



A sign advertising New Year's rituals is seen at a stand of Paloquemao market in Bogota, Colombia, on December 30, 2014. — AFP photos



Decorated wheat ears, used for New Year's rituals, are displayed for sale at a stand of Paloquemao market.



A vendor sells incense and decorations of wheat ears, used for New Year's rituals.

With colored undies, potatoes, LatAm readies for 2015



A cyclist buys a bouquet of yellow flowers.



View of bottles for purification baths, used for New Year's rituals.



A man sells grapes, used in New Year's rituals.



People buy bundles of bitter and sweet herbs for purification baths.



A girl holds wheat ears, used for New Year's rituals.



A woman sells crafts made with wheat ears.

Put on your yellow underwear, toss your potatoes under the bed and grab your suitcase for a walk around the block: as the clock strikes midnight on New Year's Eve in Latin America. From the northern deserts of Mexico to the southern glaciers of Patagonia, the region has a host of colorful New Year's traditions and superstitions, some of them holdovers from colonial times, some homegrown and some blending cultures and customs in Latin Americans' unique style.

In many countries, revelers ring in the new year by walking around the neighborhood with a suitcase, a ritual that is meant to guarantee a year of journeys. "In 2012, I ran around carrying my suitcases and I ended up traveling to Europe. I did the same in 2013 and I went to Argentina. So I'm definitely doing it again this year," said Carla Romero, a communications specialist in the Ecuadorian capital Quito.

Other Latin Americans sweep the floor or clean house to get rid of bad vibes. In Mexico, the custom includes washing the doorstep. In much of the region, revelers eat 12 grapes, cramming one in with each toll of the clock at midnight—a ritual inherited from Spain. The grapes must be divided into six red and six white, according to some keepers of the tradition. "In my family, we put them in little packets so everyone can make their wishes," said Tatiana Ariza, a Colombian housewife.

The wishes must be kept strictly secret "or they won't come true," she added. In Cuba, which had to give up on grapes during a period of severe shortages, people throw buckets of water out their windows to wash away evil—a ritual also followed in Uruguay, which like the communist island usually has hot weather this time of year. Other people put money in their shoes or tie three Chinese coins together with a red ribbon to ensure a prosperous year.

For New Year's decor, many place stalks of wheat, a symbol of prosperity, alongside images of angels or the Virgin Mary. "Changing seasons requires rites. From Central America to Patagonia, these rites to mark the end of the year are inherited from pagan traditions, from Ancient Rome, from the Egyptians, combined with indigenous American traditions and African culture," said Fabian Sanabria, head of the Colombian Institute of Anthropology and History.

Though the rise of secularism has weakened the hold of ritual on people's lives, the uncertainties of today's world have left more individuals from all social classes grasping for the comfort of superstition. "It's the zenith of astrologers and horoscopes," Sanabria told AFP.

Pink undies for love

After noticing the abundance of New Year's traditions, Colombian entrepreneur Santiago Delgado decided to round up seven of them in an "Omen Box," which he sells for \$13. The box includes materials to carry out regional rituals, plus a copy of Psalm 91, a biblical passage traditionally read on New Year's Day. He has sold some 2,000 of them this month. Other ingredients are easily found at the supermarket, from lentils to put in your pocket to potatoes to place under the bed.

"I usually have three potatoes: one I peel completely, one I peel a little bit and another one I leave the skin on," said Victor



Italian-Venezuelan 27-year-old Orne Gil, owner of 'Nowhere Land Tattoo Studio,' tattoos Egyptian-American 30-year-old Zayn Amer, a teacher based in Iraq.

Carreno, a Colombian shopkeeper. "I put them under the bed and at midnight I grab one at random. If I grab the one with the whole skin everything will go well for me. But if I grab the peeled one I'm going to have a tough year." In Peru, women shoppers snap up New Year's underwear in yellow, a color associated with happiness and friendship.

