

Mighty Irish Traditions and Customs

Open cloze. Write only one word per blank.

1. Farming



People have been skillfully farming in Ireland _____ the Neolithic period... that's over 6,000 years ago. Arguably the most prolific evidence of this can be found in a corner of County Mayo.

The 'Céide Fields' is the most extensive Neolithic site on the island of Ireland and, interestingly _____, it's the oldest field system in the world.

Fast-forward 6,000 or so years and beef and milk production account _____ roughly 66% of Ireland's agricultural output

(2018) with exports hitting a hefty €1 billion per month.

In 2016, there were 137,500 farms in operation in Ireland, many of which will have been in the same family for generations.

2. Halloween

Believe it or _____, Halloween originated in ancient Ireland and it all began with the pagan celebration of Samhain, which took place every November.

The origins of Halloween date back 2,000 years to the time of the Celts. The Celtic festival of Samhain saw people gather around enormous bonfires which were used to scare _____ the Puca (ghost).

Many years later, in the 8th century, the Pope at the time decided that November 1st would be known as 'All Saints Day' and it would be used as a day to honour the many Christian Saints that _____ passed.

The evening before soon became known as 'All Hallows Eve', which went on to be nicknamed 'Hallows Eve' which then became 'Halloween'.

There are a number of Irish traditions that take place at Halloween in Ireland:

- Kids dress up and go trick-or-treating
- People (usually those with kids or those expecting visiting children) decorate their homes
- Pumpkins are carved and placed in the window with a candle burning inside
- Fancy dress parties take place in schools and pubs

3. St. Patrick's Day



St. Patrick is Ireland's Patron Saint and it's believed that he was born in Roman Britain in the fourth century.

The very first St. Patrick's Day event began with a lad named Luke Wadding, an Irish Franciscan friar from County Waterford.

It was Wadding who helped turn March 17th into a celebration for St. Patrick, after he managed to get the power of the Church behind the idea.

At _____ foundations, March 17th is a celebration of the life of Ireland's Patron Saint. However, over the years the day has become more of a celebration of Irish culture.

4. Craic and the Use of Humour

One of the most common questions that hits our inbox is from people asking for an explanation of 'Craic'. The word 'Craic' simply _____ having fun.

Like many countries, Ireland's home to a fairly unique type of humour. Now, don't get me wrong, it's not radically different to anywhere _____, but it is uniquely Irish.

In some countries, two life-long friends throwing light-hearted abuse at _____ other could be construed as a bad thing... not in Ireland, oh no. This is known as 'Slagging' and it's *generally* not meant to truly offend.

5. Traditional Music Sessions



Now, many trad sessions that take place in Ireland these days aren't *really* traditional in the sense that they've been happening for years.

They're 'traditional' in the sense that they exclusively feature traditional Irish music that's _____ using iconic Irish instruments.

The main instruments associated with traditional Irish music include:

The Bodhran: a simple handheld old drum used as a percussion instrument. It's always played vertically, sitting on the musician's knee. It's referred _____ as the heartbeat of traditional music providing the music with a great beat.

The Bodhrán is always played vertically, resting on the musician's knee. They will place their 'free' hand on various parts of the interior of the drum to control the pitch and timbre.

The Celtic Harp: this is one of the iconic instruments played in Irish music and _____ appears on the national flag of Ireland. In Ireland it's a wire-string instrument that requires great skill and long practice.

Fiddle: the Irish fiddle is an essential Irish traditional instrument that looks very much like the violin. It offers a unique playing style and sound that sets it apart from the violin. In traditional Irish music, the fiddle is usually heard above all other instruments.

Now, note that I said *many*. There are some traditional sessions that have been taking place in Ireland for years, and they're traditional in _____ sense.

For example, Clancy's pub in the town of Athy in County Kildare is home to Ireland's longest-running trad sessions. It's been taking place regularly for over 50 years. That's pretty damn impressive.

6. Dance

One of the most famous Irish traditions is known as 'Irish Dancing'. It's a phenomenon not just in Ireland, but around the world. Irish dancing is a variety of traditional dances that comprise of solo and group dances.

It's a huge part of Irish culture and heritage and over the last decade, the tradition has _____ in popularity with new generations. The newfound revival can be related to the success of *Riverdance*.



However, Irish dancing was around long before *Riverdance* was ever a thing. For many people in Ireland, they _____ up Irish dancing as a fun activity as children and continued to enjoy it as adults. Irish dance has always been a huge feature in Irish themed events such as St. Patrick's Day.

