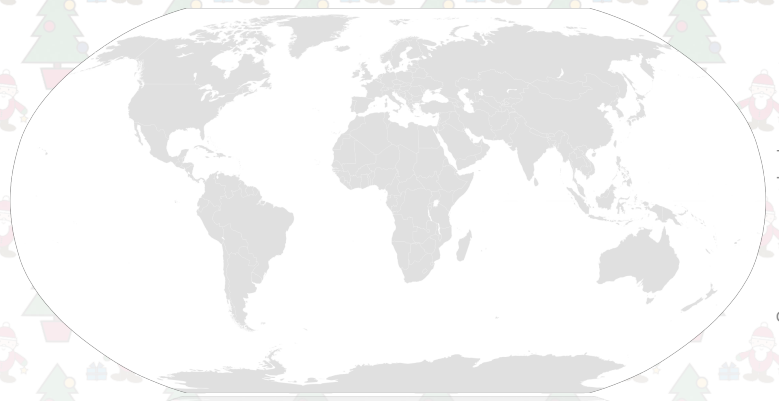


Christmas around the world



Source: www.pixabay.com

Christmas is one of the most famous holidays in the world. Although, it seems to be celebrated differently in nearly every country, there are always some similarities. Get into groups, pick a country and try to summarise the information you find. Answering the following questions might help you with your task:

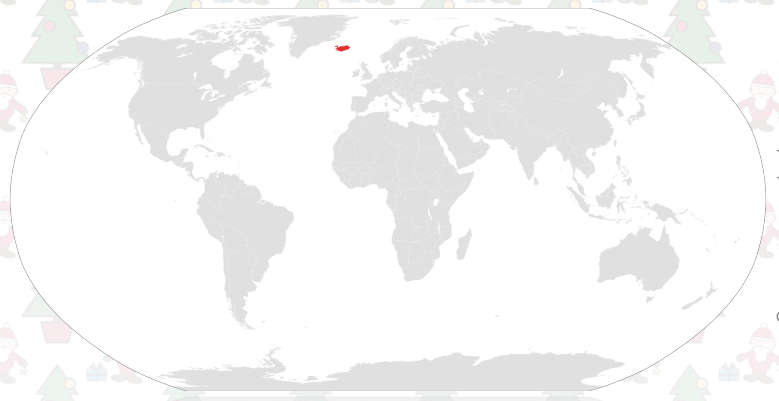
- How is Merry Christmas said in the national language of your country?
- When do the children get their presents?
- Who brings the presents?
- Which meals do the people have?
- How do they spend their holiday?
- Are there any similarities with the country where you live?

Present your posters to each other and discuss the differences and similarities. Are there aspects that seem to occur in all of the countries?

Imagine you are given the opportunity to create a new country and you should come up with traditions. How would you like to celebrate Christmas? Use the information of the different posters to describe your perfect Christmas holidays.

Talk to a partner. Ask him/her about how he/she usually spends Christmas and if there are any special traditions in their family. Are the two of you spending Christmas in a similar way?

Iceland



Christmas is known as 'Yule' in Iceland. This comes from the ancient winter solstice celebrations, that were taken over by the early Christians. Yule also include the New Year celebrations. There are lots of customs and traditions about Yule in Iceland. The Yule season consists of the following days:

Þorláksmessa - St. Thorlakur's Day - December 23rd

Iceland's major Saint is 'heilagur Þorlákur Þórhallsson', or 'St. Thorlakur Thorhallsson', the Bishop of Skálholt. December 23rd, is the day on which he died. On St. Thorlakur's Day, the main custom is eating of a simple meal of skata or skate. The Yule (or Christmas) tree is usually decorated on this day. This is also a big shopping day for last minute gifts, with stores remaining open until midnight.

