



# All About Valentine's Day





# All About Valentine's Day

*Discover where the holiday comes from, plus Valentine's Day celebrations around the world!*



Today, Valentine's Day can mean lots of things: romance, time with family and friends, roses, chocolate, and more. But how the tradition of Valentine's Day got started is a bit of a mystery! Read on to discover the festival's possible origins, as well as how it's celebrated across the globe.

## Saint Valentine

Valentine's Day is named after a saint—or two or three!—who lived in the third century, about 1,700 years ago. In the Catholic religion, a saint is a person who was considered exceptionally holy. There are at least two Saint Valentines. However, no one is sure exactly which of these saints the holiday is named for!

According to one legend, Saint Valentine was a priest who lived in the Roman Empire. When the Roman emperor Claudius II outlawed marriage for young men in order to convince them to become soldiers, Valentine continued to wed young couples in secret. The Romans discovered him, however, and ordered his death. In another legend, Valentine was a Christian who was imprisoned by the Romans. Unable to escape, he sent a love letter to a young woman he had fallen in love with and signed it "Your Valentine." Regardless of which story may be true, Saint Valentine became associated with romance and love.



## All About Valentine's Day



A statue depicts Saint Valentine, the patron saint of love, wearing a rich red cloak.

### Roman Revels

Although Valentine's Day is named for a Catholic saint, some experts believe the holiday got its start long before Christianity, as a Pagan festival. Every year on Feb. 15, the ancient Romans celebrated a holiday known as Lupercalia. It included animal sacrifices, as well as feasts and beverages. But as Christianity took hold in the Roman Empire, Lupercalia was banned by the pope, who is the head of the Catholic church. Historians think that, to encourage a change in the fifth century, Pope Gelasius replaced the old Pagan celebrations with ones dedicated to Saint Valentine that were celebrated one day earlier, on Feb. 14.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

**In ancient Rome, red roses were believed to be sacred to the goddess of love, Venus.**

### Valentine's Cards and Candy

Over time, people continued to celebrate the holiday and add to it. In Europe in the 1400s, people began to give each other written Valentine's Day greetings. This continued as the holiday spread throughout the continent, and then on to the Americas, Australia, and other regions.

By the 1700s, it was a common tradition for friends or couples to give each other holiday greetings or gifts. This became even more of a big deal in the United States in the 1800s, when a businesswoman



## All About Valentine's Day



named Esther A. Howland created ready-to-send Valentine's Day cards that people could purchase. Soon, other companies wanted to get in on the sales. More card companies cropped up. And in England, a candymaker named Richard Cadbury started selling Valentine-themed chocolates in heart-shaped boxes.

### Across the World

Today, Valentine's Day is a major holiday in many countries around the world. In fact, some 145 million Valentine's Day cards are sent each year! But not every country and culture celebrates the same way. In Argentina, the holiday doesn't last just one day—it takes place over an entire week. And in parts of England, children wait to be visited by Jack Valentine, a magical character who brings gifts.

In other countries, people celebrate different holidays entirely—although they have some similarities to Valentine's Day! In Japan on Feb. 14, women give chocolate to their male friends, family members, and crushes.

Then, on March 14, men return the favor. In Wales, people celebrate Saint Dwynwen's Day on Jan. 25. Rather than gifting chocolate or cards, couples present their loved ones with carved wooden spoons!

With all these different festivals and histories, it's clear that there is no one "right" way to celebrate Valentine's Day; the important thing is to celebrate loved ones and have fun!

#### FUN FACT

**These days, many people also give Valentine's Day presents to their pets, often in the form of pet-safe cookies!**