What makes Irish dance so special is it's completely different from modern dancing – it has its _____ unique form of dancing that's captivated people for decades. Even today, young and old are _____ learning the different steps involved in Irish dance routines. These dancing routines include jigs, reels, ceilis and step dancing.

7. Slang

Another Irish custom is the use of slang. Now, Irish slang tends to vary greatly depending _____ the county that you're in along with the age of the person that's speaking and their background.

For example, some slang from Belfast will sound _____ French to a person from North Dublin. Here's a handful of examples of Irish slang:

- I'm grand/it's grand = I'm OK/it's OK
- Gobshite = a silly person

8. Christmas



Christmas is widely celebrated across the island of Ireland and we have our fair share of Irish Christmas traditions that _____ from nice and normal to pretty damn unusual.

Some of the most common festive traditions are the likes of putting up decorations and _____ Christmas cake (7 to 8 weeks before Christmas).

Some of the more unusual traditions, like the 'Wren Boys' and 'Little Christmas', are more unique and, unfortunately, _____ practised less and less.

9. Ancient (and Unusual) Festivals



So, the likes of St. Patrick's Day and Halloween are fairly bog-standard festivals. Don't get me wrong, they're part of Irish tradition, but there's nothing too unique about them.

It's when someone tells you about the Puck Fair and the Matchmaking festivals that you start to get a sense of the more unusual side of some Irish customs.

The Puck Fair, which takes place over three days in Killorglin in Kerry, is said to be the oldest festival in Ireland. The Puck Fair kicks _____ when a group from the village go up into the mountains and catch a wild goat.

The goat is then brought back to Killorglin and crowned 'King Puck'. It's then placed in a small cage and put _____ on a high stand in the town for three days. During this time, plenty of festivities take place. On the final day, he's led _____ up into the mountains.

Another unique festival that's been taking place for 100+ years is the Lisdoonvarna Matchmaking Festival. The festival is run by Willie Daly and he's said to have set up around 3,000 marriages.

10. Watching the Late Late Toy Show

The Late Late Show (an Irish talk show) first aired many years ago, in 1962. It's now the longest-running talk show in Europe and the second longest-running talk show in the world.

In the 1970s, the Late Late Toy show first aired and, over the years, it has become a tradition for people in Ireland, old and young, to sit down and watch it.

The show features all of the _____ kid toys that are set to be 'the next big thing' that year. It also features interviews and performances from musicians.

When I was a kid, I always saw the arrival of the Toy Show as the start of Christmas. A mighty show that's _____ the test of time.

11. Storytelling



One of the most famous Irish traditions revolves _____ the art of storytelling. Now, back in the day, one could get a full-time _____ as a storyteller. During medieval times, a 'Bard' was a professional storyteller.

The bard was employed by a patron and was tasked _____ telling tales of the patron's (or their ancestors') activities.

The tradition of storytelling dates back to the arrival of the Celts in Ireland. Back then, over 2,000 years ago, history and events were not recorded in writing – they were passed from one generation to the next via the _____ word.

Over the years, Irish mythology and Irish folklore were born and both blossomed, with incredible tales of love, loss and battle gripping listeners across Ireland for centuries.

Many of us that grew up in Ireland were _____ tales of Irish legends that featured the mighty warriors Fionn Mac Cumhaill and Cu Chulainn and the many battles that they fought in.

Other stories were a _____ bit creepier. I'm talking, of course, about tales of the Banshee, the Abhartach (the Irish Vampire) and the Puca.

Choose the correct answer.

1 The 'Céide Fields' is a prehistoric agricultural site.

True False Not stated

2 Crop exports amount to a monthly €1 billion in revenue.

True False Not stated

3 'All Saints Day' ... Halloween.

precedes follows coincides with

4 Fancy dress parties are held in

offices parks schools

5 Luke Wadding banned St. Patrick's Day celebrations.

True False Not stated

6 'Slagging' is

an offence telling jokes teasing

7 The Bodhran is a ... instrument.

wind string percussion

8 The fiddle is a violin.

True False Not stated

9 Riverdance is a traditional Irish dancer.

True False Not stated

10 Slang is not the same across Ireland.

True False Not stated

11 It takes long to make Christmas cake.

True False Not stated

12 During the Puck Fair the Killorglin villagers grab a ... from the mountains and return it after three days.

Sheep goat calf

13 The Late Late Show is a ... show.

comedy talk games

14 Originally, storytelling did not involve Irish mythology and Irish folklore.

True False Not stated

