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Midsummer



Midsummer is an annual Latvian holiday, celebrated during the summer solstice when the night is the shortest and the day is the longest in the whole year. It takes place from June 23rd to 24th. This holiday always has been the greatest celebration for Latvians. That's because it is the middle of summer when the sun rises at the highest point in the sky.

The festival has many traditions. For example, everyone tries to stay awake all the Midsummer's night. Make flower crowns from many different flowers and oak branches and sing songs around bonfires. All these traditions symbolize how truly important this night is. Bonfires are usually made at the highest point on the property. Last year's flower crowns are thrown in the fire. When the fire has gotten smaller, the bravest jump over the fire one by one or in pairs. The bonfires must burn all night, so the magic of the night doesn't stop.

Searching for a fern flower is probably one of the most exciting Midsummer rituals of all time. The belief says that the fern flower grows only one night a year - Midsummer. Whoever manages to find it will be blessed with wealth and happiness for a lifetime, as well as the ability to look into the past and future.



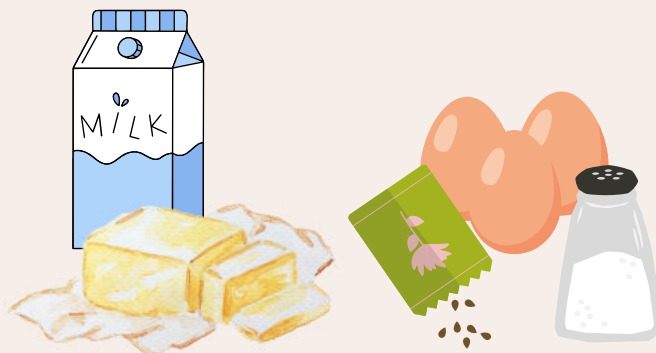


The Midsummer - just like every other Latvian holiday has lots of different traditional foods. In every family, there are different foods on the table, but the most popular are - Midsummer cheese, pies, and beer. At this time Midsummer cheese in the shops is very popular, but of course, it's tastier if it is homemade.

Midsummer cheese recipe

Ingredients:

- 3 liters of milk
- 1 kg of cottage cheese
- 3 eggs
- 100 g of butter
- Caraway seeds
- Salt



Preparation:

1. Heat the milk to around 80 C, do not let it boil. Slowly scoop cottage cheese into the hot milk. Turn the heat to low, and slowly stir until the milk gets flaky and the whey separates.
2. Dampen some gauze and line out a strainer with it. When the whey has separated, pour everything into the strainer and drain the whey moving the mass around by the corners of the gauze. When strained, put the hot cottage cheese back into the pot.
3. Beat eggs with salt and caraway and add to the cottage cheese. Add the butter and heat slowly, stirring, until it doesn't stick to the edges of the pot.
4. Rinse storage bowls with cold water so the cheese doesn't stick. Scoop the cheese into bowls.
5. Allow the cheese to cool and enjoy.

Song and Dance celebration

The biggest event of this summer was the Latvian Song and Dance Festival. I am a part of the dance collective "Piebaldzēni", so I will tell you where we participated and what our daily schedule was like.

In the evening of July 1st, we arrived at the place we had to stay at for the week - The Riga center humanitarian secondary school. Other collectives also stayed there.

On July 2, in the morning, we had to go to the walk of participants of the celebration "Novadu dižošānās" ("District show off"). We walked through Riga street, starting at the Freedom Monument and ending at the Daile Theater. The magnificence of folk costumes, cheers, the joy of meeting and celebrating the Song and Dance festival.

In the evening we went to the Opening Concert, where the entrance was free for the participants. The most popular musicians invited us to indulge in what only the strong and confident can afford - acceptance and coexistence. But the most important thing - a common song, allowing every participant and viewer to feel - the celebration is ready to begin!

The next day was free for us, so we allowed ourselves to conquer the shops of Riga.

On July 4th and 5th, our days consisted of dance rehearsals.

On Thursday evening, the first concert was held - the rehearsal of the dance performance "Mūžīgais dzinējs" ("Eternal Engine"). But the first half of the day also consisted only of rehearsals.

On July 7, the concert was both at noon and in the evening.

Saturday was the most important day. There was a final concert, which was also broadcast live on television. But the day didn't end there, there was still a ball for the participants of the celebration to attend. Even though the past few days had been very tiring, that didn't stop the dancers from partying until broad daylight.

