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CIR's Corner

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Hello everyone! "CIR's Corner" is my monthly article about international exchange and cultures around the world. I will introduce a variety of interesting international topics.

This Month's Topic: Summer Solstice

Summer solstice in the northern hemisphere is in June, and this year it will occur on June 21. It is the longest day (and shortest night) of the year. Many people around the world celebrate the summer solstice, especially people in European countries. Summer solstice festivals across Europe are sometimes called "Midsummer," because the first day of summer was traditionally thought to be May 1. With the spread of Christianity, some summer solstice festivals were renamed "Saint John's Day" to commemorate the birth of John the Baptist. No matter what it's called, the summer solstice is a time for Europeans to celebrate outdoors with bonfires, dances, and feasts.



Girls wearing flower wreaths for Midsummer celebrations in Sweden

As an American who has never been to Europe, I don't know much about summer solstice festivities that are held there. I asked Julius Žilinskas, a Lithuanian Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) who has lived in Ebetsu for 14 years, about his experience celebrating the summer solstice in Lithuania.

Summer Solstice in Lithuania

In Lithuania, the summer solstice festival is called *Rasos* (Day of the Dew) or *Joninės* (Saint John's Day). Along with the other Baltic countries Estonia and Latvia, it is a national holiday that is celebrated from the evening of June 23 to June 24.

According to Julius, *Rasos* is a traditional event that is held to celebrate growth of plants. "It was first mentioned in an ancient document in the early 14th century and continued for 14 days at the end of May at the time. Currently traditional events are celebrated for one day while recent events are held for several days in June and more commonly called *Joninės*." It seems that *Rasos* is the pagan name for the festival, while *Joninės* is the Christian name. Julius added, "Although the traditions have changed through centuries, some have still remained."



Can you see any flowers?

One tradition that continues to this day is the search for the magical fern flower. Flowers do not normally bloom on ferns. However, there is a myth

that a fern flower blooms at midnight on the summer solstice. “The magic flower must be searched for in silence, and it brings good luck to anyone who finds it,” Julius explained.



Lithuanians celebrating *Joninės* in traditional dress

Joninės celebrations are held throughout the country. In Julius’s hometown of Klaipėda, people wear traditional clothing (“It differs by region,” he said), sing traditional folk songs, and dance around a fire. People enjoy performances, drinking, and eating. At the festival, “there are some stalls selling wooden and linen products, toys, candles, food and drinks.” Julius also explained that beer is a new tradition of the event, and major beer companies have their own booths around town. It’s “like the beer gardens in Odori, Sapporo,” he said.



A *Joninės* bonfire in [Klaipėda](#)

Thank you, Julius, for explaining your culture to my readers! If you are interested in learning more about the summer solstice celebrations in Lithuania, check out [this video](#).

Summer Solstice in Other Countries

The United Kingdom: Stonehenge was built to align perfectly with the sunrise on the morning of the summer solstice. It is unknown why it was built this way, but nowadays, thousands of people gather here for summer solstice celebrations. There are

ceremonies, singing, and dancing. It’s one of the only times during the year that the general public can enter the main circle for free.



The United States: When I was in school, my friend used to hold bonfire parties in his yard for summer solstice. His family was Irish American and proud of their Celtic heritage.

Also, the Fremont area of my hometown, Seattle, holds an annual street fair and parade. The Fremont Solstice Parade is kicked off by cyclists wearing nothing but body paint. The event is famous for its artsy and quirky vibes.



Canada: June 24 is *Fête nationale du Québec*, and it is a provincial holiday in Quebec. The tradition was brought there by French colonists, so it shares some similarities with summer solstice celebrations in Europe, such as bonfires and parades. Originally, the holiday celebrated John the Baptist, the patron saint of French Canadians, but over time, it has become more secular and patriotic. It is now a holiday to celebrate French-Canadian culture and identity. ★



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