

Facts & Fancies

Fairlawn Haven Care Center and West Haven Assisted Living



Celebrating August

Happiness Happens Month

Read a Romance Novel Month

Watermelon Day
August 3

Farmers' Market Week
August 5–11

Garage Sale Day
August 11

Mail Order Catalog Day
August 18

Senior Citizens Day
August 21

Toasted Marshmallow Day
August 30

An Indian Thanksgiving

Around the world, August heralds the start of annual harvest festivals, when farmers begin to reap the delicious rewards of the summer growing season. Perhaps there is no place that celebrates the harvest with more joy and enthusiasm than the state of Kerala on India's Malabar Coast. For 10 days each August, Kerala celebrates *Onam* and gives thanks for the return of the god king Mahabali.

Hindu legend states that under Mahabali's rule, Kerala flourished with great prosperity, and he was beloved by all. He was so popular that the other gods became jealous and decided to overthrow him. However, when Mahabali showed reverence to the gods, they granted him one wish, that once a year he could return to his kingdom of Kerala. This is why, during *Onam*, the people of Kerala prepare for Mahabali's return and enjoy the prosperity of the harvest.

The first day of *Onam*, known as *Atham*, involves visiting temples and preparing for the arrival of Mahabali. One of the most significant preparations is the *Pookalam*, a beautiful and elaborate carpet made out of multicolored flowers, a sort of Mahabali welcome mat. Each day flowers are added to the *Pookalam*, and it grows and grows. On the fourth day, known as *Visakam*, families begin their preparation of the grand feast that is held on the last day. For the next five days, locals engage in various merriments. Snake boat races are held on the river Pampa. Each massive boat is oared by hundreds of paddlers while massive crowds line the river. Men play various traditional games known as *Onakalikal*. Competitors vie for archery and wrestling titles, while others play a game similar to dodgeball, except that players use their feet to move the ball. On the tenth and final day, King Mahabali arrives for the feast of *Onasadya*, which requires the preparation of a nine-course meal including 13 essential dishes. This is the culmination of a 10-day cultural tour-de-force, the ultimate expression of Kerala's blessed history.

Clowning Around



Thanks to the Clown Club of America, August 1–7 has been celebrated as International Clown Week since 1970, but the history of clowns goes back, in one form or another, to the beginnings of human civilization. The Egyptian pharaohs were entertained by Pygmy clowns as early as 2500 BC. In ancient China, the emperor's court jester used humor to prevent the emperor from forcing thousands of slaves to paint the Great Wall of China white. Ancient Rome had a fool character called a *stupidus*, and jesters were known to attend funerals. Medieval court jesters were the only people allowed to criticize the king. Even the Hopi tribe of the American Southwest employed mischievous clownlike characters to interrupt the most solemn rituals in an attempt to create sympathetic magic. America's precious Uncle Sam, with his star-spangled top hat and suit, long beard, and big feet, originated as a clown campaigning for presidential hopeful Zachary Taylor in 1848. Despite the clown's aura of good-natured fun, the modern clown has always been tinged with a hint of darkness.

Modern clowns are universally recognized by their painted white faces, red noses, and silly clothes. Most historians credit the invention of the modern clown to the British pantomime star known as Grimaldi at the turn of the 19th century. He created an alter ego named Joey who dressed in red and white and entertained people at night, but throughout the day his life was tragic. He was lonely, his wife had died, his son suffered from alcoholism, and his physical antics left him in pain. From Joey came both the comedic and tragic clowns. The clown figure has always embodied two sides of the same coin—joy and sadness. And sometimes, as is the case of Mr. Punch from the old Italian Punch and Judy shows, clowns may even have a savage side. Perhaps what makes clowns so intriguing is that they are a mirror of our society, showing the good, bad, and ugly in all its drama.

