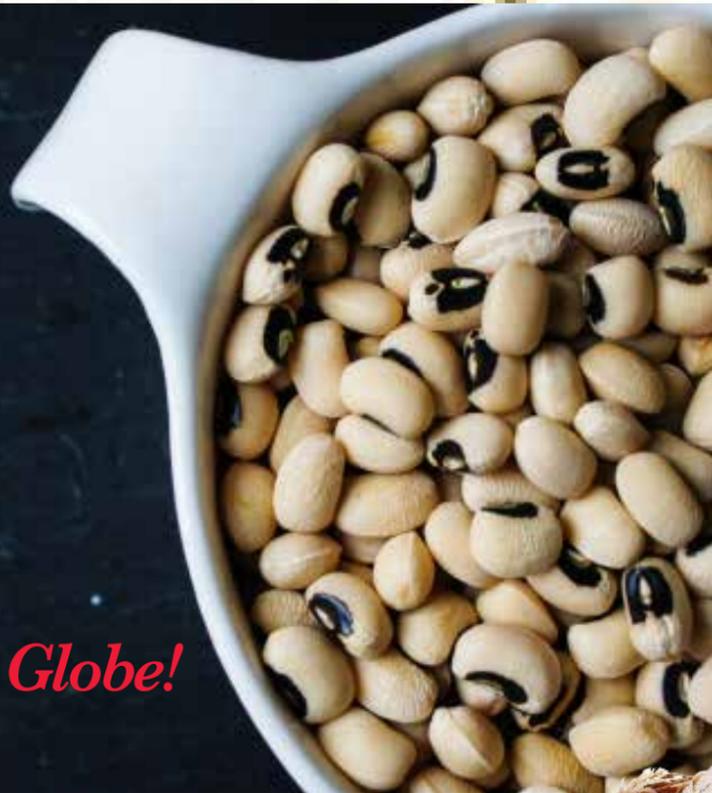


From Black-eyed Peas to Bonfires

BY MELINDA MURPHY

New Year's Eve around the Globe!



One of the best things about Singapore is how multicultural it is. We celebrate so many holidays here, but not always the same way. If a friend from another culture invites you to a New Year's Eve party, would you know what's expected? Read on and find out!

I grew up in Texas where you absolutely must eat black-eyed peas on New Year's Day if you want good luck for the coming year. My friend from Louisiana said her family added ham for health and collard greens for money. This tradition is so strongly ingrained that I actually travel with a can of black-eyed peas when we'll be somewhere else for the first of January. One year, I couldn't find a can opener and was in a flat-out cold sweat.

Odd? Not really. Superstitions are a part of many New Year's traditions. Here are a few favourite traditions from across the globe.

Austria

At midnight, all state-operated radio and television stations broadcast the sound of the bell of St Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, followed by "The Blue Danube". People across the country turn out in the streets to dance the waltz.

Belarus

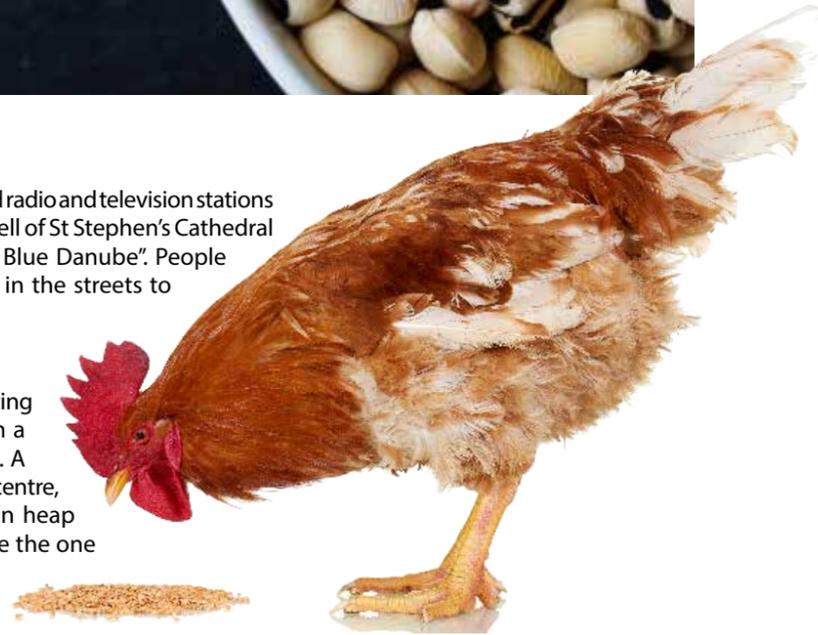
Single women looking for lasting love sit in a circle, each with a pile of corn in front of them. A rooster is placed in the circle's centre, and the woman whose grain heap it pecks first is believed to be the one who'll get married first.

