

Oktoberfest



Past Oktoberfest Cancellations

Like most events involving crowds around the world, Munich's Oktoberfest (and nearly all other ones) was canceled in 2020 and 2021.

While everyone is looking forward to a triumphant return in 2022, the past two years weren't the first time that world events conspired to close the festival that dates back to 1810.

1813

Three years after the festival began, war struck. The French Emperor Napoleon turned his attention to the German states of Austria and Prussia in what he called the "wars of liberation."

At the time Oktoberfest would have happened, Munich and the German states were deep in the war against Napoleon. In October, they delivered a decisive defeat to the French monarch in the Battle of Leipzig.

1854

The festival then got in a good 40-plus years in before it had to be canceled again. This time, like in recent years, it was due to an epidemic. Cholera swept through Europe, killing 3,000 in Munich alone. In Munich, the pandemic started on July 5, 1854. Political officials downplayed cholera as a rumor so



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that people would attend the first German industry exhibition. More than 5,000 visitors showed up and the outbreak of the disease began on the first day.

The Queen Mother Therese, the original bride whose wedding the first Oktoberfest celebrated, returned to Munich after a premature all-clear was given and she died the next day. By the end of the summer, there were more than 15,000 cases of cholera, leading the city to cancel Oktoberfest.

1866

In 1866, the Austro-Prussian War broke out between the Austrian Empire and the

Kingdom of Prussia. Bavaria, then led by King Ludwig II, the grandson of the monarch whose wedding was celebrated with Oktoberfest, decided to side with the Austrians. In the summer, they were defeated and a war-weary state was in no mood to celebrate in the beer halls.

1870

Four years later, war broke out again, but this time King Ludwig II picked the winning side, fighting with Prussia against France.

1873

Those hoping we will soon have seen the last of COVID won't want to know that chol-

era outbreaks continued to plague Europe, causing the cancellation of Oktoberfest again in 1873.

1914-1918

With the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria and his wife, the world was engulfed in war. Germany sided with Austria, and for the next four years, there would be no Oktoberfest because most of the male population was fighting a brutal war of heretofore never-seen carnage.

1923-24

After the war, economic factors conspired to make life difficult for many Germans.

The worst was hyperinflation. How bad was it? At the end of 1922, a loaf of bread in Berlin cost around 160 marks. By the end of late 1923, it cost 200,000,000,000 marks.

With bread costing that much, no one could afford a bottomless mug of beer, so the Oktoberfests those years were canceled.

1939-1945

While the Nazis tried to appropriate Oktoberfest in the years leading up to World War II, during the war, the festival was canceled. This would mark the last time that Oktoberfests got put on hiatus until COVID pushed everyone into isolation.

Oktoberfest Fashion: Dirndls

Today, dirndls are colorful costumes with each region contributing its own variation. However, this sort of dirndl is relatively modern, only really taking off in the 1930s.

Before that time, dirndls were worn by the agricultural class. According to the official Oktoberfest page of the Munich fairgrounds, women who worked on farms in Bavaria and Austria in the 19th century were known as “diernen” and the name of their clothing came from that term.

These hard workers would use bed linen to make an apron to go over their work dress. The apron was known as a leiblgwand. While some dirndls had a floral or tendril pattern, most were simple and monotone. They weren’t costumes worn to festivals, they were worn for cleaning, working in the stalls or laboring in the fields.

What changed? At first, it was city girls traveling to the mountains and adapting the look of the maids to something more elegant and fancy. Then there was an operetta called “The White Horse Inn” that was popular in both Germany and on Broadway. Set in the Swiss Alps, it featured colorful dirndls that



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contributed to a spike in their popularity.

WHAT IS A DIRNDL?

Native to Germany, Austria, Switzerland and the Italian Alps, the traditional dirndl has four parts.

• **Bodice:** The bodice is close-fitting with a low neckline. It is usually a single piece that joins in the front with lacing, buttons or a zipper. Originally it was made from heavy cotton, but today’s bodices may be made with cotton,

linen, velvet or silk. Different traditions have different decorations or embroidery on the bodice.

• **Blouse:** The blouse goes under the bodice and is cropped just above the waist. Different designs affect whether the neckline is a modest cut just below the throat or more deeply cut to accent one’s cleavage. The blouses are often made with lace, linen or cambric and are usually white. Some have short puff sleeves while others

have more narrow sleeves.

• **Skirt:** The skirt is high-waisted and can be sewn directly to the bodice. The length of the skirt varies. In its original incarnations, the skirt was long, but today it is more popular to have mid-length or even a miniskirt. The skirt usually has a pocket which is hidden under the apron.

• **Apron:** The apron is usually relatively narrow, covering only the front of the skirt. Local traditions dictate the

designs and color.

