

Christmas Cultures

Christmas all over the world is celebrated on the 25th of December. Some countries however have different traditions and celebrations take place over a longer period of time. Below you will find some interesting Christmas facts from various countries around the world. I wonder which tradition is most similar to yours and which one you would most like to experience?

France

In many regions in France, Christmas celebrations start with St Nicholas day on the 6th of December. On this day, children get sweets and little gifts. Cities are decorated, especially in the Alsace region, where they say the first decorated Christmas trees appeared as far back as the 14th century.

On Christmas eve, Children put their polished shoes out in front of the chimney and hope that '*Père Noël*' (Father Christmas) fills the shoes with sweets. Christmas Day, 25th of December, is a public holiday and families get together for a big feast and presents are exchanged.

Italy

In Italy, a nativity scene, a '*presepe*', is usually put up in churches, town squares and often in houses. This is considered to be the most important part of the decorations. The nativity scene display includes a crib filled with straw. This originally stems from Italy and is now common occurrence in many countries around the world. In Italy, Father Christmas hands out presents to children on Christmas Day instead of delivering them on Christmas Eve. Additionally, many families exchanged gifts but only on January 6th which is the day of Epiphany. The people wish each other '*Buon Natale*', which means Merry Christmas.

The Philippines

In the Philippines there is a special tradition of having a Christmas lantern, which is called '*paról*'. The lantern is star-shaped which helps people remember the star of Bethlehem, and is mainly made out of bamboo and paper. The Christmas lanterns are on sale during the festive season in the many markets across the country.

Australia

In Australia, it is tradition in the weeks up to Christmas to join in Christmas picnics organized by various churches and sing Christmas carols on the beach. As Australia is on the southern hemisphere, Christmas is in the summer time and thus it is easy to understand that during Christmas time friends and family often gather at the beaches to sunbathe and play sports.

What are your Christmas traditions in your family? How are they different to people's from other countries?