegradable decorations. These are just some of the solutions we can all be part of.

If every individual committed to making small changes to their lives, the collective impact on our communities would be profound. All it takes is a slight elevation in consciousness. Let's make green the new black!

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<https://expresolatino.net/cultural/historia/tradiciones-de-semana-santa-en-paises-de-latinoamerica-como-se-celebra/>

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