

Christmas vs Hogmanay: Who wins in the battle of the December festivities amongst Scots?

Following Christmas, and as we gear up to the New Year celebrations in Scotland, albeit in a muted form this year because of restrictions caused by the rise of Omicron, it begs the question – what is more important to most Scots – Christmas or New Year?

It may be a surprise to discover that Christmas was not celebrated in Scotland for around 400 years, from the end of the 17th century to the 1950s. Indeed, for much of that time it was effectively banned - this dates back to the Protestant Reformation, when Christmas was deemed a 'Catholic feast', and as such the Kirk deemed that it was not to be celebrated!

Therefore, right up until the 1950s, many Scots worked over Christmas and celebrated their winter holiday at New Year when people gathered for parties, exchanged presents – and this became known as Hogmanay.

Hogmanay remains a 'very Scottish tradition' and is synonymous with Scotland the world over. But how do Scots in 2021 feel about Hogmanay and Christmas? Does Hogmanay still take precedence?

In early December, before the latest Covid restrictions which will impact hugely on Hogmanay this year (no mass street parties or gatherings for example), 56 Degree Insight polled a representative sample of 500 Scottish adults and asked them – which do you like better, Christmas or Hogmanay/New Year?

And clearly, things have changed since the 1950s! Two thirds of Scots said that they prefer Christmas (65%) and only one in eight prefer New Year (12%). One in five had no preference (19%) whilst 4% don't like either.



Not unexpectedly though, there are variations in opinion by certain demographics. As would be expected, families are the group most likely to prefer Christmas (77%) – only 7% of them prefer New Year. However, young Scots adults - those aged 16-24 - are rather more likely to prefer New Year (26%), although even amongst this age group, a larger proportion choose Christmas (49%).

So why do most Scots prefer Christmas? The main reason – mentioned by just under a third is the appeal of Christmas for families and children (31%):

"It is just so magical and wonderful for children and spending time with family"

"It is my most favourite time of year - I love spending time with family and giving gifts"

However for others, preference for Christmas is fuelled as much by a dislike for Hogmanay around two areas – bad memories and often loneliness (10%) and too much of an alcohol focus (8%):

"New year is a very sad time as I think about all the people who are no longer with us"

"Hogmanay can be very lonely"

"Hogmanay is just an excuse for people to get drunk"

Indeed amongst the 19% who prefer Hogmanay (dominated by the under 35s), the main reasons given relate to parties and drinking:

"Christmas is too long and is getting boring as I get older. Prefer the parties at Hogmanay"

"Hogmanay means a good party, lots to drink and a fresh start to new year"

So, some clear evidence that for most Scots, Christmas celebrations are now more preferred over those that take place a week later – something that would have been much less likely back in the middle of the 20th Century.

56 Degree Insight are a research and insights consultancy based in Edinburgh. We undertake consumer and business to business research across a wide range of sectors from tourism, to food and drink and utilities. For further information, please just get in touch:

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