

Christmas Traditions in Latin America & the Caribbean

CLACS Resource Packet for Educators

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The European colonizers brought Christmas to the present day Latin American and Caribbean countries. Part of the mission, especially of the Spanish colonizers, was to spread Christianity. Indigenous people were forced to convert or transform their indigenous traditions by incorporating Christian traditions. In 2020, about 85% of the region's population identify as Christian. Today, many traditions are similar or shared throughout the region.

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Christmas tree in Galerías Pacifico shopping center in Buenos Aires.

Argentina is a country with strong Roman Catholic traditions, so Christmas is an important holiday. Since it occurs in the middle of the Southern Hemisphere's summer, celebrations are often held outside and fireworks are launched late at night on Christmas Eve.

Festivities typically begin with the Day of Immaculate Conception on December 8th. This is often when decorations will go up in homes and public spaces. Artificial trees are common, and most cities will have a large tree decorated in a public square.

The largest Christmas celebrations take place on Christmas Eve, with many people staying up late into the night to watch fireworks, attend midnight mass services, or go to parties. Christmas day is more laid back, reserved for small family gatherings or attending mass. Gift giving is not as common as in the US, and is usually reserved for between close friends and family. Papá Noel (Father Christmas) and El Niño Dios (the Baby Jesus) may leave presents for children on Christmas Eve as well. The holiday season continues until Kings Day on January 6th, when children may also receive small gifts to honor the Three Kings.

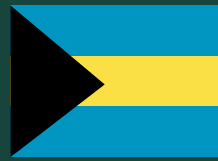


Panettone, or Pan Dulce is a common Christmas dessert

Links to learn more:

- [Christmas in Argentina](#)
- [World Holiday Traditions: Argentina](#)
- [How Argentina Celebrates Christmas](#)
- [Christmas Tradition in Argentina](#)





The highlight of Christmas celebrations in the Bahamas is the Junkanoo parades. This vibrant carnival begins around 2 AM on Christmas night and continues through Boxing Day. Similar to Carnival in Brazil, Junkanoo features vibrant costumes, dancing, and music. The Junkanoo Parade makes a loop along the oldest and busiest streets in Nassau, the capital of the Bahamas. Teams of dancers will compete for awards such as best free dance, best banner, and best choreography. Junkanoo is an important tradition in the Bahamas, and dancers and musicians take great pride in performing.

Many people will attend church services on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Gift-giving is also an important part of Christmas traditions in the Bahamas. Children will hope for presents from Father Christmas and friends and families will exchange gifts.

Traditional foods for Christmas in the Bahamas include a savory chicken souse soup and Bahamian Johnny Cake for Christmas morning. Christmas dinner may include a with turkey and sides. However, Bahamian dinner also features a glazed ham with pineapple and maraschino cherries.



Above: Junkanoo performers in the Bahamas.

Below: pineapple glazed ham common in Bahamas Christmas dinner.



Links to learn more:

- [Christmas traditions in the Bahamas](#)
- [Christmas around the world : Bahamas](#)
- [Bahamas Holiday Traditions](#)





Christmas in Barbados bears many similarities to other Caribbean countries, with an emphasis on family gatherings and attending church mass. Many people will attend either the Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve or Christmas morning mass. Christmas day itself is usually spent with immediate family while the weeks leading up to it are filled with house parties with family, friends, and neighbors.

A major tradition of Christmas in Barbados is to visit Queen's Park in the capital city of Bridgetown. People will dress up in their finest clothes to socialize with friends and family and enjoy music.



Queen's Park at Christmastime.

Christmas lights and decorations are common throughout Barbados and many roundabouts around Bridgetown will have themed displays in the center of the traffic circle. Similar to the US, people will drive around just to see the festive lights.

For Christmas dinner, great cake, Jug Jug, and baked ham are three staples. Great cake is made with various dried fruits, spices, and liquor. Jug Jug has Scottish influence and is made from peas, guinea corn flour, herbs and salt meat. Baked ham is similar to the glazed ham common in the Bahamas and is often basted with pineapple.



