

Weird Christmas: Top 10 [B2]

Gatti giganti e ravanelli sproporzionati, acconciature orrende, secchiate di pollo fritto e persino un po' di scatologia: ecco le usanze natalizie più strane.

Most of us associate Christmas with the festive celebrations in films and TV shows, which typically revolve around traditions that are common in the Western world: Christmas trees, Santa Claus and elaborate turkey dinners. However, many families, regions and countries also have their own traditions, whether modern or historical, that celebrate everything from ugly sweaters to nefarious beings. Here are ten weird and wonderful Christmas traditions from around the world:

1. UGLY CHRISTMAS

Imagine a red, white and green sweater. It is decorated with exaggerated Christmas motifs, perhaps of a Christmas tree, presents or reindeer. But that's not all. It also has pom-poms, glitter and... wait for it... Christmas lights that light up! While many people compete to have the most beautiful Christmas decorations, those who participate in this tradition compete to have the ugliest Christmas sweater; the uglier, the better! The concept of the ugly Christmas sweater began in the US in the 1950s, with the commercialisation of the festive season. But it wasn't until the 2000s that it became popular around the world. In the last twenty years, designer brands like Stella McCartney, Givenchy and Dolce & Gabbana have created their own version of the ugly Christmas sweater, and celebrities like Taylor Swift and Kanye West have proudly worn them in public. Many people now organise an annual ugly-Christmas-sweater-themed party, with prizes for those with the most creative, bizarre, and yes, ugliest sweater. What a great way to eliminate the stress of the season and have a good laugh with friends!

2. JULAFTEN

We normally associate [brooms](#), [witches](#) and [spider webs](#) with Halloween, but these are all part of Christmas traditions in Europe. In Norway, some people believe that on Julaften ([Christmas Eve](#)), [witches](#) and evil spirits attempt to sabotage Christmas by travelling around the country on [brooms](#) ticks [taking people hostage](#). In order to prevent this, people hide their [brooms](#) during the festive season, so [depriving](#) the evil [beings](#) of their preferred mode of transport.

3. LA BEFANA

In Italy, it's a witch-like old woman called La Befana giving presents to good children and [coal](#) to bad children. But La Befana doesn't visit homes on [Christmas Eve](#) — as Santa Claus does — but on the eve of the Christian feast day known as Epiphany, which is celebrated on 6 January. The night before Epiphany, families leave a glass of wine and a plate of sausages for La Befana, who comes down the [chimney](#) on her [broomstick](#) while the children are asleep.

4. PAVUCHKY

There's an old Ukrainian legend about a poor woman and her children. They grew a Christmas tree from a [pine cone](#), but they didn't have enough money to decorate the tree. So on the night of [Christmas Eve](#), local spiders decorated the tree with their delicate [spider webs](#), transforming it into a beautiful work of art. In honour of this legend, some families in Ukraine continue to decorate their trees with spider ornaments called 'pavuchky' and artificial [spider webs](#).

5. ST. NICHOLAS AND KRAMPUS

Saint Nicholas was a 4th-century [bishop](#) who was known for his generosity to children. He inspired the modern-day Santa Claus. In some European countries, people celebrate Saint Nicholas Day on 6 December. The night

before, children leave shoes or [stockings](#) for St. Nicholas to fill with sweets and small presents. However, St. Nicholas is accompanied by Krampus, a demonic creature who [punishes](#) bad children. In some towns and villages, for example in Germany, Austria and Italy, people organise Krampus runs and run through the streets in Krampus costumes, celebrating this [nefarious](#) figure.

6. THE 13 JÓLASVEINANNA

We've heard about a witch, a saint and a demonic creature [rewarding](#) good children and punishing bad children. In Iceland, on the thirteen nights before Christmas, thirteen trolls known as Jólásveinanna ([YuleLads](#)) have this responsibility: giving presents to good children and, in this case, [rotten](#) potatoes to bad children. Then on [Christmas Eve](#), a giant cat called Jólaköttur ([Yule](#) cat) travels the country devouring anyone who's not wearing new clothes — a reminder to dress in your best for the festive season. And no, ugly sweaters do not count!

7. MARI LWYD

Welsh people have a lot of ancient traditions and superstitions. One of those associated with Christmas centres around Mari Lwyd, a horse [skull](#) decorated with a white [sheet](#), [ribbons](#), lights and ornaments. At Christmas, a procession of people go through towns and villages with the [skull](#), visiting homes and singing to the inhabitants, who give them food and drink in return. People are encouraged to invite the morbid effigy into their homes, to guarantee good fortune in the year ahead.

8. CAGA TIÓ

Christmas time is supposed to be about peace and joy; in Catalonia it may also involve [mild](#) scatology and a bit of violence. If you visit a Catalan family home at Christmas, you will almost certainly find a [log](#) decorated with a smiling face and covered with a red [blanket](#). This is the Tió de Nadal, also known as the Caga Tió, which literally means '[pooping log](#)'. In the weeks

before Christmas, the children [feed](#) the [log](#) sweets every day and keep it warm. Then on [Christmas Eve](#) or Christmas Day, they beat the [log](#) with a stick until it poops out presents in return for their hospitality.

9. NOCHE DE RÁBANOS

You've probably heard of people [carving pumpkins](#) for Halloween. But in the city of Oaxaca, in southern Mexico, people carve [radishes](#) in preparation for "la Noche de Rábanos" (Night of the Radishes) on 23 December. The [radishes](#) are grown specifically for the occasion and treated with special chemicals so they grow to an enormous size. People carve them as everything from biblical figures to fantastical creatures, and those with the best [carvings](#) win a prize.

10. KENTUCKY FRIED CHRISTMAS!

For centuries, most people in Japan didn't celebrate Christmas, or eat anything special on the day. That changed in the 1970s, when the American fast food restaurant chain KFC, [aka](#) Kentucky Fried Chicken, established a tradition there of people eating [buckets](#) of KFC fried chicken on 25 December. This tradition continues to this day, with many families making their Christmas Day reservation at their local KFC months in advance. Naturally, the food comes in special Christmas-themed [buckets](#), decorated with festive motifs from the Western world.

Glossary

- **broomsticks** = manici delle scope
- **punishes** = punire
- **pooping** = defecare
- **revolve around** = girare attorno a
- **depriving** = privare
- **chimney** = camino
- **skull** = teschio
- **ribbons** = nastri
- **mild** = leggera
- **witches** = streghe
- **spider webs** = ragnatele
- **taking people hostage** = prendere in ostaggio
- **stockings** = calze
- **rewarding** = premiare
- **log** = tronco
- **feed** = nutrire
- **pumpkins** = zucche
- **whether modern or** = sia... sia
- **weird** = strane
- **Christmas Eve** = Vigilia di Natale
- **rotten** = marce
- **pine cone** = pigna
- **carving** = intagliare
- **buckets** = secchi
- **radishes** = ravanelli
- **aka** = alias (acronimo di also known as)
- **glitter** = brillantini
- **brooms** = scope
- **bishop** = vescovo
- **Lads** = ragazzi
- **blanket** = coperta
- **nefarious** = nefasti
- **reindeer** = renna

- **beings** = esseri
- **the uglier, the better** = più è brutto, meglio è
- **coal** = carbone
- **Yule** = Natale
- **sheet** = lenzuolo