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Elementary German 1

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Die Oktoberfestgeschichte

For many Americans, the word Oktoberfest brings to mind images of Lederhosen, revelry, German accents, and all the beer you can stomach (and then some). However, how accurate is that image? Like many world renowned holidays, Oktoberfest must have some great history to accompany it. For most Americans, that history is ignored and pushed to the side in favor of a beer and the false cadences of adopted Germanic speech. So for all those who are too lazy, or perhaps too drunk, to look into Oktoberfest themselves, I will do it for you. Sit back, crack open a cold one, and read on as we explore how this holiday began, just what it means today, how to celebrate it properly, and why it has become such a big hit around the world.

I suppose that we should start our exploration of this unique holiday at the beginning, with the celebration that started it all. Surprisingly enough, this beer swilling holiday began with a wedding. On October 12, 1810 Crown Prince Ludwig, who would one day become King, married Princess Therese von Sachsen-Hildburghausen. Their union was a huge hit in Germany, Bavaria especially. In fact, it was such a momentous occasion that a full five days after the wedding a great feast was held at the foot of the Sendlinger Tor.(Origin)

The Sendlinger Tor is one of three gateways into the historic parts of Munich. The gates were built by Ludwig the Bavarian during what German history refers to as, The Great Expansion. While today it has been preserved mainly as a marker between the older parts of the city and the newer, it was once the second wall in the cities fortifications(Sendlinger). So anyway, five days after the wedding, on October 17,1810, at the base of the portal, a wedding reception of sorts was held. At this, its first incarnation, the party consisted mainly of a feast, some speeches, and a horse race. Nevertheless, it quickly began to grow, and within a decade of its inception both agricultural fairs and beer halls could be counted among the festival's attractions (Origin).

How you may ask, did a wedding celebration turn into such a gloriously massive event? The answer of course, is gradually. The amplification of the conviviality began first with the addition of an agricultural proponent at the second annual celebration. What was meant to be a one time event, actually seemed to expand every year. In 1816, carnival booths made their first appearance. This new development was quickly followed by the arrival of food vendors in 1818, and with them the influx of beer which quickly became a staple of the occasion. (Flowers)

The inclusion of new and enticing attractions didn't cease any time soon either. By the early 1900's the festival was proud home to a parade, bratwurst, electric lighting, and an extravagant showing off of each brewery's lavishly decorated horses(Timeline). And while by the year 1920, eight years worth of celebrations had been cancelled due to cholera, invasion, the Napoleonic war, more cholera, and World War II, none of it was enough to destroy the holiday for more than a few years at a time. As a matter of fact, Oktoberfest has grown to become the largest annual festival in the world. Astounding

when one considers that a carousel and sack races were once upon a time the most compelling reason to attend the festivities(Flowers).

While Oktoberfest was originally observed in mid October for just a few days, it has taken on a new life unrelated to its origin. Oktoberfest is now traditionally celebrated from the third week in September to the first Sunday in October. However, this isn't the only tradition that has changed since its inception. The ceremonies grew in size and commitment, as did the tapestry of traditions and observances common to those celebrating it(Oktoberfest).

From its humble start as a wedding reception the holiday has grown into what Ben Knight, from www.thelocal.de, calls an "Irish pub" attitude. He uses this term to describe an atmosphere in which locals adopt an attitude of "Cough up the cash, grab a stein of beer, and join into this awesome party." And while the holiday has changed drastically, the people of Munich, Germany haven't forgotten their past. In fact, there are a bevy of traditions observed to remind true Oktoberfest enthusiasts of its humble origins.

Most recognizable among these diverse customs, is of course the clothing. Should you be lucky enough to attend an Oktoberfest celebration in Munich, you will be amazed at the commitment you find. Locals especially take the idea of appropriating traditional garb very seriously. In fact, it is likely you will find far more people dressed in traditional clothing than not. (How to dress)

Though it's true that approximately eighty-five percent of attendees at the Munich Oktoberfest are locals, anyone visiting can easily blend in and join the festivities by adorning themselves in traditional Bavarian fashion. These traditional accoutrements are a staple of the festivities and range from the original aesthetic to

more modern variants. (How to dress) However, in each case they are instantly recognizable.

The traditional Oktoberfest attire for men consists of a few basic elements. The first of which is a button down shirt, usually either plain white or checkered. This is then followed by a pair of Lederhosen shorts, traditionally made from leather, with a pair of suspenders. To round out the outfit, an alpine hat is a must, and you shouldn't forget a pair of sturdy Bavarian shoes. However for those looking to really go all out, there are some additional touches of flair one can add. (How to dress)

Let's start with the hat. Traditionally, a wool or felt Alpine hat, or Tirolerhüte, is the way to go. These hats are usually accented by a pheasant or ostrich feather, but if you want to get really fancy then you can trade them out for a tuft of goat or boar hair. Remember the bigger the accent on your hat the wealthier you look, as it is a sign of great esteem. It has also become custom to add pewter pins to your hat which denote what cities you've traveled to, or what activities you are interested in. Perhaps the best way to boost your outfits personality if you are a man is by adding a vest or jacket. The traditional vest is known as a Prien and is sometimes worn in replacement of suspenders.

Women have their own classic wardrobe for the event as well. The most classic of which is the Bavarian Dirndl dress. The Dirndl is a tight fitting dress usually worn with an apron tied around it. These are classically worn with a white blouse, cut to show an ample, yet hopefully tasteful, amount of cleavage. The aprons worn are always tied with a bow in the front, but different positions of the bow can bespeak different things. For instance, a bow tied on your left side means you're single, while tying it on the right

means you are taken. Traditionally, if one ties the bow directly in the center, it is a way of announcing that you are a virgin.

