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Mary Del Rosario
Lead-Writer Editor
Stars and Stripes Europe

For the holidays you can't be home sweet home

Oh 2020, what a year you've been. This year has brought on more challenges than anyone could have prepared for and forced many of us into situations out of our control. Despite the current climate around us, one thing we do have control over is how we choose to create lasting memories during the upcoming holiday season.

In this magazine, we shed light to what makes Christmas in Europe special. I encourage you to tap into the different European traditions celebrated during this time. Ever wonder what Germans think about Santa Claus? Read all about the German Christmas debate. That should be a fun conversation for the dinner table. The biggest gripe I'm sure we can all agree on concerning this festive time of year is the cancelation of Christmas markets. Some may be happening in smaller cities, but it's no secret that this year is much different than ever before. If you're really missing the beloved markets, know that you're not alone. Read one of our writer's heartfelt love letter reminiscing over her fond memories at the Christmas markets.

However, know you can bring the magic of these markets home with you—find out how!

Though we may not be able to sing along to "I'll be home for Christmas" while driving to the airport heading back to the States (like I did last year), we can still responsibly gather around our family and close friends here, whether it's by cooking together or watching holiday movies. Perhaps you'd like to bake mouthwatering Christmas cookies with your little ones? We have a few recipes to get you started. For those who feel like breaking tradition, why not check out our non-traditional holiday recipes? This magazine also features some reasons on why it's good to stay home for the holidays, which should lift your spirits up!

Whatever the holiday season looks like for you this year, we hope our magazine captures the spirit of the best time of the year. From all of us at Stars and Stripes Europe, we wish you and yours a jolly holiday season and a healthy, prosperous New Year!

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CHRISTMAS

traditions in

EUROPE

By Jeana Coleman



Although people who celebrate Christmas usually do so around the same time of year, many families create their own ways to celebrate the season, mixing both traditional and contemporary events. Living in Europe is a great time to discover other countries' wonderful and different traditions passed down for centuries. You may want to incorporate some of these into your future holiday celebrations.



Advent wreath and calendar

During Advent, which is the four weeks leading up to Christmas Day, both the Advent wreath and calendar are used to help build anticipation and educate children about the story of Christ's birth. The wreath holds four candles and is placed in a prominent location. On each of the four Sundays before Christmas, a new candle is lit. Sometimes a fifth candle is also included to be lit on Christmas day. The wreath has been attributed to German minister Johann Hinrich Wichern of Hamburg in 1839. Wichern volunteered in an orphanage and each Sunday before Christmas used the wreath to accompany Advent prayers.

Advent calendars also originated in Europe in the 19th century as a fun way to count down the days before Christmas. The calendar has 24 windows and doors. Beginning Dec. 1, a door is opened each day to share a different picture and Nativity story. Sometimes treats or small gifts await behind the doors.



Christmas markets or “Christkindlmärkte/Weihnachtsmärkte”

Dating back to the Middle Ages, these markets began as a way for local merchants to sell practical goods and food to prepare for the long winter. The markets transformed into beautiful, traditional meeting places to eat, drink and buy goods and gifts and celebrate the coming of Christmas. Most German villages and towns have their own Christmas markets, which usually open on the first weekend of Advent. Today several European cities have markets with their own customary foods and decorations.

Many traditional holiday foods are found at the markets. Dresden's 14th century “Strietzel,” or “Christstollen,” the namesake of their Christmas market called Strietzelmarkt, is a sweet, dense loaf bread of dried fruits and spices. Nuremberg offers both its famed 12th-century sausages and lebkuchen, a soft gingerbread sold and shipped in gift boxes worldwide. Glühwein, or “glow wine,” is an ever-present alcoholic drink found at markets. This hot, mulled wine helps stave off the cold as you visit with friends. Perhaps it receives its name from the “glow” that comes after you've had a few. The wine's potency does have a way of sneaking up on you.

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St. Nicholas Day

As the Patron Saint of Children, his day of Dec. 6 is celebrated in many European countries. He may visit schools, daycares and neighborhoods to bring treats and discuss the virtues of being nice. Or, in some countries, children leave their clean shoes or boots outside the door on the evening of Dec. 5 in hopes that St. Nicholas will visit overnight and fill them with goodies. Beware, naughty children. You may get sticks and rocks instead.



The Christmas tree and decorations

The Christmas tree was first documented in Germany in the 16th century. For thousands of years before, evergreen boughs were used to decorate great halls during Winter Solstice as symbols of everlasting life during the winter months. Evergreens were incorporated into Christmas because the symbolism was mirrored in the Christian faith.

Originally, Christmas trees were adorned with edible decor. Candles were later added for illumination, and carved wooden ornaments were created to hold the candles and fill the tree. The 20th century brought electricity and lights replaced candles, but many of these traditional and popular wooden decorations are still made by hand. For authentic Ore Mountain treasures, visit "The Christmas Lady" at Galerie Wagner in Kindsbach or go to Kunsthandwerk & Design in Tübingen-Kressbach near Stuttgart. Both of these wonderful stores offer authentic, German handmade items including pyramids, nutcrackers, smokers and nativity scenes hand-carved in the

famed Erzgebirge. Either buy for yourself or send a timeless gift to a loved one at home.

