



# Press Release

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## The history of the Oktoberfest

### Origins

Four years after Bavaria was elevated to the status of a kingdom, Crown Prince Ludwig – later to become King Ludwig I – married Princess Therese of Sachsen-Hildburghausen on October 12, 1810. The official wedding celebrations lasted five days and were staged as a grand ovation to the family that now ruled over the young kingdom. The celebrations, at once magnificent and open to the common folk, took place on a stage that embraced the whole of Munich: The riflemen of the National Guard held a parade together with civilian shooting clubs. There were illuminations and music, eating and drinking, trumpets and kettle drums. An enormous festival atmosphere thus engulfed the center of the town. The ruling House of Wittelsbach demonstrated its closeness to the people and, in so doing, expressed gratitude to its subjects, whose patience had been sorely tried through ties to France and the resultant wars, through territorial expansion and through administrative reorganization. This huge festival thus came at just the right time to establish an identity for the “new” Bavarians and focus their attention on Munich, as the capital and seat of royal residence, and on the Bavarian monarchy.

The celebrations in the center of town, referred to even then as a “public festival”, concluded on October 17 with a horse race on a piece of meadow land outside the gates of Munich. The highest authority to participate in this contest was obtained “by individuals classified in the

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Cavalry Division of the National Guard, third class” under Major Andreas von Dall'Armi. Children dressed in traditional Bavarian costumes paid homage to the presiding royal family with poems, flowers and fruits of the land. In honor of the bride, the festival grounds were called “Theresienwiese” (“Therese's Meadow”). And to this day, the name has stuck: “Theresienwiese” is the name given to the festival grounds – and affectionately abbreviated simply to “the Wiesn” by local residents. The horse race was won by National Guard cavalryman and coachman Franz Baumgartner, the man who is believed to have proposed the competition. This race in 1810 was intended to revive the famous “scarlet race”, which had last been held at the Jacob's Dult (fair) in Munich in 1786.

### **A public success becomes a regular event**

The horse race was a huge hit with the local public, and it was the decision to repeat it at the same time the following year that birthed the tradition of the “October festivals”, or Oktoberfest. The horse in 1811 was flanked by the first agriculture fair, a specialist show designed to improve standards in Bavarian farming. The horse race – the oldest element of the event – disappeared from the Oktoberfest for organizational reasons after 1938. However, the Bavarian Central Agricultural Festival (ZLF) still runs in parallel to the Oktoberfest every four years, on the southern part of the festival grounds. Since the space available to the Oktoberfest proper naturally shrinks in these years, the festival accompanied by the ZLF show is referred to as the “Little Oktoberfest”.



### **From beer stands to beer palaces**


Visitors to the festival could purchase beer at a rapidly growing number of small stands. It was not until 1896 that the first large “beer palaces” were set up by enterprising landlords in cooperation with the breweries. After that, it was not long before substantial snacks and hearty Munich specialties were also being offered for sale. This gave rise to the landlords' street of stalls, which still provide everything for body and soul that visitors need to enjoy the Oktoberfest.

### **Popular amusements**

The other part of the festival grounds was dominated by funfair sideshows. The first merry-go-round and two swings were set up in 1818; the selection of amusements remained modest in the early decades. The 1880s then ushered in the golden age of Germany's amusement and carousel industry. And this development in turn laid the cornerstone for the Oktoberfest as we know it today: a broad range of rides, amusements, shows and much more besides to entertain young and old alike.

### **The Oktoberfest today**

To this day, the Oktoberfest retains its traditional local flavor: It is a Munich festival characterized by Munich hospitality and lubricated by Munich beer. That is why the Oktoberfest rules specify that “only Munich beer from proper and proven traditional Munich breweries (today, this description admits the breweries Augustiner, Hacker-Pschorr, Löwenbräu, Paulaner, Spaten and the Staatliches Hofbräuhaus) that complies with the Munich Purity Law of 1487 and the German Purity Law of 1906 may be served”.

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The City of Munich has been organizing the Oktoberfest and overseeing the development of this major public festival for more than 180 years. Deputy Mayor Josef Schmid, head of the Department of Labor and Economic Development, is responsible for the organization and running of the festival. Based on his proposals, Munich City Council's Economic Affairs Committee makes all key decisions with regard to the Oktoberfest. Every year, something like 1,400 applications from funfair amusements and vendors are received and assessed. About 600 of these applicants are ultimately admitted.

Today, the Oktoberfest – the Festival of the City of Munich – has attained to global fame and is seen as the biggest public festival in the world. What makes it so special is its uncanny (and seemingly effortless) ability to remain a festival for local residents while also doubling up as an international mega-event. While never forgetting its roots, it is always open to new developments. This unique mix of high-tech and tradition is typical of the “festival of festivals” and accounts for its outstanding popularity and attractiveness.

In 2010, the world-famous festival commemorated its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary in fitting style: On the southern part of the festival grounds, a special area was set up featuring a racetrack for horses, a historical beer tent, a museum tent, an animal show, a velodrome and a theater tent. Powerfully evoking the celebrations of yesteryear, this special anniversary feature oozed a nostalgic charm and laid-back atmosphere all its own. The event was such a hit with visitors that, in 2011, Munich's City Council decided to



make what was dubbed the “Oide Wiesn” (the “Vintage Oktoberfest”) a regular feature in honor of the Oktoberfest celebrations of the olden days.

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The official website and addresses for all information about the Oktoberfest:

**[www.oktoberfest.eu](http://www.oktoberfest.eu)**



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**Oktoberfest – the Festival of the City of Munich**