

Oktoberfest



A Wedding, A Race — and Beer

Credit a member of the Bavarian National Guard for all the fun we have every fall.

He suggested a different kind of celebration after a prince and princess were married and a new tradition was born.

FESTIVAL ORIGINS

Held annually in Munich, Oktoberfest begins in mid- or late-September and traditionally continues until the first Sunday in October. More than 6 million visitors regularly attend, arriving from across the nation and the world. Visitors also enjoy amusement rides, folk music, traditional foods and games. Oktoberfest is locally referred to as Wiesn, a nickname for the fairgrounds. The tradition has since spread to cities around the world.

FIRST, A WEDDING

The wedding of Prince Ludwig of Bavaria and Princess Therese of Saxony-Hildburghausen would be commemorated with a horse race, held in October 1810 in a field that was later renamed Theresienwiese in the future queen's honor. There were no fairground rides or beer stands, but the seeds for a new festival were planted. Another celebration was held the following year, this time in association with the Bavarian agricultural



© ADOBE STOCK

association. Oktoberfest eventually began to take on a carnival-like atmosphere, with beer at the center of the celebration.

GROWING POPULARITY

A parade became part of the event in the mid-1800s, as thousands of people dressed in traditional costumes walk through Munich to the Oktoberfest grounds. Roasted chicken

emerged as a principal dining choice in the 1880s, after booths, carousels and performers joined the celebration. Breweries shifted from smaller stalls to huge tents, where traditional folk music was performed. By the early 1900s, thousands of people were gathering each year. Andreas Michael Dall'Armi was later given a medal as the festival's

inventor, and also had a street renamed in his honor. The mayor of Munich began customarily tapping the first keg in the 1950s.

INSIDE THE NUMBERS

In past years, as much as 2 million gallons of beer have been consumed. There are strict rules governing which beers can be served, including

their adherence to the Bavarian Purity Law which restricts the alcoholic content to 6%. Beers must also be brewed within the city limits of Munich. Some 1 million half-chickens are reportedly eaten every year. There have only been 26 cancellations over the festival's 210 years, during times of war and more recently because of the pandemic.

Strict Limits on Beer Brands

Only beer from breweries based in Munich can be served during the original Oktoberfest celebration.

Want to follow this time-honored tradition at your own party this year? Look for these Munich-based brewers.

AUGUSTINER

Founded by an order of monks in 1328, Augustiner is the oldest brewery in Munich. Their complex was the city's largest sacred building until the Frauenkirche cathedral was completed at the turn of the 1500s. The Augustinian monks were the official supplier of beer to the Bavarian royal family until the 1580s, with the founding of the Hofbrau brewery. The Augustiner restaurant was established in the early 1800s, and remains popular with both locals and tourists alike.

HACKER-PSCHORR

Partners Joseph Pschorr and Maria Theresia Hacker helped make this Munich's leading brewery in the 18th century, but its roots go back to the early 1400s. Crown Prince Ludwig I personally commissioned Pschorr and others to develop special beers to commemorate Oktoberfest. Pschorr and Hacker's sons initially continued their legacy separately before the label was unified again in the 1970s.

MUNCHEN

The Staatliches Hofbrauhaus in Munchen was founded by the Bavarian Duke Wilhelm V in the late 1500s, becoming a state-owned company in 1939. It initially served the old Royal Residence, located around the corner from where Munchen stands now. The brewery owns one of Oktoberfest's largest tents.

LOWENBRAU

With a history going back to the late 14th century, Lowenbrau developed into the largest brewery in Munich by the 1800s. Miller acquired North American rights to the brand in 1975, and began brewing it domestically. Rights passed to Labatt in 1999, and brewing operations moved to Canada.

PAULANER

As with Augustiner, Paulaner was founded by monks — but not until the early 1600s, making it the newest of main brewers within the city limits of Munich. Their beers were initially only available to the monks, outside of festival season. The brewery was largely destroyed in World War II, with recon-

struction lasting through 1950.

SPATEN

Founded just before the 1400s, Spaten was the first to share Munich Pale beer with the general public at the turn of the 1900s. The slogan "Lass Dir raten, trinke Spaten" has been in place since 1924, and translates into "Let yourself be advised, drink Spaten."



© ADOBE STOCK

Signature Elements

Many of Oktoberfest's most well-known traditions date back centuries, but some of the things most associated with the festival are modern inventions.

Some were even added by those who were celebrating far from Oktoberfest's traditional home in Munich.