Make Me a Match

The last day in August, Matchmaker Day, honors those who have mastered the art and science of finding love. While matchmaking is considered a long-lost tradition, marriages arranged by matchmakers are still common in India, Pakistan, China, and Japan. About 60% of all marriages in India are arranged, and out of these, less than 4% get divorced. And in these arranged marriages, as times goes on, spouses report feeling more love for their partners. Compare that to the 40% divorce rate in the United States, and you might want to rethink the role of matchmakers. Their job has become more of a science, gathering data on potential couples that includes financial and health histories, shared values, and key personality traits. Modern matchmakers are more likely to sit in front of a computer analyzing data than they are to be found in the village square gathering the latest gossip.

Are You Waffling?



On August 24, 1869, Cornelius Swartwout was awarded a patent for inventing a new, improved waffle iron. The first waffle irons date back to the 15th century in Holland, where

waffles were baked on the hearth in long-handled irons. Instead of the recognizable grid of deep wells, waffles were patterned with coats of arms, religious icons, or landscapes. These irons were direct descendants of medieval irons, used to bake religious communion wafers. Swartwout is credited with developing a new version of a waffle iron to be used on a wood- or gas-burning stove. In his design, two cast-iron plates were attached in such a manner that they could be rotated and flipped within a banded collar, allowing both sides of the waffle to cook on the stove top. Irons came in a variety of sizes with the tell-tale grid of wells on each side. Why do waffles today have that gridded and pocketed pattern? Some say that it's to cook a light, crisp waffle, while others argue that the pockets were created to hold rich maple syrup.

Strange Competition



Get ready for a week of the truly weird, because August 13–17 is Weird Contest Week in Ocean City, New Jersey. This beachy seaside haunt hosts curious family fun. Join in a variety of sculpting contests using Salt Water Taffy, French fries, and giant cookies.

Then there's the paper clip construction contest, where past contestants have attempted to replicate the Eiffel Tower and Brooklyn Bridge. "Ears Looking at You" is an ear wiggling bout, where the flappiest ears win. If these contests aren't eccentric enough for your tastes, try some of these other international oddities.

Every year the sleepy hamlet of Willaston, England, hosts the Worm Charming World Championships, where contestants try to coax as many worms as possible out of a small plot of turf. Charmers use various techniques to summon their earthworms, such as vibrating the soil with sticks, poking the grass, or even playing music. Digging is strictly against the rules. In 2009, the world worm charming record was set at 567 worms.

About 150 miles north of Willaston, in Egremont, England, contestants take part in a wholly different competition: gurning. Gurning is the act of contorting your face in the strangest manner possible. The World Gurning Championships are the highlight of the town's Crab Fair, a pastime dating back to 1267, when the local lord would distribute crab apples to the townsfolk. If gurning is not for you, the Crab Fair also hosts a pipe-smoking competition.

For a contest that challenges both the body and the mind, try chessboxing, which is exactly as it sounds. A table with a chessboard is situated in the middle of a boxing ring. Boxers sit and match wits in a game of chess before alternating into a round of boxing. This continues for 11 rounds. Dutch artist Iepe Rubingh developed the idea as a performance, but it grew into a popular sport in Germany, England, India, and Russia. During this week in August, it seems there is truly a contest for every unique taste.

Great Balls of Fire

In Nejapa, El Salvador, August 31 brings what locals concede is a bizarre tradition, the Ball of Fire Festival. On that date in 1922, the local volcano erupted, forcing all the residents to evacuate the town. The eruption became legendary when it was reported that the hot flowing lava took the form of San Jeronimo, the local saint, and Jeronimo began hurling fireballs at the devil. Another legend states that as the lava flowed through the town, San Jeronimo appeared and halted the lava right before it consumed the church. To commemorate San Jeronimo and these miracles every August 31, daring residents soak rags in gasoline, light them on fire, and hurl them through the streets. It is tradition that two teams generally throw the fireballs at each other. Hurlers take precautions, such as wearing gloves and dousing their clothes in water, but the threat of burns is real. Participants are aware of the dangers and even embrace the possibility of injury. The church, too, has even sanctioned the tradition. Perhaps San Jeronimo is watching over the festival, for very few injuries have been reported in the many years it has been celebrated.

