

Where's the party? New Year's Eve celebrations around the world

Guardian
writers

Thursday 31 December 2015
06.30 GMT

New York

The best known New Year's Eve attraction in New York City is at Times Square: it's the "ball drop". A big, brightly lit sphere is hoisted to the top of a pole and drops as the clock strikes 12. Officially, you can't drink on the streets in New York. But you might notice people with beer cans in brown paper bags, cocktails secreted in McDonald's cups and booze in hip flasks. As you can imagine, Times Square gets pretty busy. And touristy. Brooklyn is a good alternative. There are fireworks and live music at Grand Army plaza, at the north end of [Prospect Park](#), from 11pm. But there's more to do than watch fireworks explode and balls drop. If, like me, you don't mind being a hipster stereotype, there's a number of warehouse parties around Brooklyn's Bushwick and Williamsburg areas. My plan is to go to one until as late as possible. Then, on New Year's Day, engage in a different type of New York tradition: the [Coney Island Polar Bear club](#) New Year's Day swim. It's a swim in the Atlantic, first thing in the morning. I think it will be cold.

Adam Gabbatt is a writer-presenter for the Guardian, based in New York

Madrid



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Revellers in Sol Square. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

The archetypal Madrid New Year's Eve plan is to squeeze into the heaving Puerta del Sol square and, when the

clocktower chimes midnight, swallow 12 lucky grapes and roar “feliz año nuevo”. But the reality for most is more homely, and more fun. Come midnight, families and friends – after a seafood, jamón and perhaps lamb feast – watch the clocktower countdown on their living room TV and choke on those lucky grapes together (I’ll be at the in-laws). Midnight is a crescendo of cava clinks and – outside – firecracker armageddon. But we’re just warming up. At 12:01 bars open and we flood the streets, dancing and drinking until that most madrileño all-nighter climax: queuing in the cold dawn for deep-fried churros and warm chocolate solace.

James Blick is co-founder of devourspain.com

Stockholm



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Stadshuskajen Quay. Photograph: Anders Wiklund/Corbis

Ring in the new year in Stockholm is all about your vantage point. Sweden’s photogenic capital sprawls across 14 islands with a labyrinth of waterways, and on New Year’s Eve, its streets are filled with families bundled up in thick coats with stashes of glögg (mulled wine), pepparkakor (gingerbread cookies), and bubbly cider. They head up to some of the best spots, such as Monteliusvägen on Södermalm with marvellous views of Mälaren lake, Gamla stan, Riddarholmen and the City Hall on Kungsholmen; Fåfangan with views towards Gamla stan and Djurgården; and Skinnarviksberget with panoramic views of Riddarfjärden and Kungsholmen – then they await fireworks popping across each island, lighting up the winter sky.

Lola Akinmade Åkerström is editor of [Slow Travel Stockholm](#)

Buenos Aires



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Fireworks explode above Buenos Aires' Saavedra neighbourhood. Photograph: Marcos Brindicci/Reuters/Corbis

Even though Buenos Aires is revered for its lively nightlife, year-end celebrations tend to be quite tame and family oriented. In the hot and humid summer locals go to the beach, while those who stick in town gather with family and friends for a meat asado (barbecue) feast, with lots of sparkling cider, red wine, and Fernet (an amaro bitter) with Coke. When midnight strikes, I make sure to find my way high on a rooftop for a festival of light. The Porteño skyline illuminates with a colourful spectacle, and residents (dangerously) shoot fireworks from balconies and terraces. Shouts of “Feliz Año Nuevo” and even fútbol chants ricochet off the concrete buildings.

