

Christmas around the World

We are all familiar with Christmas traditions in the UK – carols, mince pies, twinkling trees, crowded high streets, dreams of a heavy snowfall on the 25th... But what about the rest of the world? Christmas is celebrated in lots of different ways in lots of different countries. Let's have a look at some celebrations on every continent.

Africa

'Melikam Gena!' This means Happy Christmas in Amharic, the official language of Ethiopia. Ethiopia is situated in the Horn of Africa, on the eastern side of the continent, and has many wonderful Christmas traditions that differ from those of the UK. Firstly, as Ethiopia uses the Julian calendar, Christmas is celebrated on January 7th, not December 25th!



For the 43 days before Christmas, many Ethiopians take part in an Advent fast called the 'Fast of the Prophets' (or Tsome Nebiyat in Amharic). It is tradition that only one vegan meal per day is eaten, meaning that you won't find many Christmas turkeys in Ethiopia! However, for those that don't partake in the Fast of the Prophets, traditional Christmas foods include 'wat', a delicious, thick and spicy stew of meat, vegetables and eggs. Wat is eaten on 'injera', a flat bread, which people tear off and use to scoop up the wat. Christmas in Ethiopia, like most places, is also a time for celebration, family, games and church.

Christmas Fact: It is believed that one of the Three Wise Men came from Ethiopia!

Europe

'Yule' or 'Jól' is how Christmas is known in the country of Iceland. Yule comes from the ancient winter solstice celebrations and consists of the following key dates:

St. Thorlakur's Day – December 23rd

It is tradition on St. Thorlakur's Day to eat a simple meal of skate, a type of fish.

It is also on this day the Yule (or Christmas) tree is usually decorated, unlike in the UK where people tend to hang their decorations much earlier (yes, September is too early, not matter how much you love Christmas!).

Yule Eve – December 24th

At 6pm on Yule Eve, the celebrations truly begin! This tradition may occur because many years ago in Iceland, a new day started at 6pm instead of midnight. Once everyone has eaten their evening meal, Icelandic children begin to open their presents.



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Yule Day – December 25th

Yule Day is spent with extended family, usually eating the traditional Yule meal, 'Hangikjöt', which is a leg of roast lamb. Another Yule specialty is 'Laufabrauð', a leaf bread made of thin, fried dough and cut into special patterns.

Annar Jóladagur - December 26th

On Yule Eve and Yule Day, public entertainment is considered inappropriate, so on Annar Jóladagur some people like to celebrate by dancing!

New Year's Eve & Day

New Year's Eve is one of the most important days of the year, and is celebrated with many magical traditions. Aside from the usual bonfires and fireworks, Icelandic myths state that from this night to Epiphany (the 6th of January, signifying the end of Yule), cows can talk, seals turn into humans and the Icelandic Elves move to new homes.

Christmas Fact: During the winter, Iceland only has 4–5 hours of daylight, so Christmas lights illuminate the towns most of the time!

Asia

Although China has the largest population on the planet, only around 1% of Chinese people are Christian. Despite this, you will still see lots of Christmas decorations in the big cities around December – you may even get to meet Shen Dan Lao Ren (that's Mandarin for Santa Claus) in one of his many grottos!



Many postal workers also dress as Santa when delivering letters before Christmas (why isn't Royal Mail doing this?!).

Not many people put up a Christmas tree over the festive period. Instead, houses tend to be decorated with paper chains, flowers and lanterns. The place you are most likely to find a Christmas tree in China is a shopping centre.

In recent years, a new Christmas tradition has developed in China: giving apples on Christmas Eve. This tradition started because, in Mandarin, Christmas Eve is called 'Ping'an Ye', which was translated from the Christmas carol 'Silent Night' to mean peaceful evening. The word for apple in Mandarin is 'píngguǒ', which sounds like the Mandarin word for peace, so many stores sell apples wrapped in coloured paper to give as gifts. Though it is a nascent tradition, many people enjoy it!

Christmas Fact: Although the majority of the world's plastic Christmas trees are made in China, most of the workers who make them don't put them up in their own homes!



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North America

Located in the Caribbean Sea is the exotic island of Puerto Rico. Here, the festive season begins as early as November and continues well into January; for many Puerto Ricans, therefore, Christmas is more of a marathon than a sprint!

