

Test your holiday IQ

Do you know the history of the holiday traditions you take for granted?

We gleaned the answers to these Christmas trivia questions from "Celebrations, the Complete Book of American Holidays," by Robert J. Myers, with the editors of Hallmark Cards (Doubleday and Co., Inc.):

- The actual date of Jesus's birth:
 - is recorded in the Gospel of Luke
 - is Jan. 6, the Feast of the Epiphany
 - is probably sometime in the summer or early fall
- The Puritan response to Christmas was:
 - to fast, then celebrate by feasting
 - to refuse to acknowledge it at all
 - to attend church from dawn to dusk
- Washington decided to cross the Delaware on Christmas because:
 - Hessian mercenaries had abandoned themselves to a rousing German festival and forgot to keep watch
 - his troops were eager to get home for holiday celebrations

(c) the date was insignificant; it was merely a coincidence

- The first state to grant legal recognition to Christmas was:
 - Massachusetts
 - Alabama
 - New York
 - none — Christmas is a religious holiday

- The image of Santa Claus as a full-bodied, bearded bell-ringer comes from:
 - Clement Moore's poem, "The Night Before Christmas"
 - Thomas Nast's cartoons for Harper's Weekly
 - a costume designed by a Salvation Army volunteer

- The origin of the word "yule" probably comes from:
 - a Germanic-Celtic November feast of the same name
 - the Gothic hiul, which meant wheel
 - the Anglo-Saxon geol, meaning feast
 - all of the above

ANSWERS: 1 (c); 2 (b); 3 (a); 4 (b); 5 (b); 6 (d)

daughter, dressed as Lucia, the patron saint of the blind, opens her parents' bedroom door at dawn wearing in her hair a wreath with burning candles. She brings them breakfast in bed, a warm assortment of special St. Lucia's buns and cakes.

In Sweden, the main family meal begins with a smorgasbord, followed by sun-dried cod in cream sauce. Then there is ham, and finally rice pudding, inside of which is hidden a whole almond. Whoever gets the almond, according to tradition, will be married before the end of the year.

In Mexico, families travel, like Mary and Joseph, to each other's homes. They are welcomed with prayers — and then a party. The high notes of these parties are the famous pinatas — papier-mache animals filled with toys and candies. These are suspended from the ceiling while blindfolded children try to crack them open with bats.

Mangers are popular in Latin America; in Costa Rica, the manger may fill a whole room, not just one corner. In Panama, the nacimiento is very elaborate and includes trees, grass and waterfalls.

In Argentina, Christmas dinner is outdoors on the veranda, and the table

is decorated with roses and jasmine. The main course is cold roast turkey or chicken. On Twelfth Night, Argentinians leave fresh water outside their doors for the Wise Men's camels; they have come a long way, and they no doubt are quite thirsty.

In Ghana, as in other Christianized countries in Africa, the celebration is traditional but with an indigenous flavor — there are fireworks and fufu, a dish of pounded yams. Food is sent to neighbors and presents are exchanged. In Liberia, the Christmas tree is an oil palm decorated with bells.

This year, do something special: "Get away from it all" by visiting an American community or vacation spot that celebrates Christmas in a special, memorable way.

For example, Disney World near Orlando, Fla., creates a fantasyland holiday for the Walt Disney characters. Toy soldiers and gingerbread men reign over the many special events.

The "Spirit of Christmas" at Williamsburg, Va., is probably America's most well-known city/community celebration. Annual parades, plantation tours, tree-lighting ceremonies and musical concerts are just a few of the holiday happenings.

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