



Bulletin

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German Easter Traditions



Look through the windows of a typical German household these days and you can't help but notice how every room is decorated with clay bunnies, crocuses, yellow daffodils and branches hung with painted eggs.

Although mainly a Christian holiday commemorating the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, Easter also marks the beginning of spring. The Germans, of course, have a whole range of customs and traditions to celebrate the change of seasons in proper fashion.



Cleaning and walking

The spring traditions are, however, not all about eating, drinking and playing games. Another old German Easter custom is to give the house a thorough spring cleaning and get rid off the old dust which has gathered over the long winter months. And on Easter Monday, it is time for a bit of an exercise. Many Germans use the last holiday to go hiking in the mountains or walking in the forest.



The Germans also have a tradition of having a big Easter dinner either Easter Sunday or Monday. Easter lamb, chicken and eggs are typical dishes for this meal, which in Catholic parts of Germany is also a celebration of the end of Lent.

by Robert Hampp

A time for eggs and bunnies

Eggs and bunnies are two of the oldest symbols of Easter in Germany and every spring shops boom with eggs and bunnies made of chocolate, cardboard or flowers in different sizes and wrappings. The tradition for using eggs and bunnies for Easter originates from pagan worshipping where they were symbols of fertility and new birth and traditionally used for celebrations of the coming of the spring.



On the morning of Easter Sunday, the children go hunting for the eggs and often find that the Easter bunny has also left chocolate eggs and Easter presents for them to find.

It is also a custom that friends exchange the painted eggs as gifts or that young people in love paint eggs for their sweetheart.

The Germans have a number of egg games which the children play over the holidays. One tradition is to blow eggs and paint them in multiple colours and patterns on Good Friday. The eggs are then put in a basket for the Easter bunny -- Osterhase-- to hide around the house on the night leading up to Easter Sunday.



Easter bonfire



Another typical German tradition is the Easter bonfire. On the night of Easter Sunday, the Germans light big bonfires across the country to welcome the sun and the spring. Much of the wood used for the bonfire is old Christmas trees which have been collected and saved for the occasion.

The bonfire is an old pagan ritual and in the past peasants used to watch the fire carefully because superstition said the fields would be fruitful and the households protected from sickness as far as the light from the fire reached. Today the event is mainly a social gathering and an excuse for the Germans to get together and celebrate over a beer. The party often continues well into the night at the local pub.

