

Celebrations, Customs and Rituals

Traditions Strengthen Communities

Celebrations, customs and rituals are an important part of Finland's cultural heritage. They mark the changing seasons and the milestones of life, while strengthening community spirit and local identity. Many traditions have been passed down from one generation to the next and continue to be cherished through public celebrations, local heritage events and parish life.

Juustopaisti – A Traditional Festive Dish of Kaustinen

One of Kaustinen's most treasured traditional dishes is **Juustopaisti**, prepared especially for Midsummer and other major celebrations. It is made by slowly simmering milk, a process that also produces a sweet whey broth.

Juustopaisti, a traditional creamy meat soup made with *leipäjuusto* (literal translation: 'bread cheese', a moist, flat fresh cheese known for its distinctive squeaky texture), has long been regarded as a festive delicacy whose preparation required both time and skill. Although it is prepared less often today, the tradition lives on in home kitchens, village celebrations and local events.

Poor Man Statues – A Symbol of Charity

Poor man statues are a unique feature of Finland's cultural heritage. These carved wooden statues resembling poor men, with collection boxes built into them, were placed in churchyards to collect donations for people in need. Most surviving poor man statues are found in Western Finland, particularly in Ostrobothnia. They reflect a time when local communities took responsibility for caring for their less fortunate members and continue to serve as reminders of the importance of shared responsibility.

Purpuri – The Traditional Dance of the West Finnish Wedding Tradition

Purpuri is a traditional West Finnish ceremonial wedding dance whose origins date back to the nineteenth century. It evolved from the dances of the social elite into a distinctive folk tradition that symbolically portrays the entire course of a wedding celebration through dance.

Each locality developed its own version of the **purpuri**, performed by the bride and groom, the bridesmaid, the master of ceremonies, the wedding guests and the **traditional folk musicians**.

Today, **purpuri** is performed by folk dance groups, at local heritage celebrations and at international folk festivals, where it is recognised as a unique expression of Finland's cultural heritage.

Caption: The opening parade of the Kaustinen Folk Music Festival making its way to the festival grounds, 1968.

Caption: At the wedding feast, 1906. Photographer: Samppa Luomala. *Photo: Folk Music Institute.*