

Christmas in Austria

The feast of St Nicholas marks the beginning of Christmas in Austria. The saint accompanied by the devil asks children for a list of their good and bad deeds. Good children are given sweets, toys and nuts. Gifts that are placed under the tree are opened after dinner on Christmas Eve.

Brass instruments play chorale music from church steeples, and carol singers, carrying blazing torches and a manger from house to house, gather on the church steps.

Silent Night was first sung in 1818, in the village church of Oberndorf. There is a story told of how Christmas was almost spoiled for the villagers that year.

On Christmas Eve, the priest went into the church and found that the organ was not working. The leather bellows that are used to pump the air through the pipes were full of holes. Christmas without music would not do so the priest showed the organist Franz Bauer a new Christmas hymn he had written. Franz quickly composed a tune for it that could be played on a guitar. So Oberndorf had music after all.

In Austria baked carp is served for the traditional Christmas dinner.

December 6 in Austria is when Heiliger Nikolaus or St. Nicholas, rewards good children with sweets, nuts and apples.

On December 24, the Christ Child brings presents and the Christmas tree for the children. The children wait until they hear a bell tinkling. Then they enter a special room where the Christmas tree is waiting all decorated with candles, ornaments and candies. The whole family sings Christmas carols and wishes each other



Christmas in Belgium

In Belgium there are two Santa Claus figures. There is St. Niklaas and Pere Noel.

Pere Noel visits those who speak the Walloon language, in fact he visits them twice. The first time is on the December 4th he does this so he can find out which children have been good and which children have been bad. If a child is good he returns on December 6th with the presents the good children deserve if they were bad they are left twigs. The good children usually received candy and toys. With the bad children he leaves the twigs inside their shoes or in small baskets that are left just inside the doorway.

Pere Noel visits those who speak French. He visits with his companion Pere Fouettard and asks about whether the children have been good or bad. If they have been good they receive chocolates and candies if they have been bad they are more likely to receive a handful of sticks.

Christmas for both gift-givers is on December 6th, the feast of St Nicholas, it is a religious occasion and is observed with services in churches and quiet family gatherings. Special cakes are baked and served during the holiday season and are a treat for children and adults.

The other part is called "Flemish" where they are Dutch speaking. They are visited by St Niklaas, they are in the North half of the country.

St-Nicholas doesn't have anything to do with Christmas. It's His Birthday on December 6th, and then he visits all children to bring them presents.

And then there is Christmas, December 25. The day Jesus Christ was born. The last years the American tradition around Christmas is coming over here. By movies and storybooks.

Now Children get gifts under the Christmas tree also. But this isn't the same everywhere. But it mostly depends on the parents. At some family, they buy gifts for each other and put them under the tree. There's no Santa to bring them. In others, mostly when there are still li'l children it's Santa who brings the gifts and puts them under the tree.

That can be on Christmas Eve, but sometimes in the weeks before Christmas. Gifts are opened on the evening before Christmas, after a Christmas dinner, or the midnight mass, or on Christmas morning.



Christmas in Bulgaria

Christmas Eve is as important as Christmas day in Bulgaria. A special dinner, consisting of at least twelve dishes is prepared. All of them are without meat and each of them represents a separate month of the year. The dishes consist of beans, different kinds of nuts, dried plums, cakes, and the traditional Banitza. On this day the whole family gathers, eat on straw and get off the table in the same time.

In the past Christmas was celebrated differently. There were boys and non-married young men who were visiting the houses, singing songs for wealth and health for the hosts. They were rewarded with money, food and so on. They were bringing long sticks to put *kravai* which are round breads with holes in them. They were called *Rkoledaris*. In the houses the families gathered sitting on the ground or on dry grass and eating meatless food. There were 7 or 12 meals: wine, *Rakia*, *sarmy* and so on. There always was a huge round bread where all the cattle, the house and things like that were carved.

Bulgarians make Christmas wishes around the fire and eat blood sausage



Christmas in Canada

Christmas celebrations are quite similar in the variety to America.

In some provinces, a big winter festival, called Sinck tuck, is celebrated by the Eskimos, with dancing and a present-giving party.

In Labrador, turnips are saved from the summer harvest and are given to children, with a lighted candle pushed into a hollowed out hole.

In Nova Scotia, a country settled by Scottish highlanders, songs and carols brought from Britain two centuries ago are sung each Christmas morning.

Also in Nova Scotia, during the twelve days of Christmas small groups of belsnicklers, or masked mummers, appear in neighborhoods, ringing bells, making noise, seeking candy or other treats. The hosts may try to guess who the mummers are and if they guess right the mummer removes his or her disguise and stops making rude noises and actions. Children may be quizzed by the mummers on their behavior if they say they have been good they are rewarded with candy.

In Quebec they display Crèches or nativity scenes in their homes as the Christmas decorations. After attending midnight mass, families may be served tourtiere or pork pie. Another favorite food is Boulettes or small meatballs. A Christmas banquet is called a reveillon.

In British Columbia Christmas turkey may be accompanied by either fresh or smoked salmon.

In Canada the traditional Christmas dinner is roast turkey with vegetables and sauces. For dessert it is rich, fruity Christmas pudding with brandy sauce. Mince pies, pastry cases filled with a mixture of chopped dried fruit.

Masked mummers are a Christmas tradition from Newfoundland.



Christmas in Denmark

Christmas in Denmark is supposed to be when a mischievous elf called Nisse can have his fun. He is said to live in the lofts of old farmhouses and enjoys playing jokes. He wears gray woollen clothes, a red bonnet, red stockings and white clogs. Families leave him a bowl of rice pudding or porridge on Christmas Eve to keep his jokes within limits. Usually though he is kind and helpful helping out on the farms and being especially good to the children.

Christmas Eve dinner begins with rice pudding that holds a magic almond inside. Whoever finds the almond receives a prize. They then have goose, red cabbage and browned potatoes. After that lots of pastries and cakes.

The Danish tradition is the Christmas plate. This was a tradition in the early days where rich Danes gave plates biscuits and fruit as presents to their servants. These plates were the nicest and best kind and were not used for everyday use, this is the reason why they became so collectable.

They take much pride making their own decorations with bright paper, bits of wood and straw. The parents secretly decorate the tree, and children are not permitted to see the tree until dinner on Christmas Eve. The tree is then lit up and families gather around to sing carols and hymns.

Each Sunday in Advent, guests are invited to join in the lighting of the candles on the Advent crown. Adults drink a warming mixture of red wine, spices and raisins, and children drink a sweet fruit juice, like strawberry. Everybody eats small cakes of batter which have been cooked over the fire in a special pan, and dusted with icing sugar.

