

June 24th

LITHUANIA

ST.JOHN'S DAY/DEW HOLIDAY



The participants and guests of the festival go through the gate of birches (it's a symbol of transition from courage to harmony). Then everybody sings the song „In the evening of St.John”, lights the so-called Kupolė, sprinkles each other with water, shares remedial herbs. Everybody glorifies the Sun by saying the nicest

words to the Sun. After the ritual a senior witch accompanied by other good withches comes in the cart decorated with flowers. The senior witch carrying a big bone in her hands casts lots from flowers, mountain ash and different blades of grass. The participants of the festival give different questions to this witch, who being very clever, gives witty and interesting answers to them. Girls try to jump over a baker's peel, hoping for much more milk from their cows next year. All the girls wear wreaths made from nine plants. Then they throw them onto the branches of trees. If a wreath catches a branch, this means they will get married this year.

Later round dances, games for Johns and Janes begin. A bonfire is lit in the honour of the Sun. The one who wants to understand the magic power of the bonfire tries to jump over it or at least to be nearer it. This ritual means that they will be healthy all year round. The girls throw wreaths and the names of their boyfriends into the water and watch them. The name, the wreath sails to, shows the name of the boy she will get married to. Songs accompanied by a country-side orchestra are sung up to midnight when everybody goes to look for the blossom of a fern.

St. John's feast

My aunt living in the village of Mizarai near the Nemunas told me how she used to celebrate S.John's feast in her youth. In the afternoon of June 24th the girls of the village went to the meadows and the birch grove to pick flowers and blades of grass to make wreaths for everybody. Meanwhile the boys saw thin planks which they hammered nails in to put a candle on. They attached a

wreath to these planks. At the sunset everybody took wreaths and went to the Nemunas. There they picked dry twigs, set up a fire and sang songs. The boys tried to jump over the fire. When the first stars appeared in the sky everybody boated into the middle of the Nemunas where after lighting up candles they let their wreaths go.

The candles twinkled in the dark and everybody taking a good look at his or her light tried to foresee who will live longer. These lights shone for a long time moving closer or farther from each other. If the candle went out, they sailed to it and lit up again. Rowing their boats they reached the Island of Love, a wonderful view of fires and twinkling little lights opened from which. The shortest night of the year finished with dances, songs and the search for the blossom of fern.

SPAIN

23rd / 24th Saint John's Night

SAINT JOHN'S BOFIRES IN GALICIA

All along the Galician coast and in many interior places, Saint John's night is celebrated. It is said that at this magic night the underworld gets in touch with our world. It is the moment when bad spirits should be expelled. "At Saint John witches and sorcerers will run away".

Bonfires are lighted when the 24th arrives; that is to say: after midnight. They are considered to give protection and good luck to the one who jumps them nine times on the same night (the number of times varies according to the different places).

At sunset, several kinds of aromatic plants are picked up and they are put into water; in the next morning people wash themselves with it. They are said to have therapeutic and cleaning properties. The typical food of this night are "cachelos" (potatoes boiled with their skin, that it is removed afterwards) and grilled sardines, and in recent times "churrasco" (grilled meat); all of it accompanied by good Galician wines. Saint John's party usually ends with a "Queimada" (hot brandy).



ESTONIA

St. John's Day or Midsummer Day

