

# THEN VS NOW: UKRAINIAN WINTER TRADITIONS



1. Read the text and choose the most suitable title for each paragraph. There are two extra headings that do not match any part of the text.

a) Traditions that are returning today

b) How modern life has changed winter celebrations

c) A carnival of masks and renewal

d) Community traditions: carolling and fortune-telling

e) Family-centred Christmas traditions

f) Regional Christmas traditions in Ukraine

g) Winter weather and holiday superstitions

In Ukraine, winter holidays are not celebrated as one single event. Instead, they form a continuous festive season that begins with Christmas, continues with the New Year, and ends with Malanka. Together, these celebrations show how Ukrainian traditions have changed over time — and which of them are now returning.

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Traditionally, Christmas was the most symbolic and family-centred holiday. Many customs were connected to farming life, protection, and hopes for the coming year. One well-known tradition was placing hay under the table and garlic under the tablecloth, which symbolised warmth, nature, and a good harvest. In several regions, especially in the south of Ukraine, children traditionally visited their godparents, bringing festive food as a sign of respect, gratitude, and belonging.

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Christmas traditions have never been the same across the country. In the Carpathian and Zakarpattia regions, Christmas Eve was known as Korochun, a name influenced by neighbouring cultures. Families baked a special round bread called korochun, which symbolised continuity and well-being. In the lowland areas of Zakarpattia, families did not prepare kutia at all. Instead, the Christmas meal began with bobalky — small baked pieces of dough mixed with poppy seeds and honey.



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Winter holidays were also a time for community traditions. Carolling played an important role, especially in villages, where groups went from house to house singing and wishing families health and prosperity. Another common winter practice was fortune-telling, mainly among young women.

These rituals were believed to reveal future marriage, luck, or important life events and were a natural part of the festive atmosphere.



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Over time, social changes have influenced winter traditions. Urban life, modern work schedules, and mass media reduced many home-based customs. Christmas became quieter and more private, while New Year developed into the most public holiday of the season. During the twentieth century, New Year celebrations moved into city centres, with decorated squares, concerts, television programmes, and fireworks.

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The winter season traditionally ended with Malanka, celebrated on the night of the Old New Year. Malanka has deep roots in pre-Christian winter rituals and was traditionally designed as a moment of controlled chaos. People wore masks and costumes, performed humorous scenes, and temporarily broke social rules to symbolically leave the old year behind and welcome the new one.

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In recent years, several winter traditions have begun to return. Carolling has become popular again among young people in creative forms. Hay under the tablecloth is used by modern families as a cultural symbol rather than a superstition. Fortune-telling has reappeared as a playful activity. Malanka, in particular, has experienced a strong revival through festivals, parades, and community events.

Today, Ukrainian winter traditions represent a balance between continuity and change. Some customs remain private and family-based, others are public and festive, and some have returned with new meaning. Together, Christmas, New Year, and Malanka show how traditions can adapt to modern life while still preserving their cultural purpose.

2. Read the text again if needed. Decide if the statements are TRUE, FALSE, or NOT GIVEN. Correct the false statements using information from the text.

1. Ukrainian winter holidays form one long festive season rather than a single celebration.    **T   F   NG**

2. Visiting godparents with festive food was traditionally practised in all regions of Ukraine.    **T   F   NG**

3. Korochn and bobalky are still prepared in most Ukrainian families today.    **T   F   NG**





4. Urban life and mass media have changed how winter holidays are celebrated.      T   F   NG
5. During Malanka, people wore costumes and temporarily broke social rules.      T   F   NG
6. The text says that all winter traditions have fully returned to their original form.      T   F   NG