In Denmark Christmas Eve is a special time. It is at this time parents secretly decorate the Christmas tree with home made wood and straw baubles. The children are only able to see the tree before dinner when it is lit up and the family gathers to sing carols and hymns.

In Denmark Christmas Eve is called Juleaften and is the biggest occasion of the year. Parties go on all night, with traditional prune-stuffed roast goose, red cabbage, fried pastries, and cinnamon-laced rice pudding called Grod.

The Christmas elves called Julenisse are appeased with rice pudding, and dishes of seeds are placed outdoors for wild birds.



Christmas in Egypt

The Coptic Church is an Orthodox Church and in the Coptic Church Christmas is celebrated on the 7th January. Advent is observed for forty days and during this period people are expected to fast eating no meat, poultry or dairy products. Some people only do this during the last week of Advent.

On the Eve of Christmas everyone goes to church wearing a completely new outfit. The Christmas service ends at midnight with the ringing of church bells, then people go home to eat a special Christmas meal known as fata, which consists of bread, rice, garlic and boiled meat.

On Christmas morning people in Egypt visit friends and neighbours. They take with them kaik which is a type of shortbread, which they take with them to give to the people they visit and eaten with a drink known as short bat. Christmas Day is a public holiday for Christians.

Christmas in Hungary

In Hungary the main Christmas celebrations take place on Christmas Eve. The evening is called Szent-este or Holy Evening. Before attending Midnight Mass, families gather around the Christmas tree to sing carols and open the presents left by Baby Jesus and the angels.

A couple of weeks before Christmas, on December 6th the children receive a visit from Mikulas or St Nicholas. He arrives wearing the robes of a bishop, with a red miter on his head, a staff in one hand and a sack full of small presents in the other. Accompanying him a "Devil" boy in a black costume, complete with horns and long tail. He holds a switch made of dry twigs, ready to smack any "naughty" children. Each child receives a small gift, usually a toy or sweets, from Mikulas.

The presenting of nativity plays is an important part of the Hungarian Christmas tradition. Performed by groups of children or adults, these plays are often combined with puppets and are accompanied by songs and musical instruments and sometimes even dancing.



Christmas in Finland

Everybody's house is given a very good clean in readiness for Christmas. Hours are spent in the kitchen cooking and baking special treats for the festive season.

Fir trees are felled, tied onto sleds, and taken home to be decorated.

A sheaf of grain is often tied to a pole, together with nuts and seeds and placed in the garden for the birds. Many of the peasants will not eat their Christmas dinner until the birds have had their dinner.

The meal was begun as soon as the first star appeared in the sky.

In Finland the Christmas tree is set up on Christmas Eve. Apples and other fruits, candies, paper flags, cotton and tinsel are used as decorations, and candles are used for lighting it.

The Christmas festivities are preceded by a visit to the famous steam baths, after which everyone dressed in clean clothes in preparation for the Christmas dinner, which is served at 5-7 in the evening.

Christmas gifts may be given out before or after the dinner. The children do not hang up stockings, but Santa Claus comes in person, often accompanied by as many as half a dozen Christmas elves to distribute the presents.

The main dish of the dinner is boiled codfish served snowy white and fluffy, with allspice, boiled potatoes, and cream sauce. The dried cod has been soaked for a week in a lye solution, then in clear water to soften it to the right texture. Also on the menu is roast suckling pig or a roasted fresh ham, mashed potatoes, and vegetables.

After dinner the children go to bed while the older people stay up to chat with visitors and drink coffee until about midnight.

Christmas Day services in the churches begin at six in the morning. It is a day for family visits and reunions. In some parts of the country the Star Boys tour the countryside singing Christmas songs. During all these days the people keep wishing each other a "Merry Yule."



Christmas in France

On Christmas Eve, children leave their shoes by the fireplace to be filled with gifts from Pere Noel. In the morning they also find that sweets, fruit, nuts and small toys have been hung on the tree.

In cathedral squares, the story of Christ's birth is re-enacted by both players and puppets.

Nearly every French home at Christmastime displays a Nativity scene or crèche, which serves as the focus for the Christmas celebration. The crèche is often peopled with little clay figures called santons or "little saints." In addition to the usual Holy Family, shepherds, and Magi, the craftsmen also produce figures in the form of local dignitaries and characters. The craftsmanship involved in creating the gaily coloured santons is quite astounding and the molds have been passed from generation to generation since the seventeenth century. Throughout December the figures are sold at annual Christmas fairs in Marseille and Aix.

The Christmas tree has never been particularly popular in France, and though the use of the Yule log has faded, the French make a traditional Yule log-shaped cake called the buche de Nol, which means "Christmas Log." The cake, among other food in great abundance is served at the grand feast of the season, which is called le reveillon. Le reveillon is a very late supper held after midnight mass on Christmas Eve. The menu for the meal varies according to regional culinary tradition. In Alsace, goose is the main course, in Burgundy it is turkey with chestnuts, and the Parisians feast upon oysters and pat de foie gras. Le Reveillon may consist of poultry, ham, salads, cake, fruit and wine.

In Southern France, a log is burned in people's homes from Christmas Eve until New Years Day. A long time ago, part of the log was used to make the wedge for the plough as good luck for the coming harvest.

In France families once had a Three Kings Cake with a bean hidden in it. Whoever found the bean in their slice was made King, or Queen, for the day.

Another name for this day is Twelfth Day. It is the last of the Twelve Days of Christmas, which used to be one long holiday. It was the last night of the Feast of Fools before the Lord of Misrule had to give up his crown and become themselves once again.

In France it is a time for the whole family to come together at Christmas time to holiday and worship. On the eve of Christmas beautifully lit churches and cathedrals, ring out Christmas carols with the church bells.

Once dinner is over and the family has retired to bed, they leave a fire burning and food and drink on the table in case the Virgin Mary calls in. Children leave their shoes or wooden clogs called sabots in the hearth for the Christ Child or Pere Noel to fill. In the north of France, children are given gifts on December 6, which is St. Nicholas' Day, instead of Christmas Day. The adults give each others presents on New Year's Day.



Christmas in Germany

Christmas preparations often begin on the eve of December 6th. People often set aside special evenings for baking spiced cakes and cookies, and making gifts and decorations. Little dolls of fruit are traditional Christmas toys.

Children leave letters on their windowsills for Christkind, a winged figure dressed in white robes and a golden crown who distributes gifts. Sometimes the letters are decorated with glue and sprinkled with sugar to make them sparkle.

