

4th of July



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The Fourth of July, also known as Independence Day, celebrates the independence of the United States from Great Britain. The tradition of celebrating independence from Great Britain began in 1776 when the Declaration of Independence was drafted by Thomas Jefferson, who later became the third president of the United States. Contrary to popular belief, independence was actually declared on July 2nd, although the formal adoption of the Declaration of Independence did not occur until July 4th. For many years following the declaration, patriots celebrated the occasion by giving speeches, ringing bells and setting bonfires, but it was not until 1941 that the Fourth of July became a federal holiday. Today, people all over the United States celebrate Independence Day by having barbecues, watching fireworks, attending parades and wearing red, white and blue. American barbecues for the 4th of July are usually attended by friends and family, and traditional food items include hot dogs and hamburgers cooked outside on the grill, as well as potato salad, coleslaw and more. Parades for the holiday are typically held around mid-morning and showcase various patriotic floats, dances and spectacles as well as candy distribution. This year in Champaign-Urbana there will be a parade as well as a fireworks display and a 5km run/walk. Check out the Champaign County Freedom Celebration website for more information to help you begin planning your own 4th of July celebration! (<http://www.july4th.net/>)



Labor Day—More than the Last Hurrah of Summer

Always celebrated on the first Monday in September, Labor Day, for many people, means two things: the end of summer and a day off from work. But there is a reason it is referred to as Labor Day. It is a national holiday dedicated to recognizing the efforts and achievements of American workers.

The origins of Labor Day date back to the late 1800s, during the height of the Industrial Revolution. During this time, the average American worked very long hours, at least 12 hours a day, 7 days a week to earn a meager living. Children were often found working in mines or factories, earning only a tiny percentage of adult workers' wages. Workers of all ages endured dangerous working conditions and were frequently denied work-breaks and clean bathroom facilities.

During this time labor unions began to grow more popular. Labor unions are organized groups that strive for safe working conditions, adequate pay, and protection of workers. These labor unions began planning strikes and rallies as demonstrations against the poor working conditions and low wages. Unions planned the first Labor Day Parade in New York City on September 5, 1882. More than 10,000 workers took time off from work, without pay, to march in what is considered the first Labor Day parade in US history.

Strikes and rallies continued for several years in the 1880s and 1890s. During worker strikes, workers ceased working to protest pay and poor working conditions. Many of the first strikes were violent affairs, such as the Haymarket Riot of 1886, in Chicago, where several policeman and workers were killed. In June 1894, railroad traffic nationwide nearly stopped as employees of Pullman Railway were on strike, demanding better wages. The US government sent federal troops to Chicago to break the strike, resulting in violent riots and deaths of workers.

After these violent episodes, the US Congress wanted to improve the government's relationship with US workers. On June 28, 1894, they hurriedly passed an act declaring the first Monday in September an official national holiday, called Labor Day. President Grover Cleveland signed the act into law 6 days later.

Today, Labor Day is celebrated across the US with picnics, barbecues, fireworks, and other public events. It is generally considered an end of summer celebration, and indicates the beginning of the back to school season, with autumn arriving in just a few short weeks. All federal offices, banks, public schools, and universities are closed.

Summer in Urbana-Champaign

So you survived the winter in Urbana-Champaign? Congratulations! You deserve a reward, and luckily this city offers a myriad of activities during the summer months that are so fun and exciting they might just make you forget how miserable the winter was. Maybe.

Here is a list of some of the major events and festivals taking place in the Champaign-Urbana area this summer:

Art at the Market – May 10 – September 13, 2014

Art at the Market runs through the summer, offering one event each month. All events are free and open to the public and do not require advance registration. For more information and a schedule of events, please visit this link: <http://urbanaininois.us/posts/2014/05/art-market-2014-season>

Uncork Urbana Wine Festival – June 14, 2014

This festival will feature a selection of wines from the state of Illinois, as well as music, food and art. The \$10 charge for admission includes a commemorative tasting glass (while supplies last) and 5 tasting tickets. The vendors will also be selling their wines by the glass and bottle if you're still thirsty after the tasting. For more details, check out the event page on the Urbana Business Association site: <http://www.urbanabusiness.com/uncork-urbana-wine-festival/>

Blues, Brews and BBQ – June 27-28, 2014

Delicious barbeque from 13 different Champaign restaurants and 3 stages for musical performances. This event is FREE and sure to be a crowd-pleaser for all ages! For more information, please visit the event website: <http://bluesbrewsandbbqfest.com/>

Champaign County Freedom Celebration – July 4, 2014

Celebrate America's Independence with a day full of festive activities! The events of the day will include a 5K run, a traditional 4th of July parade, music and a fireworks display to end the day on an exciting note. For more information on all of the day's activities, please visit the website: <http://www.july4th.net/>

