**Christmas Around The World**

**When children in Alaska go out caroling on a cold holiday evening, they carry with them a colored-star on a long pole. The youngsters are followed by “Herod’s Men,” who try to capture the star from the little ones. *(Victoria Westlane, in Tidbits of Loveland)***

**America is a place where Jewish merchants sell Zen love beads to agnostics for Christmas. *(John Burton Brimer)***

**The traditional Armenian Christmas Eve meal consists of fried fish, lettuce, and spinach. *(Noel Botham, in The World’s Greatest Book of Useless Information, p. 121)***

**Many areas of Arizona continue the Mexican tradition of Las Posadas, or the re-enactment of Mary and Joseph trying to find an inn. Parties are held in the evening with food and drink, and then groups of families carrying candles form a procession and walk through the neighborhood. Two people leading the parade carry statues of Mary and Joseph, and they knock on doors, seeking lodging for the evening. *(Victoria Westlane, in Tidbits of Loveland)***

**Christmas falls in the middle of summer in Australia, so most Aussies forego the traditional roast dinner and opt instead for a picnic on the beach. Some folks in Oz still have a full-blown holiday celebration in July, just to experience the traditional White Christmas of their friends in the Northern Hemisphere. *(Victoria Westlane, in Tidbits of Loveland)***

**It’s not surprising that music and choral concerts are an important part of Christmas in Austria, since it is the birthplace of such legendary composers as Mozart and Strauss. The holiday tree is decorated in secret by the parents, and hidden from the children until Christmas Eve, when it is unveiled with a flourish. *(Victoria Westlane, in Tidbits of Loveland)***

**Christmas mass in Brazil is called Missa do Galo, or Mass of the Rooster. That’s because the service begins at midnight on the 24th, and often by the time it ends, the roosters outside are announcing the new day. Since it is so hot in December in Brazil, Papai Noel (Father Christmas) wears silk clothing instead of his traditional heavy woolen costume in order to keep cool and comfortable. *(Victoria Westlane, in Tidbits of Loveland)***

**Christmas has been co-opted by the communists as good for stimulating business and is already a bigger deal than New Year’s Eve in China’s cities. Few Chinese, however, have any idea who the “old foreigner” is, or what Christmas is all about. Even Zhang Guoyang laughed nervously when asked who the rotund bearded mannequins represent. “He’s a character in the story about Jesus; that’s all I know,” he replied. The spread of Christmas in China has less to do with the growth of Christianity in this officially atheist country than it does with the growth of foreign joint-venture hotels. When foreign hotels began opening here 20 years ago, their annual Christmas decorations were hugely popular among locals. Soon Chinese hotels were putting up decorations of their own and before long restaurants were offering Christmas Eve banquets. (*Craig S. Smith, in New York Times)***

**December 5 is St. Nicholas Eve in the Czech Republic, and characters dressed as a bishop (with a white cottony beard) and a devil prowl neighborhoods to interrogate children to find out whether they were naughty or nice. The devil carries a large switch with him for emphasis, and it’s not unusual to find photos in Prague newspapers of “frightened” kids being menaced by the fellow. Christmas dinner is served on the 24th, and consists of fresh carp either baked or fried in breadcrumbs, and homemade potato salad. *(Victoria Westlane, in Tidbits of Loveland)***

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**The original Dutch colonists celebrated four winter holidays: St. Nicholas Day (December 6th), Christmas (a religious celebration), New Year’s Day and Epiphany (January 6th). *(Rebecca Jones, in Rocky Mountain News)***

**The American custom of hanging stockings to be filled with treats evolved from the Dutch custom of leaving wooden shoes filled with straw and carrots as refreshments for Santa’s horse, reports David Caras of the Dutch Dairy Bureau. The shoes would be found the next morning, filled with treats by St. Nicholas. Other Dutch contributions include the giving of gifts to good children (and switches to the naughty) and decorated Christmas cookies. *(Rebecca Jones, in Rocky Mountain News)***

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**A big day in England is the day after Christmas, when presents for the postman, the milkman, the delivery boy, and other employees and public servants are boxed and proffered. A legal holiday, the day is called Boxing Day. And if you don’t want your London Times thrown up in the privet, or your milk to stand in the sun, or your groceries to be delivered at 6 in the morning, you’d better have some boxes ready*. (Bernie Smith, in The Joy of Trivia, p. 326)***

**In England coins are baked into the Christmas pudding. The person who receives them in his portion is to have good luck for the next year. “Crackers”, a party favor with small trinkets inside, are used at each place setting at the table. A tradition of pulling the “crackers” and having the trinkets spill out was set many years ago. *(Bruce D. Witherspoon, in Astounding Facts, p. 244)***