Aðfangadagur - Christmas Eve / Yule Eve

Celebrations in Iceland start at 6.00pm on Yule Eve. This may come from old Icelandic tradition, when a new day started at 6.00pm and not at midnight. Icelandic children open their presents after the evening meal on Aðfangadagur. This is when the Yule celebrations really start! (TV used to stop at about 5.00pm and restarted at 10.00pm! But now TV is on all through the Christmas period.)

Jóladagur - Christmas Day / Yule Day

Jóladagur is usually celebrated with the extended family. The main Yule meal is 'Hangikjöt', a leg of roast lamb. Sometimes 'Rjúpa' (Rock Ptarmigan, a sea bird) is also eaten. Another Yule meal speciality is 'Laufabrauð' or leaf bread. This is made of thin sheets of dough cut into delicate patterns which are fried. Families often have their own patterns for the Laufabrauð.

Annar Jóladagur - Boxing Day

This is another day for visiting friends and family and eating lots more! Public entertainment is considered inappropriate on Yule Eve and Yule Day, and it is on Boxing Day that dancing in public is allowed again!

Gamlárskvöld / Nýársdagur - New Year's Eve / New Year's Day

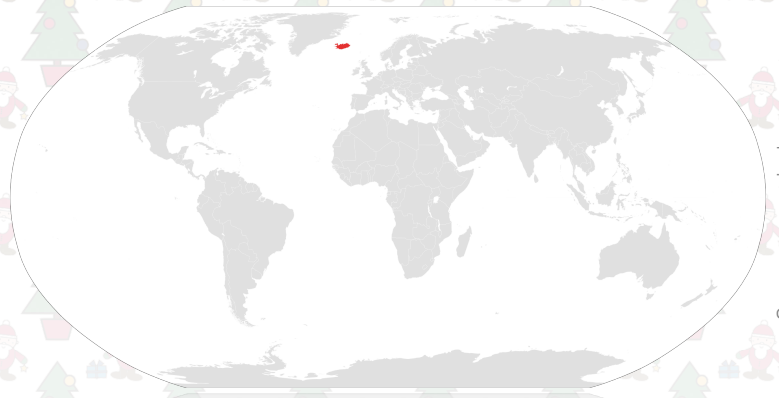
This is one of the most important nights of the year in Iceland and there are several magical traditions that are supposed to happen on it! Cows are meant to be able to talk, seals take on human form, the dead rise from their graves, and the Elves move houses. Bonfires have been lit on Gamlárskvöld since the late 1700s. People also have big fireworks to bring in the New Year. This is called 'sprengja út árið' or 'blowing out the year'.

Prettándinn - Epiphany - January 6th

This is the last day of Yule, celebrated with bonfires and Elfin dances. Many of the magical traditions associated with New Year's Eve are also supposed to happen at Prettándinn. Happy/Merry Christmas/Yule in Icelandic is 'Gleðileg jól'. Happy/Merry Christmas in lots more languages.

One other big Yule custom is the coming of the 'Jólasveinarnir' or Yuletide Lads. These are magical people who come from the mountains in Iceland and each day from December 12th to Yule Eve a different Jólasveinn (Yuletide lad) comes. They have funny names though: Pottasleikir : Pot Licker; Askasleikir : Bowl Licker, Hurðaskellir : Door Slammer, Bjúgnakrækir : Sausage Snatcher for example.

Iceland



Source: www.pixabay.com

Jólasveinar first came to Iceland in the 17th century as the sons of Grýla and Leppalúði, a couple of child-eating, bloodthirsty ogres!!!

The Jólasveinar are thought of as playful imps or elves who love to eat lots of food and to play little tricks on people.

They leave little presents for children in shoes placed on the windowsill. If children have been naughty, they might leave a potato or little message telling them to be good. They start going home on Christmas Day, with the last one leaving on Prettándinn.

Presents might also be brought by Jólasveinn (Yule Man).