Allie Lazar is a food writer based in Buenos Aires, she blogs at pickupthefork.com

San Francisco



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Photograph: Spondylolithesis/Getty Images

San Francisco brings in the new year with a literal bang thanks to an amazing fireworks display. A romantic view can be seen from Ina Coolbrith Park or you can take a boat ride on the bay. The citizens of SF get real flashy this time of year and anything sequined becomes the official fabric of the city. Swanky underground venue [Doc's Lab](#) kicks off 2016 with the North Beach Brass Band. One of my favourite neighbourhoods on NYE is the lively Mission District, which boasts some of the best food in the city and you can laugh your way into the new year with comedy legend Marga Gomez [at Brava Theater](#). Gay nightlife is abundant in the Castro and South of Market neighbourhoods. Personally, I'll be ringing in the new year at the North Bay Cabaret. Wherever you end up on NYE make sure to get out the next day and enjoy the most important meal in SF: brunch. We brunch hella hard.

Wonder Dave is a writer and performer from San Francisco, wonderdave.org who wrote Travel's guide to [San Francisco's gay scene](#)

Bangkok



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Photograph: Getty Images

Thais love any excuse for a party. So it should come as no surprise that we end up celebrating new year twice (and sometimes three times, if we join in on Thai-Chinese new year's celebrations). While Thai New Year – held in April when the hot season really gets going – is our chance to mix merry-making and family with the occasional ferocious water fight, the beginning of a new calendar year is more about flocking to the banks of the Chao Phraya river to watch the fireworks, dance badly in public, and maybe have a tippie or two.

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Tokyo



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Food stalls at Meiji Shrine. Photograph: Alamy

It's no surprise that in the land of the rising sun, the start of a new year is a significant event, but in Tokyo don't expect the massive parties and firework displays so prevalent in other major cities. Instead, there is a more introspective vibe and a homage to tradition, as most people spend the early evening eating buckwheat noodles at home with loved ones, before heading out to join the huge crowds for *hatsumode* (the first shrine or temple visit of the year) to pray for good fortune and buy lucky charms for the 12 months ahead. At Meiji shrine there is a festival atmosphere, with colourful food stalls and the din of distant ringing bells, as thousands of people patiently shuffle towards the shrine's inner sanctum from midnight onwards, with festivities (and trains) running until well after dawn. Alternatively, escape the city and hop on a train to Mount Takao (one hour from Tokyo station) to view the sunrise from a sacred mountaintop.

Tom Fay is a journalist based in Japan

Sydney



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Photograph: Getty Images

Sydney relishes its status as the first major city in the world to greet the new year (sorry, Auckland) and attempts to outdo itself annually with ever-bigger fireworks displays on the harbour. On the night, the waterfront areas nearest the Opera House and the bridge are predictably choked with spectators, but there are several secluded green spaces fringing the harbour where it's possible to turn up relatively late and still secure a patch of grass for your picnic blanket (just don't expect any local to reveal where they are). For every family or couple that celebrates the evening alfresco, there is another that uses New Year's Eve as an excuse to stay in and cook a big meal, then watch the fireworks on the television. There's even a televised 9pm test run for those who want to be in bed before the clock strikes 12.

Dan F Stapleton is a journalist from Sydney

Cape Town



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Beachgoers enjoy the sunset in Camps Bay, Cape Town. Photograph: Kim Ludbrook/epa/Corbis

The city at the foot of Table Mountain takes advantage of its natural splendour to offer a range of new year celebrations. Locals choose between beach parties hosted by the likes of [Pacha Ibiza](#), psychedelic trance gatherings, such as [Rezonance](#), picnics on wine estates, fireworks at the [V&A Waterfront](#), and no end of themed events, comedy evenings, dinner-show cabarets and swish rooftop soirees. In practice, the typical Capetonian's mix of laid-back cool and fear of missing the big party – or wave – will render them unable to commit to buying tickets for these events. The typical NYE will start with a sunset picnic on Clifton Fourth Beach, a [cable car ride up Table Mountain](#) (last car down at 9pm) or a walk up Lion's Head. Then it's on to the bars of Long Street, where punters can pull their own pints and down unlimited beer until the bells at [Beerhouse's](#) Open Tap party. If local hipsters do make it to a venue, it will be an old favourite such as Yours Truly bar; most will more likely stagger between house parties in Woodstock, Obs and Mowbray. A tip for a memorable evening is a candlelit picnic in the [Kirstenbosch National Botanic Garden](#), with live music by local sample-folk-meister Jeremy Loops; needless to say, tickets are still available.

