

Have you ever wondered if people in other countries celebrate Christmas the same as we do? After much research, I have discovered that though the spirit of the holiday is the same, how it is celebrated varies widely. While I could have repeated the same old traditions we share (i.e. Santa Claus and his many titles), it was suggested that I cover the more odd or weird customs and traditions. So here we go.

First off are some of our European nations. Surprisingly both Italy and Russia share the tale of a female figure (called by different names for each country) that had refused to go with the Three Wise Men to see the Christ child because she was busy. When she did go, she could not find the North Star and the tale says that she now walks around handing gifts to children while looking for the Christ Child. In Norway all the brooms in the house are hidden on Christmas Eve. This is done so that the witches and mischievous spirits can't get to them to be able to ride the skies at night. Portugal finds the tradition of putting place settings around the table for the dead in hopes it will bring blessing to the family the following year.

In the Ukraine, I found out about a delightful tradition created by a folk tale. The tale is that there once was a woman so poor that she could not afford decorations for her family. So one Christmas she woke to find that spiders had trimmed her kids' tree with their webs. Now many decorate their trees with an artificial spider and web in the hopes that whoever finds it will have good luck. (Me, I try to keep the spiders out of my tree). Let's travel to Latvia where it is a custom to walk around the streets wearing the masks of bears, horses, goats, gypsies and sometimes living corpses. Should you decide to participate, you will be called a mummer. For our last stop, we are going to visit Yugoslavia. Here they have a custom that starts 2 weeks before Christmas. On that day, children rush into their mothers bedroom, tie her feet and chant "Mother's day, Mother's day what will you pay to get away". The mother will hand over presents to her children in order to be untied. A week after this, the children do the same with their father. (Parents, I'm not sure if I would share this with your children for fear they get the same idea).

If you are planning on travelling to Caracas Venezuela for Christmas Eve mass, be prepared to bring your roller skates as this is the only way you will be able to get through town. All streets are shut down to any motorized vehicles.

The last two traditions I am going to cover are about a favorite holiday topic. FOOD. I discovered that the Colonel and his secret spices are a must have on Christmas in Japan. Yes, folks I am talking about Kentucky Fried chicken. This is where they have their Christmas dinner. Lastly we are going to visit Greenland for a feast of kiviak. This is a dish of auk (small flightless

bird) prepared by having the raw flesh wrapped in seal skin and placed under a rock and not eaten until it is well into decomposition. Some describe it tasting like old bleu cheese with a strong odor and taste. Those from Greenland say it is delicious but I think I will pass.

So, in closing, as we gather with our family and friends this holiday season, give a thought to those in other countries that are their traditions with family and friends.

Happy Holidays