

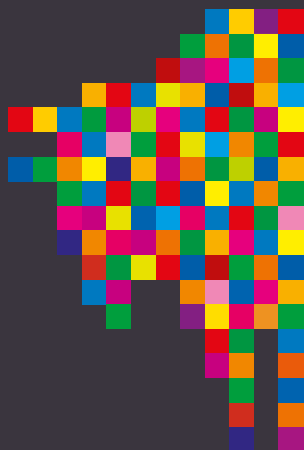
Introduction

Following the trails of various cultures and religions, meetings with interesting people, listening to their stories and their specific dialect, familiarising yourself with local folklore and tasting savoury regional dishes – this is how your leisure activities in the Podlaskie cultural melting pot may look like.

The region's tourist maps show thematic trails which offer opportunities to get in touch with cultures and religions that have been present here for centuries. They include the Tatar Trail, presenting architecture, customs and culinary traditions of the local Tatar community. The Ecumenical Trail and the Trail of Religions of the Podlaskie Region lead next to the neighbouring Catholic and Orthodox churches, synagogues and other sacred buildings.

Centuries-long influences of various religions have also left their marks on regional cuisine. Lithuanian *kartacze* and *blini* rule in the northern part of the region, Belarusian potato cake and potato sausage are popular in the environs of Białystok, whilst the south is known for its *zaguby* – local dumplings. Other regional delicacies include Balkan *buza*, and *białys*, a bread roll of the type of the Jewish bagel.

Numerous indoor and open-air museums spare no effort to present and promote the region's cultural diversity. The theatres and the Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic – the European Centre for Culture and Art in Białystok significantly contribute to the region's cultural life. You can also experience Podlaskie Region's multiculturalism at numerous festivals and concerts, in particular in the summer season. Such events as the Podlaskie Octave of Cultures and Basovishcha have become widely popular and attract many spectators, not only from Poland. Various kinds of fairs offer the opportunities for buying local craft products, traditional cheese, cured meat and bread. The events are accompanied by folk music and dance.



On the multicultural trail

Looking at the Podlaskie Region, you can easily see the traces of many cultures visible in its architecture, dialect and even local cuisine. The region is often called a multicultural melting pot owing to the influences of various nationalities.



On the Multicultural Trail – Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas in Michalów,
photo P. Tadejko | Magia Podlasia

The Tatar community has lived in the Podlaskie Region for centuries. The population concentrates around two main centres: Kruszyniany and Bohoniki, which attract tourists by the charms of simple, wooden mosques and the taste of local Tatar cuisine. It is worth taking the **Tatar Trail** to discover this specific part of the region. On the way there are not only mosques but also Muslim cemeteries (*mizars*) and other sites connected with the history and culture of Polish Tatars. The trail also leads through small towns where the traces of the once multicultural community have survived, e.g. Supraśl, Sokółka and Krynki.

The Jewish community has greatly contributed to the region's development. Shortly before the Second World War Jews accounted for a half of the local population in many larger and smaller towns. Industry and commerce boomed in Białystok, Tykocin and Krynki owing to the Jewish community. Tragically, the war brought the community in Podlaskie to an end. Today the **Trail of Jewish Heritage** leads along the traces of Białystok Jews. There are 36 sites on the way, including three former prayer houses: the Sand Synagogue at 3 Piękna Street, the Cytron family prayer house at 24 Waryńskiego Street and Samuel Mohilewer's Synagogue at 3 Branickiego Street. Besides Białystok, other relics of the former Jewish community may be found in Tykocin, Krynki, Milejczyce and other localities, where synagogues and kirkuts (Jewish cemeteries) are still in existence. Sejny was also a major centre of the pre-war Jewish minority. The White Synagogue and the Talmudic house have survived in the town, the latter now housing the **Borderland of Arts, Cultures and Nations Centre**.

The Sejny Region has been for centuries under diverse **cultural influences**. Originally the region was inhabited by the Yotvingians, later Masovians, Lithuanians, Jews and Old Believers. Every community had its own contribution to the region's cultural heritage. The situation in the Lithuanian/Belarusian borderland influences regional cuisine, traditions and rites, and even the language. Information boards in Lithuanian

can be found in Puńsk and Sejny. Local residents have a good command of Lithuanian. In view of a high percentage of the Lithuanian minority, the region is often called "Little Lithuania".