On the last day, we decided to go to the final concert "Kopā Augšup" ("Together Up") at Meža Park stage. It was a tribute to the 150th anniversary of the Song Celebration tradition.

Now my friend Zanda Loginova will tell you about her personal experience in detail next... →

Written by Ance Rutka





Dancing in the Song and Dance festival is something really special and unforgettable for every Latvian. From the audience's view, it is truly beautiful, but a huge amount of work is put into it. All the rehearsals before the celebration and the rehearsals in Riga in the hot sun, rain, and until late at night, but it's all worth it in the end.

This one week holds so much more. From the first day, when there was a festive procession, I knew that this would be something special. Not only it is a challenge to live in a school with your dance group, but also to survive all those sleepless nights and experience all those feelings. There are a lot of different feelings, for example getting ready for every concert, going into the stadium and seeing all the dancers, going back from the stadium in a full trolley of dancers and of course all of the dances.

But the most special feeling for me was going into the final dance of the last concert. It was already dark, the audience was shining flashlights, the wind was blowing in my head, I was singing words to the last song, and I was just enjoying the moment. That was the time when I understood that the festival had come to an end. There were tears, of course, but those passed quickly because the dances continued, and all the dancers danced by themselves.

But this would not be a Latvian festival without a party. So, after the concert, there was a party with live music just for the dancers, which continued till the morning.

I also had an opportunity to go to the last song concert and it really was magical. Especially, hearing the most popular and classic songs of the Song Festival. It was so emotional, beautiful, and heart-warming that I had goosebumps. These things really make me proud to be Latvian, to have this opportunity to experience and be part of this is something magical.



Written by Zanda Loginova



I participated in the Song and Dance Festival as a singer. I sing in a choir “Piebladzēni”. It is hard to put into words all the emotions I experienced. When you sing in a choir of thousands of people or in a tram that is full of singers, I am proud to be a Latvian and I am so happy I can experience this. The most emotional moment for me was when we sang “Lec Saulīte” because the lyrics are beautiful, and it is a powerful song. I felt chills going down my whole body and I could hardly sing from all the emotions I felt at that moment.

After the celebration, I saw some bad reviews about the organization of the event some of them I experienced as a participant, for example, two trams were on the same rails, the transportation to the concert place was complicated because the main way of getting to the concert was by tram. This caused the event to start a bit late. At that moment nothing seemed bad enough for me to not enjoy this moment and this beautiful event. All the good and positive emotions suppress the bad ones.

In the end, I will say, that no other nation in the world can experience our song and dance celebration like we do, just like we can't experience other culture's celebrations like they do. For that reason, we need to honor traditions, and our Song and Dance Festival. I wish this festival sees more generations and lives on for centuries so that every Latvian keeps the song and dance magic in their hearts. “Lec saulīte, spīdi spoži, vieno visu latvju tautu...” (“Let the sun rise, shine brightly, unite the entire Latvian nation...” quote from the song “Lec Saulīte”)

Written by Gerda Johansone



President elections



Let's start with what the president title means in Latvia and how Latvian presidential elections work. The President of Latvia is the highest official in the Republic of Latvia. A politically neutral person that means that they do not support any of the political parties, presidents' main job is to represent the country and its people. The presidential election in Latvia is held every four years. The President is elected by the Parliament of Latvia. A month after the election day the newly elected president starts officially working.

Our new president is Edgars Rinkevich. Since 2011, before taking this title, he used to be the Minister of Foreign affairs in Latvia. Rinkevich is the world's first openly gay head of state. He actively opposes the war in Ukraine, but at the same time supports Russian emigrants who oppose the Putin regime. As proof of this, I can mention that Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelenskyy congratulated him on becoming president.

Edgars Rinkevich began his presidency on July 8th, which falls in the 'Song and Dance Festival' week (06.07-09.07) so that meant that the previous president Egils Levits opened this festival with a speech and the new President ended the festival at the last concert. This does not usually happen, because the "Song and Dance Festival" happens every 5 years, and the presidential election every 4 years. I got to experience this because I also took part in this big event. I sang in a choir and saw both of them giving wonderful speeches.

I see him as a very interesting person and an excellent president. When he is giving an interview or a speech to Latvians and people living in this country, he is aware that he is also talking to teens and young adults, and I am so glad he does because a lot of politicians either forget about this big group of people or think it's unworthy to talk to us. Why should I be interested in them if they don't care for us? He also seems relatable and more reachable because he manages his own social media accounts on platforms like "X" and "Instagram". He posts regularly and is not afraid to post more laid-back content too.

