

Comparative Study of Traditional Festivals

Promotion and safeguarding of local cultural heritage to empower vulnerable groups of society



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Living Heritage 4 All Comparative Study of Traditional Festivals

Introduction

Whilst cultural heritage has been defined as something inherited from the past, it is in many ways a contemporary and “living” cultural resource in Europe. In its tangible and intangible manifestations, heritage is crucial for local identity and provides positive impacts on integration and social inclusion.

Festivals are one of our cultural values that should be passed on to the future by conserving their traditional characteristics. This study provides an overview of the traditional festivals in six European countries - Bulgaria, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Poland and Latvia - and introduces specific activities and foods related to these festivals. The study targets NGOs, educational institutions, cultural organisations, municipalities and regions.

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Bulgaria

Martenitsa

The custom of wearing Martenitsa is probably one of the most interesting Bulgarian tradition and it is considered to be unique to Bulgaria. UNESCO recognized it as an Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2017 and a part of our heritage.

It preserves an ancient pagan tradition. Many legends exist regarding the birth of this custom, some of them dating back to the 7th-century times. Other tales relate the Martenitsa to Thracian belief.

Cultural practices and traditions dictate to wear Martenitza on the 1st of March, when Bulgarians celebrate a holiday called Baba Marta (or Grandma Marta, Marta also means March) and it is related to welcoming the approaching spring. People hope that it would make winter pass faster and bring spring.

All over the world spring is met with joy and new hopes, but in Bulgaria it is saved as an ancient tradition. The Martnitsas are given to friends, relatives and family members and are worn around the wrist or on clothes. In some villages in the mountains people decorate their houses and domestic animals.

A typical Martenitsa consists of two small wool dolls, Pizho and Penda. Pizho, the male doll, is usually predominantly white. Penda, the female doll, is distinguished by her skirt and is usually predominantly red.

In Bulgarian folklore Baba Marta is an old woman who changes her mood very rapidly like the changeable March weather. By wearing the red and white colors of the Martenitsa our predecessors asked Baba Marta for mercy.

The Martenitsa is made of twined red and white threads - woollen, silk or cotton. The white is a symbol of strength, purity and happiness. Red is a symbol of life and passion. It is associated with health, blood, fertility and joy.



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Photo: Wikipedia



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White are the festive clothes of the bride, saints and angels are also dressed in white robes. Red is the color of vitality, health and love. In the traditional Bulgarian wedding the veil of the bride is red. Red thread is tied on fruit trees, on child's wrist to protect against evil. Such is its magical effect in the Martenitsa.

Martenitsas come in a variety of shapes and sizes: bracelets, necklaces, tassels, pompons, balls, squares, human or animal figures. Over the past several decades the tradition has been innovated by attaching all kinds of Martenitsas, made of wood, leather, ceramics, metal foil to the thread-made Martenitsas.

In the past, young would get up early before anybody else in order to meet the first day and rejoice Baba Marta with their youth and beauty. Old women would knit twisted strands of red and white threads to decorate the house. Young and old would take care to keep Baba Marta in a good mood. Women used it based on their marital status: the left arm is for unmarried women and the right arm is for married women.

Today they are generally purchased and given as gifts, but traditionally they were made by women, who made sure everyone in the family received one to wear since it was supposed to protect against evil and bring good luck.

According to the tradition, people wear Martenitsas for a certain period, the end of which is usually associated with the first signs of spring – seeing a stork or a fruit tree in blossom. After that people can tie them on a blossoming tree for fertility, health and luck. Another tradition is to take your Martenitsa and place it under a rock.

Martenitsa is the most common nation-wide Bulgarian custom. It is really amazing how these small figures passed through generations. Less is more.

Martenitsa is our Bulgarian "Cosmos" and will always remind of the constant cycle of life and death, the balance of good and evil, the sorrow and happiness in life.

Martenitsa is our Bulgarian Phoenix, a vital source of life and reflection of the Bulgarian optimistic nature.



Bulgarian Rose Valley



The Bulgarian rose, the *Rosa Damascena*, has made Bulgaria famous for producing some of the finest rose oil globally. Instead of the high quality perfumes, it is widely used in our Bulgarian cuisine in the production of food and drinks.



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The Rosa Damascena plant was most likely brought to the Bulgarian lands from the Middle East. The best home for it in Bulgaria was found in the Sub-Balkan valley, called the Valley of roses after the name of this flourishing beauty.

There is something about the air, soil and climate of that zone that stimulates the natural synthesis and accumulation in its blossoms of rose oil of outstanding aroma. The first commercially harvested rose fields were planted in those areas in the late 16th – early 17th century, during which time Bulgaria was part of the Ottoman Empire.

This beautiful Rose valley extends for more than 130 km along the Balkan Mountain range. Being the centre for rose oil production in the country, it covers an area of some 3,300 square kilometres.



Rose valley in Central Bulgaria



The Valley of Roses is one of the most impressive places in Bulgaria, where the rose plantations had been grown for more than 3 centuries.

The pure oil extracted from rose flowers is called rose oil – the gold and pride of Bulgaria!

Rose Brandy

The most jealously kept secret is not the production of rose oil, but the production of famous rose brandy (gyul rakia). Being well known all over the world, because of its high quality, the technology and subtleties of rose brandy is still a deep secret.

This is the local alcohol that every home produced, but only for a treat. So far, there is no evidence that the brandy was exported abroad by the Kazanlak traders, who had business in Orient at the time.

Gyul rakia is the most exotic and discreet representative of Bulgarian brandies. Kazanlak producers of rose brandy claimed that they were the first to introduce the double distillation.

It is more a tragic fact than a history that the old recipe for the production of rose brandy has disappeared irrevocably. It got lost like many Bulgarian cuisine traditions from the Renaissance. The only thing the researchers identify is the presence of mysterious Lokmarucha supplement. It is believed that small, but essential part, gives of the unique perfection of rose brandy. It was probably a type of resin that was brought from Arab countries to Kazanlak. The assumptions are that in the production it acts as both a stabilizer and a filter of harmful alcohols, bringing its unique taste and aroma.

The old masters had produced it from whole rose blossoms, after rose oil extraction. No sugar or alcohol was added, since the oil rose contains up to 60 percent phenylethyl alcohol.

Thus the drink kept its light rose aroma and crystal transparency, giving the delight of unforgettable flavor.



Rose Jam



Bulgarian home-made rose jam is an amazing delicious national dessert with some likening it to heaven on earth. It reflects both old Bulgarian cuisine traditions and modern trends of healthy bio food.



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Without a doubt, the oil-bearing Rosa Damascena is one of the wonders of Bulgaria and one of the sweetest ways to taste Bulgaria. Travelling in the country you have to try home-made Bulgarian rose jam and rose brendy, which can be purchased at most market places throughout the country.

Festival Kukeri



A wonderful example of how our Bulgarian ancestors lived thousands of years ago can still be experienced to this day during Bulgaria's strangest Kukeri folk festivals.

The word 'kuker' comes from Latin ('cuculla,' meaning a 'hood') and it denotes a folkloric ritual monster of a man dressed in an elaborate suit of fur and ribbons, feathers and beads. These Kukeri



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wear carved wooden masks having the faces of beasts and birds; with hanging heavy copper or bronze bells around their waists as they dance and jump in rituals intended to dispel the evil spirits, which might otherwise bring ill fortune to a community. The custom is generally thought to be related to the Thracian Dionysus cult in the wider area of Thracia, when the Thracian god Dionysus was celebrated at the beginning of the new agricultural year, when plowing and sowing of the fields is carried out.

The Kukeri celebrate the passing of winter and the arrival of summer. They symbolised the struggle between good and evil and their dances and songs are supposed to drive away evil and invite good. In addition to protection from evil, it is believed that the Kukeri bring good luck, good health and good harvests. The ritual is performed by men, dressed in costumes, made of animal furs and fleeces, covering the entire body and wearing massive metal belts and bells round their waists, the goal being to protect their place from evil spirits, their heads are also covered by masks, decorated with horns.

The ritual is public and very spectacular, with groups of Kukeri dancing rhythmically and walking through villages or towns, accompanied by musicians. The sounds of hundreds of bells and shouted wishes for prosperity create a special atmosphere. Elements of these costumes are handed down from generation to generation, especially the bells. They are designed to make loud ringing noises, when groups of Kukeri come together to dance, with the intention of making as much noise as possible, as they jump and shout in an attempt to banish all evil. Some performers impersonate royalty, others as field-workers and craftsmen. The adornments on the costumes vary from one region to another. Each region has different masks and costumes which are made from fur, leather and wood, sometimes taking animalistic forms or materialising as monsters, a result of the creator's imagination. They also come in different colors, with all of them of them having a specific meaning.

When dancing, dance steps are arranged in a particular manner to give the feeling of mystic unity, rhythm, sound and colour. The masks, according to folklore beliefs, protects individuals from the harmful influence of impure powers, with sounds made by the bells, hanging from the belts of the dancers helping to reinforce the masks protective properties.

There are a number of Kukeri festivals, which take place in different regions of Bulgaria, the largest being the Surva Festival of Masquerade Games, held in the town of Pernik - 30 miles (50 km) from Sofia, where a competition between Kukeri groups takes place. Thousands of people meet here annually, Kukeri coming from all parts of Bulgaria and abroad, to visit the three-day long festival.



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This always takes place at the end of January or the beginning of February. This major International festival has been included in UNESCO's list of protected non-material cultural heritage.

The Kukeri tradition in Bulgaria is still alive and well in Bulgaria, but subject to constant change, and from being a male dominated activity in the past, it is now practiced by men and women of all ages. Characters from the neo folklore culture have started to appear in the rituals, with significant political changes and social issues now being reflected in the rituals, revealing the presence of different social classes. The gender roles are now mixed. May be because the Bulgarian population was decimated by communist agricultural practices in the 1960s and 70s and again by a mass exodus of rural youth after the 1989's economic collapse - women, children, and the elderly became more involved in Kukeri practice simply because in many cases they were the only ones left.

Nowadays the minimum requirement for participation is having a willingness to take part, Kukeri is a strange blend of old and new traditions, what is new for one generation becomes a tradition by the time another generation becomes involved; however, the cultural heritage always remains alive and well. And so it is that once a year, individuals from all across the country dress as these strange creatures and enter into parades, dancing and laughing, proving that the struggle between bad and evil will last forever, and that we will always protect humanity and our vital Bulgarian nature, in the only way we are able to do it.



Felting



Felting is the oldest traditional way of making fabrics and textile that is not woven, but produced by matting, condensing and pressing wool fibres together. It is not woven and does not require a loom for its production. It was rather easily to make and was developed initially in sheep farming areas in Bulgaria.



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Wool does not retain water – it absorbs and releases moisture without affecting its thermal properties.

All of this makes wool a suitable material for producing carpets and clothing, so much so that felting became an inevitable part of our old lifestyle, which included the production of horse riding mats, bags, hats, shoes, scarves and many other items, typically found in old Bulgarian culture and customs. Preserved samples of many such Bulgarian products from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries are held in Ethnographic museums in a number of Bulgarian cities.

Most impressive are the carpets. Some of them measuring 10-12 sqm, weighing 20 kilos and more, having rich and vibrant colours. In the past, Bulgarian handicrafts were renowned for their exceptional durability. The Bulgarian wool is among the densest in the world, and to this day there are still houses in Bulgaria, such as ones that can be found in the town of Koprivshtitsa, having walls made of felted wool.

Nowadays felting is commonly used in Art, combined with silk, cotton, flax and viscose etc. Wool is the perfect material for creativity when used this way as it can be stained with both natural and artificial dyes. Besides different non-woven textiles, felting can be used when creating a variety of decorative items such as flowers, martenitzas, animal figures, dolls, fruit and vegetables and jewellery etc..



Cyprus

Basketry and Culture Festival of Livadia Municipality.

With its continuous history that spans over 10,000 years, the region of Larnaka is a rich tapestry of tradition and customs, and its stakeholders are committed to preserving and cherishing the authenticity that visitors love. As such, it is always wonderful news when these elements are recognised with the honour of being included in the UNESCO National Intangible Cultural Heritage List.

The village of Livadia is one of the few places on the island where a traditional form of basket making and weaving are still practised, and only a few women today are skilled in the particular art form. Livadia municipality manage to register in 2015 the basket and straw weaving in the Unesco National Intangible Heritage List. Also, to coincide with its inclusion on the list, the village opened the Basketry Museum which preserves and showcase the folk art of basket weaving. Further, the Livadia Municipality established an annual festival, the Basket Weaving & Folk Culture Festival that is organized every year in Livadia and during the festival, there is demonstrations of different types of basketry and other traditional professions and products, complimentary local nibbles, and drinks (including two traditional specialities of the village), and a folkloric entertainment programme.

Basketry / straw-mat making is a craftsmanship which has changed very little with the passage of time and is still being practised today in the Livadia Municipality. There are very few tools required and the raw material is reed, wicker or straw. Different types of baskets can be made such as the large "kofina", or woven baskets used for the collection and transportation of agricultural produce, the linen baskets and the baskets used by the fishermen. Moreover, the so-called "kalamotes" and "psatharkes" were made, which are coarse woven straw-mats used mainly as interior claddings in roof restorations of old houses or also used for shading or fencing.



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Photos: Old pictures of basket weaving from Livadia

According to witness accounts, it is estimated that the inhabitants of Livadia began to weave baskets during the 19th century, as the articles made were particularly useful for their daily lives. Although this started as a male professional activity, it was gradually transferred to the women as men preferred to become employed as labourers and craftsmen thus securing a double income for their families.

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Photos from the Basket Weaving Museum in Livadia

Basket-weaving / straw-mat making gradually became a social activity as it was often carried out collectively, in courtyards or under the shade of trees. This is where the villagers would discuss the village news, develop interpersonal relationships, sing together, and spend their time together, thus making their workplace a place for leisure and socialising.



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Photos: At the festival of Basket Weaving in Livadia

Since 2012 the Municipality of Livadia is organizing in summer during August the annual basket weaving festival which is held at the Museum of Basket Weaving. Thousands of people are coming from all the cities of Cyprus as well as tourist to enjoy this unique festival that promotes and preserves until today the art of basket weaving. During the festival there is workshops given from local craftsmen that show to people how to make their own basket with weaving. Everyone can try and at the end they can take home their own small basket done with the help of the craftsmen. Also, at the festival there is a live preparation of local products such as the challoumi and anari (Cypriot traditional cheese), souzoukos (a traditional sweet made from grape juice), lokoumades



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(traditional sweet) and many others. Also, at the festival there is a presentation of traditional dances and poems as well as a theatrical play given from the traditional youth clubs of Livadia.



Kataklysmos Festival (Festival of the Flood - celebrating Pentecost)

The Kataklysmos Fair was held in all the coastal towns of Cyprus, although historical sources refer to the specificity of the Larnaca Kataklysmos Fair where people from the whole island participated. Today, the largest Kataklysmos Fair on the island is organized in Larnaca, the biggest city of Larnaca District which is adjacent to the Municipality of Livadia. It has the highest number of visitors, artists and peddlers from all the festivals of the island. It is still held on the central coastal front of the Larnaca city, along the Foinikoudes – Palm Tree promenade, starting from the Large Pier (the Marina) and stretching all the way to the Medieval Castle. Folk poets, musical and dance ensembles from the whole island, nautical clubs, craftsmen and peddles from all over Cyprus can be found at the festival.



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The Phivos Stavrides Foundation in collaboration with the Larnaca Municipality and Municipalities and communities in the Larnaca District registered in 2015 the festival in the UNESCO Intangible Heritage List of Cyprus.



Photo: The first Kataklysmos Festival in Larnaca in 1918

The Larnaca Kataklysmos Fair is documented since the 19th century and takes place fifty days following Easter and includes the Friday preceding All Souls' Day, All Soul's Day or the day before Whit Sunday or Pentecost, Pentecost, Monday of the Holy Spirit (Whit Monday), Tuesday and



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Wednesday, known as “Kataklysmos” days (days of the flood) from the custom of sprinkling each other with water.

Today, the Kataklysmos Fair includes artistic events, a trade-fête and various other happenings associated with the feast. Parallel to the religious events on All Souls’ Day, Whit Sunday, Whit Monday or Monday of the Holy Spirit, a rich programme of celebrations is planned lasting six days and including competitions of traditional Cypriot folk poetry, love songs, oral poetic duelling known as “tsiattista”, traditional flute players and dancers. The traditional Cyprus dance competitions and the sailing, swimming, volleyball, children’s song and amateur singer competitions are also important parts of the festival. The fête programme is completed with various entertainment programmes, folk music concerts, dance performances, satire and mimes, musical theatre performances, conjuring and juggling shows, children’s theatrical performances and “Karaghiozis” shadow theatre festival.



