



Chanukah

Hanukkah, also called "the Festival of Lights", celebrates the miracle of the holy oil that unexpectedly burned in the Temple for eight days after the Maccabees defeated the Syrians

This eight-day celebration is a joyous holiday filled with games, special foods, gifts, singing, and dancing.

Jews all over the world celebrate Hanukkah by lighting the Menorah. On the first night, the shamash (helper candle) is used to light one candle. Each night, one more candle is added and lit. It is customary to light the menorah in the window so that all who pass by can see it and know which night of Hanukkah it is.

The candles are traditionally placed in the Menorah from right to left and lit from left to right so the newest is always lit first. The shamash is usually higher than, or set apart from, the rest of the candles.

CHRISTMAS IN AMERICA "Merry Christmas"

Because American culture and media have had such a disproportionate impact on the development of Christmas traditions elsewhere in this century, a detailed look at the development of the holiday in the United States seems worthwhile.



Columbus's 1492 voyage to the New World ended when he ran aground on Christmas Eve. His was, of course, the first of many such expeditions to what would eventually be called the Americas. Later explorers found the inhabitants of these unfamiliar lands engaging in end-of-the-year festivals just as people did back in Europe. Peoples in the Pacific Northwest and Alaska had winter celebrations; a tribe in North Dakota hung gifts on cedar trees.

Despite these fascinating parallels with Christmas traditions, it would certainly be overstating the case to say that Native Americans played any significant role in the shaping of the Christmas celebration in the United States. The main influence, of course, was European, and the first wave of European settlers to the colonies were of English, Dutch, and Germanic origins. These groups, representing a variety of churches and religious affiliations, organized communities according to the conditions and values of their heritage. Among other religious, cultural, and political differences manifest during the colonial period was the question of Christmas. In this case, there was scant middle ground: Some were completely for it, some completely opposed.

Those communities with strong Separatist or Puritan ties thought about Christmas only long enough to object to it-and in many colonies (most notably in New England) these strict "low-church" denominations represented the majority. At first the laws forbade only public celebration, not private, but in 1659 a law was passed prohibiting the celebration entirely, with offenders to pay a five-shilling fine or be whipped.

A steady influx of moderates from overseas brought about the repeal of the law in 1681, and the first Christmas services were held in Boston Town Hall in 1686. Still, even when it was no longer illegal, Christmas remained a workday in Boston. Although Alabama declared Christmas a legal holiday in 1836, the first state to do so, the same was not done in Boston until 1856, and children there were attending school on Christmas Day until 1870.

Hessian troops at Trenton, unwilling to forsake their customary celebrations during the Christmas season of 1776, were taken by surprise by General Washington in one of the turning points of the Revolutionary War. As it happens, Hessians, who came from central Germany, are believed to have been the first to set up a Christmas tree on American soil. They were also the first part of a wave of Christmas-loving Germans who would profoundly influence the American holiday.



In the 19th-century, it seemed that wherever Germans settled in America, they brought Christmas cheer. In Pennsylvania, in New York, in Virginia, and elsewhere, they kept their love of Christmas alive. In some places they were surrounded by some of the holiday's staunchest opponents, but they carried on anyway, and gradually gained converts to their merry ways.

But there were other voices for Christmas in America's youth. In Virginia, the Cavaliers observed Christmas by ringing bells, decorating evergreens, and feasting. The Dutch founders of present-day New York celebrated similarly; they also brought St. Nicholas with them, the man who would eventually be known in America as Santa Claus.

An infusion of Victorian Christmas spirit that began in the middle of the 19th-century, coupled with the continued dedication to the holiday of German immigrants and their descendants, brought about the beginning of the holiday Americans recognize. In 1890, Oklahoma, the last contiguous state or territory that did not officially recognize Christmas as a holiday, saw the errors of its ways. The country was now celebrating from sea to shining sea, gradually incorporating customs and traditions from all over the world. Although it had a late start, the American Christmas, because of its ancestry, rivals any other in richness and variety.

