

COLEGIUL DE STIINTE ALE NATURII "EMIL RACOVITA"

Scottish Customs and Traditions

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1. Short historical facts

Scotland is one of four constituent nations which form the United Kingdom. Its visitor should be aware of the customs of the country as otherwise they may be confused by the behaviour of the Scots, which may seem odd at times if one is unaware of the traditions and beliefs which lie behind them.

Scottish customs and traditions cover a very wide range of topics. Everything from kilts to golf, bagpipes to whisky, Celtic crosses to Protestant missionary work, the "second sight" to Nessie.

2. Bagpipes

The history of the bagpipes takes us a long way back from today and far away from Scotland. Everyone thinks about Scotland when they hear the word "bagpipe", but this instrument is so old that true age and origin are unknown. In some historical documents it is written that the pipes were first played somewhere around Asia Minor in 1000 BC. Also, it is said, by some, that "Emperor Nero played the "Pipes" not the fiddle, while Rome burned."

Some 'form' of bagpipes are used in many European countries but in Scotland they have become an integral part of the country's culture. Scotland is the ancestral home of the "Great Highland Bagpipes" known to all as the "Great Pipes".

A Pipe band is one thing that every visitor of Scotland wants to see. These are groups of men (in modern times it can be both men and women); each group has matching skirts, fancy jackets and strange little hats. They march around squeezing the air out of big tartan bags (known as bagpipes) and blowing it in again through a pipe attached to the bag. This results in a racket known as "the skirl o' the pipes" which is almost indistinguishable from the noise made by the haggis during the mating season. These pipe bands often turn out to be Australians, not Scots at all!

3. Kilts

The tartan kilt has long been the most recognizable cultural tradition of the Highland Scots, but just like the other symbols, kilts have also an unknown origin. One sure fact is that the wearing of the kilt has been developed in the 19th century during the reign of Queen Victoria. It had been created for some rational reasons: men who wore it could make very quick moves, wade through rivers and shelter in huts, woods and rocks, etc.

There is a question which will always linger next to the word 'kilt' and that is: Do people who wear kilts have underwear or not? Even though there are lots of people who consider this immoral, the tradition says that underwear should not be present if one is dressed in a kilt, the only exception being the participation to some sportive games and the presence of women. In the 50's, soldiers were

verified if they wore underwear by their sergeants who used a long stick that had in the top a mirror.

4. Scottish food and drink

Other two reasons for which Scotland is famous are its traditional food and of course, whisky. No one could argue that traditional Scottish cooking has produced one of the great cuisines of the world. The quality of the ingredients has always been excellent: the world's finest seafood including shellfish, lobster and crabs, and varieties of fish too numerous to mention; succulent lamb and beef; soft fruit including raspberries, strawberries and blackberries and a host of locally produced types of cheese, including cheddar from Ayrshire and Galloway.

The national dish is the haggis, a type of food that combines mutton with other ingredients and which is served with turnip and potatoes.

Whisky has been produced in Scotland for hundreds of years. It is well known that the Irish created this alcoholic drink, but the Scots were the ones who brought it to the form that we drink today. Whisky refers to a broad category of alcoholic beverages that are distilled from grains and aged in oak casks. The name means water of life.

5. Christmas in Scotland

Although Scotland has so many traditions, its Christmas is not too different from the others. Anyway, there are some interesting things to talk about. For example, children write letters to Santa, but they don't leave it by the window, they burn it in their chimneys so that the information goes straightly to Lapland.

Beside the traditional Christmas tree that everyone decorates, Scots also decorate their houses so that in December almost all the buildings shine in the gloom of night.

Another interesting fact is that the people who get presents unwrap the paper carefully so that they can use it again. This is not such a bad thing if we take into account how many trees are annually being cut for paper.

7. The Loch Ness Monster

The Loch Ness Monster was firstly spotted by the Vikings around year 500 BC. The legend tells that St. Columba heard about the monster's murder of a man and he ran to the center of the water to order the monster not to hurt anyone else.

The monster was also seen during the last century but the poor man who sighted the beast was so shocked that he did not speak much about the incident.

Even though lots of people say that they had seen the monster, there are few clear proofs.

7. Epilogue

Scotland is a beautiful country with beautiful and interesting customs and traditions that deserve to be talked about and even assumed.

I have chosen to talk about this country because I find it really impressive with all the myths and the things that people use to do. I hope someday I will have the chance to visit it and maybe, see the Loch Ness monster.

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