



Celebrating the Sweet Tradition of Gingerbread Houses

gingerbread House Day, observed on December 12, celebrates the delightful tradition of crafting and decorating gingerbread houses. Rooted in early 19th-century Germany, this festive custom is said to have been inspired by the Brothers Grimm tale 'Hansel and Gretel,' where a magical house made of sweets captured imaginations. Today, the day encourages people of all ages to gather, get creative, and enjoy the warmth of holiday baking. From intricate designs to simple family creations, Gingerbread House Day highlights the joy of artistry, storytelling, and togetherness during the festive season.

#FOOD

Sarson Da Saag and Makki di Roti

A Culinary Journey: The Global Roots of Punjab's Iconic Cuisine



Punjab's national food, the beloved Sarson da Saag and Makki di Roti, is a heartwarming symbol of regional pride, agricultural tradition, and culinary heritage. But behind this celebrated combination lies a fascinating story of migration, trade, and evolution that highlights how deeply interconnected the world's cuisines truly are.

Sarson Ka Saag and Makki di Roti: A Classic, Yet Not Ancient

This iconic Punjabi dish, made of mustard greens and served with a flatbread made of maize flour, is often assumed to be a timeless part of Punjab's tradition. However, the primary grain used in Makki di Roti, maize (corn), is not native to India. In fact, maize originated in South America and only made its way to the Indian subcontinent around 350 years ago. This means that this 'traditional' dish is, in historical terms, relatively recent.

A Plate of Imports: How Global Crops Shaped Indian Cuisine

India's culinary landscape, rich as it is today, has been shaped dramatically by the movement of crops and spices across continents. Groundnut (peanut), for example, was virtually unknown in India before 1920. Today, it's a staple in many regions, used in chutneys, oils, and snacks.

Chillies, a defining ingredient in modern Indian cooking, are another New World crop, native to South America. Surprisingly, Delhi and its surrounding regions had no trace of chillies until the 18th century. Before their arrival, Indian cuisine relied heavily

on native spices for heat and flavor. One such spice was black pepper, often referred to as 'the king of spices,' which had been used for centuries as the main pungent component in Indian food.

Before Mughlai: What Did Indians Eat?

Another misconception about Indian food is that the rich, creamy Mughlai dishes were always a part of Indian culinary tradition. In reality, such dishes gained popularity with the arrival of the Mughals, and before that, everyday food across much of India was simpler, more localized, and less dependent on ingredients like cream, nuts, and chillies.

Spices Across Seas: The Journey of Daldhini

Even among India's oldest spices, some have stories of foreign origins. Daldhini, or cinnamon, came not from India but from the coast of Indonesia. It first reached China, and later traveled westward through the famous Silk Route. Arab traders played a key role in this journey and gave it a name that reflected its origin: 'Cheen se aane wali dal.'

A Global Plate, A Local Identity

What these stories reveal is that Indian cuisine, like much of the world's food, is an ever-evolving fusion of global influences. Yet, over time, these ingredients and dishes have been so deeply integrated into local traditions that they now feel inherently 'Indian.'

Punjab's Sarson Ka Saag and Makki di Roti is a perfect example of how international ingredients, local agricultural practices, and centuries of cultural blending can give rise to what we now consider traditional cuisine.



Why Hundreds Are Flocking to See This 100-Year-Old Painting!

● Bulbul Joshi

Taylor Swift's newest album, *The Life of a Showgirl*, was an instant success, breaking multiple music industry records since debuting on October 3. While many fans seem to love all of the singer-songwriter's new songs, one track in particular has risen above the rest: 'The Fate of Ophelia,' which has spent three straight weeks atop the Billboard Hot 100 King of the Dinosaurs.

For one museum in western Germany, the song's popularity has been an unexpected boon. Swifties are now flocking to Museum Wiesbaden to see a Friedrich Heyser painting that appears to have inspired the opening scene of the 'The Fate of Ophelia' music video.

