



Lay Off the Lei

Kimberly Brooks, of Doty, Washington, has never even been to Hawaii. But at a Hawaiian-themed bash, an aunt warned the mom-to-be to skip the party favors: Leis could harm an unborn baby. The notion is widespread in Hawaii and in Polynesia. "Pregnant women should leave their leis untied because the fear is that a completed loop can cause the baby to be strangled by the umbilical cord," says Keali'i'olu'olu Gora, an expert on Hawaiian customs at the University of Hawaii in Honolulu. "All five of my sisters cut their leis when they were pregnant."

Play the Odds

When it came time to plan Shobha Tummalala's baby shower, a close friend (who, like Tummalala, is Indian) insisted that they hold the shower in either the seventh or ninth month of pregnancy. According to a 5,000-year-old Hindu belief, the numbers seven and nine are considered lucky and the number eight is not, says Kailash Upadhyay, head priest of the Hindu Temple and Cultural Center in Denver. So it was settled: Tummalala, a mom in New York City, was feted in her seventh month!

Avoid Cemeteries

Natasha Rosenstock, of Washington, D.C., encountered an odd dilemma while she was expecting. Modern Orthodox Jews believe that pregnant women should avoid funerals and burials. Midway through her pregnancy, however, two close family friends died within weeks of each other. Should she attend the burials and honor them, or stick with the traditions of her faith? Her grandmother (who was of Eastern European heritage) was horrified that Rosenstock even considered going to the funerals. Some Eastern European and Mediterranean Jews believe that it's potentially hazardous for a pregnant woman to be in such close proximity to death, and that recently departed souls may sometimes even linger around at cemeteries, explains Samuel Cohon, senior rabbi at Temple Emanu-El in Tucson, Arizona. In the end Rosenstock elected to attend the memorial services but skip the graveside ceremonies. She's unapologetic about her decision: "I didn't think anything bad would happen, but it felt so natural to follow tradition."