



ARTS & CULTURE

Stonehenge Welcomes 8,000 for Summer Solstice

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Around 8,000 people gathered Wednesday around prehistoric Stonehenge in Britain to observe the summer solstice.

Many wore colorful clothing and even **antlers**. They stayed overnight to greet the sunrise on June 21. It is the day with the most daylight in the Northern Hemisphere. The crowd greeted the morning sun shining into the heart of Stonehenge with drumming, chanting and cheering.

Nichola Tasker is director of Stonehenge at English Heritage, a non-profit group that oversees many historic places in Britain. Tasker said: “Stonehenge continues to **captivate** and to bring people together to celebrate the seasons, just as it has done for thousands of years.” She added, “There was a wonderful atmosphere from sunset to sunrise, and everybody enjoyed a very atmospheric morning.”

In addition to the 8,000 people present, English Heritage said that about 154,000 others watched on its live stream video.

Summer solstice

In the Northern Hemisphere, the summer solstice happened at 14:58 UTC on June 21 when “the Sun travels along its northernmost path in the sky,” said the Old Farmer’s Almanac. The day also marks the start of summer in Earth’s northern half. In the Southern Hemisphere, it’s the opposite: the June solstice marks the start of winter when “the Sun is at its lowest point in the sky.”

In China, the summer solstice is called Xiazhi. Beijing Tourism says it is a time when people celebrate the wheat harvest and pray for peace. And people eat vegetables, cold noodles and what is commonly known as “summer solstice cake.”

Northern European countries like Sweden and Finland celebrate the summer solstice by singing and dancing around the midsummer pole. In Ukraine, people traditionally gather to celebrate Ivan Kupala Night in Khortytsya, an important historical area on the Dnieper River.

The day is also known as the “International Day of Yoga.”

On Wednesday, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi led diplomats and others for a morning yoga session at the United Nations. In 2014, Modi told world leaders at the U.N., “Yoga is not just about exercise; it is a way to discover the sense of oneness with yourself, the world and the nature.”

At Stonehenge, for just one night of the year, people are permitted to spend time inside the stone circle that is believed to have been built between 5,000 to 3,500 years ago.

The purpose of the stone circle is still hotly debated. English Heritage notes several explanations. They include Stonehenge being a coronation place, or crowning place, for Danish kings. Other explanations are that the place was a temple, a center for healing, or a structure for astronomy used to predict eclipses and other solar events.

The organization said the most generally accepted explanation “is that of a prehistoric temple **aligned** with the movements of the sun.”

The stones are said to line up with the sun at both the summer and winter solstices.

I’m Faith Pirlo.

Hai Do wrote this story for VOA Learning English from Associated Press and other sources.

Words in This Story

antler *-n.* bone-like structures on the heads of deer that are not permanent

captivate *-v.* to capture the interest or attention of a person

aligned *-adj.* being in lined up with; being in the correct position or in agreement with

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