

St. Patrick's Day Around The World

Saint Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland, which means he is the protector and guardian of the country and its citizens. St. Patrick's Day is celebrated on 17th March, which is the day that Saint Patrick died. Although it is considered to be an Irish holiday and festival, it is celebrated around the world.



The shamrock is the symbol of Ireland and St. Patrick's Day. Its name comes from the Irish Gaelic word 'seamrog', which refers to the three leaves on the plant. It is said that Saint Patrick used the leaves of the shamrock to explain the Christian Trinity (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit).

Who Was Saint Patrick?

Saint Patrick was born in Wales in AD365 to a Christian family. His grandfather was a priest and his father was a deacon in the Christian church. At the age of 16, he was kidnapped by pirates and sold as a slave in Ireland. He spent six years working as a shepherd and during this time, he turned to God for help and guidance. When he escaped to Western Europe, he followed his calling and became a deacon for the church. Several years later, he was ordained as a priest and later, a bishop. He went to Ireland as a missionary to teach people about Christianity and helped to change Ireland from a pagan to a Christian country.

St. Patrick's Day in Ireland

St. Patrick's Day is a national holiday in Ireland and is celebrated across the country. It is a Christian festival, similar to Christmas and Easter. Most Irish people begin the day by attending church to pray to Saint Patrick and for missionaries around the world. After this, they make their way to local towns and villages for the St. Patrick's Day parade. There are many of these all over Ireland. They consist of dancers, local organisations, tractors and floats. It is a time of great celebration and many people wear the shamrock and dress in green. There are lots of leprechaun hats and beards and a real party atmosphere!

St. Patrick's Day in the UK

St. Patrick's Day in the UK is celebrated in many major cities. Birmingham has the largest parade (the third largest in the world), with lots of singing, dancing and partying. Manchester holds a two-week Irish festival before St. Patrick's Day, as the city has a large Irish community. There is an Irish Market outside the town hall and a large parade through the city centre on the 17th March.

St. Patrick's Day in Europe

Several countries in Europe celebrate St. Patrick's Day. In Brussels, Belgium, a parade takes place in the Schuman area of the EU quarter, which is known as the Irish Village. The Mannequin Pis, Brussels' most famous statue, is often dressed in tweed (a traditional fabric of Irish costumes). The Irish community in Oslo, Norway, celebrate with a lively parade through the city. There is a pipe band and lots of traditional Irish music and dancing. In 2001, the St. Patrick's Day three-legged charity race was started in Copenhagen, Denmark. All the money raised is donated to a different charity every year.

The Southern Hemisphere

South America's largest St. Patrick's Day celebrations take place in Buenos Aires. There isn't a parade, however, there is a giant street party with singing, dancing, food and drink, which takes up ten blocks of an area called the Retiro district.

In Sydney, Australia, St. Patrick's Day is also called Family Day. There is a large parade, as well as entertainment in Hyde Park, with lots of local and international acts performing.

Auckland, New Zealand, holds a parade and carnival with lots of traditional Irish music and dancing. There are lots of food stalls, a Gaelic football match and lots of parties in local bars and restaurants.

Interesting Facts

- New York City's annual St. Patrick's Day parade is the largest in the world with over one million spectators. It is also broadcast to millions on television.
- In Chicago, USA, the Chicago River is dyed green in celebration.
- Over 100 million people celebrate St. Patrick's Day every year.
- In Ireland, there are approximately 60 churches and cathedrals named after Saint Patrick.

Questions

1. Why is St. Patrick's Day celebrated on 17th March?
2. How would Saint Patrick have felt when he was kidnapped and sold as a slave?
3. Why is the shamrock important?
4. Why do you think St. Patrick's Day is now celebrated around the world, not just in Ireland?
5. What does he 'followed his calling' mean?

Questions

10. Why do many Irish people attend church on St. Patrick's Day?

Challenge:

Imagine you are planning a St. Patrick's Day celebration. What would be part of your celebration and why?