

Happy New Year Around The World

The celebration of the New Year is the oldest of all holidays. It was first observed in ancient Babylon about 4000 years ago. From 2000 BC, the Babylonian New Year began with the first New Moon (actually the first visible crescent) after the Vernal Equinox (first day of spring).

The Romans continued to observe the New Year in late March, but their calendar soon became out of synchronization with the sun. In order to set the calendar right, the Roman senate, in 153 BC, declared January 1 to be the beginning of the New Year. However, in AD 567 the Council of Tours abolished January first in favour of March as the start of a new year, varying the actual day to coincide with the Vernal Equinox. The first day of the Western New Year was moved back to January 1 with the advent of the Gregorian Calendar by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582. Cultures using lunar and solar calendars still celebrate at the time of the first New Moon after the Vernal Equinox.

Over the years different cultures have prepared and celebrated New Year in many different ways. Most traditions surrounding New Year are intended to bring good luck during the year ahead. Here are some examples:

- In Venezuela if you wear yellow underwear at New Year, or in Brazil wear white clothes it is good luck. In Mexico wearing red underwear at New Year will help you to find love.
- There is another South American tradition that has been passed on from the Spanish tradition of eating 12 grapes each time the bell rings at midnight. This can get quite messy trying to keep pace with the bell!
- In Bolivia families make beautiful little wood or straw dolls to hang outside their homes to bring good luck.
- In Japan, New Year or *Shogatsu*, is a most important holiday, held from January 1 to January 3. Years are traditionally viewed as completely separate, with each New Year providing a fresh start. Consequently all duties are supposed to be completed by the end of the year while bonenkai parties (year forgetting parties) are held to forget the old year's worries and troubles. Homes and entrances are decorated with ornaments made of pine, bamboo and plum trees, and clothes and houses are cleaned. At midnight Japanese people wait to hear the Joya-no-Kane or midnight tolling of Tsuru-Gane, the great bells or gongs at Japans Buddhist temples. The Joya-no-Kane consists of 108 solemn tolls on the temple bells. According to Buddhism, humans have 108 sins and that by hearing the bells toll that number they can be relieved of all of them.
- In Korea people traditionally wear clothes called 'Hanbock' on New Years Day. In the morning younger generations bow to older generations. After bowing, older people give brand new money to the children. This means good luck and good wishes. 'Dduk-gook' is eaten on this day and is a kind of soup made of rice cakes.
- In Germany, New Years Eve is the night of Holy Sylvester, an old tradition celebrating Saint Sylvester 1st. During this time guests are invited to attend a 'Sylvester Ball' and may participate in the custom of Bleigiessen. A small piece of lead is melted over a flame in an old spoon and dropped into a bowl of cold water. From the shape you can supposedly tell your fortune for the coming year. At midnight revellers wish each other "Gutes neues Jahr".
- In Denmark it is a good sign to find your door heaped with a pile of broken dishes at New Year. Old dishes are saved year round to throw them at the homes where friends live. Many broken dishes are a symbol that you have many friends.
- The Swiss believe good luck comes from letting a drop of cream land on the floor while in Belgium farmers wish their animals Happy New Year for blessings.

Sources: <http://wilstar.com/holidays/newyear.htm>
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