Here are just some of the Christmas traditions of Puerto Rico:

Misas de Aguinaldo

Misas de aguinaldo are masses held every dawn from December 15th-24th. These masses are all about music; the congregation sings along to aguinaldos, a type of folk music played at Christmas time in countries across Latin America.



Parrandas

A parranda is when a group of 'carolers' congregate to sing aguinaldos in their local community. The parrandas occur throughout the long stretch of the Puerto Rican Christmas. It is tradition that when a person is awoken by a parranda passing their house, they must join in! This means the parranda grows through the night, and many of them don't finish until dawn.

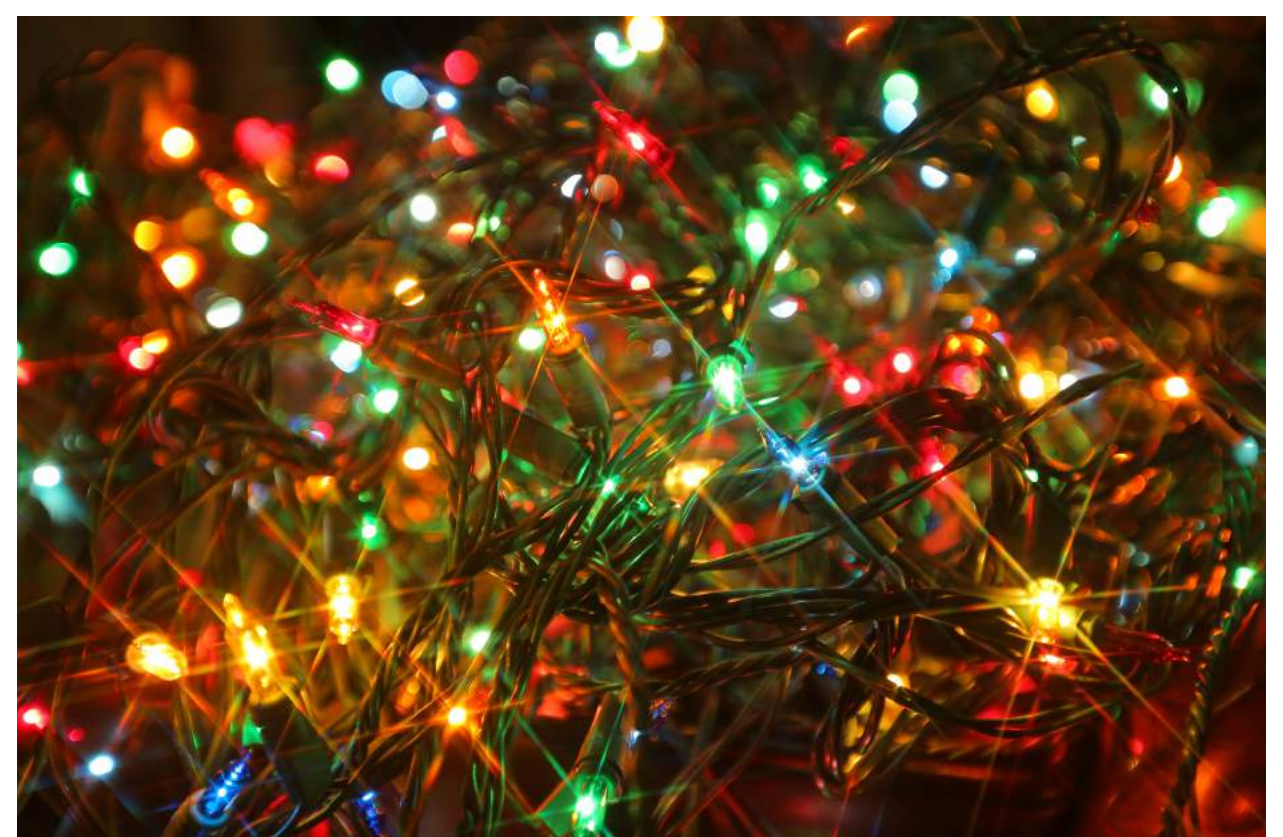
Nochebuena

Nochebuena is Christmas Eve, and for many Puerto Ricans it is more important than Christmas Day. This is when the traditional Puerto Rican Christmas dinner is usually served, consisting of roast pork, patties, rice and beans.