DISTINCTIVE DRESS

The traditional dress of Oktoberfest included lederhosen for men and dirndls for women, with fairly strict guidelines. The men's outfit featured leather shorts, suspenders, a white shirt and a traditional hiking hat that looked something like a smaller fedora. Women wore a bodice, blouse and full skirt with an apron. As the popularity of Oktoberfest spread, modifications were made in other countries. For instance, lederhosen made of fabric may be seen outside of Germany. The hat's traditional chamois adornment may be replaced with a feather.

BOTTOMS UP

Oktoberfest in Munich strictly limits the available beer, only featuring the city's six major breweries. In the United States and elsewhere, you'll typically find a much wider menu. Liter-sized steins traditionally came with a thumb-operated lid,



© ADOBE STOCK

though that is not always the case anymore. But the universal German toast remains: "Prost!"

GIVE A YODEL

Energetic sounds of polka, oompah and yodeling have always filled the air at these festivals, typically played with accordion or brass instruments. At the original Oktoberfest, head over to the

Herzkasperl-Festzelt, a throw-back music space established in 2010 as part of the celebration of the festival's 200th anniversary.

Among the best-known songs associated with Oktoberfest is "Ein Prosit der Gemutlichkeit," which roughly translates into "a toast to cheer and good times." The classic "Liechtensteiner Polka" was

most popularly recorded by Will Glahe and his orchestra in the late '50s. One of the most requested yodeling songs is "Das Esellied," with its familiar "Iha Iha Iha oh" chant.

THAT SPECIAL DANCE

"The Chicken Dance" is a staple at Oktoberfest celebrations in the U.S., and its origins are quite contemporary. Ironically,

the original song was neither German nor about chickens. Instead, Swiss composer Werner Thomas wrote "The Duck Dance" in the '50s. A band playing Oktoberfest in the '80s revived the song but changed the kind of bird — perhaps in celebration of the Bavarian rotisserie chicken that's so popular at Oktoberfest. A new tradition was born.

The History of the Beer Stein

Centuries before epidemiologists came into being, the bubonic plague's origins remained an enduring mystery. More than 25 million died in the late 1300s in an era defined by the term "Black Death."

An early theory was that fleas were to blame for spreading the disease. So how were Germans to enjoy their treasured beer?

HOW IT STARTED

A canny inventor attached a hinged lid to beer mugs with a thumb lift. This allowed people to drink with one hand while keeping the beer safe from fleas and other insects. Most steins were initially created of clay or wood. Only the wealthiest families could afford the now-familiar silver or pewter steins. Later, advances in stoneware allowed for a remarkable array of decorations.

Designs were carved into the stone or applied to the outside, depicting historic scenes, religious tales and other stories. Several steins may make up a related series, based on a theme. Some also have been engraved with dates in order to commemorate special occasions like anniversaries, birthdays, weddings,



© ADOBE STOCK

retirement or sporting events.

LATER TRADITIONS

Steins today may be handmade or mass-produced, and they're crafted from a broad range of materials beyond stoneware, wood, pewter or silver — including glass, ceramic, porcelain and crystal. The most common material, however, remains the old standby of clay,

which then is molded into unique designs. Many steins are now inspired by earlier designs, some of which are centuries old. They don't necessarily have the traditional lids, either.

COLLECTOR'S ITEMS

Kannenbackerland has been identified as the region where steins originated. The word

was derived either from "stein krug" (which translates to stone mug) or "steingut" (stone goods). Steins have always been collectible, both as works of art and status symbols. Many are put on display, rather than used for drinking beer. Some are even passed down to future generations, as other heirlooms would be.

In fact, over time many

steins have been made specifically as collector's items. For instance, the world's largest stein is reportedly four feet tall, weighs more than 35 pounds and holds more than 30 liters of liquid. The cost of steins can soar into the thousands of dollars. Among the most sought-after are made by Royal Vienna, Mettlach and Capo-di-Monte.

Dress the Part

Lederhosen and dirndls were first intended as work wear, rather than as traditional costumes.

Today, however, they are two of the world's most well-known country-specific outfits — thanks to Oktoberfest. It's been the festival's official garb since 1887.

LEDERHOSEN

Knee-length leather shorts were originally designed for rural, agrarian work, because they were more durable than traditional fabrics. Just as today, they were held up by suspenders. Their widespread use fell off, however, into the 19th century when lederhosen became more closely associated with the poor. Then Oktoberfest gave Germans an excuse for preserving and celebrating their unique culture in the 1880s.

Lederhosen was revived and is now almost exclusively associated with Bavaria, despite its earlier presence throughout central Europe. It's traditionally made of tanned deer leather, which is light, soft and resistant to tearing. ("Lederhosen" roughly translates as "leather breeches.") One of its pockets is specifically designed to hold a knife.

