

O Christmas boat, O Christmas boat...

I. Read the text, find out which sentences A-E belong in the gaps (drag and drop the appropriate letter in place) and choose the right heading for each part.

The most traditional symbol you will find in Greece during the holidays is a small boat decorated with lights, usually placed in the main square of a town and close to the more international Christmas tree. Decorating a Christmas tree is a foreign tradition that was first introduced in Greece by the Bavarians back in 1833. [1] _____ Decorating Christmas boats, on the other hand, has been a tradition in Greece for many years that, for a time, was growing less popular since they were replaced by Christmas trees. However, the *karavaki*, or small boat is rooted in the traditions of a country with a symbiotic relationship with the sea.

Different legends explain the tradition of the Greek Christmas boat. One popular theory is that the traditional Greek boat symbolizes sailing towards the new life that follows the birth of Jesus Christ. Another is related to Saint Nicholas (Agios Nikolaos), the Patron Saint of Sailors. This saint is celebrated on December 6, the day when many households start decorating their houses for Christmas. [2] _____ Of course, Greece has also always been a marine country highly associated with the sea, proud of the large amount of sailors, fishermen and intrepid captains it has, which makes them a symbol of local identity. Decorating a boat during Christmas serves as a token of gratitude to the seafarers and sailors who have devoted their lives to the sea for the greater good of their country and families. Men would often be away for months at a time, and those back home would be anxiously waiting for their return. On the islands, the wives, mothers, and daughters of seamen used to spend the cold and dark winter months with their heart and mind at sea. There, their men were battling the stormy seas during the holiday season. [3] _____ The tradition wanted the small wooden boats placed inside close to the fireplace and pointing towards the center of the house, never towards the door. They were also lovingly decorated to give a warm welcome to the men of the household. Even kids prepared their own boats with paper and chips of wood, and on Christmas Eve, they used these little boats to collect the treats they had received when singing the carols (*kalanda*) from house to house.

[4] _____ However, boats were highly connected to farewells, danger at sea, shipwrecks, and immigration – boats were the main means of transportation during the immigrating period, so the “happy” Christmas trees was seen as a natural replacement.

Nowadays, for most Greeks, Christmas decorations include a tree even though it is also common to decorate a boat. [5] _____

adapted from articles in
livinglanguage.com and
greece.greekreporter.com

- A. Around the 1970s, it became a matter of intense discussion to abolish the decorating of Christmas trees and establish that of the boat instead.
- B. These were months of expectation, hope, and prayer for their safe return.
- C. The first Christmas tree was decorated in the Palace of Othonas, by the Bavarian prince who became the King of Greece from 1832 to 1862.
- D. In fact, on the many Greek islands the Christmas boats remain the most popular ornament of the holiday season.
- E. Some agree that this is why boats are decorated, in order to honor the saint.

II. Find words in the text that mean...

- a) established deeply and firmly
- b) co-existing (often to mutual benefit)
- c) traditional, not historically authenticated, stories
- d) protector, supporter
- e) relating to or found in the sea
- f) fearless, adventurous
- g) a thing serving as a visible or tangible representation of a fact, feeling, etc.
- h) the quality of being thankful
- i) formally put an end to
- j) decorative object

III. Choose the best answer

- 1. The origins of the Christmas boats _____
 - a) are unclear but there are a few theories about them
 - b) go back to ancient times
 - c) are definitely related to Saint Nicholas
- 2. ‘Decorating a Christmas boat serves as a token of gratitude to the seafarers’ means _____
 - a) the Christmas boats’ purpose is to remind seafarers of their duty
 - b) the Christmas boats show appreciation towards seafarers
 - c) the Christmas boats are there so that the sailors’ families don’t forget about them
- 3. Christmas boats, apart from decorating homes, _____
 - a) are taken on board ships for good luck
 - b) were placed in King Othonas’s palace
 - c) are sometimes held by children singing carols
- 4. The *karavaki* is part of the Greek identity because _____
 - a) Greeks love seafood
 - b) Greece has always been a country with strong ties to the sea
 - c) Greeks immigrate a lot, and ships were used for that
- 5. The movement to stop decorating trees and just have Christmas boats didn’t catch on because _____
 - a) trees were cheaper
 - b) boats reminded Greeks of unpleasant things at that time
 - c) King Othonas was opposed to it
- 6. These days, you are most likely to find _____ in a Greek household.
 - a) a Christmas tree
 - b) a Christmas boat
 - c) neither a Christmas tree nor a Christmas boat