

LUXEMBOURG HOLIDAYS AND TRADITIONS

Days to Remember

Settling into a new country—and feeling at home there—is also a matter of opening up to different traditions. In Luxembourg, this might mean burning crosses and blowing into ceramic birds.

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LIICHTMËSSDAG

It seems February 2 is celebrated throughout the world but not always for the same reasons—it may be for Groundhog Day, Candlemas, Brigid's Day, Chandeleur or Imbolc. But in Luxembourg, *Liichtmëssdag* is celebrated. As often occurs, a traditional pagan celebration turned Catholic—but the core purpose remains of celebrating light. Children walk from house to house carrying lanterns and chanting an old song, begging for lard and peas. Nowadays, however, what they really hope for is candy and money.

BUERGBRENNEN

The first time you witness this tradition, it might be a disturbing experience—especially if you don't know what it's about! It usually starts out with a torchlight procession through villages leading to a bonfire, on top of which is placed a gigantic wooden cross or another symbol. This burning of crosses happens on the first Sunday of Lent, but that is about *all* it has to do with religion. It's more of a persistent pagan tradition symbolizing the burning of winter and the triumph of spring. Around the bonfire, you're likely to find food stalls selling mulled wine, *Bouneschlupp* (a typical Luxembourgish green bean soup), *Gromperekichelcher* (potato pancakes) and other Luxembourgish specialties.

CARNIVAL

Never ones to say no to a party, Luxembourgers are pretty fond of celebrating carnival (Fuesent) anytime between *Liichtmëssdag* and *Ashchermëttwoch* (Ash Wednesday). Colorful parades, masquerade balls and a variety of donuts with more or less enchanting names (*Nonnefäscht*—or “nuns' farts”—being one of them) are part of the deal and, of course, something must also be burned! Many therefore go to Remich on Ash Wednesday to see the traditional burning of *Stréimännchen* (straw man)—once again, a symbolic burning of winter.



Buergbrennen

ÉMAISCHEN

No need to worry about missing out on Easter eggs, bunnies or bells—they're plentiful in Luxembourg too! However, you might want to embrace a new Easter tradition: *Émaischen*, which takes place on Easter Monday in Luxembourg City and in Nospelt. The key element of these two pottery-dominated Easter markets are the *Péckvillercher*—ceramic whistles in the shape of a bird. A must-buy (and a must-blow-into-until-the-sound-becomes intolerable).

OCTAVE

Octave is considered the most important religious event of the year, stretching from the third Sunday after Easter to the fifth and honoring Notre Dame de Luxembourg. Pilgrims from Luxembourg and bordering regions in Belgium, France and Germany gather around the city and walk in processions to pray at the Cathedral where various masses are held. At the end of Oktav, a statue of Mary is carried through the city. A special market (*Oktavsmäertchen*) also takes place during this period on the Place Guillaume II.

GËNZEFEST

When Scotch Broom covers the Oesling hills with its yellow flowers, it's time for Gënzefest. To take part in it, head to Wiltz on Whit Monday, where a parade and other celebrations in honor of past agricultural traditions take place.

HOPPING PROCESSION

The Hopping Procession (*Sprangprozession*) takes place in the medieval town of Echternach every Whit Tuesday and is so unique that it has been included in UNESCO's convention for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. Documented since the year 1100, it has been banned several times for its “pagan elements” but has always survived. The procession begins early in the morning in the presence of high ecclesiastical authorities. Singers recite litanies and then some 8,000 dancers take over, “hopping” one step back then two steps forward (which is why the expression “the Echternach Step” is frequently used to refer to politicians who cannot make up their minds).

NATIONAL DAY

While most national days mark a significant historical date for a country, Luxembourg celebrates its national day on the birthday of the Grand Duchess or Duke. For some time it was celebrated on January 23 (Grand Duchess Charlotte's birthday), but was moved to June 23 in 1962 to secure better weather for the festivities. Ever since, no matter when they were born, sovereigns have celebrated their birthday that day. Merriment starts on the evening of June 22 with torch-light parades, concerts, balls and extensive fireworks on the Pont Adolphe in the city. The following day is more solemn, with a military parade, a canon salute across the city, a Te Deum mass in the Notre Dame cathedral and services in most of the country's churches.

MOTHER'S DAY

In Luxembourg, it takes place on the second Sunday of June.

SCHUEBERFOUER

The annual Luxembourg City fair starts around August 23 and goes on for three weeks. It includes close to 200 attractions (many of them snack bars and restaurants) and is the biggest fun fair in the country. It's also by far the oldest—in 2013 it will be the 673rd edition! The opening of the fair traditionally involves the mayor and a flock of sheep, which reflects its origins as a farmers' fair. Eating a *Gromperekichelcher*—a deep-fried, herby potato cake—is a tradition at the *Schueberfouer*.

WINE AND GRAPE CELEBRATIONS

In autumn, Luxembourg celebrates grapes; in spring, wine. One of the bigger "grape celebrations" takes place in Grevenmacher in September, complete with a parade and election of a wine queen. A trip to Schwebsange is usually also fun: the water in the fountain is replaced by wine...

KIERMESMÉINDEG

The first Monday of September is *Kiermesméindég*. It is more commonly known as Braderie, which has occurred the last 83 years. Around the central train station and in the city center of the capital, close to 400 sellers trade off their stocks at tempting prices. Streets are closed off to house the five kilometers of stalls, so traveling by foot is the best way to get around town that day.

JOURNÉES DU PATRIMOINE

Every year during September and October, Heritage Open Days are organized throughout the country, making it possible to visit historical sites for free, many of which are normally closed to the public. This is a great hands-on opportunity to get to know Luxembourg's history, as a number of free guided tours are organized concurrently.

FATHER'S DAY

In Luxembourg, it takes place on the first Sunday of October.

SAINT NICHOLAS

In Luxembourg, they call him *Kleeschen* and, according to the legend, he descends on the night of December 5 with his present-carrying donkey and his servant, *Houséker*, leaving gifts for the children who have been good, while Houséker whips the naughty ones! Luxembourgish children leave their slippers in front of their bedrooms for Saint Nicholas, and one of the things they're sure to find inside them on the morning of December 6 is a *Boxermännercher*—a brioche pastry in the shape of a man (available in bakeries weeks before and after *Niklosdaag*).



Krëschtmaart



Schueberfouer

KRËSCHTMAART

Getting into the holiday spirit is not a problem in Luxembourg, where lights and Christmas markets start flourishing long before November is over. The *Krëschtmaart* on the Place d'Armes in the city is one of the most popular ones; there you'll find a cozy atmosphere, music, wooden cottage stalls with Christmas gizmos and delightful, soul-warming food and drinks. Drinking *Glühwain* (mulled wine) with your *Mettwurscht* (local sausage) or *Gromperekichelcher* is practically compulsory. A Christmas parade is also part of the season's pleasures. Christmas markets can be found in many other places too, such as Vianden, Differdange, Dudelange, Esch-sur-Elzette and Remich.

2013 PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

January 1	New Year's Day
April 1	Easter Monday
May 1	International Worker's Day
May 9	Ascension Day
May 20	Whit Monday
June 23	National Day
August 15	Assumption of Mary
November 1	All Saints' Day
December 25	Christmas Day
December 26	Second Christmas Day

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