Jug Jug, a popular Christmas dish in Barbados.

Links to learn more:

- [Christmas in Barbados](#)
- [Barbados Christmas Traditions](#)





Like many other Latin American countries, religion is an important aspect of Christmas celebrations. Many Belizians will attend Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. However, Belize is a multicultural country and traditions from many different groups of people are visible in celebrations across the country.

Links to learn more:

- [Holiday Traditions in Belize](#)
- [Christmas traditions in Belize](#)
- [Celebrating Christmas in Belize](#)
- [Belizean Christmas Traditions](#)
- [Christmas in Belize](#)

The Bram is a Creole tradition where a parade of singers and dancers travels from house to house where they are offered food and drinks. Common foods for a Belizian Christmas dinner include both turkey and ham, as well as rice and beans, potato salad, and pound cake for desert.



Los Posadas is another procession-like tradition typically celebrated by the Catholic Mestizo culture in Belize. On each of the nine nights leading up to Christmas, a procession carries religious statues to seek shelter at designated houses in town, commemorating Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem.

Belize has a large Maya population as well and the Mayan Deer Dance is an important winter solstice tradition. The dance is believed to have originated as a ritual for hunting and celebrates the changing seasons and respect for the natural world. A similar tradition is the Charikanari (Two Foot Cow) dance celebrated by the Garifuna culture. These are just a few examples of the many different Christmas traditions found across Belize.

Performers for the Mayan Deer Dance (top) and Garifuna Two Foot Cow Dance (bottom).





Most of Bolivia's population is Catholic, so Christmas is a very important religious holiday in the country. Many people will attend the Misa de Gallo, or Mass of the Rooster at midnight on Christmas Eve. After this, families typically eat the main Christmas meal, traditionally including a stew called picana. This hearty meal is made with chicken, beef, and pork, and served with corn and potatoes.

It is also customary across Bolivia to set off fireworks exactly at midnight on Christmas Eve. Thousands of families will light fireworks, and it often lasts for up to an hour, resembling New Year's Eve in the US.

Gift giving on Christmas is uncommon in Bolivia, but families may exchange gifts on Epiphany instead to commemorate the Wise Men bringing gifts for baby Jesus. In addition, Bolivian workers receive El Aguinaldo which is a legally required bonus during the month of December that can be equal to double or triple their usual salary. Employers are required to give their workers a bonus to cover holiday expenses and celebrate the festive season. Many will also give their employees a Canastón de fin de Año, or end of the year basket with groceries, sparkling cider and other holiday treats.

An example of a Canastón an employee might receive.



Links to learn more:

- [Christmas in Bolivia](#)
- [Holiday Traditions of Bolivia](#)
- [Bolivia Culture](#)
- [Bolivian Christmas Foods](#)





Much of Brazil's Christmas traditions come from when it was a colony of Portugal. Today, there is a wide variety of cultural groups in Brazil who each have their own traditions.

As with many other Latin American countries, the Midnight Mass or Misa de Gallo is an important event for the Catholic population. Decorating a presepio, or nativity scene is also a beloved tradition. These displays can be found in homes, churches, and storefronts across the country. Many major cities will also have an enormous Christmas tree with lights and ornaments.

Children will leave their shoes by the door or under the Christmas tree for Papai Noel to leave small gifts in. They may also hang a stocking by the window in exchange for a present. Among adults the tradition of

Amigo Oculto, or Secret Santa, is more common. Friends, families, or coworkers will exchange small gifts throughout December using pretend names (apelidos), finally revealing their identities at the end.

Similar to Bolivia, Brazilian workers often receive a 13th Salary at the end of the year, so they make double their usual salary in December. This is a common practice meant to boost the economy around the holidays.



Iconic floating Christmas tree in Rio de Janeiro.

