

## Wacky Christmas Traditions and Events

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**Why do people in the English-speaking world hang up stockings on Christmas Eve? What are 'Boxing Day' and 'hunting the wren', and what do they have to do with the festive season? See this month's 'Did you know?' for the answers to these questions and lots more...**

Every country has its own customs and traditions around the Christmas period and some of them seem rather strange to foreigners. We've collected some of the wackiest traditions we could find from the English-speaking world for you. We've also looked at some of the most interesting events which happen in different English-speaking towns and cities at this time of year. We'd love to hear of any we've missed – wacky traditions or events.

### **Wacky traditions**

There are traditions all over the world at Christmas. Some of them are fun, some interesting and some are just plain wacky.

### **USA**

Many of the festive season's traditions in the USA are the same as those in Europe as they were brought there by the early settlers. Here are some, however, which are unique to certain states.

#### **Alaska:**

A star on a pole is taken from house to house followed by Herod's men, who try to catch the star.

#### **Polish Americans** (mainly in the northern states):

Polish Americans often spread hay in their kitchen to make it look like a stable. They also set two extra places for Christmas Eve dinner in case Mary and Joseph come looking for shelter.

## UK

### Christmas No. 1:

Since the early 70s there has been almost an obsession among the British with predicting which song will be at the top of the UK singles charts in the week before Christmas. There are always several contenders, although in recent years they seem to come from the contestants of the popular talent competition show, *The X Factor*.

What do you think? **Which artist or group has the most number ones?**

Find out by clicking here: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas\\_No.1](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas_No.1)

and checking the list in the table you find on this site. Were you right?

### Hanging up stockings:

Legend has it that Father Christmas once dropped some gold coins down a chimney. These coins would have fallen through the ash grate if it hadn't been for some socks which were hanging on the fireplace to dry. Since this time, children have hung out stockings, hoping for something good to land in them.

### Boxing Day:

The 26th December is a holiday in the UK and most of the Commonwealth. The name 'Boxing Day' originates from the Victorian tradition of employees receiving Christmas boxes of gifts from their employers on the 26th December.

To find out more about 'Boxing Day' just click here:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boxing\\_Day](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boxing_Day)

## Ireland

### Hunting the wren:

On St Stephen's Day (26th December), groups of young people dressed in masks and colourful clothes, known as 'Wrenboys' or 'mummers', go from house to house in the villages in Ireland, singing for money. They often carry a fake wren on the top of a pole. The tradition comes from times when an actual hunt took place and one of the wrens which had been shot was attached to a pole for the procession after the hunt. Although this tradition used to be popular throughout the UK, it is primarily seen in the Republic of Ireland today.

If you like to find out more about 'Hunting the wren', just click here:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wren\\_Day](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wren_Day)

You can also look at the following two websites:

[www.goireland.com/blog/article/christmas-in-ireland-the-wren-boys.html](http://www.goireland.com/blog/article/christmas-in-ireland-the-wren-boys.html)

[www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/customs/Xmas/boxingday.html#wren](http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/customs/Xmas/boxingday.html#wren)

For **more interesting information on Christmas traditions** just click here:

<http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/customs/Xmas/eve.html>

## Events

Some Christmas events have almost become traditions in their own right. Here is a selection from the English-speaking world. Please let us know of any interesting or wacky events we have missed.

### **Toronto Santa Claus Parade:**

Christmas-themed parades during Advent seem to be especially popular in Australian and New Zealand cities and towns. Auckland, for example, holds a huge parade at the end of November. In Canada, Toronto holds a 'Santa Clause parade' and many of the city's department stores have a brightly decorated float in this event which was first held in 1905. Find out more about the Toronto parade by clicking here: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toronto\\_Santa\\_Claus\\_Parade](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toronto_Santa_Claus_Parade)

**Carols By Candlelight:** Another event which is popular in Australia and New Zealand is 'Carols by Candlelight' at which crowds gather to sing carols under the night sky on Christmas Eve. It began in the 19th century and became a big event in Melbourne first. For more information just click here:

[http://www.santaswarehouse.com.au/favorite/carols\\_by\\_candlelight/](http://www.santaswarehouse.com.au/favorite/carols_by_candlelight/)

**Australia's famous Bondi Beach** offers many events, such as a turkey barbecue, for international tourists who find themselves far from home at this time.

**Christmas Day swim:** Swimming clubs from all over Britain take part in the traditional 'Christmas Day swim' in the Serpentine lake in London's Hyde Park. Elsewhere in the country, 'Boxing Day' is traditionally a day when those among us who don't feel the cold take a dip in the sea, often for charity.

See the Serpentine lake's very own swimming club for more information.

Just click here: <http://www.serpentineswimmingclub.com/>

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