TYING THE RIBBON

While not everyone adheres to this tradition, Vistawide’s World Languages and Culture points out that the ribbon around the apron can tell you what the status of the woman wearing it is. If it is tied to the left, she is single. If it is tied to the right, she is engaged, married or otherwise taken and unavailable. If it is tied in back, she is a widow. Young girls tie the ribbon in the middle.

Classic German Music

When you're attending an Oktoberfest event, there are certain types of music you expect to tickle your ear.

From polkas to oompah bands, from folk bands to yodeling, the music often dates back centuries.

POLKAS

The first Oktoberfest was in 1810 and polkas started making an appearance in central Europe during this century, being especially popular among Germans. It's the type of music that is highly compatible with the party atmosphere of Oktoberfest. Most polkas are lively and upbeat and are played by a band that might include percussion, fiddles, accordions and tubas.

OOMPAH BANDS

Oompah bands, named for a slang term that covers a large swathe of music, do most of their performing at Oktoberfest celebrations. They are not, according to musician and music teacher Allen Cole, a single style of music, but bands that play such musical styles as polkas, mazurkas, Schottishes, waltzes and Landlers.

There are several types of oompah bands, including European groups modeled on the German and Austrian military bands of the 19th and 20th centuries; tanzmusik/volksmusik that are primarily folk



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music for flugelhorns, tenorhorns and tubas; Hungry Five bands that are of Polish-American origin and feature clarinets, trumpets, trombones and tubas; and polka music bands that appeal to various ethnicities.

FOLK MUSIC

Folk music, according to Nashville Oktoberfest, is a popular musical genre at Oktoberfest celebrations with music varying from region to region. They often include children's ditties or repetitive work chants. Most of these bands

play to an acoustic guitar, accordion or harmonica.

YODELING

There aren't too many places where today's yodelers can feel welcome to ply their trade. Oktoberfests are one of them. The drinking and harvest festival throws wide its arms to accept those who engage in the German form of vocal music in which singers rapidly alternate between a speaking voice and a falsetto, between low-pitch notes and high-pitched ones.

Some festival even host yodeling contests or crown

yodeling royalty to lead their parades.

THE OKTOBERFEST SONG

What songs should be a part of your Oktoberfest playlist? While any or all of the above genres have contributions to make, the one must-have is "Ein Prosit der Germütlichkeit," the song that Oktoberfest Tours warns you will hear every 15 minutes and love every second of it.

Munich, the home of the original and biggest Oktoberfest celebration, publishes a guide in which they say

it will take you only two minutes to learn the words:

Ein Prosit, ein Prosit
Der Germütlichkeit
Ein Prosit, ein Prosit
Der Germütlichkeit

Sometimes it is followed by people counting to three in German and then saying "Drink."

What does it mean in English? "Ein Prosit" is a wish for a person to be well. "Gemütlichkeit describes a state of well-being, warmth and friendliness, according to the Munich Guide. Together, the phrase is a toast to well-being.

Parades: Join the March

Today, parades are such an integral part of Oktoberfest celebrations that it is hard to imagine the traditional festival without at least one.

The first parade was in 1835, the silver anniversary of the first Oktoberfest and the wedding it honored. King Ludwig I and Princess Theresa had been married for 25 years and Munich celebrated with a parade. There was then a lull in the parades, the next one not being held until 1887.

MUNICH PARADES

In Munich, the home of Oktoberfest, there are two parades each year. The first one is the prelude to the festival, “Grand entry of the Oktoberfest Landlords and Breweries.” Or, if you are German, “Einzug der Festwirte.”

This parade dates to 1887 when Hans Steyrer marched from his meadow to the festival with a staff, a brass band and a load of beer. The current form of the parade was first seen in 1935, the 125th anniversary of the festival. That marked the first time all the breweries took part.

Today it features around 1,000 Oktoberfest workers, carries and proprietors. It lets those who will be working the festival get a chance for fun and recognition. Decorated



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floats carry the food and beverage servers, and carriages transport the owners of the various tents and the beer tent bands. The parade is led by the Müncher Kindl and followed by the current Munich mayor riding the Schottenhammel family carriage.

This parade also includes horse-drawn drays from which the Munich breweries deliver some of the first drops of beer. The parade usually starts at 10:45 a.m. and lasts an hour.

The second parade takes place on the opening Sunday

and various sources put the number of marchers between 7,000 and 9,000. This parade is called “The Costume und Riflemen’s Procession” or, in German, “Trachten- und Schützenzug.”

Following the 1835 parade, the next one took place 60 years later with Bavarian novelist Maximilian Schmidt organizing a parade that had 1,400 participants wearing 150 different traditional costumes. In 1910, two promoters of the dirndl and lederhosen fashion organized another parade for

the 100th anniversary.

