

# Winter Solstice: The Shortest Day of The Year [A2]

Il giorno più corto dell'anno viene festeggiato in tutte le culture e in molti modi diversi, come il Natale. Si tratta, in realtà, di un fenomeno astronomico attorno al quale i popoli antichi crearono rituali destinati a scacciare l'oscurità. Molti di questi sopravvissero venendo incorporati nelle festività moderne.



The 21st of December is the winter solstice. On this day, the northern hemisphere has the fewest daylight hours of the year. The day lasts just under eight hours, and as such it is the shortest day and the longest night of the year. By contrast, during the summer solstice, daylight lasts up to sixteen hours, while during the spring and autumn equinoxes, the days and nights both last around twelve hours. The Earth is tilted on its axis, so the Sun moves higher or lower across the horizon throughout the year. During the winter solstice, the North Pole is pointed furthest away from the Sun. It also means it is the coldest time of the year. In the southern hemisphere, the South Pole points towards the Sun, so the conditions are opposite. Down Under, in Australia, in the southern hemisphere, it is the hottest time of the year.

## FROM PAGAN TO CHRISTIAN

While today this simple scientific explanation satisfies most people, in ancient times the [darkening](#) days [frightened](#) people. In Britain, druids burnt [logs to banish](#) the darkness and [evil](#) spirits. The [Norsemen](#) of Scandinavia celebrated the festival of Juul or Yule. Ancient Romans held Saturnalia, a wild festival of [rebirth](#). Work stopped and [rules](#) were temporarily suspended. People decorated their houses, [lit candles](#) and [exchanged](#) gifts. Elements of these pagan rituals were integrated into the Christian celebration of Christmas. When the Julian calendar replaced the Gregorian calendar, the winter solstice moved from the 25th to the 21st of December. However, Christmas remained on the 25th.

## STONEHENGE

The winter solstice coincides with festivals all around the world. In China, Dong Zhi [heralds](#) the return of longer days with ancestral [worship](#), [rice wine](#) making and recitals. In Iran, Shab-e Yalda celebrates the Sun god Mithra's victory over darkness, with food, drink and poetry. In Japan, Toji traditions include [taking yuzu baths](#) and eating [pumpkins](#). Modern pagans continue to celebrate the winter solstice. The most important [site](#) is Stonehenge in southwest England. The original builders of Stonehenge did not understand the reason for the Sun's changing movements, but they [were able](#) to calculate them with absolute precision. On the shortest day, the Sun's rays move in perfect alignment with the stones, and the Sun finally [sets](#) through the Great Trilithon, the [tallest](#) of the stones. Some [5,500 years on](#), people still [gather](#) here [to witness](#) this [awe-inspiring](#) event.

---

# Glossary

- **up to** = fino a
- **lower** = più in basso
- **worship** = venerazione
- **rice wine** = vino di riso
- **pumpkins** = zucca
- **tallest** = più alta
- **5,500 years on** = 5.500 anni dopo
- **higher** = più in alto
- **pointed** = essere in una posizione
- **frightened** = spaventare
- **evil** = malvagi
- **candles** = candele
- **to witness** = essere testimone, assistere
- **darkening** = oscuramento
- **exchanged** = scambiare
- **were able** = essere capace
- **awe-inspiring** = maestoso
- **furthest away** = più lontano
- **rebirth** = rinascita
- **site** = posto
- **gather** = riunirsi
- **the fewest** = la quantità minima
- **lasts** = ore di luce
- **throughout** = per tutto
- **rules** = regole
- **sets** = tramontare (il sole)
- **tilted** = inclinata
- **logs** = troncos
- **Norsemen** = nordici
- **daylight** = ore di luce
- **to banish** = far sparire
- **lit** = accendere
- **heralds** = annunciare

- **taking yuzu baths** = farsi il bagno
- **axis** = asse