

An American Christmas: Traditions Old and New [B2]

Per molto tempo il puritanesimo ha proibito le celebrazioni festive negli Stati Uniti, compreso il Natale, finché un paio di scrittori hanno reso popolare questa festa. Da allora, il Natale negli Stati Uniti è un incontro di tradizioni provenienti da diverse culture.



The first known Christmas celebration was in the Roman Empire, on 25 December 336 [AD](#). Since then, Christmas has become a global celebration, but it has evolved in different ways in different parts of the world, including in the US, a country that is synonymous today with elaborate and highly-commercial festivities.

OUTLAWED

Long before Christmas became popular in the US, it was celebrated for hundreds of years in England. However, in 1647, the Puritans, led by Oliver Cromwell, [outlawed](#) Christmas there. Likewise, the English separatists — Protestants who separated from the Church of England – who lived in the early British colonies in the US were opposed to celebrating Christmas, and

the holiday was outlawed in the Massachusetts Bay Colony from 1659 to 1681.

REVOLUTION

Nevertheless people in some of the other colonies celebrated Christmas. But after the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783) – in which American Patriot forces defeated the British, securing the independence of the United States – British traditions, including Christmas, declined in popularity in the US. It was two authors who helped to revive the celebration there: American author Washington Irving and British author Charles Dickens.

IRVING & DICKENS

In 1819 and 1820, Washington Irving's collection of thirty-four essays and short stories titled *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent* was published. The series included fictitious stories about how Christmas had been celebrated in England before the Puritans outlawed it, with descriptions of the festivities and the Christmas dinner table. Then, in 1843, Charles Dickens's famous novella *A Christmas Carol*, about the transformation of Ebenezer Scrooge from a miserable miser into a generous man, was published. It also included idyllic descriptions of Christmas celebrations in England, and demonstrated the benefits of celebrating a holiday synonymous with charity and goodwill for all.

NATIONAL HOLIDAY

Both books became popular in the US, and by the late 1800s, most Americans were celebrating Christmas but it wasn't until 26 June 1870 that US President Ulysses S. Grant declared Christmas a national holiday. Since Americans didn't have their own Christmas traditions, they borrowed them from recent immigrants. The tradition of Christmas trees, for example, was borrowed from German immigrants, whose ancestors had popularised them in the late 1400s.

RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR

Today, many of the same Christmas traditions are practised in the UK and the US. They include decorating trees, sending Christmas cards, exchanging gifts and having a big family dinner on Christmas Day. For most children, Santa Claus is an important part of Christmas; they write letters to him, go to see him, in a local shopping mall for instance, and receive gifts from him on Christmas morning. For some families, Christmas is primarily a religious occasion, while for others it is primarily a secular holidays.

AMERICAN VARIATIONS

In the US, much as in the UK, the traditional Christmas dinner consists of roast turkey, potatoes and vegetables, with [cranberry](#) sauce (in the US) and fruitcake for dessert. However, many families in the US also include regional variations in their Christmas dinner, or variations introduced to the country by the many different non-Christian cultures. In some rural areas, [game meats](#) are often served instead of turkey; in Hawaii, you can expect to see local specialities such as kālua pig and [cabbage](#) on the table; and Alaskans often include [crab](#) legs in their Christmas dinner. Another uniquely American tradition is the inclusion of a [pickle](#) ornament on the Christmas tree. The ornament is hidden on the tree and whoever finds it receives either a reward or, presumably, a year of good fortune. This is considered a German-American tradition, though the exact origins of it are unknown. There is even a tradition of eating Chinese food at Christmas. The origins of this are archetypically American: the Chinese restaurant was a [safe haven](#) for American Jews who felt like outsiders on Christmas. They believed Chinese food to be kosher — although, in fact, it is not.

Glossary

- **safe haven** = luogo sicuro
- **outlawed** = vietare
- **Carol** = canto natalizio
- **borrowed** = prendere in prestito
- **cranberry** = mirtillo
- **game meats** = carne di selvaggina
- **pickle** = sottaceti
- **securing** = ottenere
- **miser** = avaro
- **late** = alla fine del
- **crab** = granchio
- **AD** = d.C. (anno domini)
- **Nevertheless** = nonostante
- **miserable** = triste
- **goodwill** = buona volontà
- **cabbage** = cavolo
- **novella** = romanzo breve