It’s very much a dress-up parade filled with people wearing traditional costumes from lederhosen and dirndls to cultural garb from Germany, Italy, Croatia, Austria, Poland and Switzerland. There are also flag throwers, marching bands, carriages, floats, dancers, uniformed riflemen and livestock.

The parade usually starts at 10 a.m. and takes 2.5 hours for the participants to wend through the 7 km-long course. It is led by the Münchner

Kindl followed by local political officials.

CLOSER TO HOME

You don’t have to cross the ocean to take in an Oktoberfest parade. While many have been on hiatus for the past couple years due to COVID, they’re making a comeback in 2022.

Here are a few Oktoberfest parades taking place in the United States (as always, check their website for changes as the pandemic ebbs and surges):

- **Das Beste Oktoberfest, LaCrosse, Wisc.:** They have two parades. The Torchlight Parade is 7 p.m., Thursday, Sept. 29. The Maple Leaf Parade is 10 a.m., Saturday, Oct 1.

- **Chicago German-American Oktoberfest:** The parade takes place at 2 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 10. This year will mark their 101st anniversary.

- **Minster Oktoberfest (Ohio):** The parade starts at 2 p.m., Sunday, Oct. 2.

- **40th Annual Oktoberfest in New Ulm, Minn.:** A festival that stretches over two weekends, the parade is on Saturday, Oct. 8, beginning at the Glockenspiel and traveling to the music stage.

- **German-American Steuben Parade:** Held every year on the third Saturday in September in New York City, the parade kicks off at noon following a 9 a.m. mass at St. Patrick’s Cathedral.

- **Oktoberfest Phoenix Club:** The Phoenix Club in Anaheim, California holds an opening day parade on Oct. 1 for a celebration that lasts through Oct. 24.

Chicken and the Harvest Festival

Right after beer and pretzels, the most popular and traditional of Oktoberfest fare is the humble chicken.

Known as a Wiesn-Hendl or Oktoberfest chicken, it consists of half of a chicken, basted in a paprika marinade and cooked on a rotisserie stick.

Simple, but mandatory. Oktoberfest vendors will often serve it with red cabbage, sauerkraut or roasted apples and bacon.

Slow-roasted on a spit, the chicken is known for its crispy skin and moist, tender meat.

WIESN-HENDL

The website Germanfoods.org offers a recipe that adapts the one vendors make to be prepared at home.

Ingredients

- 1 whole chicken, about 3.5 pounds
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon sweet paprika
- 1/4 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1/4 teaspoon oregano
- 1 pinch ground pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon marjoram
- 1 pinch ground rosemary
- 2 tablespoon butter

Directions

1. Wash the whole chicken inside and out, and thoroughly towel dry.
2. Mix the herbs and spices in a bowl. Rub the chicken inside and out with the spice mixture.
3. Place the chicken in a baking dish filled with 1/2 in of water. Cut the butter into small pats and place on top of the chicken. Roast at 325 degrees for about one hour, or until done. Baste with the pan juices several times during the roasting, every 15-20 minutes.

4. Serve with Pommes Frites (french fries) and radish and a German pretzel or with potato dumplings and red cabbage.

THE CHICKEN DANCE

The popularity of chicken at Oktoberfest celebrations led the celebrants of one festival in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in the 1980s to create a new tradition (albeit one that hasn't yet crossed over the ocean to Europe).

A German oompah band was playing on television during an Oktoberfest and they wanted to perform Werner Thomas' song which was then called "The Duck Song." However, the band didn't have a duck costume, only a chicken one. They changed the lyrics and created the chicken dance. It became a hit and is now performed at Oktoberfest celebrations throughout the U.S. and Canada.

In Germany and Switzerland, they still perform Thomas' ditty with its original animal.

The record for the "World's Largest Chicken Dance" was first set at the Oktoberfest Zinzinnati where they hold the dance every year. In 1994, there were 48,000 participants.

In some parts of the country, fair-goers don't do the chicken dance without the proper apparel—which in this case means a chicken hat. Festival vendors offer a variety of chicken hats from ones with white feathered chickens to those representing the bird already plucked and ready for roasting.



Rides for Thrill-Seekers, Families

What would a festival be without rides and games? From its very early days to today, Oktoberfest celebrations have included events from barrel rolling races to roller coaster riding.

According to Vistawide's World Languages & Culture website, rides started showing up when Oktoberfest was only eight years old. In 1818, the festival sported a carousel and two swings. While these were rare in the early days, people did get to compete in several types of games and contests, including tree climbing competitions, wheel barrow and sack races, mush eating contests and goose chases.

By 1870, the festival was starting to see more mechanical rides with 1908 being a landmark year when the festival was home to Germany's first roller coaster.

