

Christmas in Peru

Christmas traditions in Peru date back to 1535. The holiday has a long history in the country as the majority of the population practices Catholicism. December 24th is *La Noche Buena*, or "Good Night," and the main day for Christmas celebrations. In the evening, usually after mass, families go home to feast on elaborately prepared dinners and open gifts. At midnight, adults will toast with champagne, while children toast with hot chocolate, Peruvian Christmas meal will include turkey, tamales, salads, applesauce, and a sweet bread called *Panettone*. Gifts are exchanged either before or after the meal and family members usually hug, kiss, and thank the gift-giver before opening their present.

The main focal point of Christmas decorations in Peruvian homes is the Nativity manger. Also known as a *pesebre*, the Nativity scenes are usually intricately carved out of pottery, wood, or huamanga stone. Family gifts are spread around the manger instead of a Christmas tree, and on *La Noche Buena* one lucky family member is chosen to put a figurine of Christ into the manger. Cusco holds a bustling Christmas market called *Santuranticuy* that is centered on the tradition of building a *pesebre* and embellishing it as many ways as possible. *Santuranticuy* has been held in the Plaza de Armas for several centuries and is a fun holiday event where visitors sip on hot rum punch, dance, and enjoy *La Noche Buena* Fireworks.