Some families in Germany still honor the old tradition on Christmas Eve, "Heiligabend," when the tree is decorated by one parent and then illuminated for the children that evening. Traditional Christmas dinner and festivities will follow. Both Dec. 25 and Dec. 26 are considered holidays in many European countries to spend time with family and friends.

These are just a few of the many traditions celebrated in Germany and Europe. Research and discover those that may fit into your own holiday celebrations. ■

Happy holidays!



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The GREAT GERMAN Christmas DEBATE

By Kristi Adams

*F*ew contests that Christmas is a celebration of the birth of Christ (in the nonsecular sense of the season). However, the accompanying holiday traditions aren't always as clear-cut.

For American families, the Christmas season and particularly Christmas Eve is firmly Santa Claus territory. Leading up to the big day, revelers will find a Santa ensconced in every shopping mall and big retail store across America. With an army of elves by his side, Santa's job leading up to Christmas Eve is to sit for the obligatory holiday pictures and listen to wishlists.

On Christmas Eve, of course, he then leaves the mall and flies around the world with his nine reindeer to hurtle presents down chimneys and under Christmas trees. And we Americans track him in real-time with the latest satellite technology used by the North American Aerospace Defense Command, (NORAD) as he circumnavigates the globe.

In American culture, Santa is synonymous with St. Nicholas. The descriptors, "Santa" or "Jolly Old Saint Nick", are simply a difference in semantics. One and the same to be used interchangeably with no difference in meaning whatsoever.

That is decidedly not the case in German Christmas culture.

👍 ROUND ONE 👍

St. Nick vs. Saint Nicholas

In Germany, Saint Nicholas is in fact based on the actual Catholic saint, St. Nicholas of Myra – a wealthy, benevolent saint who had a penchant for secretly leaving gifts, particularly under the cover of darkness. He died Dec. 6, 343 A.D., hence the reason his celebration and feast day is observed on Dec. 6.

In preparation for the big day, German children leave boots and shoes near doors and windows (much like American children would hang stockings for Santa Claus), on the evening of Dec. 5 and awake to find presents and goodies left by St. Nicholas on Dec. 6.

But history, religion, and tradition become strange bedfellows when it comes to explaining who brings the gifts on Christmas Eve in Germany.

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👍 ROUND TWO 👍 A Christkind is born

As the world readied itself for change and stepped out of the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance period, Martin Luther (Nov. 10, 1483 – Feb. 18, 1546) also hit the scene. Martin Luther became a prominent figure in the Protestant Reformation, as he strongly rejected teachings and practices of the Catholic Church in Germany – including ... saints.

Protestant children (and their families) couldn't very well be seen consorting with the likes of a Catholic St. Nicholas, so it is said that Martin Luther invented the Christkind, or Christ Child to deliver presents, naturally on the eve of Christ's celebrated birth. This angelic, golden gossamer-clad being functions much like the American notion of Santa Claus – and magically delivers presents in the night, on Christmas Eve.

Over time, many German families incorporated both Saint Nicholas and the Christkind into their Christmas traditions – however, never were the two interchangeable, as each operated on a different day

and represented two independent traditions.

As Europeans immigrated to America, they brought many cultural traditions with them, including the celebration of Saint Nicholas. But, prior to 1931, St. Nicholas was often depicted as a spindly, bearded man who dressed in flowing red robes and carried a hooked staff. The big jolly man in the white-fur trimmed, red suit came about via an advertising campaign launched by The Coca-Cola Company. For better or worse, this new version of Santa became immensely popular across the globe, and the image of Saint Nicholas, in America, changed to what most Americans picture as the modern Santa.

This revamped version of Saint Nicholas even made his way back to Europe from America, as the Weihnachtsmann (Santa Claus) in Germany.

👍 ROUND THREE 👍 The Weihnachtsmann vs. the Christkind *Now Germans had a dilemma.*

The Weihnachtsmann and the Christkind had been double-booked, both scheduled on Christmas Eve to deliver presents.

As Christmas has arguably, become more commercialized (Black Friday anyone?), and the American notion of Santa Claus threatens to usurp the more traditional Christkind in Germany – many Germans (and even Brits) have begun fighting back.

"Santa Claus free" (Weihnachtsmann-frei) zones have been increasing in popularity in parts of Germany, the first mainstream effort launched in 2002 by the Bonifatiuswerk of the German

Catholics – both to bring back the true meaning of Christmas, and clarify the distinction between Santa Claus and St. Nicholas.

As Santa Claus increases in popularity – along with the euphemisms for him, particularly the American notion of labeling "him" as St. Nicholas – the lines of Christmas logic start to blur. As St. Nicholas was, in fact, a real man, and Santa Claus is ... well, more magical in nature, German families wishing to adhere to more traditional German principles for Christmas have a growing dilemma on their hands when teaching their children about the

various traditions of Christmas.