**A traditional Christmas dinner in early England was the head of a pig prepared with mustard. *(absolutetrivia.com)***

**One of “Merrie England’s” most enjoyable holiday customs was bringing in the massive yule log. A log from the ash tree was most highly regarded because of the legend that Mary washed and dressed the Baby Jesus for the first time by the light of an ash-wood fire. The flame of the yule log was considered symbolic of the light that came down from heaven when Christ was born. In some places the log was brought in on Christmas Eve by the servants. Tradition says that while the log burned the hired hands did not have to work. Of course they would hunt for the largest log they could find. *(Richard A. Cheek, Church Management)***

**Christmas in England, 1640s:**

**- Christmas celebrations – banned**

**- Decorating with greens – banned**

**- Mince pies – banned**

**- Taking day off from work – banned. *(Gerry Bowler, in The Encyclopedia of Christmas)***

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**Christmas Eve is the most important day of the year in Finland. Shops close at noon on the 24th so that employees can be at home with their families. In the evening, families gather in churchyards to place lighted candles on the graves of their loved ones, and the landscape fairly glows from the flames of thousands of tapers. Father Christmas visits homes while the children are still awake so he can personally ask them if they’ve been good (of course, the answer is always “yes!”). *(Victoria Westlane, in Tidbits of Loveland)***

**The night before Christmas, the French children polish their shoes and leave them by the fireplace. Le Pere Noel or Saint Nicholas will fill them with candles, nuts and fruits. He also brings gifts in a big basket on his back. Le Pere Noel travels on a donkey. After midnight church families gather for a very fancy supper. In many parts of France people stay up all night on Christmas Eve. *(Bruce D. Witherspoon, in Astounding Facts, p. 273)***

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**In Germany, St. Nick is accompanied by an assistant who punishes naughty children by hitting them with a rod. *(Jeff Harris, in Shortcuts)***

**In the Black Forest area in Germany, religious families lay an extra place at the table for the Virgin Mary on Christmas Eve. *(Noel Botham, in The World’s Greatest Book of Useless Information, p. 120)***

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**When it comes to holiday celebrations in Greece, Christmas comes in second to Easter. Nevertheless, the Christmas feast is looked forward to, since it ends 40 days of fasting. On Christmas Day, gifts are given to hospitals and orphanages. Instead of Christmas trees in most homes, you’ll find a wooden bowl with a piece of wire suspended across the rim, from which hangs a sprig of basil wrapped around a wooden cross. *(Victoria Westlane, in Tidbits of Loveland)***

**In Greek legend, malicious creatures called kallikantzaroi sometimes play troublesome pranks at Christmastime. One could burn either salt or an old shoe to get rid of them, as the stench would drive them off. *(Noel Botham, in The World’s Greatest Book of Useless Information, p. 121)***

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**It’s said that Holland “goes mysterious” in December. To celebrate Sinterklaas, the Dutch go to great lengths to disguise gifts with what they call “surprises.” A small present may be discovered inside a huge box or hidden in a cabbage or pudding. A large gift might be stashed in the refrigerator or trash bin, with clues to its location elaborately gift-wrapped. Sometimes a present comes in many layers, with a different person’s name on each one, until it finally reaches the rightful recipient. A bit of rhyme must accompany every package, and the Dutch pride themselves on mastering this art form. For the less creative, poets work in department stores--writing verses while you wait. *(Susan Atkins, in Sky)***

**By tradition, St. Nicholas (the precursor of Santa Claus) left fruits, nuts, and candies for children in Europe. In Holland, children put their wooden shoes outside their bedrooms on the eve of the saint’s day, hoping to find the shoes filled with goodies in the morning. *(Ben Franklin’s Almanac, p. 359)***

**In Holland, St. Nicholas travels with “Black Peter” who takes bad children away. *(Jeff Harris, in Shortcuts)***

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**Santa Claus arrives in Hungary on December 6th. Children clean their shoes and place them outside the door or a window the night before. When they awake, they find the shoes filled with candy and small toys in red bags. On December 24, children spend the evening at their grandparents’ house, or perhaps at the cinema, so that little Jesus can bring the tree and presents while they are away. *(Victoria Westlane, in Tidbits of Loveland)***

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**In Iceland, shops stay open until midnight on December 23 in order to accommodate last-minute shoppers. The 23rd is also St. Thorlakur Thorhallsson’s Day, which means a traditional dinner of skate is in order. No, they don’t fry a rollerblade; skate is a native fish that, when cooked properly, smells like ammonia. In homes with young children, small gifts are distributed every night from December 1 through December 24. *(Victoria Westlane, in Tidbits of Loveland)***

**Christmas warmth: Icelandic custom has the populace lighting huge bon-fires to burn on Christmas Eve. Cemeteries are festively decorated with lights. *(Bruce D. Witherspoon, in Astounding Facts, p. 161)***

