

20 THINGS

YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW ABOUT BIRTHDAY TRADITIONS AROUND THE WORLD

Birthday celebrations have a long history.

The **ANCIENT ROMANS** were known to celebrate birthdays with banquets, gifts, and prayers for family members, friends, and even business contacts.



The tradition of BIRTHDAY CAKES

dates back even longer to ancient Greece, where moon-shaped cakes were offered to Artemis (the Goddess of, among others, childbirth).

1=2

Whereas in Western cultures, you celebrate your first birthday after living for a year, in **CHINA**, at birth you are already considered to be a one year old. So, on your first birthday, you turn two!

In **POLAND**, name days can be even more important than birthdays. Each day of the calendar is linked to specific names – so you could even get to celebrate twice!

BABY FORTUNE TELLING IN MALTA

The Maltese tradition of the 'Quċċija' takes place on a child's first birthday: a number of items are laid out on the floor, and the child is encouraged to crawl to them and pick one. The objects symbolise various professions, and whichever one they pick is believed to foretell their future career.



In **DENMARK**, birthdays can start with a magical surprise!

Whilst the birthday child is still asleep, the family quietly fill their room with gifts, so the child awakens to a delightful birthday bonanza.

'Nose greasing' is a popular tradition in parts of **EASTERN CANADA**. The birthday boy or girl has their nose buttered, so that it is too slippery for bad luck. The bad news is that the amount of butter used increases as you get older!

In **BRAZIL**, after singing "Parabéns pra você", the Brazilian Portuguese version of 'Happy Birthday,' it is common to add a few extra chants (É pique! ... É hora! ... Rátim-bum!) and then, everyone shouts the name of the child whose birthday it is as many times as their age!

PROBABLY THE WORLD'S BEST-KNOWN SONG!

"Happy Birthday to You" was originally written in 1893 as "Good Morning to All" by two American sisters, Mildred and Patty Hill. Although the notes were retained, the lyrics were later changed to "Happy Birthday to You".

In **GERMANY**, it is considered bad luck to wish someone 'Alles Gute zum Geburtstag!' in advance of their actual birthday. So, if you are celebrating your big day in Germany, don't expect any well wishes until the clock has struck midnight, heralding the start of your birthday.



In **MEXICO**, no birthday party is complete without a piñata! Kids are blindfolded and take turns swinging at it with a stick until it bursts open, spilling candy and treats for everyone to share.

In **ITALY**, it is customary to open your birthday present as soon as you receive it, in the presence of the person who gave it to you. It may be considered rude to put the gift aside and open it later!



Koningsdag (King's Day) or Koninginnedag (Queen's day) is a national holiday in the **NETHERLANDS** and is a celebration for everyone of the reigning Monarch's birthday. It is a tradition to wear orange on the day.

In countries like **ITALY, SERBIA, SPAIN, AND HUNGARY**, it is common for the birthday boy or girl to receive one 'gentle' tug on the earlobe for each year of their age. If you think that sounds painful, just look at our next tradition!

In **IRELAND**, it is traditional to give the lucky child birthday bumps! The child is held by their arms and legs and hoisted up and down in the air for the number of times equal to their age, plus one or two for 'luck' – for more lively birthday parties this can be a painful experience!



In **LITHUANIA**, a similar tradition exists where friends and family lift the birthday child in a chair as many times as their age, all while cheering and celebrating!

In **JAPAN**, gifts are traditionally wrapped in beautiful paper or fabric on birthdays, highlighting the importance of presentation and thoughtfulness.

100

Reaching a century can be a noble occasion in many cultures. In the **UNITED KINGDOM**, you will receive a congratulatory message from the King or Queen on your 100th birthday and from 105 on, you receive a message each year!

WHO INVITES WHO?

In some countries like Italy and Germany, the person celebrating their birthday buys drinks for their friends or organises the party. In other countries, such as the USA, it is more common for friends to share the cost. Be sure to check on the common practice when you go to a birthday party in a different country!

FOREVER YOUNG



One way to stay young is to be born in a leap year on 29 February – then, technically speaking, you only have a birthday once every four years! The downside is that you might not receive many birthday presents...

25 years

European Day of Languages
26 September

