

# Strange Customs



Match the depicted customs with the corresponding descriptions and discuss with your partner a) what you think about these customs, b) what other “strange” customs you’ve already heard of, c) which of your national customs you believe other nations to find “strange” rather likely, and d) which factors you believe to be shaping our understandings of the notion “strange”/of “strangeness”.



The Wolof people of Mauritania and surrounding countries believe that human **saliva** can **retain** words, so they spit on newborns to add blessings that stick. When a baby is born, women spit on its face, men spit in its ear, and then, for good measure, they rub saliva all over its head.

In the Czech Republic, men go from house to house on Easter Monday, lightly whipping the women with braided willow branches called ‘pomlázka’ (‘korbáč’ in Slovak) to, apparently, **imbue** them **with fertility**.

On 2 February, the people of Punxsatawney, Pennsylvania gather to observe a groundhog called Phil **emerge** from his **burrow**. If Phil sees his shadow, there will be six more weeks of winter. If not, you can expect an early spring. Groundhog Day dates back to 1886, and apparently there has only been one Punxsatawney Phil. He owes his great age to a closely **guarded** punch recipe.

At Mexican birthday parties, once the cake has been brought out and everyone has sung ‘happy birthday’, you’re encouraged to take the first bite of your cake. At which someone will **inevitably** push your face into the icing, and you’re not allowed to get angry, because it’s tradition.

Boot-throwing has been around so long in Finland that it’s taken very seriously and considered a championship sport. However, competitors have been known to drink during the event to **enhance** their game.

If, by the time you turn 25, you’re unmarried in Denmark, you can expect your friends to **ambush** you with a cinnamon shower all day. That’s bad enough, but if you’re still single at 30, they cover you in pepper.

*Texts taken from the following websites in abridged or changed form:*

<http://www.buzzfeed.com/robynwilder/bizarre-national-customs-from-around-the-world#.ic94myp9B5>

<http://listverse.com/2014/05/03/10-weirdest-birth-customs-from-around-the-world/>