

# Holidays

An ESL Unit



# Contents

**Activity 1 - Warm-up Discussion**

**Activity 2 - Test Your Knowledge**

**Activity 3 - Reading - The Festival of Lights**

**Activity 4 - Grammar - A Look at Passive Voice**

**Activity 5 - Listening - Chinese New Year**

**Activity 6 - Class Presentation**

**Activity 7 - Writing Task**

**Online Version: <http://roadtogrammar.com/units/holidays>**

## Warm-up Discussion

### Discuss the following questions:

- 1 What is the most widely celebrated holiday in your country?
- 2 What do you do on this holiday?
- 3 What is your favourite thing about this holiday?
- 4 What other holidays from around the world do you know?



## Test Your Knowledge

How much do you know about holidays around the world? Take this quiz and find out. (Answers are on the last page).

1 Which of these is a popular Christmas drink?

- A| root beer
- B| eggnog
- C| apple juice

2 Which country is known for its celebrations of the day of the dead?

- A| India
- B| Nepal
- C| Mexico

3 During Hanukkah, Jewish people light a menorah that holds \_\_\_\_ candles

- A| nine
- B| eleven
- C| twelve

4 Vesak day is celebrated by \_\_\_\_\_

- A| Buddhists
- B| Hindus
- C| Sufis

5 During Chinese New Year, it is common to see ' \_\_\_\_\_ ' dances

- A| snake
- B| lion
- C| crane

6 the festival of Eid marks the end of Ramadan – the period when Muslims \_\_\_\_\_

- A| fast
- B| visit Mecca
- C| give gifts

7 Diwali, celebrated in India, is the Festival of \_\_\_\_\_

- A| Gods
- B| Food
- C| Lights

8 Which of these countries would celebrate the New Year first?

- A| USA
- B| Mexico
- C| Australia

9 In the USA, Independence Day is celebrated on \_\_\_\_\_

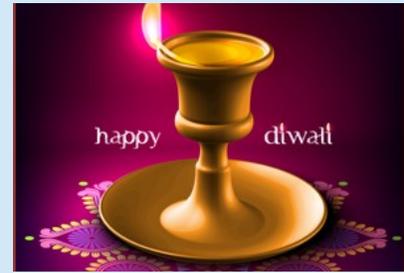
- A| June 30
- B| May 1
- C| July 4

10 The translation of Mardi Gras in English is \_\_\_\_\_

- A| Fat Tuesday
- B| Ash Monday
- C| Festive Friday

# Reading: The Festival of Lights

Diwali, or Dipawali, is India's biggest and most important holiday of the year. The festival gets its name from the row (avali) of clay lamps (or deepa) that Indians light outside their homes to symbolize the inner light that protects us from spiritual darkness. This festival is as important to Hindus as the Christmas holiday is to Christians.



Diwali, celebrated in October or November each year, originated as a harvest festival that marked the last harvest of the year before winter. India was an agricultural society where people would seek the divine blessing of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, as they closed their accounting books and prayed for success at the outset of a new financial year. Today, this practice extends to businesses all over the Indian subcontinent, which mark the day after Diwali as the first day of the new financial year.

Indians celebrate with family gatherings, glittering clay lamps, festive fireworks, strings of electric lights, bonfires, flowers, sharing of sweets, and worship to Lakshmi. Some believe that Lakshmi wanders the Earth looking for homes where she will be welcomed. People open their doors and windows and light lamps to invite Lakshmi in.

Over the centuries, Diwali has become a national festival that is enjoyed by most Indians regardless of faith: Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs.

Hindus interpret the Diwali story based upon where they live, but in all interpretations, one common thread rings true—the festival marks the victory of good over evil.

## Vocabulary list:

festival  
divine  
health

spiritual  
wealth

harvest  
subcontinent

agricultural  
bonfires

# Reading: The Festival of Lights, cont.

## Comprehension Questions

Answer TRUE or FALSE

- 1 The festival is known by two different names.
- 2 Diwali is on a fixed date.
- 3 Diwali is linked to the Goddess Lakshmi
- 4 Diwali is celebrated by lighting lamps and decorating trees.
- 5 Diwali has changed over the years.
- 6 Only Indians who are Hindu celebrate Diwali.

## Discussion Questions:

- 1 Does Diwali sound like a fun holiday?
- 2 What are the similarities and differences between Diwali and your favorite holiday?

