SOTC
For Holidays

Your Holiday Inspiration

Winter Wonders

& Festive Escapes

The world's most magical celebrations begin with planning ahead.

Some dates on the calendar carry a magic that the rest of the year simply can't match. They arrive once, hold their shape for a few short weeks, and then vanish until the cycle comes around again. A snow-covered square in Munich. A sky turning green over the Arctic Circle. A ghat glowing gold along the Ganga at dusk. None of this happens by accident and none of it waits for latecomers.

Between September and February, the world seems to gather itself for one long, layered celebration. Christmas markets fill Europe's old town squares with handcrafted gifts. The Northern Lights begin their slow return to Arctic skies. Japan settles into its quiet, snow-dusted rhythm, while Australia, on those very same days, celebrates Christmas on the beach under the summer sun. Closer to home, Vrindavan turns deeply devotional for Janmashtami and the ghats of Ayodhya fill with a thousand small flames for Diwali.

The truth about these moments is simple: they belong to those who plan ahead, not those who wait and hope for the best. Flights fill early, the best gondola slots in Gulmarg go fast, and a Christmas market crawl through three countries needs a route to work out well before December arrives. None of that has to feel like a chore. Half the pleasure of a season like this one is in the planning itself, the slow build of anticipation as dates gets circled and itineraries start to take shape.

This edition brings together the festivals, the winter escapes and the once-a-year celebrations worth building your last quarter around, along with one city that manages to turn almost every month between August and December into an occasion of its own.

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WINTER AROUND THE WORLD

Winter does not look the same anywhere twice. It can mean a frozen lake outside Gulmarg, a paper lantern glowing in a Kyoto alley, or a sky doing something no camera quite manages to capture. For some travellers, it means chasing the cold on purpose, packing thermals and setting out for landscapes that only exist for a few months of the year. For others, it means watching someone else's winter unfold from a warm hotel window, content to admire. Both instincts are welcome here. Four destinations, four temperaments and four very different reasons to build a winter escape into your plans this year.

NORTHERN LIGHTS IN EUROPE

A remarkable stillness settles over you the moment the sky begins to move. Green ribbons, sometimes streaked with purple, unfurl slowly overhead as the temperature drops and the world quietens around you. Witnessing the aurora rewards patience as much as planning, though the two go hand in hand. Finland, Norway, Sweden and Iceland remain among the best places to experience this natural phenomenon, thanks to their clear, dark skies far from city lights. Many travellers combine a few nights of aurora hunting with a stay in a glass igloo or a husky sledding adventure, turning a single spectacle into an unforgettable winter journey.

Best Time to Visit: *Late August to March, with the highest chances typically between December and February*

KASHMIR

Snow changes everything about a place and Kashmir in winter proves it better than almost anywhere else. The valleys turn hushed and white, the lakes freeze thin at the edges, and the Gulmarg Gondola, one of the highest cable cars in the world, carries you up into a landscape that looks almost too composed to be real. Fireside evenings and slow, snowbound mornings do the rest. Srinagar's houseboats take on a different character altogether at this time of year, warm inside and framed by frost outside, while Pahalgam offers quieter trails for anyone hoping to skip Gulmarg's busier weekends.

Best Time to Visit: *October to February*

WINTER IN JAPAN

In winter, Japan swaps its famous cherry blossoms for something quieter and, in its own way, just as striking. Snow settles gently over wooden villages, steam rises off outdoor hotspring, and entire cities turn their main streets into rivers of light after dark. Between snow-draped landscapes, restorative hot-spring soaks, and the country's celebrated winter illuminations, this is Japan at its most contemplative. Shirakawa-go's thatched farmhouses under fresh snowfall and Sapporo's annual snow sculpture festival are both reasons enough on their own to plan a trip around this season.

Best Time to Visit: *December to February*

SPITI VALLEY

Spiti in winter is not a gentle destination and that is precisely what makes it extraordinary. It is a land of crisp mountain air, dramatic silence and ancient monasteries that seem carved directly into the landscape. Few places in the Himalayas feel this remote or, once you arrive, this rewarding. The journey demands resilience, but the reward is unmatched. Snow-covered Monastery & frozen stretches of the Spiti River create an experience that feels far closer to an expedition than a conventional holiday.

