

# Nowruz in Countries

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## Norouz in Afghanistan



In Afghanistan, Nowroz festival is traditionally celebrated for 2 weeks. Preparations for Nowroz start several days ago, at least after Chaharshanbe Suri, the last Wednesday before the New Year. Among various traditions and customs, the most important ones are:

**Haft Mewa:** In Afghanistan, they prepare Haft Mewa (Seven Fruits) instead of Haft Sin which is common in Iran. Haft Mewa is like a Fruit salad made from 7 different Dried fruits, served in their own syrup. The 7 dried fruits are: Raisin, Senjed (the dried fruit of the oleaster tree), Pistachio, Hazelnut, Prune (dry fruit of Apricot), Walnut and whether Almond or another species of Plum fruit.

**Samanak:** It is a special type of sweet dish made from Wheat germ. Women take a special party for it during the night, and cook it from late in the evening till the daylight, singing a special song: Samanak dar Josh o mā Kafcha zanem -

Değarān dar Khwāb o mā Dafcha zanem.

**Gul-e Surkh Festival:**

It is an old festival celebrated only in "Mazari Sharif" for 40 days. People travel from different parts of the country to Mazar in order to attend the festival. It is celebrated along with the Janda

Bālā ceremony which is a specific religious ceremony performed in the holy blue mosque of Mazar that is believed (mostly by Sunnite Afghans) to be the site of the tomb of Ali ibn Abi Talib, the fourth caliph of Islam. The ceremony is performed by raising a special banner in the blue mosque in the first day of year (i.e. Nowroz). The Guli Surkh party continues with other special activities among people in the Tulip fields and around the blue mosque for 40 days.

**Buzkashi:** Along with other customs and celebrations, normally a Buzkashi tournament is held. The Buzkashi matches take place in

northern cities of Afghanistan and in Kabul.

**Special cuisines:** People cook special types of dishes for Nowroz, especially on the eve of Nowroz. Normally they cook "Sabzi Chalaw", a dish made from rice and spinach, separately. Moreover, the bakeries prepare a special type of cookie, called Kulcha-e Nowrozī, which is only baked for Nowroz. Another dish which is prepared mostly for the Nowroz days is Māhī wa Jelabī (Fried Fish and Jelabi) and it is the most often meal in picnics. In Afghanistan, it is a common custom among the affianced families that the fiancé's family give presents to or prepare special dishes for the fiancée's family on special occasions such as in the two Eids, Barā"at and in Nowrouz. Hence, the special dish for Nowroz is Māhī wa Jelabī.

**Sight-seeing to Cercis fields:** The citizens of Kabul go to Istalif or other green places around where the Cercis flowers grow. They go for picnic with their families during the first 2 weeks of New Year.

**Jashni Dehqān:** Jashni Dehqan means The Festival of Farmers. It is celebrated in the first day of year, in which the farmers walk in the cities as a sign of encouragement for the agricultural productions. In recent years, this activity is being performed only in Kabul and other major cities, in which the mayor and other high governmental personalities participate for watching and observing.

## Norouz in Kazakhstan



"Qal-Tozaq" is a contest performed in Kazakhstan between men and women on Norouz. They believe that if the women win, the New Year will be filled with prosperity, but if the men win, they consider it to be unfavorable year.

In Kazakhstan, Norouz is considered to be the point of vernal equinox, a time during which everything becomes refreshed and when the whole world is filled with joy and happiness. The Kazakhs believe that Norouz is the beginning of the year. They have beautiful sayings that "Norouz has been awaited for one whole year", "Blessings descend at Norouz", and finally:

“The Azure gem of Samarqand will melt at Norouz“.

The Kazakhs perform season cleaning before Norouz, for they believe it to push away all ailments and problems. They light two candles and hang them above the door from the moment of New Year to “Shab-e-Qazir”. On the New Year’s Eve, the Kazakh girls cook a dish with the last portions of the horse meat called “Qyaqi Ashar” and serve their beloved boys with it. The young men give them presents such as combs, mirrors, and perfumes. They believe that this interchange of gifts would increase love between them.



