

Sharing Stories Sharing Cultures

Seasons & Holidays



Index	page
Turkey - Hidrellez	1
Finland - Finnish Holidays & Seasons	4
Ireland - Fire Festivals	10
Hungary - Easter	24
Ireland - Easter	30
Comparisons	34
Conclusion	35

Hidrellez

Hidrellez is a traditional spring festival celebrated in Turkey. It celebrates the arrival of spring, renewal, fertility, health, and good fortune.

To mark this occasion, various ceremonies and rituals connected with nature are performed, guaranteeing the wellbeing, fertility and prosperity of the family and community and protecting livestock and crops for the upcoming year.



The festival is held every year on May 5th-6th. It is a religious holiday for the Alevi as well.

In folklore it marks the meeting of two mystical figures: Hızır, a wandering protector believed to bring health, prosperity, and luck, and İlyas, who is associated with water, seas, and life.

Common Hidrellez Traditions

The rituals have deep-rooted cultural meanings and provide the community with a sense of belonging and cultural identity and an opportunity to strengthen relations. The communities concerned ensure the viability of the element by participating in the Spring Celebration on an annual basis. The complex organization of related events at the local, regional and national levels ensures the wide participation of individuals, groups and communities.

- Jumping over bonfires for purification and luck
- Writing wishes or drawing pictures of desired things
- Placing wishes beneath rose bushes overnight
- Singing, dancing, and outdoor celebrations
- Picnics and communal meals
- Washing in natural water sources for health and blessing



Origins

Hidirellez celebrates the day the Prophets Hizir (Khidr) and Ilyas (Elijah) met on Earth.

Hidirellez' is a compound noun derived from 'Hidir' and 'Ilyas', which are believed to be the protectors of earth and water and the helpers of individuals, families and communities in need of them.

Cultural Meaning



Hidirellez combines ancient Turkic spring rituals, nature traditions, Islamic folklore, and seasonal celebrations shared across many cultures. It is similar to spring festivals such as Beltane in Ireland and May Day celebrations across Europe.

UNESCO Recognition

In 2017, UNESCO recognised Hidirellez as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage shared by Turkey and North Macedonia because of its importance in preserving traditional culture and community identity.





Finnish holidays and seasons

Easter

- Easter starts on Palm-sunday. Easter week is called Stilled-week and the names of the week are a little different than normal:
- Palm-Sunday, Cloudy-Monday, White-Tuesday, Dymmel-Wednesday, now to the actual Easter weekend first up is Maundy-Thursday, Long-Friday aka. Jesus crucifixion day, Short-Saturday and ends on Sunday or Easterday, Jesus resurrection day
- Some people go to church, some gather at home and some in other places



Traditions

A common tradition is to light a big fire.

It is said that the witches travel once a year to a place called bluehill often on Maundy-Thursday

- While you have Halloween over here, we have dressing as old ladies giving out hand drawn cards to people in our hometown in exchange for candy or money if





Finnish Easter blends religious traditions with spring-welcoming folklore, notably featuring children dressing as "Easter witches" (*pääsiäisnoita*) on Palm Sunday. They carry decorated willow branches to bless homes for health, reciting rhymes in exchange for treats—a tradition known as *virvonta*.



Midsommar in Finland



📅 Midsommar in Finland, called Juhannus, is celebrated in late June and marks the summer solstice and the longest day of the year.

👨👩 It is a time for family and friends to gather at summer cottages or in the countryside to enjoy nature and each other's company.

🔥 Bonfires are lit to welcome summer. People sing, play games, and enjoy traditional food.

🧑🏠 Sauna is an important part of Juhannus. Many enjoy a sauna and then take a swim in the lake.

🌸 Making flower crowns, dancing around the midsummer pole, and picking wildflowers are beloved traditions.

🍓 Fresh local food, new potatoes, fish, berries, and treats are commonly enjoyed during the celebration.

♥️ Midsommar is a cherished tradition that celebrates light, nature, community, and the joy of summer.



Villavslutning

Villavslutning is a newer tradition.

It is a cherished, hyper-local tradition celebrated, particularly by Swedish-speaking Finns, to mark the end of the summer cottage season, usually at the end of August.

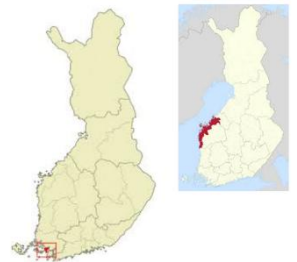
It is celebrated like New Year - by lighting lanterns, bonfires, and fireworks to create a cozy atmosphere in the archipelago.