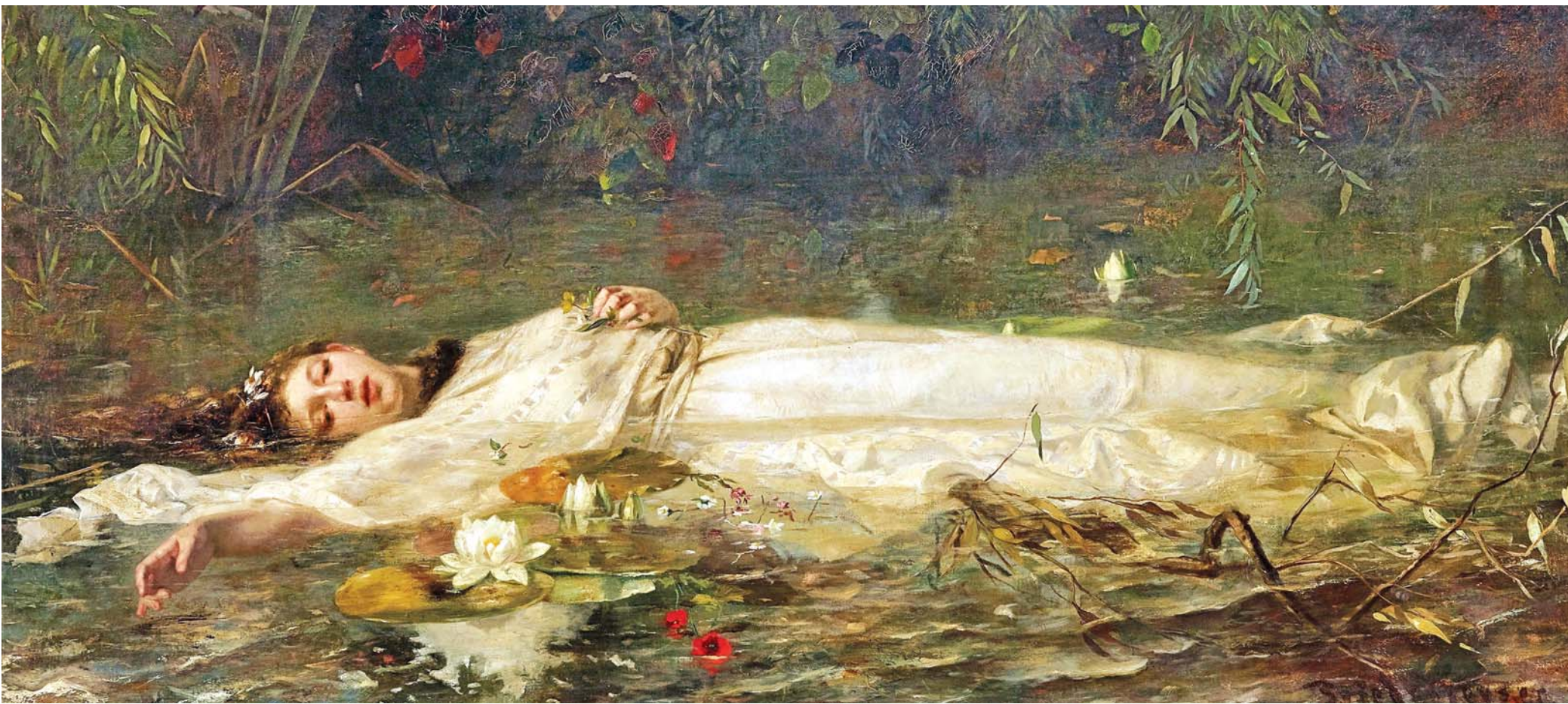
The moody oil-on-canvas artwork, painted around 1900, shows an ethereal woman in a white dress floating in a pool of water, surrounded by flowers and leaves. Heyser's piece, called *Ophelia*, depicts a scene from William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in which the young noblewoman from Denmark descends into madness and drowns to death.

Just a few seconds into the music video, Swift appears in a similar painting hung on the wall of an ornate room with a grand staircase. As the first few notes of the song begin to play, Swift lies motionless on her side in a white dress surrounded by flowers, before eventually standing and starting to sing.

Fans appear to have made the connection between the music video and the museum's painting on their own. As word spread on social media, hundreds of visitors, mostly young women, teenagers and girls, started showing up at the 200-year-old museum, asking staffers to point them in the direction of *Ophelia*.

