Christmas around the World

What Is Christmas?

Christmas is a religious holiday which celebrates the birth of the son of God, Jesus Christ, on the 25th December. Although it is a Christian holiday, it is actually one that derives from a lot of pagan traditions.

The Christmas tree is a 17th century German tradition that is said to have been evolved from the pagan practice of bringing greenery indoors for decoration in winter. It was also believed that Father Christmas was a modern incarnation of old pagan spirits flying through the sky in winter.

Celebrations

Christmas is celebrated by millions of people all over the world, by Christians and non-Christians. It is a time for gathering with family and friends. Some Christmas traditions include, decorating houses with lights, trees, candles and having a Christmas dinner. There are also some very unique traditions, specific to certain countries, for example, the people of India like to decorate their houses and streets with colourful, folded paper stars. The Polish serve a total of 12 dishes, one for each disciple, at their Christmas dinner and the Spanish leave out hay-filled boots or shoes at night so that, by the next morning, the hay has been replaced with chocolate, presents or money.

In Ireland, the people like to light candles in the windows of their homes to act as a guide for Joseph and Mary to travel to their resting place. The candles are often red and decorated with sprigs of holly.

Over in the West Indies, people like to clean their homes thoroughly before decorating for Christmas. Some people even repaint entire rooms!

The French celebrate the feast of St Nicholas, the patron saint of children, on the 6th December. On this day, St Nicholas rides around town on his sleigh whilst the people in the town celebrate how he rescued three children from being eaten by a nasty butcher!

In Russia, an old lady called Baboushka roams around giving out presents to children, to make up

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for the mistake of being too busy to guide the wise men to the baby Jesus Christ in biblical times.

In Sweden, the eldest daughter of each family dresses up with a wreath on her head, which holds lit candles. She then serves coffee and special buns to her family.

Unusual Celebrations

Single women of the Czech Republic perform a ritual every Christmas to see whether they will be single for another year. They turn their backs to the door and throw a shoe over their shoulder. If the shoe lands with the heel towards the door, then it is thought that she will stay single for another year. However, if the front of the shoe faces the door, then a wedding is likely to happen for her!

For over 40 years, the town of Gavle in Sweden has celebrated Christmas by erecting a huge straw goat and the challenge is to ensure the survival of the straw goat until Christmas day. 'Vandals' will then attempt to burn the goat down every year. The goat has survived until Christmas day only 10 times in 40 years.

In Slovakia, the head of the family will throw a mixture of Loksa (bread, poppy seeds and water) up at the ceiling. The longer the mixtures stays glued to the ceiling, the richer his crops are predicted to be.

Finally, in Japan, Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) has become a nation's favourite for a Christmas dinner. It is so wildly popular that you need to make a reservation to eat there on Christmas Day.

What Is the True Meaning of Christmas?

Everyone will have a different answer to the question 'What is the true meaning of Christmas?'. Some people think it is a time to spend together as a family, give gifts or think about the birth of Jesus Christ, whilst others think it's time to watch Christmas films and eat a lot. Some people believe that Christmas has become too commercialised (businesses use it as a time to make money). What do you think?

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Questions

1. Who celebrates Christmas?

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2. What is surprising about how some Christmas traditions have evolved?

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3. Does everyone celebrate Christmas in the same way?

_____

4. How do the people of India like to celebrate Christmas?

_____

5. How do the people of Poland like to celebrate Christmas?

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6. How do the people of Russia like to celebrate Christmas?

_____

7. Do you think that everybody in Russia thinks this? Why?

_____

8. What unusual tradition do some women of the Czech Republic take part in at Christmas? Why do they do this?

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_____

9. What unusual tradition do the people in the town of Gavle of Sweden take part in?

_____

10. Do you think the people of Sweden think badly of the vandals? Why?

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_____

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Answers

1. Who celebrates Christmas?
   Christmas is celebrated by millions of people all over the world. Some are Christians and some are non-Christians.

2. What is surprising about how some Christmas traditions have evolved?
   It is surprising that Christmas traditions traditions have evolved from pagan beliefs.

3. Does everyone celebrate Christmas in the same way?
   No, people celebrate Christmas in a different way depending on which country they live in.

4. How do the people of India like to celebrate Christmas?
   People in India like to celebrate Christmas by decorating their houses and streets with colourful, folded paper stars.

5. How do the people of Poland like to celebrate Christmas?
   People in Poland like to celebrate Christmas by serving 12 dishes at dinner, one for each disciple.

6. How do the people of Russia like to celebrate Christmas?
   People in Russia like to celebrate Christmas by having an old lady called Baboushka roam around giving out presents to children.

7. Do you think that everybody in Russia thinks this? Why?
   Children to provide their own answers with an explanation.

8. What unusual tradition do some women of the Czech Republic take part in at Christmas? Why do they do this?
   Some women of the Czech Republic turn their backs to the door and throw a shoe over their shoulder to see if the heel lands towards the door. This tells them whether they'll be single for another year or not.

9. What unusual tradition do the people in the town of Gavle of Sweden take part in?
   In the town of Gavle in Sweden, people erect a huge straw goat and see if it can survive until Christmas Day.

10. Do you think the people of Sweden think badly of the vandals? Why?
    Children to provide their own answers with an explanation.