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Photo: craftsmen at the Kataklysmos Festival

For the inhabitants of Larnaca, Kataklysmos is the most important social event and the greatest traditional, religious and folk festival. It also acts as a platform for spontaneous presentation of features pertaining to the Cypriot folk tradition.



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Photos: The Kataklimos Festival

Traditional Easter Games in Cyprus

In the past, traditional Easter games were played all over Cyprus. Nowadays they still survive in some lot of villages of Cyprus, among them the Livadia Municipality.

Traditional Easter games constitute an important element of the cultural heritage of Cyprus and continue to fascinate young and old in the communities where they are preserved. They reveal the way older and younger Cypriot societies used to have fun, the temperament of the inhabitants of those areas and the need people had to manifest their joy for the most important Christian Feast, that of Easter. They are usually played on Easter Sunday, Easter Monday or even Easter Tuesday



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after a feast lunch, usually in a village square or the church yard. In a climate of euphoria, villagers and visitors take part in traditional individual and team games which are mainly entertaining and do not lead to any material gain for the winners.



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Photos: Easter Games at old times in Cyprus.

What is worth noting is that many of the traditional Easter games of Cyprus have ancient Greek and byzantine roots, thus proving the historical continuity of tradition and the significance of socialisation and of collective entertainment at important feasts and events. Amongst others, these are the games that still survive today: Avgoullodromies (Egg race), Appiisen o Kamilos (The Camel Jumped), Vatrahos (Frog), Gaourodromies (Donkey race), gemisma tis stamnas (Fill the jug), Ditzimin (weight-lifting game), Zizyros (Cicada), Lingrin (catch the stick), Mandili (Handkerchief), Potamos (River), Shyllos tzie kokkalo (Dog and Bone), Sakkoulodromies (Sack race), Sousa (Swing), Skoupa or sarka (Broom), Sytzia (Fig tree), Tris enteka tris dodeka (Three eleven three twelve), Faratzis etc.



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Photo: Lingrin (catch the stick) game



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Every year at Easter time, all the villagers of all ages are looking forward to gathering in the village square to play or watch the Easter games and meet with friends and co-villagers. It is commonly the elders who explain to the younger ones the rules of the games. Moreover, these games constitute one way of exercising both the body and the mind, as many of these games require strength, resilience, and wittiness. Moreover, by continuing to play these games, the older generations are passing on to the younger generation's certain values and attitudes. Discipline vis-à-vis the rules of the games, respect vis-à-vis the co-players as well as the opponents, the spirit of cooperation and working as a team which are required in traditional games, constitute living examples for the young generation.



Photos: Zizyros (Cicada), Appiisen o Kamilos (The Camel Jumped) and Tris enteka tris dodeka (Three eleven three twelve) games.



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Photo: Sakkoulodromies (Sack race) game



Wine Festival

The Wine Festival is an event directly related to the human factor. This is a cultural event that people organize immemorial to wine. The Wine Festival in Limassol can be seen, somehow, as a variant, like the revival of worship celebrations in honor of Dionysus, the god of the vine and wine, like Aphrodite, goddess of beauty and love, which were held in antiquity. During these events, the people worshiped their gods, but first and foremost cared for his own amusement.

The Festival has been organized since 1961 and it takes place in the Lemesos (Limassol) Municipal Gardens, which are situated on the east side of the town near the sea. On entry to the Festival through the main entrance, situated on the south, you will see a giant statue of a Cypriot village winegrower in his traditional local costume.

This has been the emblem of the Wine Festival since the 1961. There are pavilions on both sides of the main entrance belonging to the wineries of Lemesos (Limassol): ETKO, KEO, LOEL, SODAP, and other, where the visitors can taste, free of charge, all kinds of wines.

Every evening thousand visitors come along to the Festival, to enjoy the happy and jolly atmosphere of people feasting with wine, delicious local dishes, local dances and songs and theatrical plays with comedy, humor and satire.

One night in the Limassol's wine festival is an opportunity for every person to live the Greek tradition of the Dionysiac celebrations, when all inhabitants of Attica, citizens or farmers, sat at common banquets, offered free by the state, tasted the new wines and participate in the mass dances, songs, poetry and drama. During these celebrations a number of slaves were set free, whilst those still in slavery were allowed a spell of independence and entertainment. As then, here are the free banquets, the free wine, but there are no slaves to free, you can get free from every care of life from social conventions and formalities, from daily needs and worries of life.

The Wine Festival was organised for the first time in 1961 and since then it has become an established annual event of merrymaking and fun, in which the citizens of Limassol are not the only participants; visitors come also from every part of Cyprus as well as many tourists. Its reputation is spread beyond the geographic boundaries of the island.



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Photo: the giant statue of a Cypriot village winegrower in his traditional local costume at the entrance of the wine festival venue

In September of each year, Limassol becomes the attraction of thousands of tourists who visit the Municipal Garden to enjoy the Wine Festival and play with the locals a starring role in this euphoria. They become the protagonists since the Festival is a play which is mounted and the visitors are the enthusiasts, who banish from their mind all concerns and feel an inward sense of comfort, free from social conventions or protocols, in an atmosphere of unconditional fraternization, generated by the



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mysterious effect of wine. Drinking Cypriot wine is as if the rays of sunlight, the dawn breeze, the atmosphere lucidity, the romantic magic of the land and the sky of Cyprus transfused you.



Photo: the press of the grapes



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Since ancient times Cyprus became a festivity place to celebrate the production of wine. The Wine Festival in Limassol may be considered a variation of the ancient festivities, a revival of the ancestor worship and rites in the honour of Dionysus, the god of vine and wine and Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty and love. In the antiquity our ancestors worshipped this god and goddess by drinking wine, which rejoiced them. While making sacrifices, gods received the smell while man ate the meat. Wine accompanied and corroborated the banquet. The gods high on Olympus Mountain enjoyed the nectar, which is the quintessence of wine. In ancient Greece the wine became the drink of gods and man.

Cyprus is renowned for its good wine. According to Strabo, the Geographer, the island was abounding in good wine. In the early Christian years Saint Tychon, the Bishop of Amathus, performed his most important miracle with the vine and the wine; it planted a vine, which struck root immediately, came into leaf immediately, blossomed immediately, produced sweet and ripe grapes immediately”.

In Byzantine times, eminent and renowned people drank the sweet wine. In mediaeval times Cyprus was always renowned for its wine, which according to an Italian traveller of the 16th century, “it possesses some healing qualities like a balm for the human organism”. L. von Suchen, a German priest, who was sauntering along, wrote two centuries before that Engedi’s vineyard, which is mentioned in the “Song of Solomon”, where the bride describes her bridegroom as “a bunch of grapes from Cyprus taken from Engedi’s vineyard”, is in Cyprus indeed.

The reputation of the Cypriot wine has not lost lustre, which has led to the Wine Festival becoming an established cultural event for Limassol, the town of merriment and joy. Besides, vine growing is mainly developed in the region of Limassol where the biggest wine industries are set up: KEO, SODAP, LOEL and ETKO; they contribute with their participation in organising the Wine Festival. Wine accompanies the traditional Cypriot dishes and mezes. The festive atmosphere is enlivened by folklore dances and songs as well as theatre performances and nutritional customs and habits related to the manufacturing and consumption of wine.



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Tourists, consequently, consider the Wine Festival an important traditional festivity and a significant cultural event. Apart from its festive nature, its role in promoting the Cypriot wines, which have in many cases been the inspiration of poets and novelists, cannot be neglected throughout centuries. The Cypriot wine is "soft like Muses' string/ bright as Paphia's eyes e'er met us, / light as ever trod her feet! / and the brown bees of Hymettus / make their honey, not so sweet".



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The Wine Festival has taken place twenty four times since 1961. Due to political unrest attributed to Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots, the Wine Festival did not take place in the-years 1964, 1974, 1975, 1976 and 1977. The Wine Festival again took place in 1978, and was organized by the Municipality of Lemesos (Limassol), which took this responsibility from the Lemesos (Limassol) Chamber of Commerce and Industry who organized from 1961 to 1965 it was the Festival from 1966 until 1974. Previously the responsibility of the Lemesos (Limassol) Development Association.



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Medieval Festival

The Medieval Festival was first celebrated in Ayia Napa in 2006. It has since become an annual festival and is celebrated with a series of events and activities aiming to explore and learn more about the medieval ages. These celebrations are created with historical accuracy and they function as narrative representations of the everyday life of the people in the contemporary period. The participation of European and Russian groups has established it an international festival which Ayia Napa is proud to host.



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All events take place within the Medieval Monastery of Ayia Napa whose structure forms a natural setting which enhances the thematic aspects of the medieval period.

- street theatre,
- theatrical play with the Medieval Monastery as natural setting,
- music concerts and dance shows, performed by groups from European countries such as Greece, Russia, Italy , Spain ,Ukraine ,Romania, Slovakia, Germany, Holland, France and Cyprus.
- Participation of schools and teams with Medieval costumes in the event "The streets of Crusaders"
- Medieval market setting with products for sale such as wine (in wooden barrels), medieval food and other
- Medieval workshops such as pottery making, basketry etc.
- Exhibitions of Medieval Objects



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The Ayia Napa Medieval Festival is an annual event that transports all its visitors to the fairytale world of medieval times, where crusaders, knights, princes and princesses roamed the world. The festival is held every October. The purpose of the festival is to reproduce medieval Cyprus and how this period left its mark on the island's cultural heritage. Besides the entertainment section, visitors can also enjoy the medieval market where products such as wine and food are sold as well as medieval workshops like basketry and pottery. Visitors also marvel at the medieval exhibitions depicting medieval items.



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Traditional Culture Festival

Since 2003 the Larnaca Rural Women's Association has been organizing every year the traditional culture festival. This festival is hosted and supported every year by a different Community of Rural Larnaca and aims to promote agritourism and local traditional products. During this festival workshops are organised demonstrating the procedure of the preparation of traditional local products such as traditional recipes, sweets, products, etc. Also, traditional products are exposed for sale. Members of our Association are the ones who participate in the festival, promoting their work, either traditional food, traditional products, or handicrafts. The festival has become well-known all-over Cyprus and it is celebrated every year at the 1st of October, the independence day of Cyprus. It hosts more than 5000 visitors and more than 60 exhibitionists, that promote their traditional products and crafts.

The Larnaca Rural Women's Association (WARL) is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) founded in October 2004 by a small group of 22 women and today lists over 400 women members from 19 Larnaca Mountain and Semi-Mountain Communities. The Association is based in Agios Theodoros, Larnaca, in a picturesque small village of Larnaka District. The Association participates in programmes that have to do with the fight against the social exclusion, promotes the gender equality and volunteering. Furthermore, the WARL establishes cooperation with companies and institutions in order to organise different activities for its members such as training seminars, workshops, study visits.



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Germany, Hesse

The traditions and related products in the Offenbach district are in line with German traditions, yet they are coloured by strong regional aspects which we will describe in the following pages. In order to maintain a common thread on traditions, products and typical recipes of the region we decided to start our narrative from a small town in our district: Seligenstadt.



Photo: ©Mathias Neubauer



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Seligenstadt is located in the district of Offenbach and is an old town with a great tradition. Remaining intact in its medieval and renaissance architecture - an uncommon fate for many other German cities bombed during the Second World War - Seligenstadt offers itself as an example for a number of interesting factors for our project.

The traditions -linked above all to the world of agricultural production but also handicrafts- have been enriched with an important economic value: the municipal and district offices for the economic promotion of the city have lent their support to the project and have provided us with a series of interesting data. In addition to this, Seligenstadt offers an articulated and well-structured panorama with regard to the reception of migrants and refugees through the work of voluntary and philanthropic associations.

Seligenstadt has been a place of pilgrimage, with a minor basilica and a large abbey. Located on the banks of the Main, it overlooks the Bavarian banks, which are connected by a small ferry service.

Today the town attracts visitors from the region for its cultural events and its markets.

The grounds of the former Benedictine abbey are located in the middle of the historic old town of Seligenstadt, close to the River Main. The monastery complex was built between 830 and 840. After extensive renovation of the complex, it can now be experienced in its baroque transformation and is a great attraction in the Offenbach district.

The abbey is a monument, but at the same time it is a living place that forms the backdrop to a series of traditional production activities that take place there regularly. It seems to be the perfect example of a "living heritage".



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Photo: ©Mathias Neubauer

The Benedictine abbey has a beautiful monastery garden with its apothecary garden including historical pharmacy (that you can visit in the museum), herb garden with spices, vegetable garden with traditional mixed cultivation, convent garden, orangery with citrus plants, colouring garden with dye plants.





Photo: ©Mathias Neubauer

Herbs and spices are very important in the local gastronomy because of their use in some of the most important receipts in the region: one of these is the green sauce.

Grüne Soße

The „Grüne Soße“ (green sauce) in hessian dialect 'Grie Soß', is a typical Frankfurt and Hessian spring dish and is even said to have been Goethe's favourite. It is prepared from fresh garden herbs and sour cream and served cold with jacket potatoes and hard-boiled eggs. But it is also popular with fish, asparagus or boiled beef. Indispensable, however, are the seven herbs that must make up the sauce: Parsley, chives, chervil, cress, burnet, sorrel and borage. Each of these herbs is said to have a health-promoting effect. Borage is said to help against melancholy, chervil to boost the metabolism, sorrel to purify the blood and parsley to donate iron.

There is actually no ultimate recipe for green sauce, because even gourmet chefs disagree on one standardised version.

The Benedictine Basilica preserves intact the old production areas: the kitchen, the mill and the bakery are part of these.



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Photo: ©Mathias Neubauer

The bakery still produces the old monks' bread according to a recipe that has been handed down for 17 generations.

The bread is made of a sourdough, refined according to the old recipe with five spices from the apothecary garden - caraway, coriander, fennel, aniseed and cardamom.

On Thursdays, you can get the bread still warm and straight from the hands of baker Heinz Kimmel.





Photo: © Thomas Pfuhl

Guild and craftsmen's market

Preserving the production traditions of the area is an important prerogative of the inhabitants of Seligenstadt. The private association Klatschmohn Seligenstadt e.V. was born with the aims to keep the local crafts visible and alive by organising a special market every two years in May.



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The guild and craftsmen's market is not a medieval market, it takes place around 1750, the time of flourishing crafts and guilds. It is also hosted in the former Benedictine Abbey. Visiting this market, you can immerse yourself in the world of crafts, travelling traders, scholars, minstrels and jugglers, mainly from the 18th century.

Jugglers, artists and musicians with old instruments provide all kinds of entertainment, and for your physical enjoyment there are lovingly prepared delicacies from grandma's kitchen as well as dishes cooked on an open fire in the old monastery kitchen. The market is set in the time of the merchants' processions, in which, from the Middle Ages until the 18th century, groups of merchants with their horse-drawn carts travelled from all points of the compass to the Frankfurt Fair to offer their goods for sale.

The market ends with a breathtaking fire show on the grounds of the former monastery.

At the market you can see old toys still in working order, which are used for decorations in old shops at Christmas time.



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Photos: klatschmohn-seligenstadt.de



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Christmas market

At Christmas time, the town is embellished with colourful lights and decorations and its market square hosts a popular Christmas market.

The tradition of a pre-Christmas market dates back to the Middle Ages. At that time, it served to provide supplies and stock up with food and commodities for the upcoming winter and Christmas. In addition to the merchants, craftsmen such as basket weavers, cobblers and gradually also toy makers were given the right to offer their goods at the markets. In many places, cake bakers were allowed to cater for the physical well-being. Even in the Middle Ages, travelling musicians often provided musical accompaniment.

Christmas markets are the calling card of all German cities, large and small. Over the years they have retained their traditional function as a meeting point for friends and family in an atmosphere full of impressions and scents. Even today, they are still the meeting point for sellers of handmade and handcrafted products.

Typical is the offer of toys, often made of wood and pewter, of Christmas decorations made of glass and of food specialities, such as Christmas sweets and the unmissable Glühwein, which is a wine preparation enriched with various spices come cinnamon, cloves and vanillin.



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Photo: ©Mathias Neubauer



Germany, Schleswig-Holstein

Feuerzangenbowle



Is a traditional German alcoholic drink for which a rum-soaked sugarloaf is set on fire and drips into mulled wine. It is often part of a Christmas or New Year's Eve tradition. The name translates literally as fire-tongs punch.

