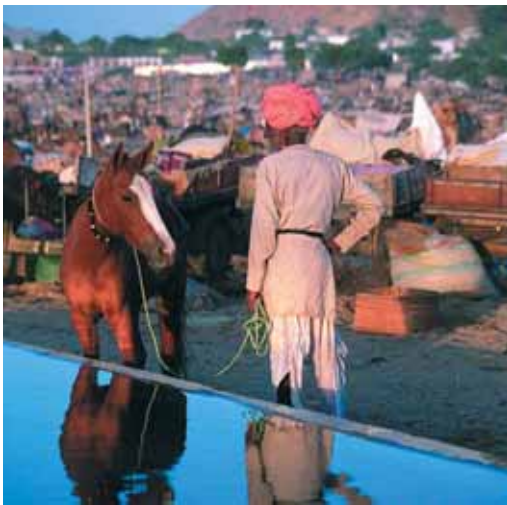


FESTIVE SPIRIT

There's always a festival going on somewhere in the world. Here, our Specialists describe their favourite lesser-known celebrations – it may be worth coinciding your trip with one.



Marwari horseman, Jodhpur

Songkran Festival, Thailand

The most celebrated of Thailand's many festivals is Songkran, the traditional Thai New Year. 'Songkran' means 'to change place', which is what happens every year from the 13th April when many of those working in the city return to the countryside to visit friends and families. People express respect for their elders by pouring sacred water on their hands and presenting them with gifts. Houses are cleaned and offerings of flowers and fruits are made in the temples. Songkran is also a water festival so you may receive a friendly soaking from locals brandishing water pistols and buckets of water! The festival is also celebrated in Cambodia as Chaul Chnam and in Laos as Bun Pi Mai.

Nick Payton: 01869 276 287

Knysna Oyster Festival, South Africa

From 30th June to 9th July this year, South Africa's Knysna Oyster Festival is not just a celebration of the Knysna oyster beds' famous

produce. As well as oyster tasting and oyster eating contests, there are bike races, marathons, canoeing events, visits from the South African navy and a host of other activities. Knysna is also ideally located at the heart of the Garden Route, so is perfect as part of a trip to South Africa.

Melissa Hillen: 01869 276 268

Tango Festival, Argentina

In the heat of the late Buenos Aires summer (last week in February and first week in March), musicians and dancers can be seen on squares and street corners as part of the city's annual tango festival. Concerts, classes, exhibitions, milongas and walking tours are just some of the entertainments taking place in the world's most important and extravagant celebration of 'tanguero' culture.

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Sauti za Busara, Zanzibar

The Sauti Za Busara is a little known Swahili music festival that takes place in Zanzibar's Stone Town in mid-February. For four days the town comes alive with a carnival atmosphere, focused on the Old Fort where everything from Swahili hip hop, bongo flava and kidumbak wedding dance to taarab music is played. It's a time to enjoy some of the finest Swahili cuisine, meet people from all over the Swahili world, dodge acrobats and fire-eaters and relax in a fun and friendly atmosphere.

Alexandra Matts: 01869 276 321

Marwar Festival, India

The annual Marwar Festival takes place in Jodhpur, the blue city of Rajasthan, in October during the full moon of Sharad Purnima. Held in the Mandore Gardens, it showcases the classical

art and culture of the region, so you will see and hear folk music and dance centred on the romantic lifestyle of Rajasthan's rulers. The festival also hosts riding competitions and polo, as this is an area famous for its Marwari horsemanship.

Sara Wells: 01869 276 243

Lusheng Festival, China

Situated in lush southwest China, Guizhou province is a melting pot of minority cultures and traditions that plays host to some of the country's most spectacular festivals. Celebrations are usually held on auspicious lunar dates, one of the most popular being the Lusheng Festival, usually held in the first lunar month. This features celebrations of traditional dancing, bullfighting, horse racing, antiphonal singing (echoing duets) and bamboo *lusheng* instrument competitions after which the festival is named. The festivals are remarkable for the spectacular finery worn by many female participants, especially the splendid beaten-silver headdresses of the long-horned Miao.

Paul Done: 01869 276 301

Marree Camel Cup, Australia

The Outback is hard to beat for quirky events. For example, the tiny Ghan Heritage Trail town of Marree at the southern end of the Birdsville and Oodnadatta tracks holds the Camel Cup every July, with local and visiting camel riders competing in a series of races and testing their skills for the prestigious \$1,000 Marree Camel Cup. The town's history is intimately linked with the Afghan cameleers and their camels brought over to help explore the continent, and there are plenty of related heritage relics to explore.

Nikki Surtees: 01869 276 295



Marree cameleer, Australia



Lighting incense for Thai New Year



Tanguero mural, Buenos Aires



Stone Town, Zanzibar



Festival time, Guizhou, China



Knysna harbour, South Africa