|  |
| --- |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| http://0.tqn.com/d/french/1/0/i/a/2/halloween-in-france.jpg |
| *Kate Kunath / Getty Images* |

What is Halloween? Where did it come from? Why and how is it celebrated in France? If you've ever puzzled over these questions, take a look at this article - the answers are here!

Halloween originated in what is now Ireland out of the Pagan Celtic celebration of Samhain. On this day, it was believed that spirits rose from the dead and mingled with the living. The Celts left food at their doors to lure good spirits and wore masks to scare off the evil ones. The Romans who invaded England added a few of their own traditions to the celebration of Samhain - celebrating the end of the harvest and honoring the dead.

Centuries later, the Roman Catholic church established November 1st as All Saint's Day (*la*[*Toussaint*](http://french.about.com/b/2009/10/30/la-toussaint.htm)), in celebration of saints who do not have their own holy day. This was done in part to detract attention from the pagan celebration of Samhain, but it didn't work. The celebrations on the eve of All Saint's Day continued evolving, and during the Irish immigration of the 1840s, Halloween found its way to the United States, where it developed over time into the children's holiday that we know today.

**How did Halloween get to France?**Some sources say that Celts in northern France also celebrated Halloween, but this is unconfirmed. In any case, Halloween is not a traditional French holiday, yet it becomes more popular every year. How and why this is so is a combination of cultural influence and corporate marketing.

The French had been hearing about Halloween from foreign residents and tourists and in their English classes for years before the holiday ever showed its (masked) face in France. In 1982, the American Dream bar/restaurant in Paris began celebrating Halloween. At first it had to explain the holiday to each customer, but since about 1995, French customers have tended to be more and more familiar with Halloween.

The Mask Museum in Saint-Hilaire-Saint-Florent was opened by Cesar group in 1992, and the owners started working to expand Halloween in France the following year.

Philippe Cahen, president of Optos Opus, claims that he single-handedly "imported" Halloween to France in 1995, despite admitting that Halloween already existed there (nope, doesn't seem like a logical claim to me either). Cahen created *Le Samain* cake in 1997 and registered the word "Halloween" as a world trademark. He also challenged 25 artists to come up with works with a Halloween theme, and the results were exhibited at the Victor Hugo Clinic.

In 1996, the village of St. Germain-en-Laye held a Halloween party on 24 October in the middle of the day, to give locals an idea of what it was all about.

Meanwhile, companies like France Télécom, McDonald's, Disney, and Coca Cola began using pumpkins and other Halloween images and ideas in publicity campaigns. This simultaneously increased French people's knowledge about Halloween and made it seem like another imposition of American culture.

**How is Halloween celebrated in France?** Halloween in France is usually celebrated by costumed people of all ages going to parties at friends' homes, restaurants, bars, or clubs. The costumes themselves tend to be traditionally "scary" - mummies, ghosts, goblins, witches, and vampires - rather than the cute costumes like princesses, superheroes, and the cartoon character of the day which are popular in the US. Some recreation centers encourage kids to make their own costumes. Trick-or-treating is getting to be more common. It started out store-to-store, rather than house-to-house, but the latter is picking up. However, Halloween occurs during the mid-season school break, which slows it down a bit.

Stores, malls, restaurants, offices, and homes decorate their windows; pastry and candy shops make up special desserts and candies; and many different kinds of companies use Halloween in their ads. Supermarkets sell pumpkins for jack-o'-lanterns and candy companies are now marketing candy in the traditional Halloween format: one big bag filled with lots of little packages, which may encourage trick-or-treating. The growing demand for jack-o'-lanterns during Halloween has been a boon for pumpkin growers. There is even a pumpkin patch at a farm outside of Paris where people can pick their own.

Halloween in France is rather controversial, due to the perception of corporate and cultural influence, as well as the fact that it is not a typical French holiday and some people still don't understand what is being celebrated. Because Halloween is seen as an American celebration, some French people refuse to enjoy it, having decided to include it in their anti-American boycott. It's too early to tell whether Halloween will develop into a long-term tradition; once the novelty wears off, it may turn out to be just a fad. And yet, interestingly, the French have been celebrating the ideas at the very heart of Halloween (respect for the dead) for centuries. 31 October to 2 November, collectively referred to as [Toussaint](http://french.about.com/b/2009/10/30/la-toussaint.htm), have traditionally been spent, especially by older generations, visiting cemeteries, honoring saints, and attending religious services.

**LA TOUSSAINT: le 1er novembre**

**What do people do?**

Many Christians visit special church services on All Saints' Day. They may also visit cemeteries and place flowers on the graves of deceased family members and close friends. It is customary to leave chrysanthemums or wreaths of artificial flowers on or close to the graves.

All Saints' Day is also an opportunity for many people to spend time with family members and close friends. This holiday falls during the autumn (fall) school holidays, it is a popular time for families to take a short vacation or to visit relatives living in other areas.

**Public life**

Public life in France is generally very quiet on All Saints’ Day. Post offices, banks, stores and other businesses are closed. Outside of tourist areas, restaurants and cafes may also be closed for one or more days. However, some stores in Paris, as well as at airports and railway stations and along major highways, are open.

Public transport service schedules vary depending on where one lives and intends to travel. Churches may be closed for visitors who do not wish to take part in the services and guided tours may not be available.

**Background and symbols**

France is in the northern hemisphere so All Saints' Day falls in the autumn (fall). Chrysanthemums are an important symbol of [All Saints' Day](http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/common/all-saints-day), [All Souls' Day](http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/common/all-souls-day), grief and funerals. Hence, they are often laid on graves, but rarely given as gifts.