Brazil

If you head to Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro for New Year's Eve, be sure to wear white. Here, people offer white flowers as gifts to Yamanjá, the Afro-Brazilian queen of the sea. The floral gifts are placed on the water, some even in special boats, hoping the queen will bring them energy and strength.

Colombia

Love to travel? So do Colombians. To be sure their year will be filled with plenty of travel opportunities, they walk around the block with an empty suitcase.



Denmark

People in Denmark save their broken dishes and throw them at the homes of their friends and family as a gesture of good luck. You can also just opt to leave a heap of broken china on doorsteps if you'd prefer.



Ecuador

Ecuadorians make scarecrow-like effigies called los anos viejos ("the old years") of people they dislike or of notable people from last year. Streets are lined with the dolls and masks in the weeks leading up to the holiday. In Quito, the capital, there is a New Year's Eve parade at night with massive effigies leading the way. At midnight, the dolls are tossed onto giant bonfires all over Ecuador. Also, women and kids dress up as viudas, or widows of the dolls. Some dress as Baby New Year. Together, they use just about everything imaginable to block streets, even highways, until you pay a toll of money or candy.



Los anos viejos, Ecuador

El Salvador

People here crack an egg in a glass at midnight and leave it on their windowsill. Fortunes are predicted based on what shape the egg takes by morning.

Estonia

You better have a big appetite if you plan to spend NYE here, where people believe you should eat seven, nine or twelve times on the day, all lucky numbers in Estonia. People think that for every meal consumed, you gain strength of that many men for the following year. Don't worry, though; some food should be left behind for the spirits of ancestors who visit on the day.



Finland

The Finns melt lead in a tin pan on the stove and throw it quickly into a bucket of cold water. The resulting blob is analysed and all sorts of predictions made. What kind of shadows does it cast by candlelight? It's loads of fun and never taken too seriously.

France

The New Year's holiday period goes to 6 January and ends with a celebration of the Epiphany. A very special kind of cake called la galette des rois ("King's Pie") is served, made of two flat sheets of puff pastry filled with almond paste. The cake contains a feve, or small china doll. Whoever finds the doll gets to wear a paper crown and choose a partner.



Germany

Like in Finland, the Germans make predictions using molten lead. It's also considered good luck to touch a chimney sweep or rub some ash on your forehead for good luck.

Greece

The Greeks have all sorts of NYE traditions. During the family dinner, the hostess puts some of her jewellery on a plate and serves it as a sign of the new year's prosperity. Dinner dishes aren't washed because Saint Vassilis (Greek Santa Claus) is expecting some food when he visits. At midnight, lights are turned off and on again – representing the new light of the new year. A vasilopita (also a "King's Pie") is then served. Inside? A foil-wrapped coin. Whoever finds it has luck for the year ahead.

The Philippines

There are many New Year's superstitions in the Philippines. One involves opening all the doors, windows and cabinets in the house to let the bad energy out and the good energy in, all while making noise to keep the evil spirits away.

Romania

New Year's Eve belongs to the animals. Truly. Farmers try to hear their animals talk and, if they do, they'll have good luck for the coming year. People also don bear costumes (often made out of real bear fur) and dance to keep evil at bay.

Russia

Russians write down a wish on a piece of paper, burn it, throw it into a champagne glass and drink it before midnight turns to 12.01am.

Scotland

Immediately after the clock strikes midnight, the first-footing begins. For good luck in the new year, a dark-haired male needs to be the first person to cross your threshold after midnight. Sometimes, the first-footer bring gifts such as coal or whiskey, too. My friend's dad was dark-haired and spent the wee hours of every New Year's Day first-footing house after house!

South Africa

In Johannesburg, locals who live in the city's Hillbrow neighbourhood toss old furniture out the windows, or off their balconies. The idea is to get rid of stuff from the old year and embrace what the new year has to offer. Only problem? People have gotten hurt with this one, so beware.



Spain

As the clock strikes midnight, people all over Spain eat twelve white grapes, one for each chime of the clock. This tradition has its origins in 1909, when grape growers thought of it as a way to cut down on that year's large production surplus.



Turkey

Folks in Turkey grab a handful of pomegranate seeds and throw them from their balconies. The more the seeds burst, the more plentiful the year ahead is supposed to be.



Out with the old in South Africa



Aside from all these weird and wonderful practices, my favourite are all the superstitions about underwear! In Turkey, red is the magic colour for fertility and passion. Columbia and Venezuela? Yellow lingerie brings happiness and peace. Puerto Ricans don white undies for fertility and health. Argentinians wear brand-new pink underwear to attract love.

Me? I'm considering rainbow underwear to cover all my bases! *EL*

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