

## God Jul og Godt Nytt År!

In Norway, Christmas Eve is the time when presents are exchanged. The gifts are sometimes brought by Julenissen in the morning of December 25th. Presents are also brought by the small gnomes called 'Nisse'.



Often children will dress up as characters from the Christmas Story, such as the Shepherds and Wise Men, and go singing carols from house to house in their local neighborhood.

Some traditional Norwegian Christmas Tree decorations are Julekurver, which are small paper baskets made in the shape of a heart. The most famous custom about Christmas in Norway is the big Christmas Tree that Norway gives to the UK every year. The tree is given as a present to say 'thank you' for the help that the people of the UK gave to Norway during World War II. The tree stands in Trafalgar Square in the middle of London and often thousands of people come to watch when the lights are turned on.



Many different types of cakes and biscuits are eaten over the Christmas period in Norway. One of the most popular is a special bread called 'Julekake' that has raisins, candied peel and cardamom in it. Risgrøt (rice porridge) is eaten on Christmas Eve as a meal at lunchtime. If you find an almond in your portion you're traditionally given a pink or white marzipan pig. The main meal is normally pork or mutton ribs served with 'surkal' (white or red cabbage) and potatoes. Christmas is a very important tradition in Norway, how about your country?



# *Sung Tan Jul*

Christianity is relatively new to Asia, but today about 30% of the South Korean population is Christian. Therefore, Christmas (*Sung Tan Jul*) is celebrated by Christian Korean families on December 25th, and is also a public holiday (even though South Korea is officially Buddhist).



South Korea is the only East Asian country to recognize Christmas as a national holiday, so schools, businesses and government offices are closed on Christmas Day. Stores remain open, and the Christmas holiday doesn't usually anchor an extended winter break, as it often does in other countries and cultures.

Christmas is banned in North Korea, and so those living in North Korea cannot decorate or attend services for the holiday.

South Korean Christians celebrate Christmas similarly to the way the holiday is celebrated in the West, but with less emphasis on presents and decorations and more emphasis on the religious traditions underlying the holiday. In Korea, Christmas is primarily a religious holiday and less an excuse for shopping and sales prices.

Grandpa Santa is popular with children in Korea (he's known as *Santa Harabujee*), and he wears either a red or blue Santa suit. Kids know him as a happy grandfather figure who gives out presents, and stores employ Santas to greet shoppers and hand out chocolate and candies.

People in Korea usually exchange presents on Christmas Eve, and instead of piles of presents, one present (or a gift of money) is customary.

Some families celebrate Christmas with meals and gatherings at homes, but Koreans also celebrate Christmas by going out. Restaurants are busy on Christmas, as it is considered a romantic holiday for couples (much like Valentine's Day), and theme parks and shows have special Christmas events.

Many younger people celebrate and party on Christmas with friends and spend New Year's Day with their families (the reverse to Christmas/New Year's in the West). For non-Christian Koreans, Christmas is a popular shopping day.

# Kiahk

In Egypt about 15% of people are Christians. They are the only part of the population who really celebrate Christmas as a religious festival. Most Egyptian Christians belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church and they have some very unique traditions for Christmas.



Christmas Day isn't celebrated on the 25th December but on 7th January (like in Ethiopia and by some Orthodox Christians in Russia and Serbia).

The Coptic month leading to Christmas is called Kiahk. People sing special praise songs on Saturday nights before the Sunday Service.

For the 43 days before Christmas (Advent), from 25th November to 6th January, Coptic Orthodox Christians have a special fast where they basically eat a vegan diet. They don't eat anything containing products that come from animals (including chicken, beef, milk and eggs). This is called 'The Holy Nativity Fast'. But if people are too weak or ill to fast properly they can be excused.

On Coptic Christmas Eve (6th January), Coptic Christians go to church for a special liturgy or Service. The services normally start about 10.30pm but some chapels will be open for people to pray from 10.00pm. Many people meet up with their friends and families in the churches from 9.00pm onwards. The services are normally finished shortly after midnight, but some go onto 4.00am!

When the Christmas service ends people go home to eat the big Christmas meal. All the foods contain meat, eggs and butter - all the yummy things they didn't during the Advent fast! One popular dish is 'Fata' a lamb soup which contains bread, rice, garlic and boiled lamb meat.

Even though not many in Egypt are Christians, a lot of people in the country like to celebrate Christmas as a secular holiday. Christmas is becoming very commercial and most major supermarkets sell Christmas trees, Christmas food and decorations. Hotels, parks and streets are decorated for Christmas.

# Joyeux Noël!!

In France, a Nativity crib is often used to help decorate the house. French cribs have clay figures in them. During December some towns and cities, such as Marseilles, have fairs that sell Nativity figures. As well as having the normal Nativity figures in them, French scenes also have figures such as a Butcher, a Baker, a Policeman and a Priest.



In French Happy/Merry Christmas is 'Joyeux Noël', celebrated on December 25th. In Breton (spoken by some people in Brittany, Northern France) it's 'Nedeleg Laouen', in Corsican it's 'Bon Natale' and in Alsatian (spoken by some people in Alsace, in Eastern France) it's 'E güeti Winächte'. Happy/Merry Christmas in lots more languages.

One of the biggest Christmas markets in Europe is held in Strasbourg, in North Eastern France. In the Alsatian language it's called the "Christkindelsmarik".



Yule Logs made out of Cherry Wood are often burned in French homes. An old tradition is that the log was carried into the home on Christmas Eve and sprinkled with red wine to make the log smell nice when it was burning. There is a custom that the log and candles are left burning all night with some food and drinks left out in case Mary and the baby Jesus come past during the night.

The main Christmas meal, called 'Réveillon', is eaten on Christmas Eve/early Christmas morning after people have returned from the midnight Church Service. Dishes might include roast turkey with chestnuts or roast goose, oysters, foie gras, lobster, venison and cheeses. For dessert, a chocolate sponge cake log called a *bûche de Noël* is normally eaten.



1.- In which of these countries would you like to celebrate Christmas?  
Why?

2.- What country were you assigned?

3.- On what date is Christmas celebrated there?

4.- What is the most attractive about Christmas in that country?

5.- How is it similar to Mexico?

6.- How is it different to Mexico?

7.- Is it something you don't like about Christmas in general? Why?

8.- Tell me a nice Christmas anecdote from your past: