

Bulgarian culture and traditions

Bulgaria has a rich and century-old cultural history. With the adoption of Christianity in the 9th century, Bulgarian culture became an integral part of the European culture, but nevertheless its authenticity is preserved till nowadays.

There are many Bulgarian traditions and celebrations that often get a "Really?!" reaction from foreigners. Many of them originate from pagan times or have Christian roots, and have been strictly followed for centuries. Bulgarians tend to be very proud of their traditions, culture and heritage. Their love for it is reflected in everything from food and songs to dances and jewelry.



BULGARIA PUBLIC HOLIDAYS – INFORMATION

National Day Of Bulgaria – 3th of March

On this day, remembered in history as Bulgaria Liberation Day, the people of Bulgaria pause for a tribute. The first time of marking March 3 occurred in 1880, in honor of Enthronement of Russian Emperor Tzar Alexander the Second – Tzar Osoboditel, meaning Tzar Liberator. Since 1888, March 3 has become Bulgaria's Day of Liberation and it was pronounced a National Holiday in 1978. Since 1990 the date March 3 is included in the list of Bulgaria's official holidays, according to a parliamentary decree.



Jordanov Day or cross-searching in the cold waters, celebrated on the 6th January.

It is one of the most ancient Bulgarian holidays. The original interpretation of the holiday is that on this winter day, God came down to Earth, whilst Jesus Christ was being baptised by John the Baptist in the River Jordan, and pronounced him His son.



The tradition entails a priest ritually throwing a cross into a river, lake or any water basin, and all the men wishing to be healthy over the

coming year jumping in the ice cold waters to look for it. Old beliefs dictate that if the cross freezes whilst in the water, the year will bring fertile crops.

Martyr Trifon Zarezan (Pruner) Winemaker's Day – celebrated on the 14th February.

This is a vine-dresses' day – first pruning of the vines. It is traditionally the Winemaker's Day in Bulgaria. The patron saint of the winemakers is St. Trifon the Pruner, and this celebration marks the death of the winter and the birth of the spring, via appreciating winemakers and vine growers.

The original tradition says that the more wine that flows on this day, the more generous the next harvest will be. So, drink on!

St. George's day (Gergiovden).

It is celebrated on the 6th of May, although some calendar changes brought by the Orthodox Church (all dates for celebration of the saints have been changed some time ago).

Saint George the Victorious ("Pobedonosez") was canonized by the Church because of what he has done. He is usually painted on an icon as riding a white horse, holding a lance in his hand, stabbed in the throat of a beast – the dragon ("Iamia"). According to the legend, a dragon used to attack the shepherds and their sheep and each time the dragon used to steal a sheep or a lamb. The shepherds were desperate.

Christmas Eve – 25 of December

In Bulgaria is celebrated with a meal consisting of an odd number of dishes which follows the forty-day Advent fast. This vegetarian meal includes grains, vegetables, fruits, and nuts. Walnuts are a necessary component to the Bulgarian Christmas meal. Each member of the family cracks one in order to determine their fate for the next year. If the walnut is a good one, it is said that the year will be successful. Bad luck is predicted for the person who cracks a bad walnut.



EASTER IN BULGARIA – HOW BULGARIANS CELEBRATE

As you may know, Bulgarians are Orthodox Christians, and Easter here is usually during a different time than the rest of the world. If you are

on the territory of Bulgaria during our Easter (this year it begins on the 28th of April and ends on the 2nd of May) get ready for a massive celebration – we love this holiday probably more than we love Christmas and know how to make the most of it! So let me walk you through the traditions.

Although some western companies started selling chocolate eggs lately, I doubt we, Bulgarians, will buy into this any time soon. This is simply because coloring the eggs is the time families get together and have lots and lots of fun! According to the Bible, Jesus was captured on Thursday during prayer and this is traditionally the day to color the eggs.

Before coloring the eggs you need to hard boil them first. Then take the egg paint and dissolve it in as much water as the packaging says before putting the eggs inside. Some Bulgarians add a tablespoon of vinegar, so the shell absorbs the color better.

The first egg you take out of the paint should be the red one. Before it dries up you make small cross signs with it, first on the forehead, and then on the cheeks of the children in the family, and then on each family member. The first egg should be kept next to the icon of St. Mary in the house until next year. When the following Easter comes you break last year’s egg to see it’s color: if it’s white, your family will be blessed with a beautiful year ahead. If the inside of the egg has darkened, you should be more cautious.



MYTHS, LEGENDS & FOLKLORE IN BULGARIA

Bulgarians love their folklore, the wackier the better, so if you have a weakness for wailing Balkan music, archaic pagan rituals, lots of shots of the national spirit, rakiya, and some whirling dervish dancing, Bulgaria’s probably a safer bet for fulfilling your folksy fantasies than, say, Tuscany or the south of France.

The Macedonian influences around Bansko make this a good area to start your pilgrimage into the wild world of folklore. For a crash course, head straight to Pirin Sings Folk Festival at the Predel Pass in August, bringing together thousands of musicians and dancers. Further east, in May, there’s the Gathering of the Beautiful Trakiya in Haskovo, and during September, the Thracian Festival in Madzharovo.

Bulgaria is famous for its wonderful folk music that is so noteworthy that it was sent into space by NASA. The most exciting folklore festivals in Bulgaria are those in *Koprivshtitza* and in *Predela*. Through the music, singing and dancing you will touch the unique Bulgarian folklore art. You could not forget this experience !

The National Fair of Bulgarian Folklore Art has been holding in the town of *Koprivshtitza* since 1965. Every fifth year in summer the region becomes a center of folklore celebrations. Ensembles from all ethnographic areas in Bulgaria take part in the *Koprivshtitza* festival. Concerts are played in the open near *Koprivshtitza* performing the unique Bulgarian singing and dancing on 8 stages. Only the best performers from every region participate in the fair. An interesting part of the celebrations is the review of authentic Bulgarian national costumes and exhibition of Old Bulgarian crafts. In the evening in the center of *Koprivshtitza* foreign folklore ensembles perform traditional Bulgarian folklore. The Folklore Festival in *Koprivshtitza* is among the most impressive, exciting and important events in Bulgarian cultural life. It gathers at one place the best of Bulgarian folklore and contributes for its preserving and popularizing all over the world.

BABA MARTA DAY: BULGARIA'S FIRST DAY OF SPRING

On this day, people greet each other with “Happy **Baba Marta**” and exchange adornments called “*martenitsi*” (named after the month of March). The *martenitsi* are made of white and red threads and are most often worn as bracelets or come in the shape of a pair of male and female dolls, called *Pizho* and *Penda*, which are attached to one’s garment. The *martenitsi* are worn until one sees a stork or a tree in blossom, signs associated with the arrival of spring. **Baba Marta** is a mythical figure, bringing with her the end of the winter and the start of the spring, with the adornments worn for health.



Family members, relatives, friends, and colleagues give each other white and red tassels, called *martenitsa*, with wishes of health, luck and happiness. You normally wear on your wrist. *Martenitsa* are only taken off when you see a stork or a blossoming tree, which symbolise the messengers of the arrival of the warmer season. *Martenitsas* are still often hung on fruit trees and livestock in rural areas.

THE MYSTICAL ORIGINS OF THE KUKERI

The word ‘*kuker*’ comes from Latin (‘*cuculla*,’ meaning a ‘hood’) and it denotes a folkloric ritual monster, a man dressed in an elaborate suit of fur and ribbons, feathers and beads. These *kukeri* wear carved wooden masks with the faces of beasts and birds; hanging heavy copper or bronze bells around their waists as they dance and jump in arcane rituals intended to dispel the evil spirits which might otherwise bring *loshotiya*, or *ill fortune*, to a community.

In the earliest surviving accounts of the ritual – and in those towns and villages with the most loyally observed traditions – the *kukeri* will often start their work as early as dawn. They dance through village streets delivering health, happiness and a bountiful harvest year; they visit houses too, letting themselves into family homes in order to perform blessings older than any book can remember.



In some traditions, these home invasions took place in the morning; in other communities they were performed after dark, as the story goes, so that “the sun would not catch them on the road.” I’ve spoken to Bulgarians who clearly remember such episodes from their childhood – some of them describing a visit from the *kukeri* as a singularly terrifying experience. But then, that’s the point. Evil spirits take a lot to scare, and these performers often spend all year crafting intricate, disturbing and grotesque costumes for the festival.

Bulgarian cuisine

Bulgarian cuisine *per se* is one of the tastiest in Europe, combining the rich influence of the Ottoman Empire with a peasant cooking style that uses Bulgaria's flavour-packed vegetables and herbs to the full. Anyone who has had the opportunity to sample traditional Bulgarian cuisine will tell you that there is little to rival a salad of fresh tomatoes and home-made sheep's cheese; the delicate flavours of slow-baked stews in clay ramekins; or the many and varied non-meat dishes that are available. Bulgarian home cooking is still very seasonal and although nowadays you can enjoy most dishes all year round they are still at their best when the ingredients are fresh and in season.



Bulgarians always start the meal with a salad, usually accompanied by a glass of *rakia*, the local spirit made of grapes or plums, or maybe in the summer months a *mastika*, an aniseed based spirit similar to the Greek ouzo.

SALADS

These are some of the most popular salads worth trying. Most are served without a dressing: oil and vinegar can be added to one's taste.

shopska salad: This is the Bulgarian salad, made with chopped tomatoes, cucumber, covered in grated sirene (salty sheep or cow's cheese) and parsley. Sometimes it also includes fresh or baked peppers and onion.

snezhanka or *mlechna salata*: cucumber finely chopped in strained yogurt, with garlic and crushed walnuts. Sometimes in the winter months, pickled gherkins are used as a substitute for the rather expensive and watery cucumbers.



chushki salad: freshly roasted peppers, skinned and marinated with oil, slivers of garlic and plenty of fresh parsley.

kyopoulu: aubergines are roasted whole, the flesh is then scooped out and blended with a couple of roasted and skinned peppers, plenty of fresh garlic and parsley and a little oil.

turshiya: a winter salad of pickled vegetables, including green tomatoes, cauliflower, carrots and peppers

russka salata: another winter favourite with small chunks of potato, carrots and gherkins in mayonnaise.

STARTERS

A hot starter may follow: this could be braised offal, such as liver or chicken hearts, or even fried brains, but if like most foreigners you squirm at the thought, do not worry there are plenty of delicious vegetarian options that can also substitute a main course.

chushki byurek: a pepper stuffed with cheese and herbs and fried in breadcrumbs.

podlucheni tikvichki: fried courgette slices covered with a garlicky yoghurt and dill sauce.

sirene po shopski: white cheese baked in a ceramic pot, topped with an egg and chilli pepper.

mish mash: scrambled eggs with tomatoes, red peppers and sirene.

surmi: either stuffed cabbage or vine leaves, which can be with meat or vegetarian.

pulneni chushki: stuffed peppers, usually with mince meat and rice, often served with a Bechamel sauce.

Culture of the Czech Republic

Festivities and traditions

Hromnice

The day of Hromnice is an important day for Czech weather-related folklore. It falls on February 2nd and it's based on the ancient Celtic tradition. The Czech word Hromnice is derived from sanctified "hromnice" candles that were lit on the night of February 2nd if there was a thunderstorm. (thunder = hrom)
The weather on Hromnice is a sign of how long winter will linger.



St. Joseph's Day (Den Svatého Josefa), March



The Czech St. Joseph's Day is a more subdued version of the Irish St. Patrick's Day and is celebrated around the same time in March every year.

The Burning of the Witches, April 30

On the evening of April 30th, Czechs gather to build a bonfire and prepare an effigy of the witch that kept winter around so long. Czechs used to believe that the power of witches would weaken as the weather got warmer. So they thought that if they made something that looked like a witch and burned it, they could finally get rid of the cold weather.

May 1: The Day of Love

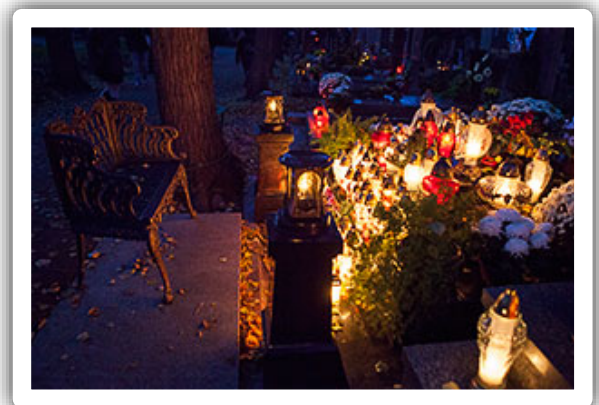
May 1st is a day devoted to lovers and the Czech romantic poet Karel Hynek Mácha

November 2: All Souls' Day

Czechs visit cemeteries to remember and pay respects to their deceased loved ones.

December 5: St. Nicholas Tradition

St. Nicholas Day, an exciting holiday for children, reminds us that Christmas is not far.



Food

Czech cuisine (Czech: česká kuchyně) has both influenced and been influenced by the cuisines of surrounding countries. Many of the cakes and pastries that are popular in Central Europe originated within Czechia. Contemporary Czech cuisine is more meat-based than in previous periods; the current abundance of farmable meat has enriched its presence in regional cuisine. Traditionally, meat has been reserved for once-weekly consumption, typically on weekends. The body of Czech meals typically consists of two or more courses; the first course is traditionally soup, the second course is the main dish, and the third course can include supplementary

courses, such as dessert or compote (kompot). In the Czech cuisine, thick soups and many kinds of sauces, both based on stewed or cooked vegetables and meats, often with cream, as well as baked meats with natural sauces (gravies), are popular dishes.



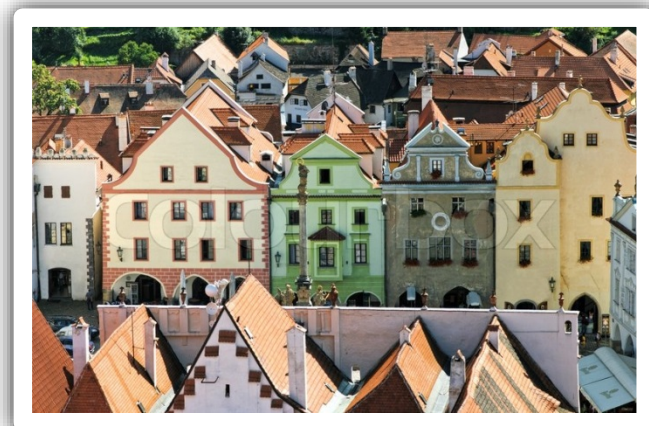
Music

Music is the most popular form of art in the Czech Republic and there is even a saying, "Co Čech, to muzikant", which means something like "Every Czech is a musician".

Music in this area has its roots in sacred music from more than a thousand years ago. The oldest recorded song from this territory is the hymn Hospodine, pomiluj ny ("Lord, Have Mercy on Us"), dating from the turn of the 11th century

Architecture

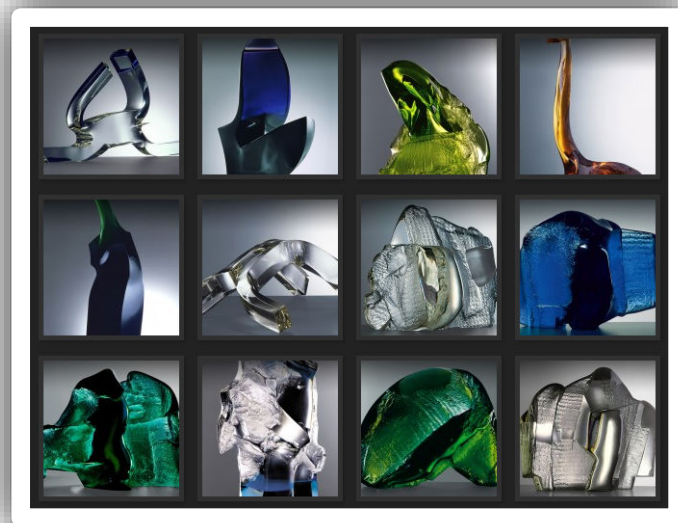
Most houses are constructed of cinder blocks or bricks and the rooms tend to be quite small.



