

Celebrating Robert Burns

An annual tradition pays tribute to a literary legend.



*Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And auld lang syne!*

Every year at the stroke of midnight on January 1, many groups of friends and family in English-speaking countries around the world sing “Auld Lang Syne” to usher in the new year. The song written by the famous 18th-century Scottish poet Robert Burns is an annual tradition in Scotland and around the globe.

However, another date in January pays additional tribute to the legendary wordsmith. January 25th is Burns’ birthday and it’s time for a whole other party. It’s a national celebration of the Ploughman Poet in Scotland and Scots and lovers of everything Scottish around the world honor him on and around the big day with Burns Suppers. The first was started by his friends in 1801.

Burns died in 1796 at the young age of 37 from a rheumatic heart condition, but his legacy of poems and songs are still enjoyed today. “Auld Lang Syne” is just one of many enduring treasures Burns penned. He started writing at the age of 15. He became famous at age 27 in 1786 when he published his first collection of poetry, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*.

Travelers can celebrate Robert Burns throughout the year, not just on his birthday, with a visit to the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum in Alloway, some 40 minutes from Glasgow. It houses more than 5,000 artifacts, including Burns' handwritten manuscripts. Among the sights to see within his home village is the three-room cottage where Burns was born and spent the beginning years of his life and a monument to Scotland's National Bard created in 1823 and its gardens. The Robert Burns Birthplace Museum is included as a stop on [CIE Tours' The Scots Irish Tour](#).

The Robert Burns Birthplace Museum is just one of many places in Scotland to celebrate his birth. At the museum, it's usually a true cultural immersion: a two-day tribute starting with "Burns Gala Day", a family-friendly event with live traditional and contemporary performances, and food and drink tastings. There's a "Blazing Burns Night Spectacular" with a ceilidh and choreographed fire show with live music, dancing, and plenty of the traditional eats for a Burns Supper, including haggis (minced sheep heart, liver and lungs mixed with oatmeal, onion and spices in a sheep stomach) and neeps and tatties (turnips or rutabagas and potatoes boiled and mashed together.) Its "Big Burns Brunch" features more live performances, more haggis, plus square sausage and tattie scones.

Inspired lovers of Scotland around the world can create their own Burns Night, with the must-have supper of haggis and neeps and tatties paired with whisky, plus the reading and singing of Burns' poems and songs. To make it a more complete night, the "Selkirk Grace" is read to begin and then bagpipers can kick-off the festivities, including the bringing in of haggis. Burns' tribute to the dish in the "Address to a Haggis" is traditionally read and a toast is then made to the food.

*Fair fa' your honest, sonsie face,
Great chieftain o the puddin'-race!
Aboon them a' ye tak your place,
Painch, tripe, or thairm:
Weel are ye worthy o' a grace
As lang's my arm.*

After the meal, more speeches can be made including the "Immortal Memory" tribute speech to Burns, a "Toast to the Lassies" followed by "The Reply to the Toast of the Lassies." Scots and fans of Scots and Burns can add in their own festive fun including Burns trivia games, before ending the evening with a rendition of "Auld Lang Syne." After all, for many Burns' lovers, his poetry will always be an old friend.