Christmas Fact: The end of Christmas in Puerto Rico, and many other countries, is marked by Three Kings Day. Puerto Rican children collect grass in a box beneath their bed for the Three Kings' Camels – similar to how some children leave carrots for Santa's reindeer!

South America

The Christmas celebrations officially start on the 7th December, which is known as Día de las Velitas (Day of the Little Candles) in Colombia. On this day, many of the houses and streets are decorated with an assortment of lights: lanterns, candles, sparkling bulbs. There are also huge firework displays, lots of music and plenty of food to help kick off the celebrations.



Starting on the 16th December is the Novenas.

This is a tremendous time for community when friends, family and neighbours come together to pray in the week leading up to Christmas. Traditionally, a different house hosts the prayers each night, and everyone sings carols and eats lots of delicious food together.



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Children will also write a Carta al Niño Dios (Letter to the Baby Jesus), in which they make requests for presents that they want. The letter is placed into a model of a nativity scene – called El Pesebre – with the hope that Jesus (not Santa!) will bring them gifts on Christmas Eve.

Christmas Fact: In Colombia, the 28th December is Innocents Day, which is similar to April Fools' Day, a time when everyone makes jokes and has fun.

Oceania

Imagine this: it's Christmas day, you're sat on the beach, the weather is boiling, columns of barbecue smoke rise to the sky, dolphins play in the distance. Can you guess where this might be? That's right – Australia.

As our winter is summer in Australia, children get to celebrate Christmas during their summer holiday. Some people even like to go camping for Christmas! Instead of trees, many people like to use bunches of 'Christmas Bush' to decorate their houses. This is a type of tree native to Australia that has small green leaves and cream-coloured flowers, which turn a deep red over a period of weeks.



Christmas Fact: Australians say that when Santa arrives in their country, he gives his reindeer a rest and replaces them with kangaroos! He also changes into more suitable beach attire.

Antarctica

The final continent is the only one that isn't split into countries. As you might know, there are not many people living on Antarctica; its population is mostly busy scientists conducting their research. As a result, Antarctica is quite different to most places at Christmas: the TV channels aren't full of Christmas adverts (because there aren't any TV channels), the streets aren't full of decorations (because there aren't any streets) and the shops aren't packed (because there aren't any shops).

However, this doesn't mean the people on Antarctica don't find time in their busy research schedules to celebrate. Depending on the culture of the base, most will cook a nice meal to share with their colleagues and have a party in the evening.

And finally...

You might be wondering, 'What about the North Pole?' Well, the North Pole is part of the Arctic, which isn't considered a continent as it's a floating sheet of ice. And anyway, we all know what happens at the North Pole at Christmas...

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SPaG Questions page 1

1 Underline the relative clause in the following sentence.

‘Ethiopia is situated in the Horn of Africa, on the eastern side of the continent, and has many wonderful Christmas traditions that differ from those of the UK.’

2 What type of sentence is each example in the table? Select one option from each row.

Sentences	Simple	Compound	Complex
Once everyone has eaten their evening meal, Icelandic children begin to open their presents.			
This is when the traditional Puerto Rican Christmas dinner is usually served, consisting of roast pork, patties, rice and beans.			
This means the parranda grows through the night, and many of them don't finish until dawn.			

3 In the space below, rewrite the adverbial from the sentence.
‘children get to celebrate Christmas during their summer holiday’

4 Is the following sentence in the active or passive voice? Write your answer in the space below.
‘The end of Christmas in Puerto Rico, and many other countries, is marked by Three Kings Day.’

5 Underline the informal vocabulary in the following sentence.
‘There are also huge firework displays, lots of music and plenty of food to help kick off the celebrations.’

6 Circle the verbs in the perfect form in the following sentence.
‘In recent years, a new Christmas tradition has developed in China: giving apples on Christmas Eve.’

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SPaG Questions page 2

7 What types of words are in bold? Select one option from each row.

Sentences	Preposition	Conjunction	Adverb
The word for apple in Mandarin is 'píngguǒ', which sounds like the Mandarin word for peace, so many stores sell apples wrapped in coloured paper to give as gifts.			
Christmas in Ethiopia, like most places, is also a time for celebration, family, games and church.			
Some people even like to go camping for Christmas!			

8 Underline the object in the following sentence.
'many of the houses and streets are decorated with an assortment of lights'

9 'A parranda is when a group of 'carolers' congregate to sing aguinaldos in their local community.'