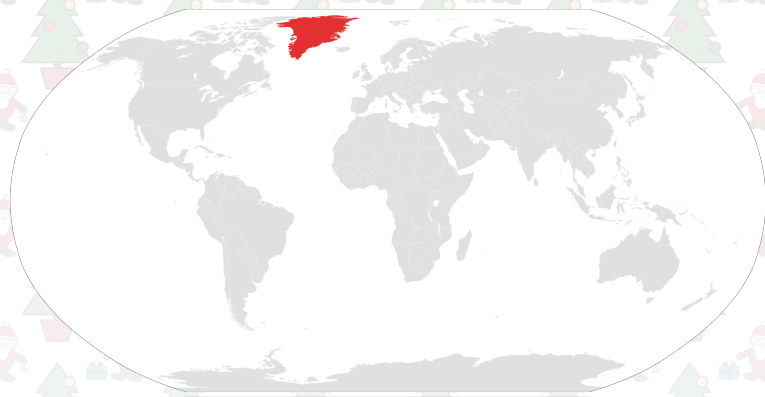
It is traditional in Iceland that everybody has a new piece of clothing for Yule and also often a book. Children also traditionally receive a candle and sometimes a pack of cards.

There are no native evergreen trees in Iceland, so the first Yule or Christmas trees were rowan trees. The first recorded Yule tree was in 1862. People then started to make Yule Trees from a central pole with branches attached to it and it was all painted green.

Nowadays, there are evergreen trees grown on Iceland and people have evergreen Yule trees. It is traditional to have a star or crown on top of the tree. The Icelandic Flag is also commonly used as a decoration. The tree is normally decorated on Þorláksmessa or early Christmas eve. A very large tree stands outside Reykjavík (the capital of Iceland) Cathedral and is a yearly present from the people of Oslo, Norway.

In Iceland the traditional Christmas meal is roast lamb. Some people like to have it smoked to add flavour and traditionally it was smoked over sheep's dung! This is still done in a few places today! Like in Finland, cemeteries are often lit up and decorated with Christmas lights over Christmas.

Greenland



Source: www.pixabay.com

In the villages of Polar Inuits, families like to visit each other and have parties. They drink coffee and eat cakes and exchange brightly wrapped parcels. Traditional presents are model sledges, pairs of polished walrus tusks, or sealskin mittens. Everyone in the village gets a gift and children go from house to house, singing songs.

On Christmas Eve, church services are held and most people go to them, many in national costume. Some men wear the white anoraks which are worn on special occasions. Christmas trees have to be imported, because no trees grow as far north as Greenland. The trees are often imported from Denmark. The trees are decorated with candles, bright ornaments and sometimes small versions of sealskin boots known as kamiks. Trees are traditionally decorated on the evening of December 23rd. People who don't use an imported tree, might have a traditional driftwood tree decorated with heather.

Another traditional and popular decoration is to put illuminated stars in windows. There are stars in most homes and in all public buildings. Because Greenland is so far north, and within the Arctic Circle, during the winter the sun never rises! (You might get a brief glimpse over the southern mountains, but that's it!) So the stars help to bring some light.

Villages also put a large Christmas Tree on a nearby hill, so everyone can see it. These trees are put up and decorated ready for the start of Advent. St Lucia's day (December 13th) is also celebrated in Greenland.

There are some rather unusual foods eaten at Christmas time in Greenland. 'Mattak' is whale skin with a strip of blubber („whalebacon“) inside. It is supposed to taste like fresh coconut, but is often too tough to chew and is usually swallowed. Another Christmas food is 'kiviak'. This is the raw flesh of little auks (a type of arctic bird) which have been buried whole in sealskin for several months until they have reached an advanced stage of decomposition! Although it sounds strange, it is a delicacy in Greenland. Other popular foods in Greenland include 'suaasat' which is a soup/stew, barbecued caribou, fish either as raw sushi or cooked and a popular desert is berries and apples with a crisp topping. Lots of Danish pastries are also eaten!