DIRNDLS

The dirndl's history is much the same as lederhosen, until

they diverge in the modern era. The men's costumes are representative of the way these garments have always been constructed. The dirndl, however, was once made of old rags but is now fashioned from far better materials. There have also been some notable adjustments to its style, with shorter skirts and a specific knot-tying style.

Newer tradition states that if the dirndl's knot is on the left, she's single. If it's tied on the right, she's in a relationship.

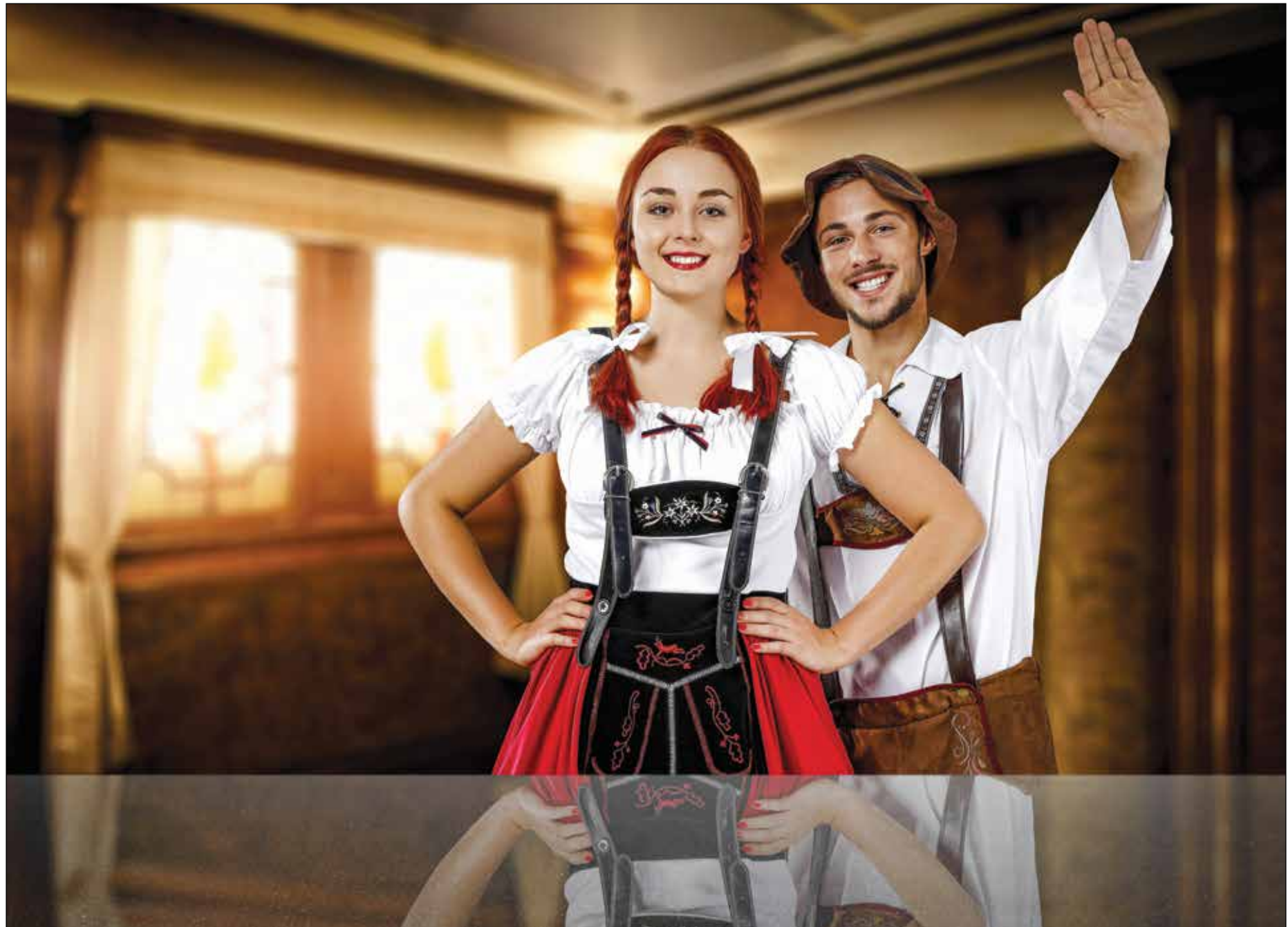
ACCESSORIES

The pomp of Oktoberfest also includes the jaunty Bavarian hat, or tirolerhut. It was traditionally topped with a cluster of chamois hair, in what was once a hunting tro-

phy. More tufts or larger tufts were a point of pride. These days, other forms of hair or imitation chamois are common sights in the first Sunday's Oktoberfest parade. You might also see these hats accompanied by a feather, typically from an ostrich or pheasant.