## Language notes:

1 *"This festival is **as** important to Hindus **as** the Christmas holiday is to Christians."*

Note how we use **as...as** to compare two things. Here is a simpler example:  
The giraffe is **as** tall **as** a lamp post!

2 *"**Over the centuries**, Diwali has become a national festival"*

Use **over the centuries** to describe a period of hundreds of years. We can also say 'over the years' or 'over the months'.

3 *"a national festival that is enjoyed by most Indians **regardless of faith**"*

We use the word **regardless** in a similar way to **despite** or **in spite of**. Note how it matches with the word **of**. Here is another example:

Mental health problems can affect anyone, **regardless of** age, race, gender or social background.

# Grammar: A Look at Passive Voice

In the Listening Exercise, we will hear some examples of the Passive Voice of the Simple Present Tense. Let's review some points.

The passive voice reverses the sentence structure so that what would be the object becomes the subject.

Examples:

Active: *We use **these computers** every day.*

Passive: ***These computers** are used every day.*

Active: *We make **these buns** in our bakery.*

Passive: ***These buns** are made in our bakery.*

Note the structure of the passive voice. We use a form of the BE VERB and the PAST PARTICIPLE:

*He **is bullied** at school.*

*They **are baked** fresh every day.*

*I **am treated** well.*

## Task

Which of these sentences contains an example of the passive voice?

- 1 Chinese New Year begins on the first day of spring
- 2 Traditionally, it is believed that a mythical beast called Nian tormented villages.
- 3 Each year is ascribed the traits of one of the twelve zodiac animals
- 4 Families thoroughly clean their homes as an offering to the gods
- 5 For the year's first days, tempers are kept in check and only kind words are used.
- 6 Fish is consumed at the reunion dinner
- 7 Like most ancient traditions, celebrations have evolved.
- 8 A gala is televised each year
- 9 Festivities resumed in the 1990s
- 10 This custom has lasted for centuries



# Listening: Chinese New Year

Listen to a description of the Chinese New Year holiday:

[audio clip at www.roadtogrammar.com/units/holidays](http://www.roadtogrammar.com/units/holidays)

Could you hear the following words and phrases?

Lunar	zodiac
ushers in	elaborate
renewal	longevity
mythical	abundance
crops	lanterns
thwarted	regime
capture	



## Task

Note down the answers to the following questions:

- 1 What are the other names given to Chinese New Year?
- 2 Which color was the mythical beast Nian afraid of?
- 3 Name three of the twelve zodiac animals
- 4 What are children given as gifts?
- 5 What foods are mentioned in the audio?
- 6 What happened in 1949?

# Presentation

Research and present to your class on a holiday from around the world.

Your presentation should be 2-3 minutes. You could talk about:

- where the holiday is celebrated
- the origin of the holiday
- what people do on this holiday

Here are some ideas:

Chinese New Year

Diwali

Eid

Vesak

Cinco de Mayo

Hanukkah

Kwanzaa

# Writing

You see the following post on an internet forum:



**Chatri**

Hi, I'm Chatri from Thailand and I have some questions about the Christmas holiday in America. Perhaps you could give me some advice.

I will be visiting America for the first time in December as an exchange student and I will be staying with an American family in their home. I will be arriving on December 18, just one week before Christmas!

Are there any traditions or customs that I need to be aware of? Do you think I should buy some presents for the family? Also, as a strict Buddhist, I don't eat meat. Do you think this will inconvenience the family?

Please help me out as I really want to make a great impression and not offend anyone!

**Task:**

Write your own message, giving advice to Chatri.

# Answers

## Test Your Knowledge (Page 3):

1 B 2 C 3 A 4 A 5 B 6 A 7 C 8 C 9 C 10 A

## Reading (Page 6):

- 1 TRUE
- 2 FALSE
- 3 TRUE
- 4 FALSE
- 5 TRUE
- 6 FALSE

## Listening (Page 8):

1 What are the other names given to Chinese New Year?

**Lunar New Year / The Spring Festival**

2 Which color was the mythical beast Nian afraid of?

**Red**

3 Name three of the twelve zodiac animals

**The twelve are: the rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog and pig.**

4 What are children given as gifts?

**Money, in red envelopes**

5 What foods are mentioned in the audio?

**Pork, chicken, noodles, dumplings, fish**

6 What happened in 1949?

**Mao Zedong banned Chinese New Year celebrations**