The Christmas of Santa Claus, of wrapped presents beneath the tree, of family gatherings for television broadcasts of *I t's a Wonderful Life*-that Christmas is alive and well because it has, like the country in which it grew, been assembled from bits and pieces of what worked elsewhere, combined with new ideas, and transformed into a colorful whole. Christmas in America is a glorious hodgepodge, a sometimes chaotic blend of disparate elements, and all the more magnificent for its variety.

A Twist on Christmas in Some States in the U.S.

- In Pennsylvania, the Moravians build a landscape, called a putz - under the Christmas tree, while in the same state the Germans are given gifts by Belsnickle, who taps them with his switch if they have misbehaved.
- *Early European settlers brought many traditions to the United States. Many settled in the early days in the South, these settlers would send Christmas greetings to their distant neighbors by shooting firearms and letting off fireworks.*
- In Alaska, a star on a pole is taken from door to door, followed by Herod's Men, who try to capture the star. Colonial doorways are often decorated with pineapple, a symbol of hospitality. In Alaska, boys and girls with lanterns on poles carry a large figure of a star from door to door. They sing carols and are invited in for supper.
- In Washington D.C., a huge, spectacular tree is lit ceremoniously when the President presses a button and turns on the tree's lights.
- In Boston, carol singing festivities are famous. The singers are accompanied by hand bells.
- In New Orleans, a huge ox is paraded around the streets decorated with holly and with ribbons tied to its horns.
- In Arizona, the Mexican ritual called Las Posadas is kept up. This is a ritual procession and play representing the search of Mary and Joseph for a room at the inn. Families play the parts and visit each other's houses enacting and re-enacting the drama and, at the same time, having a look at each family's crib.
- In Hawaii, Christmas starts with the coming of the Christmas Tree Ship, which is a ship bringing a great load of Christmas fare. Santa Claus also arrives by boat and Christmas dinner is eaten outdoors.
- In California, Santa Claus sweeps in on a surf board.

Haupia Cake (Hawaii)

CAKE:

1 18-1/2 ounce pkg. white cake mix
2 egg whites
1 1/3 C. water

FILLING:

6 TBSP cornstarch
6 TBSP sugar
3/4 C water 1 12-ounce can frozen coconut milk, thawed 1 C. heavy cream, whipped & sweetened 1 1/3 C. shredded coconut to sprinkle over top of cake

Prepare cake mix according to package directions, but using the 1-1/3 cups water and egg whites. Pour into greased 13-by-9-by-2-inch pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 35 to 40 minutes, until toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean. Cool; split cake into 2 layers

To make filling: Mix cornstarch with sugar. Stir in water and coconut milk. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly, until mixture thickens. Remove from heat and cool slightly.

Spread filling between layers and on top of cake. Cool until filling is firm. Frost with whipped cream and sprinkle with coconut. Serves 20.



CHRISTMAS IN CANADA "Joyeux Noel (Joyous Christmas!)"

In Canada, from 1875 onwards, Christmas lost its essentially religious character, at least for Anglophones and the upper middle class. Little by little it became a community festival which gave rise to much family merry-making. New customs began to take root. Henceforth, the decorated Christmas tree, the creche with its santons or plaster figures, gifts and the Christmas "reveillon" became part of family tradition. Canadians decorate a pine tree with ornaments representing Christmas, buy or make each other presents that get wrapped in wrapping paper to be put under the tree so they can be opened on Christmas Day.

On Christmas Eve, December 24th, there is usually a turkey dinner and in the middle of the night, Santa Claus is said to come down the chimney and place the presents under the tree. Then he goes back up the chimney (he's magical) and flies to the next house in his sleigh with eight reindeer pulling it through the air (it flies).

On Christmas Day, all the presents are opened.

In some provinces, a big winter festival, called **Sinck Tuck**, is celebrated by the Eskimos, with dancing and a present-giving party.

In Labrador, turnips are saved from the summer harvest and are given to children, with a lighted candle pushed into a hollowed out hole.

In Nova Scotia, a country settled by Scottish highlanders, songs and carols brought from Britain two centuries ago are sung each Christmas morning. Also in Nova Scotia, during the twelve days of Christmas small groups of belsnicklers, or masked mummers, appear in neighborhoods, ringing bells, making noise, seeking candy or other treats. The hosts may try to guess who the mummers are and if they guess right the mummer removes his or her disguise and stops making rude noises and actions. Children may be quizzed by the mummers on their behavior if they say they have been good they are rewarded with candy.