The popularity of the drink was boosted in Germany by the 1944 comedy film *Die Feuerzangenbowle*. It is a traditional drink of some German fraternities, who also call it



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Krambambuli, as the red color is reminiscent of a cherry liqueur of that name which was manufactured by the distillery Der Lachs zu Danzig

Feuerzangenbowle is prepared in a bowl, similar to a fondue set, which usually is suspended over a small burner (rechaud). The bowl is filled with heated dry red wine spiced with cinnamon sticks, cloves, star anise and orange peel, similar to mulled wine. The Feuerzange was originally a pair of tongs, but nowadays it is common for a purpose-designed metal grate mounted on top of the bowl to hold the Zuckerhut (sugarloaf), a 250-gram (9 oz) lump of sugar. The sugar is soaked with rum and set alight, melting and caramelizing. The rum should have at least 54% alcohol by volume, such as the high-proof Austrian rum Strohh 80, and be at room temperature in order to burn properly. More rum is poured with a ladle until all the sugar has melted and mixed with the wine. The resulting punch is served in mugs while the burner keeps the bowl warm. For some the ceremony is more important than the drink itself, celebrating the gathering of friends and conveying a notion of Gemütlichkeit.

Orange blossom honey

From the beginning of spring until the end of the orange season, we place the hives among our orange trees in Valencia to produce orange blossom honey. Once the orange blossom is over, we take the hives up to the mountains to produce honey with flowers and mountain plants. Below you can discover how the honey production process works and how you can benefit from adopting one of these hives:





Honey production flow

Just before the orange blossoms of the orange trees open, we bring the hives to the fields (in spring, during the months of April and May).

We place the hives in the middle of all the orange trees. The orange blossom provides great food for the hives and the hives, seeing so much food, encourage the queen bee to lay more eggs. In this way we manage to increase the bee population.

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The bees bring nectar and pollen to the hive. First to feed the queen and the brood chamber (base of the hive) and then they fill the honey supers.

Mountain honey:

Once the flowering is over in the orange trees, we take the hives up to the mountains (early June).

We place the hives at a certain altitude where heather flowers and oak acorns predominate along with other flowers typical of the mountains of northern Spain.

During the month of September when the flowering ends in the mountains we lower the hives. Unlike the orange tree we do not extract all the honey from the hives. We must leave enough reserves to get them through the winter.

This is where the bees' work ends, but not ours as beekeepers!

- First we extract the combs from the hives full of honey.
- We remove the wax with which the bees have sealed the honey-filled cells.
- We place the combs in a small centrifuge that facilitates the extraction of honey mechanically (and at room temperature so as not to alter its flavor!).
- Let the honey stand for a few days so that any insects or plant debris can rise to the surface.
- We fill the honey from each hive into personalized jars with the name you have decided to give to your hive.
- Finally we will send your honey to the address you have indicated.



Typical Schleswig-Holstein – Beet Mash



The hearty stew with cooked sausage, pork cheek and Kasseler is also known as Rübenmalheur. The traditional cuisine of Schleswig-Holstein is robust and hearty. And it is distinguished by a special taste: the "Brooken Sööt

They are sometimes green, sometimes yellow, but sometimes red. They came from Scandinavia and saved the North German farmers from many a famine. We are talking about the turnip, often named



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after its supposed homeland, the Swedish turnip. Where the popular vegetable really comes from, however, remains unclear to this day.

When it gets increasingly uncomfortable in Schleswig-Holstein, hearty food is on the table. At least as tasty as kale and, thanks to cooked sausage, pork loin and pork cheek, at least as nutritious, is the typical beet puree. The traditional dish is also known to many as Rübenmalheur or rutabaga stew.

Recipe

For 4 persons

1 rutabaga (approx. 1.5 kg)

200 g smoked bacon or pork cheek

500 g pork neck

2-3 floury potatoes

1-3 carrots (to taste)

0,5 l water

0,5 l vegetable stock or beef stock or chicken stock or broth

1,5 tablespoon butter (about 30 g)

1 sprig thyme

1/4 bunch of flat-leaf parsley

1 pinch of freshly grated nutmeg

salt, freshly ground black pepper

Peel the beet and cut it into pieces. Wash and coarsely chop the parsley. Wash the potatoes, peel them, cut them in half and put them in a bowl of cold water (to prevent them from darkening). Bring water and desired liquid to a boil, add thyme, bacon and meat. After 30 minutes, add turnip and potatoes to the broth, season. After about 40 minutes, remove the meat.

After the entire cooking time, drain the large pot, but save the cooking liquid. Return the vegetables to the pot. Using a vegetable masher, coarsely mash the contents and stir in the butter. Add the parsley and mix in. Cut up the meat and serve with it. If the stew is too thick, carefully add some broth. Taste and season, if necessary.



Greece

Christmas

Τα Χριστουγεννιάτικα κάλαντα τα παιδιά τα τραγουδούν την παραμονή. Τα παιδιά ρωτάνε «να τα πούμε;» η νοικοκυρά απαντάει «ναι» και τότε τα παιδιά ξεκινάνε να τα τραγουδούν ενώ τα τελειώνουν πάντα με ευχές για καλοτυχία του σπιτιού όλο το χρόνο. Στο τέλος στα παιδιά μοιράζονταν φρούτα, αυγά, γλυκίσματα και χρήματα για τα κάλαντα και τις ευχές τους.

The Christmas carols are sung by the children on the eve.

The children ask "Shall we say it?" the housewife answers "yes" and then the children start singing them while they always end with wishes for good luck for the year to come. At the end, the children are given fruit, eggs, sweets and money for their carols and wishes.

This great celebration of the birth of Christ is marked by the preparation of the foods that brighten this day even more, as always the fun is accompanied by good food.

Of course, Jesus' bread or birth pie was essential for every household. Christmas breads are elaborate and plump breads, loaded with a variety of ornaments designed from dough and symbols. Symbols of nature, flowers as samples of beauty and happiness, leaves and fruits of trees (vines and olives), sheaves and pomegranates that symbolize abundance and fruitfulness, birds, as symbols of good news as well as symbols of love.

However, sweets such as melomakarona, kourabiedes, diples, cookies and baklava are not missing from the houses. The festive table includes mainly pork. Its preparation and cooking is done with exceptional care.



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Cocosses: Christmas, sweet traditional buns, which were made and distributed to the children who sang the carols.



Jesus' Bread



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Photo: prlogos.gr



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Photo: Cultural Association of Vergina



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New Year's Day



Carol -1872- Oil on canvas by Nikiforos Lytras

On New Year's Eve all over Greece, children go from house to house and they sing carols with the accompaniment of musical instruments for the coming of the new year. Children usually get money for a tip.



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On New Year's morning, the whole family goes to church in order the New Year to be blessed. The householder has a pomegranate with him, which breaks on the door of the house as soon as they return from the Divine Liturgy. He enters the house with his right foot, breaks the pomegranate behind the front door saying wishes: "With health, happiness and joy for the new year. As many berries as the pomegranate has, so many pounds shall be in our pockets during the whole year".

In many areas, they give great importance to the "foot". They pay attention to who will be the first to step on the right foot on the doorstep, to bring "good luck" in the year to come.

On the first day of the year, young children visit relatives and friends to "make the foot" by taking a monetary tip from them.



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New Year Cake



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New Year Cake



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New Year Cake

Vasilopita

On New Year's Eve, all housewives make the New Year Cake called Vasilopita.

On the bread with the same dough we create a cross and place a nut in the centre. On the one side, we make the hand of the Virgin Mary with dough. On the second side, we make the house and fruit trees. On the third side, we make the farmer with the plow and the animal if the man of the house is a farmer, or if he is a shepherd we make the shepherd with sheep, if he is a sailor, we build a boat, while if he is an angler we build the boat with the nets). On the last side of the Vassilopita we make the animals of the house. We give the wish "the hand of the Virgin Mary to bless all this for the coming year". We must not forget that our grandmothers together with the Vassilopita made bread for the animals of the house, such as for the donkey or the horse as a thank you for the help they offered to the household.

We always put a coin inside the bread. The one who wins it will be the lucky and blessed person of the year.

In the rural areas, the homemakers on New Year's Day make the Vassilopita with the leaves they had prepared from the eve and it occupied the main place at the festive table.

They put a penny together with an ear of corn, an olive branch and a branch from the vineyard. Whoever finds the branch from the olive his occupation this year will be the cultivation of the olive (oil), whoever will gain the branch from the vine will deal with the vines (tsipouro and/or wine) and whoever will get the ear of corn will engage in the cultivation of cereals.



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Photo: Karditsa Association of Attica

The cutting of the Vasilopita is a custom that is reverently observed throughout Greece. From January 1st until the end of February, wherever there is a Greek family, the Vasilopita is cut. Even in Greek communities abroad, clubs and organizations reverently observe this custom accompanied by major events and balls.

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Lent

On the first day of Lent, which we also call Clean / Pure Monday, Christians “are cleansed” spiritually and physically. The fast lasts 40 days plus Holy Week until Easter. On this day, it is customary to eat lagana, an unleavened bread with lots of sesame seeds as well as tarama, seafood, vegetables, beans, olives, and halva.

On Clean / Pure Monday, we make a calendar from dough with which we count the weeks before Easter. First, we form a woman, we put a cross on her head without a mouth because she is fasting, not even a nose so that she does not smell and envy. Her hands are crossed because she has been praying all this time. Finally, we place seven legs, which symbolize the seven weeks from Clean/ Pure Monday to the Holy Week. Each week we cut one leg from Mrs. Lent, thus creating a kind of diary.





The Lady of Lent





The Lady of Lent



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The Lady of Lent

Another custom of Clean/ Pure Monday that is passed down from generation to generation is kite flying. The kite we fly on Clean/ Pure Monday is not just another toy that has been flying in the air for thousands of years.

According to ancient theories, flying signifies the ascension, the purification of the soul after the Dionysian spree of Carnival. On this day, the whole Greek sky from end to end is filled with kites.



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Photo: Savvas Kalimeris, Unsplash



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March 25th

Double great celebration, national and religious is the day of the Annunciation of the Virgin and the celebration of the Revolution of 1821 against the Turkish yoke. This year, the 200th anniversary is celebrated with great brilliance by all Hellenes everywhere.



Photo: MSETT Hellas

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Great day for Hellenism which is celebrated with military and student parades. We decorate with the Greek flag all the public buildings but also the houses. On this day the traditional dish of March 25 is the custom of cod skordalia. Salted cod fried with flour porridge accompanied by mashed potatoes with garlic.



Photo: star.gr



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Resurrection of Lazarus

Easter customs begin on Lazarus Saturday where children go from house to house singing Lazarus, the carols of Lazarus. As a reward they get sweets, fasting breads with cinnamon, raisins and walnuts.



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Lazarákia



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Easter

Easter is a very big religious holiday, with a lot of food. This may be due to the great fast of Lent. Red eggs, Greek sweet breads, buns, magiritsa, the traditional lamb or goat on a spit. Cities are emptying and families are gathering mainly in the villages. The lambs or goats are placed on skewers and from the early morning of Easter Sunday, the roasting of the lamb and the kokoretsi begins. Everyone gathers around it and enjoys this day with songs and dances. The Easter lamb symbolizes Christ, who was sacrificed for us people.



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There are many events that take place at Easter: exhibitions of egg, traditional bun, and candle.



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Poland

For many centuries the customs and rituals of the people were outside the area of scientific research. In Poland it was not until the 19th century that we can speak of a greater interest in this topic. Hugo Kołłątaj, Joachim Lelewel, and later Oskar Kolberg, Wincenty Pol or Zygmunt Głogier made native customs and rituals better known. Apart from ethnologists' works, there were also popular works, which disseminated the knowledge about the local culture among broad masses of readers. The post-war period brought with it major social changes - the population migrated to cities, many local traditions were forgotten. Today, with the development of tourism, many customs have been given a chance to survive - they attract visitors, so their cultivation becomes a form of regional promotion. We can see the commercialization of folklore in this phenomenon, but it does not always have to lead to the loss of its original spirit.

The following list is a subjective selection – and far too brief in fact - of the most interesting, in our opinion, traditional holidays, festivals as well as traditional food and customs associated with it. Some of them have pagan origins, others are connected with Christianity or have other origin. Many of the following traditions are the result of mixing of cultures present in the times of the 1st and the 2nd Polish Republic. Unfortunately, the format of the publication does not give us a chance to describe the entire cultural and culinary heritage cultivated by local Polish communities.



New Year's Traditions

New Year's Eve in Poland is like New Year's Eve in other parts of Europe. Individuals host parties, attend private events, or head to city squares for fireworks extravaganzas. January 1st is often a day for concerts in auditoriums and carols sung in churches throughout Poland. This day is usually marked with dances, concerts, fireworks and – certainly – abundance of local food.

Among the long-standing New Year traditions one can point out “kulig” which is the annual sleigh ride, that used to be arranged by the Polish nobility. Numerous superstitions also come to the fore around this time of year – mostly those that deal with making the coming year more prosperous than the last. The Poles, for instance, will do their best to pay off all their debts before the clock strikes twelve on New Year’s Eve and make plenty of noise once the strike comes. Once, this was done to scare off evil forces that may threaten one’s prosperity. The tradition has likely survived because it has also a lot of fun in it.

In terms of celebration, December 31st, the New Year’s Eve, is often called “Sylwester” in Polish as it is Saint Sylvester’s Day. The name is derived from the Pope Sylvester I, who lived in the 4th century and is believed to have baptized Constantine, thereby making him the first Christian Roman emperor, a huge step up for the formerly underdog and oppressed religion in Rome.

Three Kings’ Day

Epiphany or Three Kings’ Day is a Christian holiday celebrated to commemorate the Biblical visit of the Three Kings or Magi to little Jesus soon after his birth. In modern Poland, this is a major celebration, usually accompanied with **vibrant parades, recreating the procession in which the Kings arrived to Jesus, and Carol singers (“kolędnicy”) dressed up as shepherds carrying around a colourful star.**



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On this day, Polish Catholics visit churches to bring home a piece of blessed chalk – which is later used to mark the front doors with letters C, M and B (referring at the Three Kings: Caspar, Melchior and Baltasar; and also referring to the Latin phrase *Christus mansionem benedicat*, meaning “May Christ bless this house”).



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Feast of the Jordan

The Feast of Jordan is one of the Orthodox and Greek Catholic Epiphany feasts (connected with the revelation of Jesus) celebrated to commemorate the Baptism in the Jordan River. On this day water is blessed in Orthodox churches. Then a procession is organized to the shore of a nearby body of water, where the priest immerses the cross. Sometimes the more courageous believers wash themselves in icy water. Such a rite is performed, among others, in Drohiczyn.



Photo: Słowa Podlasia



“Jedlińskie kusaki”

Polish carnival never developed such rich forms of entertainment as its Venetian or Brazilian counterpart. People entertained more modestly, and the most lavish were **the last days before Ash Wednesday**, known as Kusaki or Zapusty. In several villages traditions related to the last day of the carnival survived and one of the most interesting of them is cultivated in Jedlińsk.



Photo: Echo Dnia



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Probably since the sixteenth century, every year the inhabitants of the village perform an unusual theatrical spectacle. Its theme is catching Deatch ("Kostucha") and putting her on trial. It all ends with a death sentence, execution, and the following play. Interestingly, all roles (even the bride and Roma girl) are played by men.

Fat Thursday

Fat Thursday, in America known as "Mardi Gras" (which is actually French for "Fat Thursday"), is a common celebration with variations in many Christian lands **on the last Thursday before Lent**. It's a celebration before fasting season of Lent.



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Poland's version is definitely more conservative than some, but is known for eating copious amounts of fatty foods, and especially "paczki"- rich filled donuts that are sometimes glazed, sometimes nut-covered, and always delicious. Poles will line up for hours to buy them from bakeries who have to mass-produce them every year. Another sweet treat is "faworki", otherwise known as angel wings, which are crispy pieces of pastry dipped in sugar.

Celebration of the spring. Drowning of Marzanna

The drowning of Marzanna is a pagan farewell-to-winter tradition that occurs before Easter, in the period between the 1st day of the spring (21st March) and the Palm Sunday (sometimes called Passion or Death Sunday). An effigy of Marzanna, the goddess of the winter seasons, is taken to the riverbank and thrown into the water. Locals create her likeness using straw, old clothing and even accessories like a headscarf. They then literally throw 'winter' into a lake or a river to drown. The practice is symbolic for sending the winter away and preparing nature for spring and its rebirth. Often, singing or the reciting of old verses accompany the procession: "Marzanna, Marzanna, swim across the seas. Let flowers bloom, and fields turn green".

