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Ukrainian marriage VS American: major difference

- Ukrainians wear their wedding rings on the right hand
- Wedding related expenses are split between the two parties or mostly covered by the groom
- Ukrainian wedding festivity traditionally lasts 3 days, and great food and drinks never end...

Wedding in Ukraine

Ukraine, being scarcely as big as Texas, an independent East-European country with great ancient customs and traditions, is also a modern developing society adjusted to many modern trends in lifestyles, wedding ceremony being one of its brightest parts.

Most modern Ukrainian brides wear the fancy white dresses with all kinds of head, gloves, and other accessories. Yet nowadays more and more young people are trying to revive from ashes amazing Ukrainian traditional wedding ceremonies, with costumes being its unique and inextricable part.

Our great-grandmothers (right before the Soviet regime started killing violently and passionately all the Ukrainian essence and culture, language and traditions) used to embroider their wedding costumes, rushnyky (embroidered linen towels) and traditionally present their grooms with the wedding embroidered shirt, otherwise they (our great-grandmothers) could have been believed to be lazy which would be one of the biggest shames for the bride! Moreover, all of the 24 Ukrainian regions (area administrative units) would present their own outstanding embroidery and wedding outfit styles. Here are some of the mail stamps portraying some samples of traditional wedding head accessories:



Engagement

The full wedding ritual consists of the three phases: pre-wedding, wedding itself and post-wedding. So, traditionally, and this is still very well-preserved in modern Ukraine, there is a special event called "svatannya", which is followed by engagement. The groom sends out his friends, sometimes is joined by his father, etc. and together with some nice drinks and food they go to the bride's family to negotiate the possibility of a marriage. There are some nice and humorous related traditions, and some families still keep to them. Good meal is served that night and many details are discussed and agreed upon between the groom's and the bride's families. It is interesting to note that after "svatannya" the wedding can still be canceled due to various reasons by either of the parties, yet, the wedding can no longer be cancelled.

It is not popular for the couple to inform their families of their wedding without any prior engagement procedures. However, sometimes the parents find out after all is done and the new family is born. Nowadays, it is all up to each couple how to get married. However, many families keep the traditions and consider it inappropriate to bypass the parents' consent and blessings.



The wedding

Traditionally, the wedding starts on Friday and lasts until Monday. First of all, besides the civil procedure of signing and receiving a family certificate, it is very important for Ukrainians to receive God's blessings at church. It is common for the couple to go through the civil procedure prior to the church wedding. Sometimes, however, both ceremonies are planned for the same day and the guests can be invited to both or either of them, yet, it all ends with a huge festivity for all the guests, with lots of food, drinks, songs, dancing, etc..

So we have moved to the second phase - inviting the wedding team for the preparations, decorations, cooking and baking of the wedding "korovay" (special wedding bread). It is a tradition to invite only those women who are happy in their marriage and live with their husbands, as it is essential for the food and korovay to be made by the "lucky" hands. There exist many songs and sayings to be sung while the korovay is being made and decorated. The wedding bread has a sacral meaning and there are books written to describe it. In short, among the decoration ingredients there must be vinca leaves, berries of viburnum and usually the two birds, made of dough and placed on the top. The wedding bread is also decorated with other symbolic ornaments, i.e. flowers, spiklets, starts. All the herbs and ornaments are meant for happy long life of the family-to-be, its fertility and strong union. On the photo above you can see an example of a wedding korovay from Western Ukraine, at a wedding I attended several months ago.

