

Christmas in France

“Merry Christmas” in French is “Joyeux Noël”

Celebrations for Christmas begin on December 6 in many parts of France. This is Saint Nicholas Day. It is common for people to decorate their homes with a Christmas tree. Setting up a nativity scene in the house is also a popular tradition in France, particularly among religious households. As well as Jesus, the shepherds and other figures normally found in a nativity scene, characters such as a hunter, a policeman and a baker are included. Mistletoe is often hung above doors. People say that that kissing at midnight will bring good luck. Streets and public buildings are also decorated.



Advent wreath

Children are often given an advent calendar which helps them count down to Christmas. Another traditional Christmas decoration in France is the advent wreath. It consists of fir and pine tree branches and holds four candles. The candles represent the four Sundays leading up to Christmas.

On the eve of Saint Nicholas Day, children place their shoes near the fireplace. Families tell Christmas stories and sing Christmas songs. Children then go to bed hoping that their shoes will be filled with gifts by morning. It is said that children who have been naughty will receive a bundle of twigs or coal!

Santa Claus is called Père Noël in France. He is a large figure who has a white beard and wears red robes with a black belt. Christmas Eve is celebrated with Réveillon, a Christmas feast. The feast is normally eaten after midnight mass or in the early hours of Christmas after the family returns from a church service. A common tradition in France is to serve 13 desserts; one for Jesus and each of the twelve apostles. One popular dessert is bûche de Noël, which is a sponge cake shaped as a yule log. Popular Christmas foods in France include turkey, duck, snails and cheese. Seafood such as oyster, lobster and salmon are also common.



Bûche de Noël

Most people in France spend Christmas Day with their families. Families will enjoy a meal together on Christmas Day, but the main feast, Réveillon, is held the night before on Christmas Eve. Some families exchange gifts on Christmas Eve while others do so on Christmas Day. Many people will attend a church service on Christmas Day.