

KeeKee's Guide to

Christmastime Holidays



Around the World



A gift from
KeeKee to You!

Christmastime Holidays Around the World

Families around the world celebrate Christmastime traditions. Many customs started in different countries around the world. Your family probably celebrates things your grandparents and great-grandparents celebrated in the countries they were born.

When traveling during the holiday season, you may come across various customs and traditions from around the world, some familiar and others new to you.



Enjoy exploring holidays around the world!

Keekee

Tannenbaum (Christmas Tree)

Origins: Germany

The tradition of the Christmas tree or *Tannenbaum*, which means fir or pine tree, started in Germany. During cold, harsh winters, bringing the green pine tree inside was a reminder that spring was around the corner. Parents secretly decorate the *Tannenbaum* on Christmas Eve with candies, nuts, ornaments, and lights. When it is ready, they ring a bell, and the children run to the tree to find presents and take goodies under the tree.

Fröhliche Weihnachten!

(FROH-lick-uh VINE-ahk-ten)



Greeting Cards

Origins: England

The tradition of sending Christmas cards began in the United Kingdom in 1843. Sir Henry Cole got tired of handwriting holiday letters to friends and family, so he asked artist John Callcott Horsley to draw a card with a festive family scene. He added the message, "A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to You."

Then Henry could write who it was "To:" and put his name in the "From:" spot at the bottom.

Happy Christmas!



Stockings

(Hung by the Chimney with Care)

Origins: Europe

Stockings are thick, long socks that are usually made with thick yarn. They take a long time to dry after being washed. Before the invention of clothes washers, hanging stockings by the fireplace would allow them to dry faster.



Christmas Tree Ornaments



Origins: Germany

Long ago, the first tree ornaments were natural decorations like apples, candy canes, nuts, berries, and pastries in the shape of stars, hearts, and flowers. In the 1800s, a German glassblower named Hans Greiner began to make ornaments out of glass, and people loved them.

Holiday Lights



Origins: Germany

Before electricity and light bulbs, people decorated Christmas trees with candles clipped to the tree branches. Luckily, now we have a safer option with electric and battery-powered twinkle lights.



Carol Singing

Origins: Europe

The first carols were sung in Europe thousands of years ago. Originally, they were songs to celebrate the start of winter, and people would sing and dance in a circle. The word "carol" means "dance in a ring." Early versions of caroling involved people going from house to house, singing, and offering good wishes. This is called *wassailing*. Maybe you've heard the carol with lyrics "Here we come a-wassailing among the leaves so green..." That's what that song is about.

Candy Canes



Origins: Germany



In 1670, a choirmaster at the famous Cologne Cathedral in Germany created the first candy canes. During a Christmas Nativity play, he handed out sticks of candy to the kids to help keep them quiet during the long church ceremony. He shaped them like a shepherd's staff like the shepherds from the story of Nativity.

Holly Branches



Origins: Italy

In ancient Roman times, holly seemed magical since the leaves would stay bright green and the berries red even in the worst winter. Holly wreaths used to be given as gifts during the December winter festival.

Buon Natale!

(BWOHN Nuh-TAHL-ay)





Hanukkah



Origins: Israel

Hanukkah, or the Festival of Lights, is a Jewish holiday that dates back thousands of years to Israel. It lasts eight days and nights; a candle is lit each night on the menorah, and special foods like *latkes* (potato pancakes) and *sufganiyot* (jelly-filled doughnuts) are enjoyed. There's also the tradition of playing a game called dreidel, which involves spinning a four-sided top with Hebrew letters on each side, and players can win chocolate *gelt* (coins).

Chag Sameach!

(KHAG sah-MAY-akh)

Kwanzaa



Origins: United States

Kwanzaa ("first fruits" in Swahili) is an African-American holiday celebrating African culture and values. It is observed from December 26 to January 1. It involves lighting seven candles, each representing a principle such as unity, self-determination, and faith. Another tradition during Kwanzaa is the *karamu*, a festive feast with traditional African food and music.

Habari Gani!

(Hah-BAH-ree GAH-nee)



Paról Holiday Lantern



Origins: Philippines



In the Philippines, they have one of the longest Christmastime seasons in the world, often starting as early as September. The festivities include attending *Simbang Gabi* (night masses) for nine days leading up to Christmas Day, decorating homes with *parols* (a Christmas star-shaped lantern made of bamboo and paper), and enjoying *Noche Buena*, a grand family feast at midnight on Christmas Eve. Traditional foods like *lechon* (roasted pig), *queso de bola* (edam cheese), and sweets are enjoyed.

Maligayang Pasko!

(MAH-lee-gahng PAHS-koh)



The Yule Goat

Origins: Sweden

Julebocken (The Yule Goat) is a key feature of Christmastime in Sweden. Its most famous representation is the giant 43-foot-tall straw goat in the city of *Gävle*, known as the *Gävlebocken*.

Miniature goats made of straw are one of the most popular Christmas decorations.

Originally, the Yule Goat's job was to ensure the holiday decorating and preparations were done correctly. Sometimes, people dress as the goat to deliver presents, but that is mainly the job of Santa Claus (*Jultomten* in Sweden).