Germans make beautiful gingerbread houses and cookies. The German Christmas tree pastry, Christbaumgebäck, is a white dough that can be molded into shapes and baked for tree decorations.

In parts of Germany, people believe that the Christ Child sends a messenger in Christmas Eve. He appears as an angel in a white robe and crown, bearing gifts. The angel is called Christkind. There is also a Christmas Eve figure called Weihnachtsmann or Christmas Man, he looks like Santa Claus and also brings gifts.

Some homes in Germany have several Christmas trees, and in all towns across Germany, they can be seen glittering and glowing.

In Germany they hang up advent wreaths of Holly with four red candles in the center. They light one candle each Sunday and last on Christmas Eve. Children count the days until Christmas using an Advent calendar. They open one window each day and find a Christmas picture inside.

In Germany the traditional visitor is the Christkindl who is the Christ Child's messenger. She is a beautiful fair-haired girl with a shining crown of candles who visits each house with a basket of presents.

In some homes a room is locked up before Christmas. On Christmas Eve the children go to bed but are woken up at midnight by their parents and taken down to the locked room. The door is opened and they see the tree all lit up, with piles of parcels on little tables.

In Germany boys dress up as kings and carry a star round the village, singing carols.



Christmas in India

Christians in India decorate banana or mango trees. They also light small oil-burning lamps as Christmas decorations and fill their churches with red flowers.

They give presents to family members and baksheesh, or charity, to the poor people.

In India, the poinsettia is in flower and so the churches are decorated with this brilliant bloom for the Christmas Midnight Mass.

In South India, Christians put small clay lamps on the rooftops and walls of their houses at Christmas, just as the Hindus do during their festival called Diwali.

Christmas in Iran (Persia)

Christmas in Iran is known as the Little Feast. For the first 25 days of December, a great fast is observed, during which no meat, eggs, milk, or cheese is eaten. It is a time of peace and meditation; a time for attending services at the church. When the fast is over, the feast is begun, for plenty of meat is prepared for the Christmas dinner.

Christmas Eve is the last day of the fast. Almost before dawn on Christmas Day, the people attend Mass to receive Communion and it is not until they have received this Communion that they are permitted to break fast.

The boys and girls of Iran have never heard of Santa Claus, so they do not exchange gifts at Christmas. But they do receive new clothes, which they proudly wear all during the happy Christmas week.

A dish eaten for Christmas day is a kind of chicken stew. It is cooked in large quantities and lasts several days.

Christmas in Iraq

In the Christian homes an unusual ceremony is held in the courtyard of the home on Christmas Eve. One of the children in the family reads the story of the Nativity from an Arabic Bible. The other members of the family hold lighted candles, and as soon as the story has been read a bonfire is lit in one corner of the courtyard. The fire is made of dried thorns and the future of the house for the coming year depends upon the way the fire burns. If the thorns burn to ashes, the family will have good fortune. While the fire is burning, a psalm is sung. When the fire is reduced to ashes, everyone jumps over the ashes three times and makes a wish.

On Christmas day a similar bonfire is built in the church. While the fire burns the men of the congregation chant a hymn. Then there is a procession in which the officials of the church march behind the bishop, who carries an image of the infant Jesus upon a scarlet cushion. The long Christmas service always ends with the blessing of the people. The bishop reaches forth and touches a member of the congregation with his hand, putting his blessing upon him. That person touches the one next him, and so on, until all have received "the Touch of Peace."

Christmas in Ireland

Christmas in Ireland lasts from Christmas Eve to the feast of the Epiphany on January 6, which is referred to as Little Christmas. Ireland's Christmas is more religious than a time of fun.

Lighted candles are placed in windows on Christmas Eve, as a guide that Joseph and Mary might be looking for shelter. The candles are usually red in color, and decorated with sprigs of holly.

Irish women bake a seed cake for each person in the house. They also make three puddings, one for each day of the Epiphany such as Christmas, New Year's Day and the Twelfth Night.

After the Christmas evening meal, bread and milk are left out and the door unlatched as a symbol of hospitality.

St Stephen's Day, the day after Christmas, is almost as important, with football matches and meetings going on. For children, the Wren Boys Procession is their big event. Boys go from door to door with a fake wren on a stick, singing, with violins, accordions, harmonicas and horns to accompany them. The reason for the ceremony is to ask for money 'for the starving wren', that is, for their own pockets.

Children often put out Christmas sacks instead of stockings.

It is tradition to leave mince pies and a bottle of Guinness out as a snack for Santa.



Christmas in Italy

The Christmas season in Italy goes for three weeks, starting 8 days before Christmas known as the Novena. During this period, children go from house to house reciting Christmas poems and singing.

In some parts shepherds bring musical instruments into the villages, play and sing Christmas songs.

In the week before Christmas children go from house to house dressed as shepherds, playing pipes, singing and reciting Christmas poems. They are given money to buy presents.

A strict fast is observed for 24 hours before Christmas Eve, and is followed by a celebration meal, in which a light Milanese cake called panettone features as well as chocolate.

Presents and empty boxes, are drawn from the Urn of Fate - lucky dip, which always contains one gift per person. By twilight, candles are lighted around the family crib known as the Presepio, prayers are said, and children recite poems.

At noon on Christmas Day the pope gives his blessing to crowds gathered in the huge Vatican square.

In Italy the children wait until Epiphany, January 6, for their presents. According to tradition, the presents are delivered by a kind ugly witch called Befana on a broomstick. It was said that she was told by the three kings that the baby Jesus was born, she was busy and delayed visiting the baby.

She missed the Star lost her way and has been flying around ever since, leaving presents at every house with children in case he is there. She slides down chimneys, and fills stockings and shoes with good things for good children and it is said leaves coal for children who are not so good.



Christmas in Japan

Only 1 per cent of Japanese people believe in Christ. Even so, most Japanese people decorate their stores and homes with evergreens during Christmas.

They enjoy giving each other gifts, and this is the part they celebrate.

They have a Buddhist monk called Hotei-osho who acts like Santa Claus. He brings presents to each house and leaves them for the children. Some think he has eyes in the back of his head, so children try to behave like he is nearby.

Among the Christian Japanese Christmas is not a day for the family. They do not have turkey or plum pudding, rather than that the day is spent doing nice things for others especially those who are sick in hospitals.

Christmas for those in Sunday schools is the happiest day of the year. On Christmas Eve or Christmas night, the children put on programs that last for hours, they sing, they recite and they put on a drama of the day Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Most children may not like Hotei-osho so they may receive their presents from Santa who goes around with a red-nosed reindeer.



