

The History of Valentine's Day, and Why We Celebrate

Valentine's Day may be associated with romance, but the history of the holiday isn't exactly lovey-dovey. Here are the facts you may not know—plus, fun ideas for Valentine's Day 2025.

Whether you love Valentine's Day or hate it, one thing is clear: The holiday goes way back. And while it's now known for kissing, [Valentine's Day gifts](#), and hard-to-get dinner reservations, the origins of the holiday are *far* less romantic.

When Is Valentine's Day?

First, a quick refresher: Valentine's Day *always* falls on February 14, but the day of the week varies by year. In 2025, Valentine's Day will be on a Friday for the first time since 2020.

How Did Valentine's Day Start?

Some historians believe it has roots in the ancient Roman festival of Lupercalia. Held yearly on February 15, Lupercalia celebrated the coming of spring and fertility. It involved animal sacrifice, lots of drunken revelry, and possibly a ritual in which men and women were paired off by choosing names from a jar.

As Christianity spread, pagan rituals fell out of favor. At the end of the 5th century AD, Pope Gelasius I outlawed the celebration. He's sometimes credited with implementing St. Valentine's Day, a holy feast day, to replace it, but we don't have definitive proof of that. Regardless, the Christian holiday eventually overtook the riotous Lupercalia.

Who Was St. Valentine?

St. Valentine is the patron saint of lovers, people with epilepsy, and beekeepers, among other things, but the real-life history of the man is unknown. There are various legends about a Christian figure named Valentine or Valentinus who was martyred on February 14 in the 3rd century AD.

In one story, St. Valentine was a Roman priest and physician who refused to convert to paganism and was executed by Emperor Claudius II in about 270 AD. Prior to his execution, he miraculously healed the daughter of his jailer. As the legend goes, he then fell in love with the daughter and, on the day of his execution, wrote her a letter signed "from your Valentine."