Imagine having the "Great Christmas Debate" with a question-riddled six-year-old, demanding to know: Who is Santa Claus? Does he know the Christkind? Do they both ride in the sleigh? Was the St. Nicholas (he of the Dec. 6 lineage) from the North Pole too?

Adults can easily discuss the merits of the 'Great German Christmas Debate', but the waters become muddled when matters of faith and religion bump up against the global cross-pollination of ideas on how to celebrate the Christmas season.

WHO'S TO SAY WE CAN'T CELEBRATE IT ALL?



In my home, our pagan Christmas tree is adorned with all manner of frivolity. The angels fight for space amongst the Disney ornaments, a hand-painted vignette featuring Jesus and the wise men catches the glow from the strands of 220-volt Christmas lights, Krampus and St. Nicholas stare each other down from opposite branches, while a pair of silver bells serve as warning sirens to keep the cat out of the tree. It all comes together to represent a delightful blend of memory, belief and culture.



In my mind, Saint Nicholas kicks the season off near the start of Advent. Krampus growls in the wings, in a German version of "Scared Straight." The Christkind flutters ahead of Santa in the dark night, leaving a mystical trail of hope, excitement, and love in their wake.

And the entire season just becomes more magical each year. ■

☆
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happy holidays and
a good start into
the new year!*

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Dear Christmas Markets: *Until We Meet Again*

By Stacy Roman

Dear Christmas Markets, Christkindlmärkte and Weihnachtsmärkte,

It's not you, it's a pandemic. While we've all held out so much hope for a holly jolly market season, alas it's not meant to be. For the past five years, I've loved everything about you. As Thanksgiving arrived, I knew it wouldn't be long before I would visit you again. However, as we embark on our final year in Europe, I'd be remiss if I didn't admit I'm heartbroken I won't be able to partake in your festive merriment one more time.

I remember my mother-in-law excitedly telling me about your splendor, but I had no idea until I went to my very first one. We decided to visit Berlin over Thanksgiving and as we wandered through the city, we came across markets on seemingly every corner and every "Platz." As we came upon Potsdamerplatz in the city center, the ethereal glow from the twinkling lights was mesmerizing. Spiced ginger and mulled wine wafted through the cold air. Rows and rows of wooden chalets were transformed into glimmering Alpine huts, office workers were crowded around the glühwein and hot chocolate vendors. The best part was the artificial snowy ice hill which seemed to magically appear in the middle of the market. How often can you say you went tubing in the heart of Berlin?

As we continued our tour in Germany, we checked off plenty of "Weihnachtsmärkte." From the small modest one we'd visit after work in Kaiserslautern to the jam-packed "Altstadt" in Frankfurt, we basked in the glow of the stary lanterns hanging from the chalets while nibbling on a freshly grilled bratwurst and "Brotchen." Although "Rot" glühwein isn't my favorite beverage of choice (hot red wine doesn't quite do it for me), white glühwein made from "Apfelwein" is definitely a winner. Our collection of mugs and glasses from your different locations soon overflowed their dedicated drawer.

When we left Germany for the U.K., we were curious to see how the holiday season would compare. While nothing quite compares to the German markets, the Winter Wonderland extravaganza in Hyde Park was pretty spectacular. My son convinced me to ride a roller coaster with five consecutive loops. Needless to say, I probably should have saved the hot chocolate for after rather than downing it right before. There was a section dedicated to the German market experience, which included all of the same trinkets and treats—minus the London-specific ornaments.

Last year, I was able to meet a good friend and visited your loveliness in Düsseldorf and Cologne. We aimlessly wandered beneath the towering cathedral and ducked into what has become my favorite market so far, the Heinzels Wintermärchen. Adorable house gnomes engaged in various shenanigans adorn the Alpine huts and everything is gnome themed. Even the souvenir glühwein mug was in the shape of a pot-bellied gnome and featured a different mischievous character. I was reminded of how special Christmas markets are and how they can totally amp up the season.

While I'm sad I won't be able to have one final romp through your magical rows of festive goodness, I'm so grateful I've had the chance to discover how special you are over the past five years. I know many others are in the same position; however, I also know you'll be back better than ever when the pandemic sorts itself out. I hope your traditions continue to invoke the same childlike wonder and seasonal spirit for years to come. Even if the assignment gods aren't kind enough to bestow another European tour upon us, I promise I'll be back to visit.

Seasonally yours,

Stacy



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*Bringing
the Magic of*
**Christmas
Markets**
Home

By Karen Bradbury

Twas the time before Christmas, and all through the land,
No one was quite sure of what they should plan.
Until the last moment, uncertainty raged –
Would winter's best pastime, Christmas markets, be staged?



