Sharing love from around the world



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Australia

During the Australian gold rush period, miners who were suddenly in possession of money from the new-found wealth of the Ballarat Mines were willing to pay a princely sum for elaborate valentines and merchants in the country would ship orders amounting to thousands of pounds at a time. The most extravagent Australian valentines were made of a satin cushion, perfumed and decorated in an ornate manner with flowers and colored shells. Some might even be adorned with a taxidermied humming bird or bird of paradise. This treasure, contained within a neatly decorated box, was highly valued, being both fashionable and extremely expensive.

Austria

Austria has some rather obscure courtship customs that may or may not be associated with Saint Valentine’s Day. Nonetheless, it is customary for a young man to present his beloved with a bunch of flowers on February 14.



United States

In the United States of America, there have been many varieties of cards given over the course of the years, some of which have often been rude or even quite cruel in their humor. In the times of the Civil War, cards were flagged with rich colors accompanied by patriotic and/or political motifs. Early American valentine cards were especially lithographed and hand-colored, beautiful and distinctive in design, produced with intricate lace paper and decorated with such ornaments as beads, sea shells, cones, berries and all manner of seeds. Cards were also available decorated with seaweed or moss, in addition to dried and/or artificial flowers, all of which were attached to a string which was pulled and could then be suspended, thereby creating a three-dimensional picture. Many early American cards were imported from abroad, given the poor quality of American paper at the time which was not particularly suitable for embossing. Today, American children usually exchange valentines with their friends and there may even be a classroom party.

Britain

The poets of Britain have probably penned the majority of the best-loved romantic verses associated with Saint Valentine. Different regions of the nation celebrate their own customs to honor this day, although the sending of cards and gifts of flowers and chocolates is standard procedure throughout the entire country. One uniform custom is the singing of special songs by children, who then receive gifts of candy, fruit or money. In some areas, valentine buns are baked with caraway seeds, plums or raisins.



Denmark

The Danish valentine card is known as a “lover’s card.” Older versions of this greeting came in the form of a transparency which, when held up to the light, depicted the image of a lover handing his beloved a gift. One custom in Denmark is for people to send pressed white flowers called Snowdrops to their friends. Danish men may also send a form of valentine known as a gaekkebrev (or “joking letter”). The sender of this gaekkebrev pens a rhyme but does not sign his name. Instead, he signs the message with dots…one dot for each letter in his name. If the lady who receives the card guesses the name of the sender, then she is rewarded with an Easter Egg later in the year.

France

In France, a custom known as “drawing for” once occurred. Unmarried individuals, both young and not so young, would go into houses facing each other and begin calling out across from one window to another, pairing-off with the chosen partner. If the young man failed to be particularly enthralled with his valentine, he would desert her. As a result, a bonfire would be lit later where the ladies could burn images of the ungrateful sweetheart and verbally abuse him in a loud tone as the effigy burned. This ritual was eventually abandoned since it left much room for nastiness, ridicule or even outright malice and the French government finally handed-down a decree officially banning the custom. Elegant French greetings cards known as cartes d’amities, which contained tender messages, were given not totally as a Valentine but chiefly as a result of a fashion which was popular in England at the time.



Germany

In Germany, it has become customary for the young man of a courting couple to present his beloved with flowers on February 14. Valentine gifts in Germany are usually in the shape of love tokens, complete with endearing messages. However, these are not distributed solely on Valentine’s Day, but on any occasion. Even early German baptismal certificates or marriage certificates were considered at one time to have been valentines, but were more likely simply decorative and pictorial documents which contained lovely verses.

Italy

In Italy, Valentine’s Day was once celebrated as a Spring Festival, held in the open air, where young people would gather in tree arbors or ornamental gardens to listen to music and the reading of poetry. However, over the course of the years, this custom steadily ceased and has not now been celebrated for centuries. In Turin, it was formerly the custom for betrothed couples to announce their engagements on February 14. For several days ahead of time, the stores would

be decorated and filled with all manner of bon-bons.



Japan

In Japan, Valentine’s Day is celebrated on two different dates…February 14 and March 14. On the first date, the female gives a gift to the male and on the second date…known as White Day and supposedly introduced by a marshmallow company in the 1960s…the male has to return the gift he received on February 14. Thus, strictly speaking, a Japanese female has the luxury of actually choosing her own gift. Chocolate is the most popular gift in Japan. However, since most Japanese females believe that store-bought chocolate is not a gift of true love, they tend to make the confection with their own hands.

Korea

The traditional gift of candy takes place in Korea on February 14, but only from females to males. There is another special day for males to give gifts to females and this is celebrated on March 14. Very similar to the custom in Japan, March 14 in Korea is known as “White Day.” On “White Day,” many young men confess their love for the first time to their sweethearts. For those young people who have no particular romantic partners, the Koreans have set aside yet another date…April 14, also known as “Black Day.” On that date, such individuals get together and partake of Jajang noodles, which are black in color, hence the name of the day.



Scotland

In Scotland, Valentine’s Day is celebrated with a festival. At this festival, there is an equal number of unmarried males and females, each of whom write their name (or a made-up name) on a piece of paper which is then folded and placed into a hat…one hat for the ladies and one for the men. The females then draw a name from the hat containing the men’s names and vice versa. Of course, it is highly likely that the two drawn names will not match, in which event, it is usually expected that the male partner with the female who selected his name. This rite having been completed, the company split up into couples and gifts are given to the ladies. The females would then pin the name of their partner over their hearts or on their sleeves. A dance often follows and, at the end of the festival, it is not unusual for marriages to take place. According to another Scottish custom, the first young man or woman encountered by chance on the street or elsewhere will become that individual’s valentine. Valentine’s Day gifts in

Scotland are frequently given by both parties in the form of a love-token or true-love-knot.



Spain

In Spain, it is customary for courting couples to exchange gifts on Valentine’s Day and for husbands to send their wives bouquets of roses.

Taiwan

Valentine’s Day is celebrated in Taiwan on February 14, but there is also a special Valentine’s Day on July 7 of the lunar calendar, based on an ancient Chinese folktale (**). Both dates are equally as important. Many men purchase expensive bouquets of roses and other flowers for their sweethearts on

these days. According to Taiwan tradition, the color and number of the roses holds much significance. For example, one red rose means “an only love,” eleven roses means “a favorite,” ninety-nine roses means “forever,” and one hundred eight roses means “marry me.”

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