Art

The Czech Republic is known worldwide for their outstanding art glass and crystal. Each piece is individually made, mouth blown and decorated. Art glass collectors value glass made by master Czech glass blowers in the Bohemian region of the Czech Republic.

Czech literature is the literature written in the Czech language. The earliest literary works written in Czech date to the 14th century. Modern literature may be divided into the periods of national awakening in the 19th century; the avantgarde of the interwar period; the years under Communism and the Prague Spring; and the literature of the post-Communist Czech Republic.



Theatre

Theatre of the Czech Republic has rich tradition in all genres, including drama, opera, ballet and dance, puppet theatre, black light theatre etc.

Culture of Turkey



The culture of Turkey combines a heavily diverse and heterogeneous set of elements that have been derived from the various cultures of the Eastern Mediterranean (West Asian) and Central Asian region and to a lesser degree, Eastern European, and Caucasian traditions. Many of these traditions were initially brought together by the Ottoman Empire, a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state.

During the early years of the republic, the government invested a large amount of resources into fine arts such as paintings, sculpture and architecture. This was done as both a process of modernization and of creating a cultural identity. Because of the different historical factors defining the Turkish identity the culture of Turkey combines clear efforts of modernization and Westernization undertaken in varying degrees since the 1800s with a simultaneous desire to maintain traditional religious and historical values.

People

Upon the fall of the empire after World War I the Turkish Republic adapted a unitary approach, which forced all the different cultures within its borders to mix with each other with the aim of producing a national and cultural identity. This mixing, instead of producing cultural homogenization, instead resulted in many shades of grey as the traditional Muslim cultures of Anatolia collided with the cosmopolitan modernity of Istanbul and the wider West.

Political, legal, religious, cultural, social, and economic policy changes were designed to convert the new Republic of Turkey into a secular, modern nation-state. These changes were implemented under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. As a result, Turkey is one of the most Westernized majority-Muslim nations.



Wearing western style hats was an important

aspect of the modernization process.



Members of the Bayar cabinet wearing a white tie and top hat. The second president of Turkey İsmet İnönü is on the far right.

Literature

Turkish literature is the collection of written and oral texts composed in the Turkish language, either in its Ottoman form or in less exclusively literary forms, such as that spoken in the Republic of Turkey today. Traditional examples for Turkish folk literature include stories of Karagöz and Hacivat, Keloğlan, İncili Çavuş and Nasreddin Hoca, as well as the works of folk poets such as Yunus Emre and Aşık Veysel. The Book of Dede Korkut and the Epic of Koroğlu have been the main elements of the Turkish epic tradition in Anatolia for several centuries.

The two primary streams of Ottoman literature were poetry and prose.

The Tanzimat reforms of 1839–1876 brought changes to the language of Ottoman written literature, and introduced previously unknown Western genres, primarily the novel and the short story. Many of the writers in the Tanzimat period wrote in several different genres simultaneously: for instance, the poet Namık Kemal also wrote the important 1876 novel *İntibâh* (Awakening), while the journalist İbrahim Şinasi is noted for writing, in 1860, the first modern Turkish play, the one-act comedy "Şair Evlenmesi" (The Poet's Marriage). Most of the roots of modern Turkish literature were formed between the years 1896 and 1923. Broadly, there were three primary literary movements during this period: the Edebiyyât-ı Cedîde (New Literature) movement; the Fecr-i Âtî (Dawn of the Future) movement; and the Millî Edebiyyât (National Literature) movement. The Edebiyyât-ı Cedîde (New Literature) movement began with the founding in 1891 of the magazine *Servet-i Fünûn* (Scientific Wealth), which was largely devoted to progress (both intellectual and scientific) along the Western model. Accordingly, the magazine's literary ventures, under the direction of the poet Tevfik Fikret, were geared towards creating a Western-style "high art" in Turkey.



Karagöz and Hacivat are the lead characters of the traditional Turkish shadow play, popularized during the Ottoman period.

Poetry

Poetry is the most dominant form of literature in modern Turkey.

The folk poetry was strongly influenced by the Islamic Sunni and Shi'a traditions.

Much of the poetry and song of the aşık/ozan tradition, being almost exclusively oral until the 19th century, remains anonymous. There are, however, a few well-known aşıks from before that time whose names have survived together with their works: the aforementioned Köroğlu (16th century); Karacaoğlan (1606?–1689?), who may be the best-known of the pre-19th century aşıks; Dadaloğlu (1785?–1868?), who was one of the last of the great aşıks before the tradition began to dwindle somewhat in the late 19th century; and several others. The aşıks were essentially minstrels who travelled through Anatolia performing their songs on the bağlama, a mandolin-like instrument whose paired strings are considered to have a symbolic religious significance in Alevi/Bektashi culture. Despite the decline of the aşık/ozan tradition in the 19th century, it experienced a significant revival in the 20th century thanks to such outstanding figures as Aşık Veysel Şatıroğlu (1894–1973), Aşık Mahzuni Şerif (1938–2002), Neşet Ertaş (1938–2012), and many others.

Ottoman Divan poetry was a highly ritualized and symbolic art form. From the Persian poetry that largely inspired it, it inherited a wealth of symbols.

The first radical step away from this trend was taken by Nâzım Hikmet, who—during his time as a student in the Soviet Union from 1921 to 1924—was exposed to the modernist poetry of Vladimir Mayakovsky and others, which inspired him to start writing verse in a less formal style.

Another revolution in Turkish poetry came about in 1941 with the publication of a small volume of verse preceded by an essay and entitled Garip (meaning both "miserable" and "strange"). The authors were Orhan Veli Kanık (1914–1950), Melih Cevdet Anday (1915–2002), and Oktay Rifat (1914–1988). Explicitly opposing themselves to everything that had gone in poetry before, they sought instead to create a popular art, "to explore the people's tastes, to determine them, and to make them reign supreme over art".

To this end, and inspired in part by contemporary French poets like Jacques Prévert, they employed not only a variant of the free verse introduced by Nâzım Hikmet, but also highly colloquial language, and wrote primarily about mundane daily subjects and the ordinary man on the street. The reaction was immediate and polarized: most of the academic establishment and older poets vilified them, while much of the Turkish population embraced them wholeheartedly.



Fazıl Hüsni Dağlarca was one of the most prolific Turkish poets of the Turkish Republic with more than 60 collections of his poems published, laureate of the Struga Poetry Evenings Golden Wreath Award.

Architecture

Early architecture (1299–1437)

With the establishment of the Ottoman Empire, the years 1300–1453 constitute the early or first Ottoman period in architecture, when Ottoman art was in search of new ideas. This period witnessed three types of mosques: tiered, single-domed and subline-angled mosques. The Hacı Özbek Mosque (1333) in İznik, the first important center of Ottoman art, is the first example of an Ottoman single-domed mosque.

Bursa period (1326–1437)

The domed architectural style evolved from Bursa and Edirne. The Ulu Cami (Holy Mosque) in Bursa was the first Seljuk mosque to be converted into a domed one.

The buildings constructed in Istanbul during the period between the Turkish conquest of the city in 1453 and the construction of the Istanbul Bayezid II Mosque are also considered works of the early period. Among these are the Fatih Mosque (1470), Mahmut Paşa Mosque, the tiled palace and Topkapı Palace. The Ottomans integrated mosques into the community and added soup kitchens, theological schools, hospitals, Turkish baths and tombs.

