

New Year Trivia for Adult Gatherings

Welcome the year with trivia about calendars, clocks, music, food customs, public celebrations, and community traditions.

Host guide / Letter / holiday trivia / 15–25 minutes

Read the guide privately first if this activity has hidden answers. Print single-sided at Actual size / 100%. Cut only sheets marked CARDS. Keep answer keys with the host.

What you need

- Printed question cards or a host screen
- Pens and score sheet
- A timer (optional)
- One host or a reader for each team

How to run it

1. Choose a host and keep the key out of sight.
2. Make teams of two to five or play individually.
3. Read the prompt and allow 20–30 seconds for discussion.
4. Award one point for a correct answer and accept equivalent wording.
5. Read the explanation after scoring.
6. Play all cards or choose a section for a shorter round.

Calendars and clocks

The set pairs accessible calendar questions with a few timekeeping details. The answer explanations keep UTC and leap years in plain language.

- Explain the leap-day rule after scoring.
- Accept the full UTC name without requiring the abbreviation history.

Public celebration and music

The Times Square Ball and Auld Lang Syne are recognizable New Year images with distinct histories. The questions stay with a few milestones instead of drilling tiny event details.

- Play these as a short familiar round.
- Allow teams to discuss before scoring.

Food traditions

Grapes and black-eyed peas carry symbolic meaning in particular customs. They are described as traditions practiced by communities, not rules that everyone follows.

- Invite optional stories from guests.
- Do not generalize one family practice to an entire country.

Community history

Watch Night gives the round a community-history dimension, with a clear connection to January 1, 1863.

- Keep the historical context attached to the answer.
- Let guests pass if a topic feels personal.

Astronomy and the new year

Earth's orbit and tilt help explain why calendars need adjustments and why seasons recur. These cards offer a quick science turn in a social quiz.

- Read the units aloud.
- Give an extra few seconds for the tilt question.

Host notes

Use the full set for a party round or choose a section for a shorter activity. Every factual card links to a cited source for host review.

- Keep the answer key separate.
- Offer a no-score version.
- Accept equivalent phrasing.

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<p>EXT_TRIVIA_NEW_YEAR-001 / Calendar</p> <p>Which pope's name is attached to the Gregorian calendar introduced in 1582?</p>	<p>EXT_TRIVIA_NEW_YEAR-002 / Calendar</p> <p>Why does the Gregorian calendar add a leap day?</p>
<p>EXT_TRIVIA_NEW_YEAR-003 / Calendar</p> <p>Was 2000 a leap year, even though it was a century year?</p>	<p>EXT_TRIVIA_NEW_YEAR-004 / Calendar</p> <p>What date is added to the calendar during a leap year?</p>
<p>EXT_TRIVIA_NEW_YEAR-005 / Timekeeping</p> <p>What is the time standard abbreviated UTC called in full?</p>	<p>EXT_TRIVIA_NEW_YEAR-006 / Timekeeping</p> <p>Why does the abbreviation use "UTC" instead of "CUT" or "TUC"?</p>

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<p>EXT_TRIVIA_NEW_YEAR-007 / Public celebrations</p> <p>In what year did Times Square first hold a New Year's Eve celebration?</p>	<p>EXT_TRIVIA_NEW_YEAR-008 / Public celebrations</p> <p>When did the Times Square Ball first descend at midnight?</p>
<p>EXT_TRIVIA_NEW_YEAR-009 / Music</p> <p>Which Scottish poet is most closely associated with the familiar "Auld Lang Syne" text?</p>	<p>EXT_TRIVIA_NEW_YEAR-010 / Music</p> <p>Which bandleader helped make "Auld Lang Syne" a New Year's Eve broadcast tradition in the United States?</p>
<p>EXT_TRIVIA_NEW_YEAR-011 / Food customs</p> <p>How many grapes are part of the midnight custom described by Smithsonian staff member Tey Nunn?</p>	<p>EXT_TRIVIA_NEW_YEAR-012 / Folk customs</p> <p>What does "first-footing" mean in a Scottish New Year custom?</p>

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<p>EXT_TRIVIA_NEW_YEAR-013 / Folk customs</p> <p>What traits are traditionally considered auspicious for the first-foot in the Smithsonian account?</p>	<p>EXT_TRIVIA_NEW_YEAR-014 / Folk customs</p> <p>What might a person carry around the block to symbolize travel in a Peruvian family custom?</p>
<p>EXT_TRIVIA_NEW_YEAR-015 / Food customs</p> <p>What kind of legume appears in some Southern U.S. New Year meals?</p>	<p>EXT_TRIVIA_NEW_YEAR-016 / Food customs</p> <p>In a Southern U.S. New Year food tradition, what do black-eyed peas often symbolize?</p>
<p>EXT_TRIVIA_NEW_YEAR-017 / Food customs</p> <p>What is Hoppin' John commonly made with?</p>	<p>EXT_TRIVIA_NEW_YEAR-018 / Community history</p> <p>What is the name of the African American New Year's Eve observance involving gathering, worship, and reflection?</p>

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<p>EXT_TRIVIA_NEW_YEAR-019 / U.S. history</p> <p>Which document took effect on January 1, 1863, giving Watch Night a particular historical meaning?</p>	<p>EXT_TRIVIA_NEW_YEAR-020 / History</p> <p>Which Roman god is associated with the name of January?</p>
<p>EXT_TRIVIA_NEW_YEAR-021 / History</p> <p>What kind of promise did Romans make around the New Year in the Janus tradition?</p>	<p>EXT_TRIVIA_NEW_YEAR-022 / Astronomy</p> <p>About how long does Earth take to orbit the Sun?</p>
<p>EXT_TRIVIA_NEW_YEAR-023 / Astronomy and seasons</p> <p>What astronomical feature causes Earth to have a yearly cycle of seasons as it orbits the Sun?</p>	<p>EXT_TRIVIA_NEW_YEAR-024 / Calendar</p> <p>What happens to the day-of-year count when a Gregorian leap year arrives?</p>

Host answer key

Keep this section separate from player cards. Accept equivalent wording where the meaning matches.

