

Old Holiday, New Traditions

- Morgan Hardwick

After seventeen Valentine's Days, I thought it was time to veer from the traditional fashion of chocolate and flower-giving America has fallen in love with. Around the world, countries have established their own traditions to celebrate February 14th, and I thought there was no better way to change up Cupid's Day than with customs of another country.

Germany, Spain and Austria all share similar traditions to us Americans, and show their love through bouquets of roses. I love flowers as much as the next girl, but I wanted a new tradition, so I set my sights on Japan.

Japan celebrates Valentine's Day on the 14th of February and March. On the first date, the woman gives a man a gift, and on the second date, known as White Day, the man returns the same gift to the woman. Ultimately the woman chooses her own gift, and the man doesn't have to pay for it. Seems like a win-win for both parties involved; it certainly eliminates the stress of choosing the perfect gift!

However, as much fun as it might be to choose your own gift, it probably wouldn't quite bring the same joy if you were spending Valentine's Day alone. Scotland, though, doesn't let anyone spend the day of love without someone beside them. The country throws a festival with an equal amount of unmarried men and women to celebrate the day. The women draw a name of a man to partner with for the night. What better time to look for a suitor than on the day of love? I'd say Scotland definitely has figured out a great alternative to online dating services.

Of course, not every relationship flourishes and some are, inevitably, left alone on Valentine's Day. In that case, celebrate the way French women used to. In France, if a man wasn't enthralled with his valentine and left, women would build huge bonfires and burn photos of the man that left them, along with verbally abusing his "worthless heart." However the French government banned the custom because it left too much room for nastiness and ridicule. But hey, if it suits your fancy, it certainly hasn't been banned in the States!

Valentine's Day is all about sending love to those you love, including your friends. In Denmark, men send gaekkbrev, or joking letters to friends and lovers, with rhyming messages but no name. Instead there's only a dot for each letter in his name. If the woman correctly guesses the sender using the dots, she receives an Easter egg later in the year. This Danish tradition is one that must be tried if you're spending the 14th with your friends.

Italy also has traditionally celebrated Valentine's Day in a friendly way, by throwing a spring festival, where young people can gather and listen to music and poetry in ornamental gardens. It's a really interesting idea, but sadly this tradition however became less involved over the years. If it's dying in Italy, why not bring it over to America?

Around the world the day of love is being celebrated in ways that bring people together, and this is something us Americans are lacking in. Valentine's Day should be spent with the ones you

love, not with the chocolate you love. Bring the traditions of another country into your home and spend the festivities with the ones in your heart. After all, no matter which countries' tradition you choose to celebrate, isn't that what Valentine's Day is about?

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