Participants watch her "drown." Though sometimes the effigy is burned instead. With the passing of Marzanna, the ills of winter are forgotten and spring can return with warm weather and natural bounty. This tradition is rooted in the pre-Christian sacrificial rites of Slavic Pagans. Because of its origin, many over the years have tried to put an end to this tradition, unsuccessfully.



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Much less common is the tradition of walking with a **“goik”**, or carrying green branches decorated with colorful ribbons around the village. In the former Silesian village of Brynica (now part of Miasteczko Śląskie), the first day of spring is celebrated particularly pompously - traditional songs are sung, the “goik” is carried, the “Marzaniko” (Marzanna) is drowned in the river, and a feast is organized at the end.

The custom of drowning Marzanna, as associated with pagan cults, was not welcomed by the Catholic Church. Priests replaced it with throwing a puppet of **Judas** from the tower of the temple. Although the tradition was not widely adopted in Poland, it survived in a slightly modified form in the village of Pruchnik in Podkarpacie region. The puppet is hung on a tree and then carried to the temple, where “Judas” receives thirty blows with clubs (as payment for selling Jesus for thirty pieces of silver).





Easter

In Poland, a Catholic country, Easter is one of the most important holidays and the traditions are both symbolic and fun. The preparations for it may take up to a week – however, only Sunday itself and Monday afterwards are days off. It is the time for the Poles to spend time with their families and pay tribute to the long-standing Easter traditions. Blessed food, decorated eggs, church services, Easter palms, and seasonal markets help to mark this springtime celebration of faith, joy, treasured

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customs, food, and family. Easter is a major holiday in Poland, and Easter celebrations are not limited to Easter Sunday. Easter-related traditions take place for more than a week in Poland. The time period from Palm Sunday to Wet Monday is marked by religious rites and practices with their origins in pagan times. It is important to note that Easter in Poland is celebrated Western Roman Catholic calendar.



Holy Week lasts from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday. Palm Sunday, the week before Easter Sunday, is marked by church attendance with palm-leaf substitutes in the form of willow branches or handmade bouquets of dried flowers. On Easter Saturday, baskets of Easter food are taken to a church to be blessed; the food that is blessed is eaten as a part of the Easter Sunday meal. The

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Easter breakfast consists of hard-boiled eggs, cold meats, “babka wielkanocna” and other dishes, including a cake or a sugar treat in the form of a lamb to symbolize Christ.

Palm Sunday

The last Sunday before Easter is associated with several interesting traditions (e.g. the Palm Jesus in Szydłowiec or the Cracovian Puffins), but the most popular is the preparation of **palm trees**, which are then blessed in churches. This custom commemorates the welcoming of Christ, entering into Jerusalem, by the inhabitants of the town. For many years, some parishes have organized contests for the largest or most beautiful palm tree

Easter Monday is a family holiday in Poland and is called Smigus Dyngus or Śmingus-Dyngus, or Wet Monday, after the practice of men and boys pouring water on women and girls. This is one of the Polish traditions linked to Christianity, whereby splashing water is considered a blessing. Moreover, Wet Monday celebrates the arrival of spring and the future of a relationship. The Poles believe the girl who gets the most soaked in the celebration will be the first to marry.

However, the tradition isn't necessarily limited to males pouring water on females - the roles are often reversed. Regional variations of the tradition are also known to occur, and a woman's married status may protect her from being doused with water. However, it is best to assume that on this day, no one is safe from being doused with water.

In Poland, the tradition of theatrical performances related to the **Passion of Christ** is also practiced. We can see them, for example, in Czerwińsk on the Vistula, Kalkowo-Godów or Kalwaria Zebrzydowska. The mystery play from Poznań is considered to be the largest spectacle of this kind in Europe.





Photo: Zambrow.org portal

Pisanki

Pisanki are Easter eggs from Poland, handcrafted in traditional designs that recall pagan symbols of fertility and spring. Decorating eggs (the finished product is called “pisanki” – from the Polish “to write”) makes for the usual part of the celebration, quite often followed with another traditional ritual – egg-beating. On the Easter morning, the whole family gathers together to exchange wishes and feast on a hearty, protien-heavy breakfast, which traditionally includes ham, sausage, roast meats, pâté (paszтет), eggs, horseradish and bread, marking the end of the 40-day lent, or fast, that precedes the holiday.





Photo: Daniel Biernat, agrofakt.p

It is common in Poland to see Easter soup made with use of horseradish and main meal consisting of white sausage. One of the rare recipes for the traditional rural "Barszcz Wielkanocny" is the one from the Lublin region. The recipe is based on ingredients that could possibly be found in peasant cottages in early spring (smoked meat, dried curd cheese, horseradish root), although it is enriched with the use of lemon juice instead of e.g. vinegar. Though much more common variation is this soup with addition of *Zakwas* (sourdough) which brings typical grey colour.





Photo: Akademia Smaku

May holidays

The beginning of May in Poland (**1st - 3rd May**) encompasses three consequent holidays – International Workers’ Day (Święto Pracy), Polish National Flag Day (Dzień Flagi) and Constitution Day (Święto Konstytucji Trzeciego Maja). Together, they form a long holiday weekend, known as “Majówka”.

In many European countries, International Workers’ Day has been celebrated on May 1st since the end of the nineteenth century. In Poland, this holiday was first established in 1889, in order to commemorate the Haymarket Affair – a major labour demonstration and protest that took place in the US in 1886. As weather usually gets better around this time, locals often opt for outdoor activities and family picnics.

Polish National Flag day was introduced relatively recently, in 2004. On this date, the Day of the Polish Community Abroad is also celebrated. Many Poles live and work abroad, in wealthier EU countries. While May 2 is technically not a public holiday, many Poles take this day off because it is the only date in the calendar which occurs between two national holidays.

The adoption of the Polish Constitution is also considered to be one of the crucial points in the country’s history and one of the country’s major achievements. The oldest constitution in Europe (and second oldest in the world after the one in the US), it was first adopted in 1791. The official holiday, however, was only established in 1918, when Poland became independent after its partitioning and reinstated its constitution. This day’s celebrations include parades and speeches from national Polish leaders.

For many recent years, Majówka has become the feast of barbecue all across Poland. Thus, it is good to assume that much of the country will simply stay closed from May 1-3 and barbecue smoke will rise from all the gardens and allotments all over Poland.



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Photo: fakt.pl, 123RF



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Pentecost

Pentecost is a national holiday in Poland. Many churches hold special services on this day, while some Poles will decorate their homes with greenery, hoping that God's blessings will come to their families. This is based on the popular name of the holiday – "Zielone Świątki", which can be literally translated as the Green Christmastide and is connected to the warm and green summer season.

The Pentecost celebrations were an excellent opportunity to celebrate the arrival of spring. Rural people combined Pentecost with various pastoral and agricultural holidays, and some of these customs have survived to this day. The custom of maypoleing houses, fences, and gates was common throughout Poland. The farmstead was usually mailed with birch branches, and a thick layer of calamus was laid in the yards and on the floors of the huts. The calamus was called calamus herb, and the plant layer was not only to serve as a spring decoration, but also to protect the house from insects. Fencing houses and yards is a tradition that is at least several centuries old. Farmers believed that young greenery and fresh plant juices would ensure the success of the entire farm and lead to a rich harvest. Maypole planting was also supposed to prevent plague, disease, evil spells, charms, and any other evil that might fall on the house and its inhabitants. This custom of decorating houses with green branches gave the holiday its folk name.

The proper name of Pentecost is the Feast of Pentecost. It is a church holiday, one of the oldest and largest Christian holidays, which was at first strongly associated with Easter. However, since the 4th century Pentecost has been treated as a completely separate holiday. **Pentecost falls on the Sunday and Monday fifty days after Easter, between May 10 and June 13**, a time when plants are in full bloom and spring is in full swing. The custom of Pentecost was forbidden by the Church, but the customs were still cultivated in the villages.



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Photo: PolskaTradycja.pl

Once upon a time huge bonfires were lit in forest clearings and on the hills. In southern Poland these fires were called *sobótki*, in Podlasie they were called *palinocki*. Similar bonfires also appeared on St. John's Eve. Shepherds would light torches from the bonfire and walk around their flocks with them. It was also believed that the crops would grow much better if burned, and they would become resistant to rainstorms, winds and fires. Bonfires in the pastures and fields were also an opportunity for all-night revelry and feasting.

Until the 20th century, Pentecost was marked by the presence of cows. Decorated with green wreaths and flowers, the cattle were herded to the pastures by being smacked with green twigs. At the same time the cows were smeared with holy herbs, herbal decoction was boiled and the butter churns and milking troughs were scalded. These procedures were supposed to prevent witchcraft because fresh milk was one of the witches' greatest delicacies.



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During the night feast, sausages, traditional spring scrambled eggs and eggs were eaten, and strong alcohol was not regretted either. Eggs were a very important ingredient of shepherd's feasts because they were believed to be an excellent remedy against magic and evil powers. The whole village enjoyed the shepherd's feast: the youth, the elderly farmers, women, and men. Beginning in the 15th century, the Church issued synodal laws that strictly forbade pagan shepherd's bonfires, but the custom was practiced virtually everywhere and survived for many centuries.



Yuvenalia

"*Juvenalia*" is Polish name for a college student festival that occurs in **May or early June** before student exams. This event is marked by colourful parades, contests, games, and parties. Juvenalia is an annually anticipated event and started in 15th-century Krakow, Poland.



Photo: Gazeta Wroclawska



Corpus Christi

If you're in the street in Poland on a **Thursday, the 60th day after Easter**, you will likely get a chance to witness the celebrations of Corpus Christi – a religious holiday with a long-standing tradition in Polish culture. The Both the English (which is actually Latin) and Polish names refer to the Body of Christ (God) and the holiday commemorates the belief in transubstantiation: that the bread taken for sacrament turns into the Body of Christ when taken. This major holiday is also celebrated in a number of other countries, including Austria, Croatia, Spain, and Portugal.

The usual Corpus Christi program includes a Holy Mass and a solemn procession afterwards, which combines carrying a monstrance (a cross that also resembles a sun) under a canopy, singing religious hymns and scattering flower petals along the route. Some Poles will decorate their windows and balconies especially if they know that procession will be passing by their street. Because of the celebrations, some roads may be blocked for several hours. As Corpus Christi always falls on a Thursday, it may also open an opportunity for a long weekend.

Corpus Christi has been celebrated in Poland since 1320. The first source description of the Corpus Christi procession comes from Plock and concerns the celebrations held in the cathedral in the 14th century. To this day, during the Corpus Christi octave, processions go out from all churches in towns and villages to four altars decorated with greenery and flowers and set up outside the church under the open sky. At each altar gospel is sung and at each altar the blessing of believers with the Most Holy Sacrament takes place.



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Photo: debica24.eu

Various customs and folk beliefs are connected with the celebration of Corpus Christi. Special magical properties were attributed to the flowers, garlands and twigs collected from the altars. It was earlier a custom to ordain garlands in the church along with the gospels written on 4 separate sheets of paper rolled up, which the farmers bury in the 4 corners of the ground, in the belief that for a year all the hail will not hit the field.

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Many herbs and grasses are still used today to weave garlands. Herbs of medicinal value and branches of trees protecting from lightning were used. Among the herbs, the most important was mugwort - a herb with magical power. In holy wreaths there had to be thyme, mint, rosemary, lovage, coltsfoot, forget-me-not, chamomile, daisies and many other herbs.

In the Polish tradition these wreaths were present at the most important moments for people - at birth, wedding and death. The magical power of garlands was also used: a garland of thyme decorated the crib at the time of baptism, forest rosemary - a symbol of love, fidelity and immortality - together with wild sedum and immortelle decorated garlands at the wedding dress. Garlands made of many herbs were above all a symbol of love.

In addition to garlands, birch twigs from altars also had great magical significance. They were used for all kinds of medicinal and farming treatments. They were placed on the field borders to protect crops from diseases and pests; they were put under thatched roofs to protect houses and farm buildings from fire. Today, many people also take consecrated birch twigs to protect their homes from all kinds of disasters.

Corpus Christi, in addition to its religious significance, was an important date in the calendar of agricultural work, as well as a time of various magical practices. Like May 1st or Pentecost, Corpus Christi and its octave were considered a period of increased magical activity. Once these eight days were free from fieldwork. But not only this prohibition was in force. During this period, women did not wash their clothes with tadpoles in order not to attract thunder and lightning to the village; in the "octave" it was also forbidden to plant cabbage, because it would not grow well.

Midsummer Solstice

"Noc Kupały" is a Slavic holiday associated with the summer solstice of the Sun, celebrated during the shortest night of the year, which falls around June 21-22. In Anglo-Saxon countries it is called Midsummer, in Germanic countries Mittsommerfest. The Catholic Church, unable to eradicate the annual celebrations from Slavic customs, attempted to assimilate the holiday with Christian rituals (hence the later St. John's Eve - also commonly called St. John's Night, celebrated on the night of June 23-24).



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In southern Poland, Podkarpacie and Silesia a celebration of a similar nature is called *sobótka* or *sobótki*, in Warmia and Mazury *palinocka*. The name Kupala Night, *kupalnocka* has become established in the tradition of Mazovia and Podlasie. The name of the custom refers erroneously to an alleged Slavic fertility deity Kupala.



It is the festival of fire, water, sun and moon, harvest, fertility, joy and love, commonly celebrated in areas inhabited by Slavic peoples, but also in similar character in areas inhabited by Baltic, Germanic

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and Celtic peoples, as well as by some Finno-Ugric peoples, Estonians and Latvia (under the name Ligo).

Kupalnocka is primarily dedicated to the elements of water and fire, which have a purifying power. It is also a celebration of love, fertility, the sun and the moon. In Lithuania, there is a song called *Mėnuo Sauluža vedė* ("The Moon married the Sun"), which tells how, on the first spring after the creation of the world, the Moon married the Sun. However, when the Sun rose above the horizon after a sleepless wedding night, the Moon left the Sun and betrothed her to Dawn. Since then, the two celestial bodies have been enemies who constantly fight and compete with each other - most notably during the summer solstice, when the night is shortest and the day longest.

Slavic customs and rituals related to the Kupala Night were supposed to ensure health and fertility. Fires were lit in which herbs were burned. Various kinds of fortune-telling and dancing took place during the joyful games. Girls would throw garlands with lighted candles into the rivers. If the garland was fished out by a bachelor, it meant a quick marriage. If it floated, the girl would not marry soon. If it burned, drowned or became entangled in rushes, it boded ill for old age.

In some regions it was believed that until Kupala Day one could not bathe in rivers, streams or lakes during the daytime, while bathing after dark or before sunrise cured various ailments, as water was then a healing element belonging to the moon.

The night was also a night for couples to get together. It used to be the responsibility of the head of the family and the elders of the family and the professional matchmakers hired by him to arrange marriages. But for girls who were not yet engaged to anyone and wanted to avoid the customary form of matching partners, the Kupala Night was a chance to win a beloved one. Young women wove garlands of flowers and magic herbs, attached burning bows to them, and in a collective ceremony with singing and dancing entrusted the garlands to the waters of rivers and streams. Below waited the boys, who - either in secret agreement with the girls or counting on luck - tried to catch the garlands. Anyone who succeeded in doing so would return to the celebrating group to identify the owner of the caught catch. In this way the matched young people could mate without offending the custom and without risking malicious comments or ridicule. On that night, they were even allowed to move away from the community together and walk alone in the forest.

On the occasion of this walk, young girls and young boys would search for a fern flower in the swamps, auguring good fortune. At dawn they would return to the still-burning bonfires, and having



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girded themselves with mugwort, hold each other's hands and jump over the flames. This leap completed the rite of passing through water and fire, and on this one day in the year of its time it similarly may constituted the ritual of marriage.

Legends of the fern flower, also known as the perun flower, tell of many people who wandered through forests and swamps trying to find the magical fern flower, which bestows wealth, strength and wisdom, and can only be seen for a moment.

Children of the Mountains Festival

The Festival is a meeting place for children from various cultural and religious backgrounds, where - while having fun together - they become acquainted with the richness and diversity of traditions of various countries and regions, learn tolerance and respect towards faith, culture, customs and behaviour of their peers. The participants of the Festival are Polish and foreign folk ensembles representing various ethnic groups of Podkarpackie regions and mountain regions of all continents. In total, about 500 children aged 7 to 14 take part in the event.