God Jul!

(GOOD Yool)

The Pohutukawa Tree

Origins: New Zealand

In New Zealand, they have their own Christmas Tree, the *Pohutukawa*. The trees grow very tall and full of bright red flowers. They are featured on greeting cards and in holiday songs.



New Zealand is in the Southern Hemisphere, below the equator; their seasons are opposite from the Northern Hemisphere. December is part of their summer. So traditions include barbecues, beach outings, and outdoor activities, along with the usual festive decorations and family gatherings. This includes Santa Claus wearing shorts.

Meri Kirihimete!

(MEH-ree KEE-ree-hee-MEH-tee)



Las Posadas (The Inns)

Origins: Mexico

Mexico's main celebration is the nine days preceding Christmas Eve, *Las Posadas* (The Inns). It's a celebration of Joseph and Mary's journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem before the birth of the baby Jesus. The celebration commemorates their search for a room at the inn. With nightly candlelight processions full of singing and children dressed like angels, it concludes with breaking the candy-filled piñata.

Feliz Navidad!

(FAY-leez Nah-vee-DAHD)



Greek Christmas Boats

Origins: Greece

In Greece, decorating boats with strings of lights is as popular as decorating Christmas trees. Saint Nicholas is the patron saint of sailors, and to celebrate, they start decorating boats on December 6, Saint Nicholas Day.

Kalá Christouyenna!

(KUH-lah KRISS-too-YEN-uh)



Gift Wrapped Apples

Started: China

The *Dongzhi* Festival is a Chinese festival that celebrates the start of winter. *Dong* means winter, and *zhi* means arrival. Around December 21, families often gather to eat *tangyuan* (sweet rice balls).



The tradition of giving apples wrapped in colorful paper on Christmas Eve is popular in China. Children hang up stockings in hopes that *Dun Che Lao Ren* (Santa Clause) will visit and fill them with presents.

Shèng dàn jié kuàilè!

(SHUNG DAN jyh kwai-luh)



Christmas Crackers

Started: United Kingdom

A Christmas cracker in the UK is a festive, paper-covered tube that two people pull apart to make it pop, revealing small gifts, a joke, and a paper crown inside. The tradition of wearing the festive crown dates back to the Saturnalia celebrations in Roman times.



Seven Fishes & La Befana

Started: Italy

The Feast of the Seven Fishes tradition, *Vigilia di Natale*, comes from Southern Italy. The Christmas Eve dinner consists of seven different seafood dishes.

La Befana, the good-hearted witch, delivers gifts to children on January 5, Epiphany Eve, when the Three Wise Men arrived at the manger bearing gifts. She is an older woman who rides a broomstick and fills children's stockings with candy and gifts if they are good, or a lump of coal or dark candy if they are bad.

Create Your Own Silly Holiday Story



'Twas the Night Before...



This story has blank spaces where words are left out. Without reading the story, ask friends and family for the words you need, "a holiday," "a dessert," and fill in the blanks. When you're done, read the story aloud with the suggested words to hear the silly story you created!

'Twas the night before _____, when all through the
HOLIDAY
_____ not a creature was stirring, not even a _____.
BUILDING ANIMAL
The _____ were hung by the chimney with care in hopes that
NOUN (PLURAL)
_____ soon would be there. The children were nestled all
FAMOUS PERSON
snug in their _____ while visions of _____ danced
FURNITURE A DESSERT
in their heads. When out on the roof there arose such a _____,
LOUD SOUND
I sprang from my bed to see what was the matter. When, what to my
wondering eyes should appear, but a miniature _____ and
TYPE OF VEHICLE
eight tiny _____. With a little old driver so lively and quick, I
ANIMAL (PLURAL)
knew in a moment it must be _____. They were dressed all in
PERSON IN ROOM
_____, from their _____ to their _____,
TYPE OF MATERIAL BODY PART BODY PART
and their _____ was all tarnished with ashes and soot. A
PIECE OF CLOTHING
bundle of _____ they had flung on their back and looked like
NOUN (PLURAL)
a _____ just opening their _____.
CAREER/JOB NOUN

Their _____ - how they twinkled! Their dimples, how merry!
BODY PART (PLURAL)
Their _____ were like _____, and _____
BODY PART (PLURAL) TYPE OF FLOWER (PLURAL) BODY PART
like a _____! Their _____ little mouth was
TYPE OF FRUIT ADJECTIVE
drawn up like a bow, and the beard on their _____ was as
PART OF BODY
_____ as the snow.
COLOR
They had a broad face and a little _____ belly that
SHAPE
_____ when they laughed, like a bowl full of _____.
TYPE OF MOVEMENT FOOD (PLURAL)
They spoke not a word but went straight to work and filled all the
_____, then turned with a jerk. And laying a finger aside of
NOUN (PLURAL)
their _____, and giving a nod, up the _____ they
BODY PART PART OF A HOUSE
rose. I heard them exclaim, as they drove out of sight, "
EXCLAMATION
_____ to all, and to all a _____ night!"
HOLIDAY ADJECTIVE



Happy Holidays



Happy Hanukkah



Happy Kwanzaa



Happy Holidays
from our family to yours!