11 Holiday Celebrations Around the World—InternationalLiving.com

As the holiday period comes closer, U.S. expats around the world are celebrating in many different ways in their new homes. A report just released from the editors at InternationalLiving.com, details 11 holiday traditions from across the globe—each offering its own unique flavor of festivities.

BALTIMORE, Md. (PRWEB) December 18, 2018 -- “One of the great pleasures of spending time abroad comes in experiencing a new place not as a tourist—but as a local. Holiday traditions offer a great window into the culture and values of a place. With our worldwide network of editors and correspondents, we’re able to shine a light on some curious, interesting, and what many folks in the States might deem ‘out-of-the-ordinary’ celebrations—from the burning of fireworks-filled effigies to the making of tamales.”

Here are 11 ways that different cultures around the world celebrate during this holiday season.

Bali—Galungan

“For the Hindu Balinese, Galungan is observed twice a year based on the Pawukon 210-day calendar,” says Josephine Brierley, IL Bali Correspondent. “This year, Galungan will fall on December 26, which means all of the island will be celebrating in their own very special way.

“Galungan is a Balinese Holiday which celebrates the victory of dharma over ahdarma, (the triumph of good over evil). As legend goes, the Hindu God, Indra, battled with the Balinese king, Mayadenawa, to ensure the Balinese people were entitled to live in the Hindu way. It’s a big happy celebration where people eat good food, then dress up in their traditional clothing and visit temples and families.

“The Balinese believe their ancestors return to visit earth on this day, and it’s a day of giving thanks and remembering those who have left. The families must be welcoming and hospitable to the spirits through prayers and offerings. The local temples are all decorated brightly and are crowded and colorful.

“The most obvious sign of Galungan is the many Penjor lining the streets. They are intricately decorated, tall bamboo poles adorned with offerings suspended from them, creating an arch across all roads as they stand outside each person’s home. The Penjor are created by the men of the family, who are extremely proud of their artwork.

“The celebration lasts for 10-days, during which families get together for fun. The end of the festival is marked by Kuningan, when the ancestral spirits leave.”

Colombia—Little Candles Night

Christmas in Colombia is a celebration of lights, food, music, family and friends that lasts from early December until mid-January. Traditions and celebrations vary by region and city, but all are held with the idea of enjoying the season.

“One of the most interesting celebrations is Little Candles Night to commemorate the eve of the Immaculate Conception and the unofficial start of the Christmas season for the entire country,” says Nancy Kiernan, IL...
Colombia Correspondent. “The festival begins at sunset on December 7 and ends at sunrise on December 8.

“Candles and paper lanterns line the windowsills, porches and balconies of people’s homes as well as sidewalks, streets and parks in both rural areas and the big cities. Some neighborhoods close the streets to cars, so the people can walk in and amongst the various displays in front of people’s houses. It is not uncommon for residents to invite complete strangers into their homes to enjoy a drink, something to eat and listen to music.

Costa Rica—Tamale Making

A classic Christmas holiday tradition in Costa Rica is tamale making—a family and multigenerational matter.

“Tamale are one of the most popular Christmas traditions in Costa Rica,” says Kathleen Evans, IL Coastal Costa Rica Correspondent. “Tamales are made from corn flour and are filled with a variety of different ingredients, such as potato puree, rice, vegetables, garlic and onions, and shredded pork or chicken or beef, all wrapped in banana leaves (not corn husks which you see in many other countries) and tied with string into squares and boiled. Two tamales tied together are called a piña.

“Women gather in the kitchen for a massive all-day project of tamale making in December and share (or sell) them throughout the month.

“Costa Rica’s Christmas celebration typically begins on Christmas Eve, or ‘Noche Bueno,’ when people visit family and friends for lively dinners of roast pork leg, tamales, pastries, and other desserts—we love our sweets, here. Rompope or eggnog, heavy with rum, is often served while family members exchange presents before midnight.”

Ecuador— The Pase del Niño Parade

“The holidays are absolutely my favorite time of year in Cuenca, especially the Pase del Niño parade,” says Donna Stiteler, IL Cuenca, Ecuador, Correspondent.

“The Pase del Niño (Passing of the Child) starts with a Christmas Eve parade downtown but is actually a three-month-long activity, beginning the first Sunday after Advent and continuing to Carnival in early March.

“I’m lucky because my house sits on the parade route, so I’m treated almost every weekend to a line of girls dressed as angels riding on the backs of elaborately dressed horses right in front of my house.

“The costumes are homemade and proud fathers hoist their daughters onto the horses and parade with their entire family beaming. The festival combines Catholic and indigenous traditions. It starts with an eight-hour parade downtown, which includes floats and cars decorated with flowers making it an Ecuadorian answer to the San Francisco’s Rose parade.

“Hundreds of children watch the parade dressed in homemade costumes while watching bands, dancers, stilt walkers, street performers, and all types of interpretations of biblical characters (imagine the Three Wise Men riding on Harley Davidsions) stroll by while people roast pigs and chickens on street corners. The parade has approximately 50,000 participants, with about 200,000 people watching from sidewalks or balconies.

“Seeing families bond over this tradition and their commitment to their faith is a reminder to me of what
Christmas is all about.”

Ireland—Wren Boys

The Wren is a tradition where men and boys paint their faces and dress up in old clothes and straw hats, travelling from house to house in rural areas playing music, singing, and dancing. It is celebrated in Ireland on St. Stephen’s Day, December 26.

In previous times, the wren bird was hunted on this day and an effigy of the bird was carried about in a holly branch or cage.

The ritual is associated with the belief the bird betrayed Irish warriors by beating their wings on their shields, making noise and waking their sleeping adversaries, and so saving the enemy camp. It is also held responsible for betraying St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, by flapping its wings to attract his pursuers when he was hiding.

