

ITALIAN TRADITIONS

The topic that I chose is: Italian tradition and the local festivity in my small hometown. I will start to introduce the classic and the most popular festivities in Italy, which are: the Epiphany (La Befana), Carnival, Saint Valentine's Day, April Fool's Day, Easter and Christmas.

THE EPIPHANY

The origin: according to the legend, the night before the Wise Men arrived at the manger they stopped at the shack of an old woman to ask directions. They invited her to come along but she replied that she was too busy. Then a shepherd asked her to join him but again she refused. Later that night, she saw a great light in the sky and decided to join the Wise Men and the shepherd bearing gifts that had belonged to her child who had died. Now La Befana flies around on her broomstick each year on the 11th night, bringing gifts to children in hopes that she might find the Baby Jesus. Children hang their stockings on the evening of January 5 awaiting the visit of La Befana.

"LA BEFANA"

The Epiphany feast, known as La Befana, is an important part of the Christmas festivities in Italy. She is an old woman, a little shabby, but very hardworking and much loved by children, although her appearance is not so reassuring. She travels on a broom and, in the night between 5th and 6th January, she brings gifts, sweets in particular, to good children. For those less good, however, she only brings coal. Many cities and towns in Italy organize festivities and parades to celebrate Epiphany on January 6, and La Befana is loved as much as Santa Claus.

THE CARNIVAL

Carnival occurs between January 8th and Fat Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday, which marks the arrival of the fasting days of Lent. Children and adults dress up with traditional and modern masks, and a variety of parties are scheduled in every Italian town, including in schools. There are many parades in each Italian town, which typically are opened by a Carnival master, and are made of sometimes very elaborate floats, bands, and of course anybody who wants to join in.

Children typically carry around a bag of colored paper confetti, which they throw at people, or they blow strings of paper rolled up in circles, which get undone as one blows on them. There are a variety of other toys and implements that people play with: colored foams, air raid horns, and many accessories for the wildest disguises.

VALENTINE'S DAY

People of Italy see Valentine's Day as a holiday imported from US, just like Halloween and Mother's Day. In Italy, the most important day for the celebration of love is il giorno della festa degli innamorati.

In recent times lovers in Italy celebrate Valentine's Day by expressing their love to their sweethearts. Couples usually go out for dinners at pizzeria or at the restaurant and there is a strong tradition to exchange gifts like rose, perfume, chocolates and diamonds depending on the age and taste of person. Another popular Valentine's Day gift in Italy is Baci Perugina - a small, chocolate-covered hazelnuts containing a small slip of paper with a romantic poetic quote in four languages. Florence and Venice are traditionally considered to be two of the most romantic places in Italy but Verona, the city of Romeo and Juliet celebrates Valentine's Day with a four-day celebration of events designated "Verona in Love."

APRIL FOOL'S DAY

April Fools' Day, is celebrated every year on April 1 by playing practical jokes and spreading hoaxes. The most common prank involved in Pesce d'Aprile is to affix a paper drawing or cutout of a fish onto the back of an unsuspecting victim. Then, everyone else asks if anyone has seen "April's fish" when, of course, the victim doesn't know he or she is the one they're talking about. Although this maybe a bit old-fashioned today, taping a fish onto someone's back is still something Italian children do.

Historically, there are references to what may be April Fools' Day as far back as the 14th century. In Italy, it is said to have been popularized first in Genoa in the late 19th century by the wealthy classes. Along with pinning a fish on someone's back, some pranks were more elaborate and far-reaching, designed to fool larger segments of the population into believing something. It's always supposed to be done in the spirit of fun, of course, not to harm or swindle anyone.

EASTER

Easter, or Pasqua in Italian, is a festive holiday throughout Italy. Religious parades and celebrations are held in many towns and cities nationwide. A statue of Jesus or his mother Mary is carried in street processions that involve large crowds of people. The Monday following Easter, la Pasquetta is also a public holiday throughout Italy. Easter in Italy may look somewhat similar to Easter celebrations in America, you'll see colorful displays of chocolate eggs in shop windows, for instance but there isn't an Italian-speaking Easter Bunny. Traditional Easter foods in Italy include eggs, artichokes, roasted lamb, a special sweet bread called "Colomba" (which means dove, and it's made in the shape of a dove) and chocolate eggs, which almost always are hollow and have a special prize inside.

CHRISTMAS

Today, when speaking of Christmas, we refer to a period of time running from December 24th to January 6th. It includes Christmas Eve (December 24th), Christmas Day (December 25th), Saint Stephen's Day (December 26th), New Year's Eve (night

of December 31st - January 1st) and the Epiphany (January 6th). This last festivity is embodied by a likeable old lady who, in the night between January 5th and 6th, flies around on a broomstick, bringing presents and filling stockings with candies for the kids who behaved well, or coal for those who behaved like rascals.

During the period preceding the real holidays, tradition calls for the setting up of the presepe(Crib) and the Christmas tree. Both are usually prepared on the 8th of December, the day of the Immaculate Conception, and taken down on the evening of January 6th. The crib is the exact reproduction of the scene of Jesus' birth and its surrounding, rendered with beautiful statuettes. The tree is usually a fir, real or fake, decorated with colored ornaments and multicolored lights.

For many families all around the world, Christmas is also a yearly occasion to get together, eat and exchange presents as a sign of mutual affection. Italian families are no exception: eating, in particular, becomes a way to be with all the family members.

FESTIVITY AND TRADITIONS IN MY HOMETOWN (BAGNARA)

The first I am writing about is the festival of “castrato”, in Italian la sagra del castrato, it starts on 28th April and finish on 3rd may. During this festival we serve grilled mutton (castrato). I'm saying “we” because I am usually a waitress with some children and teenagers, we help at the tables of the sagra as volunteers. I work very hard, because this feast is one of the most popular in Bagnara, but I also have fun because I am with my friends and I make new friends. We usually work from seven o'clock to half past eleven (p.m.) and then the people who work in the kitchen offer us a free dinner for helping them.

The second festivity in Bagnara is the popoli pop cult festival. It starts on 23rd June to 26th June. This festivity is the most popular in Bagnara, because there are people who come from all over the world. During this festival Bagnara is filled with food stands where you can eat food from all over the world. My friends and I say that is a small Expo. This year there were the following nations: Albania, Angola, Argentina Austria, Brazil, Camerun, Cuba, Ethiopia, Philippines, France, Germany, Greece, Peru, Romania, Russia, Spain and Vietnam. Brazilians made dance performances and along a famous road of Bagnara some buskers painted pictures.

The third festivity is the Feast of the castle , in Italian “la festa del castello”. It is on 3rd and 4th September. It is a sort of historical reenactment, where some knights camp in moats situated around Bagnara, and sometimes they fight with historical swords and shields. The 4th September there is a competition, the town centre is divided into 4 districts, in Italian “rioni”, and they make challenge to proclaim the winner.

Epiphany	www.timeanddate.com , www.italia.it , goitalyabout.com
Carnival	www.globalkidsoz.com.au
Sant.Valentine's day	www.stvalentinesday.org
April fool's day	www.italyexplained.com
Easter	www.italylogue.com
Christmas	www.lifeinitaly.com

by Sofia 2^E