

The Christmas Knowledge File 2018



Christmas Traditions And Origins

Christmas is a contraction of “Christ’s Mass,” which is derived from the Middle English Cristemasse, which in turn comes from the Old English Cristesmæsse, a phrase first recorded back in 1038.

Hanging stockings out comes from the Dutch custom of leaving shoes packed with food for St Nicholas’s donkeys. He would leave small gifts in return.

The tradition of putting tangerines in stockings comes from 12th-century French nuns who left socks full of fruit, nuts and tangerines at the houses of the poor.

Boxing Day gets its name from all the money collected in church alms-boxes for the poor.

The first commercial Christmas cards were commissioned by civil servant Sir Henry Cole in London in 1843. Featuring a family drinking wine, one sold for £8,469 in 2014.

Robins on cards started as a joke 150 years ago when postmen wore red tunics and were named after them.

The christmas cracker was invented by a London sweet shop owner called Tom Smith. In 1847, after spotting French bonbons wrapped in paper with a twist at each end, he sold similar sweets with a “love motto” inside. He then included a little trinket and a “bang”. His “Bangs of Expectation” included gifts such as jewellery and miniature dolls. By 1900, he was selling 13 million a year.

According to tradition, you should eat one mince pie on each of the 12 days of Christmas to bring good luck.

It’s technically illegal to eat mince pies on Christmas Day in England. In the 17th century, Oliver Cromwell banned Christmas pudding, mince pies and anything to do with gluttony. The law has never been rescinded.

Why red, gold and green? Green has long been a symbol of life and rebirth; red symbolises the blood of Christ, and gold represents light as well as wealth and royalty.

Mistletoe is from the Anglo-Saxon word misteltan, which means “little dung twig” because the plant spreads through bird droppings.

Santa hasn’t always dressed in red. Pre 1930s there were many different variations of Santa, sporting a variety of different coloured garments and ranging in size from big to small. Some people claim the modern day image of Santa Claus was created by Coca-Cola, but this isn’t strictly true. The original red-suited Santa became popular in the US and Canada in the 19th century due to the influence of caricaturist and cartoonist Thomas Nast. Coca-Cola commissioned their depiction of Santa in 1931.

Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer was invented for a US firm’s Christmas promotion in 1938.

The Yule Log was originally an entire tree that was carefully chosen and brought into the house with great ceremony and burned over the 12 days of Christmas. A Chocolate Yule Log or ‘bûche de Noël’ is now a popular Christmas desert, made of a chocolate sponge roll layered with cream. The outside is covered with chocolate or chocolate icing and decorated to look like a bark-covered log.

Traditionally, families gather together in the kitchen of their homes to mix and steam Christmas pudding on Stir-up Sunday, the last Sunday before Advent. Everyone takes a turn to stir the pudding mix and make a special wish for the year ahead.

Holly and Ivy have been used to decorate homes since the 9th century because they symbolise everlasting life. The holly represents Christ's crown of thorns and the berries his blood.

The word "Carol" actually means dance or song of praise and joy, and they used to be sung during all four seasons, but the tradition of only singing them at Christmas is the only one to survive.

Christmas in Numbers

US scientists calculated that Santa would have to visit 822 homes a second to deliver all the world's presents on Christmas Eve, travelling at 650 miles a second.

The origins of there being Three Wise Men aren't clear. There's certainly no mention of it in the bible - in the Gospel of Matthew it refers to just "wise men".

The chances of a White Christmas are just 1 in 10 for England and Wales, and 1 in 6 for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The average number of Christmas presents a UK child receives : 16

The number of rolls of sellotape that will be sold in the UK in the run up to Christmas : 6 Million

Families in the UK who always attend church on Christmas Day : 13%

Families who sit down to watch the Queen's Speech : 26%

According to a survey conducted in 2016, 57% of adults in the UK would gladly sacrifice seeing relatives on Christmas day if it meant they could spend more time on Facebook.

According to Matalan, 82% of people surveyed own a Christmas jumper, with 25-34 year olds the most likely to buy one. Over 75% of people buy their festive jumper to wear for a work event, whilst over half wear one on Christmas Day.

The number of iOS and Android devices that will be activated on Christmas day : 6.8 million

The number of British people who will travel abroad for Christmas : 4.25 million

Myth-busting Christmas Facts

The abbreviation Xmas isn't irreligious. The letter X is a Greek abbreviation for Christ.

For a Christmas to be officially classified as "white" a single snowflake needs to be observed falling in the 24 hours of 25th December on the rooftop of the Met Office HQ in London.

During the 20th century there were only seven official white Christmases in the United Kingdom. The chances of a White Christmas in London this year? 6%.

Ebenezer Scrooge's famous line "Bah Humbug" almost never existed. Charles Dickens' initial choice was "Bah Christmas".

According to data gathered from Facebook, two weeks before Christmas is one of the two most popular times for couples to break up; one would guess to avoid buying presents. Christmas Day is the least popular.

On Christmas Eve in 2001, the Bethlehem Hotel had 208 of its 210 rooms free.

The Star of Bethlehem - the one the wise men followed to find the little baby Jesus - was probably a comet, or the planet Uranus.