Best Time to Visit: *November to February for a true winter experience*

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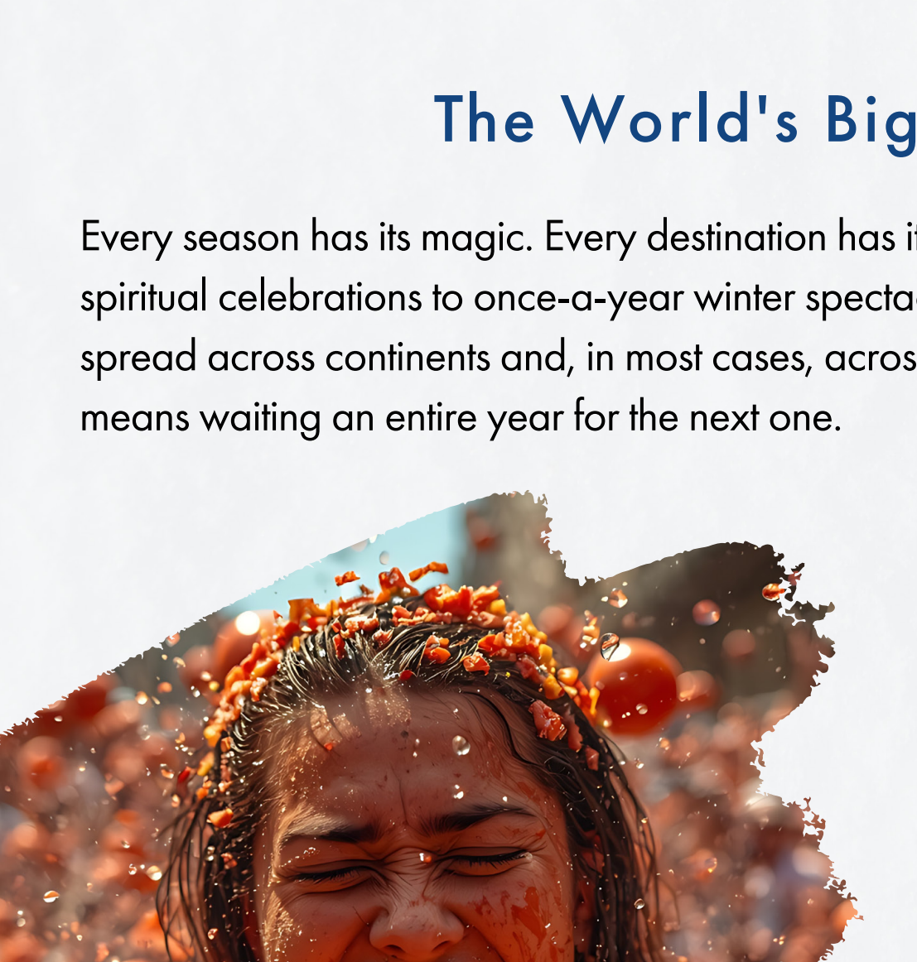
MINI STORIES

The World's Biggest Celebrations Await

Every season has its magic. Every destination has its own moment to shine. From colourful cultural festivals and spiritual celebrations to once-a-year winter spectacles, here are events worth marking on your travel calendar, spread across continents and, in most cases, across a matter of days rather than weeks. Missing the window usually means waiting an entire year for the next one.



LA TOMATINA | SPAIN

For one hour a year, the small town of Buñol stops behaving like a small town. Streets run red, strangers turn into teammates, and the entire square dissolves into a joyful, sopping fun. Roughly 20,000 ticketed participants gather each year in Plaza del Pueblo for what is widely regarded as the world's largest tomato fight.

Best Time to Visit: Late August 2026

ONAM | KERALA

Onam transforms Kerala into its most vibrant self. Doorsteps bloom with intricate Pookalam flower carpets, kitchens fill with the aromas of the traditional Onam Sadya and the backwaters come alive with the excitement of the famous Vallam Kali snake boat races. The ten-day harvest festival culminates in Thiruvonam, its most significant day.

