

Thanksgiving Around the World

As we all know, Thanksgiving is a wonderful tradition in this country. Who can turn down good food, probably too much, good football, probably too much and good conversation with family and friends? As I think back on my days in the Air Force, I remembered a fall festival each year that I was in Japan and decided to do a little research into Thanksgiving around the world. In Japan each year on 23 October, a Labor Thanksgiving Day is observed. You can think of it as a combination of Labor Day and Thanksgiving Day. However, its origin goes back to the to 678 when it was the celebration of fall harvest. It didn't become Labor Thanksgiving Day until after the end of WWII when Japan became a mostly industrial nation. Events are held throughout the country with one of the biggest being the Nagano Labor Festival, which is to celebrate the environment, peace and human rights. I remember Misawa celebrated with a parade each year.

Our neighbors to the north, Canada celebrated their version of Thanksgiving in 1578, 40 years before the US colonists celebrated it. The Canadians celebrate their Thanksgiving on the second Monday in October. The tradition was started by English explorer Martin Frobisher who organized the celebration in Newfoundland where he and his crew gave thanks for a successful voyage to North America.

China celebrates their annual Moon Festival or harvest festival on the 15 day of the eighth lunar cycle of the year which in 2020 will be 1 October, also my birthday. On this day, the Chinese families come together for a three-day feast. They celebrated unity and peace for the coming season. Families watch the full moon and sing or recite poetry about the moon. Couples tend to celebrate romance under the full moon.

In Germany, mostly rural religious groups celebrate and give thanks for their fall harvest. Although no day is officially set for this celebration, the German Catholic Church recommends celebrating on the first Sunday in October. One of the traditions is to share food with the poor. Some churches organize lantern parades in the evening of the Sunday.

In Norway, the Høsttakkefest or Harvest Thanksgiving Festival is celebrated in the fall. As with many thanksgiving celebrations, the Norwegian day goes back to a day of giving thanks for a good harvest. It was also about this time of the year when livestock was moved from the upper pastures in the mountains back down to the lower or main farm. The Bakke farm in Norway has both upper and lower farms, for instance.

The Jewish holiday of Sukkot has two roots, that of a harvest festival and a commemoration of the forty-year period when the children of Israel were wandering in the desert. We attended Sukkot last month here in Green Valley under a temporary shelter giving thanks for a good harvest.

On this Thanksgiving Day as you celebrate it as a harvest day, a religious day, a family day or a football day, I hope all of you have a wonderful day.