

# Winter Solstice Celebrations

The winter solstice, the longest night of the year, falls on December 21 or 22 in the Northern Hemisphere and June 20 or 21 in the Southern.

## A Soyal

Soyal is the winter solstice celebration of the Hopi Indians of northern Arizona. Ceremonies and rituals include purification, dancing, and sometimes gift-giving. At the time of the solstice, Hopi welcome the kachinas, protective spirits from the mountains. Prayer sticks are crafted and used for various blessings and other rituals.

## B Inti Raymi

This solstice celebration comes in June rather than December. But for Peru it is a winter solstice, and this Incan celebration is in honor of the Sun god. Originally celebrated by the Inca before the arrival of Spanish conquistadors, the festivities included feasts and sacrifices of animals or possibly even children.

## C Saturnalia

The ancient Roman festival of Saturnalia is perhaps the most closely linked with the modern celebration of Christmas. This festival happened around the time of the winter solstice and celebrated the end of the planting season. There were games and feasts and gift-giving for several days, and social order was inverted – slaves did not work and were briefly treated as equals.

## D St. Lucia's Day

St. Lucia's Day is a festival of lights celebrated in Scandinavia around the time of the winter solstice. Although it is now meant to honor St. Lucia, a Christian martyr, it has been incorporated with earlier Norse solstice traditions, such as lighting fires to ward off spirits during the longest night. Girls dress up in white gowns with red sashes and wear wreaths of candles on their heads in honor of St. Lucia.

## E Dong Zhi

Dong Zhi, the “arrival of winter”, is an important festival in China. It is a time for family to get together and celebrate the year they have had. It is thought to have started as an end-of-harvest festival, with workers returning from the fields and enjoying the fruits of their labors with family. Special foods, such as *tang yuan* (glutinous rice balls), are enjoyed.

(Abridged from [www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com))

**Read the texts about some winter solstice festivals.**

**Match the questions (1-9) with the descriptions (A-E).**

**You can choose each description more than once.**

**The first one (0) has been done for you.**

**Which winter solstice festival...**

**0. was already celebrated before the Spanish invasion? B**

**Q1. is celebrated by young women by wearing white dresses and candle crowns?**

**Q2. possibly started as a celebration of the end of the harvesting season?**

**Q3. is celebrated to greet guardian spirits coming from the mountains?**

**Q4. coincided with a period of social equality?**

**Q5. is celebrated in June instead of December?**

**Q6. involves the use of fires to keep spirits away?**

**Q7. coincided with the end of the period of field cultivation?**

**Q8.** is celebrated with purification liturgies, dances and gift-giving?

**Q9.** used to be celebrated with animal and human sacrifices?