Classical period (1437–1703)

During the classical period, mosque plans changed to include inner and outer courtyards. The inner courtyard and the mosque were inseparable. The master architect of the classical period, Mimar Sinan, was born in 1492 in Kayseri and died in Istanbul in the year 1588. Sinan started a new era in world

architecture, creating 334 buildings in various cities. Mimar Sinan's first important work was the Şehzade Mosque, completed in 1548. His second significant work was the Süleymaniye Mosque and the surrounding complex, built for Suleiman the Magnificent. The Selimiye Mosque in Edirne was built during the years 1568-74, when Sinan was in his prime as an architect.

Westernization period (1703–1876)

During the reign of Ahmed III (1703–1730) and under the impetus of his grand vizier İbrahim Paşa, a period of peace ensued. Due to the close relations between the Ottoman Empire and France, Ottoman architecture began to be influenced by the Baroque and Rococo styles that were popular in Europe. Interestingly, a style that was very similar to Baroque was developed by the Seljuk Turks, according to a number of academics.

Tulip period (1703–1757)

Beginning with this period, the upper class and the elites in the Ottoman Empire started to use the open and public areas frequently. The traditional, introverted manner of the society began to change. Fountains and waterside residences such as the Aynalıkavak Kasrı became popular.

First Ziraat Bank Headquarters (1925–29) in Ankara designed by Giulio Mongeri is an important symbol of the First National Architectural Movement.



Designed by Şekip Akalın, Ankara Central Station (1937) is a notable art deco design of its era.



Ankara Opera House, designed by Şevki Balmumcu (1933–34) and renovation by Paul Bonatz (1946–47).



Anıtkabir designed by Emin Halid Onat and Ahmet Orhan Arda (1944–53)

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Istanbul University Faculty of Science and Faculty of Literature Buildings (1944–52) designed by Sedad Hakki Eldem and Emin Onat



Skycrapers in Levent district of Istanbul



Isbank Tower 1 (1995–2000) in Levent district of Istanbul



Cinema

Turkish film directors have won numerous prestigious awards in the recent years. Nuri Bilge Ceylan won the Best Director Award at the 2008 Cannes Film Festival with the film *Üç Maymun*. This was the fourth time that Ceylan received an award at Cannes, following the awards for the film *Uzak* (which was also nominated for the Golden Palm) at the festival of 2003 and 2004, and the film *İklimler* (also nominated for the Golden Palm) at the 2006 Cannes Film Festival. These three films, along with the other important works of Ceylan such as *Kasaba* (1997) and *Mayıs sıkıntısı* (1999) have also won awards at the other major international film festivals.

More recently, Semih Kaplanoğlu won the Golden Bear at the 60th Berlin International Film Festival with his *Honey* (2010 film); the third and final installment of the "Yusuf Trilogy", which includes *Egg and Milk*. This was the second time a Turkish film wins the award; first one being *Susuz Yaz* by Metin Erksan in 1964.

Turkish film director Fatih Akın, who lives in Germany and has dual Turkish-German citizenship, won the Golden Bear Award at the 2004 Berlin Film Festival with the film *Head-On*.

Another famous Turkish film director is Ferzan Özpetek, whose films like *Hamam* (1997), *Harem suaré* (1999), *Le Fate Ignoranti* (2001), *La finestra di fronte* (2003), *Cuore Sacro* (2005) and *Saturno contro* (2007) won him international fame and awards.

Sports

The traditional Turkish national sport has been the Yağlı güreş (Oiled Wrestling) since Ottoman times. The annual international yağlı güreş (oiled wrestling) tournament that's held in Kırkpınar near Edirne is the oldest continuously running, sanctioned sporting competition in the world, having taken place every year since 1362.

The most popular sport in Turkey is football. Turkey's top teams include Fenerbahçe, Galatasaray and Beşiktaş. In 2000, Galatasaray cemented its role as a major European club by winning the UEFA Cup and UEFA Super Cup. Two years later the Turkish national team finished third in the 2002 FIFA World Cup held in Japan and South Korea, while in 2008 the national team reached the semi-finals of the UEFA Euro 2008 competition.

Turkish national basketball team won the silver medal in the 2010 FIBA World Championship.

Other mainstream sports such as basketball and volleyball are also popular. Turkey hosted the 2010 FIBA World Championship international basketball tournament and reached the final. The men's national basketball team finished second in Eurobasket 2001; while Efes Pilsen S.K. won the Korac Cup in 1996, finished second in the Saporta Cup of 1993, and made it to the Final Four of Euroleague and Suproleague in 2000 and 2001.

Women's volleyball teams such as Eczacıbaşı, Vakıfbank Güneş Sigorta, and Fenerbahçe Acıbadem have been the most successful by far in any team sport, winning numerous European championship titles and medals.

Motorsports have become popular recently, especially following the inclusion of the Rally of Turkey to the FIA World Rally Championship calendar in 2003, and the inclusion of the Turkish Grand Prix to the Formula One racing calendar in 2005. Other important annual motorsports events which are held at the Istanbul Park racing circuit include the MotoGP Grand Prix of Turkey, the FIA World Touring Car Championship, the GP2 Series and the Le Mans Series. From time to time Istanbul and Antalya also host the Turkish leg of the F1 Powerboat Racing championship; while the Turkish leg of the Red Bull Air Race World Series, an air racing competition, takes place above the Golden Horn in Istanbul. Surfing, snowboarding, skateboarding, paragliding, and other extreme sports are becoming more popular every year.

Turkey hosted the 2005 Summer Universiade in İzmir and the 2011 Winter Universiade in Erzurum.



An Oil wrestling tournament in Istanbul.
This has been the national sport of Turkey since Ottoman times.

Cuisine

Turkish cuisine inherited its Ottoman heritage which could be described as a fusion and refinement of Turkic, Arabic, Greek, Armenian and Persian cuisines. Turkish cuisine also influenced these cuisines and other neighbouring cuisines, as well as western European cuisines. Ottomans fused various culinary traditions of their realm with influences from Middle Eastern cuisines, along with traditional Turkic elements from Central Asia such as yogurt. The Ottoman Empire indeed created a vast array of technical specialities. It can be observed that various regions of the Ottoman Empire contain bits and pieces of the vast Ottoman dishes. Taken as a whole, Turkish cuisine is not homogenous. Aside from common Turkish specialities which can be found throughout the country, there are also region-specific specialities. The Black Sea region's cuisine (northern Turkey) is based on corn and anchovies. The southeast—Urfa, Gaziantep and Adana—is famous for its kebabs, mezes and dough-based desserts such as baklava, kadayıf and künefe. Especially in the western parts of Turkey, where olive trees are grown abundantly, olive oil is the major type of oil used for cooking.

The cuisines of the Aegean, Marmara and Mediterranean regions display basic characteristics of Mediterranean cuisine as they are rich in vegetables, herbs and fish. Central Anatolia is famous for its pastry specialities such as keşkek (kashkak), mantı (especially of Kayseri) and gözleme.

The name of specialities sometimes includes the name of a city or a region (either in Turkey or outside). This suggests that a dish is a speciality of that area, or may refer to the specific technique or ingredients used in that area. For example, the difference between Urfa kebab and Adana kebab is the use of garlic instead of onion and the larger amount of hot pepper that kebab contains.



Turkish Delight

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Spain

Spanish culture is widely known for Flamenco music and dance, bullfights, fantastic beaches and lots of sunshine. But what is Spain known for? It has much more to offer than that. It is - and has been for thousands of years, one of the cultural centers of Europe.



Spain has an extraordinary artistic heritage. The dominant figures of the Golden Age were the Toledo-based artists El Greco and Diego Velázquez. Francisco de Goya emerged in the 18th century as Spain's most prolific painter and he produced some wonderfully unflattering portraits of royalty. The art world in the early 20th century was influenced by a remarkable group of Spanish artists: Pablo Picasso, Juan Gris, Joan Miró and Salvador Dalí, ambassadors of the artistic culture in Spain.