01. Pope Gregory XIII.

The U.S. Naval Observatory dates the calendar reform to 1582 under Gregory XIII.

02. To keep calendar dates aligned with the seasonal year.

The Naval Observatory explains that Earth's seasonal cycle is a little longer than 365 whole days.

03. Yes, because it is divisible by 400.

The U.S. Naval Observatory's Gregorian rule includes a 400-year exception to the century-year rule.

04. February 29.

The Naval Observatory identifies February 29 as the extra leap day.

05. Coordinated Universal Time.

NIST gives the full form of the international time abbreviation.

06. To avoid favoring English or French word order.

NIST says UTC is a neutral compromise between the English and French name sequences.

07. 1904.

The Times Square Alliance dates the first celebration in the square to 1904.

08. 1907.

The Times Square Alliance says the first Ball Drop took place in 1907.

09. Robert Burns.

The Library of Congress explains Burns's role in collecting and shaping the song while recognizing older source material.

10. Guy Lombardo.

The Library of Congress says Lombardo and his Royal Canadians performed the song from the Roosevelt Hotel starting in 1928.

11. Twelve, associated with the twelve months.

Smithsonian presents this as a custom in Nunn's Peruvian and Mexican family rather than a universal rule.

12. The first visitor to enter a home in the new year.

Smithsonian describes this Scottish custom as welcoming a first visitor who brings symbolic gifts.

13. Tall and dark-haired.

Smithsonian says a tall, dark-haired man was traditionally associated with protection from Viking raiders.

14. A suitcase.

Smithsonian describes a suitcase ritual practiced by one family to invite travel in the coming year.

15. Black-eyed peas.

The Library of Congress confirms black-eyed peas are legumes and discusses their New Year symbolism.

16. Coins or prosperity.

The Library of Congress account connects black-eyed peas with coins and good fortune in New Year customs.

17. Black-eyed peas and rice.

NMAAHC includes Hoppin' John among New Year food traditions.

18. Watch Night.

NMAAHC describes Watch Night's community and religious importance.

19. The Emancipation Proclamation.

NMAAHC connects Watch Night to anticipation of emancipation taking effect at the beginning of 1863.

20. Janus.

The History.com account links January to Janus, a god associated with beginnings and transitions.

21. Promises of good conduct for the coming year.

History.com describes Roman New Year promises as one historical precursor to resolutions.

22. About 365.25 days.

NASA lists Earth's year as roughly 365.25 days.

23. Earth's rotational axis is tilted.

Because Earth's axis is tilted, the Northern and Southern Hemispheres take turns leaning toward the Sun during the year, changing the amount and angle of sunlight they receive.

24. An extra day is inserted in February, so that year has 366 days.

The Naval Observatory explains the calendar adjustment that compensates for the length of the seasonal cycle.

Hosting questions

Can we play without scoring?

Yes. Use the explanations to guide a relaxed group discussion.

Is this made for adults?

Yes. Familiar traditions and a few harder details suit adult gatherings and clubs.

Can the host verify an answer?

Yes. Each factual card has a source URL and explanation.

How can we shorten the game?

Choose one section and play 8–12 questions.

References

U.S. Naval Observatory states the Gregorian calendar was introduced in 1582 by Gregory XIII and is the internationally accepted civil calendar.

<https://aa.usno.navy.mil/faq/calendars>

U.S. Naval Observatory gives the Gregorian leap-year rule, with the divisible-by-400 exception, and explains February 29.

https://aa.usno.navy.mil/faq/leap_years

NIST gives UTC as Coordinated Universal Time and explains the neutral abbreviation.

<https://www.nist.gov/pml/time-and-frequency-division/how-utc-nist-related-coordinated-universal-time-utc-international>

Times Square Alliance dates the celebration to 1904 and the first Ball Drop to 1907.

<https://www.timessquarenyc.org/nye/nye-history-times-square-ball>

Library of Congress traces the familiar Auld Lang Syne wording to Robert Burns and earlier song traditions.

<https://blogs.loc.gov/folklife/2013/12/auld-acquaintance-for-the-new-year-burnss-auld-lang-syne/>

Library of Congress says Guy Lombardo performed Auld Lang Syne at the Roosevelt Hotel on NYE 1928, then continued radio/TV performances.

https://loc.gov/lcm/pdf/LCM_2014_0102.pdf

Smithsonian describes specific family/community customs: twelve grapes, Scottish first-footing, new clothing, and suitcase travel rituals.

<https://www.si.edu/sidedoor/midnight-magic>

Library of Congress identifies black-eyed peas as legumes and explains coin/luck symbolism in Southern New Year foodways.

<https://www.loc.gov/everyday-mysteries/categories/agriculture/item/are-black-eyed-peas-really-peas/>

NMAAHC describes Watch Night and its connection to the Emancipation Proclamation taking effect on January 1, 1863.

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/historical-legacy-watch-night>

History.com connects the name January to Janus and describes Roman New Year resolutions.

<https://www.history.com/articles/the-history-of-new-years-resolutions>

NASA gives Earth's orbital year as about 365.25 days and axial tilt as about 23.4 degrees.

<https://science.nasa.gov/earth/facts/>

Original AI-assisted resource with AI editorial review. Independent human playtesting and physical printing have not been completed. Answer, listen, or pass.