

In the Czech Republic there is an old superstition that if you fast on the night of Christmas eve, you may see a vision of a 'golden pig'. If you see this vision, it will bring good luck.

In Norway, families hide all of their brooms on Christmas eve. This is because it is believed that there are witches and spirits flying around, and they will steal your brooms and run amok in the skies until dawn if they are not well-hidden.

In Japan Christmas is not widely celebrated but it is popular to go to KFC for a bucket of 'Christmas Chicken' on Christmas day.

In Caracas, Venezuela, the streets are closed off to cars until 8:00am so that people can roller skate to early morning mass.

In the UK letters to Santa are sometimes thrown into the fireplace instead of being put in the post. It is believed that the draught carries the letters up the chimney. If the letter burns instead of being carried up the draught, it needs to be written again.

In Holland, Saint Nicholas is always accompanied by 'Black Peter'. Black Peter keeps a list of all the naughty and nice children. If you are nice you will get presents and sweets delivered. If you are naughty Black Peter will leave a bundle of sticks, or carry you off to Spain in a sack for a whole year.

If you have Christmas dinner in Greenland, the delicacies on the menu might include 'Mattak' - whale skin with a strip of blubber inside, or 'kiviak' - the raw flesh of little auks (a species of arctic birds) that have been buried whole in sealskin until they have reached an advanced stage of decomposition.

A Finnish Christmas tradition is to have porridge for lunch with an almond hidden inside. The person who finds the almond sings a song.

In the Ukraine, Christmas trees are often decorated with fake spiderwebs. It is believed that seeing a spiderweb on Christmas morning brings good luck. This belief comes from the story of a poor lady who could not afford to decorate her Christmas tree. On Christmas morning, she awoke to find spiders had decorated it with webs, and when the first rays of light touched the spiderwebs, they turned into gold and silver.

In Brazil when children leave a sock hanging by a window, instead of filling it with treats and gifts, Papai Noel (Santa Claus) will exchange it for a present.

In Argentina it is traditional to set off fireworks at midnight on Christmas Eve. It is also the time when paper lanterns called 'Globos' are lit from the inside and float into the night sky.

In Denmark at Christmas time people like to drink glogg. This is mulled red wine combined with spices, sugar, raisins and chopped almonds and is usually served warm.

The Germanic word for 'mistletoe' literally means 'dung on a twig'. This is because birds eat the berries and digest the seeds. The seeds then come out in droppings and land on tree branches where the birds are sitting. The seeds grow into new mistletoe plants directly on the branches.

In the Czech Republic, it's traditional for single women to throw a shoe over their shoulder on Christmas day. If it lands with the toe pointing towards the door, they will be married soon.

During the middle ages it was believed that if you eat a mince pie every day from Christmas until Twelfth Night (6th January) you will have happiness for the next twelve months.

Tinsel was the first mass-produced Christmas decoration, made in Europe in the 1600's. Originally it was designed to reflect the light from candles and fireplaces, and was made from sheets of silver alloy hammered until they were paper thin, and then cut into strips.

Poinsettias first became associated with Christmas in the 17th century in Mexico. According to legend a young, poor girl was walking to the village nativity scene. She needed a gift to bring but had none, so she hastily picked a bunch of green weeds from the side of the road and brought them to the church. She was mocked and ridiculed by the people around her for her simple gift, but when she laid them down at the manger a beautiful, star-shaped flower appeared on top of the plant.

The Celts believed that mistletoe has mystical healing powers and used it as an antidote for poison, a cure for infertility and to ward off evil spirits. The romans used it as a symbol for peace and legend says that enemies who met under mistletoe would lay down their weapons and embrace.

According to old superstitions, placing holly branches in doorways at Christmas time is not just to decorate, it is supposed to protect the family against witches and tax-collectors.

In some countries, shoes are left out for Santa Claus instead of stockings. Children polish their best pair of shoes and leave them by the door or fireplace and in the morning wake up to find them filled with treats and gifts.

Traditionally, stockings hung by the fireplace would be filled with treats and gifts for good children only. Naughty children would get a lump of coal instead!

The first gingerbread house was made in Germany, inspired by the witch's edible house in *Hansel and Gretel* by the Brothers Grim.

In France, the main Christmas meal is served late at night on Christmas eve, or very early on Christmas morning after the midnight church service has finished. In some parts of France it is traditional to eat 13 different desserts, representing Jesus Christ and the twelve apostles.

In Bolivia, some people bring roosters to mass on Christmas Eve, and it is called 'Mass of the Rooster'. This is because it is believed that a rooster was the first animal to announce the birth of baby Jesus.