

London's Christmas decorations

Every year the people of Norway give the city of London a present. It's a big Christmas tree and it stands in Trafalgar Square. Thousands of people come to look at London's beautiful decorations in Oxford Street and Regent Street.

Christmas cards and Christmas trees

In 1846 the first Christmas cards began in Britain. That was five years after the first Christmas tree. Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert, was a German. He brought this German tradition to Britain. He and the Queen had a Christmas tree at Windsor Castle in 1841. A few years after, nearly every house in Britain had one. Traditionally people decorate their trees on Christmas Eve - that's December 24th. They take down the decorations twelve days later, on Twelfth Night - that's January 5th.

Kisses under the mistletoe

An older tradition is Christmas mistletoe. People put a piece of this green plant with its white berries over a door. Mistletoe brings good luck. Also, at Christmas British people kiss their friends under the mistletoe.

Carols

Before Christmas, groups of singers go from house to house. They sing traditional Christmas carols (songs) and collect money. There are a lot of very popular British Christmas carols.

Christmas Eve

British children don't open their presents on December 24th. Santa Claus brings their presents in the night. Then they open them on the morning of the 25th. Santa Claus used to live at the North Pole. But now he rather lives in big shops in towns and cities all over Britain. That's where children see him in November and December. Then on Christmas Eve he climbs down the chimney and leaves lots of presents. Some people leave something for him, too. A glass of wine and some biscuits, for example.

Christmas Day

In Britain the most important meal on December 25th is Christmas dinner. Nearly all Christmas food is traditional. British Christmas dinner is roast turkey with carrots, potatoes, peas, Brussels sprouts and gravy. There are sausages and bacon too. Then, after the turkey, there's Christmas pudding.

Crackers are also usual at Christmas dinner. These came to Britain from China in the nineteenth century. Two people pull a cracker. Usually there's a small toy in the middle. Often there's a joke on a piece of paper, too. Most of the jokes in Christmas crackers are not very good. Here's an example: CUSTOMER: Waiter, there's a frog in my soup. WAITER: Yes, sir, the fly's on holiday.

Boxing Day

December 26th is Boxing Day. Traditionally boys from the shops in each town asked for money at Christmas. They went from house to house on December 26th and took boxes made of wood with them. People gave them money. This was a Christmas present. So the name of December 26th doesn't come from the sport of boxing - it comes from the boys' wooden boxes. Now, Boxing Day is an extra holiday after Christmas Day.