



# Leaping Fires on Ivan Kupala Day:

## Summer Solstice the Ukrainian Way

If you've spent any time at all in the country, you'll know that nobody in the world likes to celebrate as much as Ukrainians. There are events to mark your name, your profession, your religion – even the season – and in June another unforgettable celebration is coming to a community near you: Ivan Kupala Day. This one has it all – fire-jumping, mythical plants, superstitions about marriage – it's like Ukrainians have taken their favourite parts from all their other celebrations and rolled them into this fantastic festival. Even though it's celebrated on July 6-7, the event is Ukraine's way of marking the summer solstice (which actually takes place on June 20th this year). Like many other holidays in Ukraine, this one has been celebrated for centuries, dating back to pre-Christianity Ukraine. And much like the famous Ukrainian Easter Eggs, this festival's traditions can be traced back to the pagan rituals of the time. This is among the country's most "folksy" festivals, so be sure to grab your camera and be on the lookout for some of these inimitable rituals...



## Too Hot to Handle: The Art of Fire-Jumping

Whether it's the Burning Mountain of Azerbaijan, a fire temple in Iran, or the firewalkers of India, flames have a mesmerizing mystique that seems to capture the imagination of societies around the world. Of course, it is no different here in Ukraine and perhaps the most eye-catching tradition of the weekend is watching festivalgoers jump the bonfire. You'll see all kinds make the leap: fathers with their children in their arms; attractive young girls in skirts, vyshyvankas (embroidered shirts), and flower garlands on their heads (to mark them as unmarried); and especially couples. It's believed that making the jump is a sure-fire way to secure health, good fortune and long life, as the flames are imbued with a magical quality stemming from the rays of the sun. The holiday originated as an honour to the Sun God Dazhbug's defeat over darkness. The leap signifies the rising of the sun and a sense of joy and playfulness. Couples making the leap have much to lose, as the success or failure of their relationship depends entirely on whether they manage to hold each other's hands throughout the jump. There is of course plenty of singing and dancing, as per most bonfire rituals, but you might also find Ukrainians torching the clothes of ill children to "burn the disease away", gathering the ashes to bring home for good luck, or you might find the ladies protecting the garlands on their heads – now bursting with magical powers – as they're needed for another ritual.

## If You Float It, You Will Know: The Art of Fortune Telling Through Garland-Floating

Fire isn't the only important element on Kupala Day, as what would a midsummer festival be without a way to cool off? You might find children playing water-related games including, if you're not careful, pouring water of the poor, unsuspecting reveler! With the advent of Christianity in Ukraine came the reworking of pagan holidays and, as Ivan is Slavic for John, Ivan Kupala Day became associated with John the Baptist – who of course is well-acquainted with water rituals.

Getting soaked by a bratty kid might be the best thing to happen to you, as the custom is said to be a way of cleansing and purifying your soul. You'll also likely find young women down near the water, as it's believed that by floating their (now magical) garlands across the water, sometimes with a flaming candle, they'll be able to discover secrets from their future – especially regarding marriage! Of course, you might also see a young man chase down the garland of his fancied lady in the hopes that the young lad might secure a midsummer's kiss.

## The Happiest Festival on Earth?

Ivan Kupala Day is the theme behind Gogol's acclaimed short story "St. John's Eve". That story was the main inspiration behind Russian composer Modest Mussorgsky's poem "Night on Bald Mountain", which was made famous when the wonderful Walt Disney included it in his magnum opus – Fantasia.

## Ukraine's-Own Leprachaun: The Faux Folktale of the Flowered Fern

Any proper Ukrainian festival needs to have a little bit of everything, so you shouldn't be surprised that fire and water aren't the only sacred elements on Kupala Day. Earth also plays a part; in particular, the fabled flowered fern found only in forests. At dawn, festivalgoers might set off into the forest, looking to gather medical herbs and plants. It's believed that plants gathered on Kupala Day have – you guessed it – magical powers! Later in the day, unmarried women – marked by the garlands in their hair – will set off into the forest in search of the magical flowering fern. These plants were believed in ancient times to have flowered only on Kupala Night and should one be located, and the finder is pure of heart, than one would gain wealth, power, and extraordinary healing abilities. Of course, we now know that ferns don't flower, but this won't stop some adventurous ladies from searching. Of course, after the women, young Ukrainian men will follow into the forest shortly after. And while they may never find the fabled flowering fern, more than a few Ukrainians have found some Kupala Day love!

Lee Reaney



## СПРАВЖНЯ ЛІСОВА КАЗКА "ДРЕВНЬОГО ГРАДУ"

Древній Град – єдиний парк-готель на території Західної України. У нас все як у справжньому казковому лісі – тягнуться до неба мудрі столітні дуби, живуть крілики, гноми, ельфи і феї.

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\* Для читачів LvivToday "Древній Град" дарує знижку на проживання 20%, слово пароль "Лісова казка". Знижка діє до 11 липня.



## ENCHANTING 'DREVNYY GRAD'

Drevny Grad is Western Ukraine's one and only park and hotel. The place looks like a fairy-tale forest with sky-high, all-knowing oaks, humorous rabbits, and magical dwarves, elves, and pixies.

The complex consists of 34 hotel rooms, 34 cottages, 2 spa-cottages, a restaurant, banquet hall, picnic area, children's playground, hammocks, and 3 separate conference halls with breakout rooms.

Soon Drevny Grad will celebrate the opening of the Rombar complex – 2 hectares of pure pleasure featuring swimming pools, lounge chairs, bungalows, VIP terraces, a restaurant – everything needed for a comfortable day in the sun. Each Saturday, this venue will throw rocking pool parties with lots of fun!

**7 km from Lviv, Hamaliivka Village, Pustomystivsky region, (096) 235-1000**

\* Till July 11 for Lviv Today readers "Drevny Grad" offers 20% discount on accomodation. Password for discount is "Lisova kazka"

