

* **Birthday Celebrations from China**
* In China everyone celebrates their birthday on New Year even if it is not the official date of their birthday. They turn another year older on this day. They believe that the baby is born one year old. A Chinese child's second birthday is an important event. They might tell the baby’s fortune that is the baby tells their fortune, the baby is placed in the centre of a group of objects such as coins, a doll, or a book and they wait to see which object it picks up. If it picks up a coin it might become rich. If it reached for a book it might become a teacher. If it reaches for the doll it might have many children.
* The sixth birthday is also a big party time.
* The official language is Mandarin.
* In China, it is considered unlucky to give someone a clock for a birthday present. In Mandarin, the word for "clock" is similar to death.
* Legend records Buddha called all the animals in the kingdom to visit him before he departed Earth. Only 12 came, and he named a year after each one as a reward for their loyalty. The animal which rules the year you were born in is said to influence your life.
* The birthday child pays respect to his/her parents and receives a gift of money. Friends and relatives are invited to lunch and noodles are served to wish the birthday child a long life.
* In China, people believe that tigers protect children. Family members bring newborns special food and present them with gifts of clothing or toys decorated with tigers. When a Chinese girl or boy turns one year old, a variety of objects and toys are placed on the floor around the child. According to ancient beliefs, the object that the child chooses is a symbol foreshadowing the profession he or she will pursue in life.
* Also in China, a baby's birthday is celebrated at the age of one year and thirty days. Birthday guests bring colored eggs and good-luck pieces to the new baby.

**Birthday Celebrations from America**

* United States - Cake, candles and song.
* A cake is made, and candles are put on top based on how old the person is. Then everyone sings the "happy birthday" song, and at the end of the song, the birthday child blows out the candles. If they blow them all out with one blow, their birthday wishes will come true.
* **In America,**
* the most memorable birthdays are often those spent with brothers and sisters, mom and dad, huddled around the kitchen table with cheeks full of air, ready to help the birthday child blow out his or her candles.
* Children are definitely in the birthday limelight, beginning with their very first birthday. They and their parents invite friends to a party to share cake, ice cream, punch, and other sweet snacks. Guests are expected to bring a small gift, but rarely leave the celebration empty-handed themselves. Party favors, toys and small prizes insure that each child receives something new.
* Birthday parties often have a theme based on the child's favorite animals, characters, or stories. For example, boys and girls may choose from perennial favorites such as dinosaurs, Winnie the Pooh, Barbie, Batman, or cowboy/cowgirl themes.
* They may choose a party theme based on a current popular movie, television show, or book such as Harry Potter or Hannah Montana.
* Party games may be simple as "pin the tail on the donkey," balloon-toss, or tag. While affluent families may hire live clowns and pony rides, or rent outdoor inflatable games and carnival rides.

In America people celebrate the birthdays of famous people such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Abraham Lincoln and George Washington.

In Some parts of South America and Central America, birthdays are celebrated with a pinata. The Pinata is a paper mache type animal that is filled with candy and small toys and is hung up from a pole or a tree. This is then hit with a stick to break open the pinata to get all the goodies out of it. The children are blindfolded so as to make it harder for them.

Birthdays are celebrated more for the children than for the adults, unless it is a milestone birthday such as 21, 30, 40 or 50.

At the children’s parties they have balloons and streamers are hung up and lots of friends are invited to the party. There are always presents, cakes and ice cream. The birthday person has a cake topped with candles; one for each year and they must try to blow them out in one breath. If successful their secret wish will come true. Sometimes the person having the birthday can choose what they want to do: bowling, swimming, arcades, amusement parks camping trips and so on.

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The majority of American children celebrate birthdays with a cake topped with lighted candles. Most families use the candles to represent how old a person is turning. When the cake is set before the guest of honor, he or she is supposed to make a wish, without telling anyone what it is. After making a wish, he or she tries to blow out the candles. If all the candles go out with one breath, it is believed that the wish will come true!

Some children receive birthday "spankings", which were originally based on superstition, but are now more of a birthday prank or a joke. Hundreds of years ago, spankings were given for each year of the birthday child's life. Beyond that number, a child received another spanking to grow on, one to live on, one to eat on, one to be happy, and yet another spanking to get married on.

At one time, it was considered bad luck if the birthday celebrant was not spanked because it was believed to "soften up the body for the tomb." Historians are unsure if the practice of swatting the birthday girl or boy was treated as a joke, as people view it today.

Singing "Happy Birthday to You" has also been a long-standing tradition on birthdays as well. It was written by two American sisters in 1893, and has been translated into several languages around the world.

In the United States the sweet sixteen party is held for the girls. The symbol for the sweet sixteen party is sugar.

**Native Americans**

The Winnebago Indians have a big birthday and anyone can attend, people find out about birthday parties through word of mouth. These parties can last all evening and through to the night.

They can eat whatever they like for their birthday and it is made for them. The cake is taken around and shown to the guests and it is considered an honor to be asked to cut the cake.

After the meal the children play a hand game. This is played by an adult holding a bone or stone in one of his or her hands and the children have to try to guess where it is.

The native language of the Winnebago Indians is Ho-Chunk.

Native American tribes have placed significance on milestones in a child's development rather than the day he or she was born. The day a child takes its first step is cause for just as much rejoicing as the day he or she accepts the responsibilities of an adult, gets married, becomes a parent, etc.

If you are a Hopi Indian, you might receive a beautiful hand-woven quilt for your birthday.

http://www.birthdaycelebrations.net/usabirthdays.htm

**My American Birthday Celebrations**

My favorite things at birthday celebrations growing up were ice cream, fruit punch, and homemade cake with sugar-icing flowers (well ... gifts, too :)

There was often a dozen schoolmates in funny hats, or wearing blindfolds and playing "pin the tail on the donkey." If the weather was nice, we played water-balloon toss, or had a sack race. And when we were older, we played records and danced. Back then it was okay for girls to dance with girls :)

The dining room was decorated with balloons and flowers for the birthday party. Gaily wrapped presents sat waiting to be torn open as soon as the cake and ice cream were finished. And so no one left empty-handed, there were always party favors, small toys and gifts for friends to take home.

These are the birthday memories of my American childhood ... a special day for sweets, games, gifts, and grinning friends on their best behavior!



Growing up, our American family lived for many years in both Japan and Germany. It seems remarkable now that we knew so little of the birthday traditions of our Japanese and German neighbors.

I imagined that the exotic scents and sounds of the Orient concealed mysterious, even mystical birthday customs. And that the savory foods and vibrant music of the Germans guaranteed an energetic, toe-tapping celebration by party-goers.

But I am only guessing, having never been a guest at a traditional Japanese or German birthday party!

So I (and our readers) look forward to hearing *your real stories* of birthday celebrations from your corner of the world :)