When: Traditionally held on the last weekend of August.

Purpose: To celebrate the end of summer and the cozy, dark nights of the changing season.

Activities: Lighting bonfires by the water, decorating cottage sites with torches, lanterns, and candles, and sometimes enjoying fireworks.

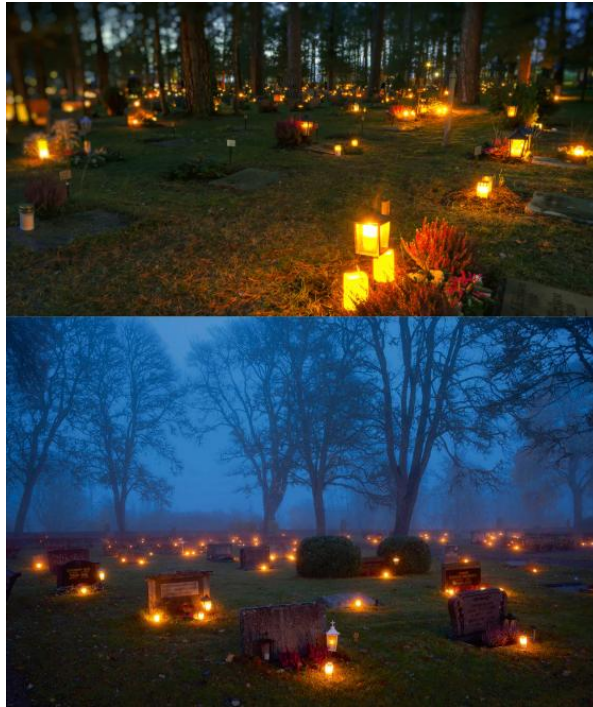
Location: West Coast - primarily observed in coastal areas of Finland, particularly in the Swedish-speaking regions (e.g., Ostrobothnia).



It is a time for enjoying one last big family gathering or party at the cottage before winter.

Allhelgona

Allhelgona (All Saints' Day in Sweden) is a quiet and meaningful holiday when people remember loved ones who have died. Families visit cemeteries and place candles and lanterns on graves, creating beautiful glowing scenes in the autumn darkness.



Unlike Halloween, which focuses on costumes and spooky traditions, Allhelgona is a peaceful time for reflection, remembrance, and spending time with family.

It is usually celebrated on the first Saturday between October 31st and November 6th.

Lucia (Saint Lucia's Day)

Celebrated on the 13th of December.

Celebrated in honor of St. Lucy, a christian martyr from Sicily who was killed by the Romans in the year 304 because of her religious beliefs.

A procession led by a girl dressed as Lucy, followed by girls in white dresses, "stjärngossar" (star boys) and sometimes boys dressed as Santa's elves and gingerbread men.

They sing Christmas songs about saint Lucy.

Each school votes who gets to portray Lucy.

It's widely celebrated in the Nordic countries, Italy and the island of Saint Lucia in the Caribbean.



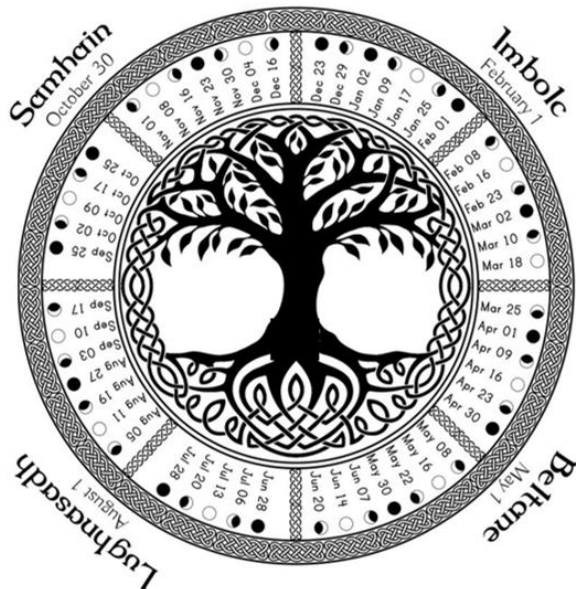
Irish Fire Festivals



The Irish fire festivals are a series of celebrations that take place during the turning of the seasons. They date from Celtic times!