The Tree and the Sacred Podlaskie Cultural Trail (Podlaski Szlak Kulturowy "Drzewo i Sakrum") is a journey among sacred and secular wooden architecture, offering the opportunity to become acquainted with the dialect of local residents characterized by a lot of borrowings from Belarusian. The trail leads through villages of the Hajnówski, Bielski and Białostocki powiats, with their wooden architecture of local cottages, farm buildings, churches, windmills and crosses. Wooden buildings dating to the end of the 16th century, wooden cottages lavishly adorned with carved ornaments and the *koźlak*-type windmills have survived on The Tree and the Sacred Trail. One of the best preserved windmills may be seen in the village of Dubicze Cerkiewne; finely adorned wooden houses add variety to the landscape of Puchty and Trześcianka villages. Colourful wooden shatters, ornamented corners and gables, as well as benches in front of the houses, attract the visitor's attention. Characteristic house decorations which can be admired in the Podlaskie countryside are due to the merging of many cultural influences, in particular Russian. When following The Tree and the Sacred Trail you can meet folk craftsmen, sculptors and other artists who contribute to a unique atmosphere and cultural space of this part of the region.

Białystok - the capital of the Podlaskie Region - reflects its multiculturalism. The **Trail of Esperanto and Many Cultures** crosses the city. It leads to the sites connected with Ludwik Zamenhof, the Białystok-born inventor of Esperanto. Inspired by multiculturalism of his hometown, which was expressed in the mix of languages and dialects that could be heard in the town, Zamenhof came up with an idea to create a universal artificial language. His idea was continued by Jakub Szapiro. City information boards with maps make it easier to follow the Trail of Esperanto and Many Cultures.



Among many religious rites and denominations

The neighbouring Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches mark the landscape of Podlaskie towns and villages. The region's stormy history has been also reflected in the presence of Jewish synagogues, Muslim mosques and Old Believers' churches (*molennas*).

The **Trail of Podlaskie Religions** illustrates the region's religious diversity. The localities on the trail are at a distance from one another, so it is easier to follow the route by car. The trail leads through the almost entire Podlaskie Region, from Drohiczyn and Grabarka in the south, to Wigry and Wodзилki to the north. Roman Catholic sanctuaries of the Virgin Mary, collegiate churches and convents, Orthodox churches and monasteries, Jewish synagogues, Muslim mosques and Old Believers' churches (*molennas*) can be seen on the trail. Historic Jewish and Muslim cemeteries can also be found in many localities.

Catholic places of worship to be visited on the trail include first of all the monastery complex in Drohiczyn, the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Sorrow in Święta Woda with a miraculous spring and the hill of crosses, the shrines in Różanystok and Studzieniczna, the Collegiate of the Birth of the Holy Virgin Mary in Krypno, St Anthony's Collegiate in Sokółka – the site of the Eucharistic miracle in 2008, and the Camaldolese Monastery in Wigry. Orthodox churches in Bielsk Podlaski (five), Białystok (the Sobor of St. Nicholas the Miracle-Worker) and Puchły (the Church of the Protection of the Mother of God), as well as the monasteries in Supraśl and Grabarka are also on the trail. The region's cultural diversity is also reflected in the synagogues surviving in many towns, such as Tykocin, Krynki and Sejny. One can also see Old Believers' (Bezpovovtsy's) buildings on the trail in the Sejny Region. Their historic churches (*molennas*) can be seen in Suwałki and Wodзилki. Kruszyniany and Bohoniki are known for their mosques.

The **Trail of Religions of the Podlaskie Region** represents the region's religious diversity. On the trail you can see Roman Catholic shrines in Święta Woda, Różanystok and Studzieniczna, the collegiate church in Sokółka – the site of the Eucharistic miracle, Orthodox churches in Bielsk Podlaski and Puchły, monasteries in w Supraśl and Grabarka, synagogues in Tykocin and Krynki, mosques in Kruszyniany and Bohoniki as well as *molennas* of Old Believers in Suwałki and Wodзилki.

