

11 QUIRKS POLISH PEOPLE DON'T REALISE ARE WEIRD

by POLAND UNRAVELED 30th April 2018

Let's face it, every country has its own quirks and weird customs but actually, this is what makes it special and fun to travel and live in another place. Poland is no different – sandwiches that never close, medieval way of drying laundry or wearing 'guest' slippers, just to name a few. For many expats who decided to live in Poland, the following list will be probably very familiar. But do you know them all? And do you know why Poles developed those funny behaviours?

Here is the list of the funniest and odd Polish customs and habits:

#1 ALMOST ALL FILMS ARE DUBBED BY ONE MALE VOICE

If you ever watched foreign films when you lived at home you must be used to subtitles. What you are going to experience in Poland is next level. All films that are shown in TV have a lector who reads the translation over the original voices. The weirdest part is that the translation is read by only one person, usually a man with a deep, monotone voice. Imagine a woman pleading for her life and the lector reading all the lines in a flat, emotionless intonation. This is the Polish TV for you.

#2

One would think that celebrating someone's birthday would be enough, but that is not the case in Poland. Actually, older people (women to be exact) prefer to celebrate their name day (imieniny) so they don't have to mention their age publicly. This tradition has Catholic roots and originated from the custom of naming children after saints.

Imieniny often involve socialising with friends and family at the celebrant's home, as well as eating cakes and sweets at the workplace.

If you want to join Poles and start celebrating your name day, pick up the nearest calendar, it should contain the names celebrated on any given day. And if you are not lucky, check out messages displayed in your local bus, usually it shows the time, date and the names that should be celebrated that day!

#3 HAPPY BIRTHDAY SONG IS SUNG FOR JUST ABOUT EVERY CELEBRATION

Talking about name days and birthdays, have you noticed that in Poland the Happy Birthday song is sung at many occasions? 'Sto lat' meaning literally 'hundred years' is the same song people in Poland sing for weddings, anniversaries and official national days. I guess it's easier for foreigners, one song rules them all!

#4 SANDWICH, OR IS IT?

In Poland, a sandwich might not necessary be how you picture a classic sandwich (you probably imagine a delicious BLT or bacon and egg between two toasts). Sandwich (in Polish kanapka) is a piece of bread with some toppings, somehow a cousin of the traditional sandwich. Some call them open sandwiches, others call them a cheat. If you are not Scandinavian you will struggle with this concept.

#5

If you are planning going to the local store make sure you have some change on you. You can be sure to be asked by the cashier if you have '32 groszy on you' so she can give you a round number of coins back. Some think this custom is a result of not enough change going around, but it could also be down to the efficient nature of Polish people.

#6

When you enter a Polish household, it is customary to remove your shoes at the door. That wouldn't be surprising as it's a custom for many different cultures but what you may not expect is that you will be offered a pair of used slippers. Many other guests may had a pleasure of wearing those before you, but if you refuse, your host will be worried about your health (it's unthinkable to walk barefoot in a Polish household!). Some Polish people bring a pair of their own slippers with them so they don't have to deal with the situation.

#7

This one is quite a simple one, Poles don't use electric clothes dryers and stick to the drying racks. Perhaps it's because washing machines are usually kept in the bathrooms rather than kitchens or separate utility room (so there is not enough space for a dryer). One could argue though that nowadays washing machines have also the drying function so it can't be the case of space.

#8 PIZZA WITH KETCHUP OR GARLIC SAUCE

Any Italian person would probably get a heart attack if they were served a pizza with ketchup or garlic sauce to dip (or worse, smothered all over the top). But In Poland, this is the most obvious way of eating this very popular dish. Garlic sauce is the king!

#9 WATCHING 'HOME ALONE' BECAME A CHRISTMAS TRADITION

'Home Alone' (translated in Poland as 'Kevin alone at home') is played on national television every year and watched by over 5 million people. It became so important to Poles that one year when the TV channel announced to broadcast a different movie, thousands of people wrote letters of protest. Since then, no one ever tried to change it and 'Home Alone' is part of Christmas celebrations, the same as presents and Christmas dinner.

#10

If you are a Polish kid you have tens of aunties and uncles who are not related to you at all but nevertheless you refer to them as they were. It could be because of the Polish language itself - if a person is older than you, you should refer to them as miss or mister. That would be quite awkward if they are friends of your parents so aunty seems like a good solution.

#11 WINDBREAK, WINDBREAKS EVERYWHERE!

If you have ever been to the Polish seaside you know what we are talking about. Windbreaks are everywhere! Windbreaks allow to secure the best spots on the beach and give a bit of privacy. Thanks to them you can make sure that no one will seat too close to you. We bet the windbreak was created by a Pole!

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EXERCISES:

I. Give examples of customs or habits you found strange while travelling to other countries. Why did they seem weird to you?

II. Can you think of some Polish customs or habits that might seem unusual to other nationalities? Make a list. Compare with your partner's(s'). Discuss the similarities and differences.

III. Match the headings with the corresponding paragraphs:

A. CLOTHES DRYER, SAY WHAT?

B. DO YOU HAVE A CHANGE ON YOU?

C. PARENTS' FRIENDS ARE AUNTS AND UNCLES

D. NAME DAY CELEBRATIONS

E. GUESTS ARE OFFERED SLIPPERS

IV. Explain the meaning of the following words:

QUIRK

EXPAT

ODD

CELEBRANT

BLT

BAREFOOT

UTILITY ROOM

WINDBREAK

V. Compare your list from exercise II with the list in the text. Is there anything that surprised you?

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