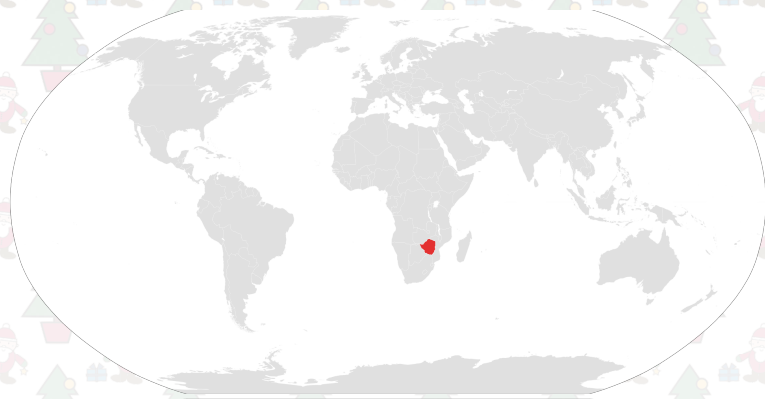
It is traditional on Christmas night that the men look after the women. The cook the meals and serve them. Usually, games follow the Christmas meal, including one in which an object is passed from hand to hand around a long table under a piece of cloth. The object is supposed to be repulsive: round, clammy and rough in texture; such as a frozen egg, wrapped in strips of wet fox fur!

In Greenland there are two main languages spoken, Inuit/Greenlandic and Danish. In Greenlandic, Happy/Merry Christmas is 'Juullimi Pilluarit'; in Danish it is 'Glædelig Jul'.

Greenland also claims to be the place where Santa Claus lives or at least goes for his summer holidays! He is said to have a home in the north of the country in Spraglebugten, near the town of Uummannaq!

New Year's Eve is celebrated twice in Greenland! At 8.00pm, the people celebrate that the new year has reached Denmark and at midnight it's new year in Greenland! At both celebrations, people like to let off lots of fireworks and rockets!

Zimbabwe



For most people in Zimbabwe, Christmas day starts with a church service. After the church service, everyone has a party in their homes and people go from house to house, visiting all of their family and friends on the way home! Sometimes, this can take all of the rest of the day! At every house you have something to eat, exchange presents and enjoy the party.

A lot of people get their biggest stereo speakers out and put them outside the front of the house and play their favourite music very loudly! It is not only Christmas music that is played, but also the latest pop tunes and old African favourites.

The people wear their best clothes for Christmas, as for some families the only new clothes they get every year are for Christmas. The parties are a good place to show off their new clothes.

Children in Zimbabwe believe that Santa Claus brings them their presents early on Christmas Day, ready to show their friends at church and at the parties.

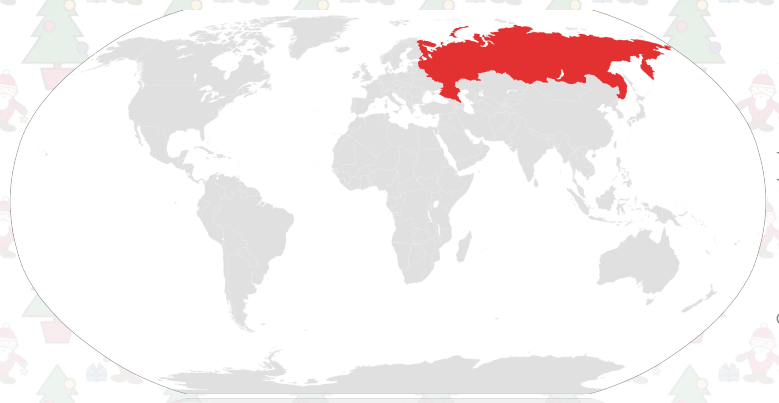
Only the main room in the house is often decorated in Zimbabwe. Some Zimbabweans have a traditional 'European' Christmas Tree, but they decorate the room with plants like Ivy. This is draped around the whole of the top of room.

Christmas Carols are sung during Christmas Day morning service and in services leading up to Christmas. There are also sometimes Carols by Candlelight Services in city parks.