Which word is a synonym for congregate?

Chant

Gather

Practise

Decide

10 Circle the verbs in the progressive tense in the following sentence
'Imagine this: it's Christmas day, you're sat on the beach, the weather is boiling, columns of barbecue smoke rise to the sky, dolphins play in the distance.'

11 'which turn a deep red over a period of weeks.'

What type of noun is 'period'?

Common

Abstract

Collective

Proper

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Reading Questions page 1

1 'This is a tremendous time for community'
What is there an example of in this sentence?

- Metaphor
- Alliteration
- Simile
- Onomatopoeia

2 To which country does each description apply?

Descriptions	Iceland	Australia	China
A very small percentage of the population celebrates Christmas.			
It is tradition to eat fish on December 23rd.			
Santa changes into beach clothes when entering this country.			

3 The following sentence is taken from the section about China. 'Though it is a nascent tradition, many people enjoy it!' What is the meaning of the word 'nascent'?

- Something that is very silly
- Something that is just coming into existence
- Something that has been popular for a long time
- Something that is kept a secret

4 On what date is Innocents Day? Write your answer in the space below.

5 'for many Puerto Ricans, therefore, Christmas is more of a marathon than a sprint!' What is there an example of in this sentence?

- Simile
- Alliteration
- Metaphor
- Personification

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SPaG Questions Answer sheet page 1

1 Underline the relative clause in the following sentence.

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2 What type of sentence is each example in the table? Select one option from each row.

Sentences	Simple	Compound	Complex
Once everyone has eaten their evening meal, Icelandic children begin to open their presents.			✓
This is when the traditional Puerto Rican Christmas dinner is usually served, consisting of roast pork, patties, rice and beans.	✓		
This means the parranda grows through the night, and many of them don't finish until dawn.		✓	

3 In the space below, rewrite the adverbial from the sentence.

'children get to celebrate Christmas during their summer holiday'

4 Is the following sentence in the active or passive voice? Write your answer in the space below.

'The end of Christmas in Puerto Rico, and many other countries, is marked by Three Kings Day.' **Passive Voice**

5 Underline the informal vocabulary in the following sentence.

'There are also huge firework displays, lots of music and plenty of food to help kick off the celebrations.'

6 Circle the verbs in the perfect form in the following sentence.

'In recent years, a new Christmas tradition has developed in China: giving apples on Christmas Eve.'

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SPaG Questions Answer sheet page 2

7 What types of words are in bold? Select one option from each row.

Sentences	Preposition	Conjunction	Adverb
The word for apple in Mandarin is 'píngguǒ', which sounds like the Mandarin word for peace, so many stores sell apples wrapped in coloured paper to give as gifts.		✓	
Christmas in Ethiopia, like most places, is also a time for celebration, family, games and church.			✓
Some people even like to go camping for Christmas!	✓		

8 Underline the object in the following sentence.
'many of the houses and streets are decorated with an assortment of lights'

Note: The answer can still be correct if the pupils has not underlined the entire noun phrase.

9 'A parranda is when a group of 'carolers' congregate to sing aguinaldos in their local community.'

Which word is a synonym for congregate?

Chant

Gather

Practise

Decide

10 Circle the verbs in the progressive tense in the following sentence

'Imagine this: it's Christmas day, you're sat on the beach, the weather is boiling, columns of barbecue smoke rise to the sky, dolphins play in the distance.'

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What type of noun is 'period'?

Common

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Collective

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Reading Questions Answer sheet page 1

1

'This is a tremendous time for community'

What is there an example of in this sentence?

Metaphor

Alliteration

Simile

Onomatopoeia

2

To which country does each description apply?

A very small percentage of the
population celebrates
Christmas.

China

It is tradition to eat fish on
December 23rd.

Iceland

Santa changes into beach
clothes when entering this
country.

Australia

3

The following sentence is taken from the section about China. 'Though it is a nascent tradition, many people enjoy it!' What is the meaning of the word 'nascent'?

Something that is very silly

Something that is just coming into existence

Something that has been popular for a long time

Something that is kept a secret

4

On what date is Innocents Day? Write your answer in the space below.

The 28th of December

5

'for many Puerto Ricans, therefore, Christmas is more of a marathon than a sprint!'

What is there an example of in this sentence?

Metaphor