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Top 10 European Festivals

If you are looking for an eye-catching, unusual holiday prize, a destination for your next group travel incentive or an unusual option for your next meeting abroad, this round-up of the top European festivals may provide the inspiration for a holiday, trip or meeting with a difference!

For further details please call our sales team on 0844 372 7505.

Carnevale Venezia (Venice Carnival), Italy

The high point of Venice's social calendar, Carnevale is a masked extravaganza and your chance to spend 12 days looking like the Phantom of the Opera! The world's best known fancy-dress party, it's as extravagant as Rio's Carnival is riotous, celebrating the approach of spring with refined gusto. The festival begins two Fridays before Ash Wednesday, finishing on Shrove Tuesday.



Festes de La Mercè, Barcelona, Spain

The Catalan capital's "festa major", a final burst of pre-winter madness for the Mediterranean city, runs in late September and is dedicated to its co-patron saint, the Virgin of Mercy. Some 600 events take place, most of them in the city centre. There's a swimming race across the harbour, a fun run and a series of free concerts. One of the most spectacular elements comes when the locals take to the streets with flaming fireworks.



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Festival of San Fermin Pamplona, Spain

More commonly known as “running of the bulls”, where men pit themselves against mad bulls in a frantic dash for their lives. The famous bull run is, of course, the top tourist draw in Pamplona but it comprises just one element of a very sacred event. San Fermin, held in early July, is a folk festival first and foremost, and commemorates the patron saint of Pamplona. It all kicks off with a huge fiesta that involves the entire town and thousands of tourists. There are plenty of traditional folkloric events to enjoy and it all climaxes, of course, with the big run.



Palio, Siena, Italy

This bareback, breakneck, ‘anything goes’ horse race around the dirt-covered sloping main piazza of medieval Siena is one of the highlights of the Italian summer. Whips are used as much on the other riders as on the horses, and even a horse who’s thrown its rider (far from uncommon) can take the prize. No matter who wins, the parties held before and afterward are street feasts to behold and take part in. The people have so much fun, they have to do it twice: July 2 and August 16.



Beaujolais Nouveau, France

The Fete des Sarmantelles (Pruning Festival) in the heart of the Beaujolais wine country is an all night affair with midnight torchlight processions, fireworks and wine. Vintners in traditional costume organise a wine tasting contest, open to all, in which the first prize is the winners’ weight in Beaujolais bottles. Lyon ‘old town’, with its delightful maze of narrow cobbled streets and restored Renaissance architecture, is the perfect base from which to explore the region and immerse yourself in the festival.



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Witches Night, Prague

A mix between Halloween, Guy Fawkes and May Day, this ancient Czech festival celebrates the end of winter and beginning of spring. Throughout the country bonfires are lit on hill tops and effigies of hags and witches are burnt, symbolising the end of winter. It's a stunning and unusual festival which creates a spectacular yet eerie air to the medieval city of Prague. The best place to view this great spectacle is Petrin Hill.



Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Scotland

Being homegrown it's easy to overlook the international status that the Edinburgh Festival has as one of the biggest arts festivals in the world. As the mother of all Fringe Festivals, it has over 200 shows in as many venues. From musicals to comedy, opera to dance, there's something for everyone.



Tomatina Wars, Spain

Just thirty minutes from Valencia, the small town of Bunol annually holds the world's weirdest event, 'Tomatina', the tomato war. The idea is to grab as many tomatoes as you can carry, then hurl them at anyone that runs, walks, crawls or stands within throwing distance. To help make things go with a swing, the town council generously provides lorry-loads of very ripe tomatoes, so if you go, don't expect to stay clean. Unlike most holidays, this is one break where we recommend that you pack the worst clothes in your wardrobe.



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Kiruna Snow Festival (Snow Sculpting), Sweden

This annual celebration of winter takes place in the far north of Sweden, where the twinkling of the Northern Lights can still be glimpsed across the snowy expanses. The festival celebrates all that is snow, a place where you can watch reindeer race through the fir trees, cheer dog sleds through the snowdrifts and be astounded by the world's largest snow-sculpting championship, where 60 artists mould and shape huge blocks of compacted snow to create fairytale landscapes.



International Film Festival Cannes, France

Rival film festivals in Berlin, Venice, Toronto and Utah may be more trendy with the hipsters but Cannes is still Cannes. There is no substitute for the pioneer and original international film festival. Held every May since 1939, stars, critics, the media, power brokers and yes, even film buffs, flock to the Cote d'Azur to take in the wonderful madness that is Cannes.



Oktoberfest - Munich, Germany

This legendary beer bash actually begins at the end of September, and winds down two weeks later in early October or whenever the kegs run dry! The revelry goes down on the Theresienwiese, which is a big grassy embankment with loads of beer tents. Of course, there's other stuff besides beer, like live music and a parade, but you can't get away from the fact that at the end of the day ... the Oktoberfest is about beer.

