

November 2009

UK'S MISTLETOE COUNTY HIRES DEBRETT'S TO HALT SWINE FLU KISSING FEARS

Kissing under the mistletoe is very much part of Christmas. However, growers and traders in Worcestershire, the UK's mistletoe county, are concerned that swine flu fears might damage sales in 2009 as people shun the tradition for fear of passing on germs.

Worcestershire's mistletoe auctions are crucial to the local economy. Running from 24th November to 8th December, an estimated 500 tons of mistletoe are sold each year to buyers who come from all over Britain, representing a much-needed annual revenue to local people. Nick Champion, mistletoe auctioneer supreme, says:

"British Mistletoe growers need support. There are hundreds of growers and traders that rely on the mistletoe season for their livelihood. The last thing we need is people worrying about kissing at Christmas and we're really hoping that people aren't going to be put off buying mistletoe because of some health scare".

But does that festive smacker really risk the spread of swine flu?

Destination Worcestershire has called in social etiquette experts, Debrett's, to advise on the 'dos and don'ts of kissing under the mistletoe' to avoid this problem together with other social faux pas (see editor's notes for complete guide). Commenting on the role, Debrett's etiquette advisor, Jo Bryant, said:

'It's medically proven that a peck on the cheek is much more hygienic than a handshake. People carry billions more germs on their hands so 'cheek-to-cheek' kissing, French-style, is a healthier greeting by far".

The BBC Good Food Show at Birmingham's NEC will see the launch of the Kissing With Courtesy Campaign - Destination Worcestershire is providing every stand at the show with a mistletoe sprig to encourage the tradition and suggesting people pay a £1 a peck to support BBC Children In Need at the same time. Debrett's Jo Bryant will be on hand to give people mistletoe kissing lessons to allay any fears.

Also attending will be world mistletoe expert, Jonathan Briggs, to answer people's questions on mistletoe and advise on all its associated traditions, as he explains:

'The symbolism of mid-winter mistletoe goes way back into prehistory - and it's not just about kissing. It has been used as a peace symbol since Roman times. And old traditions suggest that hanging up mistletoe will drive evil spirits from the home. Another belief, still widely held across Europe, is that a gift of mistletoe bestows good luck on the recipient. Kissing is optional - but it probably helps!'

Destination Worcestershire on behalf of regional development agency "Advantage West Midlands", have brought together the "Visit the Heart of England" stand (Stand HEFF 1) for the exhibition where a host of regional and seasonal specialities will be offered on a daily basis in addition to mistletoe, kissing advice and great ideas for seasonal short breaks.

Kissing With Courtesy coincides with the start of the Tenbury Wells Mistletoe Festival in the north-west corner of Worcestershire where the first wholesale auctions on the 24th November signal the start of a 3 week mistletoe season including the Mistletoe Festival.

ENDS

For further information, please call Sara Stewart on 07833 467774 or email sara@madasamarchhare.com

EDITOR'S NOTES

Destination Worcestershire has co-ordinated the Heart of England stand to showcase regional food and drink as well as highlighting destinations where visitors can enjoy them in their authentic settings.

Worcestershire is joined by Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Shakespeare Country and the Black Country and can be found next to the Heart of England Fine Foods (HEFF) demonstration kitchen.

DESTINATION WORCESTERSHIRE STAND HIGHLIGHTS

Wednesday 25th November

Anita Sharma James of The Spice Trade, Bromsgrove will be offering spice advice complete with free samples

Thursday 26th November

Barbara Palmer & Helen Hirons of Worcestershire Farm Stay Group will be handing out cakes and flapjacks after demonstrating The Great British Breakfast on the HEFF Theatre

Friday 27th November

Felice Tocchini of Fusion Brasserie, Stoulton will be launching two seasonal twists on his record-holding dunkable biscuit

Saturday 28th November

Camilla Lywood of What a Pickle will be sampling her tasty pickles including her Tomato & Chilli Jam

Sunday 29th November

Chris Von Landkammer of The Pear Tree Hotel will be handing out tasters of his Pear Chutney

Tourism is a major industry across the region supporting thousands of jobs, and bringing millions of visitor pounds into the local economy. From the National Exhibition centre, Ironbridge Gorge and Stratford to the Three Counties Showground, local attractions, hotels and bed and breakfast's, the Heart of England has something for everyone to enjoy year round.

DEBRETT'S KISSING WITH COURTESY

9-STEP GUIDE TO KISSING UNDER THE MISTLETOE

- 1) **BE CONSIDERATE** If you're feeling unwell at the Christmas do, just stand back and observe or, better still, make your apologies and go home rather than risk spreading the lurgy.
- 2) **THE CANDIDATE** Make sure you pick a willing target and that you won't make them feel embarrassed or uncomfortable by asking for a kiss.
- 3) **THE REQUEST** If you want to give someone a Christmas kiss under the mistletoe, it's polite and well-mannered to ask first.
- 4) **THE DECISION** Decide in advance, are you going to proffer one kiss or two? Be cautious with strangers – two kisses may seem over the top, even in festive environment.
- 5) **KEEP YOUR DISTANCE** Don't get too close before or during the kiss and avoid invading the other person's space.
- 6) **HANDS OFF** It's acceptable to touch the other person's shoulders or upper arms, but don't be a sleaze with wandering hands....

- 7) **RIGHT CHEEK FIRST** It is customary to kiss the other person's right cheek first (that's the one to your left!). Deflect any "meet-in-the-middle" embarrassment with humour or a friendly apology.
- 8) **CHEEK-TO-CHEEK** Unless you know a person intimately, a social 'kiss' is actually the briefest touch of your cheek against the other person's. Because there is so little contact, there is a minimal transfer of germs – that's why a kiss is the healthier alternative to a hand shake.
- 9) **THANK** the other person and wish them a merry Christmas.

THE 9 DON'Ts

- 1) Don't go to the Christmas do if you think you have flu.
- 2) Don't proffer unwanted kisses at the office party, mistletoe or not.
- 3) Don't reject a kiss under the mistletoe – a festive peck is all part of Christmas fun.
- 4) Don't leave a saliva trace – remember it's cheek-to-cheek.
- 5) Don't kiss on the lips – reserve this for private romantic moments.
- 6) Don't kiss anyone if you, or they, have a mouthful of food or drink.
- 7) Don't kiss the air.
- 8) Don't make sound effects.
- 9) Keep away from the mistletoe if you've had too much to drink – your social skills will be impaired & you don't want any of those morning-after regrets.

About Debrett's & Jo Bryant

With a heritage dating back over two centuries, Debrett's is the modern authority on etiquette, social occasions and people of distinction.

Debrett's acclaimed range of contemporary publications includes A-Z of Modern Manners, Wedding Guide, Correct Form, Etiquette for Girls and Guide for the Modern Gentleman.

Jo Bryant is the etiquette advisor for Debrett's. She regularly comments on manners and etiquette for national newspapers, magazines, television and radio, and has written numerous articles on modern manners.

About Nick Champion

Nick Champion, the UK's leading mistletoe auctioneer who leads the annual Tenbury Wells mistletoe auctions www.nickchampion.co.uk

About Jonathan Briggs

Jonathan Briggs is a botanist and environmental consultant. He has been promoting the need for mistletoe conservation and management for over 20 years. He ran the National Mistletoe Survey in the 1990s and, in recent years, has led calls for more sustainable mistletoe management in the apple orchards of Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire. He runs Mistletoe Matters, a specialist Gloucestershire-based consultancy, and is closely involved in mistletoe celebrations and trading in Tenbury Wells, Worcestershire.

