

 Dogsledding in Arctic Norway

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Admit it. New Year's Eve rarely lives up to expectations. Performing the same old tired countdown in overcrowded, freezing cold conditions is simply boring after a while.

After the hype of Halloween, swiftly followed by an overkill of two months of Christmas adverts and a December chock-a-block with Christmas parties and hectic last-minute shopping, an overwrought New Year's Eve party holds little appeal.

Don't despair! Welcome in 2011 far from the maddening madding crowds with one of these five far-flung, once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

1. Svalbard, Norway

Can you think of anywhere more remote from the heaving hordes of Trafalgar Square than the Arctic? Head to Svalbard to see the New Year in through clouds of your breath hanging in crisp, clear air beneath a carpet of sparkling stars and, if you're lucky, the Northern Lights.

Basecamp Spitsbergen is offering three-day holidays of dog sledding and snowmobile safaris through the polar night from October to January. Book one to see in the New Year from an icy landscape resonating with a crystallised silence. Bliss!

2. Cornwall, UK

You don't have to travel overseas to escape the New Year lunacy. *Retallack Resort & Spa* is supplying a much-needed alternative to the usual over-indulgent, over-crowded festivities.

Guests can get away from it all by cosying up in an intimate self-catering pod amply pre-stocked with a heavily-laden fridge and wine rack. There is also a private terrace with a BBQ - for roasting chestnuts - and a mini bar.

The resort is best known for its FlowRider artificial surf wave, so those keen to get a seasonal dose of adrenaline can give flowboarding a go. Described as "skateboarding without the wheels (and the road rash), surfing without a fin, snowboarding without the mountain, wakeboarding without the boat and skimboarding without the sand," the activity will help work off all those seasonal excesses.

Retallack is also planning a New Year's Eve cocktail party and New Year's Day brunch, so you can dip into the partying as little or as often as you like.

3. Everest Base Camp, Nepal

If you're really desperate to escape the crowds, how do the high Himalayas grab your fancy? More specifically, Everest Base Camp and the trek there and back. It's not short and it's not easy. But it certainly is a remarkable way to spend your New Year!

World Expeditions is running a 20-day itinerary, departing December 20th from Kathmandu, Nepal, that will take you through remote Sherpa villages and the towering snowy peaks of the Khumbu Valley to the highest mountain in the world.

The best views of Mount Everest will be from the peak of Kala Pattar (5,545m) on December 30th - unfortunately a day too early to count as a New Year's Eve event - but the memory of that awe-inspiring panorama will stick with you for many, many years to come.

4. Mali

Mali's Festival of the Desert is West Africa's most famous music event. It's a celebration of

Malian music and Tuareg traditions and attracts the region's best performers (Ali Farka Touré was a regular) as well as international acts. The festival takes place in the oasis town of Essakane, two hours west of Timbuktu, itself a figure of speech for a far-away land - the perfect place to truly step off the mainstream New Year path!

Wild Frontiers is organising an 18-day trip, departing January 28th to Mali and Burkina Faso. New Year's Eve quite rightly plays second fiddle to the Festival of the Desert, which takes place from January 6th to 8th, and the occasion will be celebrated with locals in Djenne, Mali, after crossing the border from Bobo Dioulasso in Burkina Faso.

5. Antarctica

New Year celebrations mean nothing in this vast, timeless land of water and wildlife. At this time of year the snow and ice retreats to reveal the Antarctic Peninsula in all its haunting beauty. Glaciers calve to set hundreds of icebergs adrift in the narrow fjords and sheltered bays and humpback and minke whales breach nearby.

The peninsula is home to the continent's greatest concentration of wildlife, and the beasts aren't shy! It's possible to walk among the penguin rookeries and seal colonies for an up-close-and-personal encounter with nature.

World Expeditions is running a ten-day Antarctica Special cruise for New Year, departing December 29th, and visiting scientific stations and historic sites on Deception Island, Gerlache Strait, Paradise Bay and the Lemaire Channel. You might even forget that there's a New Year being ushered in around the rest of the world!

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Top 5 ways to escape the crowds on New Year's Eve

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