Best Time to Visit: Late August 2026, with Thiruvonam falling on 26 August

OKTOBERFEST | GERMANY

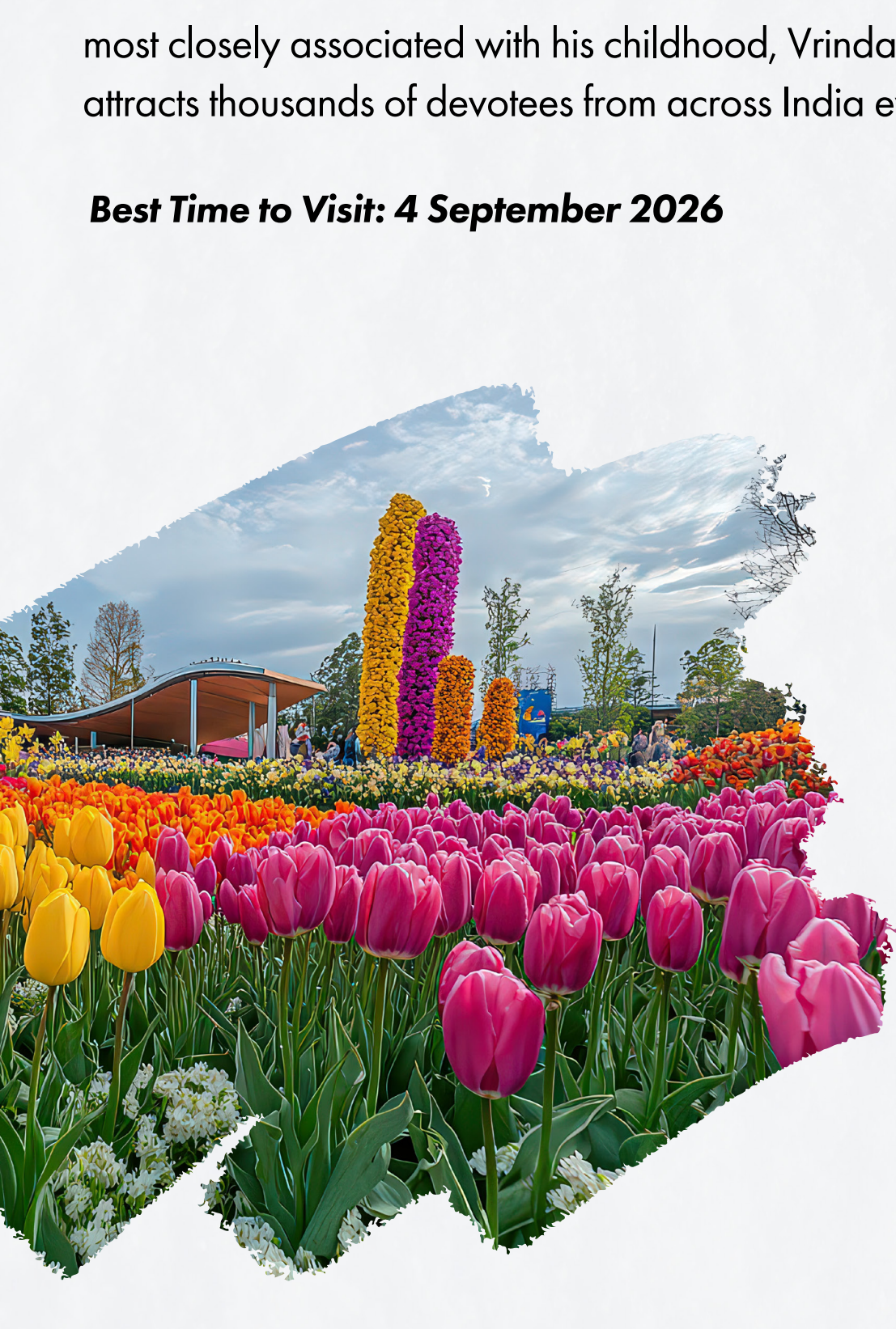
Munich doesn't do subtlety in autumn. The Theresienwiese comes alive with festival tents, brass bands and traditional Bavarian celebrations, all leading up to the ceremonial keg tapping that officially opens Oktoberfest. The 191st Oktoberfest will feature 17 large festival tents and 21 smaller tents, welcoming millions of visitors over 2 weeks.

Best Time to Visit: Mid September to Early October 2026

JANMASHTAMI | VRINDAVAN

Few places wear devotion as visibly as Vrindavan on Janmashtami. Processions wind through narrow lanes, temples resonate with devotional songs and the town comes alive in celebration of the birth of Lord Krishna. As the place most closely associated with his childhood, Vrindavan attracts thousands of devotees from across India every year.

Best Time to Visit: 4 September 2026



FLORIADE | CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA

Experience the beauty of spring in Canberra, Australia’s capital city, at Floriade. The Commonwealth Park transforms with more than one million colourful blooms, creating a spectacular backdrop for sightseeing and family fun. For travellers from India, spring is one of the best times to visit Canberra, with pleasant weather, vibrant gardens, outdoor events, and seasonal flavours to enjoy. Stroll through stunning floral displays, discover local food and entertainment, join workshops and cultural activities and experience the city at its most colourful and welcoming.