Bows aside, there are still a few other ways in which women can customize their Oktoberfest outfits. Dress length, which originally ends just below the knee, can be altered to suit your personal tastes. It seems that it is very common for American women to go with the shorter skirt version that one often sees worn around Halloween here in the states. While this style is gaining popularity, locals still prefer the slightly longer, more traditional choice. Also becoming more common among female festival attendees is lederhosen. While traditionally only worn by men, many women, especially international visitors, have been adorning a high cut version of the traditional shorts. (How to dress)

The last piece of clothing, or accessory, one is likely to find female partiers wearing is a Wiesn Glupperl. This traditional piece of Oktoberfest flair takes the form of a wooden clothespin. The pin is often decorated with Oktoberfest themed glamour and the wearer's first name scorched into the wood. While it is more likely to see women wearing them, it is considered tradition for both men and women to wear a Wiesn Glupperl as a way to break the ice when talking to strangers. It isn't uncommon to find stands selling them with a variety of names and funny phrases. (How to dress) Now that you know what to wear if you would like to blend in, it's time you learned what else to expect at a traditional Oktoberfest celebration.

Every Oktoberfest starts the same way, with the tapping of the first keg. At noon the Mayor of Munich stands before the gathered masses for this time honored tradition. This established practice is actually rather new compared to many others, having only began in 1950. However, since its inception it has been the event to start the festivities

every year. (dates and general) Once the keg has been tapped, the mayor shouts “O’zapft is!”, which means, “it’s tapped”, and everyone present is finally free to begin quenching their thirst.(O’zapft)

Said thirst is satiated by an ocean of beer. And when it comes to Oktoberfest, only one type of beer can call itself king, Märzen. A rich red beer, Märzen is, as far as Germany is concerned, the one true beer of Oktoberfest. Märzen is named after the month in which it was brewed, March. You see, before the invention of refrigeration, it was near impossible to brew beer in the summer as the warm temperatures would lead to bacterial infection in the brew. Because of this, beer production traditionally ended with the advent of spring, and picked up with the coming of fall. Märzen beer, which is produced as the last batch of the winter, became the perfect beer for the festivities.

(Märzen)

The beer is notable for its dark, almost copper like color and it’s hoppy scent. It has a rich, toasty, and full bodied flavor with a medium to high alcohol content, usually around five to six percent. However, while Märzen is considered the one true Oktoberfest libation, it has in recent years been replaced by a lighter, less intense counterpart known as Oktoberfestbier. This newer version has proven to be more suitable to a broader range of international tastes. The standards for this new beer still have to meet those of the original though.

You see, in order to be considered a true beer of the celebration, every brewski that makes an appearance at the festival **must** be manufactured in Munich. In fact, if you are lucky enough to attend a true Oktoberfest celebration, you will find that every beer tent and bar is stocked only with beers brewed in the holiday’s home town.

Amazingly enough there are only a total of six breweries even authorized to supply this hoppy treat to beer tents.

Augustiner is officially Munich's oldest brewery, having been founded in 1328, almost five hundred years before the wedding that started it all. This iconic producer of Märzen actually started out in the basement of a monastery before eventually moving to Landberger Straße (German for street), where it still remains today. (Munich Breweries) It's steadfast production and consistent business over almost seven hundred years show just how proud of their beer Munich really is. (Oktoberfest Munich)

However, this hasn't stopped brewers from around the world from trying their hand at their own versions this particular ambrosia. Hundreds of companies have created their own tributes to this iconic recipe. In America alone there are over a dozen breweries producing their own varieties, each competing to best the classic Oktoberfest paradigm. Among the numerous contestants, Samuel Adams currently holds the title of the best selling Oktoberfest brew in the US. Thanks to companies like Sam Adams, Goose Island, and Dogfish Head, those of us who live outside of Germany can enjoy a bit of the holiday in the comfort of our own countries.(Märzen)

Be that as it may, specialty beers aren't the only way Americans can experience some of the magic of Oktoberfest. Across the country Oktoberfest celebrations have become more and more common. Among these, there are a few standouts here in the US that steal the show every year. The king of which is held in Cincinnati, Ohio. First held in 1976, the party now draws in over half a million people yearly. Every year this spectacular party has the distinct honor of challenging two of its own world records. The records for the world's largest kazoo band, and the world's largest chicken dance, are both held by this awesome party. Unfortunately, while a true Oktoberfest lasts for

more than two weeks, Cincinnati's version condenses all of the fun into just two short days.

If you don't think you can make it to Cincinnati, then perhaps you could check out one of the other top five American Oktoberfests. San Francisco, California, Crosse, Wisconsin, Las Vegas, Nevada, and Angel, Oregon all host incredible celebrations in honor of the popular beer themed holiday. Each of these spectacular parties has been featured by the travel channel, and are sure to be worth the trip. (Briley)

The United States of America isn't the only country that has adopted Oktoberfest as it's own though. Obviously Munich is the only place to celebrate a true Oktoberfest, but one can find celebrations all over the world. In fact, the second largest Oktoberfest celebration in the world is held in Blumenau, Brazil. Over seven hundred thousand revellers join in this ceremony every year. But, Brazil isn't the only place you will find Oktoberfest inspired conviviality. Every year parties are thrown in China, Mexico, Canada, Japan, Australia, and half a dozen other countries all over the planet. (Top 10)

Oktoberfest has become a worldwide phenomena celebrated religiously across the globe. It's unique combination of pageantry, history, and an intense passion for all things beer makes has led people everywhere to join in on the fun. While the celebration may have begun to celebrate a wedding, it has evolved far beyond its humble roots. A time for people to come together and carouse about with huge steins of beer while wearing leather shorts and wearing goofy hats, Oktoberfest has earned its place as a staple of world culture, and I for one can't wait for a chance to attend a true Oktoberfest in Munich someday.

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