Spain's architecture ranges from prehistoric monuments in Minorca in the Balearic Islands, to the Roman ruins of Merida and Tarragona, the decorative Lonja in Seville, Mudéjar buildings, Gothic cathedrals, castles, fantastic modernist monuments and Gaudí's intricate fabulist sculptures in Barcelona. They are all representative of the culture of Spain.

Another example of **culture in Spain** is the invention of the Spanish guitar, which was invented in

Andalusia in the 1790's when a sixth string was added to the Moorish lute. It gained its modern shape in the 1870's. Spanish musicians have taken the humble guitar to dizzying heights of virtuosity and none more so than *Andrés Segovia* (1893-1997), who established classical guitar as a genre. Flamenco, music rooted in the *cante jondo* (deep song) of the *gitanos* (gypsies) of Andalusia, is experiencing a revival. *Paco de Lucia* is the best known flamenco guitarist internationally.



Spanish food is often recognised as one of the top cuisines in the world, and some traditional Spanish dishes and recipes date

hundreds of years. Food has become as integral to Spain as its rich and tumultuous history, with each region of Spain – once a collection of numerous, distinct kingdoms – boasting their own unique cuisines and flavours.

Each regional speciality in Spain is worth trying, and many of the top Spanish restaurants are known by the different regions they come from. In the main Spanish cities you can find Basque, Galician, Asturian and Valencian (paella) restaurants, to name but a few of the renowned regions for local food specialities.

In bars you'll quickly find the usual top Spanish tapas all around the country, for example olives, Manchego cheese, *tostadas con tomate* (grated or scratched tomato on Spanish bread), *pinxtos* (Basque-style, mini sandwiches) or a plate of Spanish *bravas* (fried potato with spicy tomato sauce). While Spain's tapas are a gourmet exploration in itself, here are some more top Spanish foods you have to try.

Spanish Traditions:

Piñatas

Quince Años

Carnival

Posadas

Nochebuena

Misa del Gallo

Reyes Magos

and other...



30 Facts about Spain

The Kingdom of Spain, as it's officially known, is the second largest country in the EU – with an area of 505,955 square kilometres, Spain covers about 85 percent of the Iberian Peninsula, which it shares with Portugal.



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Spain was once a number of separate kingdoms with different languages – which were unified in the 15th century after the marriage of two Catholic monarchs Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile. These kingdoms became the basis for many of the different regions in modern Spain. Today, there are 17 autonomous regions (15 on the mainland and the Balearic and Canary Islands), and two autonomous enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in North Africa.

Spanish is the second most widely spoken language in the world – with more than 406 million people worldwide speaking Spanish, it comes only after Chinese. Back home, while Castilian Spanish is the official language, in Catalonia, the Basque country and Galicia, the regional languages of Catalan, Basque and Galician all have official status.

Nudity is legal in Spain – some say all the better to enjoy the country’s mainly Mediterranean-temperate climate with its hot dry summers, mild, rainy winters and more than 3,000 hours of sunlight a year. Spain also had the youngest marrying age in Europe before it changed the legal age from 14 to 16 years in 2015.

The population of just under 47 million is the sixth largest in Europe – with more than three-quarters living in urban areas. Around six million people live in Madrid and five million in Barcelona – both cities have more inhabitants than the entire populations of Ireland or New Zealand. **Spain has the fourth highest life expectancy of all the OECD countries** – with a life expectancy of 82 years, it comes after Switzerland, Italy and Japan, and ranks 15th in the world. Spanish women live longer than men: 85 compared to 79 years.

The United Nations projects that Spain will be the world’s oldest country by 2050 – with 40 percent of the population aged over 60.

Only 13.6 percent of Spain's population actually goes to church on Sundays – yet some 70 percent of the population are Roman Catholic, according to a 2012 study by the Centre for Sociological Studies in Spain.

Spain is a constitutional monarchy – former king Juan Carlos I came to the throne after the right-wing dictator General Franco died in 1975. Once one of Europe's most beloved monarchs, Juan Carlos fell from favour in recent years and abdicated in favour of his son, King Felipe VI, in 2014.

There is only one tax inspector for every 1,928 taxpayers – compared to one per 729 people in France. So while Spain's economy ranked 13th in the world, with a GDP of 1,356 billion USD (EUR 989 billion) in the 2013 Centre for Economic Research (Cebr) World Economic League Table, the Spanish Inland Revenue says a quarter of the GDP comes from the 'black' economy.

In 2015, Spain has the second highest unemployment rate in Europe – and third highest among the OECD countries at 24.2 percent, only slightly behind Greece and South Africa, and high above the OECD average of 7.3 percent (2014). Youth unemployment is even worse: around half of 15 to 24 year-olds who could be working are unemployed.

Female entrepreneurs set up 40 percent of all new businesses in Spain – since the beginning of the recession in 2008 to 2013, totalling some 800,000 businesses.

Spain has Europe's biggest wealth gap – according to findings in two reports by Credit Suisse and the Catholic charity Caritas. In 2012, while more than 6 percent of the population lived on EUR 307/month or less (double that of 2008), the number of dollar millionaires rose to 402,000, an increase of 13 percent on the previous year.

Out-of-school hours childcare is limited – about a quarter of all grandparents take care of their grandchildren on a daily basis.

Only half of all adults aged 15–64 have the equivalent of a high school degree – the OECD average is almost three-quarters. Younger people are staying on at school longer than the previous generation though, as 65 percent of 25–34-year-olds gain the qualification.

The Spanish love to chill out – according to the 2013 OECD report, on average they devote 16 out of every 24 hours to leisure, eating, drinking and sleeping.

The first 'novel' is attributed to a Spaniard – Spain Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, written in 1605, is considered to be the first modern novel.

Spain has 44 UNESCO World Heritage Sites – pre-historic rock art, historic cities and buildings, bridges, national parks and landscapes. Only Italy with 49 sites and China with 45 have more.

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The next time you use a stapler, thank the Spanish – the first known stapler was made in the 18th century in the Basque country for the French King Louis XV – and every single staple was engraved with the royal emblem. Spain has also given the world the mop and bucket (1956), the forerunner of the modern cigarette (17th century) and the astronaut’s space suit (1935).

Spain produces over half of the world’s olive oil – more than some 1.5 million tons, and almost all of it comes from the southern region of Andalusia. It’s also the third largest wine producer after France and Italy, making 3.3 million tonnes (metric tons) in 2013. **Spain was the first country in the world where wind power was the greatest source of electricity.** *Red Eléctrica de España* (REE), operators of Spain’s electricity system, revealed that in 2013 wind turbines generated over just under 54,000 gigawatt hours of electricity – a fifth of the nation’s usage.

Spain has produced some of the world’s greatest artists – Valázquez in the 17th century, Goya in the 18th and 19th to Picasso, Miró and Dali in the 20th.

There's no tooth fairy in Spain – when Spanish children lose a tooth, they put it under their pillow and a small mouse called Ratoncito Pérez comes to collect it and leaves a small gift or money in its place.

Until 2013, the age of consent to have sex or marry in Spain was amongst the lowest in the world – 13 for sex and 14 for marriage. Spaniards now have to wait until they are 16 to do both, in line with other European countries such as the UK, the Netherlands, Norway and Belgium.

The Spanish are a tolerant society – the European Social Survey in 2010 found that 80 per cent of respondents agreed that ‘gay men and lesbians should be able to free to live their own lives’, compared to less than 40 percent of Croatians, Lithuanians and Russians. Same-sex marriage has been legal in Spain since 2005.

You can enjoy a meal in the oldest restaurant in the world in Spain's capital, Madrid – although other restaurants claim they are older, the title has been awarded by Guinness World Records to Restaurante Botín, which has been open since 1725. The signature dish? *Cochinillos asado* (roast suckling pig).

Spain was the world’s third most popular tourist destination in 2013 – after France and the US, attracting a record 60.6 million visitors.

