

18 Weird Facts About the Olympics Through the Years

You might be surprised to learn that the Olympics have changed a lot over the years, from the events included in the official program to the athletes eligible to compete. These 18 unique facts shed some light on the history of the Olympic Games and will deepen your appreciation if you like to tune in every couple of years.

1 The Olympics used to take place over six months.

First celebrated in Greece in 776 BC, the Olympic Games originally spanned a hefty six months. Some of the events included in the earliest Olympics include discus, chariot racing, and wrestling.

2 Women couldn't always compete.

Women have been allowed to compete in the Olympics since 1900, though many events did not permit women to compete until several years later.

3 The Olympics were banned for over a thousand years.

The Olympics were banned by the Romans in 396 AD, as they considered the competition a pagan ritual that was in direct conflict with Christianity. They were not held again for another 1,500 years until the modern Olympic games began in Athens in 1896.

4 Olympic sports have changed quite a bit.

Many sports, like hot air ballooning, rope climbing, and tug of war, were once part of the competition in the Olympics but have since been removed from the program.

5 It wasn't always a worldwide event.

Only 14 countries participated in the first Summer Olympics in 1896, though over 200 compete today.

6 Artists used to compete in the Olympics.

Between 1921 and 1948, musicians, artists, and architects, among other creatives, competed in the Olympic Games by making works of art. These pieces typically included athletes and Olympic sports as their subjects.

7 There's less gold in gold medals than you think.

Gold medals are [not made from solid gold](#). Modern Olympic gold medals are gold-plated and primarily comprised of silver; solid gold medals stopped being produced in 1912.

8 Only one country has won medals from every Winter Olympics.

The United States is the only country to have earned a medal at every Olympic Winter Games.

9 Some countries excel at the Winter Olympics over the Summer Olympics.

Despite winning medals at the Winter Olympics, Liechtenstein has never won a medal at the Summer Olympics. On the other hand, plenty of countries compete in the Summer Games but don't have enough winter sports athletes to compete in the Winter Games.

10 South America did not host the Olympic Games until 2016.

The Olympics were held in South America for the first time in 2016 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Women's rugby made its Olympic debut, and golf and men's rugby returned to the Olympic program after a century-long hiatus.

11 The 1900 Olympic Games were small and long by today's standards.

The 1900 Olympic Games were held in Paris, France as part of the World's Fair in Paris. The games spanned five months, and only 24 countries were in competition at that time.

12 Asia was not represented at the Olympics until 1912.

Japan was the first Asian country to participate in the Olympic Games when it competed for the first time in the 1912 Summer Games, held in Stockholm, Sweden.

13 Only five countries have competed in every Olympic Summer Games.

Only five countries—Greece, Switzerland, Great Britain, Australia, and France—have competed in every Olympic Summer Games

14 Figure Skating was once part of the Summer Olympics.

Despite taking place on ice, figure skating was included as part of the Summer Olympics. The Winter Olympics were not introduced until 1924, at which time figure skating was moved over.

15 The Olympic flag holds tremendous significance.

The five rings on the Olympic flag represent the world's five inhabited continents, with North and South America (the Americas) considered as one. The ring's colors are the most common colors on countries' flags around the world.

16 The Olympics have official languages.

English and French are considered the official languages of the Olympic Games, as is the language of the country hosting the Games.

17 The Olympics are proud of its Greek heritage.

Fire is significant to Greek mythology, with Hestia being the Goddess of the Hearth. Sacred flames were often kept lit throughout the Ancient Games in temples like Olympia. The idea of lighting an Olympic Flame in a Cauldron began at the Summer Olympics in Amsterdam.

18 The Torch Relay was invented in Nazi Germany

The tradition of moving the Olympic flame from country to country until it reaches the host nation seems much older, but it was conceived by German Olympian Carl Diem for the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin. The Nazis used the torch relay and subsequent games as propaganda, with filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl creating the film *Olympia* after filming the events.