The **Ecumenical Trail** also shows a multitude of religious denominations in the Podlaskie Region. The picturesque route is set in the attractive natural environment, abounds with legends and stories, and is 5 km long. It runs in the hills, goes around Ozierany

reservoir, only a few kilometres from Kruszyniany. On the way you can see various sculptures: Dziewanna, Lasowid, devil Kuwas hidden in the stone, and other allegorical figures. At the crossroads, sheltered by beech trees, stands the wooden roadside shrine of St Eustace (Placidus), the first patron saint of forests. The Hill of Crosses is the most important site on the trail. The Catholic cross and the Orthodox cross stand side by side, along with a Muslim stone with the crescent moon.

Bielsk Podlaski, known as the Town of Wooden Orthodox Churches, is one of the many points on the **Trail of Orthodox Saints**. In Bielsk you can see three wooden and two brick Orthodox churches. The trail leads through the charming villages around Hajnówka and Bielsk, with Orthodox churches as characteristic landmarks in the landscape. The colours used in the churches have a special symbolic meaning – blue is the colour of the Virgin Mary and Michael the Archangel, green is the colour of the Holy Ghost, whilst brown is the colour of the martyrs. The number of domes is also symbolic: a single dome symbolizes one God, three – the Holy Trinity, and five – Christ and the four evangelists. Many roadside shrines and votive crosses can also be seen next to the Orthodox churches on the trail. Whilst on the trail, stop by the *skit* in Odrynki – Poland's only Orthodox hermitage.

The Papal Trail should also be mentioned among the trails presenting the region's rich religious legacy. The trail has been marked in the northern part of the region to commemorate John Paul II's pilgrimage in 1999 and leads through the Augustów region, in attractive natural landscapes. You may take a cruise following the Pope's footsteps by ship of the Augustów Fleet (Zegluga Augustowska). On the way you will have the opportunity to hear John Paul II's favourite song – *Barka*, to see the cabin with mementoes related to the visit of the distinguished guest, and to stop at St Mary's sanctuary in Studzieniczna. The Papal Trail leads through Przewięź and Swoboda sluices to the sluice in Gorczyca. You can also go by kayak, gondola or catamaran. There is also an inland travel option – by bike or horseback. It is worth stopping by the Sanctuary of the Mother of God in Studzieniczna, the church in Mikaszówka and the former Camaldolese Monastery complex in Wigry where the Pope stayed during his pilgrimage.

A mosaic of nationalities

The Podlaskie Region is a mosaic of nationalities and cultures that have influenced the region's development throughout its history. Belarusian, Lithuanian, Tatar and Jewish influences merged in the everyday life of local residents. Today their impacts are reflected in the wealth of local architecture, music, customs, dialect and cuisine. Let's try *buza*, *pierekaczewnik* or *kartacze* and be carried away by traditional, melodious music of Podlaskie.



© Potato cake, Lithuanian-style, photo MOPR archive

The Podlaskie Region shows a cultural diversity at various levels. It can best be seen during its annual cultural events, involving music and dance of various nations. The Tatar Sabantuy Festival, the Lithuanian Saskrydis Review of Folklore Ensembles and the Basovishcha Young Belarusian Music Festival are periodical events which attract crowds of audience. Those festivals, just as Podlasie Octave of Cultures (Podlaska Oktawa Kultur) perfectly show the region's multiculturalism and openness. Catering stands serving local specialties accompany nearly all summer cultural event. You can take the opportunity to taste a Balkan *buza* or Belarusian *cheburek*.

The dishes typical of Podlaskie cuisine appeared on the menu of the local residents under the influence of various cultures and nations which lived in the region. Many of today's traditional dishes in Podlaskie have been passed from generation to generation by Belarusian, Lithuanian, Tatar and Jewish housewives.

Bialys – bread rolls known in Yiddish *Bialystoker Kuchen*, inspired by Jewish bagels, were popular in Białystok before the war. Today they are served in a restaurant with regional cuisine in the centre of Białystok. If you want to experience the taste of Tatar cuisine, you should try such dishes as *jepoczmaki*, *kibiny*, *perekaczewnik*, *shavla* (veal goulash), sweet *czak-czak* or *listkowiec*. As Podlasie closely neighbours Belarus and as a result of historical upheavals, Belarusian potato *babka* and *kiszka* are now on the menu of local cuisine and are now served in almost every home in the region. The popularity of those dishes has led to the organization of the annual **World Potato Babka and Kiszka Baking Championship in Supraśl**. The contest is held on a Sunday at the end of May or the beginning of June. It is accompanied by the **Forest Fruit Liqueur Tournament**. The Jury selects the most tasteful liqueur in two categories: dry and sweet. Individuals, agritourist associations, groups of local product manufacturers and representatives of local municipalities participate in the contest. Many people are keen to taste a potato cake or a fruit liqueur, so they draw to Supraśl on that occasion.

