

A night festival scene featuring a large wooden boat with a dragon head at the prow, surrounded by people holding torches.

# Winter Festivals Around the World

 beanstack originals



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Read about the fun ways people celebrate during winter.



Winter can be a tough time. It is cold and often dark. This means there is even more reason than normal to celebrate! Around the world, people hold winter festivals to cheer each other up and enjoy the cold seasons. Discover some of the winter festivals that happen around the globe.

## Dancing Bears

These aren't real bears dancing—but it is a real festival. In eastern Romania, people celebrate winter with the Dancing Bears Festival. Each December, hundreds of people get dressed in realistic-looking bear costumes. They also decorate these costumes with bright red capes and red tassels. Then, they dance through the streets! These “bear dancers” dance to the beat of drums and flutes played by musicians.

In Romanian tradition, these dancing bears helped drive away evil spirits. Today, the festival remains a fun celebration. However, it also takes skill: the bear costumes can be very heavy. Some can even weigh up to 110 pounds (49.9 kg). That's like carrying a giant dog on your back!

### FUN FACT

**People in Slovenia have combined the traditional celebrations of their ancestors with Christmas festivals. Each year, they hold the Dragon Carnival and have a parade featuring a large dragon.**



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Traditional krampuslauf with costumes and wooden masks.

### Spooky Celebrations

In many places, winter celebrations are filled with light and cheer. But they can be spooky, too! Just look at Krampusnacht, or Krampus Night. During Krampus Night, people dress up as a goat-like monster and then spend time jumping out at people or chasing them through the streets! But why?

Krampus Night is thought to have originated in Germany. According to legend, Krampus was a Christmas monster. With his goat head, horns, hooves, and shaggy fur, he certainly fits the part! According to the tales, Krampus would scare and punish naughty children. He was probably a scary story that was told to convince children to behave. These days, however, Krampus Night has become a traditional festival full of both fun and frights. It has even spread across Europe and into the United States.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

**One popular winter activity is the Polar Plunge: people jump into freezing waters! This often helps raise money for charities.**



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Polar plunge swimmers run towards the water.

### Winter Carnival

If you think winter could use a little more fire, then you should definitely check out Scotland's Up Helly Aa Festival. Located in the country's Shetland Islands, this festival celebrates winter with a unique twist: Vikings. To honor their ancestors, people on the islands dress up as Vikings. They hold large axes and torches while parading. They also pull a Viking boat behind them. And at the end of the parade, they burn it!

So, why does this festival of fire and Vikings take place during the winter? It is a way to celebrate Yule. Yule is a holiday that comes from thousands of years ago. It took place during the longest night of the year, known as the Winter Solstice. During this time, people lit large bonfires. They thought this might drive away evil spirits. Today, people continue to celebrate Yule and honor their ancestors at the same time.