

Suburb News Youth

FESTIVALS OF THE WORLD

A festival a day for the Filipinos!



Can you imagine having something to celebrate every single day? In the Philippines, there's no need to imagine - every year the collective communities on its 7,100 islands celebrate over 42,000 festivals. Many of these have both cultural and religious roots. The Philippines have a large Roman Catholic influence thanks to Spanish conquests in the 1500s (the name "Philippines" comes from King Philip II of Spain). Previously pagan festivals became Christianised when both Spanish and native cultures became entwined.

Besides the Western influence, an impressive diversity of ethnicities provides the Philippines with a rich culture of celebrations. There are festivals lasting over a month (Panagbenga festival, celebrating flowers), ancient festivals (the over 800-year-old Ati-Atihan festival), and newer festivals (the Pineapple festival started in 1993). Each festival brings together a community to celebrate with colourful decorations, dancing, singing and feasting. I'll be taking a closer look at the Sinulog Santo Niño festival, one of the oldest Filipino festivals, which originates from the pre-Christian Philippines.

Sinulog is an especially interesting festival, because it was developed amidst a transition in Filipino society - the arrival of the Spanish - and uniquely celebrates the old and the new cultures side by side.

Even though the festival is over 500 years old, it was modernised about 40 years ago when the first Sinulog parade was organised. The event celebrated the traditional Sinulog dances with a collaborative performance between several PE teachers from local schools and universities. Since then, these festivities have increased in size and popularity, and last about 10 days. Every year, millions of tourists and locals flock to witness its buoyant atmosphere, rhythmic music and colourful costumes.

So what is the festival like? On the third Sunday of January, brightly coloured dancers in fabulous parades fill the streets of Cebu, in the southern Philippines. Thudding drums and lively music reverberate through the air, crowds cheer loudly at the lavishly decorated floats passing by the specially erected grandstands. Beautifully costumed performers dance their mesmerising steps, forward-backward, forward-backward, mimicking the Sulog (the current of the river) which the festival is named after. These traditional dances, once performed to idols, now pay homage to the Santo Niño (Baby Jesus) - which is where the festival gets its second name: the Sinulog Santo Niño festival.

To start with, the image of Santo Niño is taken to various important buildings in Cebu city, then the festival kicks off with a Catholic mass and an opening parade. Throughout the week, there are daily live concerts, various cultural events and a multitude of competitions. The Sinulog Competitions include dance competitions, a film festival, Sinulog Idol (a singing competition), and the annual search for the Sinulog Festival Queen.

On the main day of the festival, after another early morning mass, the Sinulog Grand Parade runs until the evening, ending with two grand firework displays. Re-enactments of the Sinulog's history are depicted on several procession floats, which are usually very elaborate, and the Parade can last nearly 12 hours!

During the celebrations, there are numerous lively street parties involving spontaneous group hugging, the throwing of drinks or even paint. Despite being one of the oldest Filipino festivals, Sinulog has adapted to modern times and is still a vibrant centre of partying!

This year, with COVID-19 restrictions, all events will be either online or outdoors and socially distanced.

With a complex cultural history and an uncertain future, at their core, these festivals still bring together families and communities to celebrate their heritage and beliefs. Perhaps this reminds us of what our own festivals mean to us - that festive spirit that bonds together family, friends and strangers: all are welcome.



Popular festival food is street food, for example puso (hanging packages of rice wrapped in leaves). Cebu City is also famed for its barbecue.

ISABELLE H

The Pagan wheel of festivals

For centuries people all over the world have been using the turning points of nature as a cause to celebrate. Our pagan ancestors had their own traditions and customs, which soon trickled down into modern religion and heavily influences the festivals we still celebrate today. The wheel was invented in the late 1960's, for modern pagan practitioners to keep track of the festivals. These old pagan festivals are still celebrated by neo-pagans. Here are just a few of the many pagan festivals:

Imbolc celebrates the first day of spring. The Celts of Ireland and England initially used it as a day to celebrate their goddess Bridgid. Over the centuries Bridgid was adopted into Christianity as St. Bridgid. In Christianity, Candlemas is celebrated on the same day to commemorate the ritual purification of the Virgin Mary (in Catholicism).