Christmas in Malta

A Maltese Christmas traditionally is centered on the crib or presepeju. The child's version of the church crib is called grolta. Everywhere had at least one crib, varying in size and detail. The crib figures are called pasturi and represent Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, the shepherds, angels, villagers and animals such as cows, donkeys and sheep. The Cribs are surrounded by lights and plants.

Midnight mass on Christmas Eve is the climax of all religious activities. The whole family attends and everyone wears new clothes. The mass begins with choirs singing carols in Maltese. The highlight of the mass is the reading of a story of the nativity by a ten-year-old boy. After Mass it is customary to greet Il-Milied It-Tajjeb which is Happy Christmas, to all who attend.

Christmas in Mexico

Mexicans share many traditions with the Spanish. Their main Christmas celebration is called La Posada, which is a religious procession that reenacts the search for shelter by Joseph and Mary before the birth of Jesus. During the procession, the celebrants go from house to house carrying the images of Mary and Joseph looking for shelter.

Santa Claus is not predominant, but the bright red suit is represented in the traditional flower of the season. This flower is the poinsettia, which has a brilliant red star-shaped bloom. It is believed that a young boy walking to the church to see the nativity scene showing the birth of Jesus had realized on the way that he had no gift to offer the Christ child so he gathered up some plain green branches as he walked in he was laughed at but upon placing the branches near the manger they started to bloom a bright red poinsettia flower on each branch.

The Mexican children receive gifts. On Christmas day they are blindfolded and taken to try and break a decorated clay piñata that dangles and swings at the end of a rope. Once the piñata has been broken, the children clamber to recover the candy that was inside the piñata. Those children who have been good also on January 6th receive a gift from the Three Wise Men.

Mexicans attend a midnight mass service which is called la Misa Del Gallo or "the rooster's mass," and at the mass they sing lullabies to Jesus

Christmas in New Guinea

To create peace amongst tribes the chief of each tribe would exchange an infant son known as the Peace child. Each tribe was to take care of this adopted child, for if the child died the treaty would end and fighting would erupt once again.

A Canadian missionary and his wife told the sawi of how god sent his only son to be the peace child. As a result the sawi overcame their demons becoming Christians and giving up their treachery and started to spread the word of the peace child amongst their people.

Christmas in New Zealand

In New Zealand Christmas is combined with summer holidays, so as well as present-buying and parties, families are preparing for trips to the beach. Shops are decorated with Father Christmas in his red cloak and white beard, as well as snow scenes.

The New Zealand traditions of Christmas have mostly come through the English settlers who began arriving there in the late 18th Century. In the last 20 or 30 years the persona of Father Christmas had changed and he is referred to as Santa Claus and has become much more like the Santa of the United States and Ireland. As well people have been forced to change as a result of the Maori culture. The spirits and creatures of the Maori culture resemble the elves and gnomes of European Christmas traditions.

They celebrate the story of the birth of Jesus Christ with a special service, which is appropriate to New Zealanders way of life as they had no motels, and they have many shepherds who take care of their flocks, in doing so they can see the true meaning of Christmas.

In New Zealand the traditional Christmas dinner is roast turkey with vegetables and sauces. For dessert it is rich, fruity Christmas pudding with brandy sauce. Mince pies, pastry cases filled with a mixture of chopped dried fruit.

On Christmas Day a lot of people have a big brunch at noon or dinner in the afternoon for friends and family. It is done the Italian way and can last for several wonderful hours!

Traditional cakes and cookies made at Christmas can be julekake (with raisins), kryddekake, delfiakake, rosettbakels, fattigmann, smultringer, goro, silkekaker, pepperkaker, kokosmakroner. Different nuts, fruits, figs, dates and sweets also belong to the celebration. God Jul! (Merry Christmas!)



Christmas in Norway

Norwegian children always remember a little gnome Nisse at Christmastime. He guards all the farm animals, and he plays tricks on the children if they forget to place a bowl of special porridge for him.

Norway has its gift-bearing little gnome or elf. Known as Julebuk or "Christmas buck," he appears as a goat-like creature. Julebuk harkens back to Viking times when pagans worshipped Thor and his goat. During pagan celebrations a person dressed in a goatskin, carrying a goat head, would burst in upon the party and during the course of evening would "die" and return to life.

During the early Christian era, the goat began to take the form of the devil, and would appear during times of wild merry-making and jubilation. By the end of the Middle Ages, the game was forbidden by the Church and the state. In more recent times the goat has emerged in the tamer form of Julebuk.

A favourite holiday cookie is called a sand kager is made by mixing 2 cups of butter and sugar, 4 cups of flour, and 1 cup of chopped almonds. This pressed into a tin, baked until golden brown, and cut into squares.

In the dark afternoons, in the Viking tradition, children go from house to house asking for goodies.

Norwegians eat lye-treated codfish, and wash it down with boiled potatoes, rice porridge, gingerbread, and punch.

Norwegians are very close to the North Pole, and they strongly hope for the magic of snow for the holidays! Christmas in Norway begins with the Saint Lucia ceremony on the 13 December. At the crack of dawn, the youngest daughter from each family puts on a white robe with a sash, a crown with evergreens and tall-lighted candles, accompanied by the other children, the boys dressed as star boys in long white shirts and pointed hats. They wake their parents, and serve them coffee and Lucia buns, lussekatter. The custom goes back to a Christian virgin, Lucia, martyred for her beliefs at Syracuse in the fourth century. The Saint Lucia ceremony is fairly recent, but it represents the traditional thanksgiving for the return of the sun.

The Christmas tree, juletre, spruce or pine tree usually, are often decorated with candles, apples, red harts, cornets, straw ornaments, balls of glass and tinsels, all depending on what you like. The homes have a scent of resin, hyacinths, red tulips, spices and tangerines.

Some children, especially in the country still believe in and remember a little gnome or elf, fjøsnissen at Christmas time. He is told to guard all the farm animals, and he plays tricks if the children forget to place a bowl of special rice porridge, risengrynsgrøt, in the barn or outside for him. This is old superstition. Norwegians also love to eat this porridge on the 23 December, lillejulaften, and then it holds a magic almond inside. The one who finds it gets a prize. Some eat the rice porridge for lunch on the 24th. Perhaps in the evening they have some gløgg, it is a spicy drink (you can add some red wine if you like), with raisins and chopped almonds. Julaften, on the 24 December, a lot of people go to church service before they gather at home around the table for a nice Christmas Eve dinner. The dinner can consist of a rib with a good crackling, ribbe, (served with "cabbage à la norvégienne", surkaal, potatoes, carrots, cauliflower, sprouts, prunes and brown sauce), salted and dried ribs of mutton, pinnekjøtt, (served with potatoes, carrots and mashed swedes), or lye-treated codfish, lutefisk (served with potatoes, bacon and pea stew). For dessert: rice blended with whipped cream served with a red sauce, riskrem, caramel pudding, cherry mousse, or whipped cream blended with multer (orange, wonderful berries found on the mountain - looks like raspberries).