Another ceremony performed by the young men is saddling an untamed horse. They let the horse gallop through their place at exactly three in the morning to wake the people up. This is a symbolic show representing the arrival of the New Year.

There are well-known contests among Kazakhs on the occasion of Norouz, among which “Qal-Tozaq” is one performed between men and women. Should the women win, they believe the New Year to be one filled with prosperity and blessing. However, if the men win, they consider it to be unfavorable year. “Koekpar”, picking goats by men riding on horses, “Avdar Yespaq”, wrestling, “Qiz Qov” and “Alti Baqan” are examples of other contests and games held on Norouz.

### Norouz in Pakistan



New Year in Pakistan is called Alam Afrouz meaning the New Day that illuminates the world with its arrival.

The ancient festival of Norouz in Pakistan is celebrated as the symbol of New Day. Norouz in Pakistan is called Alam Afrouz meaning the New Day that illuminates the world with its arrival.

This day begins in March and traditionally represents the rebirth of nature after the long winter. The New Year begins the instant the sun is no longer in the astrological sign of Pisces and enters Aries. It is celebrated as a time of renewal.

Norouz has an exclusive importance among the people of Pakistan and therefore different social and religious groups elucidate in details about it in the calendars they publish. The calendar is called Jandri.

One of the customs of Norouz in Pakistan is the practice of burning piles of wood. The bonfires are a symbol to destroy any remaining evil from the previous year. Season cleaning, putting on new clothes, preparing certain sweets such as “Luddoo”, “Golab Jamen”, “Rus Malai”, “Barfi”, “Shekar Pareh”, “Cream Roll”, “Souhan Halva”, and giving and receiving gifts (Eidi) are among the ceremonies practiced in Pakistan. In some cities, women take part in a bridal dress show to celebrate the New Year. During Norouz, people avoid unfavorable talks and follow a kind attitude toward each other. Composing and reciting poems in Urdu, Dari, and Arabic are quite trendy as well.

The Pakistani people believe that hope, peace, and amity in the Islamic world are the purposes of Norouz. They believe that this way, freedom, fortune, happiness, fraternity and equity would rest in the souls and hearts of the people.

### Norouz in Uzbekistan



In Uzbekistan, people cook sumalak, the symbolic Norouz dish. It is its mass character when each participant of this event becomes a part of the general elation that has prevented Norouz from falling into oblivion.

For all the nations spring is the time of nature revival and renovation, the period of expectations and hope for peace between



people, for bumper harvest in the fields and gardens and good increase in livestock, for love and consent in family. And all these expectations are embodied in spring festival Norouz.

From the times this holiday originated, Norouz was mainly the festival of masses and has been preserved as such up to the present days. During this festival there are no official events such as parades, demonstrations, meetings or marches in Uzbekistan.

Unlike the western New Year traditions, Norouz is celebrated in daytime hours within the family circle. March 21st is the main celebration, but for the next week it is common practice to visit friends and relatives, buy and plant seeding of fruit trees and have cheerful gatherings in the fresh spring air.

Traditionally, it is also a time to “clean up” one’s life. People tidy up their homes, wash rugs and draperies, decorate with flowers, and buy new clothes that they will use for visiting. On the day of Norouz, all housekeeping - including the preparation of the meal, careful cleaning of the home and the arrangement of blossoming branches from apricot, peach, almond or pomegranate trees - must be completed before rising of the morning star. Children enjoy the holiday because they often get presents of money, as well as blessings, from their elders.

In Uzbekistan, it is a customary practice for people to gather for hashar (team-work) few days before beginning of the festival. During

hashar, they tidy up and decorate their cities and villages because it is natural enough to celebrate the holiday in clean and tidy surroundings. By the time the celebration starts, all cooking of holiday food is to be completed too.

