

CHRISTMAS AROUND THE WORLD

Christmas in Brazil

Brazilians are a mix of different ethnic people, and as a former Portuguese colony, they have many Christmas customs which originate from this heritage.

One tradition is to create a nativity scene or **Presépio**. The word originates from the Hebrew word "**presepium**" which means the bed of straw upon which Jesus first slept in Bethlehem. The Presépio is common in northeastern Brazil. Nowadays presépios are set up in December and displayed in churches, homes, and stores.



Papai Noel or **Father Noel** is the gift-bringer in Brazil. According to legend, he lives in Greenland. When he arrives in Brazil, he usually wears silk clothing due to the summer heat.

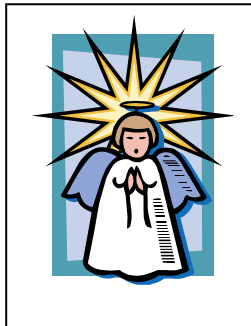
A huge Christmas dinner includes turkey, ham, colored rice, and wonderful vegetables and fruit dishes.

Christmas in China

The Christian children of China decorate trees with colorful ornaments. These ornaments are made from paper in the shapes of flowers, chains and lanterns. They also hang muslin stockings hoping that **Christmas Old Man** will fill them with gifts and treats.

The Chinese Christmas trees are called "**Trees of Light**." Santa Claus is called **Dun Che Lao Ren** which means "Christmas Old Man."

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.

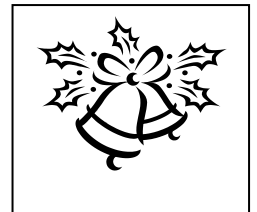
On the Eve of Christmas everyone goes to church wearing a completely new outfit. The Christmas service ends at midnight with the ringing of church bells, then people go home to eat a special Christmas meal known as *fata*, which consists of bread, rice, garlic and boiled meat.

On Christmas morning people in Egypt visit friends and neighbors. 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 *shortbat*. Christmas Day is a public holiday for Christians.

Christmas in England

The English enjoy beautiful Christmas music. They love to decorate Christmas Trees and hang up evergreen branches.

One England's customs is **mummering**. In the Middle Ages, people called mummers put on masks and acted out Christmas plays. These plays are still performed in towns and villages.



The English gift giver is called **Father Christmas**. He wears a long red or green robe, and leaves presents in stockings on Christmas Eve. However, the gifts are not usually opened until the following afternoon.

Christmas in England began in AD 596, when St Augustine landed on her shores with monks who wanted to bring Christianity to the Anglo Saxons.

Father Christmas delivers them during the night before Christmas. The Children leave an empty stocking or pillowcase hanging at the end of the bed. In the morning they hope it will be full of presents.

In England the day after Christmas is called **Boxing Day** because boys used to go round collecting money in clay boxes. When the boxes were full, they broke them open.

Christmas in Iraq



makes a wish.

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

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 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.

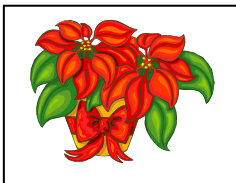


Santa Claus is not predominant, but the bright red suit is represented in the traditional flower of the season. This flower is the **poinsettia**, which has a brilliant red star-shaped bloom. It is believed that a young boy walking to the church to see the nativity scene showing the birth of Jesus had 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 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 Poland



Traditionally, Advent is an important season in the Polish year, with special church services, known as **Roraty**, being held every morning at 6am. The four Sundays of Advent are said to represent the 4,000 years of waiting for Christ.

During Advent and, in some homes, on Christmas Eve, bees wax or plain wax is poured on water, and fortunes are told from the shapes which emerge.

Special tasks carried out during Advent are the baking of the Christmas **piernik** or honey cake, and the making of Christmas decorations. **Pierniki** are made in a great variety of shapes, including hearts, animals and St Nicholas figures. Traditional decorations include the **pajaki**, which are handmade mobiles, stars and decorated egg shells. Pajaki are traditional decorations, rather lots of bomb lets, colorful paper chains and lots of electric lights.

Beautifully lit Christmas trees are placed in all public arenas, outside churches and in homes. Traditionally the trees are decorated with shiny apples, gift walnuts, beautifully wrapped chocolate shapes and many homemade decorations and candles. On the top of the tree is a star or a glittering top piece. In many homes, sparklers are hung on the branches of the trees giving it a magical air. Sometimes the trees are left standing until February 2nd, the feast day of St Mary of the Candle of Lightning.

During Advent, the **Gwiadorze** or star carriers or carol singers, used to begin wandering through the towns and villages and this would continue until Epiphany. Some of the **Gwiadorze** sang carols, others recited verses or put on **Szopke** or puppet show, or **herody** or nativity scenes. The last two customs are developments from traditional manger scenes or **Jaselka** or crib.

Christmas Eve, **Wigilia**, is an important part of the Polish Christmas, in fact, the most important rituals are celebrated on this day.

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 Man 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 honor 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 favorite 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 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.

This information was found on the following website. <http://www.santas.net/aroundtheworld.htm>

I would encourage you to have your children look into other countries and learn about the various traditions around Christmas.