Links to learn more:

- [Christmas in Brazil](#)
- [Holiday Traditions of Brazil](#)
- [Exploring Brazil's Christmas Traditions](#)



Christmas in the Caribbean is a time of festivity and spending time with others through a blend of Christian customs and local customs including Jonkonnu dancers, ghost stories, European Christmas carols, parang, calypso and reggae.

A typical Christmas Day throughout most islands in the Caribbean starts with mass early in the morning. Many people paint a fresh coat on their house, thoroughly clean it and acquire new furniture or appliances to prepare for guests. Homes are decorated with tropical flowers, Christmas trees and greeting cards.

Most of the day involves spending time with family and friends. Christmas songs fill the air, whether that be in Spanish, Hindi, Patois, or English. Later in the evening, people gather to share folk tales about the fearsome duppies (ghosts) in Jamaica and John Bull in Antigua.

Festive foods are prepared. Most Caribbean islands feature a main meat such as ham, turkey, goat or chicken. Cake is the primary dessert. The selection of cakes ranges from rich dark fruit cake to the lighter brown fruit cake. Both of these are laced with rum or wine.



See Also:

- [Bahamas](#)
- [Barbados](#)
- [Cuba](#)
- [Dominican Republic](#)
- [Haiti](#)
- [Jamaica](#)
- [Puerto Rico](#)
- [Trinidad & Tobago](#)



The Christmas season in Central America is a time primarily for family, friends, feasts, religion, and celebration. In this region, the holiday is blended with different cultures, all influencing one another. It brings together Indigenous, African, and European elements that form a distinctive blend of cultural practices that display great diversity across nations. This blend consists of folklore, spiritual practices, music, and dance.

Central America consists of numerous countries that all share very similar Christmas traditions throughout the region.

The type and amount of cuisine that is eaten during this time is also a large cornerstone of this holiday in Central America. Feasts, often on Christmas Eve, are family-focused and typically include both Spanish and Indigenous culinary traditions.

Lastly, the focus on dance celebrations and music during this festive time is a large part of what makes Christmas in Central America so special.

Link to learn more:

- [Central America Holiday Traditions](#)

See Also:

- [Costa Rica](#)
- [Honduras](#)
- [Belize](#)
- [Nicaragua](#)
- [El Salvador](#)
- [Panama](#)
- [Guatemala](#)





Given Chile's location in the southern hemisphere, Christmas occurs in summer which allows for family celebrations of beach barbecues. Outdoor festivals include music and dancing. The holiday season is called Pascua, which comes from the Latin Pascha (meaning Easter), symbolizing renewal and hope. Holiday decorations include Christmas trees, wreaths, garlands, colored lights, nativity scenes, and in some regions, prayer ladders ascending to Heaven.



Pan de Pascua

Since Chile is a predominantly Catholic country, faith plays a strong role in Christmas. Many people observe Advent and the Novena, the nine days of church services and prayer leading up to Christmas. During this time, families often attend Misa de Gallo (Midnight Mass) on Christmas Eve, which can last until the early morning.

Santa Claus is known as Viejito Pascuero, Little Old Man of Christmas or Papa Noel. Children may take a paseo de Navidad where they sing carols and walk their neighborhoods looking for Viejito Pascuero. Children may leave treats such as pan de Pascua, a rich, spiced fruit cake, and Cola de Mono, or Monkey's Tail which is similar to eggnog.

Other traditional Christmas foods consist of cazuela de ave, a chicken and vegetable stew, asado (barbecue), and ensalada a la Chilena, a tomato and onion salad.



Links to learn more:

- [Christmas in Chile](#)
- [Holiday Traditions of Chile](#)
- [Christmas Traditions in Chile](#)
- [Magic of Christmas in Chile](#)
- [Viajar Chile](#)





Christmas time in Colombia is warm and tropical and blends faith, family and festivities. With deep Catholic traditions, Colombians celebrate with light displays, nativity scenes, prayers, fireworks, food, and music throughout the holiday season beginning in December and ending in early January.



