

Cherry Blossoms Festival, Nago Central Park, Okinawa, Japan

19 January - 11 February, 2009

In the dull, grey months of winter following Yuletide festivity, the sight of 20,000 Taiwan Cherry trees blossoming is bound to be more than just heartening. In Okinawa, watching this phenomena called *hanami*, is an integral part of Japanese culture. In its 47th year, the festival attracts thousands of watchers as the spectacular city transforms into a garden of sorts, and locals put up various performances and parades. The observatory at Nago Central Park offers an uncluttered view of trees that are almost in full bloom. The flowers have a week-long season, so make sure you hurry!



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Merry January

Turbo charge your spirits this New Year with a marathon; then there's beer waiting to be guzzled, apart from the music festivals, fairs and spiritual rejuvenation that make this month fun.

The Great Alaska Beer and Barley Wine Festival, Anchorage, USA

16 -17 January, 2009

For a beer buff, there's no greater place to be than a festival featuring over 30 kinds of it, especially when every brewery worth its hop in the region—some also from across the globe—participates in the festival.



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Even though the idea of drinking beer in Alaska's freezing temperatures may seem a little outlandish, it's not entirely out of order! A competition for barley wine producers at the event also ensures that there's more than just one beverage to slug! For a few dollars one receives tickets to sample several beers, a souvenir and a listing of all the exhibitors at the festival. And while some may maintain that a few beers or barley wine never did anything; this will be a welcome surprise!

Boston Celtic Music Festival, USA

10 - 11 January, 2009

What began as a collaboration of Boston musicians who play Irish, Scottish and Cape Breton traditional tunes, has grown into a festival that has won reviews for its experimental style. In partnership with the Folks Arts Centre of New England, this event has been attracting music lovers from all over the country and abroad. In its sixth year, this time it will feature more than a hundred performers. Offering first-timers a chance to put up whacky gigs, their approach has won favour with audiences! Dances, musical performances, and singing, are all available here in high-energy flavour!



© Philippe Angers

Festival Au Desert, Essakane, Mali

8 - 10 January, 2009

The romance of listening to music at a desert festival that's far-flung, not just by virtue of distance, but its cause and lack of commercialisation is inimitable. Originally part of the Tuareg festive traditions, camel races, Tuareg songs, sword fights and dances form part of the event programme that spreads over three days. It now invites artists from the Malian region, Europe and the world over. It's also a great opportunity to meet the natives of Tuareg or the Blue Men of the Desert who host and attend the festival.

The Northern Lights Music Festival, Tromso, Norway

23 - 31 January, 2009

Sitting in the middle of the aurora borealis zone, the city of Tromso—touted as the Arctic capital of art and culture—celebrates the return of the sun with a musical festival that straddles genres from jazz, blues, and opera to chamber music symphony orchestra ensembles from Gothenburg, St Petersburg, and Oslo. Snow-shrouded mountains act as the perfect backdrop for artists who come from across the world to team up with Norwegian performers and enthral crowds. Having attracted performers like Leif Ove Andsnes, Truls Mørk, Martin Fröst, Yuri Bashmet and Dee Dee Bridgewater, it has been drumming up a following for two decades now.



© Ivan Mervillie

54th Brussels Antiques & Fine Arts Fair, Belgium

23 January - 1 February, 2009

Each year thousands of pieces of art are displayed at the famous Thurn & Taxis house—inventors of the postal system. One of the oldest fairs of its kind, the BRAFA is an art collector and exhibitor's paradise found. Marking the event this year is participation from American exhibitors alongside the regular local and international ones. Oriental, tribal, Oceanic art and furniture from the Middle Ages to silver and antique jewellery, paintings, sculptures, ceramics, contemporary pictures and coins—all can be found tucked away here. Since all the exhibits go through a stringent selection process by an experienced committee, authenticity, quality and rarity are guaranteed!



© Belgian Tourist Office NYC-USA



Standard Chartered Mumbai Marathon, India

18 January, 2009

Thousands of Mumbaikars—apart from professional athletes from across the globe—regardless of their age, ability and stamina along with celebrities, socialites, and businessmen and politicians take to the streets to run for a cause they support. The annual international event that has put Mumbai on to the world athlete's map raises crores of rupees in charity each year. Costumes, masks and slogan-chanting through the dream run or 7-km marathon, almost make the event a parade of its own kind, with an infectious level of enthusiasm that adds the fun component to this adrenalin-fuelled day.

The Organic River Festival, Levin, New Zealand

16 - 18 January, 2009

Held on the banks of Ohau River, this festival is considered to be “a celebration of good Kiwi life”. Based on the principle of zero-wastage, the focus of the festival is to educate all participants about the use of sustainable methods of existence and waste-reduction, even during the event. International and local bands offer constant melody in the background. And if swaying to music isn't meant for your feet, the weekend menu also offers massages and healing therapies like yoga and homeopathy. Workshops and seminars on varied subjects keep the mind occupied while gourmet chefs rustle up dishes that keep the tastebuds happy. Jugglers, fire-pits, swimming pools, and games ensure that your little ones leave you undisturbed—and all this comes under the canopy of the blue sky.

