



# Nowruz Celebrations

By: Nayyereh Towhidi

Happy Nowruz, happy spring. May Allah - The Gracious give you the best in life, and may He help you make your lives as beautiful and fruitful as springs. As we know, this world's life has its ups and downs, like each year in our lives in which the refreshing spring and warm summer are followed by a dry or cold autumn, and colder winter. Yet the fact is that Allah, the All-Knowing, has placed innumerable blessings for His servants in each of these apparently difficult times. One lesson we can take from this fact is that we should regard hardships we go through in life as leading to certain blessings, just as cold winters give their place to refreshing springs. Hope and trust in God are really what we need most to become able to tolerate what we need to tolerate, without thanklessness. Our divine teachers have taught us, among others, to rely on Allah - The One and Only God - and to keep our hearts alive and healthy through remembering God. This lesson is most valuable and should be conveyed to all.

We extend our heartfelt greetings to you and wish you better and better days and years, and here we present a brief account of Nowruz celebrations in various countries to you.



### Nowruz in Tajikistan

Tajikistan's biggest annual celebration is the spring festival of Nowruz. For the Tajiks, Nowruz represents a festival of friendship and renewal of all living beings.

Jumping over the fire on the eve of the last Wednesday of the year is practiced by the Tajiks as well. One tradition that has survived in Tajikistan is the gathering of wildflowers by children in the villages. They bring the flowers back and while wearing colorful attire walk around the village, knock on people's doors and present them with a flower.

House cleaning is done before the celebrations start and this includes washing and polishing all the dishes in the household. New Year's morning starts with a sweet breakfast. New colorful clothes with spring motives (flowers) are worn.

Special food and sweets are prepared. Games including playing with eggs, and wrestling are part of the celebrations. Women prepare "Sumalak", a porridge made from sprouted wheat that is traditionally eaten on the spring holiday.

March 21 and 22 are official Nowruz holidays in Tajikistan, but celebrations start before these dates and continue afterward.



### Nowruz in the Republic of Azerbaijan

Nowruz in the Republic of Azerbaijan is the most important national celebration. It starts two weeks before the beginning of the New Year when house cleaning starts. Homes and public places are cleaned and painted and new flowers are planted in city squares and in private gardens. The night before New Year members of extended families have dinner together and fish is a must at these dinners. New clothes are worn and all kinds of sweets

are baked for the occasion. There are plays and performances with games, competitions, horse riding, wrestling, fencing, and archery. There is a Nowruz spread with symbolic items and people visit parks and fields after the occasion. Chahar-Shanbe-Soori is also celebrated. But unlike Iran where this celebration takes place only on the last Wednesday eve of the year, it lasts for four Wednesday eves in the Republic of Azerbaijan. Each Wednesday eve is dedicated to one of the four elements water, wind, soil, and fire. The night before the last Wednesday, dedicated to fire, is the most ostentatious one and is celebrated by setting bonfires and jumping over them with music.



### Nowruz in Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, Nowruz is celebrated for two weeks. People wear new clothes, refurbish their houses, paint the buildings, and henna their hands.

A famous tradition among Afghans is to forget and forgive the mistakes of one another and start the New Year with new hopes and new goals. During the first three days of the year, families and relatives meet and visit each other. These are parts of Afghan traditions that date back to centuries ago. One of the most significant symbolic traditions of Nowruz in Afghanistan is Haft-Meewa or Seven Fruits. The Seven Fruits table is adorned with seven dried fruit: raisins, senjed (the dried fruit of the oleaster tree), pistachio, hazelnuts, prunes (dry fruit of apricot), walnuts, and either almond or another species of plum fruit. Haft-Meewa is like a fruit salad, served in the fruits syrup. Afghans also celebrate Chahar-Shanbe-Soori, the festival of the last Wednesday eve before the New Year, celebrated with bonfires and fireworks.





