

spice route

THE INFLIGHT MAGAZINE



**TAKE THE
YEAR-END
BREAK!**



Festivals, Frost and Fables



As we enter the season of winter festivities, here's a glimpse of some unique Christmas and New Year traditions followed around the world.

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If you like to understand the cultural ethos of a city or country, there is no better way than to be present during its festivals and events. These traditions are rooted in history and often have interesting back stories. While the entire world immerses itself in festive cheer on Christmas and New Year, some communities also follow unique customs on these occasions.



GIANT STRAW STATUE OF THE GÄVLE GOAT

Every year in Sweden, the town of Gävle sees a giant straw statue of the Yule goat. The 13-m tall statue adorns the Castle Square, a tradition that dates back to 1966. As legend goes, Christmas elves would ride the Yule goat to deliver gifts door to door to sleeping children. Small straw goats are also a popular Christmas decoration in Sweden. The Yule goat, which has been mentioned in the Guinness Book of World Records, sees crowds throng to it. Also interesting is how around 3 pm, many Swedes watch the 1958 Walt Disney special on Donald Duck called *Kalle Anka*. Only then can the celebrations begin, some believe.



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Sweden



WATCH OUT

Visit the vibrant Christmas markets at Gammelstad in Swedish Lapland, Jämtli, Jämtland, and Stenegård, Hälsingland for its wide collection of handicrafts. As you explore the places, try *glögg* or mulled wine with *pepparkaka* or gingerbread. The Christmas markets at Falun Mine in Dalarna, Skansen in Stockholm, and Taxinge Castle in Nykvarn are also worth a visit.



EATING SOBA NOODLES



The Japanese tradition of eating *soba* noodles on New Year's Eve is based on the custom of reflecting on the past year and wishing for a healthy and prosperous year ahead. The *toshikoshi soba* tradition is centuries old and is said to date back to the Kamakura period, when a Buddhist temple gave *soba* to poor people on New Year's Eve. The tradition is believed to bring good fortune as *soba* is easy to break while eating, a symbolic connection to breaking out of the year gone past.



WATCH OUT

Try ceremonial foods like *ozoni*, a soup that is usually eaten with mochi rice cakes, which locals believe represent longevity. Another New Year specialty is the *osechi*, a traditional box with an eclectic collection of foods. Visit a shrine or a temple on the first day of the new year, also known as *hatsumode*.





Every year, Caracas in Venezuela closes roads to traffic between December 16 and 24 to allow people to use their roller skates to get to the early morning Christmas mass. It is believed that this tradition comes as an alternative to sledding, as this is the time of the year when the place has pleasant weather. While skating to the mass, people also tug on the ends of the strings dangling out of windows on their way. These strings are said to be tied by children to their toes.



WATCH OUT

Do not forget to jive to the notes of the local *Gaita*, a type of folk music, which uses a variety of musical instruments. Do not miss local delicacies like *hallacas*, *tamale*-style delights and *pan de jamon*, a ham-olive raisin bread. The *ensalada de gallina*, which is a chicken salad, and *quesillo*, a type of dessert, are must-try here.



If you are a bibliophile, you must be in Iceland for Christmas; after all, it is time for *Jolabokaflod* or the Christmas book flood. Since 1944, the Icelandic book trade publishes a catalog of new launches every year, which is sent to every household around the holiday season. Locals buy and gift books to each other as a way of promoting reading. You can read too — just find your corner, grab a cup of hot cocoa, and enjoy.



WATCH OUT

Stop at the Christmas markets for a taste of all things local. Hlemmur Mathöll Food Hall is the Christmas market that sees an amalgamation of top-notch restaurants, bakeries, cafés, and ice-cream shops that come together to ensure you are on a gastronomic journey. Ice skating at Ingólfstorg in the middle of downtown Reykjavik is also good fun. The big Christmas market in Hafnarfjörður is another must-see for local delicacies, local handicrafts, festive decorations, and a horse-driven carriage ride.

WATCHING THE BALL DROP

USA

Started in 1907, the tradition of watching the ball drop is held annually at the Times Square Building in New York. The ball that has been redesigned a few times is about 12 ft in diameter and is illuminated with over 32,000 LED lamps. The dropping of the ball is timed to coincide with the exact moment of the start of the new year. The buzz around Times Square, however, begins evening onwards on December 31, when the area resembles a fair with confetti, balloons, people in hats, musical performances, and more.



JUMPING SEVEN WAVES

Brazil

Party-loving Brazilians make a beeline for the beach on New Year's Eve, dressed in white for luck and peace for the next year. The locals believe that jumping over seven waves, throwing flowers into the water, and burying candles in the sand will make the sea goddess bless them with good luck and happiness. Plus, one gets to make a wish with each wave.



WATCH OUT

Do not miss the Christmas markets like Bryant Park Winter Village by Bank of America, FAD Market, Astoria Holiday Market, Queens Craft Brigade, and Union Square Holiday Market. Dig into traditional dishes like *black-eyed peas* and *lentils*, which are considered auspicious, apart from other delicacies like fondue, cookies and pastries.



WATCH OUT

Head to Brazil's hottest beach parties on New Year's Eve at Copacabana Beach, Porto Seguro, and other places, and get a taste of the regional cuisines. Attend celebrations at Litoral Norte that has a jaw-droppingly stunning landscape or go hiking like the locals at Visconde de Mauá.



HANGING AN ONION

If you are in Greece during the New Year, you cannot miss the sight of bunches of onions hanging outside doors. This is because the Greeks believe that onions are a sign of rebirth and growth. The *Kali Hera*, or 'good hands', is yet another tradition where gifts are exchanged. The Greeks believe that receiving gifts on the first day of the year is a sign of prosperity throughout the year. Right before midnight, families turn off the lights in their homes and step out. One among

them then re-enters with their right foot, which is considered lucky. This tradition is called *Kalo Podariko* or 'good footing'. Among the traditions is colourful fireworks that are held across the country, including Athens, Thebes, and Corinth. On the island of Chios in the Aegean Sea, on Easter and New Year, people propel fireworks in a tradition called *rouketopolemos* or the "rocket war"! People also hang pomegranate at doors on New Year for luck.



WATCH OUT

Try festive foods like *vasilopita* or New Year's cake. Traditionally, a small coin or medallion is inserted in the cake and the person who is able to locate it is believed to enjoy great fortune. Also try other dishes like tomato soup, stuffed cabbage and cabbage salad.



PLACING A SHOE BY THE FIRE

In the week upto Christmas, children place one of their shoes by the fireplace in Netherlands. They fill the shoe with carrots, hay, drawings or poetry and hope that they will wake up to gifts from *Sinterklaas* (Saint Nicholas) and his horse in their shoe in return. This ritual is practised on Saint Nicholas Day in a number of countries around the world. Saint Nicholas was revered as the bringer of gifts.



WATCH OUT

Do not forget to collect your Christmas goodies such as chocolate coins and mandarin oranges, two food items associated with the tale of Saint Nicholas. Relish the wide variety of *marzipan* delights, which are available at the festive markets. Also, try festive crunchy cookies called *speculaas*.



Image: unsplash.com