Spain is the country of fiestas, with hundreds of festivals taking place throughout the year – the oldest, *Romería de Nuestra Señora de le Cabeza*, has been held for over 800 years and the *Fiesta de los Patios* was even awarded UNESCO World heritage status in 2013. Be chased by bulls during the festival of *San Fermin*, throw overripe tomatoes during *La Tomatina* or watch while huge *ninots* (statues) are burnt during *Las Fallas*.



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Spain's Christmas lottery has the world's biggest payout – Spain’s national lottery, El Gordo (*‘the fat one’*), held just before Christmas has a payout of some EUR 2.24 billion.

The Spanish national football team topped the FIFA World rankings for five consecutive years – from 2008 until 2013. *La Roja* (The Red One), *La Furia Roja* (The Red Fury), *La Furia Española* (The Spanish Fury), or *La Furia* (The Fury), as the national team is known, also holds the world record (28) for winning the most consecutive competitive matches.

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Lithuania

About Lithuania

Lithuania is a green flat land in the north Europe, ashore the countries, and Byelorussia, Poland country is full of woods, lakes and with Curonian spit, Curonian sea from the Baltic sea.



and of Baltic Sea. It is one of three Baltic shares borders with Latvia, and Russia (Kaliningrad). The preserved natural landscapes, rivers, and has an unique sea side, a sandy peninsula, isolating the

Though Lithuania was mentioned already in 1009, now it is a young republic, trying to recover from a grinding occupation of Soviet Union. The independence was retrieved only in 1990, but the history of Lithuanian statehood started already in XIII century, when Mindaugas, the first and only kind of our country, gained the crown. The history of Lithuania is erratic, full of mighty victories and severe events. Today’s Lithuania is a small country, but in historical maps you can find it the biggest country in the Europe, or not existing at all. Today the country, still under impact of 50 years soviet occupation, tries to blend into the economic and cultural space of Europe Union.

As one of the countries in Europe, baptized at the latest, Lithuania preserved much of pagan traditions, and folk traditions are still alive in villages. The cultural life prospers in all the bigger cities.



Facts about Lithuania

Area: 65 300 km²

Population: 2,872 millions (year 2016)

Coat of arms and flag:

Language:

Official language– Lithuanian, which is the member of Baltic language group (other 2 members are Latvian, and dead Prussian language). It is the most archaic language from all the Indo-European languages.

Religion:

Lithuania is considered to be very religious country, sometimes named as "The land of Virgin Mary". Today 79 percent of Lithuanians consider themselves as Roman Catholics.

Seaside:

Whole shore is 90 km long. The most unique part of seaside is the Curonian spit – the peninsula, which starts in Kaliningrad and creates the Curonian sea.

National holidays:

1st of January, New years
16th of February, Independence Day
11th of March, Restoration of Independence
Easter (Sunday and the following Monday)
1st of May, Labour Day
First Sunday of May, Mother's Day
24th of June, Midsummer Festival
6th of July, Coronation of King Mindaugas
15th of August, Assumption Day
1st of November, All Saints' Day
25th-26th of December, Christmas

Lithuanian Cuisine

Lithuanian cuisine features the products suited to its cool and moist northern climate: barley, potatoes, rye, beets, greens, and mushrooms are locally grown, and dairy products are one of its specialties. Since it shares its climate and agricultural practices with Eastern Europe, Lithuanian cuisine has much in common with other Eastern European and Jewish cuisines. Nevertheless, it has its own distinguishing features, which were formed by a variety of influences during the country's long and difficult history.

Because of their long common history, Lithuanians and Poles share many dishes and beverages. Thus there are similar Lithuanian and Polish versions of dumplings (pierogi or koldūnai), doughnuts (pączki or spurgos), and crepes (blini or blynai). German traditions also influenced Lithuanian cuisine, introducing pork and potato dishes, such as potato pudding (kugelis) and potato sausages (vedarai), as well as the baroque tree cake known as šakotis. The most exotic of all the influences is Eastern (Karaitite) cuisine, and the dishes kibinai and čeburekai are popular in Lithuania. The popular «Torte Napoleon» was introduced during Napoleon's passage through Lithuania in the 19th century.

Cepelinai, potato dumplings stuffed with meat, curd cheese or mushrooms, is the most famous national dish. It is popular among Lithuanians all over the world. Other national foods include dark rye bread, cold beet soup (šaltibarščiai), and kugelis (a baked potato pudding), smoked sausage and vedarai (cooked potatoes and sausage stuffed into pig intestines). Lithuanian cuisine also include suktiniai (arba zrazai) - fried beef stuffed with salt pork, crushed garlic and caraway seeds and Lithuanian guliašas, that is a quite different from Hungarian goulash. Some of these foods are also common in neighboring countries. Lithuanian cuisine is generally unknown outside Lithuanian communities. Most Lithuanian restaurants outside Lithuania are located in areas with a heavy Lithuanian presence.



Locally brewed beer (alus), vodka (degtinė), and kvass (gira) are popular drinks in Lithuania. Starka is a part of the Lithuanian heritage, still produced in Lithuania. Beer, an occasional drink in ancient times, has become very popular. There are around 80 big and small breweries in Lithuania. Some light brews have been recognized the best in the world for several years. Lithuania is the only place where you may taste the unique snacks with beer such as: garlic bread, peas with ribs, smoked cheese, smoked pig ears and plums with various fillings.

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Every region in Lithuania has preserved its original traditional dishes. The Aukštaitija residents are experts in flour and freshwater fish dishes and their culinary heritage is member of the European Culinary Heritage. The Žemaitija residents are excellent cooks of potatoe, vegetable and dairy meals. People from Suvalkija are unrivalled in smoked meat products. Residents of Dzūkija specialize in dishes of forest products as well as cakes. The most savoury smoked fish can be tested in Lithuania Minor and on both shores of the Curonian Lagoon.

In Lithuania people usually eat three meals each day. Breakfast is between 7 and 9 am, the main meal between 12 and 3 pm, and a lighter meal between 6 and 8 pm. In rural areas, meals are eaten earlier than in urban areas. For the midday meal most people either go home or eat in cafeterias at work. Toasts are often made during meals, whether guests are present or not.

Traditions That Only Lithuanians Can Understand

Uzgavenes or Shrove Tuesday



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Shrove Tuesday, Fat Tuesday, or Mardi Gras is a holiday known to many; however, Lithuania has its own unique take on this particular holiday. Known as Uzgavenes, this day is traditionally one



full of merriment, over indulging in pancakes, and wearing hand-carved wooden masks. Mixed with pagan traditions, Uzgavenes culminates with the burning of a More (a straw effigy). This More is meant to represent a female character, which is typically obvious by its voluptuous shape, and burning her is meant to chase away winter and encourage the arrival of spring! Another straw character that may also be burned is the male effigy symbolizing winter.

Goat Beauty Pageant

The small village of Remygala, Lithuania holds an annual beauty pageant for...goats? In preparation for the pageant, goats are groomed, decorated with flowers, and dressed in outfits. If you'd like to experience this unusual beauty contest yourself, visit Remygala in mid-June and perhaps you'll get to meet the crowned goat in person!



Christmas Eve Dinner

Though not as unusual as the two aforementioned traditions, Lithuanians follow a rather specific tradition when it comes to dinner on Christmas Eve. The whole family gets together to eat at least 12 vegetarian dishes. The first dish must be wafers that are prepared using the same recipe as wafers received at Holy Communion in church. All other dishes must be meatless, although fish can be enjoyed.

Easter Granny and Other Easter traditions





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Americans have their Easter Bunny and Lithuanians have an Easter Granny. The Easter Granny leaves Easter eggs and sweets to children when children leave a homemade nest outside their house. Prior to tucking into a delicious meal, one hard boiled Easter egg is cut into enough pieces for each of the family members present. Sharing one Easter egg among the whole family symbolizes a harmonious family. Additionally, to celebrate the end of Lent, families indulge in a meat heavy meal. If lamb is not served at the meal, butter is carved into a lamb statue.

