

Orthodox New Year 2015: How Christian communities around the world celebrate 'Old New Year'

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People dance and sing near Minsk in Belarus on the eve of Old New Year(Reuters)

The festive period feels like a million years ago for those who celebrated Christmas and New Year at the end of December. But for some Orthodox Christian communities around the world, 2015 is just beginning.

As with countries which use the Gregorian calendar, New Year's Day is a public holiday on 1 January, but Orthodox communities in Belarus, Serbia, Macedonia, Switzerland and other countries celebrate Old New Year on 14 January – with some traditions beginning in the evening of 13 January.



People sing Christmas carols, known locally as 'Kolyadki', in the village of Noviny in Belarus, on Orthodox New Year(Reuters)

The date is taken from the old Julian calendar, which was introduced by Julius Caesar in 46 BCE as a reform of the Roman calendar.

Although it was replaced by the majority of Western Europe around 500 years ago, it is regarded as a nostalgic family holiday which ends the New Year holiday cycle – which includes Orthodox Christmas on 7 January.

IBTimes UK looks at the different ways in which the New Year is celebrated:

Macedonia

On the evening of 13 January, people gather outside their houses to start a bonfire, drink and eat and sing traditional Macedonian music. St Vasilij's Day is celebrated during the day and has been marked for more than 14 centuries, particularly in the small town of Vevcani, situated at the southwestern range at the foot of the Jablanica mountain range.

For those who stay at home to celebrate, homemade pita with a coin inside is eaten. Whoever finds the coin is said to have good luck during the year. Macedonians in Australia, the United States and Canada, where the Macedonian Orthodox Church has adherents, also celebrate the New Year on this date.

People sing Christmas carols, known locally as 'Kolyadki', in the village of Noviny in Belarus, on Orthodox New Year(Reuters)

Serbia

The Serbian Orthodox Church celebrates the New Year according to the Julian calendar, although part of the population celebrates on the 1 January. In 2013, 14 January was officially made a public holiday.

Fireworks are set off from the Church Cathedral of Saint Sava and clubs, cafes and hotels host events with both modern and traditional celebrations. It is said that the best Serbian New Year's Eve parties are held by the River Danube and the River Sava.

Some Serbians continue Orthodox Christmas traditions, such as the badnjak - an oak log or branch brought into the house and placed on the fire on Christmas Eve.

Belarus

The "Kalyady Tsars" – or Christmas Tsars - is a festive event celebrated in the village of Semezhevo in the Minsk region of Belarus, where men dress up and perform a drama and carry out a procession. The tradition dates back to the 18th century, when the tsar's military units were stationed near the village.

Unesco, the [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation](#), added the Kalyady Tsars to its list of "Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding" – as the popularity of the event has begun to dwindle.



WATCH VIDEO <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3XRz0uLwUg>

Russia

Although the Russian Orthodox Church continues to use the Julian calendar, New Year's Day is a public holiday on 1 January, celebrated with entertainment, fireworks and feasts.

Interestingly, Russia combines secular traditions of bringing in the New Year with Christian Orthodox Christmastide customs, such as koleda, an ancient pre-Christian winter festival. The Old New Year traditions have been mentioned in Russian art, including by the playwright Mikhail Roshchin, who wrote the comedy-drama *The Old New Year* in 1973.

Switzerland

People in the Appenzell region of north-east Switzerland celebrate *Alten Silvester*, Old New Year's Eve, on 13 January.

It dates back to the conflict when Pope Gregory II altered the Julian calendar by moving New Year's Eve ahead by 13 days. Some take part in the tradition of *Chläusen*, when people dress up and walk around the villages.