Christmas Tree Facts

Nearly 60 million Christmas Trees are grown each year in Europe.

8 million natural Christmas trees are consumed by the UK each year.

In the UK, natural Christmas trees outsell artificial Christmas trees by a ratio of 3:1.

Many parts of the Christmas tree can actually be eaten, with the needles being a good source of Vitamin C.

Christmas trees usually grow for about 15 years before they're sold.

On average, three Christmas trees are planted to replace each one harvested.

Facts About Christmas Songs

The bestselling Christmas single ever is Bing Crosby's White Christmas, shifting over 50 million copies worldwide since 1942.

In Britain, the best-selling festive single is Band Aid's 1984 track, Do They Know It's Christmas?, which sold 3.5million copies. Wham! is next in the same year with Last Christmas, selling 1.4 million.

Royalties from Last Christmas are estimated at around £300,000 per year. The first year's royalties were given to Band Aid, and since 2012, George Michael has donated ALL his royalties from the song to charity.

The video of Last Christmas was the last time George Michael was filmed without a beard.

The Beatles hold the record for most Christmas number 1 singles with FOUR, topping the charts in 1963, 64, 65 and 67. Cliff Richard (1960, 1988 and 1990) and The Spice Girls (1996, 1997 and 1998) have three each. - Source

Paul McCartney earns £250,000 a year off his Christmas song, which is widely regarded as the worst song he ever recorded.

Who earns the most royalties from their Christmas songs? Well, Mariah Carey makes about £375,000 per year from All I Want For Christmas and the Pogues make about £400,000 from Fairytale of New York. But top of the tree are Slade, who are reckoned to earn £500,000 per year from Merry Christmas Everybody,

Bohemian Rhapsody by Queen is the only record to get the UK Christmas Singles Chart Number One twice, once in 1975 and again in 1991. "Do They Know It's Christmas" was number 1 three times (1984, 1989 and 2004), but technically it was by different groups, so doesn't count.

Irving Berlin hated Elvis Presley's version of "White Christmas" so much that he tried to prevent radio stations from playing Presley's cover.

David Bowie hated the choice of "Little Drummer Boy" as the song he was to sing with Bing Crosby on his A Merrie Olde Christmas in September 1977, but luckily the producers/songwriters for the program - Buz Kohan, Larry Grossman and Ian Fraser - quickly decided to compose the counter-part lyrics and a new bridge for Bowie to sing alongside Crosby. They found the nearest piano and banged out "Peace on Earth" in about an hour, and saved the day.

Mel Tormé's "The Christmas Song" (more commonly known as "Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire") was written during a summer heatwave in 1944.

Singer Brenda Lee recorded the original version of "Rockin' Around The Christmas Tree" when she was only 13 years old.

The first song ever broadcast was a Christmas Carol. On Christmas Eve, 1906, the Canadian inventor Reginald Fessenden (1866-1932) played "O Holy Night" on the violin and sang the final verse while broadcasting from his Brant Rock radio tower in Massachusetts.

In a survey carried out in the UK in 2016, Silent Night was voted as the nation's favourite Christmas carol. O Holy Night was second, which has been sung by Mariah Carey, Cher and Big Crosby, and held the number one spot from 2003 to 2013. Hark The Herald Angels Sing was third.

Facts About Christmas Films

In a recent Yahoo poll, users voted the most popular Christmas film of all time as Home Alone, with The Muppet Christmas Carol second, and It's a Wonderful Life third.

It's A Wonderful Life was mentioned in an FBI file in 1947, when an analyst expressed concern that the film was an obvious attempt to discredit bankers, a "common trick used by communists."

It's A Wonderful Life; Ever wondered why George looks strangely sweaty in the scene where he and Clarence are on the bridge? It's because on the day of filming it was actually 90 degrees.

In Home Alone, the ugly photo of Buzz's girlfriend is actually a boy because director Chris Columbus thought it would be too cruel to make fun of a real girl. The boy used in the picture is the art director's son.

In The Grinch, the prosthetics and makeup Jim Carrey wore took three hours every day to put together. They were so miserable to apply and wear that Carrey consulted a Navy SEAL who taught him torture-resistance techniques.

The lead role in the film Elf was originally going to be given to Jim Carrey. In the Grinch, Eddie Murphy and Jack Nicholson were both considered for Carrey's part. In Home Alone, the part of Harry was offered to both Robert De Niro and Jon Lovitz, before being taken by Joe Pesci.

In Home Alone, Daniel Stern (who plays Marv) wasn't very happy about having to film a scene with a tarantula on his face, but he agreed to do it on the condition they'd do just one take. His scream had to be dubbed in later because if he'd screamed for real it would have scared the tarantula.

In the same film, Joe Pesci frequently forgot that he was in a family comedy and would drop the f-bomb during his character's outbursts.

In Home Alone 2 - Lost in New York, future president Donald Trump makes a (thankfully brief) appearance when Kevin first arrives at the Plaza Hotel. Macauley Caulkin earned \$4.5 million from the movie.

In Polar Express, when the conductor says "11344 Edbrooke" near the start of the film, it's a reference to director Robert Zemeckis' actual childhood home in Chicago.

