



Because legislation's cobwebby vaults are only infrequently dusted, legal anomalies abound -

and pose an obvious question: under what circumstances were such laws actually passed? Why, say, are cinema-goers in Baltimore discouraged from taking a lion along? Why is it unlawful in Samoa to forget your wife's birthday? And why, if they so wish, shouldn't Canadian fancy-dress outfitters sell contact lenses?

In many cases, it seems, guardians of public morality are at work. In Estonia, playing chess during love-making is illegal. So, too, is nutmeg in Saudi Arabia (large quantities being allegedly hallucinogenic). Wearers of noisy flip-flops in Capri can be fined for 'diminishing civic pride'. And in Ireland, if a leprechaun rings your doorbell, you're formally obliged to share your dinner with him.

Some rules are only marginally less obscure. In strait-laced Indiana it's unlawful to dress Barbie in Ken's clothes (but apparently not vice versa); in England you need a licence to sell seaweed; stepping on Thailand's currency is an indictable offence; and China prohibits TV ads for haemorrhoid cream during mealtimes.

If not for *our* benefit, though, many laws attempt to safeguard *animal* wellbeing. In Australia, it's illegal to give kangaroos more than six bottles of beer; in Florida you can be jailed for loading livestock onto school buses and, in the same enlightened State, for having sex with a porcupine (don't ask); under UK wildlife legislation, the Loch Ness Monster is a protected species; and in the Philippines cremations are authorised only if there is no live creature in the deceased's pocket.

Some laws, though, are wholly unworkable. Miserable old Oliver Cromwell made eating mince pies on Christmas Day illegal. It's still on our statute books - but just let them try enforcing it. Sometimes law-makers have no idea what's best for us...

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