Best Time to Visit: Mid September to Early October 2026

DIWALI | AYODHYA & VARANASI

Diwali in Varanasi and Ayodhya is unlike anywhere else in India. As dusk falls, the ghats of Varanasi shimmer with thousands of glowing diyas, while Ayodhya, the birthplace of Lord Rama, comes alive with grand celebrations and breathtaking displays of light. Temples resonate with prayers, the evening aarti fills the air with devotion and the illuminated riverbanks create an unforgettable spectacle. Celebrated as the Festival of Lights, Diwali marks the triumph of light over darkness and good over evil, making this one of the most magical times to experience India's spiritual heart.

Best Time to Visit: Early November 2026

CHRISTMAS MARKETS | EUROPE

Somewhere between the aroma of roasted chestnuts and the glow of a thousand fairy lights, Europe's old town squares turn genuinely magical for a few weeks each year. Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic and France each run some of the continent's most atmospheric markets, filled with handcrafted gifts and carol singers on every corner. A journey through Vienna, Prague and one of Germany's charming smaller towns offers a wonderful blend of tradition, culture and winter charm.

Best Time to Visit: Late November through December

CHRISTMAS IN LAPLAND AND SANTA CLAUS VILLAGE | FINLAND

There is something magical about standing on the Arctic Circle, surrounded by snow-covered forests and reindeer, and realising that childhood stories come alive here. Meet Santa Claus in his official hometown, cross the Arctic Circle and enjoy unforgettable reindeer or husky sleigh rides through Lapland's pristine winter landscape.

Best Time to Visit: December 2026

CHRISTMAS IN SUMMER | AUSTRALIA

Picture Christmas lunch on the beach instead of beside a fireplace and you have Australia in December. It is festive in every sense, only reimagined for the Southern Hemisphere, where sunshine, outdoor barbecues and beachside celebrations replace woollen scarves and snow.

