

Vernal (Spring) Equinox Celebrations



Photo by Alan Gould

Vernal Equinox Day and Cherry Blossom Festival (Japan)

Vernal Equinox Day (Shunbun No Hi) is a time for family gatherings or visiting visiting family graves to honor ancestors. It can be a time for spring cleaning or starting new activities.

Spring is also time for Cherry Blossom Festival, called Sakura in Japan. People drink, sing, and feast to celebrate the beauty of nature.



Photo: <https://spacetourismguide.com/march-equinox-celebrations/>

Chichen Itzá (Mexico—Mayan)

The great pyramid at Chichen Itzá (in Yucatan) has 4 staircases with 91 steps each. The sum total of steps plus the temple at the top equals 365, the number of days in a year. On the equinox triangles of light and shadow appear on the side of the pyramid, resembling a snake slithering down the pyramid, finally shining on a giant serpent's head carved in stone at the bottom. The snake symbolizes Kukulcán, the feathered serpent, bringing light of the Sun to the Earth and reminding us to prepare corn fields for planting.



Photo by Isabel Hawkins, 2022

See <https://maya.nmai.si.edu/maya-sun/maya-and-sun>

Stonehenge (England)

Stonehenge is a prehistoric site that draws crowds for the solstices in June and December. Visitors are interested in seeing the sunrise or sunset in a particular alignment of the stones. But the equinox is another occasion for gathering. Druids and Pagans gather in a spiritual community.



Photo by Andrew Dunn (via Wikimedia Commons)

Cahokia Woodhenge (Illinois, USA)

Earth mounds were left by Native American civilizations before Europeans arrived. Cahokia, near St. Louis, Missouri, is a large and complex archaeological site. It includes the Cahokia Woodhenge, a series of timber circles, believed to be a solar calendar for tracking the passing seasons, similar to Stonehenge.



Photo from <https://spacetourismguide.com/march-equinox-celebrations/>

Mnajdra Temples (Malta)

Mnajdra temples have structural alignments to the Sun on the equinoxes and solstices. On the equinoxes, sunlight enters a central corridor of the South Temple at sunrise. Archaeologists, interested travelers, and druids gather to observe these events.



Photo from <https://spacetourismguide.com/march-equinox-celebrations/>

Chunfen (China)

Chunfen is the equinox day when the Sun reaches the celestial longitude of 0° . That's the point in the sky where the ecliptic (annual path of the Sun) crosses the celestial equator. Celebration activities include flying kites or playing a game to try to balance an egg to stand up vertically.

Folklore (not just in China) says that eggs can only be balanced in this way on the vernal equinox. Folklore also says that eggs can be balanced on the heads of nails at the Earth's equator. In truth, eggs will balance anywhere at any time of year, and the game has no connection to the gravitational force of the Moon or Sun.



Nowruz (Iran)

Nowruz is the Iranian New Year or Persian New Year, the first day of the Iranian calendar. “Nowruz” means “new day” and symbolizes hope and rebirth.

In Iran, the Nowruz holidays last thirteen days. People celebrate by spring cleaning, repairing or disposing of broken things, painting and home improvements.

Traditional foods include tea and pastries, cookies, fresh and dried fruits, mixed nuts. There is also Sabze (wheat, barley, mung bean, or lentil sprouts), Samanu (wheat germ sweet pudding), Persian olive (senjed), Vinegar (serke), Apple (sib), Garlic (sir), and Sumac (somāq)



Photo from <https://spacetourismguide.com/march-equinox-celebrations/>

Maslenitsa (Russia)

Maslenitsa is a Slavic religious and folk holiday, preceding Great Lent in Eastern Orthodox religion, and preceding the equinox by a few days.

Lent forbids parties, secular music, and dancing, so Maslenitsa is the last chance to do those things before Lent. It is also the last week during which eggs and dairy products are permitted, so it's called "Cheese-fare week" or "Crepe week". It is often celebrated with an effigy of "Lady Maslenitsa," sleigh rides, and eating bliny (thin pancakes or crepes).



Photo from <https://spacetourismguide.com/march-equinox-celebrations/>

In Belarus the spring equinox is the time birds return to their homeland. To welcome them back Belarusians decorate trees with ribbons and paper birds. They also bake bread formed in the shape of birds and then take them outside and throw them up into the air.

Whuppity Scoorie (Lanark, Scotland)

Whuppity Scoorie on 1 March celebrates the approach of spring. Local children gather around the local St Nicholas kirk and at 6 pm the wee bell is rung, whence the children run around the church in a clockwise direction, making noise and swinging paper balls on strings above their heads. After three laps, they scramble for coins thrown by members of the Community Council who host the event. The Community Council also hosts a "Whuppity Scoorie Storytelling Festival" and art workshops after the event until 7 March.