Ostara, the spring equinox is usually celebrated on March 21st. It is a festival of new life and birth. Eggs were painted and eaten on this day to symbolise new life. Easter likely evolved from the word Ostara. This festival correlates with Easter and some modern traditions such as egg hunts and Easter eggs were taken from pagan practices.

Lughnasadh (loo-na-sa) is commonly known as the harvest festival. Harvest festivals are celebrated throughout the year by many communities. The Gaelic version is celebrated on August 1st when the community comes together to offer the fruits of the harvest to the gods. In Hinduism, the Harvest is celebrated in January and is called Pongal; farmers give thanks to the sun god for a successful harvest.

Mabon, the autumn equinox celebrates the second harvest and the start of winter. In Christianity the closest festival to Mabon (which is no longer widely observed) is Michaelmas. Higan, is a six-day Buddhist celebration in Japan during the September equinox. It is a time to remember the dead by visiting, cleaning, and decorating their graves. El Dia de los Muertos is a similar festival celebrated in Mexico. The mid-autumn or moon festival celebrated by Chinese and Vietnamese communities honours the harvest moon and celebrates the abundance of the summer's harvest. In Judaism, the harvest festival is known as Succot and is celebrated around September/October depending on the Lunar calendar.

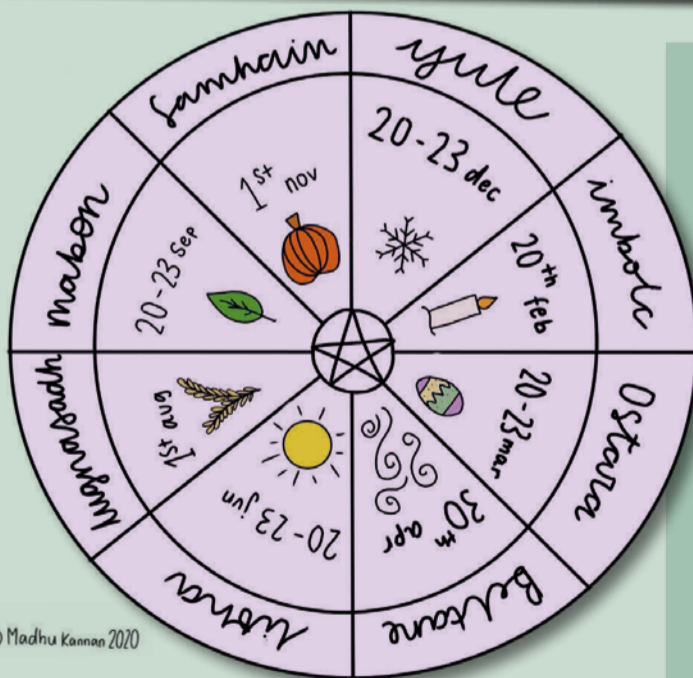
In our modern world where all celebrations are so different it is comforting to think about our ancestors who celebrated similar festivals all over the world and that helps to bring our global community together rather than dividing us by religion or culture. The Pagan festivals were not influenced by material possessions; our ancestors believed the coming together was a gift enough. I love receiving and giving gifts, but I do feel sometimes that too much importance is placed on finding the perfect gift when your time should be seen as a much more valuable gift.

The lockdowns have meant we have been unable to come together and celebrate, however physical distance should never separate us! The spirit of the festivals that we love place family and community at their hearts, so whatever you may be celebrating this winter, the time you spend with the people you cherish (in person or online) and reconnecting with the world that we live in through nature, are the two most important gifts.

MADHU K



The Burning of the Clavie which is an old Pagan Festival, held in the coastal village of Burghead, Moray, Scotland, that celebrates the New Year on 11 January 2020.



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