A Dream Improvised



On August 28, 1963, civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech at the foot of the Lincoln Memorial before a crowd of 250,000 people during the March on Washington for

Jobs and Freedom. King's speech may be the most famous in American history, but he did not even write it until he arrived at his hotel room the night before. Indeed, he finished his final draft after midnight on the day it was to be delivered. In his speech, King synthesized themes from both the Bible and the U.S. Constitution, but he broke from his written remarks to ad-lib the "I have a dream" section that is so well-known today. It was gospel singer Mahalia Jackson, standing just behind King, who said, "Tell 'em about the 'dream,' Martin."

Mounting a Challenge



Everest. K2. Kilimanjaro. Why are humans so driven to climb to the highest places on Earth? When mountain climber George Mallory was asked why he dared to climb Mount Everest, he replied, "Because it's there." His answer seemed both childish and heroic,

a mixture of folly and fearlessness. Have you ever climbed a mountain? Consider why you did it on August 1, Mountain Climbing Day.

Mallory was one of the first to climb Mount Everest, the highest mountain peak on Earth. Today, more than 600 people every year complete that feat. Similarly, over 50,000 people climb yearly to the top of Mount Kilimanjaro in Kenya to see its famous snows. Obviously, these climbers are not trying to win any accolades for being the first to reach the summit. So if the challenge has been done so many times before, why do people still want to climb? The answer is that the challenge is not necessarily the mountain; climbers climb to challenge themselves. In this sense, the mountain is an innocent bystander.

Serious mountain climbing provides many life lessons. In order to succeed, climbers must have careful planning, teamwork, discipline, athleticism, risk management, and the ability to improvise in a split second. Survival is paramount when you are moving in some of the world's harshest conditions. Many times, people who climb together forge lifelong bonds born out of the cooperation necessary in order to survive.

And then there is the outdoor aspect of a climb. Climbs may be physically and mentally demanding, but they occur in some of the most beautiful natural places on our planet. For many climbers, an ascent is akin to meditation. Climbers are alone on a mountain, intensely aware of their environment in a manner that is transcendent. Mountain climbing allows one to escape civilization and focus only on the essentials of survival. This, for many, is reason alone to climb.

August Birthdays

In astrology, those born between August 1–22 are Lions of Leo. Leos are natural-born leaders: confident, charismatic, creative, and warmhearted. Leos also use their humor and loyalty to bring people together to work for a common cause. Those born between August 23–31 are Virgo Virgins. Virgos are one of the most careful signs of the zodiac. They pay attention to detail, analyze problems, and plan so as to leave nothing to chance. These amazing listeners give excellent advice.

Herman Melville (author) – August 1, 1819
Tony Bennett (singer) – August 3, 1926
Lucille Ball (comedienne) – August 6, 1911
Dustin Hoffman (actor) – August 8, 1937
Alex Haley (author) – August 11, 1921
Julia Child (chef) – August 15, 1912
Roberto Clemente (ballplayer) – August 18, 1934
Al Roker (meteorologist) – August 20, 1954
Gene Kelly (actor) – August 23, 1912
Mother Teresa (humanitarian) – Aug. 26, 1910
Michael Jackson (musician) – August 29, 1958
Buddy Hackett (comedian) – August 31, 1924

Animal Kingdom



Lions, elephants, and orangutans, oh my! August celebrates all these wonderful animals with World Lion Day on August 10, World Elephant Day on August 12, and International Orangutan Day on the 19th. While all of these species are precious and majestic, why should we celebrate such animals? To celebrate animals is to celebrate our human relationship with the entire animal kingdom, of which we are a part. Humans have evolved from hunters and gatherers, to herders, to guardians and conservationists. We humans have made advances that have allowed us to populate the world, but we cannot do this at the expense of animals. Human health and animal health are interconnected. Only together, as a united animal kingdom, will we survive.