

6 customs that only Ukrainians will understand

1 Greeting people with bread and salt



Ukrainian people are very family oriented. This is why a lot of customs are related to family holidays or events. One of them comes from the Kyivan Rus period when people greeted their most honourable guests with bread and salt. By doing this they wished wealth (bread is a symbol of wealth) and protection from evil spirits (with the help of the salt). If you greeted your guests like that now, they would probably be surprised.

Nowadays, it is mostly just a part of the saying.

This tradition

2 Celebrating the Old New Year



On 14th January, Ukraine celebrates its most unusual holiday. It is called Old New Year. The holiday is the result of the transition from one system of chronology to another. As the difference between the calendars (old and new style) is 13 days, people decided to celebrate the New Year twice - once in a new style, and another time in the old way.

This tradition

3 Plunging into an ice hole



A few days after Old New Year, on 19th January people in Ukraine celebrate Epiphany – the baptism of Jesus. Every year on this day thousands of Ukrainians jump into an ice hole. They believe that by going into the icy river all your sins and illnesses will be cured. This event happens every year, and people queue to dive in.

This tradition

4 Jumping over the bonfire



If you are not ready to dive into icy water, Kupala night might be something for you. Many people believe that Kupala Night, which is on 7th July, is a magical time. On this night, fire has some special powers. You need to jump over the bonfire to be cured of some illnesses or forgiven for your sins. And if you want to be happy and rich, you need to find the flower of a special plant - a fern. This is a really difficult task that only a few lucky people can do.

Have you ever tried it?

This tradition

5 Striking the family with willow twigs



If you don't enjoy the fire or cold water, there are still options. On Willow Sunday, which in Ukraine is called Verbna Nedilia, people celebrate the date of Jesus' entry into the city of Jerusalem. In Western countries, this day is called Palm Sunday, but because there aren't any palms in Ukraine, locals use willow branches instead. There is an ancient custom that suggests hitting your family members with a bunch of willows. If you do this, you will protect them from illnesses and evil spirits.

This tradition

6. Painting and beating eggs



Starting the Easter celebrations with an egg (pysanka) is a custom that has existed in Ukraine since ancient times. An egg symbolises the beginning of new life. People paint the shell of an egg in bright colours using wax paints. Each colour has a different meaning (red is for the joy of life; yellow is for sunlight; blue is for health, etc.). Children usually play a game called 'beats'. In this game they hit each other's pysanka. Whoever's egg breaks is the loser.

Have you ever played this game?

This tradition