There are four of them:

- Imbolc
- Bealtaine
- Lughnasa
- Samhain



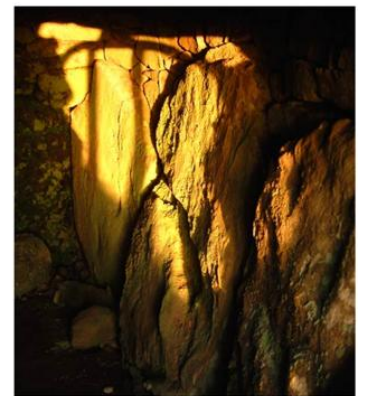
Imbolc

Imbolc (Imbolg) the festival marking the beginning of spring has been celebrated since ancient times.

It's the midpoint between the Winter Solstice and the Spring Equinox, generally falling between the 3rd and 6th of February.

Imbolc is often mistakenly said to be on February 1st, St. Brigid's Day.

Imbolc derives from the Old Irish *i mbolg* meaning *in the belly*, a time when sheep began to lamb, and the grass began to grow. It symbolised new life and the start of a new year!



At the Mound of the Hostages on the Hill of Tara the rising sun at Imbolc illuminates the chamber.

In early Celtic times around 2000 years ago, Imbolc was a time to celebrate the Celtic Goddess Brigid (Brigit, Brighid, Bride, Bridget, Bridgit, Brighde, Bríd).

Brigid the Fire Goddess

She was the Celtic Goddess of inspiration, healing, and smithcraft with associations to fire, the hearth and poetry.

One of the most well-known aspects of Brigid is her association with fire.



In Celtic mythology, she is often depicted as a goddess of the hearth and home. It was believed that she watched over the hearth fires of every home in Ireland. She was also associated with the sun and the warmth of spring, which was seen as a time of rebirth and renewal.

Brigid was also known for her ability to bring the dead back to life. It was said that when she passed by, plants the flowers would bloom, and animals would come out of hibernation. She was also said to have the power to cure sickness and heal wounds. She was often called upon by those in need of healing.



When Ireland was Christianised in the 5th century, the mantle of the Goddess Brigid was passed on to Saint Brigid. She was born at Faughart, near Dundalk, Co. Louth. She founded a monastery in Kildare and is buried there. We now celebrate Saint Brigid's Day and since last year get a day off school!



There are many stories about St. Brigid, but the most famous one is about how she made a cross.

Brigid was called to the bedside of a dying pagan chieftain. She sat by him to keep watch over him in his final hours. While sitting by the dying man, Brigid picked up some rushes from the floor and began to weave them into a cross.

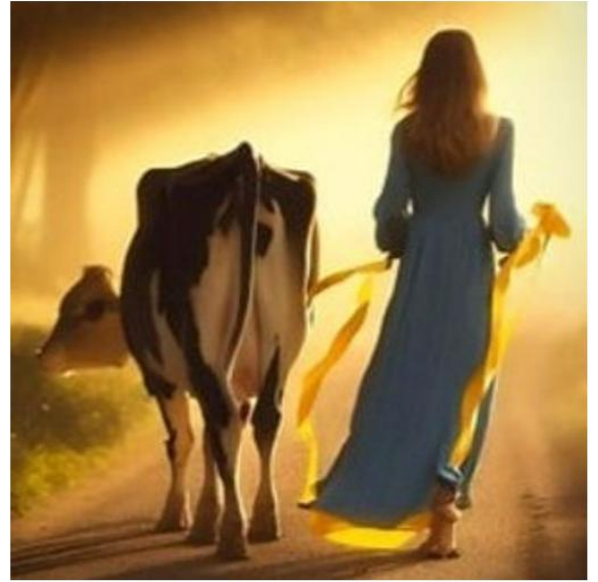


Beltane or Bealtaine festival, marking the beginning of summer. It is traditionally held on 1 May, or about midway between the spring equinox and summer solstice.



It marked the beginning of summer and was when cattle were driven out to the summer pastures. Special bonfires were kindled, whose flames, smoke and ashes were deemed to have protective powers.

The people and their cattle would walk around or between bonfires and sometimes leap over the flames or embers.



All household fires would be doused and then re-lit from the Beltane bonfire. These gatherings would be accompanied by a feast, and some of the food and drink would be offered to the fairies to prevent them from stealing dairy products, which were thought to be especially at risk e.g. May flowers were tied to milk pails or the tails of cattle to ensure the cattle's milk was not stolen, or three black coals might be placed under a butter churn to ensure the fairies did not steal the butter.





