

10 FACTS ABOUT CHRISTMAS – READING TEXT

Navigation bar for National Geographic Kids website. Includes search bar, login/register options, and a magazine subscription button. The main menu features categories: VALENTINES, DISCOVER, COMPETITIONS, KIDS CLUB, GAMES, and PRIMARY RESOURCES.

Advertisement banner for National Geographic Kids books. Text: "Explore the world from home with National Geographic Kids books". Images of books include "DIRT & GOOD ACADEMY", "Maths & English", "PUZZLE BOOK", "INFOPIEDIA FOR KIDS", "5000 AWESOME FACTS", and "ROCKS & MINERALS".



10 FACTS ABOUT CHRISTMAS!
Learn all about the history and twinkly traditions of the festive season...

As the year draws to an end, millions of people around the world look forward to sparkling decorations, colourful lights, delicious food, jolly music and exciting gifts. Yup... because Christmas is coming! But how much do you know about this super-fun holiday? It's time to find out in our ten facts about Christmas...

Facts about Christmas

1) Christmas is a **Christian festival** that celebrates the birth of **Jesus Christ**. For most people, it takes place every year on the **25th of December**. But, in fact, no one knows the exact date Jesus was born!

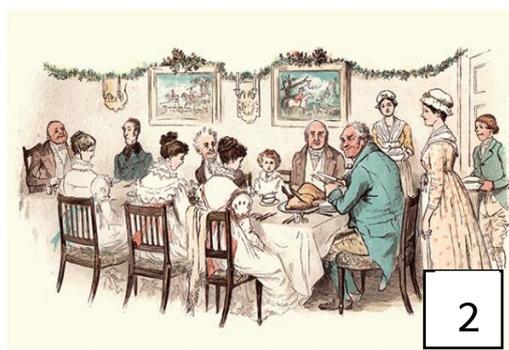


1

2) Did you know that not all Christians celebrate Christmas on the same day? In countries with large populations of **Orthodox Christians***, such as **Russia**, the **Ukraine** and **Romania**, Christmas Day falls on the **7th of January**. Some **Greek Orthodox Christians** celebrate Christmas on the **7th of January**, too.

3) The name 'Christmas' comes from the old English phrase *Cristes maesse*, which means 'Christ's mass'. But what about 'Xmas'? Lots of people think this is just a modern-day abbreviation – but it actually dates back to the **16th century!**

4) Come Christmas, people around the world enjoy all kinds of jolly-good fun! Many of the festive traditions we have in the UK today came about in the **Victorian era** – such as **Christmas cards**, **gift-giving** and **crackers**, as well as traditional foods like **mince pies** and **roast turkey!** **Queen Victoria** and her husband **Prince Albert** were huge fans of Christmas!



5) **Christmas trees** were first seen in **16th Century Germany** where, at Christmas time, people decorated fir trees with **fruit and nuts** – and later sweets, paper shapes and candles. Historians think the origins of this festive tradition may date back to the **Romans** and **Ancient Egyptians**, who used evergreen plants and garlands as **symbols of everlasting life**. Wow!



6) Every year, **Norway** sends a beautiful home-grown Christmas tree to **London**, where it is decorated with lights in **Trafalgar Square**. Standing a towering **20m tall**, the terrific tree is a gift to say thank you for the help the UK gave Norway during **World War II**.

7) We can't talk about Christmas without mentioning the big bearded, rosy-cheeked jolly man, **Father Christmas!** But have you wondered how he got the name **Santa Claus?** It's from *Sinterklaas*, which means **Saint Nicholas** in Dutch, the language of the **Netherlands**. St. Nicholas was a Christian bishop who lived in the 4th century. He was known for being kind and generous. He later became the **patron saint of children**.



8) But Santa isn't the only Christmas character. There are many more around the world! In **Italy**, for example, a kind witch called **La Befana** is said to fly around on a broomstick delivering toys to children! In **Iceland**, children leave shoes under the window for 13 mischievous trolls called the **Yule Lads**. If children have been good, they'll find **sweets in their shoe** – but if they've been bad, the Yule lads will leave them a **rotten potato!**



9) We all love to sing along to *Jingle Bells*, but have you ever noticed that the song doesn't have the word Christmas in it? Or Jesus or Santa Claus? That's because it wasn't originally a Christmas song! In fact, the jolly anthem was written in 1850, entitled *One Horse Open Sleigh*, for the **American** holiday, **Thanksgiving!**

10) Now, imagine if there was no Christmas. Does it feel quite strange? Sad, perhaps? Well, believe it or not, in **1644** Christmas celebrations were made illegal in England, and soon after, in the **English Colonies in America**, too! At that time, members of the government felt that the religious meaning of Christmas had been forgotten, and so banned the holiday festivities. Some people still celebrated in secret, however, until Christmas was once again legal... almost **20 years** later!

Images

Images © Getty Images: Santa and sleigh (134107545), nativity scene (186041990), Victorian Christmas lunch (908208794), Christmas tree (119296650), La Befana (954665456).

Did you enjoy reading our Christmas facts? Leave a comment and let us know!



190 Likes

LEAVE A COMMENT

Customize your avatar

Your name

Your comment

OK

COMMENTS

Cool!

Wow!

Wow!

Cool!

LOL!

Adapted from [Facts about Christmas! | National Geographic Kids \(natgeokids.com\)](https://www.natgeokids.com)