

Māori New Year: Matariki [B1]

Alla fine di giugno, la cultura aborigena neozelandese celebra l'inizio del nuovo anno con l'apparizione di Matariki, la costellazione delle Pleiadi.

Like most countries, Aotearoa/New Zealand celebrates [New Year's Eve](#) on 31 December, following the Gregorian calendar. In fact, [due to](#) its time zone, the country is one of the first places in the world to welcome the new year. Māori culture has many iwi or tribes, each with its own linguistic and cultural tradition. All celebrate Matariki, Māori New Year, which occurs in June or July in the middle of the Southern Hemisphere's winter, when temperatures can fall to below 0°C. Each tribe marks Matariki in its own way. In Māori cosmology, a profound spiritual connection exists between the people and the land. Matariki is the Māori name for the mother of a [cluster](#) of stars known as the Pleiades. Depending on the tribe, each of these sister stars has a different connection to the land, environment and Māori tribal culture. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, Matariki appears low on the north-eastern horizon just before [dawn](#) in midwinter, signalling the changing of the seasons. People watch the sky and wait for the stars to come out before beginning their Matariki celebrations. The exact date changes every year because it follows the Māori lunar calendar and astronomical observations. This year, Matariki will be observed on Friday 20 June.

CONNECTION TO THE STARS

Traditionally, Māori were expert navigators who used the stars to guide them, travelling great distances across the Pacific Ocean. They also used the sky to determine the best times for planting and [harvesting crops](#) and the brightness of the Matariki stars was believed to predict the success of the year ahead: if the stars were bright, it meant there would be a good year; if they were [dim](#), the year might be difficult and there could be food [shortages](#). Following British colonisation, many Māori traditions were [discouraged](#). By the 1940s, Matariki celebrations had nearly disappeared. The revival of Matariki as a national event only began in the

2000s, and in 2022 Matariki became a public holiday in New Zealand, and the first Indigenous holiday to be recognised [nationwide](#). People celebrate Matariki in many ways. This includes organising festivals with waiata (songs), haka (dances) and karakia (prayers) as well as performances and fireworks. The haka is not merely a dance, it is also a challenge that invokes mana (cultural power) and commands respect. Māori also enjoy traditional foods like hāngī, a meal cooked underground in a Māori [earth oven](#), and participate in pūrākau, or storytelling, [to pass down](#) Māori legends, traditions and knowledge.

FIRES AND OFFERINGS

Matariki is not only about new beginnings; it is also a time for remembering those who have died. Some Māori tribes hold special ceremonies where they call out the names of the [deceased](#), guiding their spirits on the journey to the stars to join their ancestors. Some people light ritual fires at [dawn to strengthen](#) Matariki and encourage it to shine brightly. These fires, called ahi kā, symbolise the connection between past, present and future generations. Others make food [offerings](#) to the stars, believing this will bring good fortune. Today, Matariki has become an important part of the identity of Aotearoa/New Zealand. It carries deep cultural and spiritual significance, [blending](#) astronomy, tradition and the idea of renewal: distinctly different from a New Year's all about parties and [resolutions](#)!

Glossary

- **discouraged** = scoraggiare
- **due to** = a causa di
- **to pass down** = tramandare
- **New Year's Eve** = Vigilia di Capodanno
- **dim** = tenue, poco illuminato
- **shortages** = scarsità
- **nationwide** = a livello nazionale
- **earth oven** = forno di terra
- **cluster** = gruppo
- **dawn** = alba
- **harvesting** = raccogliere
- **crops** = coltura
- **deceased** = defunti
- **to strengthen** = rafforzare
- **offerings** = offerte
- **blending** = mescolare
- **resolutions** = propositi