While the scourge of COVID-19 may well take away our chances to gather en masse in 2020, it cannot erase all the pieces of the puzzle that slot together to create that inimitable Christmas market magic. By breaking a market down to its essential elements and recreating a reasonable approximation of each, we can capture many of the aspects which have made these holiday meet-ups so popular over the past centuries.



The backdrop

The iconic buildings that form the backdrop to Europe's greatest markets will be standing as tall and proud as ever, and will no doubt be donning their holiday garb in the form of twinkling lights, fragrant pine boughs, bulbs and baubles. Bundle up in your flashiest Christmas gear and snap pictures of friends and family in front of landmarks such as the Strasbourg Cathedral, the Marienplatz in Munich or the Old Town Square of Prague.



The gifts

The gifts and souvenirs picked up at the Christmas market range from cheap and mass produced items to high-end, handcrafted wares. Pick up the little doo-dads and craft supplies to make your own cards and decorations at a discount shop. High-end food and drink from smoked sausages to honey can be found at the weekly farmer's market, butcher's shop or an organic supermarket. Seek out handicrafts at the smaller, high-end boutiques you're apt to find on the cobbled streets of a city's Old Town. Tourist information offices often sell a range of quality gifts specific to the city they're promoting and are always ready with recommendations for shopping. For more eclectic gift giving, a trip to a charity shop such as Oxfam or the Red Cross is in order.

As artisan's markets typically attract much smaller crowds than the vast Christmas markets, look for many of these to go forward as usual. The Wiesbaden Town Hall and the Fruchthalle in Kaiserslautern are just two venues at which items such as leather goods, jewelry, felt toys, silk scarves and the like can be acquired, sometimes even from the hands of their own makers.

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The tastes

Many of the foods we know and love from Christmas markets can be purchased at other points where people tend to gather. At train stations and the surrounding areas, there's likely to be a vendor or two selling grilled meats and sausages, crepes or roasted and sugared almonds. Chocolate shops, bakeries and pop-up shops will be selling all the sweet treats and gingerbread needed to keep a sugar high going for days. Other market favorites including potato pancakes or flammkuchen can be purchased in ready-made form and heated up in the oven back home, where they won't freeze before you've had a chance to scoff them down!



The drinks

Even in the absence of the Christmas market itself, it may be possible to find a stray Glühwein stand or two. For an amped-up mulled wine experience, check with your favorite winery to see if it plans to open its doors for a weekend or two in the run-up to Christmas: one steaming mug of Winzerglühwein and you may never want to go back to that mass-produced stuff from the carton again! Many breweries concoct a special Christmas brew with hints of dried fruits and spices, and those with restaurants attached will serve traditional Christmas fare with duck, goose or carp served with all the trimmings on the menu. Wineries and breweries are also great places to pick up bottles for gift-giving. If you're feeling ambitious enough, make your own glühwein!

Skating rinks

A turn on the ice can be a fun part of any market visit. Look for some outdoor rinks to be up and running, albeit with limitations on the number of skaters on the rink at any given time. Rinks are oftentimes set up a bit removed from city centers, so if skating's your thing, take the time to search one out.



Nativity scenes

In the absence of prettily decorated chalets, this year, venture inside churches and cathedrals to take in the amazing sight of hand-carved crèches depicting the birth of Jesus in the manger. Bamberg, for example, boasts of dozens of such scenes which can be discovered by means of a walk along its so-called Nativity Trail. The sumptuous interiors of these churches you might not otherwise have chosen to visit are sure to take your breath away!

Holiday-themed outings

There may be no market, but that doesn't necessarily mean all other holiday fun is off the table. Amusement parks may be up and running, riverboats may be sailing the Rhine and Mosel, and steam trains might be chugging along scenic, snow-dappled valleys. Ethnographical and open-air museums often offer a weekend or two depicting Christmas celebrations of bygone eras.

Swap town for country

This year, in lieu of heading to a big city, make way instead to the glorious countryside. The Alps, Black Forest or Vosges mountain range to the west of France's Alsace region are just a few places blessed with hills perfect for torch-lit hikes or horse-drawn carriage rides and idyllic villages straight out of a Christmas card.

The holiday season may look much different this year, but its message of hope, renewal and good will toward men is hardly diminished by the absence of markets and the social events we know and love. And when they're back and the world is healthy once again, we're sure to cherish them all the more. ■



Make Your Own *Glühwein*

Be merry during this festive season.

Impress your friends and family with this simple recipe which comes courtesy of the German Wine Institute:

Ingredients

- 1 liter locally produced red wine (there's no need to go for the top shelf stuff)
- Sugar, preferably in candied form (Kandis)
- 1 orange
- 1 lemon
- 4 cloves
- 1 stick cinnamon

- 1** Sweeten the wine to your own taste with sugar; honey could also be used. The sweeter the base wine, the less sweetener you'll wish to use.
- 2** Add slices of the lemon and orange, using fruits with peels that haven't been coated with pesticides or preservatives, along with the rest of the spices. Adding slices of apples will further refine the taste. To make a white mulled wine, replace the cloves with star anise.
- 3** Heat the liquid over medium heat, being sure not to bring it to a boil. Cooking with excess heat makes the delicate fruit aromas disappear and creates a bitter taste.
- 4** Leave the wine to steep at a low temperature for a few hours.
- 5** Remove the spices with a sieve and re-warm before serving, but don't serve it overly hot.