In Quebec they display Crèches or nativity scenes in their homes as the Christmas decorations. After attending midnight mass, families may be served tourtiere or pork pie. Another favorite food is Boulettes or small meatballs. A Christmas banquet is called a reveillon.

In British Columbia Christmas turkey may be accompanied by either fresh or smoked salmon.

In Canada the traditional Christmas dinner is roast turkey with vegetables and sauces. For dessert it is rich, fruity Christmas pudding with brandy sauce. Mince pies, pastry cases filled with a mixture of chopped dried fruit.

Christmas Pudding

2 cups pastry flour
2 tsp baking soda
1/2 tsp cinnamon
2 cups raisins
16 oz whole candied cherries
16 oz cut mixed peel
1-1/2 cups currants
2 cups chopped suet (1/2 lb)
2 cups lightly packed brown sugar
2 eggs
1/3 cup molasses
2 cups fine dry bread crumbs
2 cups buttermilk OR sour milk
1/2 cup slivered blanched almonds

Grease one 2-quart or two 1-quart pudding moulds. Sift or blend flour, baking soda and cinnamon together. Combine the fruit, sprinkling with 1/2 cup flour mixture. Beat together suet, sugar, eggs and molasses. Combine remaining flour mixture with bread crumbs. Add dry ingredients to suet mixture alternating with buttermilk. Stir in floured fruit along with the almonds. Turn batter into prepared mould. Cover with wax paper and foil and tie tightly. Steam for 3 to 4 hours. Turn out of moulds immediately and allow to cool. To reheat for serving, return to mould, cover as before, and steam 1-1/2 hours.



CHRISTMAS IN MEXICO "Feliz Navidad"

In Mexico, the most cherished custom of Christmas is the Posadas.

Posadas, meaning lodging, is the name given to the nine days of celebration before "La Navidad," Christmas Day. This celebration commemorates the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem and their search for lodging that night.



In the country, children gather at private homes. Each child is provided with a candle which is lit as the children form a line and slowly begin to parade down the streets. At the head of the procession, two children carry small figures of the Holy Family. As they approach each house, they are turned away and told, "there is no room in the inn," until they come to the home with the replica of the stable of Bethlehem. There they arrange the figures, placing the Christ Child in the manger, just at midnight. Mexicans attend a midnight mass service which is called la misa del gallo or "the rooster's mass," and at the mass they sing lullabies to Jesus.



The story behind the poinsettia, which has a brilliant red star-shaped flower... It is believed that a young boy walking to the church to see the nativity scene showing the birth of Jesus had relied on the way that he had no gift to offer the Christ child so he gathered up some plain green branches as he walked in he was laughed at but upon placing the branches near the manger they started to bloom a bright red poinsettia flower on each branch.



On Christmas day the children are blindfolded and taken to try and break a decorated clay pinata that dangles and swings at the end of a rope. Once the pinata has been broken, the children clammer to recover the candy that was inside the pinata. Also, the GOOD children of Mexico receive their gifts on January 6th (Epiphany) instead of Christmas Day. This day is known as the "Day of the Wise Men." Instead of hanging up their stockings, the children put shoes out for the Wise Men to fill with toys.

Chocolate Caliente (Hot Chocolate)

6 cups of milk
6 oz sweet chocolate
6 oz semi sweet chocolate

1/2 tsp vanilla
dash of cinnamon

Heat the milk over medium flame. Break the chocolate into pieces. When the milk is hot, dissolve in it the chocolate pieces, moving constantly until everything is dissolved. Increase heat and let the mixture slowly boil. Add the vanilla and the cinnamon. Continue beating until frothy. Sing when chocolate is prepared for children.

"Chocolate, molinillo
estirar, estirar,
que el demonio va a pasar."