In the evening Santa Claus, julenissen, arrives with gifts. Often it is snowing. In the days between Christmas and New Years Eve, romjulen, the children sometimes go from house to house in the afternoon asking for sweets, this tradition is called "Christmas buck", julebuk. The tradition harkens back to the Viking times when pagans worshipped Thor and his goat, but just a few children keep up the tradition today.

Christmas in The Philippines

The only Asian nation in which Christianity is the religion chosen by the people. Christmas celebrations start nine days before Christmas with a mass known as Misa de Gallo. At this mass the story behind the birth of Christ is read from the Bible.

The Panunuluyan pageant is held each Eve. A couple is chosen to re-enact Joseph and Mary's search for shelter.

Mass is held hourly on Christmas Day so that everyone can attend. Religious services include pastore, or play, based on myth of the birth of the Christ Child. The pastore closes with a star from the upper part of the church sliding down a wire and coming to rest over the church's Nativity scene.

Christmas celebrations may have evolved from old tribal customs mixed with other influences. Serenading cumbancheros, or strolling minstrels, end their performances by singing Maligayang Pasko to the tune of "Happy Birthday".

Christmas in Scandanavia

In Scandinavia a little gnome called Julenisse puts the presents under the Christmas tree in the night. The children leave a bowl of porridge out for him.

It is from Scandinavia that most of our Yule log traditions derive. The dark cold winters inspired the development of traditions concerned with warmth and light. Yuletide, meaning "the turning of the sun" or the winter solstice, has traditionally been a time of extreme importance in Scandinavia. For a long time, it was considered dangerous to sleep alone on Christmas Eve. The extended family, master and servant, alike would sleep together on a freshly spread bed of straw.

The Yule log was originally an entire tree, carefully chosen, and brought into the house with great ceremony. The butt end would be placed into the hearth while the rest of the tree stuck out into the room. The tree would be slowly fed into the fire and the entire process was carefully timed to last the entire Yule season.

In Scandinavia an important part of Christmas is the candles. It is said that the presents are brought by gnomes who live in the attics of houses all the year round.

Christmas in The Sicily

In Sicily the Sicilians fast from December 23rd at sunset to the December 24th at sunset. They then have a great Yule log which is kindled. After prayers and songs are done around the Presepio or crib the feast begins.

The foods that might be served are eels and larks, boiled pasta, fish, sweet bread and Torrone a type of nougat.

The children are visited by La Befana on January 6. She was said to have been so busy cleaning her house that she missed out on going with the three wise men to Bethlehem. She was also considered to be a witch. Children hang up their stockings so that she will fill them with toys and gifts.

Christmas in Portugal

In Portugal the tradition of gift-giving was defined mostly by the strong Christian religious beliefs of the people. Children await the coming of the Three Wise Men during Christmas time. On the eve of January 5th children place their shoes along windowsills and doorways and fill them with carrots and straw. They do this hoping that this will lure the wise men's horses to their houses during the night and that they will find their shoes packed with gifts and treats in the morning. The treats left is more likely to be candied fruits and sweet breads.

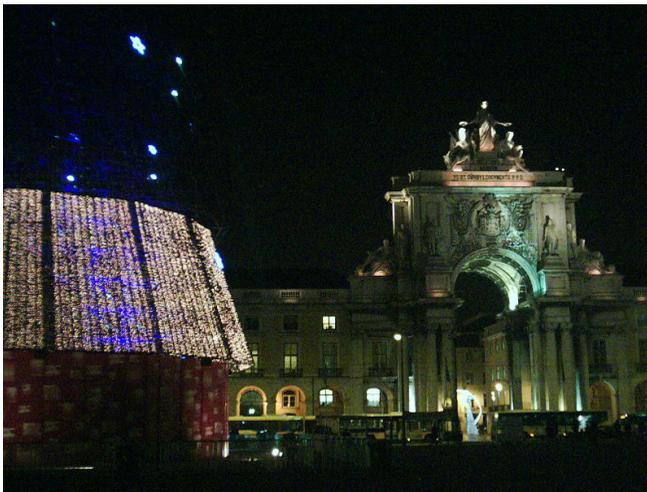
They do not recognize the red suit of most traditions as the person who brings gifts, but, gifts are a big part of the many Christmas celebrations. The Christmas Feast of the Immaculate Conception and the Feast of the Holy Innocents both involve the sharing of gifts.

They have a feast known as the consoda which takes place on the morning of Christmas Day. They set extra places at the table for the souls of the dead. They give a gift of food to these souls and hope that by doing so the fortunes of the next year will be good.

The Portuguese "Christmas log," or cepo de Natal, is a piece of oak that burns on the hearth all through the day while people enjoy a lingering consoda.

At midnight, there are also families who attend to the church for a special Midnight Mass, called "Missa do galo"- "Rooster's Mass", but it happens more in the interior, who are more religious.

During the Christmas day Portuguese people visit the friends and family and have a big lunch normally with roast chicken, lamb or turkey.



Christmas in Romania

Carols form an important part of the Romanian folklore. Romanian carols are not simple songs (a sort of invocation in verse sung by children and lads, on the evening of Winters Holidays) with religious origin, but wide windows through which we are allowed once in a year to go by the immaculate snow-towards the evergreen Heaven and to eye-touch God at least for an instant, in order to give us the power to surpass the life's obstacles. Carols put people in the mood for a perfect communion with the simple and healing greatness of Jesus' Birth. The carol singers walk in the streets of the villages and towns holding in their hands a star made of board and paper with biblical scenes painted in water colors and they sing:

"Do you receive the pretty star, Pretty and so very bright?

It Haseko we did in the sky, Just like God thought it would be right,

Stand it could be seen on high, Just like we did in the sky"

On the first Christmas day, children walk in the streets of snow covered towns and villages, when holding in their hands a star made of board and paper with a biblical scenes painted in water colors or an icon showing Virgin Mary and baby Jesus, they sing somewhat of a question:

"Do you receive the pretty star, Pretty and so bright? It has appeared on the earth

Just like God through it would be right, And it could be seen on high,

Just like we did, in the sky.

Five days before Christmas with a very sharp knife the pig is cut.