For more glühwein tips, see www.germanwines.de/knowledge/wine-more/mulled-wine/. ■

guten appetit

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With their fiddly little windows opening up to reveal a treat for each December day in the run-up to Christmas, Advent calendars are a gift that keeps on giving, at least for 24 days.



German Christmas gifts: *Advent Calendars*

By: Karen Bradbury

In a country like Germany, where so many traditions and festivals trace back centuries, it may surprise you to learn the Advent calendar tradition is, relatively speaking, not all that old. According to the website of Advent calendar pioneer Richard-Sellmer-Verlag, its origins trace back to the 19th century, when families in Protestant areas would erase a chalk-drawn line for every day in December leading up until Christmas Eve. The oldest known calendar as such dates back to 1851. A Christian bookshop in Hamburg published a Christmas clock forerunner in 1902, and in 1904, the "Neues Tagblatt Stuttgart" newspaper offered an Advent calendar insert as a gift for their readers.

Fast-forward to the post World War II period, and we can find a U.S. military connection to the calendars. The aforementioned Richard-Sellmer-Verlag, a publishing house in Stuttgart, received a permit for the printing of an Advent calendar from the U.S. occupying forces in December of 1945. The following year, Sellmer brought his calendar to a trade fair in Frankfurt in hopes of securing American buyers. Soldiers returning to the U.S. from Germany popularized them in their homeland, and after a photo of President Dwight D. Eisenhower's grandchildren with an Advent calendar appeared in Newsweek in December of 1953, demand

for the calendars soared. For more on the publishing company's relationship with its U.S. customers, see www.sellmer-verlag.de/about-us.

A welcome twist on tradition occurred in the late 1950s, when the first calendars with chocolate candies were produced.

Chocolate Advent calendars appear in German supermarkets, drug stores and specialty shops across all price points, the cheapest of which go for a mere two or three euros—our item of choice to kick off this list of fabulous stocking stuffers that say Germany ringing up at ten euros or less.

As you've no doubt noticed, today's Advent calendars open up to reveal much more than chocolate. Department stores sell them laden with cosmetics and perfumes. A drugstore version offers tea lovers the chance to sample a new kind of tea each day. Beer lovers would no doubt appreciate finding the "KALEA Bier Adventskalender" next to their stockings. You don't even need to be human to enjoy one, as several versions for dogs are on the market too.

Another reason to rush out and buy an Advent calendar this very day? Once December arrives, unsold articles are often marked down to sell fast. ■

TRAVEL TIP:

Several German cities use the pretty facades of their buildings to create gigantic Advent calendar-inspired displays. At a set time each day, a new window is opened to reveal a new tableau. The one in Gengenbach, a charming village in the Black Forest, is widely considered the world's largest, and Quedlinberg is home to what's termed the biggest "living calendar."

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Christmas Craft for Kids

Folding your letter to Santa

By Sherece Spain



As a kid, it was always such a joy to write my letter to Santa each year. I'd flip through the JCPenney toy catalog to create an epic wish list of Barbies (I realize I totally dated myself with this admission). I was convinced that if I made my letters stand out, Santa would remember mine more than any other kids! Now I'm passing the tradition along to my kiddos (sans an actual printed catalog) and we wanted to share it with you. Here's how you can fold your letter of dreams into an origami-style envelope:

What you'll need:

- 8 ½" x 11" sheet of paper
- Pen, pencil or marker
- Decorative flare
- stickers, glitter, etc.



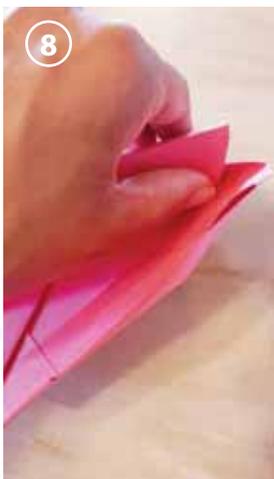


Instructions:

1. Fold your paper in half long- and short-ways.
2. Fold the left and right bottom corners in so the paper edge meets the long-ways crease.
3. With corners still folded in, fold in the left and right sides so they meet in the center crease.



PHOTOS BY SHEREECE SPAIN



4. Fold the bottom edge (the shorter edge) up so the angles and corners meet.
5. Fold that same edge up toward the top stopping about an inch below the edge.
6. Fold the top edge down.
7. Open up all the folds made in Steps 4-6 and turn the letter 180 degrees.
8. Tuck your one inch fold in to the angled creases on the left and right. (Tip: This step will take a little help from Mom or Dad.)
9. Fold down the top edge
10. Use your flare to decorate the envelope however you choose!

Now your letter is ready to go!