The Christmas Cards that are used in Zimbabwe sometimes have African pictures on them, such as wild animals, but most are imported so they have the traditional 'snow scenes' and pictures of the Christmas story on them.

The special food eaten at Christmas in Zimbabwe is Chicken with rice. Chicken is a very expensive food in Zimbabwe and is a special treat for Christmas. This is often eaten at the Christmas Day parties. Santa might sometimes arrive at big stores in a Fire Engine. The streets in the big cities also can have colourful Christmas lights.

Russia



In the days of the Soviet Union, Christmas was not celebrated very much. New Year was more important at that time. Following the revolution in 1917, Christmas was banned as a religious holiday in 1929 and Christmas trees were banned until 1935 when they turned into 'New Year' Trees! If people wanted to celebrate Christmas, they had to do it secretly, just with their families.

After the Soviet Union in 1991, people were free to celebrate Christmas again. But it's still a quieter and smaller holiday in Russia than the big New Year celebrations. The New Year is the time for spending lots of money and eating and drinking lots of food. Christmas is much more religious and private. New Year is also when 'Grandfather Frost' (known in Russian as 'Ded Moroz' or Дед Мороз) brings presents to children. He is always accompanied by his granddaughter Snegurochka. On New Year's eve children hold hands, make a circle around the Christmas tree and call for Snegurochka or Ded Moroz. When they appear, the star and other lights on the Christmas tree light up! Ded Moroz carries a big magic bag.

The traditional greeting for Happy New Year is 'S Novym Godom'. Christmas in Russia is normally celebrated on January 7th (only a few Catholics might celebrate it on the 25th December). The date is different because the Russian Orthodox church uses the old 'Julian' calendar for religious celebration days. The Orthodox Church also celebrates Advent. But it has fixed dates, starting on 28th November and going to the 6th January, so it's 40 days long. The official Christmas and New holidays in Russia last from December 31st to January 10th.

In Russian Happy/Merry Christmas is 's rah-zh-dee-st-VOHM'

Some people fast (don't eat anything) on Christmas Eve, until the first star appears in the sky. People then eat 'sochivo' or 'kutia', a porridge made from wheat or rice served with honey, poppy seeds, fruit (especially berries and dried fruit like raisins), chopped walnuts or sometimes even fruit jellies! Kutia is sometimes eaten from one common bowl, which symbolises unity. In the past, some families threw a spoonful of sochivo up onto the ceiling. If it stuck to the ceiling, some people thought it meant they would have good luck and would have a good harvest!

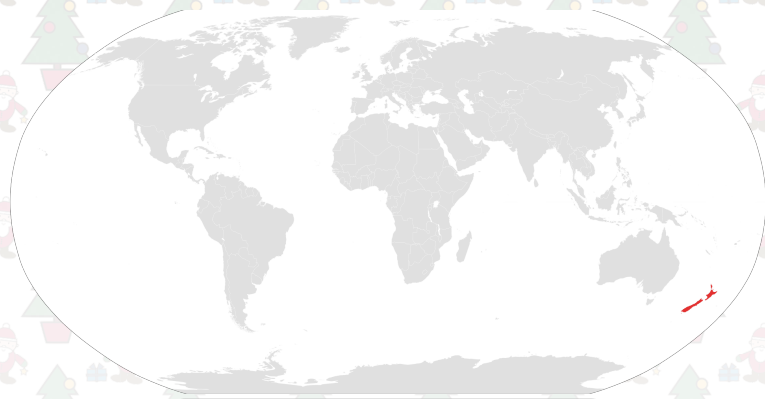
Other popular Christmas Eve foods include, beetroot soup (borsch) or vegan potluck (solyanka) served with individual vegetable pies (often made with cabbage, potato, or mushroom); sauerkraut, porridge dishes such as buckwheat with fried onions and fried mushrooms, salads often made from vegetables like gherkins, mushrooms or tomatoes, and also potato or other root vegetable salads. The meal often consists of 12 dishes, representing the 12 disciples of Jesus.

