

FARSANG CELEBRATIONS IN HUNGARY

The last day of Christmas on January 6 marks the start of a huge, colourful festival period called Farsang – like “Carnival” in other parts of the world. This period is filled with eating decadent food, masquerade balls, lots of loud noise and a UNESCO-recognised festival called “Busójárás” in the southern city of Mohács. Farsang is a combination of Christian traditions and old pagan rituals, and the huge celebration lasts until the start of the Christian Lenten fasting period. But Farsang is also symbolic of saying goodbye to winter and looking forward to spring warmer weather.



The history of Farsang

Farsang (“Carnival” in English) is an important **tradition in Hungary**, as it is in many other parts of the world. Beginning on January 6 (**Epiphany**) the festive period lasts until **Ash Wednesday** when, in the Christian tradition, the fasting period of Lent begins in the lead-up to Easter. In contrast to **Lent** though, Farsang is a period marked by eating rich foods, many colourful and loud celebrations, masquerade and costume balls, and other events that are steeped in **Hungarian traditions**. The first day of Farsang, on **January 6**, is also the day when, traditionally, many families take down and throw out their **Christmas trees**. In Hungarian villages the Farsang period was, traditionally, also went days-long wedding celebrations were held. This was because winter is quieter for farm workers so they could spend days partying, and also because food was easier to prepare and store for what would often be hundreds of guests.

The high-point of **Farsang** is its last three days, which changes dates each year depending on the dates of Easter. These last three days are called **Farsang**

Farka (“the tail of Farsang”) and lasts from the so-called **Farsang Sunday** through to **Shrove Tuesday** (or “Húshagyókedd” in Hungarian).

„Fat Thursday”



Aside from masquerade balls and other **Farsang parties**, one of the most famous Farsang events is called **Torkos Csütörtök** (or “Fat Thursday” in English). It’s held on the Thursday after Ash Wednesday. During Fat Thursday registered restaurants offer a 50% discount so you can eat, drink and be merry at a variety of restaurants throughout Budapest.

The famous „Busójárás”

Similar Carnival celebrations are held in other parts of the world such as the **Rio Carnival** and the **Venice Carnival** – but in Hungary one of the largest Farsang events is held in the southern city of **Mohács**, with what’s called the **Busójárás**. This huge event is recognised by **UNESCO** as an **Intangible Cultural Heritage**. The most recognisable feature is men in scary wooden musks with big teeth and horns, dressed in furry sheep’s skin, who run around making loud noises and chasing women and playfully smacking them.

Farsang Sunday is a great time to go with many food and craft stalls, live music, dancing and traditional parades – just beware that if you’re a woman then you’re likely to be chased and scared – in a playful way – by the scary “Busók.” This, though, is a large part of why this festival is so colourful and memorable. Another big part of this festival – already filled with **pagan rituals** – is on the Tuesday night (Shrove Tuesday), when a large bonfire in the main square is lit and the **Farsang coffin** is burnt. One theory is that **Busójárás** is meant to scare away the winter, but the other is that the event actually represents scaring away the Turks. Back in Ottoman times (the 17th century) the Turks had invaded and locals fled to nearby swamps. But the locals made scary masks and frightening costumes, and ran back into the town making loud noises. The Turks on hearing the strange noises and seeing the scary figures fled the town in fright.

Traditional Farsang food

It’s typical to eat a lot of cabbage and pork during Farsang, but the most famous is perhaps the **Szalagos Farsangi Fánk** (“Carnival Doughnuts”).



source: <https://welovebudapest.com/en/2015/01/27/explainer-farsang-celebrations-in-hungary/>

Exercise 1: True or false?

1. The „Farsang” starts on January 6th and ends next week on Wednesday.
 2. People take down the Christmas tree on January 6th.
 3. Farsang is mainly celebrated in the city centre.
 4. On „Fat Thursday” you can eat at many restaurants for free.
 5. Busójárás is a UNESCO recognised event in Mohács.
 6. The Busó people usually scare and frighten women on Farsang Saturday.
 7. Shrove Thursday is based on some important pagan rituals.
 8. Busójárás is meant to welcome winter and the Turks.
 9. Strange noises and frightening costumes made the Turks go away.
 10. The most prominent food is the doughnut.
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Exercise 2: What are these important names and dates?

- Ash Wednesday:
 - January 6th:
 - Shrove Tuesday:
 - Fat Thursday:
 - Farsang Sunday:
 - Farsang coffin:
 - Carnival Doughnuts:
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Exercise 3: Turn these sentences from passive to active.

1. *This period is filled with eating decadent food, masquerade balls, lots of loud noise by Hungarian people.*

2. *Farsang is a period marked by eating rich foods, many colourful and loud celebrations, masquerade and costume balls, and other events that are steeped in Hungarian traditions by Hungarians.*