Written by Gerda Johansone



“Breaking boundaries”

“This summer on the 25. – 26. th of July, I and two of my classmates (Zanda Loginova and Dinija Eksto) went to the yearly event “Breaking boundaries” which helps to bring young people together. We went with our youth center. We got to know new people through new and interesting games. We have to introduce ourselves by playing a 12 date game. In which we had to get a “date” with another person on each of the 12 hours of the clock. When the organizers said the time, we had to find our “date”. For each “date” we were given a different theme to talk about for 30 seconds.

The weather was very rainy, but despite that, we played team games in the rain and mud, which was surprisingly very fun! Then we were divided in groups and given themes and we had to film a commercial for Cēsis as the capital place for teens in Latvia. In the evening we sat around a campfire. We chatted, sang songs, and cooked s’mores. Since the next morning, we had to get up early the organizers went through our “tent city” while blasting heavy metal music through speakers to wake us up.



On the second day, we were surprised by two popular guests – Rojs Rodžers and Krivenchy. Since a friend of ours (Gerda Johansone) couldn’t make it, we asked the embarrassed Rojs Rodžers to send a video to her.

They each gave a speech about finding yourself and doing what you love, even if other people see you as weird. After that, we could ask them questions and get photos with them!

This project was incredibly fun and a great way to make meaningful connections and spend a great time with newly made friends. Since this event is for people ages 13-25, we hope to go next year, to have an even better time!



Written by Līga Kīne

"Choose Piebalga"

In Latvia we have a lot of traditions, one of them being annual city festivals, in which most cities have a certain day a year in which they celebrate with concerts, marches, celebrity guests fairs and more. So it's no surprise that this is the biggest event of the year in Piebalga! The annual fair/exhibition "Choose Piebalga!" was held on the 14th of August for the 18th time, celebrating its 'adulthood'! Visitors could buy anything from carefully crafted toys, jewelry, and clothing to beautiful plants, and flowers for your garden. The fair certainly did not lack mouth-watering food, snacks, and drinks to quench your thirst on this hot and sunny day.

This year's theme was "Feast of Honor" meaning, we had the chance to appreciate the work of small home-based businesses. We got to experience many different culinary masterpieces and generation-old recipes. Every visitor was kindly invited to participate in the feast, where Piebalga-style soup was served for a small donation. After eating the soup, you don't have to look far for dessert, because delicious homemade cakes from Piebalga were served on the tables close by. This is a great way for the best cake-makers from Piebalga to show off their greatest masterpieces!



While the fair was going on outside, an art exhibition was happening in the nearby exhibition hall "Velves". There were many different artist's paintings. New and older culturally significant works of art were displayed for all to see. The dancers tirelessly prepared for this fair after the Song and Dance Festival earlier in the summer. This year there were more businesses, craftsmen, and sellers than in other years!

An essential part of the fair was the music, which, as always, was fun to sing along.

I had a lot of fun, supporting small businesses and enjoying the fair with my friends after the long summer break.

In the evening, there was a concert program of theater tenors "Tavas mājas manā azotē" on the stage "TACES". Later, when music artist GACHO performed, everyone went dancing. After midnight, the party started, which was led by "Veja radītie" and DJ Roberts Lejasmejers.



Gerda's summer holidays

In August I went on a summer holiday with my family. Our destination was Montenegro. We traveled by car. To reach Montenegro we needed to drive for 4 days, cross multiple country borders, and the European Union border.

Day 1

We headed out early because we spent most of the day driving. Soon, we reach the Latvian and Lithuanian border, and a few hours later we are in Poland where we spend the first night. We continue our journey early in the morning.

Day 2

We ate breakfast at the hotel because as my dad says, "It would be a crime not to eat breakfast at a Polish hotel". We drive to Hungary today and we stay at a cozy mountain cabin. The view is amazing, the neighbours and we could see how Hungarians celebrate family events.

Day 3

We really like this place and are sad we cannot stay longer. Today we are supposed to reach Croatia and stay in Split. We lose a couple hours in traffic jams. We arrive at the apartment the owner asks where are we going next, and says we have chosen a beautiful destination.

Day 4

First, we visited Croatia's city Dubrovnik, I wanted to see it because one of my favourite shows "Game of Thrones" was filmed here. We arrive at Montenegro. We can see the change as it is not in the EU. The driving style isn't safe, although that can also be seen in EU countries that are warmer.