This custom is called "Ignatius" from Saint Ignatius (celebrated on December the 20th). Straws are put in his snout and then it is covered with burning straws and then is it singed. The pig is nicely washed and covered with a piece of cloth for ten minutes. The housewife comes and incense the pig and then the husband comes and makes the sign of the cross on the pig's head saying to the family gathered around: "Let's eat the pig!" After the pig is cut there is a feast called the pig's funeral feast or alms. At the feast the whole family friends and neighbors take part. All eat the rind or the skin of the bacon and they also eat small pieces of fried pork they drink wine or plum brandy.



Christmas in Russia

In Russia the religious festival of Christmas is being replaced by the Festival of Winter but there are some traditions that are still kept up in some parts of the country.

In the traditional Russian Christmas, special prayers are said and people fast, sometimes for 39 days, until January 6th Christmas Eve, when the first evening star appears in the sky. Then begins a twelve course supper in honor of each of the twelve apostles - fish, beet soup or Borsch, cabbage stuffed with millet, cooked dried fruit and much more.

Hay is spread on the floors and tables to encourage horse feed to grow in the coming year and people make clucking noises to encourage their hens to lay eggs.

On Christmas Day, hymns and carols are sung. People gather in churches which have been decorated with the usual Christmas trees or Yelka, flowers and colored lights.

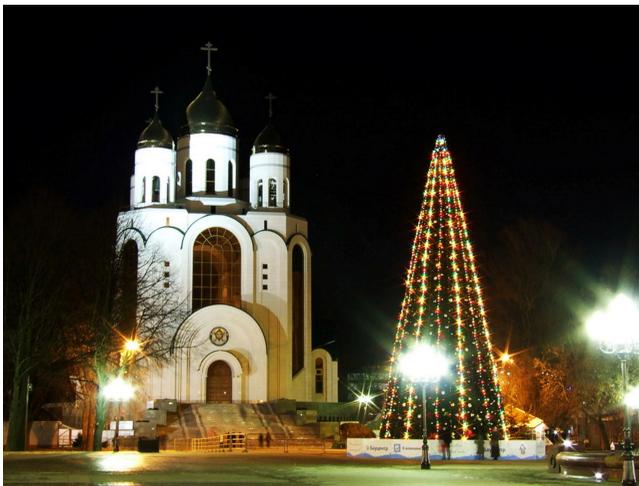
Christmas dinner includes a variety of different meats - goose and suckling pig are favorites.

Babushka is a traditional Christmas figure who distributes presents to children. Her name means grand-mother and the legend is told that she declined to go with the wise men to see Jesus because of the cold weather. However, she regretted not going and set off to try and catch up, filling her basket with presents. She never found Jesus, and that is why she visits each house, leaving toys for good children.

The role of Father Christmas was played by Dedushka Moroz or Grandfather Christmas.

Babushka is a traditional Christmas figure who distributes presents to children. The word "Babushka" is translated to English as a grand-mother!

A traditional Christmas figure is Snegurochka. She is a grand-daughter of Ded Moroz



Christmas in South America

Native Bolivians celebrate Christmas more as a harvest festival. Thanks are given for completion of the year's work. They give an account of the work done during the year and propose what is to be done the next year. Christmas tends to become a feast of adoration of the Goddess Mother Earth, who is asked to bring a fruitful harvest, to keep away plagues, and to give a prosperous year.

In Brazil Santa Claus is little known and those who do know of the jolly fellow call him Papa Noel.

The children have no Christmas trees, but they do have a crèche or Presepio, representing the Christ-child's birth. Gifts and toys are exchanged during the holidays after which the Presepio is put away until the following Christmas.

In Ecuador the children write letters to the Christ-child and place shoes in the window in which he may place toys as he passes by on Christmas Eve. Noise-making toys are common and are used with much energy on the streets on Christmas morning.

Since the weather is very warm, most celebrations are in the streets. There are firecrackers, brass bands, and dancing. At midnight everyone goes to Mass. after which the family dinner is enjoyed.



Christmas in Spain

In Spain it is a very festive time at Christmas. On Christmas Eve, as the stars come out, tiny oil lamps are lit in every house, and after Midnight Mass and Christmas Dinner, streets fill with dancers and onlookers. There is a special Christmas dance called the Jota and the words and music have been handed down for hundreds of years. They dance to the sound of guitars and castanets.

Children think of the Three Wise Men as the gift bearers. Tradition has it that they arrive on January 6th, the date the Wise Men gave gifts to Jesus.

Shoes are filled with straw or barley for the tired camels that must carry their riders through the busy night. By morning the camel food is gone and in place of the straw or barley are presents. Shoes also may be placed on balconies on the night of the 6th January in the hope that the Wise Men will fill them with gifts.

Most homes have a manger, like cathedrals and churches. These are complete with carved figures. During the weeks before Christmas, families gather around their manger to sing, whilst children play tambourines and dance.

The Spanish especially honour the cow at Christmas because it is thought that when Mary gave birth to Jesus the cow in the stable breathed on the Baby Jesus to keep him warm.

Christmas is a deeply religious holiday in Spain. The country's patron saint is the Virgin Mary and the Christmas season officially begins December 8, the feast of the Immaculate Conception. It is celebrated each year in front of the great Gothic cathedral in Seville with a ceremony called los Seises or the "dance of six." Oddly, the elaborate ritual dance is now performed by not six but ten elaborately costumed boys. It is a series of precise movements and gestures and is said to be quite moving and beautiful.

Christmas Eve is known as Nochebuena or "the Good Night." It is a time for family members to gather together to rejoice and feast around the Nativity scenes that are present in nearly every home. A traditional Christmas treat is turrón, a kind of almond candy.

December 28 is the feast of the Holy Innocents. Young boys of a town or village light bonfires and one of them acts as the mayor who orders townspeople to perform civic chores such as sweeping the streets. Refusal to comply results in fines which are used to pay for the celebration.

The children of Spain receive gifts on the feast of the Epiphany. The Magi are particularly revered in Spain. It is believed that they travel through the countryside reenacting their journey to Bethlehem every year at this time. Children leave their shoes on the windowsills and fill them with straw, carrots, and barley or the horses of the Wise Men. Their favourite is Balthazar who rides a donkey and is the one believed to leave the gifts.

The Spanish Christmas is Navidad, people go to church, exchange presents, and many play on swing sets set up especially for the occasion. Swinging at solstice time evokes an ancient desire to encourage the sun, urging it to "swing" ever higher in the sky.

Christmas in Sweden

Christmas begins in Sweden with the Saint Lucia ceremony. Before dawn on the morning of 13 December, the youngest daughter from each family puts on a white robe with a red sash. She wears a crown of evergreens with tall-lighted candles attached to it. She wakes her parents, and serves them with coffee and Lucia buns. The other children accompany her. The boys dressed as star boys in long white shirts and pointed hats.