For seven festival days the children live together, give concerts, go on trips, make bonfires and spend one day in the homes of their Polish partners. For the final concert they prepare a joint program in which elements of the cultures and customs of individual nations are transformed into a new quality. This way of realizing the festival allows the children to find their own language of communication, thanks to which the fear of "the Other" disappears and the natural distrust towards everything that is foreign and incomprehensible changes into the acceptance of "otherness" and, consequently, into friendship which develops in later contacts.



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The festival has been organized since 1992. In its assumptions it refers to the programme premises of the MOUNTAIN FESTIVAL - the pre-war event initiated by the Mountain Lands Association, whose main objective was to protect the cultural heritage - nurture, cultivate and present folk culture and art traditions of the inhabitants of the Podkarpacie region. Currently, through the original program assumptions, distinguishing the festival from other children's events of a similar nature, it has become an event whose significance goes far beyond the protection and presentation of folk culture. During the Festival the National Instructors' Workshops for instructors of regional ensembles are organized as well as numerous accompanying activities addressed to the public: exhibitions, competitions, thematic art workshops.



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Suwalki Folklore Fair

Suwalki Folklore Fair is the annual folklore event promoting the folk traditions of the multicultural Suwałki Region and 1st Polish Republic Borderlands. During the fairs, competition auditions are held in the following categories: solo singers, singing groups and the Master-Apprentice category, which qualify participants to take part in the National Festival of Folk Bands and Singers in *Kazimierz nad Wisłą*.

The artistic part of the event is complemented by a handicraft and folk art fair, with an opportunity to learn about the process of making them according to the oldest methods and folk tradition, as well as a tasting of traditional regional dishes. The main objective of the Suwałki Folklore Fair is to protect, support and promote the folklore and folk handicrafts of the communities living in the macroregion.

Sabałowe Bajania

Sabałowe Bajania is a national festival of Polish folklore, a competition of storytellers, instrumentalists and singers held annually in August in Bukowina Tatrzańska

For the first time "Sabałowe Bajania" took place in 1967. Initially had the form of a competition of storytellers and instrumentalists. The event is accompanied by various events, including performances of regional bands and theater performances. The original local event quickly expanded beyond the boundaries of Nowy Targ district. The festival was enriched by the performances of folk singers, and later by the competition for the wedding *starost* speeches, singing of the wedding best man and the *tatrzańskich pytacy* (photo below).



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Currently the program includes a number of accompanying events, such as an exhibition and fair of folk art, photography exhibitions, shooting competition and performances of foreign regional bands.

Borderland Culture Festival

Borderland Culture Festival is aimed to bring closer and popularize Polish culture from the area of the Eastern Borderlands (territories of the former 1st and 2nd Polish Republic). It takes place in Mrągowo in Mazury. The location is associated with the fact that many Polish inhabitants of the eastern borderlands were resettled after the II World War to territories acquired by Poland in 1945, e.g. Mazury. The Festival was founded in 1995 on the initiative of the Vilnius and Vilnius Land Society. The Festival recalls the rituals and customs of the past. There have already been sixteen editions of the festival.

Performances of music and dance ensembles from Lithuania, Latvia, Belarus and Ukraine are organized. The performances are accompanied by art and photography exhibitions, handicrafts, poetry evenings, fairs and tastings of borderland food.





Photo: Radio Olsztyn

Beskid Folklore Culture Week

The first edition of the Beskid Culture Week took place in 1964 in Wisła, but the traditions of the festival date back to the pre-war "*Święta Góra*". It is a folklore festival annually in August in Wisła, Żywiec, Szczyrk, Oświęcim and Maków Podhalański but also associated with other local festivals taking place in nearby locations. It is organized by the Regional Cultural Center in Bielsko-Biała. The symbol of the Week is *klepok*, a traditional wooden toy. Due to its scope, duration, number of concerts and audience it is one of the biggest folklore festivals in Poland.

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Nowadays, the Beskid Culture Week is a gigantic undertaking that takes over the Beskids in the middle of summer. It is five large stages: Wisła, Szczyrk, Żywiec, Maków Podhalański, Oświęcim, where concerts lasting several hours are held for nine consecutive days. In these towns there are also short concerts in market squares and street parades of bands.



Photo: radio90.pl

Single concerts are also held in other towns - in Ujszoły, Istebna, Bielsko-Biała. Selected ensembles participating in the Week of Beskid Culture also give concerts in the Czech Republic, during the Gorolski Festival in Jablunkov in Zaolzie, which is organized by the Polish minority. During the Week of Beskid Culture usually performs nearly a hundred ensembles, several are foreign groups from around the world. There are also bands, folk singers and instrumentalists. The concerts are watched by an audience of almost 200 thousand people. Exhibitions of folk art, handicraft, photography, etc.



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are presented. The organizers prepare fairs and markets of folk art, workshops and competitions are held. It can be said that the whole region comes to life during this colorful folklore meeting.

Some guests come to the Beskidy especially at this time. TKB is a meeting place for people for whom native tradition is a great, undeniable value, building their identity, and who devote their time, talent and strength to protect it. The concerts are also attended by those who like to take the opportunity to listen to folk music, watch traditional dances, learn about the customs and rituals of their region, country, and various corners of the world.

Some of the groups participate in two competitions that take place within the framework of TKB: the Polish Highland Folklore Festival and the International Folklore Meetings. Both competitions are aimed at popularizing and protecting traditional folklore, music, dance, singing, rituals and customs related to everyday life, work and celebrations.

Polish Highland Folklore Festival takes place in Zywiec since 1970, since 1982 is organized as part of the Week of Beskidy Culture. This is the only meeting in which all ethnographic groups of Polish highlanders participate. It gives an image of the state of traditional highland culture and its intergenerational transmission. It is a review of bands and soloists, preserving the most valuable and authentic values in song, music, dance, rituals and folk customs. It includes the competition of regional song and dance ensembles, competition of bands, singing groups, folk singers and instrumentalists. Regional groups compete in the amphitheater below Grojec. Bands, singing groups and instrumentalists usually compete in the Market Square, where presentations of folk art and handicrafts also take place.

The International Folklore Meetings began in 1990. They are a wide opening of TKB windows to the richness of world folklore. They have been under the patronage of CIOFF. Their competitive nature reinforces the care for passing on tradition in a form closest to the authentic one.

In addition, other events are held as part of TKB:

Gorolski Festival in Jablunkov (Czech Republic) is organized since 1949 by the Polish national minority. It (and the pre-war Festival of Mountains) was the inspiration for the activists from Wisła when in 1964 they initiated the Week of Beskid Culture. This festival is independent of TKB, associated with it only on the basis of friendly relations and long-term cooperation.



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Wawrzyńcowe Hudy in Ujsoły joined TKB as an accompanying event in 1980. They are a local celebration of the day of St. Lawrence, the martyr burned at the stake. On that day, after darkness falls, piles of brushwood and wood, called huds, are lit up.

The Istebna Festival was organized for the first time by the highlanders from Istebna in 1995 and since then every year bands from the Tri-village (Istebna, Koniaków, Jaworzynka) present their traditions as well as folklore of the guests - bands from other regions of Poland and the world.

International Festival of Mountain Folklore in Zakopane

Its history dates back to the times of the Second Polish Republic, and growing of Podhale regionalism. The concept proposed assumed the unification of all groups living in the Polish Carpathians, from the Hutsul Region to the Silesian Beskids, and creation of a common development program for such an organism.

On 4th of August 1935, Podhale welcomed musicians, dancers, singers, creators and folk artists who came to the Tatra Mountains from all over the Polish Carpathians, from Czeremosz to Olza. For a whole week the highlanders from Żywiec, Nowy Sącz, Beskidy, Hutsuls, Lemkos, Boykos presented the creative achievements of their lands. Already then the festival was a competition, and the main prizes went to the Hutsuls. Two years later, the event was renamed the "Mountain Week" and took place in Wisła. After the World War II, rural ensembles were of the greatest value, as they presented traditional, unprocessed folklore that needed to be protected and even reactivated.



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Photo: Wydział Kultury- Urząd Miasta Zakopane

Today, the Zakopane competition is a prestigious and recognised folklore event, not only in Poland but also abroad. The competition formula has stood the test of time and now attracts groups from different countries and continents, wishing to compete for the most important trophy, the "*Golden Ciupaga*". Moreover, the festival is also one of the most important elements creating the unique atmosphere of Zakopane and its cultural landscape. It is a unique event, and also an attractive proposal in the tourist offer of the city, which attracts crowds of fans from all over Poland.



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Kashubian Unity Day

The Kashubians are a unique ethnographic group living in Pomerania. They are unique because of the cultivation of rich traditions and customs, and their own language. The Kashubian Unity Day is an event that aims to both cement the community and highlight the unique character of the region. The origin of the name is an important issue in the context of the meaning of the Day of Kashubian Unity. Officially, it commemorates the first written reference to Kashubians. It appeared in a bull of Gregory IX, who entitled the Prince Boguslaw I of Szczecin "Prince of Kashubia" confirming the property donated by him to the Order of St John of Jerusalem near Stargard on the Ina River. That took place on March 19, 1238.

The aim of the festival is to promote Kashubian culture. There are organized concerts of folk bands, fairs of folk artists, exhibitions (e.g. handicrafts, folk instruments), anniversary meetings commemorating historical events or personalities of Kashubian region. Of course, there must be stands with traditional Kashubian dishes.



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Photo: Karolina Misztal, Dziennik Bałtycki

One of the obligatory points of the festival is a tournament of traditional Kashubian card game "Baška". It is the most popular game in the region, a frequent element of social gatherings, even tournaments are organized, the Pomeranian-Kashubian League of Baška functions. What is characteristic for Baška, the game is accompanied by great emotions, like at a soccer match. Shouting and hitting the table with your fist on the counter attacks and punches are the order of the day. Many people not connected with Kashubia may be surprised by the specific dances prevalent in the area, such as "Szewc" (imitates the work of a shoemaker, sewing and hammering in studs), "Dzèk" (an exclusively male, dynamic dance that serves to show strength), "Kòséder," or "Marëszka."



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Lemko Community Feast

It takes place every year in the third or fourth week of July in Zdynia. It consists of concerts, meetings with artists, workshops, exhibitions. It is organized by the Lemko Association in a specially built center in Zdynia. Watra lasts three days - Friday, Saturday and Sunday, but most Lemkos arrive already on Thursday.

Feast of Lemko Culture "Łemkowska Watra" in Zdynia is the biggest and the most recognizable cultural event of Lemkos' community. The brand of the festival developed over the years has strengthened the importance of the event as one of the largest international artistic events in the Carpathian region and Poland. Every year Watra gathers from 6-10 thousand people, inhabitants of the Low Beskids, guests and tourists from Poland and abroad: Canada, Ukraine, Slovakia, USA, Croatia, Serbia, Hungary, Austria.

Lasting three days, the event is cyclical and is a kind of combination of cultural traditions with a contemporary form of recreation. Watra is accompanied by anniversary celebrations, Lemko Spartakiada, exhibitions, competitions, demonstrations of traditional crafts. On the stage of the Zdynia amphitheater there are several hundred performers of folk, rock, folk and jazz music, as well as various theatrical stage forms. One of the permanent elements of the event is the presentation of Carpathian oil traditions based on the experience of oil-makers from the village of Łosie. What is equally important, the unique dimension of our festival is emphasized by the visits of celebrities from the world of culture and politics.

"Łemkowska Watra" is also the time of mutual intercultural dialogue of transboundary dimension in the triangle Poland-Slovakia-Ukraine. This creates an opportunity to exchange ideas for good neighborly relations and above all to understand the specificity of our culture and history.



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Photo: sadeczanin.info



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Festival of Slavs and Vikings

Cyclical outdoor event in the form of historical reconstruction. It takes place annually on the first weekend of August on the island Wolińska Kępa in Wolin. Viking Festival is probably the biggest event of this type in this part of Europe. In 2008 over 1500 participants: warriors, craftsmen, reenactors of ancient rites and music groups from 21 countries - not only Europe - presented all aspects of Viking and Slavic life, preserving the historical realities, and the Viking village was visited by 37 thousand tourists. The event is also an opportunity to meet people fascinated by the Baltic cultures of the early Middle Ages.

Attractions of the festival on Wolin include large re-enactments of Viking and Slavic battles: conquering a castle, burning a village, staging attacks and skirmishes. There are also performances of old rituals: weddings, funerals - based on the Viking sagas. On the water, battles between replicas of Viking and Slavic ships take place, as well as races and tournaments, such as the paddle race, where daredevils must run through a row of paddles protruding from the ships' hulls. During the three days of the festival, the Vikings, Slavs, Balts, Magyars, Rusyns, and warriors and craftsmen - re-enactors of other peoples - pitch replicas of old tents in Wolin, prepare food using medieval recipes and products, craftsmen make pots, and weavers produce material for clothing, blacksmiths forge iron, and goldsmiths make copies of early medieval jewelry from silver and bronze; Shoemakers make shoes, and armourers weave chain mail from wire hoops. At the same time, replicas of Viking and Slavic ships and vessels, sometimes adorned with dragon finials on the bow sterns, sail on the Strange River. The festival attracts whole families dressed in medieval costumes. Children play on a special playground, make clay pots, compete in children's tournaments, and take part in games derived from medieval legends.



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Photo: Kamienskie.info

The idea of organizing the festival was taken from the Icelandic saga of Jomswiking, written in the thirteenth century and describing the history of the Jomswiking brotherhood, living in the tenth century in the fortified stronghold Jómsborg on the island of Wolin. According to legend the founder of the stronghold was Danish king Harald Bluetooth. The literary epic of the saga was partly confirmed by archeological excavations carried out on the island.

International Folk Festival

For over 40 years the University of Silesia has been the main organizer of the MSFF. It is one of two folklore festivals in Poland prepared by students and with the help of the academic community. MSFF has a permanent place in the calendar of CIOFF®, i.e. the International Council of Organizers of Folklore and Traditional Art Festivals, operating under the auspices of UNESCO.

During the last 32 editions at the IFF, there have been already approx. 300 bands that came from Germany, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Russia, Hungary, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Macedonia, Greece, Cyprus, Turkey, and also from more distant countries like Colombia, Mexico, Indonesia, Malaysia, Kenya and Benin. Currently, each year, Cieszyn, where the festival takes place, is visited by over 400 folklore performers.

Showing the extraordinary variety of singing, dancing and folk costumes is the best way to promote traditional culture, both Polish and from other regions of the world. The organizers try to convey the knowledge of folklore to the festival audience also through lectures and workshops.

Every year, during the festival, the whole of Cieszyn is alive with the event - concerts and other outdoor events take place in the city space, and colourful processions of artists from all over the world walk the streets of the city. Cieszyn is becoming the center of interest for folklore lovers, but the festival is also very popular among tourists and people from nearby towns.



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Photo: Nasze Miasto



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Sabantuj

Sabantuj is an old Tatar festival which came to Poland together with settlement of Tatar soldiers during the 1st Polish Republic. Podlaskie is home to the largest community of Polish Tatars in the country, whose history of settlement in the lands of the former Republic of Poland is over 600 years old. In Kruszyniany there is not only a historic mosque, there is also a Centre for Muslim Education and Culture of the Polish Tatars.

Sabantuj, otherwise known as the plow festival, is usually held after sowing the fields. The most important part of the holiday was the gathering of the village community and invited guests in a specially prepared square, where games, competitions, and plays took place. The holiday's name means "plough's feast" in Turkic languages. Sabantuy traces its origins to the pre-Islamic epoch, when it was celebrated before the sowing season. The presence of Sabantuy was noticed by ibn Fadlan as early as in 921. Traditional songs and other customs of the Sabantuy probably had a religious connotation at that time. In the 20th century Sabantuy gained recognition as the national festival of the Tatars.



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Currently this Tatar plough festival is celebrated in the summer, after the completion of spring works in the fields. Nowadays, a pinch of survived traditions can be seen in Kruszyniany. The main distinctive elements of Sabantuy should include the traditional sporting competitions such as köräs (Tatar wrestling), horse racing, race-in-sack, pillar-climbing, sacks-battle on the crossbar, pot smashing, finding a coin in a qatıq (a beverage made from sour milk), and other contests. Such activities take place on the mäydan, which would usually be located at the edge of a forest. The festival include also many dishes known in eastern Polish and Lithuanian cuisine.