Most commonly practiced in the southwestern counties of Cork and Kerry, today some towns host parades and stages with each Wren group performing before marching through the town holding pitch forks and playing music.

Mexico— Three Kings Day

Celebrations usually take place on Christmas Eve in Mexico, with carols, a big meal and maybe mass at midnight. However, a few days later is an even bigger day.

“Three Kings Day or El dia de Reyes, is an important celebration in Mexico,” says Don Murray, IL Riviera Maya Correspondent. “Recognized on January 6th, this is the day that many locals exchange gifts to celebrate the biblical story of three kings visiting baby Jesus and is the traditional day children receive Christmas gifts.

“Depending on local customs and family traditions, this may also be the day that Santa delivers gifts to small children.”

Belize—New Year’s Eve

“New Year’s Eve is a huge night in Belize,” says Laura Diffendal, IL Belize Correspondent. “There’s a party in every major town with fireworks and vast parties. Belize is a very festive country, and everyone gets behind the celebrations.

“In San Pedro, the main party is in the Central Park area, made festive by many vendors, local food and drinks, and the bars that line the zone. It’s a great place to sit at an open-air bar and people watch. After the party in the park, the crowd tends to move to the many beachfront bars and docks to settle in for the fireworks. Of course, the party doesn't end after the fireworks—it goes on late into the night…or the next morning!”

Panama—Burning of Effigies

New Year’s is very interesting in Panama. In rural parts, people tend to burn effigies representing the old year—it's their way of letting go of the past to embrace the new year. Effigies are often dressed as celebrities or
public figures.

“The first day of January, Panamanians do more than usher in the coming year,” says Jessica Ramesch, IL Panama Editor. “It’s also a time to purge the evils of the past. Tradition in rural parts is not to make New Year resolutions, but to let go of negativity with a symbolic act: the burning of effigies.

“The tradition has evolved from simple beginnings, when the typical “muñeco de año viejo” or “old year doll” had a long beard, a cigarette in its mouth and a bottle of rum in its hands. People would place placards in front of the “dolls” or dummies, on which they had written every bad thing that had happened during the year, from political events to rising food prices.

“Today dummies made by local families can have unremarkable faces...a few lines symbolizing eyes, nose, and mouth drawn on a balloon. But the ones sold by craftsmen bear the likeness of ‘naughty’ celebrities or politicians and can cost $80 to $300.

“These days you’ll see the best ones displayed along the PanAmerican Highway thanks to local competitions in which there are sometimes cash prizes ($300-$600) for the most creative. The dolls represent the past year and its events, especially any let-downs or worries. For the religious, they represent Judas and so many Panamanians call the dolls ‘Judases.’

“A Judas can be made of whatever materials are on hand...coconuts, newspaper, leaves, old clothes, toilet paper, papier mâché, even gypsum, but the most important ingredients are the bombitas or small fireworks used to fill up the body!

“With some gas or starter fluid (do not try this at home), the dolls are set on fire during the first minutes of January 1. Stand back!”

Portugal—Christmas Eve Celebrations

“As you might expect in a predominantly Roman Catholic country, Christmas still retains religious significance for much of the population,” says Tricia Pimental, IL Portugal Correspondent. “That’s not to say that Santa Claus, known here as Pai Natal, doesn’t make an appearance, though. And, as you also might expect, food and drink play an important role in the celebration of the holiday. On Christmas Eve families gather together for their consoada, a time to visit when traditionally bacalhau (dried, salted cod), is eaten together with boiled potatoes and cabbage.

“Often people attend church at midnight afterwards. During the Missa do Galo (Mass of the Rooster), a representation of the Baby Jesus is finally placed in the presépio, or manger scene, every church has had adorning its interior or exterior for the past weeks.

“Many homes also have nativity scenes. Traditionally, prior to departing for church, parents secretly put the Christ Child in place, delighting the returning children.

“In certain areas an enormous fire called the madeiro is built outside the church before the service begins, creating an inviting area to greet neighbors and stay warm.

“Another special occurrence on Christmas Eve is that the priest will baptize children free of charge—a nice gift
for working parents.”

Spain—Eating Grapes at Midnight

New Year’s Eve in Spain is a time to party…and to eat grapes on the stroke of midnight. It’s both a tradition and a superstition, which very few Spaniards ignore for fear of ruining their luck for the coming year.

“The tradition is to try to eat one grape for each stroke of midnight, and to finish all 12 grapes by the last stroke,” says IL Editor Glynna Prentice. “If you do, you have good luck for the next year.”

It makes the stroke of midnight a bit more focused than in other countries, as everybody tries to down the required 12 grapes before the chimes end—although there are often plenty of laughs as giddy participants struggle to cram the grapes into their mouths fast enough. It’s also important not to get over-energetic and start eating your grapes before the first midnight strikes—this is said to bring bad luck.

Thailand—NYE Lanterns

“Though Thailand’s New Year (Songkran) happens in April each year, Thai people by nature love a party and have embraced our New Year’s Eve celebrations with all-out gusto,” says Michael Cullen, IL Thailand Correspondent.

“If in Bangkok, expect world-standard fireworks displays over the Chao Phraya River—best viewed from the city’s renowned skyscraper rooftop bars and restaurants. This is repeated in all the regional cities, popular beach and island destinations across the Kingdom.

“But for a more cultural New Year’s Eve, try Chiang Mai where thousands of people parade along the streets in the old town holding colorful paper lanterns with lit candles inside.

“At the stroke of midnight, everyone releases their lanterns into the air with much merriment, partying, and fireworks. Since moving to Thailand, I must say I love the unabashed fun Thai people add to these New Year’s Eve celebrations.”

The information on the Holiday Celebrations can be found here: 11 Holiday Celebrations Around the World

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