Day 5

We decided to go explore the city of Kotor and the old city. There were a lot of cats in the old city. Not all the cats there are strays, some shop owners have cats in their stores, to attract tourists. Kotor's government is taking care of the stray cats, so they don't overpopulate. Cats are the symbol of this city, but why? In the time of the black death, cats were savers, they killed rats and saved people's lives. Nowadays, cats keep out rats and snakes.





Day 6

Every place we have planned to visit is in the mountains, the road is barely wide enough for one car to go both ways up and down the mountain. We had to overcome our fears. First, we visited the mountain Lovcen. The second object was Ostrog's monastery, I cannot imagine how it was built.

Day 7

We had planned to visit the Tara bridge that goes across the Tara Canyon. This is the second biggest canyon in the world. I decided that I wanted to go across it, but nobody else from my family wanted to cross so I stopped at the middle and went back.

Day 8

On this day we have to reach Budva. It is a resort and nightlife city; it is very big and full of tourists it is said that there are not a lot of people here off-season.

Day 9

We go to the Budva old town, it's like Kotor only without the cats. In the evening we go to the night market.

Day 10

Today we are going on a tour on a boat. We go to some islands, they are very small and empty, but still interesting. The last stop was Blue Cave, I and my dad went swimming the rest of my family stayed on the ship.

Day 13

We start to drive back home.

Day 16

We are back home; our cats greet us outside.

This holiday was a challenge but we were happy to experience it. This was the first time I had been outside the EU. This trip made me realize that not everything is self-explanatory for visitors.

Written by Gerda Johansone





Our school's champion - Veronika

In Latvia there are a lot of young and talented athletes. One of them definitely is Veronika Monika Stūriška, who is a 12th grade student in Jaunpiebalgas Secondary school. She is not only a student but also a professional BMX rider. She is a Latvian National Champion 23', World Cup U23 Overall Winner 22', World Junior Champion 23' and European Vice-Champion 23'.

This season for her has been like a roller-coaster. In the first two stages of the season in Turkey she was dealing with a knee injury, which prevented her to fight for the podium. Then in The Netherlands she was undefeated in the next two stages. In the stage in France in September she fell in the final and did not finish. In Argentina she took the seventh place in the World Cup BMX cycling in the last, tenth stage of the U-23 age group competition and became the runner-up overall.

Although she is only 17 years old she has already experienced and achieved a lot. She is an athlete of the junior group and will play her first full-fledged U23 year next season. Her work abilities, long training sessions even in winter, determination and dreams are truly amazing. She is already starting to think about elite group. But this is only the beginning for her, because of her love for this sport, she will go far and will achieve all her goals.

Written by Zanda Loginova





Bike marathon

Bike marathon "Over the hills of Piebalga" is a great tradition in Janpiebalga. This year it happened for the 21th time. The competition has changed over the years, improving overtime. For the past two years this competition is organized by Sandis Grīngbergs, who is a part of a SK Piebalga (sport club Piebalga).

The preparation process for this event is long. As Sandis says: "It is a lot of work, but if you understand the things you are doing, it is not too difficult. The main thing is to define everything, how you want it all to look, which is necessary for the whole event. If you have this vision, then all that remains is talking to people and paperwork."

The hardest part is to create a qualitative and exciting track, which is the most important thing for good competitions. There are distances for the youngest participants, older children, all those who like to ride a bike in their free time, as well as the longest MTB distance for experts.



This year the track also included speed stages. They are short tracks that are timed and the fastest participants won prizes. There was also a family rating to invite families to participate.

After competition, of course, there is an award ceremony and a lottery. Every participant gets a number when they are registering for the competition. In the lottery there are a lot of prizes, but the main prize is a new bike, which everyone wants.

But the main thing for the organizers are the motivating and responsive words after the event. These speeches push them to do a better job every year.

Written by Zanda Loginova





The concert that changed everything

"Pērkonš" is a Latvian rock band that performs Jura Kulakova songs. It was one of the most popular and scandalous groups in Latvia in the 1980s, its activity was banned twice during the Soviet era.