Harvest Festival

Harvest Festival / Dożynki – it is a folk holiday combined with ceremonies of thanksgiving for the completion of harvest and field work. In pre-Christian times it was an ethnic Slavic holiday, celebrated during the autumnal equinox (September 23). In modern times it is usually celebrated on one of the Sundays or Saturdays in August or September after the completion of the harvest.

As part of the August harvest, some regions traditionally practiced the *przepiórka* – an offering to the quail which personifies the grain spirit to ensure fertility for the future year. The harvesters would weave three braids of wheat, decorated with ribbons or berries and leave them in the fields in a prominent place for some time. Also called the *popiórka* or simply *pępek* depending on the region, the best harvester had to have cut down the wheat, to the singing of ladies: “*Pielim przepiórkę na odłogę, będziemy pić piwo, chwala Bogu*” – We’ll weed the quail wheat on the fallow field, we’ll drink beer, thanks to God!”

The villagers would also make an open wreath or a closed crown of rye stalks as a symbol of the whole harvest called a *plon*. In some areas a *równianka* – tied wheat stalks were also prepared and decorated similarly to the *plon* with flowers and ribbons. Together with a round loaf of bread baked with the new grain, the villagers would lead a *korowód* – procession through the village and ceremonially the top female harvesters would present them to the local landowner.





Photo: eluban.pl

The wreath is a central feature of most celebrations associated with *dożynki*, as it symbolises a rich harvest, the prospect of wealth and the power of new life vested in the grain gathered during the Summer. The latter probably explains why in many regions the grain from the wreath is used as the first batch of grain threshed and set aside for next year's sowing.

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Originally the wreath was in fact a decorated sheaf of grain, decorated with field flowers, ribbons and braided straws. However, with time other forms of wreath became more popular, including the now-typical round wreath, but crown-shaped, oval or rectangular wreaths are also popular in various regions.

The sheaf or the wreath is usually brought back into the village by a ceremonial procession. It is often blessed, either by a Christian priest, or in an extra-religious way. Sometimes the landowner would reward the harvesters with silver coins. They were all invited into the manor house, leading with the wreath, by the landowner who would toast them before they sat down to a celebratory feast including music and dancing. The heir would invite the chief female harvester and the heiress, the chief male "*kośnik*" – harvester for the first dance followed by more dancing, games, jokes and challenges to show off the local talent.

Harvest festivals in contemporary Poland are obviously a little different, though the party is definitely a key element. Through mass media there is an much interest in *dożynki* beyond the villages and larger events take place with markets and concerts. All villages on a smaller or larger scale arrange *dożynki*.

Hops&Harvest Festival in Krasnystaw

Harvest festival in Krasnystaw, called "*Chmielaki*", is slightly different from the others. Traditions of hop growing in Krasnystaw and its surroundings date back to the early twentieth century and are closely associated with the person of Tadeusz Fleszyński (1886-1968), an engineer in hop growing, who worked on his farm to develop agricultural education in the countryside and as a member of the Agricultural Society gave lectures on hop growing. He was also one of the initiators of building an agricultural school where he worked as a hop cultivation teacher after the Second World War. Under his supervision, a large staff of hop growers was educated which led to the creation of a specific "hop district". Numerous successes of hop growers in Krasnostaw in hop production and the development of this branch of agriculture, as well as the traditions of this movement dating back to the eighteenth century contributed to the creation of hop harvest festival called "*Chmielaki Krasnostawskie*".



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The event has been organized since the 70s of the twentieth century and has already gained a few fixed points (Holy mass for the intention of hop growers, colorful parade and the best beer election).



Photo: Narodowy Instytut Kultury i Dziedzictwa Wsi w Warszawie



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Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The Assumption of Mary into Heaven is a major feast day on **August 15th**, celebrated by Christians in many countries around the world. In Poland, it is usually associated with blessing and offering gifts of grains, flowers, herbs, and vegetables, as well as with the pilgrimage to the Jasna Góra Monastery – a famous Polish shrine devoted to Virgin Mary.

As the Virgin Mary is also the patron saint of the Polish army, this day is also Polish Army Day (Święto Wojska Polskiego), which adds to the customs of the celebration. It is a state holiday. Many locals attend church services in order to commemorate Polish soldiers who died fighting for their country. Military parades take place too, highlighting all branches of the Polish military.



Sylwia Krasnowska - Polskie Radio Białystok



Jagiellonian Fair

The history of Lublin was connected with fairs that started in the 15th century. At that time, the trade route running through Lublin brought to the city world cultures, travellers and traders. At that time, Lublin was the main center of trade, including trade in Hungarian wine, grain and oxen from Ukraine and Volhynia. Along with the development of trade, more and more craft workshops and merchants' stalls, such as butcheries, mills and smithies were established. All this led to rapid economic development of Lublin and the region in the *Jagiellonian* times (XIV – XVI century). Hence the name of this revived event - *Jarmark Jagielloński*.

Over the several years of its existence, the festival has become a space where traditional culture originating from the countryside and culture inspired by it is presented, adapting traditional content in a conscious and respectful manner.

Lublin is visited by artists, craftsmen and masters from Slovakia, Hungary, Ukraine, Lithuania and Belarus. These are people who cultivate family and regional traditions and are engaged in folk art. The Jagiellonian Fair has been recognized as one of the greatest international tourist attractions in Poland.

During this event you have the chance to try traditional snacks and dishes coming from many territories related to the 1st Polish Republic. Of course *cebularz lubelski* and *pierogi ruskie* are local top priorities!



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Photo: nocowanie.pl



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St. Dominic's Fair

The tradition of St. Dominic's Fair dates back to 1260, when Pope Alexander IV allowed the Dominicans of Gdansk to give well indulgences on the feast day of their founder. In one of the oldest descriptions of the fair from the sixteenth century, the papal nuncio Giulio Ruggieri wrote as follows: In the month of August there is a great Fair of St. Dominic, to which the Germans, French, Flemings, English, Spaniards, and Portuguese gather, and then 400 ships come to port laden with French and Spanish wine, silk, oil, lemons, jams, and other Spanish produce, Portuguese roots, tin, and English cloth. Circus performers, acrobats and acting troupes came from everywhere to the Fair. There were all sorts of freaks, exotic animals, and even apparently... mermaids.

St. Dominic's Fair was held annually for several centuries, becoming an important holiday for the city. This tradition was interrupted by World War II. It returned in 1972. And it was then that the symbol of the Fair became a cockerel.

Today the solemn opening of the Fair announces to the world a specially written bugle-call, to which every year another note is added. And so the bugle-call "ages" together with Jarmark. In 2020 it had 760 notes.

The Fair aimed to persuade the faithful to participate in the Indulgenced Mass on the day of St. Dominic (then **August 4th**), thanks to which one could receive 100 days of exemption from purgatory. At 12:00 the bells would ring announcing the beginning of the Fair on Dominikanska Square. The folk festivities originally served as devotional prayers and entertainment, and later evolved into a commercial and cultural event of great importance to the city. Initially, it was held on Dominikanski Square, but as the event developed, the square soon proved to be too small and the fair moved to the vicinity of the Jagiellonian Embankment and Długa Street. New, additional market squares were created, such as Wood Market, Sienny, Węglowy, Wąchany, Rybny, whose names came from the goods which were traded there, in addition to the Long Market, whose name comes from its shape. For August *Jarmarks* about 400 ships from different countries used to come to the port of Gdansk. In the past one could buy there gingerbread from Torun, Kashubian ceramics, Czech glass, Eastern furs and carpets, English cloth, Gypsy pots, Gdansk vodka and amber. Apart from merchants, numerous circus performers, jugglers, acrobats and theater groups gathered there.



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Photo: interia.pl



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All Saints' Day

Although initially connected with Christianity, nowadays this holiday is celebrated by the majority of Poles – including atheists and followers of different religions. As its name suggests, All Saints' Day originated as the day when all Church saints are to be celebrated as examples for those still walking the Earth.

All Saints' also forms another holiday cluster. Although **November 1st** is a public holiday, many additionally take the next day off, November 2, for All Souls' Day (Zaduszki). Here, the deceased are remembered. Both days are often used by Poles to travel, reconnect with their living family members and remember the deceased loved ones by going to cemeteries.

November 1st, is accompanied by the tradition of decorating cemeteries with thousands of glowing candles. On this night, the worlds of the living and the dead come closer to one another. Poles honour their deceased family and friends with memories, church services, and the flickering candles that brighten graveyards all over Poland. All Saints' Day, observed on November 1st, is an important holiday celebrated, notably, in Poland and Lithuania. Cemeteries are visited and candles and flowers placed on graves as the living say prayers for the deceased. The nature of the holiday does not dictate that only family members' graves are decorated; old and forgotten graves and the graves of strangers are also visited. On a national level, the graves of important figures and military tombs are honoured.



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Photo: Sanktuarium Świętej Rodziny

Candles in colourful glass jars that number in the thousands light up cemeteries on All Saints' Day, and a day that might be otherwise considered a mournful affair is transformed into one of beauty and light. Additionally, it is an opportunity for family members to bond and to remember those whom they have lost. This time may also be a time of healing: the last century in both Poland and Lithuania saw populations reduced by war, occupying regimes, and deportations and this day may be when usually silent individuals talk about their losses. Holy Mass is held for those who wish to attend church and pray for the dead.



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Families may join together for a meal, leaving an empty place with a plate filled with food and a full glass as a way of honouring those that have passed.

An interesting custom, especially in the eastern parts of old Poland, was lighting large bonfires. The main places for bonfires were crossroads or convenient places near cemeteries. Souls wandering in the world were supposed to warm themselves by the fires before they made the long journey to the afterlife. Moreover, fire was supposed to protect people from evil spirits and ghosts. All Souls' Day bonfires were always lit on the graves of people who had died a violent death, and especially on the graves of suicides buried under cemetery walls. Nowadays bonfires are no longer lit, but lighting candles on the graves of the dead is a beautiful custom that originated from this ritual.

Nowadays, the old beliefs, witchcraft, customs and practices are becoming a thing of the past. Masses, prayers and eulogies (prayers combined with calling the names of the deceased), have replaced the old custom of invoking the dead. Placing flowers on graves is to remind us of the tradition of preparing food and drink for the souls of our relatives.

All Saints' Day is followed by **All Souls' Day ("Zaduszki", November 2nd)**, and it's the evening between these two days that past generations believed that the deceased would visit the living or return to their homes. In Lithuania, the day is called Vėlinės, and its history is steeped in pagan legend when feasts and ceremonies remembered those who lived before. In the past, after visiting the graves of the deceased, family members would return home together to dine on seven dishes that were "shared" with the dead souls visiting Earth.

In the Polish tradition it was customary to leave churches open on the night before All Souls' Day (1/2 Nov.). It was believed, although there are still people who believe now, that the souls of the dead gather in their parishes to celebrate mass that night. The service is celebrated by the deceased pastor of the parish. The service takes place at midnight, the hour of the spirits, at which time no one is allowed to enter the church, for they will not return to the world of the living. Until the beginning of the 20th century, it was believed that houses were visited by the souls of the dead. For this reason, doors and gates were left opened. Bread and other dishes were left on tables or windowsills, and sometimes a quart or a bottle of vodka was placed on the table. An interesting culinary custom can be found in Podlasie, where **Kisiel Owsiany** (kind of oatmeal porridge) was cooked especially for young souls, after which a full bowl was left on the table.



Halloween and All Saints Day

Although officially frowned on by Catholic Church in Poland and somewhat controversial, Halloween is also making inroads in Poland on October 31st. Celebrations are mostly in bars and clubs, although some neighbourhood trick-or-treating has reported and jack-o-lanterns spotted in residential windows. Many attribute its rising popularity to mandatory English lessons in Polish schools. Halloween is not observed in Poland or Lithuania like it is in the United States, but All Saints' Day recalls the ancient aspect of the Halloween tradition that describes how the world of the living and the world of the dead collide.

Kisiel owsiany

It is said to be one of the oldest Slavic dishes. It is known that it was already popular in the 10th century in the eastern lands along the Polish-Ruthenian border. In the past, oat *kisiel* was made by fermenting oats in water with a piece of rye bread. The starch sediment was collected from the bottom, which contains the most lactic acid bacteria, especially *Lactobacillus Plantarum*. There all the valuable by-products of fermentation are concentrated. The mild-tasting fermented starch was used by the old Slavs to thicken soups and make *kisiels*. *Kisiels* were served hot or cold. Usually with salt, butter, hemp or linseed oil. Or sweet with honey and fruit. Oat *kisiel* as a Christmas Eve dish was known in its pure version or with poppy-seed milk. In Lithuania it was served with grated sweetened poppy seeds or fruit syrups.

Ingredients:

- oatmeal
- sourdough
- water
- oil
- salt



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Put oatmeal in water, add a tablespoon of sourdough starter. Leave for 12 hours, then drain. Pour the oil into the bottom of a pot, then pour in the drained oatmeal water. Add salt and cook for about a minute, until boiling. We must obtain a uniform consistency. Pour the mixture into wet salad bowls and cool down.



Photo: Renata Reda, radio.bialystok.pl



Independence Day

The second major Polish holiday that takes place in November is Independence Day. Following the partitions of 1795, the country was divided between Austria, the Russian Empire, and the Kingdom of Prussia and ceased to exist for 123 years before re-emerging after the end of World War I in 1918. The state was rebuilt as the Second Polish Republic.

On November 11th, parades are held across Poland, and many houses and buildings as well as public transportation are decorated with Polish flags. There is also an annual Independence Run – a marathon hosted in several cities with a number of participants who often dress in the colours of the Polish flag. Over 20,000 people participated in it in Warsaw in 2018.

There is, of course, no big celebration without traditional food. On the Independence day, which coincides with the feast of St. Martin, Poles traditionally eat St. Martin's croissants *Rogale Świątomarcińskie* – a desert that originated in the city of Poznań and is at least 150 years old – but it is also a feast of roasted goose (*Gęsina Świętego Marcina*). The famous croissants are still made of rough puff pastry, filled with poppyseeds, glazed, and decorated with nuts.



St. Andrew's Day in Poland

Andrzejki, jędrzejówki, jędrzejki. Celebrated in Poland on the night from **November 29th to 30th**, on the eve of St. Andrew. With time, they have become mainly an excuse to participate in dance parties, which have little in common with their former form. The first written references to this holiday date back to the 16th century.

Even several decades ago, all Polish girls at the time of marriage knew that on St. Andrew's name day they had a chance to find out how their love life would turn out. While today we think of St. Valentine's Day as a holiday for lovers, a few decades ago St. Andrew was the patron saint of love-seeking maidens, while the patron saint of bachelors eager to get married was St. Catherine (November 4). Over time, St. Andrew's Day absorbed St. Catherine's Day, and boys began celebrating with girls.

In old Poland St. Andrew's Day was one of the most important dates on the calendar, and fortune telling on that special evening was treated with great seriousness. Large bonfires were lit around houses to ward off evil spirits, and maidens would put men's pants under their pillows to dream about their future husbands or count the rails on the fence in the hope of finding out something about their future spouses.

As the folk saying goes „*Święty Andrzej Ci ukáže, co Ci los przyniesie w darze.*” - "Saint Andrew will show you what fate will bring you as a gift."

Pouring wax

The idea is to pour hot wax on water and then find symbols in its shape and interpret them. The shadow of the wax creation on the wall may be helpful - it is easy to see and stimulates the imagination. Attention - we traditionally pour wax through a keyhole.





Photo: Mariusz Cieszewski/ AG, gazeta.pl

Shoe race

On St. Andrew's Eve we can also have a shoe race. The idea is to place the participants' left shoes in a row in a corner of the room. Then we should move them so that the last shoe "jumps" on the first place and so on until one of the shoes touches the threshold. The person who owns this shoe will be the first to get married, according to the fortune telling.

Shoe toss

Another popular fortune using footwear was the shoe toss. The participant would turn his back to the door and throw a shoe behind his head. The shoe that fell with its sole to the floor and its tip

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towards the door heralded the imminent change of marital status. Here is a practical tip: to avoid damage, be sure to replace heavy shoes with slippers.

Four cups

Under three of the four cups put: a ring, a leaf and a coin. Do not put anything under the fourth cup. Switch places between the four cups, and then choose one of them. The ring stands for love, the leaf for marriage, and the coin for wealth. You can use more than one cup and place other small items in them (e.g. a key for moving house, a sugar cube for a sweet and carefree life, etc.). If we end up with an empty cup, nothing is likely to change in the near future.