Best Time to Visit: December 2026

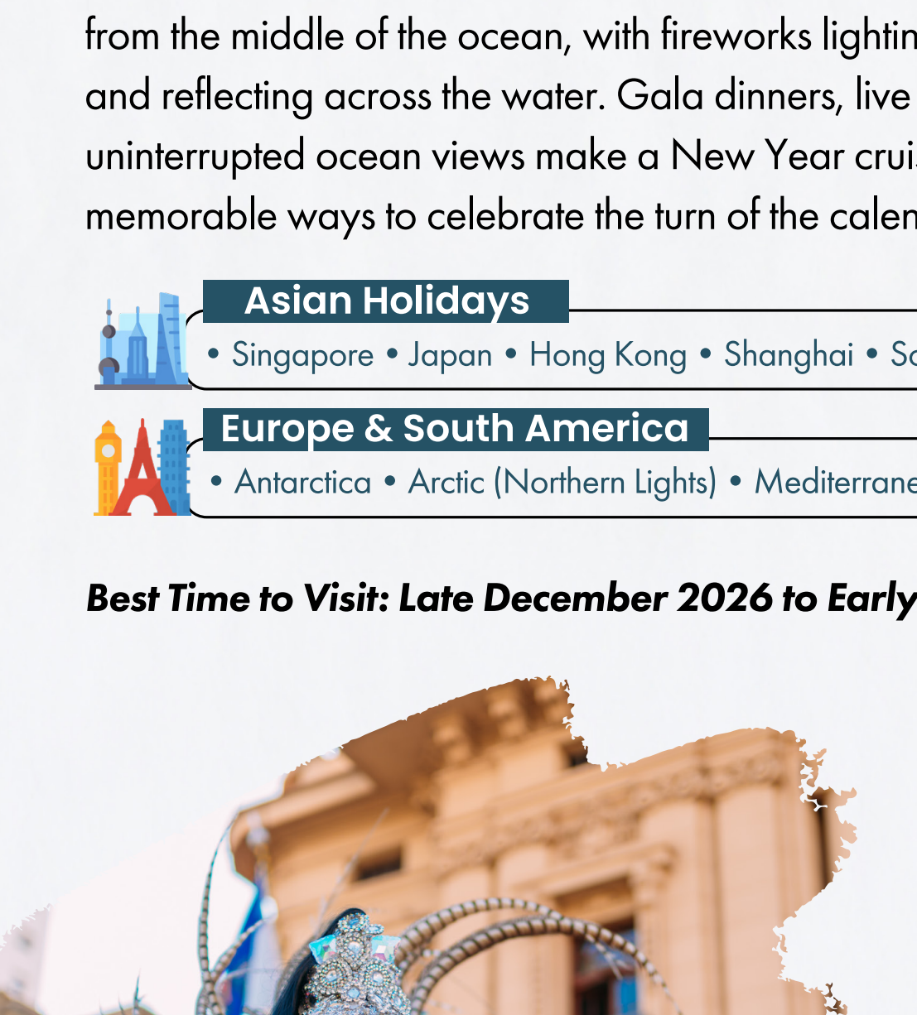
NEW YEAR | CRUISE HOLIDAYS

There is something unforgettable about welcoming the New Year from the middle of the ocean, with fireworks lighting up the horizon and reflecting across the water. Gala dinners, live entertainment and uninterrupted ocean views make a New Year cruise one of the most memorable ways to celebrate the turn of the calendar.

Asian Holidays
- Singapore • Japan • Hong Kong • Shanghai • South Korea

Europe & South America
- Antarctica • Arctic (Northern Lights) • Mediterranean Cruises

Best Time to Visit: Late December 2026 to Early January 2027



RIO CARNIVAL | BRAZIL

Nothing else on this list matches the energy of Rio in carnival season. Samba schools spend an entire year preparing for just a few spectacular nights, creating an explosion of music, colour and movement. Elaborate floats, dazzling costumes and electrifying performances fill the Sambadrome, while lively street parties, known as blocos, take over neighbourhoods across the city, welcoming anyone ready to join the celebration.

Best Time to Visit: February 2027

SINGAPORE

Destination in Focus

One City. Endless Celebrations.

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Between September and December, Singapore does not simply host festivals; it seems to rearrange itself around them. Lantern-lit streets give way to illuminated arches, which eventually give way to a skyline strung almost entirely in fairy lights. Few cities in Asia pack so many celebrations into just a few months. What makes it work is the size of the place. A short taxi ride, or often a pleasant walk, is enough to move between one festival's beating heart and the next, which means a single week here can genuinely cover three or four different celebrations without ever feeling rushed.

Why Visit Singapore?

- Family-friendly experiences that work equally well for toddlers and grandparents
- Excellent shopping, dining and nightlife spread across a compact, walkable island
- Enough packed into a short window to suit both quick getaways and longer festive holidays
- Whether you are travelling with family, as a couple or with old friends, this stretch of the calendar keeps offering something new.

What's Happening from September to December?

MID-AUTUMN FESTIVAL

(SEPTEMBER– OCTOBER)

Chinatown comes alive with dazzling lantern displays, cultural performances, festive bazaars and an irresistible selection of traditional mooncakes, creating one of Singapore's most vibrant seasonal celebrations.

DIWALI IN LITTLE INDIA

(NOVEMBER)

As the Festival of Lights approaches, Little India is transformed with spectacular light installations, colourful street decorations and festive markets. Visitors can enjoy cultural performances, shop for traditional attire and sweets and soak in the vibrant atmosphere as the celebrations culminate on Diwali.

CHRISTMAS ON A GREAT STREET

(NOVEMBER– DECEMBER)

Orchard Road transforms into a glittering boulevard of festive lights, themed installations, Christmas markets and live entertainment, becoming the heart of Singapore's holiday celebrations.

With SOTC's holidays designed around this festive calendar, it's easy to time your visit and experience one or even several of these iconic celebrations.

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The world's most unforgettable experiences don't happen every day. They unfold in a particular season—sometimes for just a single evening and then disappear until the calendar brings them around again. That is precisely what makes them worth chasing. A beach holiday can happen almost any time of the year but a night beneath the Northern Lights or an afternoon amidst the tomato-stained revelry of Buñol follows its own unchanging schedule.

Whether it's standing beneath a dancing Arctic sky, wandering through Kerala's flower-lined streets during Onam, or watching the ghats of Varanasi glow with thousands of diyas during Diwali, one thing remains constant: timing is everything. These are experiences that don't wait, and they can't be recreated on demand. The travellers who witness them are almost always the ones who planned ahead.

The final months of the year bring together more extraordinary celebrations than almost any other season, from the Arctic Circle to the Sambadrome, from the lively streets of Buñol to Singapore's illuminated skyline. Plan early, travel with purpose, and let the season unfold before you. The planning takes only a moment, but the memories stay with you for a lifetime.

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