MUNICH OKTOBERFEST RIDES

The Oktoberfest grounds in Munich covers 103 acres. In recent years, rides have included a Ferris wheel, roller coaster, water slide, labyrinth, haunted house, and lots of game booths. City Brew Tours promises its tourists that the Munich Oktoberfest has 80 rides.

According to official website



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of Munich's Oktoberfest, this year's rides and attractions will include:

- Swing carousel.
- Ferris wheel.
- The toboggan, where you ride the conveyor belt up to a spiral staircase and then you ride sack cloths down a slide.
- Skyfall, the tallest mobile drop tower in the world.
- Olympia Looping, a five-loop roller coaster that is the largest transportable one in the world.
- Krinoline, a nostalgic ride with a brass band.
- The Flip Fly, a giant boat swing.
- Pitt's Todeswand, the "wall of death" where people perform stunts on motorcycles and go-karts.
- Zugspitzbahn, an 80-year-old ride with free-swinging gondolas that sometimes go upside-down at high speed.
- Hex'n Wippen, The Witches' Seesaw is all about illusion and getting rotated up, down and around.
- Münchner Rutschn, giant slides.
- The Rotor, a ride that's been around since 1955, it spins so fast that you are stuck to the wall when the floor drops out.

• The Ghost Palace, the world's largest mobile tunnel of horror.

OKTOBERFEST CARNIVALS

In the United States, nearly every Oktoberfest is different. While they all feature beer and lederhosen, other activities vary by city. Several have modeled themselves after the original and offer carnivals with rides and quirky competitions.

In Tulsa, they have a carnival on all five days of their Oktoberfest celebration and kids 12 and under are free when they are with their par-

ents or guardians.

The military base Fort Gordon in Georgia hosts a carnival every year as part of their Oktoberfest celebrations.

The Four Peaks Oktoberfest in Tempe, Arizona, has traditionally included a carnival filled with rides.

If you want something tamer than roller coasters, the Denver Oktoberfest has keg bowling and a stein hoisting contest.

Wherever you go, your biggest decision may be whether the rides are more fun before or after you've hit the beer tents.

Raise a Stein to Good Health

Anyone who has lived through the past few years understands how a pandemic can change just about everything.

COVID isn't the first time plague has spread through the world, claiming millions of victims. In fact, it was a plague in the Middle Ages that produced the iconic German beer steins that are a popular sight at Oktoberfests and a favorite of collectors.

ORIGIN OF THE STEIN

The bubonic plague killed more than 25 million people between 1340 and 1380. There weren't epidemiologists in those days (that wouldn't happen until 1802), but people spent an awful lot of time trying to figure out how to survive the Black Death. They quickly learned that people who lived in clean areas out-survived those who lived in dirty ones.

At the time, many blamed the flies and fleas that were descending on Central Europe, according to Gary Kirsner in his book, "The Beer Stein Book: a 400 Year History," 3rd edition. The principalities that now make up Germany passed laws saying food and beverages had to be covered. This made drinking challenging until someone introduced the idea of covering their beer mugs with a hinged lid that had a thumb-

blift. People could now drink with one hand and still keep their beverages covered.

MAKING OF THE STEIN

Early on, most beer steins were made with wood or porous earthenware, accord-

ing to Kirsner. Only wealthy folks were able to afford pewter or silver steins.

Scientists began experimenting with earthenware. The result was stoneware, which also lent itself to decoration. Renaissance artists

created designs to apply to the stoneware or to carve into it. Common themes included shields and scenes from history, religion or allegories.

Some steins are handmade while others are mass produced. Today they are made

from stoneware, ceramic, glass, faience, wood, porcelain, ivory, silver, pewter and crystal. Oktoberfest Haus, a maker of beer steins, says that the most common beer steins are made from clay that is molded into designs and shapes. It also creates a sturdy base.

Oktoberfest Haus identified Kannenbackerland as the German region known for first producing beer steins. Today's beer steins are often inspired by those centuries-old designs.

COLLECTING STEINS

Even in the early days of beer steins, they were a status symbol and something Germans put on display. Another side-effect of the Black Death was that so many people died, the survivors were able to demand higher wages because there were fewer laborers. That meant more people were able to buy modest luxuries such as beer steins, Kirsner wrote.

Some beer steins get passed down through the generations. While many were made for drinking, some have always been purely decorative. Oktoberfest Haus said the world's largest beer stein can hold more than 30 liters of beer, is four feet tall and weighs more than 35 pounds.

Beer steins range in value from \$7 to \$5,000. Valuemystuff says the most highly sought-after mugs are made by such manufacturers as Mettlach, Royal Vienna, and Capo-di-Monte.



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