Following the meal, prayers might be said and people then go to the midnight church services. They often don't wash the dishes until they get home from Church - sometimes not until 4.00am or 5.00am! The main meal on Christmas day is often more of a feast with dishes like roast pork & goose, Pirog and Pelmeni (meat dumplings). Dessert are often things like fruit pies, gingerbread and honeybread cookies (called Pryaniki) and fresh and dried fruit and more nuts.

In some areas, children will go carol singing round the homes of friends and family and to wish people a happy new year. They are normally rewarded with cookies, sweets and money.

Christmas around the world

New Zealand



Source: www.pixabay.com

In New Zealand Christmas comes in the middle of the summer holidays. Lots of people like to spend time at the beach, camping or at their Baches (holiday homes) for Christmas.

Many towns have a Santa parade with decorated floats, bands and marching girls. This can be any time from mid November onwards and is really a commercial event but much enjoyed by all spectators. As it's warm, Santa is often seen wearing 'jandals' (New Zealand sandals) and sometimes he swaps his red top for a New Zealand 'All Blacks' rugby shirt!

Children in New Zealand leave out carrots for Santa's reindeer and beer might be left for Santa himself and some pineapple chunks!

In the main cities like Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Hamilton, there are big Christmas light shows and displays. There are big carol services throughout the country, even in small towns, villages and rural areas. New Zealand has some special carols of its own. These include 'Te Haranui', Christmas in New Zealand and A Kiwiana Christmas! These are sung at most carol services around the country.

Many people have a Christmas tree in their homes and decorate it like people in the USA or UK. New Zealanders also have their own special Christmas Tree, the Pōhutukawa. It can grow to be a very large tree and has bright red blossoms which are popular decorations and also feature on Christmas cards. They have been associated with Christmas since the mid 1800s. The Pōhutukawa is also important in Maori culture.

Many New Zealanders have a barbecue for Christmas lunch and it is becoming more and more popular. The food cooked on the barbecue is often ham slices or even venison or some other kind of exotic meat. Shrimps and other fish are also barbecued. White bait fritters are also popular. It's common to have Christmas Crackers on the Christmas dinner table.

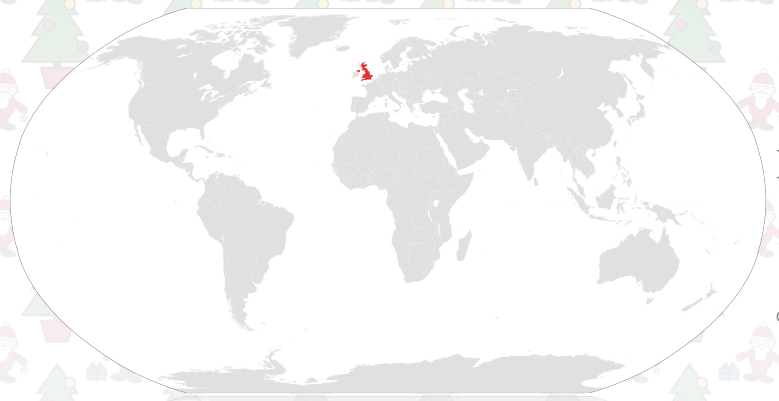
Desserts are also very popular! Many still have a hot fruit pudding with custard and ice cream but also cold desserts are popular. These include pavlova and whipped cream, meringues, cold fruit salad, jelly and ice cream. Drinks will include a range of soft drinks.

New Zealanders open their presents on Christmas day once the whole family is together. This is usually before the Christmas lunch.

One popular present for Christmas in New Zealand are 'jandals'. Those are flip-flops/thong sandals - the name 'jandals' comes from combining the two words 'Japanese Sandals'. They've been popular in New Zealand since the late 1950s.

In the Maori language Happy/Merry Christmas is 'Meri Kirihimete'!