"We are having an absolute *Ophelia* run at the moment and are quite surprised and happy about it," says Susanne Hirschmann, a spokesperson for the museum located west of Frankfurt, to the Guardian's Deborah Cole. "We have a wonderful Art Nouveau collection. Many of our guests want to see Alphonse Mucha; they want to

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Friedrich Heyser's oil-on-canvas painting depicts a scene from William Shakespeare's Hamlet.

see Hector Guimard. But this is the first time we've really had a run on a painting. It's been a shock, to be honest." Museum leaders were initially worried about the sudden

influx of Swifties. Staffers have erected a rope to prevent visitors from getting too close to the painting, report David Crossland and Jennifer Kennedy of the London

Times. But so far, the hordes of fans have not posed any problems. Hirschmann tells the Guardian that they've taken a 'respectful approach,' one that includes posing

for photos with the painting and, in some instances, sharing the encounters online. Overall, the song's popularity has been a positive for the institution, and for art

appreciation more broadly. "For us, it's a really great opportunity to bring people to the museum who don't know us yet, and also just to talk about the art," Hirschmann

tells BBC Radio 4's 'Today.' Museum Wiesbaden has held an *Ophelia*-themed event in early November, which includes a short guided tour of the artwork and an exploration of *Ophelia* as a character. Visitors are encouraged to attend in costume, either dressed as a Swiftie, or as *Ophelia* herself. (Unsurprisingly, the event was already sold out in October itself.) Why did Swift pick this specific painting? Nobody at the museum knows. One possibility is that the American pop artist somehow discreetly visited the museum last year, when her Eras Tour passed through Germany in July 2024. But that seems unlikely. "I think if Taylor Swift came here, even incognito, we would have noticed," Hirschmann tells the Guardian.

It's also possible Swift was referencing a different artwork altogether, for example, an 1852 painting by John Everett Millais housed at Tate Britain in London. Millais' piece purportedly inspired Heyser's painting 50 years later, and Swift may have drawn inspiration from both.

Some onlookers see a connection between the Millais painting and *The Life of a Showgirl*'s album cover, as well as the final scene of 'The Fate of *Ophelia*' music video, when Swift lounges in a bathtub in a sparkly costume.

"The gown she's wearing in the music video resembles much more closely the Heyser painting, as does her opening pose in the video," says Elly McCausland, a literary scholar at Ghent University in Belgium who writes a blog about the literary quality of Swift's songwriting, to the Times. "But the flowers in the Millais painting have been linked to the flower-covered piano that Swift performed on at the Eras Tour, suggesting she had been thinking of the painting long before she released the album."

McCausland says there's yet another painting to connect to John William Waterhouse's *The Lady of Shalott* (1888), also at Tate Britain. "I think she's cherry-picking various literary and artistic references and combining them to suit her message, rather than remaining faithful to one particular vision or interpretation," McCausland adds.

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#READING

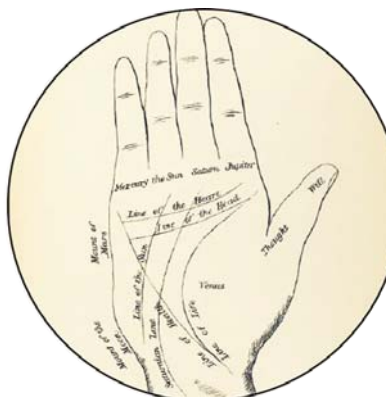
The Divine Method

Palm of the hand to moldy cheese, to prophesy supernatural knowledge about fates

Reading the lines of the palm may have originated in India before spreading to the Middle East and Europe. Aristotle believed the creases of the palm indicated the length of a life, and by the Renaissance, palmistry had become so popular that it was denounced by the pope. Shakespeare had Othello tell his wife, Desdemona, that her hand 'argues fruitfulness and liberal heart.' Not all palm readings are so happy. According to an English guide published around 1700, if a small half-moon shape is lodged in someone's 'middle line,' they're fated to suffer from 'cold and watery diseases.'

