

INFLUENCE OTHER COUNTRIES ON CULTURE OF HOLIDAYS IN GREAT BRITAIN

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Every nation and every country has its own traditions and customs. Traditions make a nation special. Some of them are old-fashioned and many people remember them, others are part of people's life. Some British customs and traditions are known all the world.

English traditions can be classified into several groups: traditions concerning the Englishmen's private life (child's birth, wedding, marriage, wedding anniversary); which are connected with families incomes; state traditions; national holidays, religious holidays, public festival, traditional ceremonies.

The most popular holiday in Britain is *Christmas*. Christmas has been celebrated from the earliest days of recorded history, and each era and race has pasted a colourful sheet of new customs and traditions over the old.

The Druids, for example, honoured the mistletoe in their religion and sacrificial rites. The red berry of the holly was believed to protect one against witchcraft. Ivy symbolised immortality. The Vikings introduced the Yule log which used to be burnt in honour of God Thor. The English adapted this practice for Christmas and today's (electric) Christmas candle is a holdover from baronial days.

Each year, hundreds of thousands of people all over the world send and receive Christmas cards. Most of people think that exchanging cards at Christmas is a very ancient custom but it is not right. In fact it is barely 100 years old.

A traditional feature of Christmas in Britain is the Christmas tree. Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert, brought the German tradition (he was German) to Britain. A few years after, nearly every house in Britain had one.

There is another name for Father Christmas in Britain – Santa Claus. That comes from the European name for him – Saint Nicholas. Then on Christmas Eve he visits every house. He climbs down the chimney and leaves lots of presents. Some people leave something for him, too. A glass of wine and some biscuits, for example.

In Britain the most important meal on December 25th is Christmas dinner. A twentieth-century British Christmas dinner is roast turkey with carrots, potatoes, peas, Brussels sprouts and gravy. There are sausages and bacon, too. Then, after the turkey, there's Christmas pudding. Crackers are also usual at Christmas dinner. These came to Britain from China in the nineteenth century.

Although the Christian religion gave the world *Easter* as we know it today, the celebration owes its name and many of its customs and symbols to a pagan festival called Eostre. Eostre, the Anglo-Saxon goddess of springtime and sunrise, got her name from the word east, where the sun rises. Every spring northern European peoples celebrated the festival of Eostre to honour the awakening of new life in nature. Christians related the rising of the sun to the resurrection of Jesus and their own spiritual rebirth.

Many modern Easter symbols come from pagan times. The egg, for instance, was a fertility symbol long before the Christian era. The ancient Persians, Greeks and Chinese exchanged eggs at their spring festivals. In Christian times the egg took on a new meaning

symbolizing the tomb from which Christ rose. The ancient custom of dyeing eggs at Easter time is still very popular.

The Easter bunny also originated in pre-Christian fertility lore. The rabbit was the most fertile animal our ancestors knew, so they selected it as a symbol of new life. Today, children enjoy eating candy bunnies and listening to stories about the Easter bunny, who supposedly brings Easter eggs in a fancy basket.

On October 31st British people celebrate *Halloween*. It is undoubtedly the most colourful and exciting holiday of the year. According to old beliefs, Halloween is the time, when the veil between the living and the dead is partially lifted, and witches, ghosts and other supernatural beings are about. Its origins date back to a time, when people believed in devils, witches and ghosts. Many Halloween customs are based on beliefs of the ancient Celts, who lived more than 2,000 years ago in what is now Great Britain, Ireland, and northern France.

Much later, when Christianity came to Great Britain and Ireland, the Church wisely let the people keep their old feast. But it gave it a new association when in the 9th century a festival in honour of all saints (All Hallows) was fixed on November 1. In the 11th century November 2 became All Souls' Day to honour the souls of the dead, particularly those who died during the year.

Every year the Celts celebrated the Druid festival of Samhain, Lord of the Dead and Prince of Darkness. It fell on October 31, the eve of the Druid new year. The date marked the end of summer, or the time when the sun retreated before the powers of darkness and the reign of the Lord of Death began. The Dun god took part in the holiday and received thanks for the year's harvest.

When Halloween night fell, people in some places dressed up and tried to resemble the souls of the dead. They hoped that the ghosts would leave peacefully before midnight. They carried food to the edge of town or village and left it for the spirits.

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Christian tradition included the lighting of bonfires and carrying blazing torches all around the fields. In some places masses of flaming straw were flung into the air. When these ceremonies were over, everyone returned home to feast on the new crop of apples and nuts, which are the traditional Halloween foods. On that night, people related their experience with strange noises and spooky shadows and played traditional games.

And no Halloween party is complete without at least one scary story. It helps too create an air of mystery.

Certain fortunetelling methods began in Europe hundreds of years ago and became an important part of Halloween. For example, such objects as a coin, a ring, and a thimble were baked into a cake or other food. It was believed that the person who found the coin in the cake would become wealthy. The one who found the ring would marry soon, but the person who got the thimble would never get married.

On February 14th it's Saint *Valentine's Day* in Britain. On this day, people send Valentine cards to their husbands, wives, girlfriends and boyfriends.

Valentine was a Roman priest put to death on February 14th, AD273 for refusing to give up his Christian faith. The day coincided with the Roman Spring festival, Lupercalia, held in honor of the gods Pan and Juno. Lupercalia was believed to be one of the most important festivals in the Roman calendar, and was brought to Britain by the Romans. The early Christian church frowned upon the festival but unable to prevent people from

celebrating it, linked it with the name of St. Valentine, who became the Patron Saint of Lovers.

As a result, we see that many countries at various times influenced the culture of festivals Velikobratanii. This is reflected in their very special celebrations and parades. . A lot of them have very long histories. Some are funny and some are strange. But they are all interesting. There are songs, saying and superstitions. They are all part of the British way of life.