

Christmas Trivia



Why are robins associated with Christmas? Where does the word carol come from? When was celebrating Christmas illegal in Britain? Find out the answers in our Christmas trivia.

- In Britain, the Holy Days and Fasting Days Act of 1551 stated that every citizen must attend a Christian church service on Christmas Day, and must not use any kind of vehicle to get to the service. This act has not yet been repealed!
- In 1647, the English parliament passed a law that made Christmas illegal. Festivities were banned by Puritan leader, Oliver Cromwell, who considered feasting and revelry, on what was supposed to be a holy day, to be immoral. The ban was lifted only when the Puritans lost power in 1660.
- In the United States, during the Christmas buying season, Visa cards alone are used an average of 5,340 times every minute. Many retailers make up to 70% of their annual revenue in the month preceding Christmas.
- According to a 1995 survey, 7 out of 10 British dogs get Christmas gifts from their doting owners.
- In 1843, the first Christmas card was printed in England for Sir Henry Cole. 1000 copies of the card were sold at one shilling each. Only 12 of these cards are thought to be still in existence.
- Postmen in Victorian England were called 'robins' because they wore red uniforms. And today, Christmas cards often show a robin (the bird) delivering Christmas mail.
- In 1937, the first postage stamp to commemorate Christmas was issued in Austria.

- Christmas trees became popular in Britain after a picture appeared in a newspaper of Queen Victoria and her family standing around a Christmas tree in Windsor Castle. Victoria's German husband, Prince Albert, had brought the tree from Germany to England.
- Electric tree-lights were first used just three years after Thomas Edison publicly demonstrated electric light in 1879.
- Tinsel has become a popular Christmas tree decoration. According to legend, a widow wanted to make the first Christmas without their father very special for her children. She decorated the Christmas tree but during the night a spider spun a web from branch to branch. That morning, the Christ Child changed the webs to a silver colour. That's why an artificial spider is often included in the decorations on Ukrainian Christmas trees.
- For every real Christmas tree harvested, 2 to 3 seedlings are planted in its place.
- The poinsettia plant was brought into the United States from Mexico by Joel Poinsett in the early 1800's.
- Mistletoe, a traditional Christmas symbol, was once revered by the early Britons. It was so sacred that it had to be cut with a golden sickle.
- The word carol is derived from the old French word caroller - meaning a song to accompany dancing. The custom of singing Christmas carols is very old - the earliest English collection was published in 1521.
- Irving Berlin's White Christmas is the biggest selling Christmas song - over 350 million copies of the song (records and sheet music) have been sold.
- It is estimated that in the US 400,000 people become sick each year from eating tainted Christmas leftovers.
- Before 1880, most pictures of Santa Claus show him in a green coat. The colours in Santa Claus' suit, red and white, were the creation of artist Haddon Sundblom, who was commissioned by the Coca-Cola Company to redesign Santa Claus in the 1930s.
- 26 December is St Stephen's Day, but is more commonly known as Boxing Day. This expression came about because money was collected in alms-boxes placed in churches during the festive season. This money was then given to the poor after Christmas.

The actual gift givers are different in various countries:

- England: Father Christmas
- France: Pere Noel (Father Christmas)
- Germany: Christkind (angelic messenger from Jesus) She is a beautiful fair haired girl with a shining crown of candles.
- Holland: St Nicholas.
- Italy: La Befana (a kindly old witch)
- Spain and South America: The Three Kings
- Russia: In some parts - Babouschka (a grandmotherly figure) in other parts it is Grandfather Frost.
- Scandinavia: a variety of Christmas gnomes. One is called Julenisse.

If you want to find out **more about Christmas customs throughout the world** (and learn how to say Merry Christmas in 123 languages!), click on:

<http://www.theholidayspot.com/christmas/facts.htm>

Now take **the Christmas Trivia Quiz** to test what you know about Christmas in Britain. Click on:

<http://xportal.klett-sprachen.de/club/0004/>