Mariposa Music Festival – July 12, 2014

The Mariposa Music Festival will feature performances by nationally-recognized musicians and bands in downtown Champaign. Come enjoy the music as well as food and drinks from various local restaurants and bars. For more information, check out the event page on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/events/757642680937228/>

County and State Fairs

County and state fairs are a staple of American summer-time culture. Originally created to promote local agriculture and trade, these events have grown into extravagant events that include everything from concerts to carnival rides to pig judging contests. Here are the details for two fairs being held this summer in Central Illinois:

Champaign County Fair – Urbana, IL – July 18-26, 2014
<http://www.champaigncountyfair.cc/jos/>

Illinois State Fair – Springfield, IL – August 7-17, 2014
<http://www.agr.state.il.us/isf/>

43rd Annual Taste of Champaign-Urbana – August 15-16, 2014

Taste of C-U will take place this year in West Side Park and features food from some of the best restaurants in the city. Come join the festivities, sample food and drinks from some new places, or old favorites while you enjoy a variety of musical performances. There will also be a number of arts and crafts vendors and activities for the whole family! For more information, check out the event page on the Champaign Park District website: <http://www.champaignparkdistrict.com/programs-events/special-events/taste>

Urbana Sweetcorn Festival – August 22-23, 2014

Food, music, activities, fun and, of course, sweetcorn! This event began in 1975 and is one of the highlights of summer in Urbana-Champaign. Come for the sweetcorn, stay for the musical performances and family-friendly activities. For more information, check out the event's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/urbanasweetcorn>



Football/Soccer in the United States

When I was asked to write about football, or soccer, in the US, it was presented to me as a way to explore why it wasn't as big as in the rest of the world, and why it was more of a minor sport. But here's the good news football fans- this isn't true. Football (which I will call it for the rest of this article) is getting huge in the US. Ten years ago, it's true, football was a niche sport. Minimal TV coverage, poor crowds in the domestic league called the MLS, very little interest from major media outlets. However over the past decade there's been a huge change.

First, let's look at TV coverage. The biggest league in the world, the English Premier League, now has every single game broadcast in the US by NBC networks. NBC Sports shows three of 4 games a week, with NBC-one of the big four channels- showing at least one live game a week. And they stream every other game online for free! For this, they outbid other networks in a huge \$250m three year deal, demonstrating an acknowledgement of the value of the sport. ESPN's coverage of the 2010 World Cup was stellar, showing every single game live on ESPN or ESPN2, with at least half an hour of build up before each game. I spent time in the UK during the 2010 World Cup and even the highly rated BBC and ITV couldn't match that level of coverage, which will be repeated this year for the 2014 tournament.

The domestic game has benefited from this increase in interest. The MLS has begun to realize its huge potential. Instead of playing to quarter-full crowds in vast NFL stadiums, the MLS teams now almost all play in custom built football stadiums that perfectly reflect their crowds. 20,000 fans in a 22,000 seater stadium creates a far better atmosphere than those same 20,000 spread around a 65,000 stadium designed for a different sport. And the increase in atmosphere makes for a better viewing experience, which attracts more fans, and suddenly, the ball is rolling and can't be stopped. Now, amazingly, an average MLS game draws more fans than an average NBA (basketball) or NHL (ice hockey) game.

So when the 2014 World Cup kicks off, expect to find more interest than ever before in the US. Of course, like in every country, a good run by that nation's team does a lot of cultivate excitement, but the US look unlikely to progress out of an incredibly difficult group. It's a shame, because the work that has been done developing the sport in the US could be further enhanced by a run to the quarter-finals or further.

When I moved to the US in 2002, I had a dreadful time finding people who liked football, or who wanted to play football, or finding games I wanted to watch on tv. As a visitor to the US in 2014, you will happily be spared that pain. Football is everywhere, and it's growing by the day. Don't believe anyone who says otherwise.





English Corner: Summertime is here!



Here are some commonly used English phrases with a summer theme:

“hot off the press”

Freshly printed.

Example: Take a look at my dissertation—it’s hot off the press!

“be in hot water”

To be in or get into a difficult situation in which one is in danger of being criticized or punished

Example: If I don’t finish my homework on time, I’m really going to be in hot water!

“to take a shine to someone”

To like someone (normally when you meet new people)

Example: The international students and scholars at UIUC are so nice—everyone’s really taken a shine to them!



Calendar of Events: June-August 2014

June	Event	July	Event	August	Event
4-5	Shavuot (Jewish)	4	Independence Day	3	International Friendship Day
8	Pentecost (Christian)	24	Lailat Al-Qadr (Muslim)	5	Tisha B’Av (Jewish)
6	D-Day	28	Eid Al-Fitr (Muslim)	13	International Left-Handers Day
14	Flag Day			15	Assumption of Mary (Christian)
15	Fathers’ Day			21	Senior Citizens’ Day
21	Summer Solstice			26	Women’s Equality Day
29	Ramadan begins (Muslim)				