The custom goes back to Lucia, a Christian virgin martyred for her beliefs at Syracuse in the fourth century. The Saint Lucia ceremony is fairly recent, but it represents the traditional thanksgiving for the return of the sun. Often she is followed by star boys, who wear pointed hats, and carry star wands.

Candle-lit processions to Church feature Scandinavian Christmases, where, in the home, it is mother who always lights the candles on Christmas Eve.

Christmas trees are usually found in Swedish homes two days before Christmas. Decoration may include candles, apples, Swedish flags, small gnomes wearing red tasseled caps, straw ornaments. The houses may be filled with red tulips and smell like pepparkakor, which is a heart-star, or goat-shaped gingerbread biscuit.

Swedish Julafton, or Christmas Eve dinner may be a smorgasbord, or buffet with julskinka, or Christmas ham, pickled pigs feet, lutefisk, or dried codfish, and many different kinds of sweets. Risgryngrot a special rice porridge, has hidden in it an almond which as tradition has it the person who finds the almond in his or her bowl will marry in the coming year.

Christmas trees are usually brought into Swedish homes one or two days before Christmas. Decorations include: candles, apples, Swedish flags, small gnomes and tasseled caps, and straw ornaments. The house may be filled with red tulips and the smell of pepparkakor - a heart-star, or goat-shaped gingerbread biscuits.

After Christmas Eve dinner, a friend or family member dresses up as tomte or Christmas gnome. The tomte, unlike Santa Claus is supposed to live under the floorboards of the house or barn and ride a straw goat. The make-believe tomte, wearing a white beard and dressed in red robes, distributes gifts from his sack. Many are given with funny rhyme that hints at the contents.

Swedes eat lye-treated codfish and welcome the Christmas elves and the julbok which is the Christmas goat, who is responsible for the distributing of the presents.

In Sweden Jultomten, a little brownie helps Santa Claus give gifts to the children who have been good.

On Christmas morning, churches are lit up entirely by candles for the Christmas service.



Christmas in Switzerland

A tinkling of a silver bell heralds the arrival of Christkindli - a white clad angel, with a face veil held in place by a jeweled crown. The tree candles are lit as she enters each house and hands out presents from the basket held by her child helpers.

The week before Christmas, children dress up and visit homes with small gifts. Bell ringing has become a tradition, and each village competes with the next when calling people to midnight mass. After the service, families gather to share huge homemade doughnuts called ringli and hot chocolate.

In Switzerland, the Chlausjagen Festival or Feast of St. Nicholas is celebrated at dusk on 6 December with a procession of 'lifeltrager' wearing gigantic illuminated lanterns in the shape of a Bishop's mitre on their heads.

The Swiss wait for the Christ child called Christkindli, to arrive with gifts for all in his reindeer-drawn sleigh.

In Switzerland, during the holiday season the Star Singers or Sternsingers dressed as the Three Kings parade through the streets of cities and towns singing Christmas songs.

In Zurich, Santa visits in a special fairytale tram and gives the children a ride through the city, singing songs with them and sharing a basket full of sweets.



Christmas in The Holy Land

Christmas in the Holy Land where Christ is believed to have been born is often full of travelers come to celebrate Christmas. Here in a grotto there is a 14-pointed Silver Star on the floor is where the birthplace is supposed to have been.

There are three Christmas Eves in the Holy Land. One on the 24th December celebrated by the Protestant and Catholic Churches. The second for the Greek Orthodox, Coptic (Egyptian) and Syrian churches. The third is the Armenian Church. At times, all three services are going on at the same time, but, in different parts of the church, as well as in different languages. For lunch they eat turkey, spiced with pepper, cinnamon and nutmeg and stuffed with rice, meat, pine nuts and almonds.

Early in the evening, members of the Protestant church groups would go around singing carols. On Christmas morning children would open their presents before breakfast. After breakfast Protestant people would go to church, and visit friends to wish them a happy Christmas.

The Catholic Church priests would come a bless water from which all members of the family would take a sip.

The member of the Greek Orthodox Church Epiphany is very important. They have a special church service at which a cross was dipped into water to bless it. People would take the water home with them drink three sips before eating anything.

Christmas in Syria

In Syria on December 6, a special Mass is held in churches in honor of Saint Nicholas Thaumaturgus, who legend has said was a kind and generous man not dissimilar to Saint Nicholas after who Santa Claus is modelled.

On Christmas Eve everyone in the family, carries a lit candle, to stand around an unlit bonfire outside their house. The youngest child usually the son of the family reads the Christmas story, after which the bonfire is lit. The way the flames spread shows the luck of the house in the coming year. When the fire burns, psalms are sung, and when it sinks, everyone leaps over the embers making wishes.

Early on Christmas morning everyone goes to Mass. At this Mass another bonfire is lit in the middle of the floor. While the wood is blazing, ancient hymns are sung and the celebrant carries a figure of the Christ Child around the building. After this the celebrant then touches the nearest person in a "touch of peace". This touch is passed from one to another until everyone has received it.

Christmas dinner is chicken, oranges, nuts and pastries. But it is on New Year's Day that children receive presents. They are brought their gifts by the youngest of the camels that carried the Three Wise Men to Bethlehem. The children leave water and hay outside the house of the camel. In the morning the water and hay are gone, replaced by presents.

Christmas in The Lebanon

About two weeks before Christmas people in Lebanon and elsewhere in the Middle East plant seeds - chickpeas, wheat grains, beans, lentils - in cotton wool. They water the seeds every day and by Christmas the seeds have shoots about 6 inches in height. People use the shoots to surround the manger in nativity scenes. Figures are made from brown paper, as well a star is placed above the scene.

Traditionally throughout the Middle East people visit friends on Christmas morning and are offered coffee, liqueurs and sugared almonds. Lunch at Christmas is the most important meal of the season and the whole family gathers together for it, usually at grandparents or the eldest sons' home. The meal consists of chicken and rice, and Kubbeh, which is made up of crushed boiled wheat or burghul mixed with meat, onion, salt and paper.

Christmas in Venezuela

In Venezuela on December 16th families bring out their pesebres which is a specially designed and thought out depiction of the nativity scene.

It is a custom to attend at one of nine carol services is observed by most Venezuelans. Firecrackers explode and bells ring to call worshippers from bed in the predawn hours. The last of the masses takes place on Nochebuena de Navidad Christmas Eve. Families attend a mass on this night and then return home to a huge and fancy dinner.