4

Christmas Movies **TO BINGE WATCH**

By Elizabeth Jones

Grab a warm cup of hot cocoa, a reindeer-shaped, sugar cookie-or two-and snuggle up in a cozy blanket on the couch. It's time for some Christmas movie magic! While there are many wonderful movies out there that will get you in the Christmas Spirit, here are the four that are near and dear to my heart.



1

“BUDDY
THE ELF,
WHAT’S YOUR
FAVORITE
COLOR?”

“Elf”

“Buddy the Elf, what’s your favorite color?”

“You’re not Santa, you smell like beef and cheese!”

Any of these quotes sound familiar? They should, and if they don’t, you’re missing out on the, best Christmas movie out there! “Elf” brings you Christmas joy, positivity and lots of laughter. It’s corny, but also cute and it’s ridiculous, but also hilarious. Buddy the Elf discovers he was mistakenly delivered to the North Pole as a child and raised amongst Santa’s elves. With the (obvious) realization that he doesn’t fit in, Buddy sets off to New York City—decked out in elf attire—to search for his real father, who may or may not want anything to do with his child-like, adult son. Will Ferrell does a phenomenal job bringing laughter and holiday cheer as Buddy the Elf.

2

“KEEP THE
CHANGE,
YA FILTHY
ANIMAL.”

“Home Alone”

In my opinion, the original Home Alone was hands down the greatest movie of the quintet of Home Alone movies. In the first movie, Kevin McCallister misbehaves the night before a family Christmas trip to Paris. His punishment is to sleep in the attic, where he wishes he would have no family. His family leaves for their trip but forgets Kevin is in the attic, and next thing you know, Kevin believes his wish came true. However, it’s not long before his dream is crushed by two crooks with bad intentions. This popular holiday movie touches hearts by highlighting the importance of family, despite how mad they make you, and that no matter the circumstances, nobody wants to be alone for the holidays.

3

“YOU’LL
SHOOT YOUR
EYE OUT KID!”

“A Christmas Story”

This beloved holiday movie is an oldie, but a goodie! Following the adventures of young, nine-year-old Ralphie Parker as he spends his time wishing for his dream Christmas gift. His mother, school teacher and a man dressed as Santa Claus all deny him of this gift with the warning, “you’ll shoot your eye out kid!” Ralphie barely makes it to Christmas Day with the suspense of whether or not he will get this gift along with the stress of dodging a bully and dealing with his grumpy father. Whether you’ve seen this 1983 holiday classic or not, it’s a must-watch during the Christmas season!

4

“The Grinch”

Know someone who needs to get in the Christmas spirit? Make them watch the Grinch with you and watch the magic unfold. The mean, green Grinch and his dog sidekick, Max, devise an evil plan to ruin Christmas for the endearing people of Whoville. However, leave it to sweet Cindy Lou Who of Whoville to try and warm the Grinch’s cold heart and kick-start his Christmas Spirit. This classic Dr. Seuss tale can make any grump happy!

“MAYBE CHRISTMAS DOESN’T
COME FROM A STORE.
MAYBE CHRISTMAS PERHAPS
MEANS A LITTLE BIT MORE.”

Regardless of what Christmas movies you find yourself watching this year, just ensure you’ll have a jolly, good time – and lots of Christmas-themed snacks! Merry Christmas and to all a good movie night!



FIVE REASONS TO STAY HOME

By Stacy Roman

FOR THE HOLIDAYS

AFTER SEEMINGLY ENDLESS WEEKS SPENT INSIDE YOUR HOUSE DURING ALL THESE MONTHS, THE OVERWHELMING URGE TO GET OUT IS STRONG.

You can probably count the number of floor tiles between your living room and kitchen, and even with holiday decorations sprucing up the all-too-familiar walls, this year is the year to travel for the holidays. However, when you factor in canceled Christmas markets, overpriced airline tickets and the hassle of traveling, staying home for the winter vacation may not be such a bad idea.

1 NO JET LAG.

Since we hadn't spent Christmas with family in five years, we decided to head back to California last year for two weeks. Luckily, we combined it with a college fact-finding mission for my now-high school senior but let me tell you ... the jet lag is real. By the time we finally adjusted to a somewhat normal schedule, it was time to fly back to Europe. And then the vicious hour adjustment cycle began all over again just in time for both of the kids to start school again. By staying put, you completely avoid the jet lag hassle.



2 NO CROWDS TO CONTEND WITH.

With the virus pandemic still fresh in our minds, one of the last places you want to be is in the middle of a crowd. And traveling during the holidays pretty much guarantees plenty of crowds, both indoor (think shopping malls) and outdoor. Also, if you're thinking of jet-setting to warmer climes, airport crowds can take the jolly out of the holiday.

continued on page 30

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3 YOU'RE NOT LIVING OUT OF A SUITCASE.