The northern part of the region shows strong Lithuanian influences, which may be seen in such local dishes as *kartacze*, *chłodnik* (cold soup) and Lithuanian blinis.

The northern part of the region, in particular the environs of Sejny and Puńsk, is inhabited by a numerous Lithuanian community, strongly enhancing its cultural

identity as regards the language, rites, traditions and tastes. The annual **Bread, Milk and Honey Festival** offers an excellent opportunity to be acquainted with all they can offer. The event is held in the middle of August in the Šilainė centre on Lake Serwy in the municipality of Puńsk. During the event you can see the traditional baking of leavened bread, make your own cottage cheese and eat it with honey from a local apiary. A good Lithuanian bread is still fresh up to two weeks. The secret of its taste lays in the proper leavening as well as its production method. The loaves of bread are baked in a birchwood-fired oven; the pastry is placed on dried cabbage or sweet flag leaves. The performances of Lithuanian musical ensembles and a folk fair with folk craftworks on sale and regional cuisine accompany the event.

The most popular Lithuanian delicacies you should taste are *kartacze*, *chłodnik* (cold soup) and Lithuanian *blini*. *Kindziuk*, i.e. dried cured meet from chopped pieces, is a special product of Lithuanian cuisine. The pieces of quality pork meat (most often sirloin and neck) are placed in a pork stomach or bladder and dried for a long time. This production method guarantees a long use-by date. The product has a unique taste and aroma. Traditional methods of preparing *kindziuk* have been passed from generation to generation. *Soczewiaki* is another noteworthy dish from the Polish-Lithuanian borderland. The dish looks like dumplings made from boiled potatoes with lentil stuffing. The ready dish is sprinkled with onion and pork scrapings. *Soczewiaki* from Sejny are on the list of traditional products of the Podlaskie Region.

Other typical specialties of Sejny regional cuisine include *czenaki*, Lithuanian *kolduny* and sweet *mrowisko*. *Czenaki* is a dish prepared from pork ham, carrot, potatoes, fresh cabbage, onion, leek, garlic and spices, and served in small clay pots with lids. *Kolduny* are raviolis, nicely surprising with their size and succulent filling. They are stuffed with meat with some suet, seasoned with marjoram, garlic and other spices. They taste delicious when served with broth or borsch. Preparation of *kolduny* is a rather painstaking work, particularly because of their small size – each ravioli should be small enough for one bite. As to the sweets, the leading dish in northern part of the region is *mrowisko* (anthill) – a cake made from very fine flakes of dough, topped with honey, sprinkled with poppy seed and resins. *Mrowisko* looks like a heap, whilst poppy seed and resin topping looks like running ants.

Opera, indoor and open-air museums, theatres and art galleries

Music aficionados will find a lot of interesting musical productions on the rich and diversified repertoire of the Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic – the European Centre for Art. Those who are fascinated with the region will be enchanted by the Wierszalin Theatre productions abounding with borderland culture. If you look for museum exhibits you will not be disappointed by a visit to the Podlaskie Museum and many local open-air museums. If you want to see the entire region in the 1:25 scale, you will drop in at the Park of Miniatures in Hajnówka. The region's diversified cultural offer is as wide as is its multicultural heritage.



The Puppet Theatre, Dramatyczny Theatre and Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic (OiFP) in Białystok are the main cultural institutions in the capital of the Podlaskie Region. Theatre stages also attract the audience with their diversified repertoire. The Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic – the European Centre for Art in Białystok invites you to concerts, exhibitions, shows and musical performances. The OiFP building is a beautiful, modern venue. In summer it makes its viewing roof terrace available to visitors. The **Wierszalin Theatre based in Supraśl** offers unique performances based on the cultural heritage of the borderland region.

The Niezabudka Film, Sound and Photography Studio in Michałów is a unique museum-gallery. Its collection consists of 30 thousand exhibits, including photographs, postcards, documents, newspapers, leaflets, maps and post stamps. The collection presents local history before and during the Second World War, including mementoes showing the region's multicultural features. The studio also runs workshops and organises many art and education activities.

