



Fireworks at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin

# GETTING ALL FIRED UP

THERE'S NO BETTER WAY OF SEEING OFF THE END OF ONE YEAR AND WELCOMING IN THE NEXT THAN A PARTY WITH SOME BIG BANGS, WRITES XAV JUDD

## IT'S NEVER EASY TRYING TO DECIDE WHERE TO SEE OFF THE END

of one year and welcome in the next. However, if you want a party that goes off with a real bang, there's nothing better than somewhere with a fireworks show. We pick some of the best from around the world.

### BANGKOK

Thailand's capital is definitely the place to be for New Year's Eve, if you're an out-and-out hedonist. Located roughly in the middle of the country by the Chao Phraya River, Bangkok's ultimate party to welcome in 2014 is the eponymous Countdown in front of the colossal shopping mall and complex, CentralWorld Square.

The quadrangle itself covers 8,000 square metres, so there's plenty of room for a beer garden, large-screen projectors, and the hundreds of thousands who gather. The itinerary includes light and sound shows, performances from famous musical artists, and a blast of more than 1,000 fireworks. It's suggested to arrive by 10pm.

Alternatively, if you're looking for something a bit more intimate, why not have dinner at one of Bangkok's classy hotels? Grand Sukhumvit ([www.grandsukhumvithotel.com](http://www.grandsukhumvithotel.com)) and Praya Palazzo ([www.prayapalazzo.com](http://www.prayapalazzo.com)) are elegant options, but perhaps the standout is the luxurious five-star Chatrium Hotel Riverside Bangkok ([www.chatrium.com](http://www.chatrium.com)). Just before New Year, either stay inside and watch the nearby Asiatique night market's fireworks through the huge bay windows, or pop outside into the sultry winter air (average December temperature 25 degrees Celsius) to take everything in.

### BERLIN

In Germany, New Year's Eve is known as Silvester, after the eponymous fourth-century pope who was made a saint by the Catholic Church. And nowhere in the country is 2014 ushered in with more gusto than in the atmospheric capital, Berlin.

Indeed, there is a dramatic and unforgettable fireworks show at

the Brandenburger Tor (Brandenburg Gate), which was built in 1788. Set against the fabulous backdrop of what is actually a neoclassical triumphal arch, this dazzling light-filled jamboree starts at midnight.

But these pyrotechnics are just a small fraction of the evening's entertainments; the metropolis also hosts the world's biggest official open-air end-of-year party that encompasses a plethora of tents, stages, dance floors and food stalls.

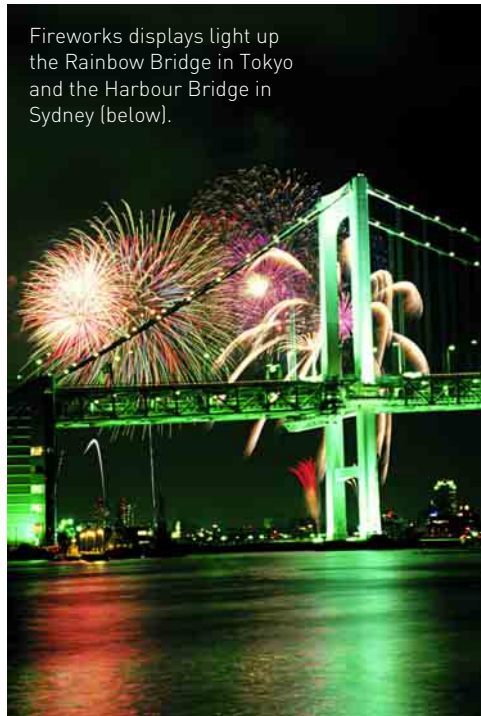
The official schedule on the main stage kicks off at 6.30pm. However, with an expected 1 million revellers, it's best to turn up around 5pm for a good spot.



Fireworks in Bangkok  
Photos: Thinkstock



Fireworks displays light up the Rainbow Bridge in Tokyo and the Harbour Bridge in Sydney (below).



New Year's Eve festivities in London

## LONDON

Bram Stoker once wrote: "I long to go through the crowded streets of your mighty London, to be in the midst of the whirl and rush of humanity." And there's no better period to enjoy the atmosphere in the capital of the United Kingdom, than on December 31.

A big reason is the stunning fireworks extravaganza centred on the South Bank (a narrow stretch of development next to the River Thames), with a major focal point of the evening being the London Eye. Last year, this popular landmark became part of the show, and was lit up like a Catherine wheel.

As there will be tens of thousands of visitors in this part of town, turn up around 7pm or 8pm. Expect more than £1 million (HK\$12.5 million) of every conceivable type of firework, in an hour-long demonstration.

Alternatively, just a five-minute walk away, see in the New Year in Trafalgar Square. In the period leading up to December 25, this quadrangle is decorated with an enormous Christmas tree – an annual gift from the people of Norway since 1947.

## NEW YORK

"The city that never sleeps" stays up even longer than usual as it ushers in January 1. Yes – New York, with its swanky skyscrapers, yellow taxis, multiple hotdog stands and immense park areas, definitely knows how to throw a knockout party.

And the best seat in the house is in Manhattan's Times Square – the glaringly-illuminated heart of the Broadway theatre district. The actual event is known as the New Year's Eve Ball Drop and it normally draws over 500,000 revellers. The particular ball in question descends from a flagpole at the top of One Times Square at 11.59pm. The whole affair is free but it is important to note that some roads in the area might be closed, so it's advised to enter the quadrangle from Sixth or Eighth Avenue.

## SYDNEY

Nothing sticks more in the consciousness than the kaleidoscopic fizz of flame that surrounds Sydney Harbour Bridge during New Year's Eve. Sydney, which is the state capital of New South Wales, has the highest population in its country (4.6 million). Thus, there are more than enough locals to mingle with in the astonishing list of official events organised for end-of-year celebrations.

The programme begins at 6pm with an aerial acrobatics extravaganza, followed by a fire tug-water display. Next, there's an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander smoking ceremony, believed to cleanse bad spirits. Other demonstrations and performances follow, but the undoubted highlights of the evening are two out of the three fireworks bonanzas: a traditional midnight finale, and one at 8.30pm so that youngsters can catch a glimpse of it. And let's not forget, it's mid-summer Down Under, so the weather is perfect.

## TOKYO

New Year (Shogatsu) is Japan's most important holiday, so rocking up for its chief city's entertainment seems like a no-brainer. Situated on the largest island, Honshu, Tokyo is blessed with several landmarks that provide the ideal spot to witness the annual fireworks display.

None can beat Shiba Park's Tokyo Tower. A 333-metre-high communications hub and observation deck, it's probably the focal point of this metropolis' most impressive festivities. When illuminated at night, this structure looks like some wacky spacecraft that's been held back from take-off by an overbearing sky.

Other sites that afford great vantage points are Imperial East Gardens, the National Museum, Roppongi Hills, Shiodome, and Sunshine City, with the eponymous 60-storey skyscraper at its centre. In Japan, just as December 31 ends, it's possible to join the local populace in a much-adhered-to custom, Hatsumode; the year's first trip to a temple (Meiji Shrine is the most visited one in Tokyo).