

New Year Celebrations in Scotland

In Scotland on the 31st of December we celebrate Hogmanay. Hogmanay is the Scottish word for New Year's Eve. We have lots of different New Year traditions!

In many Scottish cities, the Hogmanay celebrations start on the 30th of December with a torchlight procession.



In the evening of the 31st, all the family gathers together to have a meal. Traditionally, the house must be clean and tidy (even the insides of the kitchen cupboards!); and all debts must be paid. This is so that we start the new year well!

At the stroke of midnight, we kiss and hug each other and then everyone sings a Scottish song called Auld Lang Syne. It was originally written as a poem by a Scottish poet called Robert Burns. The words 'Auld Lang Syne' translate from a Scottish language (called Scots) to 'Old Long Since'. The song is about love and friendship. Everybody stands in a big circle, crosses their arms, hold hands with the next person and sings....

*'Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought tae mind,
Should auld acquaintance be forgot;
For auld lang syne'*

To finish the night, many people go to a traditional party called a ceilidh. There's lots of Scottish folk music and everybody dances. It's a great night!



After midnight, you can expect first-footers. First-footing is another Scottish tradition where we visit our friends' homes bringing whisky, shortbread, and a piece of coal for the fire. These gifts are mostly symbolic nowadays, and they represent our wishes for the New Year: to never be thirsty, hungry, or cold. It's better if you are a tall and dark man, because after the Viking invasions it was never a good thing to see a blond or red-headed person at the door!

On the 1st of January, New Year's Day, it can be very difficult to wake up, so why not go for a refreshing "dook" in the sea? The Loony Dook is a New Year's Day tradition where people go for a quick swim in the sea at the coast or a river. This year I went for a dook in the North Sea, at Rosemarkie beach near Inverness. It was very, very cold but I would recommend it!



We have an expression in Scots: “Lang may yer lum reek!” Literally, it means “May your chimney always be smoky”, and we use it to wish our friends and family warmth and happiness for the year. So, lang may yer lum reek!