The Podlaskie Museum has seven branches scattered around various towns throughout the region. Each museum branch is housed in a historic building. The Museum consists of:

- The Town Hall in Białystok,
- The Museum of Palace Interiors in Choroszcz (a small palace – the summer residence of the Branicki family),
- The Museum in Tykocin (an old synagogue),
- The Alfons Karny Museum of Sculpture in Białystok, at 17 Świętojańska Street (a historic villa which houses an exhibition of Alfons Karny's works and the exhibition of contemporary art: painting, sculpture, graphic art and photography),
- The Historical Museum in Białystok, at 37 Warszawska Street (the collection displays the history of the city and the region),
- The Town Hall in Bielsk Podlaski (a collection on the Bielsk region's history and ethnographic exhibits on display),
- The Museum of Icons in Supraśl.

Until recently, the Białostockie Museum of Village in the open-air museum at Jurówce was also part of the Podlaskie Museum. Today it is known as the **Podlaskie Museum of Folk Culture**. It operates as a separate institution, organising a lot of regional festivals, history lessons and crafts workshops. It is a perfect place for a Sunday walk among historic architectural landmarks. Interesting exhibitions are on display in the interiors

of cottages, familiarising the visitors with the everyday life of villagers in the olden times.

The **Adam Chętnik Open-air Museum of Kurpie in Nowogród** presents the rich tradition of Kurpie. The ethnographic park situated on the Narew River embankment covers an area of 3.5 h, with numerous residential buildings, farm buildings, mills, windmills, roadside shrines, wells and a hayloft. A regional inn in the open-air museum area serves traditional Podlaskie dishes. Wzgórze Ziemowita, the hills with ruins of a mediaeval castle are also within the limits of the museum area. A beautiful panorama of the Kurpie Green Forest extends from the hilltop.

In the north of the region, the **District Museum in Suwałki** is worth visiting. Among permanent exhibitions, "The earliest history of the Suwałki Region and Eastern Masuria from the end of the Ice Age to the fall of Yotvingia" is particularly noteworthy. Prehistory and early history of territories of north-eastern Poland are displayed using sound and multimedia effects. The District Museum has two other branches:

- The Maria Konopnicka Museum at 31 Kościuszki Street in Suwałki (the exhibition on the most important biographical facts concerning the writer Maria Konopnicka),
- Centre of Modern Art – Andrzej Strumiłło Gallery.

Cultural heritage of the Puńsk and Sejny area is connected with its Lithuanian community. A rich collection of objects of everyday use from the region, including household appliances, folk art and farming tools used in the 20th century, are on display in the **Józef Vaina Ethnographic Museum in Puńsk**. While there, visit a **traditional Lithuanian Farm** dating from the turn of the 20th century. The interiors of the residential cottage and farm buildings are fully furnished and available to visitors. At the end of July and August the **Festival of Barn Theatres** is held. Performances given during the event have traditions dating back to the 19th century and deal with the everyday life.

Lavish, colourful and very specific architecture of the Podlaskie Region can be seen in the **Park of Miniatures of Podlaskie Landmarks in Hajnówka**. Exhibits presenting historic architecture from various parts of the region have been gathered in a small area in the 1:25 scale. These include the tsar's palace in Białowieża, no longer extant; the mosque from Kruszyniany; the Branicki palace from Białystok; the church and the railway station from Białowieża; the summer palace of the Branicki family in Choroszcz, and many other objects.

Festivals, events, fairs and culture days

The openness of Podlaskie to other cultures is best seen at regional festivities. Music, dance and delicacies of many nationalities are the highlights at most of such events. The meetings are accompanied by exhibitions, workshops, sale of folk craftworks and traditional regional products. Common singing and all-embracing joy bring together all participants in festivals and fairs throughout the Podlaskie Region.



Tatar dancers in traditional attire,
photo D. Lukaszik

The Podlaskie Region offers a variety of tastes and music of many cultures. The best way to experience them is participation in numerous local cultural events. During the Podlaskie Octave of Cultures, Białystok and other towns in the region turn into a colourful stage resounding with music of various nations, not only those who live in the Podlaskie Region, but also from the most distant corners of the world. People dance, learn to play folk instruments and enjoy the opportunity to admire colourful and richly adorned traditional attire.