CHRISTMAS IN SOUTH AFRICA "Gesëende Kersfees"

As in South Africa, Christmas falls during summer vacation down under. Because of the climate, flowers are the most important Christmas decoration, particularly the Christmas Bush and the Christmas Bell. Father Christmas and Santa exist side by side-like siblings, which they certainly are. Gifts are exchanged on Christmas morning before attending church. Typically, the afternoon is spent at the beach or engaging in sports.

South African Bobotie (Meat Pie)

2 ounces butter
1 cup onions, thinly sliced
1 apple, peeled, diced
2 pounds chopped cooked beef
2 bread slices soaked in milk
2 tablespoons curry powder
1/2 cup raisins
2 tablespoons slivered almonds
2 tablespoons lemon juice
1 egg
1/2 teaspoon turmeric
6 bay leaves
1 egg
1/2 cup whole milk

Melt the butter in a saucepan. Add the onions and sauté for 5 minutes, then add the apple dice and cook for another minute. Add the chopped beef and combine. Squeeze out the excess milk from the bread slices, then tear up and add to pot. Add the curry powder, raisins, almonds, lemon juice, egg, and turmeric, and stir well.

Place mixture in a greased 9 x 13" baking dish. Place bay leaves vertically in the casserole. Bake at 325 degrees F for 40 minutes, then remove from the oven. Mix together the egg and milk, then pour it over the Bobotie. Bake for 15 more minutes. Remove bay leaves before serving.



CHRISTMAS IN GERMANY "Froehliche Weihnachten"

Christmas preparations often begin on the eve of December 6th. People often set aside special evenings for baking spiced cakes and cookies, and making gifts and decorations. Little dolls of fruit are traditional Christmas toys.

Children leave letters on their windowsills for Christkind, a winged figure dressed in white robes and a golden crown who distributes gifts. Sometimes the letters are decorated with glue and sprinkled with sugar to make them sparkle.

Germans make beautiful gingerbread houses and cookies. The German Christmas tree pastry, Christbaumgebäck, is a white dough that can be molded into shapes and baked for tree decorations.

In parts of Germany, people believe that the Christ Child sends a messenger in Christmas Eve. He appears as an angel in a white robe and crown, bearing gifts. The angel is called Christkind. There is also a Christmas Eve figure called Weihnachtsmann or Christmas Man, he looks like Santa Claus and also brings gifts.

In Germany they hang up advent wreaths of Holly with four red candles in the center. They light one candle each Sunday and last on Christmas Eve. Children count the days until Christmas using an Advent calendar. They open one window each day and find a Christmas picture inside.

In Germany the traditional visitor is the Christkindl who is the Christ Child's messenger. She is a beautiful fair-haired girl with a shining crown of candles who visits each house with a basket of presents.

In some homes a room is locked up before Christmas. On Christmas Eve the children go to bed but are woken up at midnight by their parents and taken down to the locked room. The door is opened and they see the tree all lit up, with piles of parcels on little tables.

Christmas preparations begin December 1st.

December 6th is St. Claus Day and a shoes is left out as good kids get presents and bad kids get rods.

The Catholic boys and girls dress up as kings for three kings Day (Jan. 6). They sing carols and collect money for donations for the different church projects.

Christmas Stollen

Ingredients:

1 tablespoon active dry yeast
 2/3 cup warm milk (110 degrees F/45 degrees C)
 1 large egg
 1/3 cup white sugar
 1/2 tablespoon salt
 1/3 cup butter, softened
 2 1/2 cups bread flour
 1/3 cup currants
 1/3 cup sultana raisins
 1/3 cup red candied cherries, quartered
 2/3 cup diced candied citron
 6 ounces marzipan
 1 tablespoon confectioners' sugar
 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

Directions:

In a small bowl, dissolve yeast in warm milk. Let stand until creamy, about 10 minutes.

In a large bowl, combine the yeast mixture with the egg, white sugar, salt, butter, and 2 cups bread flour; beat well. Add the remaining flour, 1/4 cup at a time, stirring well after each addition. When the dough has begun to pull together, turn it out onto a lightly floured surface, and knead in the currants, raisins, dried cherries, and citrus peel. Continue kneading until smooth, about 8 minutes.

Lightly oil a large bowl, place the dough in the bowl, and turn to coat with oil. Cover with a damp cloth and let rise in a warm place until doubled in volume, about 1 hour.

