

Saint Patrick's Day

Get ready for green lights, green hats, even green beer! Saint Patrick's Day is on 17 March. Why is Ireland's national day such a worldwide party?

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. a parade
2. actually
3. wealthy
4. to chase something
5. apparently
6. ancestral
7. a landmark
8. to dye something

Definition

- a. related to your ancestors (people in your family who lived many years ago)
- b. rich
- c. to use a special substance to change the colour of something
- d. a line of people (or cars or lorries) that moves along a street to celebrate a special event or holiday
- e. a famous building or monument which is easy to recognise
- f. in reality; in fact
- g. to follow something quickly so that it will leave a place
- h. according to what has been said or written by others

Saint Patrick's Day

In the 1971 film *The Flight of the Doves*, an Irish policeman lifts up a little English girl so that she can see the nearby parade for Saint Patrick's Day. He tells her, 'It's a great day for the Irish.' The little girl exclaims, 'I'm not Irish!', to which the policeman replies, 'You don't have to be Irish to be Irish!' Saint Patrick's Day is the national day of Ireland. Every 17 March, the day is celebrated around the globe by millions of people, Irish and not-so-Irish.

Patrick, the man

Did you know that Saint Patrick himself was not actually Irish? It is thought that he was either Scottish or Welsh, coming from a wealthy Christian family. Ancient documents suggest that, as a teenager, he was taken by Irish pirates to work as a slave in Ireland. Once in his new country, he began to talk to Irish people about God, introducing his Christian beliefs to the country.

Patrick and the snakes

Old legends say that, years ago, Ireland had a lot of snakes and that Saint Patrick used his powers to chase them all into the sea. To this day, Ireland has many old statues of Saint Patrick, often with snakes at his feet. Apparently, this is why Ireland has no native species of snakes (though most scientists suggest that this fact could be more related to geographical reasons!).

International popularity

March 17 is a day for huge celebrations in Ireland. However, due to Ireland's history of emigration, many people around the world consider themselves to be partly Irish because of their ancestral connections. This means that Saint Patrick's Day parties take place around the world, from Boston to Tokyo, Sydney to Buenos Aires. In fact, Saint Patrick's Day is celebrated in more countries than any other national festival.

Big parades

The most famous celebrations on Saint Patrick's Day are the parades. These are carnival-like events, where people dress up and walk along the street, dancing or playing music. Often the parades include big lorries, specially decorated in green. Many of the world's major cities have enormous parades. The largest is in New York, where 150,000 people participate in the parade and millions of people watch. The second largest is in Dublin, Ireland's capital city.

More 'modest' parades

Ireland itself is a relatively small country with few cities. However, most of its towns and villages have their own 'mini' parades. Sometimes, these simply include a few tractors and the children from the local school. The shortest known parade used to take place in the village of Dripsey, in southern Ireland. The length of the parade was just 23 metres, between the village's two pubs. However, the Dripsey parade came to an end when one of the two pubs sadly closed down!

A day for green

Another well-known aspect of Saint Patrick's Day is the colour green. Around the world, many people wear green clothes as a way of marking the day. In major cities, green lights illuminate famous global landmarks such as the Colosseum in Rome or the Christ The Redeemer statue in Rio de Janeiro. In Chicago, thousands of people watch as special boats dye the river a bright green colour. Students at Miami University in Ohio, USA, even have a 70-year-old tradition of drinking special green 'Saint Patrick's' beer!

Wherever you're from, make sure you celebrate this 17 March by watching your local parade, drinking some Irish beer or perhaps just by wearing a silly green hat. And don't forget to wish your friends a wonderful Saint Patrick's Day, or, as they say in Ireland, 'Happy Paddy's Day!'

Tasks

Task 1

Choose the correct answer.

1. In the film *The Flight of the Doves*, the policeman speaks to the little girl in ...
 - a. an arrogant way.
 - b. a friendly way.
 - c. a confused way.
2. Patrick first travelled to Ireland because he ...
 - a. was forced to go.
 - b. wanted to teach people about God.
 - c. was ill.
3. Scientists believe that Ireland has no native snakes because ...
 - a. of the country's location.
 - b. Saint Patrick chased them into the sea.
 - c. the snakes come from other countries.
4. Saint Patrick's Day is the world's most popular ...
 - a. celebration.
 - b. ancestral celebration.
 - c. festival from just one country.
5. The number of people who walk in the Saint Patrick's Day parade in New York is ...
 - a. over a hundred thousand.
 - b. over a million.
 - c. less than in Dublin.
6. The parade in the village of Dripsey is famous because it ...
 - a. was not very long.
 - b. was between two well-known pubs.
 - c. included old tractors.
7. In Chicago, the river is always green on Saint Patrick's Day because of ...
 - a. a special green chemical.
 - b. small plants in the river.
 - c. special lights on boats.
8. In Ohio, special green beer is usually drunk by ...
 - a. people over 70 years old.
 - b. the Irish community.
 - c. students.

Task 2

Complete the sentences with the adverbs in the box.

specially

sadly

relatively

partly

apparently

actually

1. Did you know that Saint Patrick was not Irish?
2. Saint Patrick used his powers to chase the snakes into the sea;, this is why Ireland has no native species of snakes.
3. Many people around the world consider themselves to be Irish because of their ancestral connections.
4. Often the parades include big lorries, decorated in green.
5. Ireland itself is a small country with few cities.
6. However, the Dripsey parade came to an end when one of the two pubs closed down!

Discussion

Do people in your country celebrate Saint Patrick's Day? When is the national day of your country?

Answers

Preparation task

1. d
2. f
3. b
4. g
5. h
6. a
7. e
8. c

Task 1

1. b
2. a
3. a
4. c
5. a
6. a
7. a
8. c

Task 2

1. actually
2. apparently
3. partly
4. specially
5. relatively
6. sadly