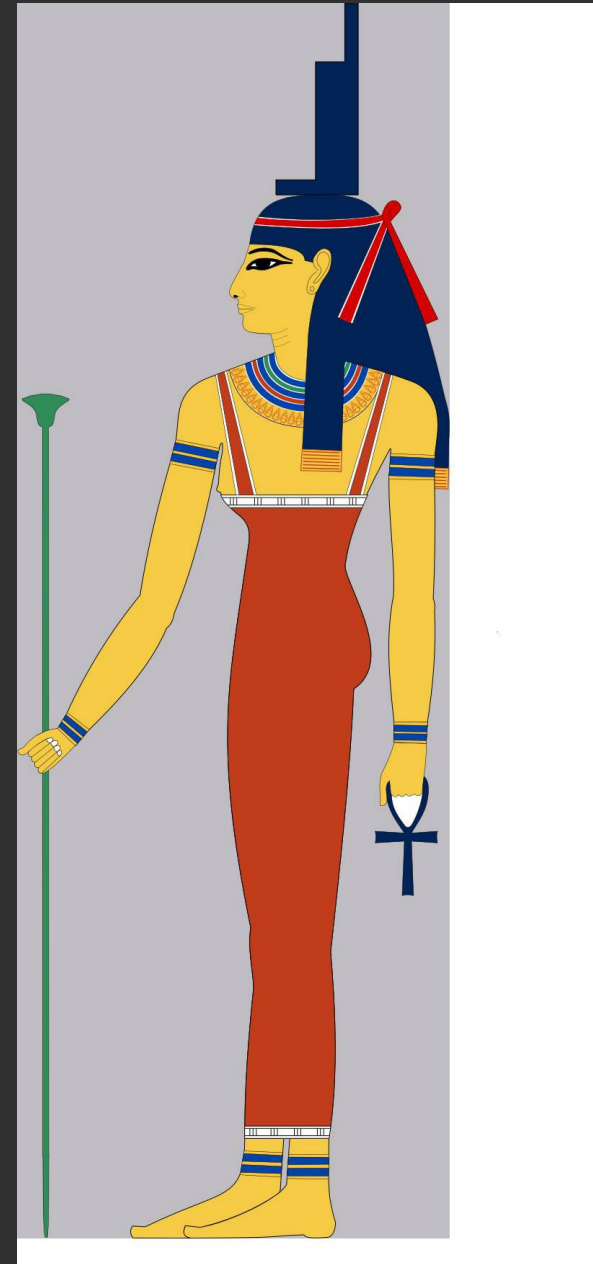
Photo from BBC -

http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/hi/newsid_6410000/newsid_6411700/6411767.stm

Festival of Isis (Ancient Egypt)

The Festival of Isis in ancient Egypt was a celebration of spring and rebirth. Isis features prominently in the story of the resurrection of her lover, Osiris. Folklorist Sir James Frazer says "Egyptians held a festival of Isis at the time when the Nile began to rise the goddess was then mourning for the lost Osiris, and the tears which dropped from her eyes swelled the impetuous tide of the river." Isis' major festival was in the fall.

Photo from wikipedia.



Songkran Water Festival (Thailand)

Celebrated shortly after the spring equinox each year in Thailand, the event represents New Year's Day in Thailand. "Songkran" is derived from a Sanskrit word meaning "astrological passage". Typical traditions include going to a Buddhist monastery, visiting elderly relatives and, most importantly, throwing water!



Photo from

<https://www.twinkl.com/teaching-wiki/spring-equinox-rituals-around-the-world>

Armed with buckets of water, pressure hoses, and water guns, some as large as cannons, people drench anyone and everyone. Some go for up to six days!

Easter

Easter or Resurrection Sunday is a Christian festival and cultural holiday commemorating the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, described in the New Testament as having occurred on the third day of his burial following his crucifixion by the Romans about 30 AD. It is the culmination of the Passion of Jesus Christ, preceded by Lent (or Great Lent), a 40-day period of fasting, prayer, and penance.



Photo from <https://whitehouse.gov/1.info/easter-egg-roll/>

The White House Easter Egg Roll is an annual event that takes place on Easter Monday. It can be traced back to 1814. With the help of wooden spoons, children compete to roll eggs across the White House lawn and cross the finish line first. Easter eggs are offered as prizes. Overlooking the celebrations is the U.S. President and their family, accompanied by a giant Easter bunny! The fun event is replete with colorful decorations

Cooper's Hill Cheese-Rolling and Wake (England)

Near Gloucester the Cooper's Hill Cheese-Rolling and Wake is simple. A wheel of cheese is thrown down the steep hill and competitors race after it to the finish line. The results are hilarious but dangerous. Broken bones can ensue. The 200-year-old tradition has had winners from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Nepal!



