



Christmas traditions around the world

Which of the following Christmas traditions do you know?

Bûche de Noël

The Bûche de Noël is a French Christmas cake that is shaped like a log. It is based on the tradition that a log was burnt on Christmas Eve in the hearth in families' homes. This was thought to be lucky. When the hearths were replaced by stoves, the tradition of eating a log-shaped cake instead of burning a wooden log started.

Advent wreath

The tradition of Advent wreath dates back to the 16th century, when it was used for the first time by German Lutheran Protestants. It consists of four candles fixed on a wreath of pine branches that is decorated with cones, berries, dried flowers and Christmas ornaments. The Advent wreath represents a kind of countdown to Christmas: three weeks before Christmas, one candle is lit, then two candles, then three and finally four are lit at Christmas.

Olentzero

The Olentzero is a legendary character in the Basque Country, a region located partly in Spain and France. He probably has a pagan origin. According to tradition, on December 24, the Olentzero comes down from the mountains to visit the Basque villages and towns and give presents to the children.

Caga Tió

The Caga Tió goes back to a pre-Christian tradition in Catalonia and Aragon in Spain. It is a tree trunk covered with a blanket that has a painted face and sticks as legs. Children "feed" it,

for example with sweets and fruits. At Christmas, they hit the Caga Tió with sticks while singing Christmas carols to make it "poop" gifts (that have previously been hidden under the blanket).

Christmas cracker

The Christmas cracker is an English tradition that dates back to the Victorian time (19th century). It consists of a cardboard paper tube wrapped in coloured paper that is twisted at both ends to make it look like a huge wrapped sweet. Inside the cracker is some chemically impregnated paper. When the cracker is pulled apart, normally by two people, this causes a bang. Inside the cracker is a paper crown, a joke on a slip of paper and a little gift.

Posadas

The posadas are nine religious festivals that are traditionally organized in Mexico before Christmas from December 16 to 24. They refer to María's and José's trip to Bethlehem and their search for accommodation. The Posadas have their origin in an ancient Aztec cult known as Panquetzaliztli that was celebrated in pre-Hispanic Mexico between December 17 and 26.

In the modern posadas, the guests are divided into two groups, one group stays inside the house and represents the innkeeper while the second group is outside the house and asks for a place to stay. This involves singing between the two groups with the people outside asking for an inn and the innkeepers denying it. After a few verses the innkeepers let the others in.

La Befana

La Befana is an old woman on broomstick who fills children's socks with gifts in Italy on Epiphany Eve, the night of January 5. The well-behaved children get sweets, while naughty children receive a lump of (sweet) coal. Another name for La Befana is Christmas witch. The origin of the tradition is probably a Christian legend.

Lucia

There is a tradition in Sweden on December 13 that a girl dresses up in a white robe and wears a crown of candles on her head. She leads a procession of other white-clad students. Although the Lucia festival is named after a martyr who was killed by the Romans, it is not much of a religious celebration in today's Sweden. Its most important elements are wearing white robes and candles, eating traditional saffron buns (Lussekatte) and singing songs.

Yule goat

The Yule goat is a Christmas tradition in Scandinavia and Northern European. It delivers presents together with the Jultomte (the Swedish version of Father Christmas) on Christmas night. The goat probably goes back to the pagan tradition of Yule, a festival celebrated by Germanic people. Today the Yule goat is typically made of straw.