

New Year's Traditions from Around the World

And Their Fun Facts

By **DARSHITA MODI**

Typically, traditional New Year celebrations involve people saying goodbye to the events of the past year and welcoming a new year that holds much promise. Think about how you and your family ring in the New Year. Do you hold a party, or enjoy a nice meal?

Cultural ways and traditions play a big part in how and when the New Year is celebrated. Traditions, or customs that are passed down from generation to generation, range from writing New Year's letters to cracking open the bubbly, to watching elaborate displays of fireworks. Let us look at how the new year is celebrated in diverse cultures around the world.

UNITED STATES

Watching "the ball" drop: Millions of Americans gather around their television sets (or in Times Square, New York City, despite freezing temperatures) to watch "the ball" drop at the stroke of midnight each year. Kicking off in 1907 to ring in January 1908, *New York Times* owner Adolph Ochs created the event to draw attention to the

Times's new headquarters, and it has been an annual spectacle and one of the most popular New Year's Eve celebrations ever since.

BRAZIL

Heading to the beach: People usually go to the beach, since it is summer in the South American country. Immediately after midnight, you are supposed to "jump seven waves while making seven wishes," says Hudson Bohr, a Brazilian photographer based in New York City. The [tradition](#) is rooted in paying homage to Yemanjá, the goddess of water. "Before you get in the water, you're supposed to wear all white, as it symbolizes purity," says Bohr.

SPAIN

Eating 12 grapes: The Spanish start their new year by [eating 12 grapes](#), which symbolize each strike of the clock. The tradition of [las doce uvas de la suerte](#) started in the late 19th century and is believed to ward off evil while boosting your chances of a prosperous and lucky new year. This will only work, however, if you manage to eat all the grapes in a matter of seconds, since they need to be gone by the time the clock finishes striking midnight.

INDIA

While January 1 is certainly celebrated there, the New Year celebration in India has [many different dates](#). *Diwali* is the most popular. It's celebrated in the months of October and November, but the specific day of celebration changes from region to region.

JAPAN

Eating soba noodles: People in Japan kick off the new year by eating a warm bowl of soba noodles. The [tradition](#) dates to the Kamakura period and is tied to a Buddhist temple giving out the noodles to the poor. Because the long, thin noodles are firm yet easy to bite, it is believed eating them symbolizes a literal break away from the old year.

FRANCE

Feasting with Champagne: While the notion of drinking wine in France is about as groundbreaking as florals for spring, the French up the ante and go all out on Champagne to celebrate the new year. There is usually plenty of dancing and party hopping. Sparkling wines are paired with oysters, turkey, goose, or a Cornish hen.

DENMARK

Throwing old plates: Chucking plates at your friends usually signals a conversation gone wrong. In Denmark, however, New Year's Eve traditions like this bring your loved one's good luck. Tradition has it that the more broken kitchenware you accumulate on your doorstep, the better off you will be.

PHILIPPINES

Serving 12 round fruits: On New Year's Eve, families in the Philippines make sure to [serve 12 round fruits](#)—such as apples, grapes, and plums—which are believed to represent prosperity due to their shape, which mirrors coins. As for the lucky number, each fruit represents one month out of the year.

MEXICO

Giving the gift of homemade tamales: Families gather to make New Year's Eve food—specifically a tamale, which is corn dough stuffed with meat, cheese, and veggies wrapped in husks—and then distribute them to loved ones on New Year's Eve. On New Year's Day, [the warm pockets are often served with menudo](#), a traditional Mexican soup made from cow's stomach.

GREECE

An onion is traditionally hung on the front door of homes on New Year's Eve in [Greece](#) as a symbol of rebirth in the New Year. On New Year's Day, parents wake their children by tapping them on the head with the onion.

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