



Sister Bay drops a lighted cherry to count down to the new year.
TINA M. GOHR/USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN

WACKY CELEBRATION

From a Cheese Drop to a Chili Run, ways to enjoy the new year in Wisconsin

Chelsey Lewis Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

On Dec. 31, hundreds of thousands of people will watch a glittering ball drop in New York City’s Times Square as they count down to the start of a new year. In Plymouth, a smaller group will celebrate the end of 2018 in a more Wisconsin fashion: by watching a giant wedge of cheese descend to the earth. The Big Sartori Cheese Drop isn’t the only unusual way to ring in the new year in Wisconsin. Here are five ways beyond booze and balls to celebrate the new year around the state.

Big Sartori Cheese Drop, Plymouth

The big cheese wedge, a BellaVitano lined with lights, gets dropped at the family-friendly time of 10 p.m. Get there earlier; the first 250 families get free cheese wedges from Sartori. The festivities kick off at 8:30 p.m. outside the Plymouth Arts Center and include live music, a bonfire and hot chocolate. After the cheese is dropped, the party continues inside the PAC with a complimentary champagne toast at midnight, cheese hors d’oeuvres and a cash bar. **While you’re there:** If there’s snow, bring your snowshoes or skis for a trek in the Kettle Moraine State Forest’s Northern Unit. The forest’s Greenbush system (on Kettle Moraine Drive south of Highway 67) has 9 miles of trails for hiking or snowshoeing and 13.5 miles of trails groomed for skiing, including a 1.2-mile loop that is lighted for night skiing. Spend the weekend at the Osthoff Resort in nearby Elkhart Lake. The resort will have its own New Year’s Eve celebration with live entertainment from 6:30 to 10:30 p.m. at Lola’s on the Lake, live music from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. at the Elk Room and a complimentary champagne toast at midnight. New Year’s Eve packages start at \$219 per night (two-night stay minimum), which includes a \$25 dining credit.

Cherry Drop, Sister Bay

Another Wisconsin food product gets its time in the spotlight in Sister Bay. Door County is one of the country’s leading cherry-producing regions, and Sister Bay celebrates that legacy by dropping a 7-foot, 300-pound cherry made of red lights on New Year’s Eve. The drop takes place at midnight near Husby’s and the Sister Bay Bowl, but the fun gets started earlier with bonfires and fireworks near the Sports Complex at 8 p.m. and a DJ beginning at 10:30 p.m. at the drop site. **While you’re there:** Peninsula State Park, south of Sister Bay, is one of the state’s most popular parks in the summer. Crowds thin in the winter, when 16 miles of trails are groomed for skiing and 6 miles of trails are open for snowshoeing and hiking. The park also has 17 miles of trails open to snowmobiles. If conditions allow, Green Bay is a good spot for ice fishing for perch, walleye and trout.



The Big Sartori Cheese Drop will be at 10 p.m. on Dec. 31. PHOTO COURTESY PLYMOUTH ARTS CEN

Skyrockers New Year’s Eve Fireworks at the Bluff

La Crosse rocks every New Year’s Eve, when fireworks are launched from high above the city on Grandad Bluff. The local group that launches them, the La Crosse Skyrockers, counts down to New Year’s Eve with launches of two to four fireworks every night in December from Pettibone Park or the bluff. Volunteers can set the fireworks off for a small donation, which helps fund the big show at midnight on New Year’s Eve. **While you’re there:** Take in views of La Crosse from the top of Grandad Bluff during the day, then head to the 800-acre Hixon Forest for hiking, snowshoeing, skiing or fat-tire biking. Find a sweet place to stay at the Charmant Hotel, a former chocolate factory built in 1898 that found a new life as a boutique hotel in 2015. New Year’s Eve

rates start at \$259 (winter rates for other dates are as low as \$139). The hotel is offering a five-course prix fixe New Year’s Eve dinner for \$75; reservations are required (call 608-519-8830).

Chilly Chili Run-Walk, Fond du Lac

Getting in shape is a common New Year’s resolution, so get a jump start at this run/walk at Marian University on New Year’s Eve. A free half-mile kids run kicks off at 3:15 p.m., and the 5K run/walk starts at 3:30. A party at the Hornung Student Center will follow the race. Registration is \$20 and includes chili and other food, beverages and awards. **More races:** Run Into the New Year, a 5K or 10K at the Milwaukee County Sports Complex in Franklin beginning at 8:30 a.m. Dec. 31. Registration is \$40; see racelighthouse.com/runintothewhenyear. Run Your Past Off is a 3- or 6-hour ultra run at High Cliff State Park in Sherwood. The night run kicks off at 4 p.m., with competitors running as many laps as they can on a 4-mile loop in the park. Advance registration is \$45 for the 3-hour race and \$60 for the 6-hour race; see facebook.com/runyourpastoff.

First Day Hikes, throughout Wisconsin

Get to bed early on Dec. 31 and celebrate 2019 with a First Day Hike on New Year’s Day. In the Milwaukee area. Join hikes at Lapham Peak in Delafield from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.; a 4-mile hike on the Scuppernong trails in the Kettle Moraine State Forest-Southern Unit from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.; a 2.5-mile or 4.5-mile hike at Pike Lake from noon to 3 p.m.; or a 3- to 4-mile hike on the Ice Age Trail in the Kishwaukee nature preserve in Williams Bay from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m.

Not-so-Lucky bonus: Carp Fest, Prairie du Chien

In the past, Wisconsin’s trifecta of weird things being dropped on New Year’s Eve, included Lucky, a 40-pound frozen carp, being dropped at midnight in Prairie du Chien. Revelers then kissed the fish for good luck in the new year. Lucky will not be lowered this year, however. The committee that puts on the event noted on their website “it’s not an easy task to pull off,” and that it was only meant to happen one year, but continued for 17 because it was so popular. “We’re not saying the Droppin’ of the Carp is completely done, we just hope somebody will step up and say ‘we miss this’ and rekindle it,” Mike Ulrich, Prairie du Chien’s Parks and Recreation director, said in a statement. The city’s New Year’s festival, Carp Fest, will continue with activities Dec. 26-31. Those include a Family Droppin’ of the Carp Party from 5 to 6:30 p.m. Dec. 31 at Hoffman Hall. For a small fee, party-goers can kiss Lucky Carp Jr. for good luck, play carnival games, enjoy carp samples and more.