**An Icelandic legend says that unless you get a new garment to wear for Christmas, you “get caught by the Christmas Cat.” Here is a condensed translation: The Christmas Cat’s eyes glare wide and glowing. He roams hungry and evil in the freezing Christmas snow. In every home, people shudder at his name. He picks on those who live in dire need and receive no new garments for Christmas. So the women labor to create a dress or even a sock. Then, on Christmas Eve when the Cat peers in, the children stand rosy and proud in their new clothes. All who get something new to wear stay out of the Cat’s grasp. He gives an awful hiss and goes on his way. The Christmas Cat’s next visit will be in vain if everyone gets new clothes for Christmas. Are you thinking of children who have nothing? Doing something for those who live in the dark world of poverty would give you a happy day and a merry, merry Christmas. *(Vignir Jonsson, Reykjaveg, Iceland, from the Multi-Cultural Calendar)***

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**Although India is primarily Hindu and Muslim, they nevertheless plunge into the Christmas season with the same fervor as their Western neighbors. In Delhi, Santa can be spotted in shopping areas, while in other areas, mango and banana trees are decked out in holiday ornaments. Churches are adorned with poinsettia plants and candles for the Christmas service. *(Victoria Westlane, in Tidbits of Loveland)***

**Iraqi Christians begin their Christmas celebration by having a child read the Nativity story. Then a bonfire is lit, using a dried bush of thorns as fuel. Hymns are sung while the fire burns, and if the thorns are completely reduced to ash, it is a sign of good fortune for the coming year. Each member of the family then jumps over the ashes three times and makes a wish. The Christmas Day church service always ends with a “touch of peace” from the bishop. *(Victoria Westlane, in Tidbits of Loveland)***

**In Ireland a candle is placed in the window on Christmas Eve as a welcome light to all who, like Mary and Joseph, may be in search of shelter. *(Bruce D. Witherspoon, in Astounding Facts, p. 165)***

**In Italy, Christmas is preferably shared with family rather than co-workers and casual acquaintances. Christmas Eve dinner always consists of several different fish entrees, and in Rome, eel is added to the menu. Italy is known for creating elaborate manger scenes as decorations, with some churches offering prizes for the best Nativity displays. *(Victoria Westlane, in Tidbits of Loveland)***

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**Christmas is not a national holiday in Japan, but you’d never know it by looking at the retail stores, which are decked out with almost as many decorations as the average North American mall. Over 70 percent of Japan’s residents serve a traditional Christmas cake, which is sponge cake covered with strawberries and whipped cream. *(Victoria Westlane, in Tidbits of Loveland)***

**In Japan, Christmas Eve is a time to eat strawberry shortcake and fried chicken. *(Noel Botham, in The Ultimate Book of Useless Information, p. 189)***

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**In Lebanon, Christmas is a time of visiting friends and relatives. Everyone expects a parade of visitors at their home and is prepared with refreshments, while their guests provide fruit baskets and cakes. In downtown Beirut, Lebanon’s tallest Christmas tree is adorned with shiny shooting stars and red and silver ornaments. *(Victoria Westlane, in Tidbits of Loveland)***

**Unlike the rest of southern Asia, Christianity is the leading religion in the Philippines. Filipinos use fireworks to ring in the Holiday season, which officially starts in September. On Christmas Day, Mass is said every hour so that everyone has a chance to attend. The traditional holiday dinner includes a roast pig. *(Victoria Westlane, in Tidbits of Loveland)***

**The first star that appears in the sky on Christmas Eve in Poland has its own special name, Gwiazdka, which means “little star.” Folks watch the sky anxiously, and when the star appears, they shout greetings to one another. Families then gather for Wigilia, the traditional Christmas supper. A few bits of hay are traditionally spread underneath the tablecloth as a reminder that Christ was born in a manger. *(Victoria Westlane, in Tidbits of Loveland)***

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**King Knut, Sweden’s king from 1080 to 1086, decreed that the Christmas season should be celebrated for 20 days – December 25 to January 13. In Sweden, it is still traditional to wait until January 13, known as St. Knut’s Day, to discard the Christmas tree. *(Ben Franklin’s Almanac, p. 20)***

**Among the joyous Swedish celebrations is that of St. Lucia, the Queen of Light, who arrives on December 13. Young girls, usually blond and clear of voice, are selected to wear the white robe and seven-candle crown of Lucia. Lucias pop up everywhere to herald the three-week Christmas season. The tradition is even observed on SAS flights. Passengers leaving for Scandinavia on the night of December 12 can count on a glorious wake-up visit from a flight attendant wearing a glowing crown of white candles--lighted electrically. As in Swedish homes, where the Lucia-for-a-day serves ginger cookies and coffee to her parents, the airborne Lucia greets her passengers with the traditional fare. *(Judith Morgan, in Los Angeles Times)***

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