Unless you've just arrived or are getting ready to move, odds are pretty high you're not living out of a suitcase. However, traveling during the holidays means packing ... lots and lots of packing. Especially if you're gifting (or bringing back) souvenirs or visiting places with contrasting weather patterns and need multiple layers. The 50-pound limit sneaks up on you quickly and shipping boxes back can add up rather quickly. Remaining at home means the only weight limit you need to worry about is how much home-made fudge you can safely consume in one sitting.



4 MAKE NEW TRADITIONS.

Once we began celebrating Thanksgiving and Christmas with just the four of us, we began incorporating new traditions into some of the ones we carried with us from childhood. My kids know they get to open two presents on Christmas Eve—a set of goofy pajamas and something completely random. One year it was a bag of pretzels, the next it was a wrench. Another fun tradition we started was coming up with a nontraditional Christmas dinner. Who needs goose when you can make super cheesy nachos rivaling Taco Bell or Chili's? Staying close to home helps us create more memories and traditions.

5 YOU CAN RELAX AND ENJOY THE SEASON.

Not traveling means you have more time to explore the area around you and discover awesome local customs and holiday traditions. You can decorate your house without rushing and stay in your pajamas all day if you want. Since we've now spent more holidays staying home, I love the unhurried pace it takes. The stress level is a lot less and it feels much more enjoyable.



With all of the craziness happening, it's completely understandable to want to escape your house and get away from it all. I absolutely love traveling and admit Thanksgiving is one of my favorite times to go. This year, however, I plan on sticking closer to home for both of the major holidays this year. No crowds to fight with, decking the halls with the season's splendor, eating pie for breakfast and staying in my sweats? Sign me up. ■

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By Kristi Adams and Shereece Spain

Mouthwatering *Christmas Cookie* Recipes

Nothing ushers in the holiday season like baking Christmas cookies. For some families, this is a tradition handed down throughout the generations. For some, it's simply a love of baking and sharing desserts. For others, it's a new way to make memories with loved ones.

Whether you're an expert baker, or a novice that's just peeled the sticker off a brand new cookie sheet—we've got eight Christmas cookie recipes you and your family will love.



Germany and Austria:
Raspberry-Almond Linzer Cookie

This one is going to take you a bit, but they're worth it! The cookie is similar to a shortbread but with a raspberry almond filling in the center.

Italy: Bocconotti

More like a pastry than a cookie, they're filled with chocolate, jam and nuts. If you need something fast, these are perfect. They only take approximately one hour.

Belgium: Speculaas Spice Cookies

A spiced cookie with a holiday inspired imprinted picture.

Switzerland: Zimtsterne

Literally translated, it means cinnamon star. There's no flour, so you can actually cut out a few carbs this season!

Czech Republic:
Black-and-White Cookie
(or Linecke Testo Dvoubarevne)

Erase the thought of the black and white cookie you would buy from the bakery in New York City. These vanilla and chocolate cookies are crafted into very playful spiral and checkerboard patterns. You can even get creative and make your own designs.

Croatia: Licitars

These delicious gingerbread-like cookies look more like candied hearts. You probably wouldn't know they were cookies at first glance. They're almost so pretty that you don't want to eat them... Almost! They will require some time and effort, especially when it comes to the decorating. However, they will be much appreciated.

Poland: Almond Cookies

A carb friendly recipe! There is no flour in the recipe. This means you can eat more of something else, right? This is also another quick and easy recipe. You'll have cookies ready in no time.

While you're baking, turn up some holiday tunes to bring the spirit of the holidays to life even more in your home. You can use this list of European Christmas songs or any number of other playlists to enhance your Christmas spirit. I hope these recipes and the music adds a wonderful new experience to your Christmas in Europe. ■





Non-Traditional Holiday Recipes

BY STRIPES STAFF

Break out of tradition and follow these recipes for a different holiday dish to bring to the table.





Homemade Italian-Inspired Lasagne

By Karen Bradbury

My husband is a shift worker, which means that more often than not, he can be found hard at work on Christmas day itself. But that doesn't stop us from celebrating the festive season. We've adapted to his schedule by inviting our friends to come by any time before or after December 25. Rather than serving a sit-down dinner, we like to keep a large tray of homemade lasagna at the ready. When guests show up, there's nothing easier than reheating this universally-loved dish, which seems to taste even better when warmed up the next day anyway. We prefer the European version of lasagna, which relies on Béchamel sauce instead of the ricotta filling favored by American cooks.

*Start to finish: 1 hour 10 minutes
(30 minutes active)*

*Servings: 8 - 10, depending on portion size
1 400 gram / 14 ounce jar spaghetti sauce (Pasta Sauce)*

1 400 gram / 14 ounce can chopped tomatoes (gehackte Tomaten)

2 tablespoons mixed Italian spices

500 grams / 1.1 pounds freshly ground beef or beef-pork combination

1 large white onion

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 500 gram / 18 ounce box of lasagne noodles (Lasagne Platten), the type that need not be boiled before use

Two 250 milliliter / 8.5 fluid ounce packages of Béchamel sauce, sold in Tetrapacks

1 200 gram / 7 ounce package grated Mozzarella cheese (Mozzarella gerieben)

Preheat oven to 190 C / 375 F.