Polish culture and traditions



Facts

Capital: Warsaw

Population: 38,628,927 (2016 est.)

Climate: July is the warmest month (27°C), and December the coldest (-10°C).

Nationality: Polish 93.52%, Silesian 1.09%, German 0.28%, Belarusian 0.12%, Ukrainian 0.12%, Kashubian 0.04%, Romani 0.03%, Other 4.80% (2011 census)

Religions: (Based on 2011 survey of 91.2% of the population) Roman Catholic 87.5% (around 75% who are practicing), Opting out of responding 7.1%, Non-believer 2.4%, Not stated 1.6%, Eastern Orthodox 1.3%, Other religions 1%.

Government: Republic

Currency: Polish Zloty

Local time: GMT+01:00

National Holidays: Constitution Day, 1 May (1791), Independence Day, 11 November (1918).

The Languages of Poland

The official language of the country is Polish, and around 38.5 million people in Poland speak it (as well as it being spoken as a second language in several nearby countries).

A Slavic language, the Polish alphabet has 9 additional letters to those used in the basic Latin alphabet, making a total of 33. It is the second most spoken Slavic language after Russian, and some of its vocabulary is shared with the languages of other neighbouring Slavic countries – Czech, Slovak, Belarusian, and Ukrainian.

There are a number of officially recognised minority languages that are spoken in Poland; Belarusian, Czech, Lithuanian, German, Slovak, Russian, Ukrainian Armenian, Hebrew, and Yiddish, and there is also one regional language; Kashubian

English is the most common foreign language spoken in Poland.



Local Culture

With a rich history that can be traced back over hundreds of years, Poland has a unique and diverse culture. As a country the minority populations are concentrated around the borders with the German minority mainly residing near the city of Opole in the southwest. In Warsaw and other major cities there has been a recent increase in the inward migration of other nationalities.

When it comes to local culture, religion plays a vital role in society and an even bigger part in Polish culture.

- It is common for most businesses to close on religious holidays – they are considered to be national holidays in Poland.
- Christmas is considered the religious holiday that holds the most importance, with celebrations lasting a full 2 1/2 days.
- November 1st, All Saints Day is another very important religious holiday on the Polish calendar. It is a time to honour loved ones who are no longer with them, with many Poles visiting cemeteries.
- Baptisms, weddings, first communions, confirmations, and funerals are all very much influenced by religion; Poland is one of the most devoutly religious countries in Europe.

Family

When it comes to social structure, family is right at the heart of everything and family obligations will always come first. Whilst extended family is still very much a part of any individual's social group, Poles mark a distinct difference between this group, an inner circle so to speak, and any outsiders. This inner nucleus is made up of family and close friends, with interaction within this group and with outsiders being very different. Poles rely very much on the people in their inner circle when it comes to advice, help with finding a job, assistance with official decisions and even finding an apartment. An intricate protocol comes in to play when it comes to offering favours and getting things done using family contacts.

Etiquette and Customs

Meeting and Greeting

- A firm handshake with a smile, direct eye contact and the correct greeting depending on what part of the day it is should always be used.
- When addressing someone who is Polish it is best to use the prefix Pan for addressing males or Pani for females. This should be accompanied by the surname of the person.
- Greetings are generally civil yet polite.
- Good morning or afternoon is "dzien dobry" and good evening is "dobry wieczor".
- It is quite likely you will not be invited to address someone by his or her first name for some considerable time. This is generally something that only occurs once you have been admitted to the "inner circle" and in business this can take a number of years.
- Parties and social gatherings can be quite formal events; it is likely the host will give you an introduction. It is commonplace to introduce the women first and then the men.

Giving Gifts

There is a certain etiquette that comes with gift giving. On the whole, gifts are given on name days (these occur on the birth date of the saint a person is named for), birthdays, and, of course, Christmas. In general, a gift will be opened by the recipient as soon as they receive it.

Here are a few helpful tips on gift giving:

- Gifts should not be too expensive as this may prove embarrassing to the person they are for.
- Appropriate gifts when invited to a Polish home for dinner include flowers, wine, sweets, or pastries for the hostess.
- Never give an even number of any type of flowers.
- Do not offer the following flowers as gifts: Yellow Chrysanthemums (as they are seen as funeral flowers), white, or red flowers – especially if they are lilies or carnations.
- Flowers should be removed from their paper before giving them as a gift.
- On their name day employees will bring cake and champagne to work to celebrate. Name days are celebrated more than birthdays.

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- It is common practice to give small gifts to service workers at Christmas: postal workers, refuse collectors etc.

Dining at someone's home

- Always be on time. Be prepared to remove your shoes, you may be offered slippers as an indication that this is required.
- Dress appropriately – conservative clothing is the safer option.
- Although it may be turned down, ask if you can help with the preparation of food, or to help clear up after the meal.
- Meals are served Family style; you should wait for the hostess to indicate that you should start eating. Try a small amount of everything offered so you are able to accept an offer of second helpings.
- When toasts are made, this is usually with spirits, predominantly Vodka. You should attempt to offer a toast of your own at some point during the meal.
- Be warned – alcohol is usually offered in little glasses, and should be downed in one go.

Business Meetings and Management Advice

Meeting and Greeting

The initial style of business is a very formal one in Poland, and although this may appear detached, this is not the aim. Whilst government officials are more likely to maintain a high level of formality, it is possible that entrepreneurs will dispense with such rigidity. In general, it is wise to follow your colleagues' lead when it comes to the tone of a meeting.

A few general tips:

- Shake hands, firmly, on arrival and again on leaving. Remember eye contact. Titles are important. Both Academic and professional titles, sometimes followed by the surname.
- Do not use first names unless you are asked to.
- Business cards; these are given and taken without any ceremony but it is worth trying to have your card (or at least one side of it) translated into Polish. Qualifications such as university degrees and job titles are important so make sure you include them.

Communication

- As a rule, Poles judge others on personal virtues and what they have learnt about them. Knowing the people you do business with is important, especially where longevity of business is concerned. Honesty is a highly valued commodity.
- When it comes to communicating, Poles put high emphasis on saying what they think, but in a diplomatic manner. Although this direct approach is important, they also put high emphasis on being polite.
- The length of the business relationship will dictate how direct they are. A newer, more formal relationship will be far more diplomatic than a more established one where speaking freely will be more commonplace.

Polish traditions

Poles are fun lovers who enjoy festivities, traditions and centuries-old Polish customs. The most ancient rituals, especially those dating back to pagan times, have long lost their magical character, becoming a colorful vestige of the past and a form of amusement. Links with tradition are felt the strongest during the greatest religious feasts, such as Christmas, Easter, Corpus Christi processions and All Saints' Day.

St. Andrew Day Rituals (Andrzejki) – November 29th



Not diamonds, but picket fences, melted candle wax and walnut shells are a girls best friend on this special night. November 29th – just before the full moon is the Eve of St. Andrew's Day (Andrzejki). This is a special time for young Polish girls who want to find a husband. On this night and the next day, fortunes are told and the results are not taken lightly.

Here are a few ways that fortunes are told:

The most popular way is by melting wax and pouring it into a bowl of cold water. Wax is then picked up from the water, raised to the light, and the girls try to see the similarities of it to real objects. Depending on the shapes, fortunes are told for the following year. If nothing meaningful comes up, there is always a chance that a girl will dream of something important dealing with her future, that night – but only if she could remember it.



In another traditional Polish customs way of fortune telling, girls stand in a circle leaning over a bowl of water with a small floating walnut shell containing a tiny-lighted candle. Each girl pastes a slip of paper with the name of a favored young man on the inside edge of the bowl above the water. To whichever name the lighted candle sailed to and burnt, a marriage proposal from him could be expected.

Also, during the day, a girl counts to the fourteenth post on a fence to see what her future husband will look like – fat, thin, short, tall, old, young. In another game, a scarf, a ribbon, and a rosary are placed separately under three plates. A girl, her eyes blindfolded, turns around three times while other girls rearrange the plates. If she draws a scarf, it means marriage; a ribbon – single for another year; rosary – becomes a spinster or a nun.