In Samarqand, Bukara, Andican, the ceremonies which start on Norouz continue for almost a whole month. The people visit each other’s tents during these ceremonies and congratulate each other. The food served during such visits is rice which is specially made. Shows like wrestling, horse races and rooster fights are organized.

Of the seven food beginning with the sound of SH in the Uzbek language, milk represents cleanliness, dessert represents the joy of living, sugar represents the coolness and rest; candle represents worshipping to fire, and comb represents the beauty of the women. After the introduction of Islam, 7 objects beginning with “SH” were replaced according to the Islamic traditions.

Various and plentiful meals are also made during the Norouz festival which is held in the hope of the coming profitable and bumper-crop year. On the day of the festival, different national dishes are served: pilov (meat dish with rice), shurpa (vegetable soup), boiled mutton or beef, kuk-samsa (patty with spring onions) and sweet nishalda (dessert made of eggs whisked with sugar).

But the culmination of the holiday is sumalak – a ritual meal, which citizens of Uzbekistan can

taste only once a year, whereas the guests, very likely, can do it once in their lifetime. Sumalak is made from flour and wheat sprouts, which are the symbols of eternal life.

Today, Uzbeks still serve a traditional meal of “sumalak”, which tastes like molasses-flavored cream of wheat and is made from flour and sprouted wheat grains. Sumalak is cooked slowly on wood fire, sometimes with addition of spices. Sprouted grain is the symbol of life, heat, abundance and health.

People cook sumalak, the symbolic Norouz dish. It is its mass character when each participant of this event becomes a part of the general elation that has prevented Norouz from falling into oblivion. Sumalak-making is a long process: it is cooked for 24 hours until it becomes a viscous mass. Special large pots are used, with round small stones covering the bottom of the pot to protect the sweet mass from getting burnt. Cooking of sumalak as an ancient ritual which has its own peculiarities; traditionally only women used to make it. It is notable that sumalak-making process is accompanied by women’s singing of special short verses, dancing, joking, telling either true or cock-and-bull stories. The ready-to-serve sumalak becomes a good treat for relatives, guests and neighbors. Local people believe that it is a good omen if you find a small stone in your sumalak dish: it means you will be lucky and healthy till the next Norouz.

Meanwhile, the parks and squares are surrounded by blossomed trees the general merry-making starts. The traditional personages, Bahor-Hanum (Spring), Dehkan-Bobo (Old farmer), Momo-Er (the Earth), accompanied by musicians, drive along the streets in the cars decorated with the flowers, and invite everybody to the central square, where the main celebration takes place.

Following old traditions, Norouz is the day when people forgive each other’s resentment and make it up with each other. Many people call on those who are poor, lonely or disabled, take care of them, and give them small gifts. In fact, the celebration of Norouz lasts the whole month.

The activities of the first 13 days of the New Year are considered harbingers of the year to come. For this reason, it is traditional to end quarrels, forgive debts and overlook enmity and insults. It is a time for reconciliation, when forgiveness and cheerfulness are the dominant sentiments. As with the celebration of the Chinese New Year, there are traditions associated with the first visitor to the house during Norouz. To ensure good luck for the coming year, this person should have a “happy foot”; he or she should be kind, gentle, witty, pious and have a good reputation.

Central Asia has its own Norouz traditions. From ancient times, the holiday was celebrated in agricultural oases with festivals, bazaars, horseracing, and dog and cock fights.

There is an interesting precept in “Norouzname”, a well-known poetic work by a prominent Iranian philosopher and poet Omar Khayam also famous in Uzbekistan: “He who celebrates and has fun on the day of Norouz will spend his life cheerfully until the next Norouz celebration.”

It was only after Uzbekistan became an independent state that Norouz gained huge popularity. It is significant that one of first acts of the new state authorities imparted a status of nationwide state holiday to Norouz.

In independent Uzbekistan, this ancient festival has gained a new sense. People of all nationalities, who populate Republic of Uzbekistan and for whom this land has become native celebrate Norouz with genuine enthusiasm, while the guests of their country participate in the festival with utmost interest.