Food was left or milk poured at the doorstep or places associated with the fairies, such as 'fairy trees', as an offering.

However, milk was never given to a neighbour on May Day because it was feared that the milk would be transferred to the neighbour's cow.

Doors, windows, byres and livestock would be decorated with yellow May flowers.

In parts of Ireland, people would make a May Bush: typically a thorn bush or branch decorated with flowers, ribbons, bright shells and rushlights.



Holy wells were also visited, while Beltane dew was thought to bring beauty and maintain youthfulness. Visitors to holy wells would pray for health while walking sunwise (moving from east to west) around the well.

The first water drawn from a well on Beltane was thought to be especially potent, and would bring good luck to the person who drew it.



Beltane morning dew was also thought to bring good luck and health. At dawn or before sunrise on Beltane, women would roll in the dew or wash their faces with it. The dew was thought to increase attractiveness, maintain youthfulness, protect from sun damage (particularly freckles and sunburn) and help with skin ailments for the ensuing year.



It was also thought that a man who washed his face with soap and water on Beltane will grow long whiskers on his face.

Public celebrations of Beltane fell out of popularity by the 20th century. Although many people still put flowers outside the door of families and friends on May morning!



Lughnasa

Lughnasa, the Irish harvest festival, took place on August 1st and was celebrated across Ireland. This date was chosen because it marked Lugh's victory over the spirits of Tír na nÓg.



Lughnasa was primarily a harvest festival celebrating the ripening of the crops.

The festival was established by Lug as funeral games in honour of his foster-mother, *Tailtiu*,

There were contests of chariot racing and wrestling. She was said to have died of exhaustion clearing the forests of Ireland for farming.



Later Lughnasa celebrations expanded to other parts of the country and to include additional events, such as bardic poetry and music contests.

This was also the time for retelling or re-enacting the events of Lug's life

It is traditional to share bread made from the first grains harvested and the apples of the season at Lughnasa. Slice some apple or freshly made bread and pass it around in a circle. Each person takes a slice and passes it to their left (clockwise).



As they pass it to their neighbour, they say "I offer you the first fruits of the harvest, share them with me in fellowship, and let us together thank nature for this bounty."

Samhain is a Gaelic festival marking the end of the harvest season and beginning of winter or "darker half" of the year.

It is also the Irish name for November. Celebrations begin on the evening of 31 October

Samhain is believed to have Celtic pagan origins, and some Neolithic passage tombs in Ireland are aligned with the sunrise at the time of Samhain.



In Irish mythology great gatherings and feasts marked Samhain when the ancient burial mounds were open, which were seen as portals to the Otherworld.

It was when cattle were brought down from the summer pastures and livestock were slaughtered.



Special bonfires were lit, which were deemed to have protective and cleansing powers.



Samhain

At Samhain the boundary between this world and the Otherworld blurred, making contact with the *Aos Sí* or 'fairies' more likely. At Samhain, they were appeased with offerings of food and drink to ensure the people and livestock survived the winter.



The souls of dead kin were also thought to revisit their homes seeking hospitality, and a place was set at the table for them during a meal.

Mumming and guising were part of the festival, whereby people went door-to-door in costume, reciting verses in exchange for food. The costumes were a way of disguising oneself from the fairies.



Divination was also a big part of the festival and often involved nuts and apples.

Most American Halloween traditions were inherited from Irish and Scottish immigrants.



There are many stories associated with this time of year such as Fionn & Aillén.



Easter in Hungary



- Easter is one of the most important Christian holidays, where we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- It has deep roots in Hungary. It has greatly intertwined with our folk traditions.
- The holiday also celebrates spring and the renewal that comes with it. There are many colourful interesting traditions related to it in Hungarian culture.

Easter traditions in Hungary - Sprinkling

- Easter in Hungary is not just a religious thing its also a celebration. There are many traditions that make it more interesting. The most famous one is the sprinkling that still very much exists in the Hungarian countryside.
- The sprinkling can be traced back to an old fertility ritual, that represents the cleaning and renewing power of water.



Easter traditions in Hungary - Sprinkling

- According to the tradition on the morning of easter Monday, men and boys visit their relatives and "sprinkle" the woman and girls.
- At the start the sprinkling was done with water, but today it's mostly done with cologne water. In return the girls give boys a painted and decorated eggs. This egg is a symbol of fertility. The boys also tell girls so called sprinkling poems and they get an egg painted red, some pastries or some drinks in exchange.