Longest peel

For this game we need to prepare apples of the same size, which the participants will then peel. Whoever manages to get the longest peel will have the longest relationship. The game can continue - each participant throws his peel behind him and in the shape in which it turns out, he can see a letter, which will be the initials of his future love.

Heart with names

Cut out two large paper hearts. On one of them write popular female names, on the other - male names. One person holds the heart while the participants pierce (from the other side, of course, so as not to see the names) the paper. The name that the participant hits with the pin will be the name of his or her future wife or husband.

Coin toss

Each participant chooses a coin of any denomination. Then he has to think of a wish and hit the coin into a bowl filled with water placed at a suitable distance (it cannot be too close or too far away). If the coin hits the bowl of water, the wish will surely come true.



Advent

Advent (Latin *adventus*) helps to prepare Poles for Christmas through fasting, prayer, and church services. During this time, a special mass, called "roraty", is held for church-goers. The mass begins just before sunrise in almost complete darkness in the church. The name "roraty" comes from the first words that begin the service, "rorate coeli," which means "heaven, drop dew" in Latin.

Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas and is a time of religious observances and prayer. Special church services mark this season, and some devout Catholics may give up their favourite food, drinking alcohol, or another vice during this time. Families also begin to prepare the home for Christmas by scrubbing the carpets, washing the windows, and deep-cleaning the house. Children in school often take part in nativity plays, known as "Jasełka".

Symbols and customs of Advent

Advent wreath - the Advent wreath, in the form of a circle, consists of Christmas tree branches on which are placed 4 candles, symbolizing the 4 Sundays of Advent. Every Sunday another candle is lit. 1st candle is the candle of peace, II of faith, III of love, IV of hope. The elements of the wreath symbolize the community waiting in hope and joy for the coming of the Lord. The meaning of each element is as follows: green branches - life, hope; candles - light, the coming Light; the form of the wreath: circle - the returning cycle of life.





Photo: czestochowskie24

Advent calendar - a special calendar used to count down the days from the first day of Advent or December 1 to Christmas Eve. The idea originated in the 19th century with German Lutherans. This custom is known and cultivated in many countries around the world in Christian families.

Advent lantern - is a kind of lamp, made in the shape of a closed quadrilateral, whose walls resemble Gothic stained glass windows with Christian symbols or biblical scenes. Candles or a small



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battery-operated bulb are placed inside the lantern. Lanterns are used to illuminate the first part of the Holy Mass, during which the lights in the church are turned off and there is symbolic darkness.

The wandering statue of the Mother of God - this custom is practiced in many Polish parishes. It consists in taking the statue of Our Lady out of the church. Most often the statue of Our Lady is received for one day. On this day, the whole family tries to celebrate the so-called "family liturgy" by singing Advent and Marian songs, reading and meditating on the Scriptures, and praying the Rosary and other prayers. The family prays as if inviting Mary into their home.

The *Roratna* candle is a symbol of the Blessed Virgin Mary who brings Christ, the true Light, to people. In churches it is placed in the chancel next to the altar or at the altar of the Mother of God. The white or blue bow with which the wreath is wrapped speaks of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Advent ligaves

Ligaves are wind instruments used to signal the beginning of Advent. Allegedly, it was supposed to refer to the angel's trumpet, whose voice was heard after the birth of Jesus. "Ligawy" were played to the four corners of the world. This custom is recalled, among others, in Siedlce, where contests of playing this instrument are organized.

Carolers, nativity scenes

One of the most popular Polish customs associated with the Christmas time is the so-called caroling. Groups of costumed people (e.g. as a devil, death, three kings, goat, turion or stork) visit farms in the village, singing carols and wishing them good luck in the New Year. This custom is practiced in many parts of the country (e.g. Podlasie). Another tradition associated with this period is the Nativity play, which originated in the Middle Ages and depicts the events associated with the birth of Jesus. As the part of Nativity play, Christmas crèche and Christmas crib are present at every church in this time period. Nowadays though, the mentioned carolers most often appear just after Christmas and visit homes in rural areas of Poland.



Santa Claus Day

“Mikolaj”, the Polish Santa, visits children on **December 6th**, during Advent church services. He brings children small gifts to reward them for good behaviour, but he may also remind them not to be naughty by including a switch with their presents. The appearance of Santa Claus (Mikołaj) happens on the night of December 5, the eve of the Feast of St. Nicholas. The feast day is a part of the Advent celebrations, which are an integral part of Polish Christmas traditions.

Although “Mikołaj” is the primary gift-giver for children in Poland, children also do receive presents on Christmas Eve as well. However, the gift-giver on Christmas Eve depends on the region of Poland – these are Baby Jesus, Santa Claus, “Gwiazdor”, “Dziadek Mróz” among the most common.

In medieval Western Europe, Saint Nicholas was considered the patron saint of children. The custom of giving gifts on St. Nicholas' Day originated in the medieval legends about his life, which became very popular through plays staged from the 10th century on December 6th.

The most famous was the tale of the three daughters, written down in the first half of the 9th century in Constantinople by the archimandrite Michael. According to it, young Nicholas, before his election as bishop, had a greedy and rich neighbour who mocked the saint's piety. God punished the neighbour and made him lose his property and fall into extreme poverty. When he could no longer support his family, he decided to sell his three daughters because no one would marry them without receiving a suitable dowry. Nicholas, after long meditation on the texts of Scripture and prayer, decided to save the girls' virtue. Three times, under the cover of darkness, he threw the dowry money for each successive sister through the window. When the neighbour had already arranged two weddings, he decided to find out where the mysterious money was coming from. He stayed awake all night and was astonished to discover that it was Nicholas, whom he despised, who was throwing the money through the window for the third time. He thanked him ashamed and decided to change his life to one in accordance with the commandments.



Christmas

The end of the annual holiday season in Poland is marked with one of the biggest celebrations of the year – Christmas. It starts on the evening of December 24th. The Christmas family dinner, called the “**Wigilia**” (sometimes the term is used to name not just the dinner, but the entire evening) does not start until the first star lights up in the sky – it symbolizes the Bethlehem star which led the three Magi to the newly born Jesus. When it is spotted, the celebrations begin. Among the first customary actions is the sharing of a wafer which comes from the traditions of the first Christians who shared bread in imitation of Jesus during the Last Supper. After that, family members exchange well wishes and sit down to the table which is usually covered with white cloth, a symbol of purity. Hay is often laid underneath the cloth it, to remind of the crèche in which Jesus was born.

Christmas (24-26 December) is a magical time in Poland during which animals are said to speak and forgiveness is offered to those who have offended. December is full of holiday events in Poland, beginning with St. Nicholas Day on December 6 and stretching all the way into the new year with the Epiphany one month later. The primary Christmas traditions, however, start with the coming of Advent and culminate with celebrations on December 24, 25, and 26.

Poland is a predominately Catholic nation, and many traditions revolve around church services, fasting, and other religious customs. Like in most parts of the world, food is an important part of the holiday and the dinner table is filled with traditional entrees. Town squares and most homes are decorated with Christmas trees, and special holiday markets pop-up around the country selling typical foods, gifts, and souvenirs.

In Poland, the traditional Christmas feast occurs on Christmas Eve, or Wigilia, a day that holds equal importance with December 25. Before the table is set, straw or hay is placed under a white tablecloth. An extra place is set for any unexpected visitor, as a reminder that the Holy family was turned away from inns in Bethlehem and that those seeking shelter are welcome on this special night.



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Photo: Polskawieś24.pl

It is the last day for the Christmas tree to be decorated. Usually the Polish Christmas tree is decorated many days before the Christmas. It can be decorated with shapes cut from gingerbread, coloured wafers, cookies, fruit, candy, straw ornaments, decorations made from eggshells, or commercially produced ornaments.

On the Christmas table, there should be 12 dishes – one for each of the apostles and each of them needs to be tried, lest a shortage of that dish happens in the upcoming year. Among the commonly

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cooked Christmas foods are the red borsch (*barszcz czerwony z uszkami*), dishes made of cabbage and mushrooms, and plenty of fish, including the absolute must have – carp (*karp*). It is believed that placing some of the carp's scales in your wallet will lead to good fortune over the next year. However, if a fish doesn't strike you as a lucky symbol, you can replace it with a poppy seed cake ("*makowiec*"), which is also lucky. Make sure there are plenty of poppies, as the belief holds that it'll bring you as much money as there are seeds on the cake.

After dinner comes a midnight Christmas Mass (*Pasterka* after the Polish word for shepherds who traditionally went to welcome the born Jesus) at one of the churches nearby (there is always a church nearby in Poland).

On the Christmas Day (**December 25th**), Poles eat a large meal, often containing meat and other foodstuffs which were considered inappropriate to be eaten the day before.

December 26th is known as "*Święty Szczepan*", or St. Stephen's Day. It continues the Christmas celebrations. Traditionally a day for consecrating grain crops, Holy Szczepan is now a day for church services, visiting with family, and singing carols ("*kolędy*").

Traditional Polish Christmas Beliefs and Superstitions

Certain beliefs and superstitions surround Christmastime in Poland, though these beliefs are often only observed for fun today. One is that animals are able to speak on Christmas Eve. Another tradition is placing straw underneath the tablecloth during dinner, which can then be used for fortune-telling.

The Christmas Spider is an old Eastern European story about a family who couldn't afford to decorate their Christmas tree, and then on Christmas morning, it was decorated in golden and silver strands from a spider's web. Families in Poland often consider it good luck to find a spider in their Christmas tree, and some even place an artificial spider decoration in hopes of good fortune.

Poles believe that no one should be alone or hungry on the Christmas evening, which is why they traditionally leave an extra spot/plate for an unknown newcomer or even invite somebody who they think might be lonely on December 24. Poles are very proud of the traditional hospitality they may extend to a stranger who turns up at their door on Christmas eve (unlikely to happen, but not



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impossible). There is a lot of debate as to the origins of this custom, but three different explanations emerge:

Pagan rite. Despite their religious beliefs, several Polish traditions are rooted in Pagan rites. The host leaves an empty chair for the deceased and sweeps it away before everyone sits at the table to excuse the soul who isn't there.

Another explanation is rooted in the New Testament. In the scriptures, the Holy Family was en route to Nazareth when the Virgin Mary went into labour, forcing the family to find shelter. Consequently, Catholic Poles believe one must always be ready to accept an unexpected guest, never turning away anyone in need.

The last explanation is more recent. In 1863, there was an uprising triggered by the forced enlistment of Polish men into the Russian Army. Those caught rebelling were deported to Siberia. The Poles leave the chair open in the hope that these brave men would return.

In addition to mentioned above, Christmas traditions include:

Hay under the tablecloth - the custom originates from pagan times. According to Christian tradition, the hay symbolizes the birth of Jesus in poverty.

Wafer - the act of breaking the wafer symbolizes the mutual devotion of one person to another and the desire to share successes with loved ones. Sharing the wafer is meant to bring people together.

Christmas candle - the light of the candle is supposed to be a sign of invitation to Mary and Joseph's family so that little Jesus could be born in every home.

Christmas tree - is a Christian symbol to remind us of Adam and Eve and the fall and redemption of the human race. Placing gifts under the Christmas tree, is meant to signify the imitation of goodness.



Latvia

The Solar Year in Latvian Tradition

The Solar Year reflects the eternal passage of flourishing, decline and renewal in life. As ancient Latvians were engaged mainly in growing crops, they used the Solar Year as the basis for their time-reckoning system.

The ancient Latvian wisdom has been preserved in folk songs (dainas) which are proof of our ancestors' high level of understanding of the solar rhythm. The period between two seasons with the same name is called a Solar year. The Solar year or cycle is caused by the Earth's rotation around the sun.

The four main seasonal festivals, recognized as the Annual Festivals, correspond to the astronomical solstices and equinoxes:

Winter Solstice – Ziemassvētki (Winter Festival),

Vernal Equinox – Lieldienas (Big Day),

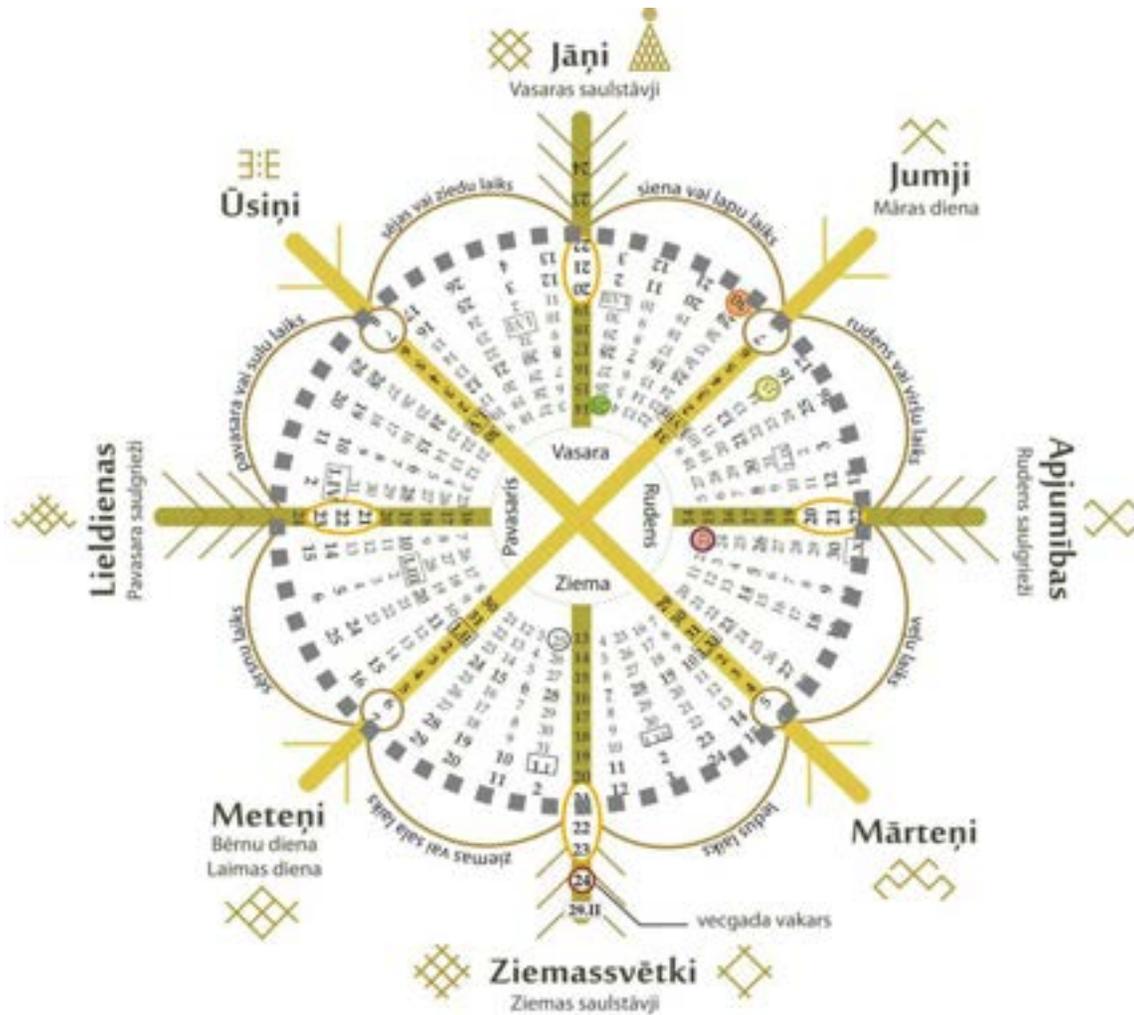
Summer Solstice – Jāņi (Midsummer),

Autumnal Equinox – Miķeļi (Harvesting festival).

The Latvian descriptive elements of writing used in the calendar are symbols of time which bear a decorative tradition and a tradition corresponding to the solar cycle. Furthermore, the structure of every symbol, its constituent basic elements of composition, also store mythological content and meaning. It was important to find regularity, for were created, in which every time symbol, like an acknowledgment, 'rises' from previous one and, naturally changing, 'transforms' into the next one.. All symbols jointly are pervaded by the idea of the presence of the light and of the solar path in the rhythm of the year.



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The Latvian Solar Year



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Easter

Latvians call the Easter period „Lieldienas”, which means "The Great Day", "Great Days". According to folk tradition, Easter has arrived when the day has become longer than the night for the first time that year.

