

21 Things to be Thankful for in 2021

by

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Now that we are approaching the end of 2021 with the threat of a European-like winter surge of the Coronavirus and a renewed shut-down hanging over our heads, let's think about some positive experiences we have had this year. Here are 21 "good news" items (some of) you experienced in 2021.

1. Despite the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020, the most severe post World War II recession, and the events surrounding January 6, we still have a democracy to be proud of. The size and diversity of the voter turnout was remarkable. After an election that was certified by Congress in January, Joe Biden became the 46th President of the United States, and California's Kamala Harris is the first black female Vice President.
2. Pfizer-Biontech and Moderna vaccines arrived in January. By now, 71.5% of the U.S. population is fully vaccinated. In terms of the four most populous states, California is at 80.9%, New York shows 81.4%, Florida 73.2%, and Texas 65.5%. In the Inland Empire, 62% are fully vaccinated in Riverside County with 60% in San Bernardino County. Eventually, booster shots arrived and appeared to be effective against the omicron variant. Finally, 5-11 year olds are getting vaccinated, thereby protecting themselves and the community.
3. Given the ranking of vaccinated individuals by state, California, not surprisingly, has the 12th lowest cumulative mortality rate from the Coronavirus. Also California, and especially SoCal, has warmer temperatures during the winter months which will help contain infection and mortality rates at a relatively lower level.
4. In January 2021, the unemployment rate for the Inland Empire stood at 8.6%. The most recent number (from November) puts us at 5.4%. We continue to have lower unemployment rates than the state (6.9%) and Los Angeles County (7.1%). We are only 10,900 employees short of the employment level from the start of the Coronavirus downturn. Despite talk of the Great Resignation, our labor force is actually 22,800 bigger. GDP grew solidly for the year, bouncing back to pre-recession levels. Jerome Powell was given another term as Chairman of the Federal Reserve. The "Other Services" sector opened and we finally could get that tattoo we were waiting for.
5. The Indian Wells tennis tournament was played after a one year hiatus and after moving from April to October. International travel was given a boost with the November opening to foreigners: the snowbirds from Canada can think about migrating to Palm Springs again. PSP has seen a record number of passengers during the summer low season.

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6. The “2020” Olympics took place and the U.S. came out on top with 39 gold medals. Some old sports, like wrestling, were dropped, thereby joining previously discontinued croquet and tug-of-war. Others, like Skateboarding, Surfing, 3 on 3 basketball, Sport Climbing, and Karate, made their debut. Sakura Kokumai of the U.S. placed fifth in women’s karate, which made the black belt wearing co-author of this piece happy, having admired Kokumai at youth competition.
7. Universities and Colleges mostly returned to in-person instructions. No more Zoom connections with party lighting and strange posters on the wall, or roommates emerging from the shower behind us on-screen. K-12 schools returned to in-person instructions. We learned to appreciate teachers more, and realized that women still bear the majority of the burden when it comes to taking care of children - part of why the downturn was labeled a “she-cession.”
8. We spent a lot of time watching foreign language TV shows, being fascinated by the Korean drama series *Squid Games* and rooting for No 067 until the semifinals. The “Red Light - Green Light” episode reminded us of the U.S. economy, which moved forward after the shutdown, but not all competitors (firms, workers) were still there after we recovered. *Arcane*, League of Legends first tv series, topped Netflix’s charts for weeks - a win for gamers.
9. Disneyland finally reopened, although access remains limited and international visitors are mostly missing. This more nearly levels the playing field with Florida’s Disneyworld, which opened earlier. We were able to go to the Hollywood Bowl again.
10. Halloween happened. Kids knocked on doors again in large numbers; seasonal candy sales were up almost 30% compared to last year.
11. Large crowds are again allowed to watch sports events. 42,275 mostly disappointed San Francisco Giants fans cried while leaving after Game 5 in Oracle Park. The German word “Schadenfreude” ranked highly on Google Trend in Los Angeles, especially among Dodger fans.
12. The U.S. signed on to the Paris Climate Accord, which will hopefully mitigate the worst case climate scenarios. One of the authors is a resident of Alaska, and she is more concerned about permafrost and the number of polar bears declining than growing wine in Fairbanks.
13. Indoor dining opened up. Residents of Chicago may snicker at statements like “it’s too cold to eat outside with temperatures in the low 60s,” but it does feel good leaving the gloves at home while driving to our favorite restaurants. One of us recently invited a colleague from Boston to come and visit SoCal for some warmth and sunshine, but then rescinded by saying “I am sorry, I forgot you can’t come since Logan airport is closed due to an ice storm.”
14. The Government finally acknowledged U.F.O.s: we are not alone in the universe- at least in the U.S. The sheer number of out of space visitors clearly favors visits to our country. There is no fear of China overtaking us in Unidentified Aerial Phenomena (U.A.P.)

sightings in the near future. Scientific American labeled it “Completely Ridiculous Alien Piffle” (CRAP).

15. The stock market, both in terms of the Dow Jones and the S&P 500, hit several new record highs, even late in the year. Related, the state of California is running a huge budget surplus. We are investing in gorillas - r/WallStreetBets members rallied to raise \$350,000 in donations and adopted more than 3,500 endangered gorillas in just six days.
16. Juneteenth was recognized as an official holiday, marking a national celebration of emancipation.
17. Big versus Small: Otis, the 2014 champion, reclaimed his title as the publicly recognized best Fat Bear in the annual Alaska Katmai National Park Fat Bear competition. We found one of the smallest lizards known to mankind, the Nano-Chameleon, barely larger than a fingernail.
18. We created the world’s first ‘time crystal:’ a crystal that has order and perfect stability while breaking time-translation symmetry. This gets us closer to engineering computers which will be able to harness the power of quantum physics and thereby can perform computations of complexity not experienced to date.
19. Ontario Airport (ONT) celebrates its 5th Year of local authority. Passenger volume is 127% above the October 2020 level, and less than 2% short of the October 2019 numbers. We could see the first direct flight from ONT to Europe next summer.
20. Amoxicillin, a common human antibiotic, has a 95% success rate in treating stony coral - a hopeful showing for coral reef loss. This may result in supply chain problems in providing medicine following wisdom tooth extraction.
21. Over 100,000 monarch butterflies migrated to California this year, up from 30,000 counted in 2019 and 2,000 in 2020. Note that they were smart by following the venture capital invested in California rather than emigrating to Texas where some of the firm headquarters, like Tesla, moved. Or perhaps they heard about the Texas power grid failure and Senator Ted Cruz leaving 30-degree Houston for 80-degree Cancun to escape the “FREEZING” family home “to be a good dad?”

Let’s look forward to 22 good news items next year, perhaps starting with “we slayed the baby inflation dragon after the Fed raised interest rates three times.”

