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CIR's Corner

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Hello everyone! "CIR's Corner" is my monthly article about international exchange and cultures around the world. I will introduce a variety of interesting international topics.

This Month's Topic: Happy New Year!

Happy New Year! In the first CIR's Corner of 2023, I'm going to introduce some New Year's customs from different countries.

America

Americans usually ring in the new year with a countdown party. The most famous countdown party takes place at Times Square in New York City. This event started on New Year's Eve in 1907, and except for a few years during World War II, has continued every year. Over one million people join the party, and over 20 million watch it on TV



The Times Square Countdown Party starts at 6:00 PM with an opening ceremony. Balloons and party hats are distributed to partygoers. There are musical performances by popular artists up until midnight, and these are always televised. At 11:55 PM, there is a performance of John Lennon's "Imagine." After that, the countdown begins. From the top of the One Times

Square building, a gigantic illuminated ball slowly drops as the people below count down. The ball measures 3.7 meters in diameter and is covered with over 30,000 LED lights. When it finally reaches the bottom of the 23 meter pole, the clock strikes midnight, and fireworks, as well as over 1400 kg of confetti, are launched from the rooftops surrounding Times Square. People's New Year's resolutions are written on the confetti. The Scottish folk song "Auld Lang Syne" plays, followed by the Frank Sinatra version of the unofficial NYC anthem, "New York, New York." The people gathered in Times Square cheer and celebrate, and many of them share a kiss with a friend, a loved one, or maybe even a complete stranger. After the party comes to a close, around 200 city sanitation staff work hard all night to clean up the confetti and trash left by partygoers. By dawn, Times Square is returned to its original state.



In 2013, my husband and I spent New Year's Eve in



New York City. In the morning when we visited Times Square, the stage hadn't been set up yet, but there were

already some people waiting around for the party to start. Once you enter the countdown party area, there are no places to get food or drinks, no toilets, and you cannot move freely due to the huge crowd. You have to stand in one place for hours in the freezing cold. This wasn't a very appealing way to spend our New Year's Eve, so instead, my husband and I went back to our hotel in Chinatown, had delicious Chinese food, and watched the ball drop on TV. Apparently the locals avoid Times Square on New Year's Eve like the plague, and watch the countdown on TV, like most Americans.

I asked American ALT Shelby Brown about how he spends his New Year's Eve. When he lived in America, he stayed up late to watch the ball drop on TV, but since coming to Japan, he has spent the evening at his friend's house playing board games and eating good food. Also, as the father of two young children, he generally goes to bed early with the kids. He doesn't make any New Year's Resolutions.

Scotland

ALT Ross Sutherland told me a bit about New Year's Eve in his home country, Scotland. People in Scotland call New Year's Eve *Hogmanay*, and there is a custom called "first-footing." After midnight, people visit the homes of their neighbors and friends in order to bring them luck for the new year. A tall, dark-haired, handsome man visiting first is considered particularly lucky. Traditional presents for first-footing are salt, coal, shortbread, a fruitcake called a "black bun," and whiskey. These presents symbolize a warm home and plentiful food in the upcoming year.



In addition to first-footing, Scottish people celebrate similarly to those in other countries, with fireworks, parties, and lots of alcohol. Musicians play in the streets and create a lively atmosphere.

As I said above, the New Year's anthem "Auld Lang Syne" is a Scottish folk song. Japanese people know this

song as "Hotaru no Hikari," and it's played at closing time in shops. When I first heard it in a shop here, I felt like wishing people "Happy New Year!"

Lithuania

ALT Julius Žilinskas shared his childhood memories of New Year's Eve in Lithuania. He always spent the evening with relatives at his home. There were many dishes on the main table, and various sweets on a separate one. Unlike Christmas Eve, there were no food restrictions. The children were allowed to stay up as late as they wanted. Julius and his cousins ate, watched TV, and played together. A few minutes before midnight, everyone went outside to light fireworks. They greeted their neighbors who had also come outside, and the grownups enjoyed champagne together. Then, they all returned indoors and continued celebrating. The next day, New Year's Day, was a day to take it easy.



Australia

Anthony Tartan, ALT from Australia, told me about New Year's Eve down under. There are fireworks shows held in every major city, and since they're not so common during the year, they always attract large crowds. People stay up late and make New Year's resolutions. Also, because it's summer and very hot, the pool is the place to be. Anthony says he made many fond New Year's Eve memories in his friend's pool, enjoying a refreshing New Year's swim.

Of all the major cities in the world, Sydney is one of the first to celebrate the new year. The fireworks show over the harbor is watched by over 1.5 million locally, and by millions on TV all around the world.★



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