

Fact File: Columbus Day

What does Columbus Day celebrate?

Columbus Day commemorates the day that Christopher Columbus arrived in the Americas.

When is Columbus Day celebrated?

In the United States it is celebrated on the second Monday in October. The traditional day is October 12th, the day that Columbus arrived.

Who celebrates this day?

The day is celebrated by many countries in the Americas including the United States. In many Spanish speaking countries it is called Dia de la Raza which stands for Day of Race. In the United States the level of celebration varies from state to state and community to community. Many states have the day as an official holiday and government buildings and schools are closed. A few states have chosen not to recognize Columbus Day has a holiday. These states include Hawaii, South Dakota, and Alaska. South Dakota celebrates Native American Day and Hawaii celebrates Discoverers' Day instead. Some people are opposed to the day because they don't want to celebrate what Columbus and the Europeans did to the Native Americans after they arrived.

What do people do to celebrate?

Some of the largest celebrations in the United States are Columbus Day parades. There are large parades in many cities including New York and Chicago. The parades celebrate not only Columbus Day, but also celebrate Italian-American heritage. Since many people have the day off from work and kids are out of school, people often travel over the Columbus Day weekend.

Columbus Day Activities:

You can try some crafts including making a map of his travels or drawing a picture of his three ships: the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria.

A lot of people like to shop on this day as there are many great sales and they can get an early jump on Christmas shopping.

History of Columbus Day

Christopher Columbus is sometimes credited with "discovering" America. Of course there were already people living in the Americas for thousands of years. Today we call them Native Americans. Columbus wasn't even the first European to reach the Americas as Leif Ericsson of the Vikings had already visited. However, it was Columbus' journey and discovery that led to the European colonization of the Americas. The Portuguese, Spanish, French, English, and Dutch all sent more explorers and settlers following Columbus' return telling about the riches of this new land. Columbus first landed in the Americas on October 12, 1492 and the anniversary of the day has been celebrated in the new world ever since. The 300 and 400 year anniversaries in 1792 and 1892 were big events in the United States, but it wasn't until 1937 that the day was made an official federal holiday.

Originally the holiday was on October 12, but was changed to the second Monday of October in 1971.

Fun Facts About Columbus Day

- One of Columbus' ships, the Santa Maria, wrecked on the coast of the Americas and did not make the return voyage. T
- The day is called Dia de la Hispanidad or Fiesta National in Spain.
- The first state to officially recognize the day as a holiday was Colorado in 1906.
- It is the least observed of all federal holidays with only around 10% of businesses closing and taking the day off.