



Christmas Traditions

Across the world, people in different countries celebrate Christmas and the winter period with lots of different traditions. Some of them may be familiar to you, others may be new and exciting. Do you have any traditions that you can share with the people around you?

Christmas Pudding

It seems that Christmas pudding originated in the 1300s in England. Back then, it was made with beef or mutton along with fruit. The pudding might have included raisins, currants, prunes, wines and spices. It was much more of a porridge and would have been eaten as a soup, rather than in slices. It was called “frumenty”.

It began to change into a more sturdy pudding by the late 1500s. People began making it with eggs, breadcrumbs and spirits to give it more flavour and make it more like the pudding we know today. It was normally filled with plums. By 1650, it had become the pudding that almost everybody ate at Christmas. The puddings we eat today first appeared in Victorian England.

Christmas Carols

Like lots of Christmas traditions, carols began thousands of years ago in pagan rituals. Pagans celebrated the Winter Solstice rather than the birth of Christ. The word carol means to dance or sing with praise and joy. At first, these carols were sung throughout the year. Eventually, they became known as something that was mainly sung at Christmas. The first Christmas hymn seems to have been one called Angel’s Hymn that was sung in 129 CE.

Early carols were written in Latin, which put lots of people off because they couldn’t read or understand it. This began to change in the 1200s when people started writing them in languages that people could understand.

Gävle Goat

The Yule Goat is a Swedish Christmas tradition that goes back a long way. Originally, the Yule Goat was a helper animal for Santa Claus and would bring presents for the children of Swedish towns and villages. This had been a tradition for hundreds of years. Straw models of goats are still very popular in Sweden.

In 1966, the small town of Gävle wanted to celebrate Christmas in a new way, so they build an enormous



straw goat for their town square. It was 13 metres tall and 7 metres long! It seemed a great idea to make it out of the traditional material of straw, even though it is highly flammable. On that first year, the goat lasted until New Year's Eve before somebody in the town burnt it down. Strangely, the tradition of burning the goat now appears to have become part of the town's history. Out of the last 50 years, it has been destroyed 35 times. Perhaps it is not the safest of Christmas traditions and definitely not one to try at home.

Krampus

The Krampus has been terrifying children across Germany and the surrounding countries for centuries. He is often pictured with twisted horns and a distorted face, and his main job is to punish naughty children. He traditionally comes into town on the 5th of December along with Saint Nicholas. While Saint Nicholas is busy handing out candy canes and gifts to well-behaved children, the Krampus is dealing with those who didn't do as they were told. You'd better watch out!

RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. Where did the Christmas pudding originally come from?
2. When did Christmas pudding first start to actually look like a pudding?
3. What did pagans celebrate?
4. Which country does the tradition of the Gävle Goat come from?
5. Who does the Krampus travel with?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

S

Why didn't people like early carols?

I

Look at the section about the Krampus. Why should you "watch out"?

V

Find and copy a word that tells you Christmas pudding was stronger.

V

What does the word "traditional" mean?

P

Which of your traditions do you most enjoy? Why? It doesn't have to be a Christmas tradition.

Answers:

1. England
2. The 1500s
3. Winter Solstice
4. Sweden
5. Saint Nicholas

S: They were written in Latin and they couldn't understand them

I: If you don't behave, it might come and punish you

V: Sturdy

V: Something has been done that way for a long time