

# Munich, Germany

## Oktoberfest

By Tom Kirvan

### MUNICH FESTIVAL DRAWS MILLIONS OF VISITORS TO A TASTE OF TRADITION

Oktoberfest is a massive, joyous celebration of Bavarian history and carnival magic that annually draws more than 6.5 million celebrants to Munich, the third most populous city in Germany with some 1.5 million residents.

The 2026 Oktoberfest runs from September 19 to October 4 and transforms the sprawling Theresienwiese fairgrounds into a bustling village of towering beer palaces, glowing amusement rides, and the unmistakable, sweet scent of roasted almonds, toasted malt, and golden pretzels. Despite its name, the festival is held mostly in September to take advantage of the more seasonal and warmer weather.

The magic begins when the mayor of Munich taps the first wooden keg, officially declaring “O’zapft is!” (It’s tapped!) the first day of the festival. A universal wave of camaraderie then takes over, as strangers become instant friends as glasses clink, toasting the start of an event that has royal roots.

What started as a royal wedding celebration for Crown Prince Ludwig and Princess Therese in 1810 has bloomed into the largest folk festival on the planet. The royal family played a central role in the origins of the event with such festivities as horse races and public celebrations in honor of the newlyweds. Over time, it has been converted into a celebration of Bavarian and German culture, food, and especially beer. Most visitors dress in traditional Oktoberfest costumes, which for men is the lederhosen and for women a dirndl.

Oktoberfest covers 100 acres and features 17 large beer halls and 21 smaller tents, only serving beers from the “Big Six” Munich breweries – Augustiner, Hacker, Hofbrau, Lowenbrau, Paulaner, and Spaten. In addition to being local beers that obey German purity laws, the brews are typically served in one-liter (34-fluid-ounce) glasses. Outside the beer halls you will find traditional German food, Bavarian music and performers, and stomach-churning fairground rides and attractions.

A grand parade serves as a highlight of the opening weekend of Oktoberfest. The Sunday, Sept. 20 event will feature thousands of participants in traditional Bavarian clothing, marching bands, and rifle clubs as they parade through central Munich, the city that hosted the 1972 Summer Olympics.

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A Landlords' Concert takes place on the second Sunday of Oktoberfest (September 27), and features a massive open-air brass band performance staged at the foot of the Bavaria statue. Held at 11 a.m. on September 27, the concert will include more than 300 musicians playing traditional Bavarian marches, folk songs, and the Bavarian National Anthem.

The beer tents, of course, are a buzz of activity throughout Oktoberfest. Of special note this year are three tents:

- Bartls Flößerstadt: A highly anticipated new tent for 2026 highlighting Munich's rafting history with an organic and Fair-Trade regional menu.
- Bodos Cafézelt: A completely rebuilt, eco-friendly wooden tent, which now features a beautiful gallery and extended cocktail bar.
- Oide Wiesn: A dedicated heritage area recreating the atmosphere of historical Oktoberfests. It features antique rides, traditional folk dancing, and classic brass music.

For those who gravitate to carnival attractions, here are three of the most popular:

- Olympia Looping: The world's largest transportable roller coaster with five loops.
- Krinoline: A historic, music-accompanied merry-go-round operating since the 1920s.
- The Toboggan: A classic wooden helter-skelter slide that challenges riders to scramble to the top.

On the closing day of Oktoberfest (October 4), a Marksmen Event will take place at noon as the kings of a local shooting competition are crowned. The competition concludes with a collective gun salute and the playing of the Bavarian National Anthem.

As the tents close on the final day, bands will play a full musical program while waiters and waitresses distribute sparklers to the crowd, creating a warm, melancholic close to the autumn celebration where more than 2 million gallons of beer will be consumed – enough to fill three Olympic-sized swimming pools.

Image credit: FooTToo (2025 September 21). Participants with traditional clothes at a parade at the annual Oktoberfest beer festival in Munich, Germany [Photograph]. Shutterstock. Retrieved September 1, 2026 from [Shutterstock](#)