On January 6th when the children awaken they will discover that the straw that they had left beside their bed the night before has gone and in its place are gifts the children know that the Magi and their camels have been and when they go to look in the mirror if they have a black smudge on their cheek they know that Balthazar, King of the Ethiopians has kissed them whilst they slept



Christmas in The Ukraine

Sviata Vechera OR "Holy Supper" is the central tradition of the beautiful Christmas Eve celebrations in Ukrainian homes. The dinner table sometimes has a few wisps of hay on the embroidered table cloth as a reminder of the manger in Bethlehem.

When the children see the first Star in the eastern evening sky, which symbolizes the trek of the Three Wise Men, the Sviata Vechera may begin. In farming communities the head of the household now brings in a sheaf of wheat called the *didukh* which represents the importance of the ancient and rich wheat crops of Ukraine, the staff of life through the centuries. *Didukh* means literally "grandfather spirit" so it symbolizes the family's ancestors. In city homes a few stalks of golden wheat in a vase are often used to decorate the table.

A prayer is said and the father says the traditional Christmas greeting, "Khristos rodyvsya!" which translated is Christ is born!, which is answered by the family with "Slavite Yoho!" which translated is Let Us Glorify Him!. In some families the Old Slavic form *Khristos razhdayetsya* is used.

At the end of the Sviata Vechera the family often sings *Kolyadky* which is a Ukrainian Christmas Carols. In many communities the old Ukrainian tradition of caroling is carried on by groups of young people and members of organizations and churches calling at homes and collecting donations.

The favorite Ukrainian carol is *Boh predvichny* meaning God Eternal which has a very beautiful melody and lyrics. Some Ukrainian carols are unusual because they mention Ukraine while others are ancient pagan songs of a thousand years ago which have been converted into Christian carols.

Christmas is a joyous day which opens for Ukrainian families with attendance at Church. Ukrainian Churches offer services starting before midnight on Christmas Eve and on Christmas morning. Christmas supper, without Lenten restrictions, does not have as many traditions connected with it as Sviata Vechera. The old tradition in Ukraine of giving gifts to children on St. Nicholas Day, December 19th, has generally been replaced by the Christmas date.

The traditional Christmas customs of Ukraine add color and significance to the winter festival of Christmas, and Ukrainian Christmas on January 7th is usually a peaceful and quiet event. This celebration reminds us of the baby in a Bethlehem manger whose birthday we celebrate. But whether Christmas is celebrated on December 25th or on January 7th the message is the same: "Peace on Earth! Good will towards men!"

In the Ukraine, Father Frost visits all the children in a sleigh pulled by only three reindeer.

He brings along a little girl named Snowflake Girl. She wears a silver blue costume trimmed with white fur and a crown shaped like a snowflake.



Christmas in the USA

Santa Claus was born in US in the 1860's he was named this as he had a white beard and a belly, so he was named Santa Claus as this was the Dutch word for St Nicholas, Sintaklaas. Although the Dutch had brought him with them in the 17th century, he did not become an important person at Christmas until the Novelist Washington Irving put him in a novel that he wrote in 1809. This first Santa Claus was still known as St. Nicholas, he did smoke a pipe, and fly around in a wagon without any reindeer, but he did not have his red suit or live at the North Pole, he did however bring presents to children every year.

In 1863 He was given the name Santa Claus and bore the red suit, pipe, and his reindeer and sleigh.

Now Christmas celebrations vary greatly between regions of the United States, because of the variety of nationalities which have settled in it.

In Pennsylvania, the Moravians build a landscape, called a putz - under the Christmas tree, while in the same state the Germans are given gifts by Belsnickle, who taps them with his switch if they have misbehaved.

Early European settlers brought many traditions to the United States. Many settled in the early days in the South, these settlers would send Christmas greetings to their distant neighbours by shooting firearms and letting off fireworks. In Hawaii this practice is still in use as under the sunny skies, Santa Claus arrives by boat and Christmas dinner is eaten outdoors.

In Alaska, a star on a pole is taken from door to door, followed by Herod's Men, who try to capture the star. Colonial doorways are often decorated with pineapple, a symbol of hospitality.

In Alaska, boys and girls with lanterns on poles carry a large figure of a star from door to door. They sing carols and are invited in for supper.

In Washington D.C., a huge, spectacular tree is lit ceremoniously when the President presses a button and turns on the tree's lights.

In Boston, carol singing festivities are famous. The singers are accompanied by hand bells.

In New Orleans, a huge ox is paraded around the streets decorated with holly and with ribbons tied to its horns.

In Arizona, the Mexican ritual called Las Posadas is kept up. This is a ritual procession and play representing the search of Mary and Joseph for a room at the inn. Families play the parts and visit each other's houses enacting and re-enacting the drama and, at the same time, having a look at each family's crib.

In Hawaii, Christmas starts with the coming of the Christmas Tree Ship, which is a ship bringing a great load of Christmas fare. Santa Claus also arrives by boat.

In California, Santa Claus sweeps in on a surf board.

In America the traditional Christmas dinner is roast turkey with vegetables and sauces. For dessert it is rich, fruity Christmas pudding with brandy sauce. Mince pies, pastry cases filled with a mixture of chopped dried fruit.

The majority of Americans celebrate Christmas with the exchange of gifts and greetings and with family visits. For many, the day begins on Christmas Eve with the Midnight Mass. At Christmas it snows in many states, so dinner is usually eaten indoors. Dinner usually is roast turkey, goose, duck or ham served with cranberry sauce, then plum pudding or pumpkin pie followed by nuts and fruit.

American homes are decorated with holly, mistletoe and branches of trees, most have a Christmas tree hung with electric lights, tinsel, baubles, and strings of popcorn and candy canes.

In Colorado, an enormous star is placed on the mountain, it can be seen for many kilometers around, while in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, a star is lit in early December.

Polish Americans on Christmas Eve spread hay on their kitchen floor and under the tablecloth to remind them of a stable and a manger. When they make up the table for dinner two extra places are set up for Mary and the Christ Child in case they should knock at the door to ask for shelter.

In Philadelphia, a procession called a mummers parade runs for a whole day with bands, dancers and people in fancy dress.

There are two homes for Santa Claus in the United States one is in Torrington, Connecticut, where Santa and his helpers give out presents. The other home is in Wilmington, New York, where a village for Santa and his reindeer is located.

In Arizona they follow the Mexican traditions called Las Posadas. Families play out the parts of Mary and Joseph searching for somewhere to stay. They form a procession and visit their friends' and neighbors' homes where they admire each family's Nativity crib. In parts of New Mexico, people place lighted candles in paper bags filled with sand on streets and rooftops to light the way for the Christ Child.