United Kingdom



In the UK families often celebrate Christmas together, so they can watch each other open their presents! Most families have a Christmas Tree (or maybe even two!) in their house for Christmas. The decorating of the tree is usually a family occasion, with everyone helping. Christmas Trees were first popularised in the UK by Prince Albert, the husband of Queen Victoria. Prince Albert was German, and thought that it would be good to use one of his ways of celebrating Christmas in England. Holly, Ivy and Mistletoe are also sometimes used to decorate homes or other buildings.

Most villages, towns and cities are decorated with Christmas lights over Christmas. Often a famous person switches them on. The most famous Christmas lights in the UK are in Oxford Street in London. Every year they get bigger and better. Thousands of people go to watch the big 'switch on' around the beginning of November.

Like in other countries, Nativity Plays and Carol Services are also very popular at Christmas time the UK.

Children believe that Father Christmas leaves presents in stockings or pillow-cases. These are normally hung up by the fire or by the children's beds on Christmas Eve. Children sometimes leave out mince pies and brandy for Father Christmas to eat and drink when he visits them. Now, some people say that a non-alcoholic drink should be left for Santa as he has to drive!

Children write letters to Father Christmas listing their requests, but sometimes instead of putting them in the post, the letters are tossed into the fireplace. The draught carries the letters up the chimney and Father Christmas reads the smoke.

There are some customs that only take place, or were started, in the UK. Wassailing is an old Anglo-Saxon custom that doesn't take place much today. Boxing Day is a very old custom that started in the UK and is now taken as a holiday in many countries around the world.

In Scots (a Scottish dialect) Happy/Merry Christmas is 'Blithe Yule'; in Gaelic it's 'Nollaig Chrìdheil'; in Welsh (which is spoken in some parts of Wales it's 'Nadolig Llawen', in Cornish (spoken by some people in Cornwall in south west England) it's 'Nadelik Lowen' and Manx (spoken by some people on the Isle of Man) it's 'Nollick Ghennal'.

In the UK, the main Christmas meal is usually eaten at lunchtime or early afternoon on Christmas Day. It's normally roast turkey, roast vegetables and 'all the trimmings' which means vegetables like carrots & peas, stuffing and sometimes bacon and sausages. It's often served with cranberry sauce and bread sauce. Traditionally, and before turkey was available, roast beef or goose was the main Christmas meal. One vegetable that is often at Christmas in the UK are brussel sprouts.

Dessert is often Christmas Pudding. Mince pies and lots of chocolates are often eaten as well! Trifle is also a popular dessert at Christmas. It's made in a large bowl and consists of a layer of sponge cake (or sponge fingers) at the bottom of the bowl (which is often soaked in sherry or brandy) then there's a layer of fruit (normally suspended in a fruit flavored jelly) and it's topped with a layer of custard and then whipped cream. In Scotland there's a variation called 'Topsy Laird' which uses whiskey to soak the sponge and the fruit are raspberries.

The dinner table is decorated with a Christmas Cracker for each person and sometimes flowers and candles.

United Kingdom



Source: www.pixabay.com

The dinner table is decorated with a Christmas Cracker for each person and sometimes flowers and candles.

The UK is also famous for Christmas Cake - some people love it and some people really don't like it! It's traditionally a rich fruit cake covered with marzipan and icing - and often topped with Christmas themed cake decorations like a sprig of holly.

In the UK, it doesn't snow very often, but people always want to know if it will be a 'White Christmas'. The British definition of „White Christmas“ is that a single snow flake has been seen falling in the 24 hours of Christmas Day! This doesn't happen a lot in the UK!!!

