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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

How Many Blini Can You Eat?

Maslenitsa - Pancake Week - begins

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Kirill Zykov / Moskva News Agency

Moscow is gearing up to celebrate Maslenitsa — the week before Lent begins — in grand style with food, concerts and burning effigies. In recent years, Russia's Mardi Gras or "pancake week" has seen a glamorous and all-frills revival in the large cities as municipal and regional administrations organize a week of public celebration. From Monday, March 4, the holy trinity of butter, eggs and milk will be upon us.

The week of blini madness has ancient pagan roots and gives believers the final chance to eat their fill before Lent. And because indulgence is discouraged during the fasting period, when observant Orthodox Christians don't eat any meat, fish, or dairy products, Russians really give it their all for a last bash at excess and extravagance with batter-based treats.

For the dairy-intolerant and vegans among us, happily food is not the only focus. You can hop on a train to regional towns, such as hipster hotspot Nikola-Lenivets, to watch as effigies and wooden towers are set alight — combusting and carbonizing the end of winter.

Here’s a selection Maslenitsa events in and around Moscow so you can bid farewell to both winter and heavy winter food. If you can't make it, check back later next week for some photographs.

If you’re in Moscow, take a trip to the past...

Actors, costumes and puppets are key to the Moscow Seasons street festivities taking place across 23 different locations in the city. Experience Moscow’s Maslenitsa’s traditions during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. There will be live cooking shows, tea brewing demonstrations, music and performances to help transport yourself to the pre-revolutionary experience of Maslenitsa. It all begins on Friday March 1, the first day of spring. See the site for more information.

...and then burn off the blini.

See the city, eat the blini and absorb the creative greatness of Moscow’s artistic heritage. "Walking in Moscow" are offering a selection of 53 free walking tours around the capital with sprinklings of Maslenitsa festivities. Themed walks will last until the end of the festival.

For those who want to take a trip out of town...

In Kaluga’s Nikola-Lenivets, the organizers have moved on from the typical igniting of the “usual stuffed animal” to take on a French revolutionary classic — a 20-meter-high wooden homage to the Bastille. The construction has taken 50 days with a workforce of 15 assisting the creator Nikolay Polissky. However, all will be consumed in flames on March 9 to chase away the darkness of winter. Bus shuttles are available from Moscow to Kaluga, with more directions on the website for other transport. Tickets can be purchased here.

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