Photo from

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-gloucestershire-27111592>

Cimburijada (Bosnia)

Cimburijada on the first day of spring in Bosnia means “Festival of Scrambled Eggs”. At dawn people gather at on the banks of the Bosnia river to share scrambled eggs. Music and visiting friends and families round out the celebration of the equinox.



Photo from

<https://sarajevotimes.com/traditional-marking-of-the-first-day-of-spring-to-be-held-in-zenic/>

Spring time is often associated with eggs and chickens because they are symbols of fertility in many countries. Spring is when many animals give birth. Trees and plants are reborn.

Holi (Northern India)

Holi is the “Festival of Colors, Love, and Spring”, celebrating arrival of Spring, the eternal and divine love of the deities Radha and Krishna, and the triumph of good over evil, Holi celebration has spread to other regions of the world through the Indian diaspora. It lasts for a night and a day,



<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/watch-now-celebrate-holi-with-herbal-colours/article66586702.ece>

The celebration includes people by throwing coloured water and powder at each other. Children spray coloured powder solutions (gulal) at each other while adults smear dry coloured powder (abir) on each other's faces. Visitors get served Holi delicacies, desserts and drinks. After the play with colors, people clean up, bathe, put on clean clothes, and visit friends and family.

Floriade (Canberra, Australia)

Floriade is an annual flower festival held in Canberra, Australia.



Photo from <https://www.nca.gov.au/events/floriade-2023>

The celebration features a beautiful display of flowering bulbs and artistic features. Each year, hundreds of thousands of people travel from Sydney, Brisbane and other neighbouring areas to witness more than a million flowers bloom! The month-long festival is a celebration of color, music and horticulture.

Floriade celebration originated in 1908 in the Netherlands where it has been held every 10 years, the latest having been 2022 when the motto was “Growing Green Cities.”

Passover (Judaism)

One of Judaism's biggest festivals is Passover. It commemorates the exodus of the Jews from Egypt after centuries of slavery. A special meal, the Seder, concludes with the story of the Jews leaving Egypt, and readings from a special book of prayers. Part of the eight-day Passover traditions includes a thorough spring cleaning, going through the house from top to bottom.



Photo from <https://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/jewish/last-day-of-passover>

Ostara (pagan)

Ostara celebrates the spring equinox. The word comes from the Anglo-Saxon goddess, Eostre who represented spring and new beginnings. For Wicca folk, Ostara symbolizes fertility, rebirth, and renewal. This time of year marked the beginning of the agricultural cycle, and farmers would start planting seeds.

Rabbits and hares are symbols of Ostara. The March hare was a fertility symbol because it is nocturnal most of the year but mates in March and then are seen all day. Amazingly, females can get pregnant with a 2nd litter while pregnant with their 1st litter. Not bad as symbols for fertility. Chocolate rabbits anyone?

Wiccans or pagans today may go outside to meditate, perform rituals to welcome the spring, or plant seeds.



<https://www.bpl.org/blogs/post/the-origins-and-practices-of-holidays-ostara-holi-and-purim/>

Saint Patrick's Day (Ireland)

In Ireland, St. Patrick's Day is celebrated each year on March 17. St. Patrick is known as a symbol of Ireland, particularly around every March. One of the reasons he's so famous is because he drove the snakes out of Ireland, and was even credited with a miracle for this. What many people don't realize is that the serpent was actually a metaphor for the early Pagan faiths of Ireland. St. Patrick brought Christianity to the Emerald Isle and did such a good job of it that he practically eliminated Paganism from the country.



Marzanna (Poland)

In Poland, a spring equinox tradition is the drowning of a Marzanna doll (topienie Marzanny). Marzanna or Morana was a Slavic goddess portrayed as a figure representing death, winter, and disease. The figure is braided from straw into the shape of a human and dressed in traditional local women's clothing. The doll is burned and then drowned it in the river.



Photo from <https://study.gov.pl/news/everything-you-should-know-about-polish-spring-tradition>

The tradition date back to the pre-Christian era, when the sacrificial rites of pagans took place. Polish Catholic church tried to end this ritual but was unsuccessful. Nowadays people have concerns about drowning the doll due to ecological reasons. Instead of drowning away the straw doll, the groups of children may take their Marzannas for a walk and welcome spring by singing occasional songs.

This site is a goldmine of more
Spring Equinox cultural connections:

- <https://www.loveexploring.com/gallerylist/72365/how-countries-around-the-world-celebrate-the-spring-equinox>

References

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