

Valentine's Day Around the World

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Each year on February 14th, Valentine's Day is celebrated all over the world. It is a day to celebrate friendships and share the beautiful, wonderful feeling we call love with others. Valentine's Day is widely associated with and symbolized by hearts, roses, and Cupid angels, though specific traditions during Valentine's Day may vary in different countries.

Despite its popularity, the history of Valentine's Day has been blurred over the years. The origin of Valentine's Day began in the third century, when the Roman Empire had been at war for many years. The Empire had already passed its peak and was declining rapidly. Along with it, its army was growing weaker. The number of young men leaving the army was increasing quickly, and not as many young men signed up to join the Roman military. Emperor Claude II, frantic to recruit more young men to fight for the empire, banned weddings throughout the Empire. A priest named Valentine strongly disapproved of Emperor Claude II's decision and defied the law. He secretly encouraged young lovers to marry each other, and he continued to perform at wedding ceremonies. When Emperor Claude II found out about Valentine's illegal actions, he immediately imprisoned Valentine. While in jail, Valentine befriended his prison guard's blind daughter. Valentine was eventually sentenced to death. Before his execution on February 14th, Valentine was said to have blessed the blind girl with sight and gave her a heart-shaped letter that was signed "From Your Valentine." When the Roman Empire fell at the end of the 5th century, Valentine was officially proclaimed Saint Valentine by Pope Gelasius I for defending other people's love. At the dawn of the 6th century, the Catholic Church announced that February 14th would be a day of feasts in honor of Saint Valentine.

1,500 years later, Valentine's Day has evolved into a widely celebrated holiday in most countries around the globe. On Valentine's Day in France, storekeepers and business owners decorate and fill their shops with hearts, roses, and Cupid's angels. Homes are decorated with love cards and roses. France likely has the most beautiful Valentine's Day traditions in the world. The French village called Valentine turns into the world's capital during Valentine's Day, as many couples from around the world travel there on February 14th to express and experience love.

South Korea also has a very interesting Valentine's Day. They celebrate a love day on the 14th day of every month. February 14th is the Day of Love/Valentine's Day. Unlike in America, where people buy gifts for each other, only the girls in South Korea get gifts, usually chocolates, for the boys. Then a month later, on March 14th, which is called White Day, the boys buy chocolates and small presents to the girls who give them chocolates on February 14th. What's most interesting is that South Korea named April 14th the Black Day. Singles eat Jjajangmyeon, also known as black noodles, while

grieving that they haven't found their loved ones yet.

In addition to celebrating Valentine's Day on February 14th, people in China also celebrate the Qixi Festival, their own equivalent of Valentine's Day. The Qixi Festival is celebrated on the 7th day of the 7th month on the Lunar Calendar. The story of the Qixi Festival dates back to 2,000

years ago during the Han Dynasty of China. The story is about two star constellations: Vega, portrayed as Zhinü, meaning weavergirl, and Altair, portrayed as Niulang, which means cowherd. Zhinü was the Goddess's seventh daughter. She had come down from her home in the sky to earth without her mother's permission to have some fun. Down on earth, she met a young cowherd named Niulang. They married without Zhinü's mother's knowledge. Zhinü and Niulang had two children and lived happily together. When Zhinü's mother found out that Zhinü had married a mortal, she was enraged and ordered her daughter to return back to heaven and continue her work weaving colorful clouds in the sky. Back on earth, Niulang was extremely upset to have been separated from his wife. Suddenly, one of Niulang's oxes began speaking, telling him that if he killed it and put on its hide, he would be able to fly up to the sky. Niulang followed the ox's orders and carried his two children up with him to the sky. Zhinü's mother discovered Niulang's secret meetings with her daughter. She used her hairpin to scratch a wide river between them, forming the Milky Way between the constellations of Vega and Altair. Zhinü sits on one side of the river weaving clouds, while Niulang watches from afar, taking care of their two children. Once each year, on the 7th day of the 7th month on the Lunar Calendar, all the magpies in the world form a bridge crossing the river, allowing Zhinü and Niulang to unite for a single night. Chinese people celebrate the reuniting of Zhinü and Niulang each year. This year, 2024, Qixi Festival will be celebrated on Saturday, August 10.

Valentine's Day is a beautiful holiday. The planet is filled with hearts and roses and is overflowing with love. Although Valentine's Day traditions are different around the world, the central theme stays the same. February 14th is a day to celebrate and share love.