In White Christmas, the part of Betty is played by Rosemary Clooney, who is George Clooney's aunt.

The story from Jingle All The Way was based on the shopping craze for Cabbage Patch Dolls in the '80s.

Christmas Facts About The Amount Of Money Spent

Brits love Christmas – UK Christmas spending hit £77.56bn in 2016, up by 1.9% on the previous year and almost double the European average.

The average home will splash out £809.97 at Christmas; on food and drink, travel, decorations and presents, with the latter accounting for 58.5 per cent of the budget.

The amount of money spent on unwanted Christmas gifts : £700 million

The amount saved each year through the use of discount voucher codes : £51,000,000

Amount withdrawn from UK cash machines over Christmas : £18,000,000,000

The average amount a UK adult spends buying Christmas presents : £330

During the Christmas period, nearly 28 Lego sets are sold EVERY SECOND.

Christmas Facts - World Records

The length of the longest ever Christmas Stocking : 32.56 metres. It was also 14.97 metres wide.

The record number of Christmas cards sent by a single person in a year : 62,824. At the time of writing, that would cost £40,207.36 in first class stamps.

According to the Guinness World Records, the tallest Christmas tree ever cut was a 221-foot Douglas fir that was displayed in 1950 at the Northgate Shopping Center in Seattle, Washington.

In 1999, residents of the state of Maine in America built the world's biggest ever snowman. He stood at 113ft tall. The world's tallest snowman and, one assumes, the world's biggest carrot ?

The largest ever Christmas cracker was 63.1m (207ft) long and 4m (13ft) in diameter and was made by the parents of children at Ley Hill School and Pre-School, Chesham, Buckinghamshire on 20th December 2001. The joke was rubbish.

30,000 - The number of participants in the largest ever Secret Santa, organised by Reddit in 2012.

The most valuable Christmas card was sold at an auction in the UK in 2001 for £20,000.

The most expensively dressed Christmas tree was valued at just under £7,000,000 and was erected and displayed by the Emirates Palace in Abu Dhabi, UAE, from 16 to 29 December 2010.

The most lights lit simultaneously on a Christmas tree is 194,672 and was achieved by Kiwanis Malmedy and Haute Fagnes in Malmedy, Belgium, on 10 December 2010.

Christmas Facts From Around The World

Santa Claus has different names around the world - Kriss Kringle in Germany, Le Befana in Italy, Pere Noel in France and Deushka Moroz (Grandfather Frost) in Russia.

Japanese people traditionally eat at KFC for Christmas dinner, thanks to a successful marketing campaign 40 years ago. KFC is so popular that customers must place their Christmas orders 2 months in advance.

During the Christmas of 2010, the Colombian government covered jungle trees with lights. When FARC guerrillas (terrorists) walked by, the trees lit up and banners asking them to lay down their arms became visible. 331 guerrillas re-entered society and the campaign won an award for strategic marketing excellence.

There is a village in Peru where people settle the previous year's grudges by fist fighting. They then start the new year off on a clean slate.

A large part of Sweden's population watches Donald Duck cartoons every Christmas Eve – a tradition that started in 1960.

Christmas Facts - Food and Drink

According to research carried out by Jarlsberg cheese, the strain of cooking the big Christmas dinner sees the average Brit start to sip their first alcoholic drink at 11.48am.

A survey has revealed on average, British women do not attempt their first Christmas lunch until the age of 34. Nearly half of women polled said they felt a real sense of achievement when finally dishing up the Christmas dinner and 28% of British men admit that their partner's dinner is better than their mother's. Source: Food Network

The number of Olympic sized swimming pools that could be filled with the beer consumed in the UK over Xmas : 57

The amount of wasted Christmas food that is thrown away each year : 230,000 tonnes

The typical number of calories in your average Christmas dinner : 957

The average Brit consumes around 7,000 calories on Christmas day, and you'll reach your recommended daily allowance at about 2pm.

The UK Brussels Sprouts industry (and yes, it's Brussels sprout, not brussel sprout) is worth £650 million, and the area of the country covered by Brussels Sprouts fields is the equivalent to 3,240 football pitches.

Sprout fan Linus Urbanec from Sweden is the current world record holder for the most sprouts eaten in a minute. He managed 31 on 26th November, 2008.

In Somerset and parts of Dorset, it's traditional for the last person to finish eating their sprouts to have to do the Christmas Day washing up dressed as a giant turkey. This tradition is believed to have started in the 1960s as a way to encourage children to eat the vegetable.

The total amount spent on Christmas puddings by the UK is £48,000,000.

Christmas pudding was originally a soup made with raisins and wine.

In Victorian times, in a reversal of modern UK tradition, turkey was seen as an expensive meat to eat on Christmas day, and goose was often eaten by poorer families. In A Christmas Carol, Bob Cratchitt was planning to have goose before Ebenezer Scrooge surprised him with the prize turkey.

Goose used to be the poor man's Christmas dinner

The number of Turkeys cooked in the UK every Christmas : 10 million



**This Christmas Knowledge Base
Was Compiled By Illuminate Learning Ltd
December 2018**