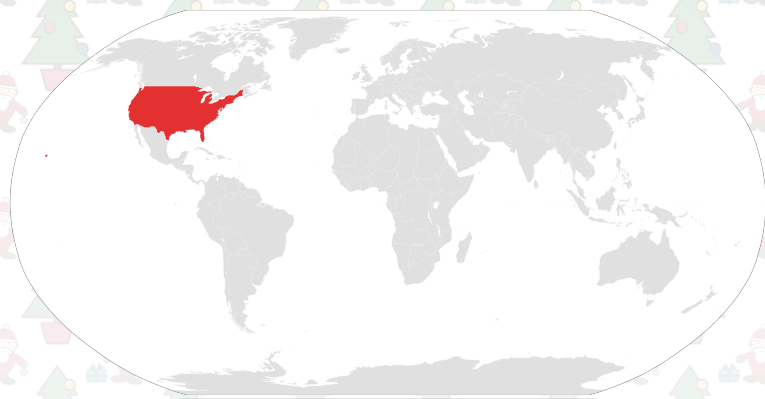
Statistics show that in the UK, they get an official White Christmas about every 4 or 5 years and have real snow at Christmas about 1 in 10 years (but often this is only normally in Scotland!).

In Scotland, some people celebrate New Year's Eve (which is called Hogmanay) more than Christmas! The word Hogmanay comes from a kind of oat cake that was traditionally given to children on New Year's Eve.

All across the UK, in cities and towns, there are fireworks to celebrate the New Year. Two of the most famous fireworks displays are in London, along the River Thames, and in Edinburgh at the Hogmanay celebrations.

Also in Scotland, the first person to set foot in a house in a New Year is thought to have a big effect on the fortunes of the people that live there! Generally strangers are thought to bring good luck. Depending on the area, it may be better to have a dark-haired or fair-haired stranger set foot in the house. This tradition is widely known as 'first footing'. In England it is sometimes said that a stranger coming through the door carrying a lump of coal will bring good luck.

United States of America



Source: www.pixabay.com

The United States of America has many different traditions and ways that people celebrate Christmas, because of its multi-cultural nature. Many customs are similar to ones in the UK, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Mexico.

The traditional meal for Western European families is turkey or ham with cranberry sauce. Families from Eastern European origins favour turkey with trimmings, keilbasi (a Polish sausage), cabbage dishes, and soups; and some Italian families prefer lasagne!

Some Americans use pop-corn threaded on string to help decorate their Christmas Tree!

Many Americans, especially Christians will go to church to celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas. Many churches have special Christmas Carol services and events where the story of Christmas is told. In New England (the American States of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine), there are shops called 'Christmas Shops' that only sell Christmas decorations and toys all the year round!

Americans also send out Christmas Cards, like Carol singing and there's the unusual custom of the Christmas Pickle. This is a decoration in the shape of a pickle which is placed among the other decoration on the Christmas tree, but in a place where it is hard to find. The first visitor who finds it, gets an extra present.

People in America like to decorate the outsides of their houses with lights and sometimes even statues of Santa Claus, snowmen and reindeer. Some cookies and glasses of milk are often left out as a snack for Santa on Christmas Eve!

Towns and cities often decorate the streets with lights to celebrate Christmas. Perhaps the most famous Christmas street lights in the USA are at the Rockefeller Center in New York where there is a huge Christmas Tree with a public ice skating rink in front of it over Christmas and the New Year.

Customs such as Mumming (a kind of acting out drama) take place in some communities. On New Year's Day in Philadelphia there is a Mummers' Day parade which lasts over six hours! Clubs called "New Years Associations" perform in amazing costumes which take months to make. There are four categories (Comics, Fancies, String Bands, and Fancy Brigades) which are judged.

In the Southwest of the USA, there are some special customs which have some similarities to those in parts of Mexico. These include 'luminarias' or 'farolitos' which are paper sacks partly filled with sand and then have a candle put in them. They are lit on Christmas Eve and are put on the edges of paths. They represent 'lighting the way' to somewhere where Mary and Joseph can stay.

In the south of Louisiana, on Christmas Eve, families in small communities along the Mississippi River light bonfires along the levees (the high river banks) to help 'Papa Noel' (the name for Santa in French as Louisiana has a strong historical connection with France) find his way to the children's homes!

In Hawaii, Santa is called Kanakaloka!