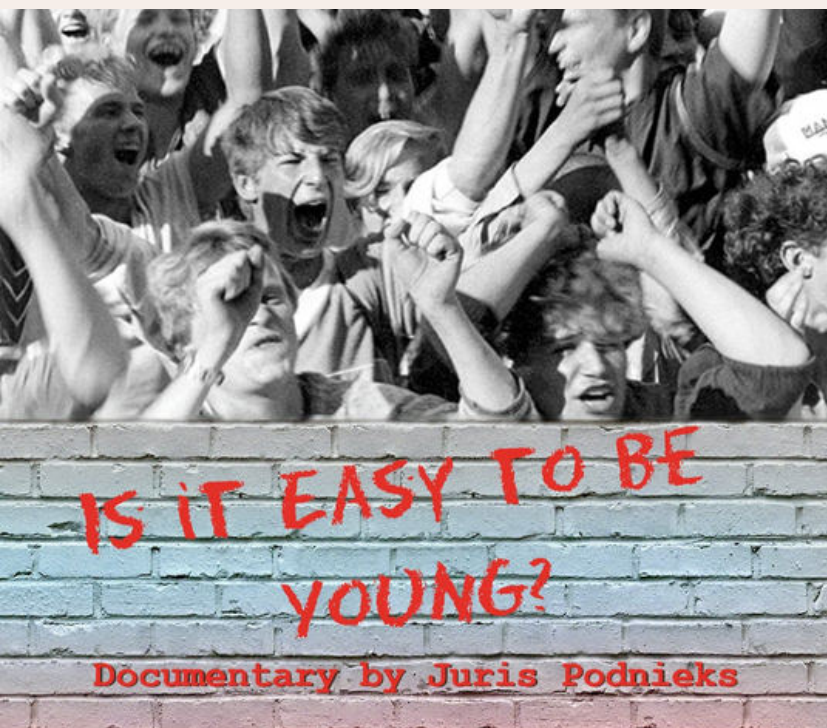
On July 6, 1985, after the performance of the band "Pērkonš" in Ogre, young people vandalized two carriages of a passenger train on the way to Riga. The sense of community and freedom became the main reason for demolishing the train, realizing that another, alternative, everyday life is possible, in which one does not have to suffer from the restrictions of the USSR.

" In the mid-1980s, in concerts you usually had to sit, and rock concert audiences in the modern sense, standing at the stage itself, did not exist. This is also why the concert in Ogre became an exception, because the young people stood up, and danced along as they would in a Western European country.

Such incidents were unprecedented in the Soviet Union. It was not without reason that the authorities saw in the incident a rebellion of the youth against the existing system. What today would be simply hooliganism, back then, was seen as a sign that young people were no longer subject to control and were allowing themselves to feel free.

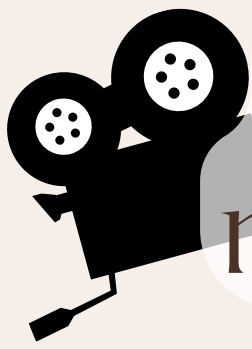


The damage caused at that time was measured at around 5,000 rubles. But the most difficult thing came after the court of the USSR awarded different levels of punishment to 7 young people (6 of them were minors during the trial), one of the most severe was sentenced to 3 years in a correctional institution, which was later reduced to 1 year. "Pērkons" after the Ogre events were temporarily banned from concerts, but the events of Ogre inspired the outstanding film documentarian Juri Podnieku to shoot the legendary film "Vai viegli būt jaunam" ("Is it easy to be young?"). My class also attended this play. After it, I had a greater understanding of the USSR time and experiences.



In 2022, the premiere of the play "Mēs roks, sekss un PSRS" ("We, rock, sex and USSR") was held, which also tells the story of young people who experienced the legendary concert of the group "Pērkons" on the Ogre stage in 1985 and the subsequent vandalism of the train. The play does not leave anyone careless, but makes the part that takes freedom for granted to wake up. It is difficult to understand that society was once so intimidated by the invisible but ruthless Red Army that it could do without open terror. My class also attended this play. After it, I had a greater understanding of the USSR time and experiences.

Written by Ance Rutka



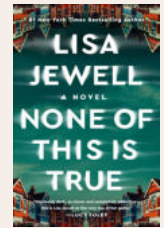
Top 5 books and movies of summer 2023



Love, Theoretically
by Ali Hazelwood



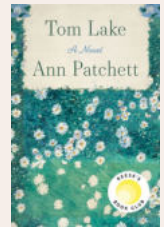
None of This Is True
by Lisa Jewell



The Only One Left
by Riley Sager



Tom Lake
by Ann Patchett



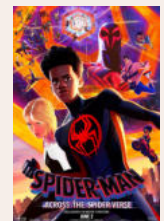
The Five-Star Weekend
by Elin Hilderbrand



Barbie



Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse



Oppenheimer



Sound of Freedom



Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny



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