

# The 12 best apps for Christmas – from what to cook to tracking Santa

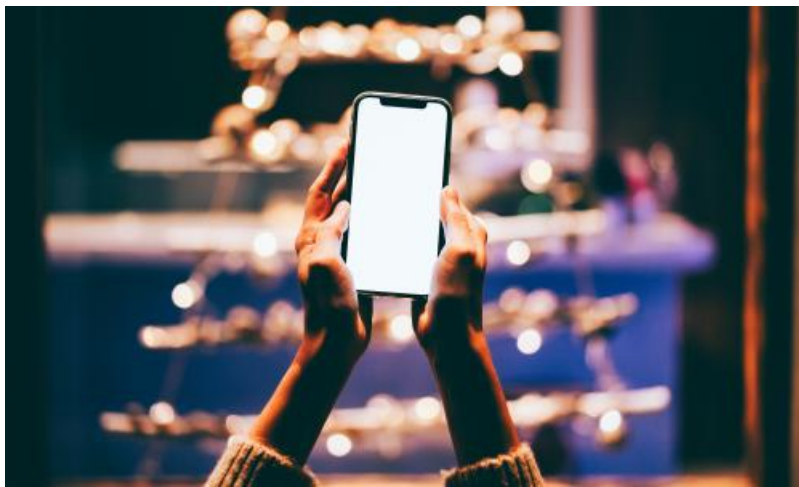
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It's that time of year again, when the days are shorter, mince pies are back on the shelves and Mariah Carey is always playing somewhere. As plans for office Christmas parties and family gatherings are made, here are some apps that might come in handy for the holiday season. Elfster (Android/iOS, free) Office Secret Santas can be a hassle to organise, especially with many of us working remotely now. Elfster helps you manage your gift exchanges by letting you create a group, invite friends and family, generate names, set spending limits and exchange gifts. It also allows participants to create wish lists, and the app's curated gift guides by budget are excellent for inspiration. Beyond office parties, it's also a neat app to use as a gift registry with friends and family for any occasion. Etsy (Android/iOS, free) If you want to be more thoughtful about your Christmas gifts this year, check out Etsy. With plenty of options for unique, handmade, vintage and custom goods, it's the closest you can get to a Christmas market on your phone. Most sellers are independent businesses, so you will be spreading the holiday cheer by shopping from them. The app also lets you chat directly with shop owners to customise your presents. AccuWeather (Android/iOS, free, with paid-for features) Unpredictable weather can spoil the best-laid plans, and when your calendar is likely to be full of social events, it's best to be prepared. AccuWeather is a straightforward live weather forecast app that is accurate to your current postcode. Its MinuteCast feature gives you the breakdown of weather conditions for the next four hours, with rainfall predictions up to two hours ahead. So it can be a real lifesaver when you don't want to show up soaked to your friend's Christmas party. Go Jauntly (Android/iOS, free, with paid-for features) If you're finding it hard to leave the house for some vitamin D and exercise, Go Jauntly is just the app you need. Its walking map feature offers beautiful walks near you that you can customise by distance and destination. It may be ideal for that Christmas or Boxing Day walk. You can download trails, save and share them and even curate your own with photos, routes and descriptions. A "Moments of Joy in West London" walk took me on a picturesque route, pointing out where I could buy flowers and where I should stop to look at street art or mosaic-tiled alleyways I might otherwise have missed. It also points out cute cafes or art galleries. There is the option to join walking challenges, too, and the Nature Notes feature is a nice addition to log interesting flora and fauna spotted on your walks. Kitchen Stories: Recipes (Android/iOS, free, with paid-for features) Whether it's cooking the all-important Christmas dinner or baking your comfort treats for winter, the Kitchen Stories app makes it easy with step-by-step recipe guides. The fun bit is that you can be part of a community of millions of amateur chefs worldwide, sharing your culinary attempts and collecting your favourite recipes in your personal cookbook. It's the perfect reason to spend colder days indoors in a warm kitchen. Snoop (Android/iOS, free, with paid-for features) The holidays can be

stressful for your bank account, so if you aren't using a finance app yet, this is your sign to download Snoop. The money management app helps you track your spending, set budgets and keep track of your bills. Snoop shows you all your accounts in one place, so you know exactly where your money goes each week and month with detailed spending summaries. You also get a weekly reminder of forthcoming bills and contract renewals if you need to get ahead and cancel anything. Skyscanner (Android/iOS, free) Do you need to use up some paid leave by the end of the year? Or get away for some winter sun? If you're feeling spontaneous, Skyscanner's "Everywhere" feature shows you cheap flights to anywhere around the world. If you're already planning your holidays for next year, it will tell you the best time to fly to your destination. Compare flights from major travel brands alongside reviews from fellow travellers. If you're still undecided, set up a Price Alert and you'll be notified when flight prices change. Skyscanner also goes beyond flight bookings and helps you compare and find deals on accommodation and car hire. Canva (Android/iOS, free, with paid-for features) Physical greetings cards might be quickly disappearing, but you can still keep the holiday spirit alive digitally with Canva. Design anything from your annual Christmas card to new year party invitations or a menu for Christmas dinner. The app's user-friendly interface makes it a breeze, even if you have zero design experience. Simply select a festive template and start customising it with your own photos, illustrations, text and graphics. Mixel (Android/iOS, free, with paid-for features) Mixel is a cocktail app that lets you create great drinks using ingredients you already have in your kitchen. With a curated library of more than 2,600 cocktail recipes, it's great if you want to try your hand at mixology. The best part is the fun pixel-art interface showing the ingredients you're working with. NORAD Tracks Santa (Android/iOS, free) For more than 60 years, the North American Aerospace Defense Command (Norad) has tracked Santa Claus's journey, ensuring that the magic of Christmas remains alive for children around the world. The programme starts in December with the actual sleigh-tracking simulation launching early on Christmas Eve. The app is perfect for families due to interactive features such as a live map, games and music. Heads Up! (Android, free, iOS, £1.99, with paid-for features) It's not a holiday party without charades and this version was made popular on The Ellen DeGeneres Show. With their phone held up to their forehead, players must guess the word on the screen as their friends and family give them clues. They nod if they guess the phrase correctly, or tilt their heads up to skip to a new word. You can choose from themed decks, including celebrities, movies and animals, or players can create their own decks by making in-app purchases for each new deck. Lapse (iOS, free) The latest photo app, which climbed to the top of the App Store charts last month, Lapse claims to turn your phone into a disposable camera. Unlike your camera app, once you take a picture on Lapse, you won't be able to see it until it "develops" at a random time later in the day, allowing you to live in the moment. The images taken on the app have a grainy, analogue effect, and you can share the snaps with your friends. It also creates a monthly photo-dump on your phone, and you can curate your favourite pictures into albums.