



St Patrick's Day origins and trivia

1 Pre-reading

Match the words (1 to 8) to the pictures (a-h).

1	A church	
2	A snake	
3	A parade;	
4	A marching band	
5	An Irish wolfhound	
6	A wig	
7	The Irish flag	
8	A shamrock	



St Patrick's Day is Ireland's national holiday. It takes place on 17th March. But what are its origins?

STPATRICK

Saint Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland. He was born in the Welsh town of Banwen in 385 AD, and died on 17th March 460 AD. He's famous for bringing Christianity to Ireland. Nowadays, there are about 60 churches and cathedrals named after him in Ireland alone. One of the most famous is St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. There are lots of legends associated with St Patrick. One says that he drove all the snakes out of Ireland.



PARADES

Many countries celebrate St Patrick's Day with a parade. The biggest parade is in New York City (USA), where there are lots of Irish immigrants. It attracts more than a million spectators, and consists of dozens of marching bands and thousands of participants who walk behind two Irish wolfhounds. The very first St Patrick's Day parade took place in Boston (USA) in 1737. Other large St Patrick's Day parades, in America, are held in Chicago (Illinois) and Savannah (Georgia).

GREEN

Ireland is known as the Emerald Isle because it's so green (thanks to all the rain). As a result, Ireland's national colour is considered to be green. During St Patrick's Day celebrations, there's a lot of dancing and music, and people dress up in green clothes, and often wear funny green hats and wigs. Some people paint their pets green or in the colours of the Irish flag (green, white and orange). In cities such as New York City and Chicago, they even dye the river water green (with an ecologically-friendly dye, of course).

SHAMROCK

The most common symbol of St Patrick's Day is the shamrock – Ireland's national plant. The term "shamrock" refers to the three-leaved sprigs of a clover plant. Legend says that St Patrick used the shamrock to explain the concept of the Trinity (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit) to Irish people when he converted them to Christianity. On St Patrick's Day, many people wear a shamrock. Aer Lingus (Ireland's national airline) even flies fresh shamrocks to Irish Embassies all over the world for their traditional parties. ☑

2 Reading I

Read over the text. Then, answer the questions.

- When does St Patrick's Day take place?
- When did Saint Patrick die?
- Where's the biggest St Patrick's Day parade?
- When did the first St Patrick's Day parade take place?
- What's Ireland's unofficial name?
- In which cities do they dye the river water green?
- What's Ireland's national plant?



Answers 1. on 17th March; 2. 460 AD; 3. in New York City; 4. in 1737; 5. the Emerald Isle; 6. in Chicago and New York City; 7. the shamrock