

Weird Traditions around the World

Warm up

- Do you have any strange or unusual traditions in your country?
- Do you have any strange or unusual traditions in your family?
- Are there any traditions that you particularly enjoy (Christmas or wedding traditions etc)?
- Are there any traditions that drive you crazy?
- Do you know the origins or history of any traditions?



1. Read the article below about strange British traditions. Each description of the tradition has 4 adverbs missing. Choose which adverb goes in which gap.

Weighing the Mayor

loudly

exactly

purely

literally

“Weighing the Mayor” is a tradition in the town of High Wycombe that is **exactly** what it sounds like. It is tradition to weigh the mayor at the start and at the end of their term in office. A crowd of people watches the weighing ceremony, and if the mayor hasn’t gained weight the crowd claps and cheers **loudly**. However, if the mayor has gained weight they are booed, because they have **literally** gotten fat at the taxpayer’s expense. The tradition began in the 17th century as a real tool to measure corruption, but today it is **purely** ceremonial.



Wife Carrying Race

hopefully

seemingly

frantically

actually

Every year in the town of Dorking couples compete in a bizarre race. Hundreds of men pick up their wives and **frantically** sprint through a 380-meter racecourse (**hopefully** they’re not married to the mayor of High Wycombe). The **seemingly** light-hearted race **actually** has a dark origin, dating back to a Viking invasion in 793 AD in which Vikings carried off women from the town against their will. The woman in the team must weigh at least 50 kilograms, and the winner gets a keg of beer.



Very poor technique

Nettle Eating Competition

drunkenly

originally

instantly

apparently

Nettles are a type of bush which are *originally* from Europe but are now found all over the world. Their leaves are spiky, they can *instantly* give you a rash if you touch them, and they also taste like spinach, which is why nobody eats them. Nobody except for the small town of Marshwood. Every year residents of the town gather in the town hall to have the annual nettle-eating contest. How did this weird tradition even get started?

Apparently two farmers were *drunkenly* arguing about who had the tallest nettle bushes on their land, and decided to make a bet about it. The farmer who had the shortest nettle bushes had to eat all the nettle leaves from his bush. The loser of the bet was a man of his word, and the rest, as they say, is history.



Nettles



2. Read through the traditions below with a partner and see if you can guess which country they originate from.

Thailand

India

Denmark

Scotland

Mexico

Spain

a) In this country it is customary to throw cinnamon at a person on their 25th birthday if they are not married. The tradition dates back to the 16th century when spice salesman, known as “pebersvends”, were unable to find a wife due to always travelling for their work. *Denmark*

b) This country has an unusual birthday tradition. The birthday boy or girl has their hands tied behind their back. Then, as they try to take a bite of their cake, someone shoves their face into it while everybody around them yells “Mordida! Mordida! Mordida!”. Happy birthday! *Mexico*

c) Every year a festival is held in which people pierce their skin with sharp objects and hooks. Some even pull cars with the hooks piercing their backs. This festival is held to honour Lord Murugan, the god of courage, wealth, and wisdom. *India*

d) Nobody quite knows where the tradition of “baby-jumping” came from, but every year dozens of babies are placed on a blanket in the street, and then men dressed up as the devil jump over them. This supposedly cleanses the babies of sin. *Spain*

e) A huge feast is prepared, and no expense is spared. Dishes of every kind, piles of fruit, and hundreds of treats. But this feast is not for humans. Every year an enormous buffet is prepared and served to thousands of lucky monkeys. *Thailand*

f) This country has a very odd pre-wedding ritual called “blackening the bride.” Before her big day, the bride is taken around town, and people will throw eggs, spoilt milk, and basically anything that is disgusting at her. This is supposed to toughen her up for her hard life after being married. *Scotland*



3. You are going to watch a video about wedding traditions around the world. The video contains the words in the box. Use the words to complete the sentences.

broom	newlyweds	misconception
prosperity	shave	fiancé
envelope	turmeric	evils

- The *newlyweds* were both drunk and happy after the wedding.
- You need an *envelope* to send a letter
- Why does he even own a broom if he never sweeps the floor?
- The priest made a speech about the *evils* of the modern world.
- Indian food has a lot of *turmeric*, mostly for colour.
- I wish you luck and *prosperity* in your future.
- There is a common *misconception* that pigs are dumb. They're actually very smart.
- My *fiancé* and I are getting married in 2 months.
- He's a very hairy guy, he has to *shave* every three days.



4. Watch the video “What Wedding Traditions Look Like Around the World”¹ and answer the questions

- What is “the dollar dance”? *It is a dance where people throw money at and pin money to the bride and groom*
- Did the “jumping the broom” tradition begin in the United States? *No, it began in Ghana*
- What does the “Koumbaro” in Greece do? *Help the groom shave and get ready*
- What do couples in China usually receive after the tea ceremony? *Red envelopes filled with money*
- What is traditionally rubbed on newlyweds in India? *Turmeric paste*
- What does cleaning up broken dishes in Germany symbolize? *Teamwork*
- Which of these wedding traditions did you like the most? Which do think is the strangest?



5. Optional task/homework. Research *two* unusual traditions from around the world. These could be anything from Christmas traditions to good luck traditions. Then make up a tradition of your own. Your class will guess which is true and which is made up.

¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6WeD_a0Zil4&ab_channel=Insider