Here are some types of the traditional wedding costumes from different regions of Ukraine:



A typical second phase would evolve as follows: On Friday, it is all about baking the korovay with the traditional songs, inviting the guests to the wedding, bride's night. On Saturday, the bride's girlfriends make the flowery decorations and bouquets. Other traditions include decorating the wedding tree with songs, unbraiding the bride's braid and singing sad songs. Sunday would start with the groom's "train" to the bride, brother 'sells' the bride, church wedding ceremony, groom comes back home with the bride, party, dancing, songs, bride's gifts for the groom's family, bride's farewell with her girlfriends and family (usually done through a beautiful dance), bride's mother-in-law covers bride's head with a white cover which is a symbol of her childhood coming to end. Traditionally, after marriage women may cover their heads, for instance. For example, my grandmother uncovers hers only before going to bed and when taking a bath. Though many other Ukrainian elderly ladies ignore this tradition, and our mothers mostly lost it... It is also a rule, reflected in many old songs, that once a girl is married she cannot be a bridesmaid for any of her friends anymore.

Now, we cannot go into details of all the above-mentioned traditions, yet, let's look at some interesting facts and their reflections nowadays. By the way, most of these traditions are still kept, especially in the villages!

For instance: songs. You might ask someone what is so special about Ukrainians is their ability to remain happy and joyful no matter what hardships happen to them. The fact that Ukrainian nation survived until today is the best evidence for that! Why? Because we sing, at any occasion, without any special occasion, while cooking and raising kids. Our grandmothers did, and still do a lot of farming and gardening. All of their work with the soil is accompanied with songs. There are thousands and thousands for every occasion. We have over 1500 wedding songs which have survived until present times. Imagine now what we do for the three days of the wedding. Of course singing! There are several thematic groups of such songs: songs reflecting the wedding drama actions (sorrow of bride's parents missing their child, bride's missing her family, etc); songs addressed to God and saints asking for good life of the newly weds; songs glorifying the couple and their families; lamenting motives (about hard fate of women, hard times living in another – groom's – family); humorous songs.



Any wedding would always have "muzyky" (musical ensemble) accompanying the ceremony and processions, as well as singing lively songs so that people dance and play for the guests who usually sing all together the above-mentioned songs. Among musical instruments present at a wedding there would definitely be violins, tymbaly (a traditional horizontal string instrument), sopilka and sometimes also harmonica. Again, today, they are often replaced by a live singing band with a keyboard and some

guitars which is not even close to the quality of a traditional way. Often, there are various games and competitions organized for the guests, so people still have fun, which is essential for the happiness of the couple! A Ukrainian wedding must be filled with joy, lots of good food and great fun.

In the end of the big party, which traditionally last until the morning of the next day, there is a dance of a bride with all the members of the groom's family, while she is also presenting them with little gifts before coming to their house. This happens even if the couple is going to live separately as such is the tradition, because traditionally girls used to join the house of their husbands. The bride also dances in the circle of her unmarried girlfriends, in turn choosing each one and putting a wedding veil on their head to make sure they all find their true love and get married when the time comes. At last, the groom's mother covers her daughter-in-law's head with a white scarf and this is usually funny because the bride needs to pretend she is against leaving her freedom and so she would throw this scarf on the floor, etc. while her mother-in-law is being friendly and nice and would often put money in the scarf so that her new daughter would agree to wear it 😊 All of this is done to music with no words, so it is a whole theatrical performance observed by all the guests.

The party is over and every guest receives a slice of the korovay, the wedding bread, to bring it home and eat it for the happy life of the newly weds.



Above are the photos of modern-time traditional wedding outfits from different regions of Ukraine (couples are real!)

Post-wedding

Sometimes, the festivity would go on to the next morning, which would be Monday, when all the guests come back and have breakfast and lunch together. At this point, it is not as loud and the young couple doesn't have to wear the wedding clothing anymore as it is their first day as husband and wife. But again, when we talk about today, this tradition is still kept in the villages, while urban life requires us to go to work on Mondays, etc..

Well, if you want to experience one of those wedding described above, you should go to some villages or make friends with the young Ukrainians who still maintain the traditions, and attend their celebration. In the city, you would see a one-day party, with nice fancy food, white dress on the bride, and doing many things western-style, with no real Ukrainian fun.