

Valentine's Day

Valentine's Day is celebrated in many countries, but what are the differences between today's celebration and in the past? Read the text to find out some curious facts about the most romantic day of the year.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. a millennial
2. Generation X
3. a baby-boomer
4. mass market
5. vinegar
6. anonymous
7. to troll
8. pagan

Definition

- a. produced and sold in large numbers
- b. without a name on it
- c. people born between 1981 and 1996
- d. a sour liquid used for cooking or on salads
- e. someone born between 1946 and 1964
- f. someone who believes in many gods
- g. someone born between the early 1960s and the early 1980s
- h. to say or write nasty things to someone, often on social media

Valentine's Day

Valentine's Day is on 14 February, and it can seem as if the world is full of couples who are celebrating their love. Some couples might celebrate with dinner at a nice restaurant, flowers, chocolates or other presents. Some single people might put a post on social media about why they hate 'V-Day' or maybe they just avoid it completely. But it's impossible not to know that Valentine's is happening. And that's not surprising when over half of all Brits and Americans celebrate Valentine's in some way.

The price of love

For most of these romantic people, Valentine's Day means spending money. British people spend much less than Americans. The average Brit spends £28.45, while the average American spends \$221.34 (approximately £170.81). Interestingly, in the UK, all three adult generations are likely to buy something for Valentine's (around 68–69% of them). But in the USA, millennials spend slightly more than Generation X, and both spend almost a third more than baby-boomers. Across all generations, on both sides of the Atlantic, men spend more money than women.

The beginning of modern Valentine's Day

Today Valentine's is celebrated in Canada, Mexico, France, Denmark, Italy and Australia as well as the USA and England. But it's the USA where the celebration really became mass market, because of a woman called Esther Howland. She became known as the 'mother of Valentine's' after she created a successful business making and selling greetings cards in the 1840s. She got the idea from valentine cards from Europe that were decorated with lace and flowers and were very expensive. Then, in the early 1900s, two things happened that meant valentine cards became really popular: cheap printed cards were made by the greeting cards company, Hallmark, and the price of postage stamps fell.

Vinegar valentines

At about the same time as this, another kind of valentine card was popular. 'Vinegar valentines' were nasty, anonymous cards that people sent to someone they didn't like. This pre-social media way of trolling people was popular for a hundred years, but not many examples of the cards are in museums today. Museums have big collections of traditional valentine cards, but it's no surprise that not many people kept an unkind valentine card.

Further back in history

Valentine's Day has been celebrated in some way for 600 years. As far back as the 17th century, people gave cards or presents, but the very first valentine messages were written down in the 1400s. In 1415, the Duke of Orleans in France sent his wife a Valentine's Day letter while he was in prison in the Tower of London after the Battle of Agincourt. It is the earliest example of a written valentine message. However, the exact history of Valentine's Day is not known because there were three saints with the name Valentine. One story says that Valentine was a priest. He performed marriages at a time when the Emperor thought that single men were better soldiers than married men. The Emperor was so angry that he punished him with death. Another story says that Valentine helped Christians escape from Roman prisons. A third story says he sent a letter to a girl while he was in prison and signed it 'From your Valentine'.

Whichever story is true, the Catholic Church chose 14 February for St Valentine's Day in AD 270. They probably wanted to replace the pagan festival of Lupercalia on 15 February with the new Christian celebration.

Tasks

Task 1

Write a number to put the sentences in the order that the events took place.

- A man called Valentine became a saint after he died.
- People sent loving and also horrible valentine cards.
- Valentine's Day became a celebration for many people in some countries.
- February 15 was a day of special celebrations by non-Christians.
- A woman copied the valentine cards she saw from other countries.
- People wrote the first valentine messages.

Task 2

Use the words to complete the sentences.

Americans	Baby-boomers	Esther Howland
Hallmark	The Duke of Orleans	Women

- brought a valentine tradition to a large number of customers.
- sent a valentine card to his wife in France.
- spend the most money on Valentine's Day.
- spend the least money on Valentine's Day in the USA.
- receive more expensive valentine presents than they buy.
- used new technology to make valentine cards.

Discussion

What is a good way to celebrate love?

Answers

Preparation task

1. c
2. g
3. e
4. a
5. d
6. b
7. h
8. f

Task 1

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|---|---|
| 2 | A man called Valentine became a saint after he died. |
| 4 | People sent loving and also horrible valentine cards. |
| 6 | Valentine's Day became a celebration for many people in some countries. |
| 1 | February 15 was a day of special celebrations by non-Christians. |
| 5 | A woman copied the valentine cards she saw from other countries. |
| 3 | People wrote the first valentine messages. |

Task 2

1. Esther Howland
2. The Duke of Orleans
3. Americans
4. Baby-boomers
5. Women
6. Hallmark