The Festival of Many Cultures and Nations From the country backyard in Czeremcha is an annual event that has been organised for over 20 years. The fans of folklore come from all over Europe to acquaint themselves with foreign cultures during concerts, performances, photography exhibitions, film screenings and traditional rite shows.

The National Days of Kurpie Culture organised in Nowogród belongs to the greatest folk events in the Podlaskie Region. Participants can familiarise themselves with Kurpie music-making, song and dance traditions and the local dialect. The concerts are accompanied by story-tellers, the shows of disappearing professions (blacksmith's, weaver's) and a craft and regional cuisine fair. One of the most interesting points of the programme is a colourful pageant of folk artists and creators, dressed in traditional festive folk attire. The Days of Kurpie Culture are held in the scenic setting of the Adam Chętnik Open-air Museum of Kurpie.

The **Tatar Culture Festival** perfectly represents the specificity of the region. The festival is held in the open-air museum in Jurówce near Białystok. Dance and song, Tatar cuisine workshops, Arab calligraphy shows and impressive shooting shows by horseback archers attract a lot of spectators. During the event you can also visit the interior of a Tatar yurt, take part in the workshops in handling sabre and *rohatoryna* (a type of spear), and even shoot with a bow and arrow. On top of that, you can taste exquisite Tatar and local cuisine specialties.

Basovishcha in Gródek as also a much awaited annual festival. Ensembles from across the eastern border gather here in July to freely present contemporary independent Belarusian music. A fantastic atmosphere of friendship and joy rules in the Boryk woods, only 15 km from the border. Open-air concerts, tents, rock sound and various forms of artistic creation by young artists offer a space for a lot of fun.

Belarusians belong to the most numerous national minorities in the region. Every year in June the Belarusian Socio-Cultural Society organises the **Belarusian Culture Festival** in Białystok. The audience has the opportunity to see performances by Belarusian

music and dance ensembles, both regional and from abroad, presenting traditional folklore and its contemporary adaptations. The event is accompanied by book, music recording and folk craft fairs.

Fans of Ukrainian culture also celebrate their feast in the Podlaskie Region. The **Podlaskie Autumn Ukrainian Culture Festival** is held every year in October. Folk music and dance, theatrical performances, exhibitions and fairs are presented during the event. Folk ensembles from Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, Romania, Slovakia and other countries participate in the event. Festival events are held in various localities throughout the region: in Bielsk Podlaski, Hajnówka, Białystok, Narew and Siemiatycze.

For many years **Zachor – Colour and Sound Jewish Culture Festival** has also been held in Białystok. The mission of the June event with world-renowned artists, scientists, guests from abroad and musical ensembles is to restore the memory of Jewish traditions in the region. During the festival you can take part in workshops on Jewish culture, e.g. Jewish dance or traditional paper cut-outs, and to taste kosher cuisine dishes.

The Podlaskie Region displays its specificity also during various **fairs** and regional events, some of which having centuries old tradition. At Kaziuki, Easter or St John's Fairs the market square in Białystok fills with sellers, tourists and crowds of local residents. You will find here every kind of product that cannot be found in any shopping centre: clay vessels, wicker baskets, embroidered tablecloths, wooden folk toys and more. The aroma of traditional cured meat, bread and other regional delicacies tempt you for buying, to the music of folk bands and an organ-grinder.

The **Biebrza Fair: A hundred ideas for Biebrza** also presents folk arts and crafts. If you come to the Biebrza National Park on the May weekend, you will have plenty to pick and choose from the offer of colourful stands under the weight of wooden birds, clay vases and jugs, paintings on glass, double-weave cloth, traditional cheese, cured meat and bread. The region's tourist offer is also presented at the fair. Many events of similar type are also held in other localities, e.g. in the open-air museums in Jurówce and Choroszcz.

The **Harvest Festival (Dożynki)** always ends the season of work in the field. Such festivals are organised by many municipalities throughout the region, but the Regional Harvest Festival is the grandest event. It is a colourful thanksgiving feast, including the presentation of the year's crops. Harvest wreaths are plaited, and everybody participates in the pageant and shares bread with each other. The event is accompanied by folk ensemble performances and a fair of regional products and craftworks.

CERTIFIED TOURIST

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