Tasseomancy

Reading tea leaves may have originated in China- tea's birthplace, thousands of years ago, when people first began examining the wet dregs left at the bottoms of their cups. After tea arrived in Europe, tasseomancy became a popular pastime for English women, especially



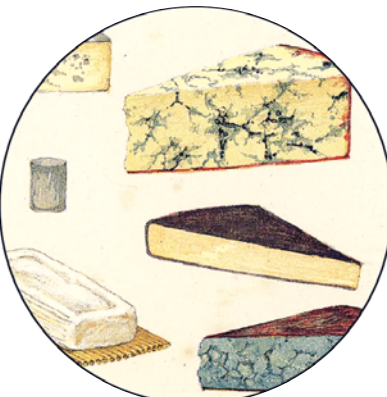
in the Victorian period. Industrious diviners assigned meaning to images they saw in leaves, like animals, objects, numbers or letters, which they would interpret for curious souls. For example, a mushroom shape, according to a 19th-century guide, signified a 'sudden separation of lovers after a quarrel.'

Tyromancy

This funky divination method, first



mentioned (derisively) by a second-century A.D. Greek citizen of Ephesus, in present-day Turkey, works best with varieties like blue cheese and Swiss, as a diviner discerns fortunes from moldy veins and holes. According to the modern practitioner Jennifer Billock, the niche method gained popularity in medieval and early modern England, used to predict the harvest, a child's future or even a maid-



en's romantic fate. A hopeful lass, Billock says, would carve suitors' names into a block of Cheshire and watch to see which molded first, indicating her future husband.

Crystallomancy

Seeing visions in a crystal ball is one way to 'scry,' or divine the future from a reflective surface. Celtic druids are thought to have crystal-gazed, and traveling Romani

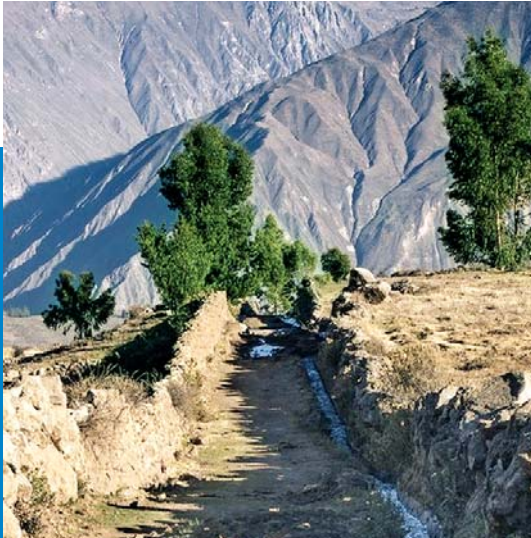


people have practiced the art for centuries. After it resurged in Victorian England, in 1905, one scholar explained that a scryer could see either a clear picture or a misty cloud designed to reveal a vision from the future. But conditions have to be right. According to a 1920s guide, the scrying room should be temperate and 'charged with dull light,' and the seer must not have recently eaten.

#QHAPAQ NAN

The Inca Roads of Peru

A network of roads that spanned thousands of miles across the Andean mountains, an engineering marvel of the Ancient Andes



The Inca Empire, one of the most advanced civilizations in pre-Columbian America, not only left behind monumental structures like Machu Picchu but also a vast and intricate network of roads that spanned thousands of miles across the Andean mountains. Known for their remarkable engineering, the Inca roads were key to the empire's cohesion, military control, and communication. These roads remain a testament to the ingenuity of Inca civilization and continue to captivate both historians and travelers alike.

Overview of the Inca Road System

The Inca road system, often referred to as the Qhapaq Nan, was an extensive network of highways and trails that stretched over 25,000 miles (around 40,000 kilometers), connecting diverse regions of the Andean highlands and coastal areas. The Qhapaq Nan was used primarily for military, administrative, and trade purposes, facilitating the movement of troops, supplies, and information across the empire, which spanned modern-day Peru, Ecuador, Chile, Bolivia, Argentina, and parts of Colombia.

At its peak, the Inca road system was the most sophisticated and far-reaching network in the Americas, offering a model of efficiency and durability that still astounds engineers and archaeologists today.