James Bainbridge is a travel writer and tour guide, [myriadafrica.com](#)

Copenhagen



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Fireworks show in Tivoli park. Photograph: Alamy

Things that dominate New Year's Eve in Copenhagen: drunk people and fireworks, and drunk people with fireworks. A lot of Copenhageners imagine they will celebrate New Year's Eve attending a swanky ball with hundreds of interesting and attractive strangers. What most of us will actually be doing is attending a dinner with people we have known for ages spending hours debating whose party to crash later. Others will be gathering in thousands at midnight at the town hall square, armed with rockets, Roman candles and champagne, ready for the party to evolve. This may include hugging and snogging strangers in a state of champagne-induced bliss. What everyone will be doing on New Year's Day: tending to their hangovers while watching the new year's ski jump in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, on the television. What will I be doing on New Year's Eve? Celebrating with a small group of friends and their children I find pyrotechnics and alcohol to be a tricky combination, so I will avoid the streets and enjoy the fireworks from the balcony. I'm done slowly freezing to death while searching for a good party. I suppose I will just have to live with not hugging or snogging a stranger.

Andrea Bak is a journalist from Copenhagen

St Petersburg



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New Year's Eve light show in St Petersburg's Palace Square. Photograph: Ruslan Shamukov/Corbis

St Petersburg city centre lights up for the New Year's Eve – strict classical buildings give up the attention in favour of twinkling lights, and the naturally gloomy people on the streets laugh and shout as they watch fireworks being shot from the Peter and Paul Fortress over the Neva river. The smell of champagne and clementines and the shouts of “Oura!” (hooray) and “S novim godom!” (happy new year) fill the air. Nevsky Prospect is closed for traffic for one night and people go out to roam the streets. While celebrations in Moscow clubs and bars are known to be more glamorous – with longer queues, strict face control, and higher prices – St Petersburg, known as the bar capital of Russia for its artsy bohemian bashes, is more welcoming. Parties with lots of dancing take place at the Konyushennaya square bars and clubs such as [Mosaïque](#) and [Stackenschneider](#). Dumskaya street is another popular destination, with the karaoke bar [Poison](#) proving to be the most notorious, and hipsters and intelligentsia favour cafes and bars on Rubinshteina street.

[Sasha Raspopina](#) is a journalist based in St Petersburg

Gothenburg



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Fireworks above the Gothenburg skyline. Photograph: Stefan Isaksson

It might be chilly in Sweden in the middle of winter, but the best place to spend New Year's Eve in Gothenburg is outdoors: on one of the many hills surrounding the city centre. From there, amid a huddle of revellers in thick jackets clutching bottles of beer and champagne, you'll get a great view of the fireworks that light up the sky and the dark waters of the Göta älv. Afterwards, head on down to either Andra Långgatan or Avenyn to continue the party until the sun rises. But pace yourself: at this latitude, that sun will be a while.

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Berlin



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Brandenburger Tor. Photograph: Axel Schmies/Corbis

One can argue about almost everything else ... but Berlin knows how to party. Almost one million Berliners (and tourists) take to the streets to enjoy the fireworks at Brandenburger Tor, the night's most crowded and popular spot, where you'll see people coming from all parts of the planet to rejoice together and drink beer and schnapps. For those who want to carry on the celebrations until morning, the city offers an abundance of club nights in popular venues such as Berghain, where the party runs straight through to Saturday evening. As with most permanent residents, however, I prefer to avoid the river of tourists, having a dinner at home with friends and later going to a rooftop to toast the new year above the city lights.