### Nowruz in Turkey

In Turkey, Nowruz is celebrated by the Kurdish community. Kurds celebrate this feast between March 18 and 21. The Nowruz holiday is considered by Kurds to be the single most important holiday of the year. It involves setting up large bonfires on mountain tops, celebrating the defeat of the demon-king Zahak, a character from the Shahnameh, a book by the Iranian epic poet, Ferdowsi. With this festival, Kurds gather at fairgrounds mostly outside the cities to welcome spring. Women wear colorful dresses and headscarves and young men wave flags of green, yellow and red. They hold this festival by lighting fires and dancing around them. Nowruz is still largely considered a potent symbol of Kurdish identity in Turkey. In recent years the New Year celebration attracted another one million participants in Diyarbakır, the largest Kurdish-majority city in Turkey.



### Nowruz in Uzbekistan

Nowruz, in Uzbekistan, starts with house cleaning and airing of beddings and carpets. Broken household dishes and pots and pans are discarded. Pots or saucepans are left outside to be filled with rainwa-

ter and this water is kept as a symbol of blessing. They celebrate with Haft-Seen, wearing new clothes and having lights or candles in every room of the house when Nowruz starts. Jumping over the bonfire on the last Wednesday eve of the year is also practiced. Children and youths in the villages and small cities go out into the fields and gather wildflowers that they will later give as presents to their neighbors and friends. The elderly will kiss the flowers and will put them on their eyes and give treats to the children.

Reading the poems of Hafez, the renowned Iranian famous poet, and seeking one's fortune through various poems of his is very popular and they often leave an open book of Hafez next to their baby's cots to bring good fortune for the newborns. On the 13th day, the celebrations end by going to picnics and spending time in the fields in nature



### Nowruz in Kyrgyzstan

Nowruz is a short but major national celebration in Kyrgyzstan. It is celebrated on the first and the second day of the New Year and these days are public holidays. On these two days, people gather from early morning in major squares where Nowruz markets are set up. Music bands, games, competitions, fencing, horse riding, and archery are part of the celebrations. Special foods are prepared with sweets and treats and are distributed in the community.

On March 21, Kyrgyz (and Kazakh) households fumigate their homes with special smoke, which is said to make malicious spirits flee. The main holiday dishes for Turkic Central Asians are pilaf (plov), Shurpa, boiled mutton and Kok-samsa pies filled with spring greens and the young sprouts of steppe grasses. According to tradition, people try to make the celebratory table as rich as possible with various dishes and sweets. Everyone at the table should be full and happy to ensure that the coming year will be safe and the crop will be plentiful. The holiday is accompanied by competitions among national singers, storytellers, and horsemen, and also competitions among strong men.



### Nowruz in Kazakhstan

The celebration of Nowruz starts a few days before the New Year with house cleaning. On the night before Nowruz, two candles are placed above the house and during the celebrations, people wear new white clothes. In the villages on the night before Nowruz, at 3 a.m. a large doll covered with bells is mounted on a horse and released and the sound is supposed to wake up everyone to make them ready for the coming of the first day of Nowruz. Neighbors, friends, and relatives visit each other and the people rub their shoulders with one other, a local tradition. If it rains people regard it as a good sign.

Special foods are made including Nowruz Goojeh (Ash-e-Nowruzi) that has seven ingredients. Different kinds of sweets are baked and shared by all.



### Nowruz in Turkmenistan

Turkmen ancestors considered Nowruz as the symbol of a new life, blessing, dignity, bliss, and welfare. In Turkmenistan, the first two days of Nowruz, i.e., March 21 and 22, coinciding with the First and Second of Farvardin (first month of the Iranian calendar) are official holidays. While it was banned during Soviet rule, this festivity has been celebrated again since independence.

In Turkmenistan, Nowruz is a sign of preserving ancient customs. Turkmen have certain customs for Nowruz such as special foods, games, horse racing, and different competitions.

People in Turkmenistan celebrate this time with famous dishes. There is a tradition of jumping over fire in the evening which is still practiced in Turkmenistan. On Nowruz, women practice a very special rite. They cook wheat sprouts and place them in a bowl on their heads. Water is poured into the bowl while another woman cuts the steam with scissors. They believe it will make the woman fertile.