Św. Mikołaj – St. Nicholas Day – December 6th

If you're over in Poland during the month of December, you probably won't find any presents under the Christmas tree. The reason: traditionally, Christmas trees are not displayed until they are put up on Christmas Eve Day, and Jolly St. Nick brought the kids presents on his namesake day, December 6th.

St. Nick over in Poland does a much better job keeping a list of who's naughty or nice. “Różga” is a little something that might show up from St. Nick's bag of goodies for children that do not behave they way they are expected to throughout the year. It is (similar to a cane) made from a limb from the birch tree and used for corporal punishment. The naughtier kids are the bigger the “różga” will be.

It is not to say presents aren't also given on Christmas Eve (rather than the typical American Christmas Day). Since St. Nick brings presents a couple weeks before Christmas in Polish customs style, usually God's helpers are responsible for bringing gifts on Christmas Eve. In Wielkopolska

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(Greater Poland – Poznań and West-Central region) the Starman – a man with a “gwiazdor” (star) brings the gifts to the children. The tradition of starman predates the tradition of Santa Claus.

In Lesser Poland and Silesia a small “aniołek” (angel) who is a messenger for the baby Jesus brings presents to kids on Christmas Eve. The small angel is invisible, but the angel’s presence is signaled by the sound of a ringing bell, and a moment later – the presents magically appear.

Polish Christmas



Wesołych Świąt Bożego Narodzenia! That is the way to say “Merry Christmas” in Polish. Polish Christmas Carols or kolędy are numerous and beautiful, especially when sung in Polish parishes at the Christmas Eve Mass. This Mass is called the Pasterka, which means the Shepherds Watch, and there is popular belief in Poland that while the congregation is praying, peace descends on the snow-clad earth and that during that holy night, the humble companions of men – the domestic animals – assume voices. But only the innocent of heart may hear them.

Christmas Day itself in the traditional Polish custom is spent in rest, prayer, and visits to various members of the family. In Poland, from Christmas Day until the twelfth night, boys trudge from village to village with an illuminated star and sing carols. In some districts, the boys carry on puppet shows called *szopki*. These are built like a little house with two towers, open in the front where a small crib is set and before which marionettes sing their dialogues.

During the Christmas season, the theaters give special performances. On the feast of the Epiphany, the priest and the organist visit the homes, bless them and write over their doors the initials of the three wise men – KMB (Kasper, Melchior and Balthazar) – in the belief that this will spare the homes from misfortune.

Eating traditional Christmas Eve dishes happens in 98 percent of the homes. Just behind these traditions come decorating the Christmas tree, fasting on Christmas Eve until dinner and preparing an additional place at the Christmas table for an unexpected guest – which we will discuss in a little more detail in a moment.



Another element of the Polish Christmas Eve is the custom of visiting the graves of deceased relatives. The survey said this was important for 75% of Poles. For 68 percent of the nation, it is important to sing Christmas carols.

Here’s a little more about the importance of the empty seat at the table. Nearly all Polish families prepare the extra place. And, nearly a third invite a poor or lonely person to share Wigilia.

The patriotic duty to remember people who are in exile or far from home, has its roots in Polish hospitality – and in times when Poland lay divided between Russia, Prussia and Austria. Keeping a space open pays tribute to these loved ones. The first casualties of French soldiers from Napoleon’s failed winter attack on Russia retreated to many of these open seats two centuries ago as unexpected guests. And, were well cared for by Poles.

Polish Cuisine

Polish food is famous for being simple, hearty and not especially colourful. You simply haven’t had a thorough sampling of it until you’ve tried all the traditional dishes below, all of which you should be able to find in Polish restaurants in town. *Smacznego!*

Bigos

Traditionally a winter dish, Bigos is a hearty stew made in large batches. Though there is no standard recipe, ingredients usually include lots of fresh and pickled cabbage, leftover meat parts and sausage, onion, mushrooms, garlic and whatever else is on hand. In fact, metaphorically Bigos translates to ‘big mess,’ ‘confusion’ or ‘trouble’ in Polish. Seasoned with peppercorns, bay leaves, caraway and the kitchen sink, the stew is left to gestate, sometimes underground, for a few days for full flavour infusion. A Polish restaurant or prospective wife can be fairly measured on the strength of their Bigos.



Gołąbki

Translating to ‘little pigeons,’ this favourite dish consists of boiled cabbage leaves stuffed with beef, onion and rice before being baked and served in a tomato or mushroom sauce. Polish legend claims King Kazimierz fed his army gołąbki before a battle outside Malbork against the Teutonic Order, and their unlikely subsequent victory has been attributed to the hearty meal ever since.



Golonka

Pork knuckle or hock, as in pig’s thigh - boiled, braised, or generally roasted and put before you on a plate. A true Polish delicacy, the meat should slip right off the bone, be served with horseradish, and washed down with beer. Go caveman.

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Kiełbasa

Sausages, and in Polish shops you'll find an enormous variety, made from everything from turkey to bison. There are a few varieties to watch for including Krakowska, a Kraków specialty seasoned with pepper and garlic; Kabanosy, a thin, dry sausage flavoured with caraway seed; and Kaszanka, a blood sausage filled with groats and pig's blood. These you'll find in any 'delikatesy' or butcher shop. Two old-timers have been grilling and serving sausage out of a van since time immemorial at this hallowed sidewalk stand.



Kotlet Schabowy

Probably the most popular lunch/supper in Poland is the almighty 'schabowy' with mashed potatoes and pickled cabbage, and you can walk into almost restaurant in the country and be assured of its presence on the menu (if the kitchen hasn't run out of it already). Essentially a breaded and fried pork chop (cutlet), 'kotlet schabowy' is quite similar to Viennese schnitzel, and a solid bet for a cheap, filling, risk-free meal. If you're awoken on a Saturday or Sunday morning by the sound of profuse banging - that's the collective sound of every housewife in Poland tenderising the meat for this meal with a spiky mallet. So best mind your manners.

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Naleśniki

The Polish equivalent of French crepes, these are thin pancakes wrapped around pretty much any filling you can dream of, savoury or sweet. Generally the easy way out in any dodgy Polish dining establishment.



Pierogi

Doughy dumplings traditionally filled with potato (Ruskie), sweet cheese, meat, mushrooms and cabbage, strawberries or plums, though if you nose around you will find plenty of maverick fillings like broccoli, chocolate or liver as the possibilities are truly limitless and they are served almost everywhere in the city.



Placki

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These greasy, fried potato pancakes (‘placki ziemniaczane’) are very similar to Jewish latkes (if that means anything to you) and best enjoyed with goulash on top (placki po Węgiersku). Highly caloric, they’re also a tried and true hangover cure.



Smalec

Vegetarians who broke their vows for a bite of sausage or a taste of żurek generally draw the line here. An animal fat spread full of fried lard chunks (the more the better, we say) and served with hunks of homemade bread, Smalec is a savoury snack that goes great with a mug of beer. Any traditional Polish restaurant worth its salt should give you lashings of this prior to your meal.



Zupa (Soup)

Poland has three signature soups: barszcz, żurek and flaki. A nourishing beetroot soup, barszcz may be served with potatoes and veggies tossed in, with a croquette or miniature pierogi floating in it, or simply as broth in a mug expressly for drinking ('barszcz solo'). A recommended alternative to other beverages with any winter meal, we’d be surprised if you can find a bad cup of barszcz anywhere in Kraków.

It doesn’t get any more Polish than żurek – a unique sour rye soup with sausage, potatoes and occasionally egg chucked in, and often served in a bread bowl.

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If you're of strong constitution and feeling truly adventurous, spring for flaki – beef tripe soup enriched with veggies, herbs and spices. A hearty standby in most kitchens, we personally save the pleasure for compromising situations involving mother-in-laws, but we still have to give credit to any local restaurant bold enough to keep this on their menu.





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