Cesare Alemanni is editor of [Berlin Quarterly](#)

London



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Photograph: Lystseva Marina/Corbis

New Year's Eve in London has its own ambience: that of blind-drunk survival. Every year the capital becomes an industrious end-of-days assault course, as costumed squads litter the streets and the tube turns into a 24-hour nightclub. Choice is another defining factor: parties are sardined into every restaurant, bar and pub back room, all vying to charge you £20 to see their mate DJ. And thousands who "just want to have a chilled one" jostle around the river for the annual fireworks display, only to lose everyone in the rush to the tube afterwards. Tiring of these scenarios, the professional partier knows that New Year's Day is the new New Year's Eve. While the rest of the city resembles those opening scenes of *24 Hours Later*, these Londoners emerge fresh-faced to enjoy a dance in one of the many [Berlin and Ibiza-channeling ravespots that pop up on 1 January](#). Me, I'll be escaping to Havana, but if I was London-bound I'd no doubt be found seeing in 2016 here. After all, isn't celebrating better than just surviving?

Kate Hutchinson is deputy editor of the Guide

Rio de Janeiro



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Crowds celebrate the new year at Copacabana Beach. Photograph: Alamy

In the thick of a crowd, in the light, sound and colour of a 16-minute fireworks extravaganza, Copacabana beach on New Year's Eve may sound like an unlikely place to find spiritual communion. But on the candle-lit sand and even on the avenue above the beach, a sense of stillness and joy prevails in the white-dressed throng. By the water, people will release flowers into the waves in honour of the goddess Iemanjá – more than usual this year, perhaps, since according to the Afro-Brazilian religions Candomblé and Umbanda, 2016 is ruled by Iemanjá *and* Oxalá (god of peace and creation). Also, this year, in honour of the Rio Olympics, the fireworks display will climax with a 2,000-drummer drumroll, as the sky turns bright white. Away from the beach, there are many fixed-price parties in places such as the [Museu de Arte Moderna](#) and [Sociedade Germânia](#) in Gávea, and more economical events at Rio's many hostels. But best of all is to get yourself invited to a house party, or tag along to one with your new best friends from the beach. Failing that, you can't go far wrong on the streets of the Lapa neighbourhood, where the year-round party crowd ramps it up one more notch.

Claire Rigby is a journalist based in São Paulo

Rome



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Fireworks light up the sky above the Colosseum. Photograph: Getty Images

Rome's magnificent piazzas host spontaneous, as well as city-sponsored parties. Although this year's official festivities remain in limbo thanks to empty public coffers, Romans will nevertheless take to the streets, bundled in parkas and clutching bottles of beer and wine to numb them to the relative cold. I spent most of 2015 in the crowded historical centre, so to ring in the new year, I'll be doing the opposite and going to a rooftop party on the Janiculum Hill overlooking Rome, prime position for an eyeful of the midnight fireworks displays. For similarly sweeping views, visitors can go to the Janiculum's Fontanone, a monumental fountain, for a impressive front row seats. Meanwhile, down in the centre, expect tipsy crowds with blow horns, firecrackers, and a healthy buzz to be partying well into the first morning of 2016.

Katie Parla is a food and travel writer

Mumbai



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Waterfront at Marine Drive. Photograph: Kevin Frayer/AP

In my many years here, I have come to realise Mumbai is a sentient being. Alive, pulsating and ever-growing. Home to people with diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, there's always reasons to celebrate. New Year's Eve is no different. This year there's governmental permission for restaurants and bars to stay open till 5am and foreign liquor retail shops can do business till 1am, as opposed to the previous deadline of 10.30pm. This means Deepak wines in Bandra, one of *the* most popular wines shops in the suburbs, will be raking in the money! My gang is planning on stocking up on alcohol and has booked suites at a hotel. We aren't very keen on going to a club, because all of us are on the sadder side of 25, and spending 3,000-4,000 rupees to go to a club full of strangers doesn't seem like such a good idea anymore. As for the more public celebrations, midnight at Marine Drive sea face in south Mumbai is a delightful sight. People gather and let loose many flying Chinese lanterns, though lots of people have the same idea and the likelihood of you getting stuck in traffic is extremely high.

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