Strategic Importance of the Road System

The Inca Empire's vast road network was critical for several key aspects of Inca governance and economy.

- Military Mobility:** The Inca Empire expanded through military conquest, and the road system played a crucial role in moving troops quickly across the empire. The roads allowed the Sapa Inca (the emperor)



and his military commanders to send reinforcements or suppress rebellions far from the capital, Cuzco.

- Economic and Trade Facilitation:** The roads enabled the Inca to manage a complex tributary system, where subject peoples were required to provide goods and labor. The road network helped facilitate trade between different regions, moving goods such as potatoes, maize, cotton, gold, and textiles. Even though the Incas did not use currency, the efficient transport system helped ensure the redistribution of goods from rich to poor areas.

- Communication:** The Inca road system also played an essential role in communication across the empire. With the help of the Chasquis and Tampus, information could be sent and received quickly, ensuring that the centralized bureaucracy functioned effectively.

- Religious and Cultural Integration:** The roads also



had a symbolic and spiritual purpose. The Incas viewed the roads as connecting different regions of the empire to the sun god, Inti, and their most sacred sites. Major roads led to key Inca ceremonial centers like Machu Picchu, Sacsayhuamán, and Qosqo (Cuzco), which was considered the navel of the world. Pilgrims and state officials would travel these roads for ceremonial purposes, further solidifying the cultural unity of the empire.

The Legacy of the Inca Road System

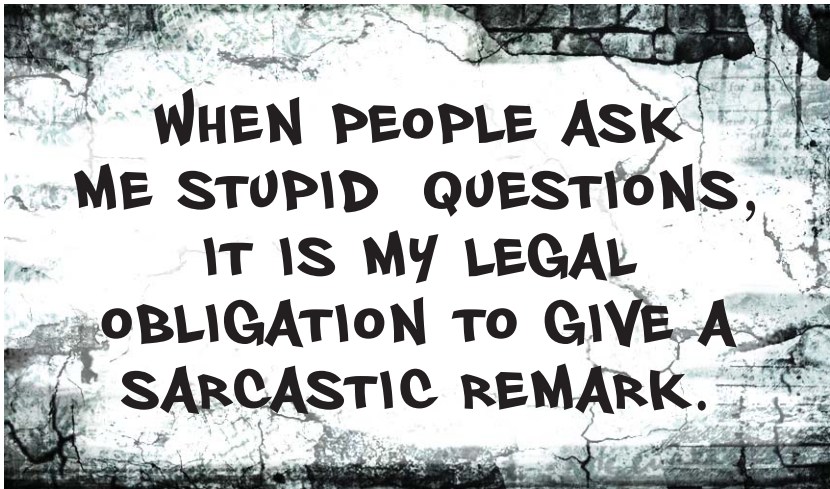
Although the Spanish conquistadors destroyed much of the Inca Empire in the 16th century, the road system remained largely intact in many regions. In fact, some of the Inca roads still form the backbone of Peru's modern transportation network.

The town of Ollantaytambo, located near Machu Picchu, still preserves Inca roads and architecture. Today, many of the ancient roads are still used by locals, tourists, and trekkers, especially the famous Inca Trail that leads to Machu Picchu. The Inca Trail, in particular, remains a popular route for tourists wishing to experience a piece of history while hiking through the dramatic Andean landscape. The enduring appeal of the Inca roads lies not only in their historical significance but also in their breathtaking beauty and connection to a time of profound cultural and technological advancement.

The Acidic Deposits and the Atacama Desert

As the Inca road system reached its southernmost territories, it encountered the harshest and driest environments in South America. One notable region is the Atacama Desert, which lies to the south of the Inca Empire, extending across modern-day Chile and Peru. Known for being the driest desert on Earth, the Atacama presents extreme challenges to both travelers and engineers alike. In this region, the unique environmental conditions have led to the accumulation of acidic mineral deposits. The desert, characterized by very low rainfall, experiences a buildup of sulfur, sodium chloride, and other acidic compounds in the soil and groundwater. These acidic deposits are a result of both the high evaporation rates in the desert and the natural mineral-rich volcanic activity in the region.

THE WALL



BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman