Christmas is almost upon us, our favourite time of the year. Wherever you are from in the world, why not take some time to learn more about Christmas and New Year’s Eve traditions all over the planet? From fun, quirky traditions to more unusual customs, I have prepared a list of interesting Christmas traditions from different countries.

**THE NETHERLANDS**

Christmas in The Netherlands is much more centered around December 5th rather than the traditional 24th/25th. In the couple of weeks leading up to it, children put one of their shoes by the fire on the Saturday nights before bed, filled with carrots, treats, poems or drawings for ‘Sinterklaas’ and his horse in the hope that they’ll wake up to little gifts in their shoe in return.

**SPAIN**

As well as having Santa Claus coming to leave presents on the 25th December, the Spanish also have Three Wise Men who come to visit on the 6th January. Little children leave food for the men and water for their camels and in return the Wise Men will leave presents. On the 5th January, the day before the Wise Men visit, a special cake is eaten called El Roscon de Reyes (the cake of the Wise Men) with little presents hidden within the cake - however there is one bad present in the cake and whoever finds it pays for the cake!

**ENGLAND**

In England the British custom is to crack Christmas crackers at the dinner table before you start your meal on Christmas Day. Christmas crackers are filled with jokes, small toys or silly gifts, as well as a coloured paper hat that everyone wears for dinner. It’s not a British Christmas without watching the Queen’s Christmas Day speech on TV.

**NORWAY**

On Christmas Eve, the Norwegians have an unusual tradition of hiding their brooms. They believe this will help to ward off evil based on a legend that witches and bad spirits come out on Christmas Eve to find brooms to ride on. To this today, people hide their brooms in Norway to stop them from being stolen.

**ICELAND**

For 13 days in the lead up to Christmas in Iceland, 13 mischievous trolls, also known as the Yule Lads, wreak harmless havoc across the country! On each of the 13 nights, children leave their favourite pair of shoes by the window, hoping that the Yule Lads will leave them a nice Christmas gift in them during the night, and they won’t get given rotting potatoes for being naughty. The 13 Yule Lads all wear real traditional Icelandic outfits, and each of them cause mischief in their own, jokey way!

**AUSTRALIA**

Christmas in Australia is all sun, sea and sand. Drinks on the beach and chilling by the pool is how the Aussies spend Christmas Day. Santa often pays a visit to the beach, arriving in style on a boat, handing out sweets to the kids. They drink stubbies and grill shrimp and seafood on the barbecue on Christmas as well as eating cold meats. Backyard cricket is a popular Christmas game to play during the day.

**AUSTRIA**

In Austria, there is quite a scary Christmas tradition known as Krampus, a beast-like demon character who roams the city scaring naughty children. The Krampus character is meant to be St Nicholas’ evil accomplice. Sometimes men dress up at Krampus on the eve of St Nicholas.

**GERMANY**

An advent wreath is put on the dining room table on the fourth Sunday before Christmas. The wreaths have four large candles on them and each one is lit every Sunday. In some German households, the Christmas tree is not revealed until Christmas Eve.

**UKRAINE**

While other countries decorate their Christmas tree with lights and pretty hanging ornaments, in Ukraine they decorate with spiders’ webs (fake, of course). The tradition derives from a myth about a poor widow who was unable to afford Christmas tree decorations. Spiders around her house spun shimmering webs around the tree as they felt sorry for her and her children, to which they all woke up to an incredible, shining tree on Christmas Day. Ukrainians also believe that spiders webs bring good luck.

**JAPAN**

The Japanese don’t tend to celebrate Christmas, however one tradition that is pretty nationwide is getting a KFC takeaway for lunch on the 25th. In Japan, if you don’t preorder your chicken weeks in advance, you’ll have to suck it up and wait in line at the nearest store, sometimes for hours!

**PORTUGAL**

In Portugal, a fun Christmas tradition involves a special festive cake which is eaten called ‘’Bolo Rei”. Inside the cake there's one trinket inside and whoever finds it "wins". In some Portuguese homes a fava bean is hidden inside the cake and whoever eats the slice that contains the bean, that person has to bake or buy next year’s cake.