Lightly grease a cookie sheet. Deflate the dough and turn it out onto a lightly floured surface. Roll the marzipan into a rope and place it in the center of the dough. Fold the dough over to cover it; pinch the seams together to seal. Place the loaf, seam side down, on the prepared baking sheet. Cover with a damp cloth and let rise until doubled in volume, about 40 minutes. Meanwhile, preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C).

Bake in the preheated oven for 10 minutes, then reduce heat to 300 degrees F (150 degrees C), and bake for a further 30 to 40 minutes, or until golden brown. Allow loaf to cool on a wire rack. Dust the cooled loaf with confectioners' sugar, and sprinkle with the cinnamon.



Kwanzaa - December 26th

December 26th marks the first day of Kwanzaa, a seven-day celebration many African Americans observe. Borrowing many of its symbols from harvest festivals, Kwanzaa is a relatively new holiday (first observed in 1966) that focuses on African heritage and pride.

Each night, families light one of the red, green, and black candles in the kinara (key-NAR-ah), or candleholder, which symbolize seven ideals to live by. Other items are placed on a woven mat, including a bowl of vegetables, fruit, and nuts, and the kikombe (key-COMB-bay), or unity cup. Families drink from the kikombe each night, sharing a special drink and family memories.



December is...

- Bingo's Birthday Month
- Hi Neighbor Month
- National Stress Free Family Holiday Month
- Read A New Book Month
- Safe Toy and Gift Month
- Universal Human Rights Month

Special December Days

1 National Pie Day * Eat A Red Apple Day * World AIDS Awareness Day * Rosa Parks Day * 2 National Fritters Day * 3 Bath Tub Party Day * International Day of the Disabled Person * National-Roof-Over-Your-Head Day * 4 Wear Brown Shoes Day * 5 Walt Disney's Birthday--Born in Chicago in 1901 * National Sacher Torte Day * 6 Mitten Tree Day * National Gazpacho Day * Ira Gershwin's Birthday--(composer born in 1896) * 7 Pearl Harbor Day (1941) * National Cotton Candy Day * 8 Feast of Immaculate Conception of Mary--(Catholic Holyday) * Take It In The Ear Day * 9 Ball-bearing Roller Skates Patented in 1884 * National Pastry Day * 10 Human Rights Day * Anniversary of the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. * Nobel Peace Prize Awarded Each Year * Emily Dickinson's Birthday (Born in 1830) * Festival for the Souls of Dead Whales * 11 National Noodle Ring Day * UNICEF Anniversary * 12 Poinsettia Day * National Ding-a-Ling Day * 13 Ice Cream Day * Violins Day * 14 South Pole Discovered in 1911 * National Bouillabaise Day * 15 Bill of Rights Adopted in 1791 * Thomas Edison Receives Patent on Phonograph (He recorded "Mary had a little lamb" in 1877) * National Lemon Cupcake Day * 16 National Chocolate Covered Anything Day * Boston Tea Party Anniversary * 17 National Underdog Day * Wright Brother's Day (Their first flight at Kitty Hawk in 1903) * National Maple Syrup Day * Simon Bolivar's Death Day (Venezuelan National Holiday) * 18 National Roast Suckling Pig Day * 19 Oatmeal Muffin Day * 20 Games Day * Ramadan begins (Islamic) * 21 National Flashlight Day * Look at the Bright Side Day * Forefathers' Day--Pilgrim landing anniversary. * National French Fried Shrimp Day * 22 First Day of Winter * National Date-Nut Bread Day * 23 Roots Day * 24 National Egg Nog Day * 25 National Pumpkin Pie Day * Christmas * 26 Kwanzaa--Celebrated from today to January 1st. * Boxing Day--Canadian Holiday. * St. Stephens Day (Catholic Feast Day) * National Whiners Day * 27 National Fruitcake Day * 28 National Chocolate Day * Card Playing Day * 29 Pepper Pot Day * 30 Festival of Enormous Changes at the Last Minute * National Bicarbonate of Soda Day * 31 New Year's Eve * Unlucky Day *