Easter traditions in Hungary - Egg painting

- One of the most popular easter traditions in Hungary is the gifting of painted eggs.
- There are many techniques used to decorate eggs such as: using onionshells, using wax or scratching patterns and things into it.
- They often use flowers, birds and geometric patterns. These often have symbolic meanings.



Easter decorations - wreaths, flowers & plants



- The easter wreaths are used to decorate tables, doors and windows. They are made with fresh or fake flowers, painted eggs and ribbons, they are mostly made out of willow sticks as it symbolises eternity and renewal.
- Spring flowers, like tulips, daffodils and hyacinth are essential parts of easter decoration.



Easter decoration - Table decoration

- The decorations on the table are also important. The tablecloth and napkins have patterns revolving around spring. At the center there is often some nice eggs or a wreath.



Celebrate Easter (An Chásc) in Ireland - past & modern traditions!

Back in time, the Irish Easter was a time of religious contemplation, fasting, feasting and dancing.

'Holy Week', the week that includes Good Friday, used to be a full seven-day period of extreme denial. Black tea, dry bread, potatoes with salt (but no butter or buttermilk) and perhaps a little porridge made up the daily fare of this difficult week until Friday when some families denied themselves anything other than dry bread and water.

Easter is an important date on the Irish calendar.

Spring has always been a significant time in Ireland. As far back as Celtic times, agriculture was a huge part of the national identity and spring was associated with growth and fertility.



Coming as it did after a five-week period of semi-fasting, when salted herring and a bit of milk might have additionally been allowed (but no meat), Holy Week was tough.

So tough that the Holy Week fast was officially relaxed to two days by the Church authorities in the mid-19th century

The fast of Lent came to a close on Easter Saturday, so the next day was a day of feasting. For the majority of people, the centrepiece of the feast consisted of corned (salted) beef, a baked Easter ham or boiled bacon served with cabbage and potatoes.



The day began with eggs. And plenty of them. The average Easter breakfast for an Irish man consisted of six eggs.



Children had their very own Irish Easter traditions known as the clúdóg.

The Clúdóg involved calling on neighbours and family to collect gifts of eggs, potatoes, cakes, bread and butter, and milk or flavoured water.



The children would then gather in a field, a makeshift 'den' beneath a tree, or a fireside (if the weather was poor) to cook their eggs and enjoy their feast.

They often painted/dyed and decorated the eggs.

This tradition was replaced with the introduction of chocolate Easter eggs (delivered by the Easter bunny) from the 1910s.



Good Friday in Ireland

Since medieval times, all bread baked on Good Friday was marked with a cross in remembrance of Christ's crucifixion on this day. The custom survives in the Hot Cross Buns we eat in modern times. But it doesn't just stop there.

Eggs that hatched on Good Friday were thought to produce particularly healthy birds while eggs that were laid on this

day were, like bread, marked with a cross and then saved for eating until Easter Sunday.



Comparing Hidrellez, Midsommar, Imbolc, Samhain and Easter Traditions

Similarities

- **Connection to Seasons and Nature:** Many celebrations are linked to important points in the natural year. Hidrellez celebrates spring, Imbolc marks the start of spring, Midsommar celebrates summer, Samhain marks winter's arrival, and Easter celebrates renewal.
- **Renewal and New Beginnings:** Themes of hope and change appear across these festivals. They celebrate life cycles, growth, and fresh starts.
- **Fire and Light Symbolism:** Bonfires, candles, and light appear in many traditions and symbolise protection, life, and warmth.
- **Community and Family:** Families and communities gather to celebrate, share meals, and strengthen social connections.

Differences

- Some festivals are mainly religious (Easter), while others began as folk or seasonal celebrations.
- Each festival marks a different seasonal moment.
- Every country has unique customs: Turkish wishes under rose bushes, Finnish sauna traditions, Irish Celtic customs, and Hungarian Easter water-splashing traditions.

Conclusion

These festivals show both shared and different cultures. Across Europe people responded to the same experiences of nature, changing seasons, and community life. Similar symbols such as fire, flowers, water, and gathering together appear repeatedly.

At the same time, each country shaped these traditions through its own history, religion, geography, and folklore. The celebrations are different on the surface but connected by common human experiences and values.