In a large saucepan, combine spaghetti sauce and chopped tomatoes. Season with Italian spices and allow to simmer on the stove over low heat.

Dice the onion and sautee it in olive oil that's been preheated in a frying pan.

Once the onion has browned, add the ground meat and fry until it is cooked through.

Add the meat to the spaghetti sauce / chopped tomatoes, allowing the mixture to gently simmer as you prep the remainder of the ingredients.

Into a deep sided, approximately 9 inch x 13 inch non-stick pan, pour exactly one third of your meat sauce.

Cover sauce with the noodle plates, breaking them up to fit in the pan as necessary.

Pour contents of one package of Béchamel sauce over the lasagna noodles.

Cover with another layer of noodles, the next one-third portion of the meat sauce, the second box of Béchamel sauce and so on. The top layer should be one of the meaty tomato sauce.

Cover with aluminum foil and bake for half an hour.

Remove from oven and sprinkle top with the grated Mozzarella. Return to oven and bake just long enough for the cheese to turn golden and slightly crispy.

Allow the lasagna to stand for several minutes before cutting into it; otherwise, it will be too runny.

We love this lasagna as it remains moist with subsequent reheatings. We hope you enjoy it as much as we do!

continued on page 36

Simple Nachos

By Stacy Roman

Tiring of turkey and, quite frankly, a bit intimidated to try my hand at prime rib, many years ago my husband and I decided to go the non-traditional route for Christmas. We've done lasagna, pulled pork and even chicken and waffles one year. However, the perennial favorite with the teens and my husband are nachos — beefy, crunchy, rubber cheesy goodness. You can customize however you prefer and try different variations with whatever ingredients you have on hand.

Start to finish: 20 minutes

Servings: Approximately 4

1 16-ounce block of Velveeta, cubed

1 14-ounce can Rotel, undrained (I use Original, but you can spice it up with Hot or tone it down with Mild)

1-pound ground beef (you can use other ground meat, or omit entirely)

1 packet taco seasoning (I prefer the low sodium, or make my own)

1 large bag of tortilla chips (Tostito's Cantina Style is our go-to chip)

In a large skillet, cook ground beef over medium-high heat until done. Drain grease and return to pan. Add taco seasoning and cook according to directions on packet.

Using a medium saucepan, combine Velveeta cubes and Rotel. Stir over low heat until melted and well combined.

Divide chips into individual bowls, top with taco meat and pour desired amount of cheese mixture over chips and meat. Garnish with your favorite toppings, such as sour cream, guacamole, jalapeños, extra tomatoes, olives, Tapatio sauce, etc.

Note: These are also great using leftover grilled chicken, pulled pork (minus the BBQ sauce) and steak. You can also add refried or black beans instead.





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Norway's Holiday Lefse

By Anna Leigh Bagiackas

My mom never wore white shirts except for one day a year. Growing up, this special Friday in early December would be devoted to lefse making, and with flour covering the kitchen, the white shirt was necessary. Lefse is a thin, potato flatbread from Norway and is often made for Christmastime. The lefse-making process always went more smoothly when there were two people, so my part-Norwegian mom would team up with a friend's part-Norwegian mom, one of them the designated roller and the other the cooker and flipper. Having access to a lefse griddle, rolling pin and stick makes the process smoother, but it is not necessary. The most common way to flavor lefse in Norway is a smearing of butter, but if you want to go very traditional, grab the lutefisk too! You can also go the sweet route with a sprinkling of sugar and cinnamon or lathered with your favorite jam or chocolate-hazelnut spread.

Start to finish: Approximately 15 hours, with potatoes sitting overnight

Serves: 6-8, makes about 25 sheets

5 pounds of Idaho russet potatoes, peeled

1/2 cup butter

1/2 cup heavy cream

2 tablespoons sugar

1 teaspoon salt

3 to 4 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for rolling

To cook the potatoes, place them in a saucepan and add enough water to cover generously and salt the water. Cover and cook at a slow simmer over medium heat until the potatoes are tender when poked with a fork, about 40 minutes. Drain and push the potatoes through a ricer and into a bowl.

Stir together hot riced potatoes, butter, cream, sugar and salt. Cover and refrigerate overnight.

The next day, cut flour into potato mixture in a large bowl with a pastry blender until combined. Knead the flour in with your hands, if necessary. Shape the dough into a long roll, approximately 3-inches wide in diameter. Cover with plastic wrap and keep cool until ready to roll.

Heat lefse griddle to 500°F (260°C).

On floured, cloth-covered surface, roll 1/3-cup portions of dough very thin with floured lefse rolling pin. Using wooden lefse stick or thin spatula, transfer carefully to hot griddle. Cook 1 to 2 minutes per side, or until light brown spots appear on the bottom. Remove from griddle; let cool on brown paper or dishtowels.

Fold into quarters. Store refrigerated in plastic bags or freeze until ready to use. ■

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