

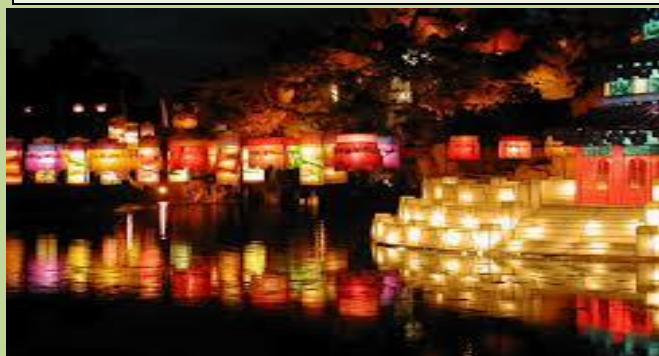


ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE



Holidays and Gift Giving

As we approach the big gift-giving season of Christmas, we decided to share some of the major holidays and gift-giving practices around the world. JSRCC students pictured above are, from left to right, Rubee Baruah (India), Mita Jabbar (Bangladesh), Gursharan Kaur (India) and Zakia Sultana (Bangladesh).



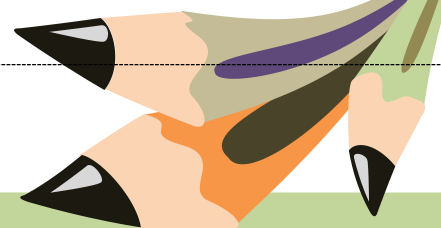
The Mid-Autumn Festival is a popular harvest festival celebrated by the Chinese and Vietnamese people. It is held on the 15th day of the eighth month in the Chinese calendar, during a full moon, which is in September or early October in the Western calendar. In 2008, it became a public holiday in the People's Republic of China. In Vietnam, the Mid-Autumn Festival is considered the second most important holiday tradition (after Tet). A notable part of celebrating the holiday is the carrying of brightly lit lanterns, lighting lanterns on towers, or floating sky lanterns. Making and eating mooncakes is one of the hallmark traditions of this festival. One tradition is to pile 13 mooncakes on top of each other to mimic a pagoda, the number 13 being chosen to represent the 13 months in a full lunar year. In Vietnam, it is also known as Children's Festival because of the event's emphasis on children.



Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Every day during this month, Muslims around the world spend the daylight hours in a complete fast. Ramadan is much more than just not eating and drinking. Muslims are called upon to use this month to reevaluate their lives in light of Islamic guidance. It is a time to strengthen ties with family and friends, forgive others, and to do away with bad habits. Ramadan is a time to cleanse the body and soul from impurities and refocus ones' self on the worship of God.

The Indian holiday of Diwali is the "Festival of Lights" (Diwali is the name in north India and Deepavali is the name in southern India). It celebrates the victory of good over evil and light over darkness. This Indian holiday has significance for Hindus, Sikhs and Jain. The exact date of this 5-day holiday varies since it is based on the Hindu-Luni solar calendar, but it usually falls in October or November. Each day has its own significance. On Diwali, families gather and eat lots of foods and sweets. It is also common to send Diwali greeting cards to family members and friends. Gifts include Saris for wives and mothers, home decorations, and toys. Fireworks are also a popular part of the Diwali festivities.





The most popular celebration in Russia is the **Russian New Year**. Late family dinners, sparkling wine and fireworks at midnight are some of the traditional ways of celebrating New Year's Day in Russia. Children's festivities may include a decorated fir tree and a visit by the Russian equivalent of Santa Claus. The Russian national anthem begins at midnight and people congratulate each other and exchange presents. Some people go outside to build a snowman or light fire crackers in their backyards.



TET is the Vietnamese New Year or first day of the lunar new year, occurring somewhere in the last ten days of January or the first twenty days of February, nearly halfway between winter solstice and spring equinox. The festival of Purity and Renewal, for the Vietnamese people, Vietnamese New Year is like a combination of New Year's Day, Christmas, Easter and Thanksgiving. People clean and decorate their homes and get new clothes which are not typically worn before the first day of the New Year. People also give away red envelopes filled with "lucky money." Flower buds and blossoms symbolize new beginnings, and Tet is not Tet without seeing yellow apricot flowers in the South and pink peach blossoms in the North. One of the most traditional foods for this holiday is Banh Chung, or sticky rice cake.

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The **Carnival of Brazil** is held 40 days before Lent. The term "carnival," from *carnelevare*, means "to remove meat." Carnival has roots in the pagan festival of Saturnalia. Adapted to Christianity, it became a farewell to certain things in a season of religious discipline to practice repentance and prepare for Christ's death and resurrection. Participation and costumes vary from one region of Brazil to another. In the cities of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, huge organized parades are led by samba schools. Carnival in some of the northeastern cities is influenced by African-Brazilian culture and the public directly interacts with the smaller parades. Carnival is the most famous holiday in Brazil and tourism receives 70% of annual visitors. With the exception of industries and carnival-related workers, the country stops completely for a week full of intense day and night festivities.



Some common gift-giving practices

- In China and Vietnam, gifts are offered and received with both hands; this shows respect. Gifts are not typically opened in front of the gift giver.
- **Ivan Borges** said that in Brazil, even though gift giving is common practice among co-workers, one must be very careful when giving gifts in the workplace because it can be seen as a bribe.
- If you are invited to a Chinese family's home for a meal, a little gift is always welcome. If you are a woman, you can bring a present to both the host and hostess, but if you are a man, you just bring a present for the host. According to student **Fei Fei Li**, China has complicated gift-giving rules, and even though she is Chinese, she says she doesn't know all of the rules.
- **Kim-Trang Nguyen** and **Tu Tran** observed that Vietnam and the U.S. share the practice of bringing beer or wine when invited to someone's house. This is true in Brazil as well, reported Ivan Borges. Bringing flowers is also common practice.
- **Agaibi Girgis** of Egypt said that it is customary to bring a basket of fruit when invited to someone's house. It should be an impressive size; a few pieces of fruit would not be well received.

Happy Holidays!