Women would often pair their dirndls with brooches

made with silver, deer antlers or animal teeth. Today, the bodice may be decorated with fresh flowers, and paired with silk aprons, waistcoats or brightly colored silk scarves. Unmarried women might wear a small floral wreath known as jungfernkranz. Others might choose a small crown. Bonnets are worn in formal settings.



More than Giant Steins of Beer

Six major Munich breweries are featured each year at the original Oktoberfest, while countless others take center stage elsewhere.

But you'll also come across a wide range of delectable food options, some of which have been part of this tradition for ages.

CHEESE NOODLES

Order kasespatzle and you'll be served a cheesy, savory egg noodle topped with tangy quark cheese.

DUMPLINGS

Made of either potato or flour, traditional dumplings are popular comfort food throughout central Europe.

GRILLED FISH ON A STICK

Steckerlfisch is marinated then put on a skewer and grilled. Local fish like bream are typically served at Oktoberfest, but mackerel or trout can be substituted at home. In the Bavarian dialect, "steckerl" translates to "small stick" or "pole."

POTATO PANCAKES

Reiberdatschi is served with a salad or with apple sauce, creating both savory and sweet flavor profiles.

PRETZELS

What better pairing with a giant stein of beer than a large, soft Bavarian pretzel? They've been an integral part of the German baking tradition for hundreds of years. Ask for brezen.

ROAST CHICKEN

Chickens are traditionally roasted rotisserie style until the skin is golden and crispy. Those celebrating at home who don't have an old-fashioned setup can create a rough simu-

lation in the oven. Rub lemon, thyme and butter over the chicken before roasting to ensure crispiness.

ROASTED HAM HOCK

Called schweinshaxe, roasted ham hock is a beer-hall classic. A popular variant is shank, roasted until it's tender on the inside but crispy on the outside.

ROAST PORK

Known locally in Bavaria as schweinebraten, this classic dish can be created with a wide variety of cuts, including pork loin and shoulder. Roast with onions and dark beer.

SAUERKRAUT

This pickled cabbage dish is served beside just about everything at Oktoberfest. Oddly enough, sauerkraut is closely associated with Germany but did not originate there. It's actually very popular throughout central and eastern Europe.

SAUSAGES

Wurstl can refer to any of a variety of Bavarian sausages. The white brats are made of veal, while others are pork based. The tradition dates back to the 1300s. Saute them in a skillet at home with apple sauerkraut and bacon, then garnish with mustard.

SPICED CHEESEBUTTER SPREAD

Obatzda is an aged soft cheese, mixed into a spread with butter, a little beer and paprika, garlic, salt and pepper.



Polkas, Oompah and Yodeling

Like so many of the other things involved with Oktoberfest, the musical traditions date back centuries.

It's a historic mixture of polka and folk music, with lots of oompah bands, marches and yodeling. As day turns to night, the music becomes more boisterous as friends and strangers alike link arms to sing together.

POLKAS

Polkas emerged in central Europe in the same era as Oktoberfest, and quickly became a staple of the event. The genre's lively, upbeat song structure, often played on accordions, makes it perfect for this festival atmosphere. They may also play tuba or violin as happy patrons do a dance that is also known as the polka. The dance spread from Prague and Vienna to Paris, London and then America over a matter of years in the mid-1800s, leading to so-called "polka mania."

OOMPAAH BANDS

Oompah bands are also a staple of Oktoberfest celebrations. They don't perform a narrow style of music, but rather a range of songs including polka, waltzes, mazurkas and other genres. They may be modeled on military bands of the 19th and 20th centuries, or folk music ("volksmusik") acts that perform on brass instru-



© ADOBE STOCK

ments. The name is derived from the group's instrumentation. A tuba makes the oom sound, while the pahs arrive on the offbeats from higher-pitched instruments like a clarinet.

FOLK MUSIC

The German-based volksmusik overlaps in some

important ways with polka. They both have boisterous brass elements, but volksmusik may also include yodeling — as well as themes that focus more on Germany's traditions and history. The songs may range from popular material to kids' songs to topical subject matter, played on acoustic guitar, harmonica or accordion.

YODELING

This variant on vocal music finds singers rapidly alternating between their regular voice and a falsetto, moving from low pitches to high and then back again. Alpine yodeling began as a rural tradition in Europe, used by herders to call their flocks or to communicate with other herders. The form

shifted to wider popularity in the early 1800s in music halls and theaters. It's said to have been brought to the U.S. during the same era by German immigrants who landed in Pennsylvania. Some Oktoberfest events now hold yodeling contests, crowning champions who are celebrated on stage and in their parades.