



Confetti falls at midnight on New Year's Eve in New York's Times Square.

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By Charles Apple | THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Can you believe that New Year's Eve is upon us already? Here's a look at some of the New Year's Eve and New Year's Day traditions in the U.S. and around the world:

New Year's resolutions

In ancient Babylonia, folks would renew their oath to the king during a 12-day-long New Year's festival they called Akitu that was observed every March. The Romans carried on that tradition and, by the 1740s, Methodists were renewing their religious commitments on New Year's Eve.

A New Year's kiss

This comes from an old English tradition of "saining," or seeking blessings or protection during the yuletide season — back before "Christmas" was even a thing.

Dropping a giant ball in Times Square

Sailors of old would set their shipboard chronometers according to "time balls" that were dropped at certain times. The first big time ball was used in Portsmouth, England, in 1829, and the first one in the U.S. was used in Washington, D.C., in 1845.

The New York Times first dropped one atop its headquarters building in Times Square in 1907 to replace the fireworks that had been banned that year by safety-conscious city officials. Since then, the Times has moved — twice, in fact — but the tradition lives on, with about a million people attending every year.

Due to the pandemic, the ball drop was held with no crowds present on Jan. 1, 2021.

New Year's traditions around the world

SPAIN

As the clock begins to strike 12 on New Year's Eve, people eat a grape for each chime — 12 grapes in all, one for each month — for good luck and prosperity. The catch is: They have to finish the 12th grape before the final chime. They call this uvas de la suerte: grapes of good luck.

IRELAND

Single women sleep with a sprig of mistletoe under their pillows on New Year's Eve. The idea is that the mistletoe will affect their sleep and help them find the man of their dreams. People also bang bread against their walls to drive away evil spirits.

SCOTLAND

Folks believe in what they call "Hogmanay," or First Footing: For good luck, the first person through the threshold of your home after midnight on New Year's should be a dark-haired male ... carrying a lump of coal, some salt, shortbread and a "wee bit" of whiskey.

NETHERLANDS

People eat oliebolten, which is deep-fried dough. Ancient Germanic tribes thought the goddess Perchta would cut open their stomachs and fill them with trash on New Year's Eve. The fat from the dough would cause her sword to slide right off.

DENMARK

Broken dishes at New Year's are considered lucky, so folks go around breaking dishware on the doorsteps of their friends and family. The more shards in front of the door, the luckier the new year will be. It's also thought to be a great way of working out aggression from the previous year.

ESTONIA

People eat all day long on New Year's Day — preferably seven, nine or 12 meals: Those are the luckiest numbers. The more they eat, the luckier the new year. Then, they stand on chairs and leap to the floor at the stroke of midnight. Leaping into the new year brings good luck.

RUSSIA

On New Year's Eve, people write down their wishes, burn the paper with a candle and then mix the ashes with a glass of champagne — which they swallow at midnight. While under Communist rule, Russians weren't allowed to have Christmas trees, so they put up New Year's trees instead.

LATIN AMERICA

The color of underwear people wear is important: Red brings romance, yellow brings financial success and white brings peace in the new year. In Argentina, people believe that eating beans on New Year's Day will help them keep their current job or find a better one.

PERU

In one village, people start out the year with a huge fistfight. This is aimed at settling past differences so they can wipe the slate clean for the new year.

CHILE

New Year's Eve Masses are held in cemeteries, rather than in the usual churches, so people can be with their deceased family members and include them in their New Year's Eve celebrations.

BRAZIL

Everyone wears white for good luck. On New Year's Eve, folks go to the beach and jump over seven waves as they roll in. They believe a wish will come true for each wave they can jump. People also toss white flowers and candles into the ocean as an offering to the water goddess Yemoja to ask for her blessing.

CZECH REPUBLIC

People look into the future to see their fortunes by cutting an apple in half on New Year's Eve. If the core of the apple looks like a star, that means good luck for everyone there. If it looks like a cross, then someone at the New Year's Eve party will fall ill that year.

SOUTH AFRICA

Folks in Johannesburg's Hillbrow suburb celebrate the new year by throwing their old appliances and furniture — refrigerators, microwave ovens, beds and so on — out a window or from the top of high-rise apartment buildings. Police there issue "flying fridge" warnings every year.

TURKEY

As soon as the clock strikes midnight on New Year's, folks sprinkle salt on their doorsteps for good luck, peace and prosperity in the new year.

JAPAN

Folks at Buddhist temples observe the new year by ringing their bells 108 times, one for each of the human sins they believe in, with the final toll at the stroke of midnight. People also celebrate by eating a bowl of soba noodles — the long noodles are symbolic of a long, healthy life.

Sources: the New York Times, PBS, History.com, Oprah magazine, Good Housekeeping, LiveScience.com, BestLifeOnline.com