For Latvians, Easter was a time when the barn was already emptied and the spring works began. In the past, through ritual activities, farmers tried to revive the land and ensure its fertility.

One of the most characteristic Easter traditions today is egg painting and cooking. It is not known how old egg painting is, but it is one of the oldest Easter traditions. The most common and traditional way to paint eggs is to boil them in the peel, then the eggs get a golden brown colour.

Many traditions and games, such as egg fights, are associated with eggs during this festival. The egg is a symbol of the sun. Eggs have long been considered a magical tool for life and fertility, and also the embodiment of animal fertility.

Like egg painting, swinging is one of the main traditions at Easter. Swinging is a magical ritual that symbolically mimics the swinging and dancing of the sun on Easter morning. A good swing ensures that in summer there will be no bites, mosquitoes and snakes. In old times, the owner of the house was first swung in the swing. The swinging continued all three holidays and often a week after Easter. The swing was usually dismantled and burned so that the witches had nowhere to swing.

It is believed that on Easter morning one must get up early to see the sun rise and bathe in the running water against the sun. It is a magical ritual of purification that helps to get vitality, bright mind, health and beauty.

Beliefs also say that whoever gets up on Good Friday morning after sunrise sleeps like a bear that year. It is also believed that at least 13 cranberries should be eaten before Easter in the morning, because then the cheeks will be pink. The dreams seen on Easter night come true.



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Photo: Latvian Institute



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Photo: Ethnographic Open-Air Museum of Latvia



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Midsummer (Jāņi)

When the day is longest and the night is shortest, at the summer solstice, Latvians celebrate Līgo evening (June 23) and Jāņi day (June 24), staying awake around bonfires or burning barrels raised high on poles.

When German crusaders arrived on the shores of the Baltic Sea in the 12th century, they were taken aback by the scale of the festivities taking place around the bonfires on the night of Jāņi. The celebration used to take place during the longest day and the shortest night of the year, June 21. The Christianization of Latvia moved the date of Jāņi day forward to the June 24, the St. John Day.

In the Latvian farmer's calendar, Jāņi marks the first haymaking and follows the beginning of astronomical summer. Traditions include the conclusion of spring labours, weeding, tending flowerbeds, learning folk songs, cleaning and tidying the home, making a special Jāņi cheese in the shape of the solar disk, brewing beer, baking pīrāgi (pies), and on the day preceding the festivities – decorating the farmstead with birch boughs, bouquets of flowers, garlands, oak branches and wreaths.

Of the seasonal ancient Latvian celebrations, the summer solstice has most fully retained traditional activities that include preparations awaiting the great day. Scholars of religion connect Jāņi to solar cults and fertility rites. The birch boughs and flowers, the gathering of specific, magical plants, the dancing and the sexual symbolism in folk songs make the erotic content of the festival clear.

During the Līgo evening, fires are lit and burned from sunset till next morning. This practice reflects the belief that light from the fires will transmit to the next solar year. Jumping over the fire is said to bring best of luck and wellbeing through the coming year.

Singing has a central place in the celebration. Jāņi is the most loved Latvian holiday. Līgo is also known as the Day of Grasses as the brief summer with different plants is at the peak of bloom.

Jānis used to be the most popular Latvian personal name for almost 100 years (1918-2000). In the Līgo evening everyone called Jānis wears a wreath made from oak leaves, whereas women and girls wear wreaths made from flowers, grasses and herbs.

Currants are called "jāņogas" ("berries of Jānis") in Latvian, as they mature around Midsummer.



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Traditional wreaths made of flowers, plants and oak leaves
Photo: Ethnographic Open-Air Museum of Latvia



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Jāņi fire and decorations from plants
Photo: Latvian Institute

Jāņi Cheese

Beer and Jāņi cheese are an integral part of Midsummer celebrations.

Jāņi cheese (Jāņu siers) or Midsummer cheese is fresh sour-milk cheese produced from milk and curds using a traditional method of preparation. It has a clean, lactic-acid flavour and aroma, and the pronounced associated flavour and aroma of caraway seeds. The cheese is moderately salty.

Jāņi cheese is made in the form of a low cylinder, with a diameter of 8-30 cm and a height of 4-6 cm. The colour of the cheese ranges from pale yellow to yellow.

The round shape of Jāņi cheese is significant and symbolic. Round-shaped foods are usually eaten at the time of the summer solstice as a symbolic representation of the sun. Likewise, the shape and colour of Jāņi cheese is associated with the symbolic representation of the sun. At summer solstice feasts, Jāņi cheese embodied both the creative energy of the sun and the plentiful and successful yield of dairy products. The roundness of Jāņi cheese symbolises the sun and the world; by cutting the cheese into pieces, each person takes a part of the sun's energy.

The name Jāņi cheese being given to the cheese eaten during the summer solstice celebrations (Jāņi) is recorded in Latvian folk-songs called Latvju dainas. In many of the folk-songs contained in Krišjāņa Barons' work Latvju dainas (1894–1915) the tying of Jāņi cheese is presented as a special ritual: the cheese is wrapped so the knot is in the centre of the cheese round, and the folds of the fabric are arranged in such a way that even impressions are created in the surface of the cheese. The knot and the area around it creates the 'Jāņu siera viducītis' [middle of the Jāņi cheese] and the folds leave an impression resembling the sun's rays. The tying gives the cheese its shape, likened to a 'round wheel'. This process is described in all literary descriptions of the preparation of Jāņi cheese.

Jāņi cheese is prepared as follows: milk is curdled using only the yeast of lactic acid bacteria or curds. These are heated to remove the whey, and butter or cream, eggs, salt and caraway seeds are added to what is left. The resulting mass is heated and intensively stirred until a homogeneous consistency is obtained.

In 2015, Jāņi cheese was granted the entry to the EC's Traditional Speciality Guaranteed register.



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The following ingredients are required to produce 10 kg of Jāņi cheese:

28-50 litres of skimmed milk,

10-13 kg of skimmed milk curds,

1,0-1,2 kg of butter (82 % fat) or 2,5 l cream (35 % fat),

0,6-1,0 kg of egg pulp (without shells),

40-50 g of caraway seeds,

100-120 g of cooking salt.

Food colouring (beta-carotene) may also be added.

Preparation method:

The milk is heated in a pan (to 85-90 °C) but not boiled.

The crumbled curd is added to the hot milk. Stirring continues until the mixture is heated to 65-85 °C. Stirring continues until the milk has completed curdled and the whey begins to separate.

During the heating process the curds change in structure and become slightly stretchy.

The whey is drained off.

The cheese mass is placed back into the pan. The egg mix, butter or cream, caraway seeds and salt are added and the mixture heated to 65-70 °C (stirring continues) until the cheese mass comes away from the sides of the pan (approximately 15-30 minutes) and becomes a homogeneous mass with a slightly elastic consistency.

The cheese mass is placed into moulds and left in a cool place for at least 1-2 hours. Remove the cheese from the moulds, allow to dry, and pack.

Although the demand for Jāņi cheese is highest around the summer solstice, it is produced all year round.





Photo: Latvian Institute



Dark rye bread

Dark rye bread in Latvian homes has traditionally been one of the main courses, so today it is one of the symbols of Latvian speciality. In 2014, the European Commission included "Salinātā rudzu rupjmaize" or "Sweetened brown rye bread" in the list of the protected quality products.

To bake the naturally leavened bread, the bakers use coarse rye flour. When making the dough for this bread, they pour scalding water on the flour, and what is specific - they also add a little bit of sugar. This reinforces the fermentation process providing a sweet and sour taste to the bread, which is not characteristic to rye bread baked in other countries. Also cumin is added to Latvian rye bread for flavour. The bread is baked in a very hot oven; it has a form of an elongated loaf, weighing one or more kilograms. The sweetened brown rye bread has a smooth, dark crust.

In the old days, bread was baked in every Latvian country house, using a special oven. The dark rye bread named "rupjmaize" (literally "rough bread") was baked of rye flour, the sweet-and-sour bread was baked from fine rye flour, on Saturdays people ate „karaša” - a type of bread made of barley and roughly ground wheat flour, but finely ground wheat flour was reserved for white bread which was baked for special festivities.

Making of Rupjmaize began with making the dough – for this they used a trough made of light wood. Usually, boiling water was poured over the flour; mixed with lukewarm water, yeast was supplemented by a starter kept from the previous baking. The dough was left in the trough overnight to ferment, and in the morning the kneading started, which was a hard job and took quite a long time, during which more flour and caraway seeds were added. When the dough would no longer stick to one’s hands the kneading stopped.

Once the oven was hot, the trough with the dough was put next to the oven and little loaves were shaped on the baker’s peel that was covered with a dusting of flour or maple leaves, and loaves were quickly put in the oven. The sign drawn on the top of the loaf was usually a Christian cross, but sometimes older signs were pressed into the dough, pronouncing special spells. When the baking ended, a small ball of dough was left in the trough as a starter for the next batch. Sometimes a loaf was baked with a filling: sauerkraut with meat or pilchards, or salted meat with chopped onions.



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Photo: Latvian Institute

The first piece of the freshly baked bread was given to the head of the household who had tended to the crops, whereas the children and the young girls waited for the heels. The bread cutting was started at the wider end of the loaf so that the older daughter would be married first, but also for the ears of rye to get bigger. The loaf was never left upside down, because there was the belief that the devil then can feed himself and send famine to the house.

Winter solstice (Winter Festival)

The Winter Solstice, called “Ziemassvētki”, literally the “Winter Festival”, is celebrated on the shortest day and the longest night of the year. Over the centuries old pagan traditions have blended and mixed with the Christian ones.

Christmas Eve is also called Log Night (Yule Night), when people rolled the Yule Log from one farm to another and eventually burned it. Burning of the Yule Log symbolizes the beginning of a new solar year and the Sun itself.

Other Winter Solstice traditions include going to the sauna, a nine course meal, which ensure a prosperous next year, dressing up in special costumes (iet budēļos, ķekatās, čigānos), fortune telling and giving gifts.

The fir tree has a special role; it comes from the ancestral tree of life that was brought into the house. People were gently whipped with its branches in order to have blessings, vitality, health. The fir tree is also associated with fire and light magic, combining two of our ancestral traditions – living branch and fire blessing.

Throughout the world, just like the whole Christmas, also decorating Christmas tree is related to pagan winter solstice rituals. It was not always a fir tree that was decorated - our ancestors also used to bring branches of juniper into the house.

Rīga is recognised as the birthplace of the first Christmas tree, put up and decorated as early as 1510 by some accounts. However, the fir tree as the main Christmas adornment for every family in Latvia was introduced at the beginning of the 20th century.

One of the almost mandatory dishes for the Christmas table is grey peas (pelēkie zirņi) with bacon. The tradition of cultivating grey peas in Latvia dates back to at least the 18th century. Peas, barley and beans long constituted diet staples, and they remained important up until the introduction of the potato in the 19th century. Nowadays grey peas with bacon are referred to in tourist guidebooks as a specifically Latvian dish that is worth sampling. Latvian large grey peas have been enlisted in the European Protected Designations of Origin (PDO) list since 2015.

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Christmas market in front of the Riga Cathedral (built in 1211)

Photo: Daniels Joffe, Unsplash



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Rolling the Yule Log
Photo: Ethnographic Open-Air Museum of Latvia

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Dressing up in special costumes (iet budēļos, ķekatās, čigānos),
Photo: Ethnographic Open-Air Museum of Latvia



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Grey peas

Photo: Ethnographic Open-Air Museum of Latvia



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Winter solstice decorations

The first Christmas trees were decorated with simple and beautiful edible things – nuts sprinkled with flour, apples, sugar cubes and gingerbread. Cones, paper flowers and pine splints wrapped in red threads were also used. As decorations for the fir tree's branches, colourful threads, straws, birds' eggs, fruit, vegetables, plain chips and dried flowers were used.

Especially popular was the ornament puzurs. It was made from strung straws which were enriched with other different like colourful cloths or birds' feathers. The houses were also decorated with a potato into which straws were stuck. Such a formation was called the sun (saulite).

The decorations most often were made by children who put in their love and the purity of a child's heart. That is why such creations had special energy.



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The sun (on the left) and puzurs (on the right)
Photo: Ethnographic Open-Air Museum of Latvia



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Candles' Day

Latvians have a special month, which is called the 'Candles' month'. It is February. There is also the 'Candles' day'. In the contemporary calendar it is on February 2nd, but in the distant antiquity it could have been on some Thursday night before Shrovetide or maybe the second new moon after Christmas – a day when the new moon crescent is visible in the sky.

It is one of the Māra days – Winter Māra. Among the people this day is also called: Svecaine, Grabenīca, Groninica, Wind's day (Vēja diena), Cows' day (Govju diena). Candles' day is the middle of winter and, as it is the case for all seasons, festivities, celebrations, work and rest times, it has its own songs, games, rituals and specific food. To have a good and fertile year and yourself healthy and beautiful, on Candles' day it was required to eat pork, drink beer, laugh, sing and rejoice. Girls needed to eat cranberries to have pink cheeks.

The main part on the Candles' Day, however, was making candles. Candles made on Candles' day burn bright and economical. If the candle maker is angry, then the candle burns low and crackles.

Popular belief goes like this: when candles are made and the first candle is lit, then, in order to make it burn bright, you need to laugh, whether you want to or not.

In ancient times, candles were mostly made out of sheep fat or wax. First, bomeles or wicks were cut – cotton threads the length of a candle, then dipped in molten fat or wax as many times as needed – soaked and dried, soaked and dried – until the candle was fat enough. Then the candle was ready.



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The Song and Dance Festival

The Song and Dance Celebration has been the most powerful, enduring, and all-encompassing Latvian cultural phenomenon since the 19th century. The preservation of national identity in a shifting context, bringing fresh creativity to time-tested tradition, is at the heart of a festival based upon choral singing, especially a capella. Choirs from every corner of Latvia converge in what may be the largest choir on the planet.

The traditions of the festival, passed on from generation to generation, are concentrated in a week long intensive singing where art and celebration are inseparable. Preserving these traditions and mounting the festival is a far longer, complex process with amateurs, professionals and masters working together.

The repertoire of the Song and Dance Celebration accentuates what's seen as vital to the nation's spiritual growth – nature, love for the land, and the ethics of human relations. The creation of the national costumes unique to each region, applied art, and clusters of concerts of all kinds, from sacred music to brass bands, expand the context.

The Song and Dance Celebration is the story of the national experience. The mood is not only one of song but also of keeping together. The first singers came to Riga on 26 June 1873 for the Song celebration, arriving in boats, by train, and by horse-drawn carriages to begin a tradition that would carry Latvia to independence and through the occupation to the restoration of its nationhood.

Nowadays, the Celebration, held every 5 years, brings together tens of thousands of participants from all over Latvia and worldwide.

In 2003, the Song and Dance Celebration was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.



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2018 Latvian Song and Dance Festival closing concert "On the Starry Path"

Photo: Ernests Dinka, Saeima (Latvian Parliament)



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Cemetery festivals

Cemeteries are one of the visible expressions of the Latvian cultural heritage. Over time, they have changed, but the graves received regular visitors and the tradition of their care has been sustained over several centuries.

Looking at this tradition of gravesite care, we see respect for the deceased in all times - in the 16th and 17th centuries the landlords, clergymen and other outstanding individuals were buried in cathedral arches and courtyards, whereas farmers were still buried into burial mounds even in the 18th century. Only in 1773, when Vidzeme was under Russian rule, the Governor ordered the cemeteries to be marked off by a fence or surrounding rampart. Burials in the churches or churchyards were prohibited, which explains why Vidzeme developed vast cemeteries.

Covering the grave with flowers was apparently first practiced by Herrnhutters - members of the so-called Brethren congregations around Valmiera and Cēsis at the end of the 18th century. In 1773, the citizens of Riga obtained the so-called Great Cemetery for establishing burial places outside the city limits. In 1910, the Riga City Council granted nearly 100 hectares to install a suburban cemetery in the forest. The Forest Cemetery, which is over a hundred years old, has now become a very large "city of the dead".

During the summer, from late June to early September, cemetery festivals takes place attended by the relatives, friends and neighbours of the deceased: they congregate to commemorate the dead even if they live far away and even outside Latvia. In preparation for celebrations, the cemetery is decorated with vases of flowers on the graves, candles are lit and fresh sand strewn around the graves; flowers are planted and decorative shrubs trimmed.

Latvians care for the cemetery as if it was a garden, and landscape architects recognize that the Latvian cemeteries may be considered parks of sorts.



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