In Uruguay and Argentina, the preferred color is pink, which is supposed to bring luck in love. In Colombia, many women choose red, the color of passion. The first bath of the year is another key rite. In the Colombian capital Bogota, herb sellers at the Paloquemao market offer bitter- and sweet-smelling bundles to make a purifying bath. Others use champagne. Douse your body in bubbly and let it dry for a year full of happiness and success, they say. — AFP

NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS

New Year festival, any of the social, cultural, and religious observances worldwide that celebrate the beginning of the new year. Such festivals are among the oldest and the most universally observed.

The earliest known record of a New Year festival dates from about 2000 bce in Mesopotamia, where in Babylonia the new year (Akitu) began with the new moon after the spring equinox (mid-March) and in Assyria with the new moon nearest the autumn equinox (mid-September). For the Egyptians, Phoenicians, and Persians the year began with the autumn equinox (September 21), and for the early Greeks it began with the winter solstice (December 21). On the Roman republican calendar the year began on March 1, but after 153 bce the official date was January 1, which was continued in the Julian calendar of 46 bce.

In early medieval times most of Christian Europe regarded March 25, the Feast of the Annunciation, as the beginning of the new year, although New Year's Day was observed on December 25 in Anglo-Saxon England. William the Conqueror decreed that the year begin on January 1, but England later joined the rest of Christendom and adopted March 25. The Gregorian calendar, adopted in 1582 by the Roman Catholic Church, restored January 1 as New Year's Day, and most European countries gradually followed suit: Scotland, in 1660; Germany and Denmark, about 1700; England, in 1752; and Russia, in 1918.

Those religions and cultures using a lunar calendar have continued to observe the beginning of the year on days other than January 1. In the Jewish religious calendar, for example,

the year begins on Rosh Hashana, the first day of the month of Tishri, which falls between September 6 and October 5. The Muslim calendar normally has 354 days in each year, with the new year beginning with the month of Muharram.

Symbolic foods

The Chinese New Year is celebrated officially for a month beginning in late January or early February. Other Asian cultures celebrate the day at various times of the year. In southern India the Tamil celebrate the new year at the winter solstice; Tibetans observe the day in February; and in Thailand the day is celebrated in March or April. The Japanese have a three-day celebration January 1-3.

Many of the customs of New Year festivals note the passing of time with both regret and anticipation. The baby as a symbol of the new year dates to the ancient Greeks, with an old man representing the year that has passed. The Romans derived the name for the month of January from their god Janus, who had two faces, one looking backward and the other forward. The practice of making resolutions to rid oneself of bad habits and to adopt better ones also dates to ancient times.

In the West, particularly in English-speaking countries, the nostalgic Scottish ballad "Auld Lang Syne," revised by the poet Robert Burns, is often sung on New Year's Eve.

Symbolic foods are often part of the festivities. Many Europeans, for example, eat cabbage or other greens to ensure prosperity in the coming year, while people in the American South favor black-eyed peas for good luck. Throughout Asia special foods such as dumplings, noodles, and rice cakes are

eaten, and elaborate dishes feature ingredients whose names or appearance symbolize long life, happiness, wealth, and good fortune.

Because of the belief that what a person does on the first day of the year foretells what he will do for the remainder of the year, gatherings of friends and relatives have long been significant. The first guest to cross the threshold, or "first foot," is significant and may bring good luck if of the right physical type, which varies with location.

Public gatherings, as in Times Square in New York City or in Trafalgar Square in London, draw large crowds, and the countdown to the dropping of an electronic ball in Times Square to signify the exact moment at which the new year begins is televised worldwide. The first Rose Bowl Game was played in Pasadena, Calif. on Jan. 1, 1902, and college football games have come to dominate American television on New Year's Day. The Tournament of Roses parade, featuring floats constructed of live flowers, and the Mummers' Parade in Philadelphia are popular New Year's Day events.

Many people mark the new year with religious observances, as, for example, on Rosh Hashana. Buddhist monks are presented with gifts on the day, and Hindus make oblations to the gods. In Japan visits are sometimes made to Shinto shrines of tutelary deities or to Buddhist temples. Chinese make offerings to gods of the hearth and wealth and to ancestors.

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