



Fireworks explode over the Sydney Harbour Bridge during New Year's Eve celebrations in Australia on Jan 1. BRENDAN ESPOSITO / AAP / AP

Revelers usher in the new year

Partygoers worldwide braved the elements, exuded optimism about the future

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Fireworks and countdown celebrations took place around the world on Dec 31 to mark the transition to the New Year as revelers around the globe bid farewell to 2018 and welcomed 2019.

In New York City, pouring rain could not keep crowds from picking Times Square for the traditional ball drop and a string of star performances.

"I didn't expect the rain, but I'm well prepared," said Jessica Wang, a Chinese student from Canada, who wore a plastic poncho.

Because umbrellas were banned for security reasons, hardy spectators like Wang packed their ponchos and even taped plastic bags to their bodies as they took up their spots in the "Crossroads of the World" as early as 7:30 am on Dec 31.

The celebration took place under tight security.

Partygoers were checked for weapons and then herded into pens,

ringed by metal barricades, where they waited for the strike of midnight.

About 7,000 police officers provided security, with the help of bomb-sniffing dogs, 1,225 security cameras and 235 "blocker vehicles" to stop any potential vehicle attacks.

This year's official programming began at 6pm, concluding at 12 am with the lighting and raising of the New Year's Eve Ball up a pole atop One Times Square.

Earlier on Dec 31, the Sino-American Friendship Association flipped the switch that lights the ball before presenting a Chinese cultural performance culminating in red and gold pyrotechnics.

Hong Kong celebration

Earlier in Hong Kong, as many as 340,000 people lined Victoria Harbour to kick-start the new year with a fireworks show at midnight, according to police statistics.

They gathered on both sides of the city's harbor to watch a 10-minute synchronized pyromusical of fireworks, light shows and music. The fireworks exploded in front of the Special Administrative Region's

iconic skyscrapers with songs sung in Cantonese, Mandarin and English, including the famous New Year's song, *Auld Lang Syne*.

Among those officiating the celebration event was the city's Chief Executive Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor and the central government's top liaison official Wang Zhimin.

Countdown celebrations were also held across the city's commercial districts including Causeway Bay, Lan Kwai Fong and Mong Kok.

In Lan Kwai Fong, the city's most popular area for night life, partygoers packed the pubs and clubs and celebrated all night.

In the city's Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital, Hong Kong welcomed its first baby of 2019 at 12:17 am, a girl weighing 2.84 kilograms. Soon after was another baby girl who was delivered at Princess Margaret Hospital.

The Macao SAR also hosted its own celebration at one of the city's largest squares — the Praca do Lago Sai Van — near the iconic Macao Tower. About 20,000 people joined the New Year countdown, which also included a fireworks show.

Celebrations were also held at

the city's historic port area — the O Porto Interior, attracting about 4,000 people.

Chimes of Big Ben

London ushered in the New Year with its annual fireworks on New Year's Eve and a parade on New Year's Day.

As part of the Mayor's #LondonIsOpen campaign, the city's New Year's Eve Fireworks 2018 aimed to show the world that London is proud to be a global, European city and to send a message of support to more than 1 million European citizens living in London.

The display, organized by the mayor of London, brought together more than 100,000 spectators. The show, which is the largest annual fireworks display in Europe, included eight tons of fireworks connected to 5,000 firing circuits across 348 firing locations on barges, pontoons and the Coca-Cola London Eye.

The celebration was started by the chimes of Big Ben, which has remained silent during the year while undergoing renovation.

Sadiq Khan, the mayor of London, said: "By paying tribute to our close

relationship with Europe as we welcome in the New Year, we will once again show the world that London will always be open."

The New Year's Day Parade was scheduled in the city's historic heart at noon, featuring thousands of performers and colorful floats from across the world.

Across the channel in Paris, Parisians and tourists gathered on the Champs-Élysées to celebrate New Year's Eve under heavy security.

Anti-government protesters from the yellow vests movement issued calls on social media for "festive" demonstrations on the famous avenue.

Paris police set up a security perimeter in the area, with bag searches, a ban on alcohol and traffic restrictions.

The Interior Ministry said on Dec 30 that the heavy security measures were needed because of a "high terrorist threat" and concerns about "non-declared protests."

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