

“Bei uns ist immer was los!”

FEIERTAGE UND FESTE IM MAI SITTEN UND GEBRÄUCHE MAIBAUM

May pole: der Maibaum, die Maibäume

“There were trees running across the street . . .”. No, this was not hallucination on the part of the person describing a strange experience, but a maypole appearance in the true sense of the word.

With the wealth of such maypole appearances in past and present, folklorists differentiate, so to speak, between three different types: the town-, the inn-, and the lovers-maypole.

Traditionally, the maypole has had two functions: it is part of the festive customs of the village, and secondly it is regarded as the symbol of freedom. The custom of putting up a maypole goes back to practices of the decoration-happy craftsmen of the Baroque. Today still, it is known and popular almost everywhere in Germany. The dates are regionally different and range from the eve of the first of May until Pentacost.

For the town-maypole – the “Ortsmaibaum” –, the young men of the village (often the bachelors) go into the woods, where they fell a suitable tree (mainly a fir and in most cases picked out in advance) quite unceremoniously with a power saw. The lower branches are stripped right away leaving only the treetop untouched. Then the tractor and trailer plus their load are escorted back to the village, and the strenuous task of erecting the pole can begin. The hole has already been dug, and the wreath with its colored ribbons and/or other decorations (sausages, hams, eggs, sawed out bands depicting the crafts, etc.) is ready to be attached. In Bavaria, the maypole must be climbed afterwards, the delicious “natural” decorations constituting the reward.

After the hard work of putting up the pole, in many places the fun part begins with eating, drinking, and dancing.