On December 1st, the traditions begin with Alborada, a fireworks display that lights up the city as excitement builds for the December celebrations. On Día de las Velitas (Day of the Little Candles), for the Immaculate Conception on December 7th, families and neighbors line streets, windows, and balconies with candles and lanterns.

Novena de Aguinaldos marks Mary and Joseph's journey and search for shelter in Bethlehem. For nine nights, a different host welcomes family and friends with songs, snacks, and prayers honoring the journey to Jesus's birth.

El Niño Jesus (Baby Jesus), brings gifts on Christmas Eve, Nochebuena, after the main meal and midnight mass Misa de Gallo. Traditional Christmas foods range from Natilla, a sweet custard-like dessert flavored with cinnamon and panela, buñuelos, a fried cheese dough ball, to lechona, roast pork stuffed with peas and rice. The Christmas season ends with Día de los Reyes Magos, the Three Kings Day on January 6th when children may receive small gifts or treats.

Links to learn more:

- [Christmas in Colombia](#)
- [Christmas & New Years Traditions](#)
- [Colombian Christmas Traditions](#)
- [11 Christmas Customs](#)





The Festival de la Luz, “Festival of Lights” on the 2nd Saturday of December in San Jose, the capital, kicks off the season with a nighttime parade with illuminated floats, marching bands, stilt walkers, fireworks, and live music. A few weeks later in San Jose’s Plaza de la Cultura is El Avenidazo with concerts, plays, games, and street shows.



Festival de la Luz in Costa Rica

Las Posadas is celebrated from December 16th- 24th. Groups reenact Mary and Joseph’s search for shelter, visiting neighbors’ homes while singing carols. Hosts will welcome them inside for traditional foods and drinks. Traditional Christmas foods include tamales, pierna de cerdo, carne asada, queso Navideño, rompopo, and grapes. For Christmas Eve, La Nochebuena, families share a large dinner, exchange gifts, and attend Midnight Mass, which can last until past midnight. Gifts are delivered by either El Niño Dios (Baby Jesus) or Colacho (Santa Claus). Since Costa Rica is located near the equator, on Christmas day, many families will go to the beach or countryside to enjoy the warm weather.



On December 26th is El Tope, a parade in Palmares featuring horse riders from across the country. The Christmas season ends on February 2nd, when families gather to pray to Baby Jesus before taking down their nativity scenes.

Links to learn more:

- [Christmas in Costa Rica](#)
- [Christmas Traditions in Costa Rica](#)
- [Christmas Festivities in Costa Rica](#)





Cuba's leader, Fidel Castro, banned religious celebrations, including Christmas in 1969. With the visit of Pope John Paul II in 1998, Christmas became a public holiday again.



A Cuban Christmas dinner

While some families may decorate a tree, nativity scenes are more common. On Nochebuena or Christmas Eve, families gather for a main meal which traditionally includes roast pork, fried plantains, rice with black beans (moros y cristianos), yuca with mojo (yuca and garlic) along with a dessert of arroz con leche or rice pudding and buñuelos which are fried balls of dough.

After dinner, many will attend midnight mass. In Remedios, Nochebuena includes Las Parrandas which involves loud parties and parades. According to one story, in the 1820s, a priest encouraged children to make a lot of noise so people would not fall asleep before going to mass.

Family and music are integral for Christmas celebrations. Spanish stringed instruments and African idiophones offer upbeat rhythms for dancing. Danzón, the official dance of Cuba, is slower with more formal postures than salsa and evolved from European colonists.

Presents are exchanged on January 6th, Epiphany, when Los Tres Reyes brought gifts to Baby Jesus.

Links to learn more:

- [Christmas in Cuba](#)
- [Vibrant Christmas Traditions in Cuba](#)
- [Cuban Christmas History](#)

Las Parrandas celebrations in Remedios.





Since there are no pine trees in the Dominican Republic, people make Charamicos, a slang word for dry tree branch. Charamicos are handmade straw and wood decorations shaped to be trees, stars, angels and animals. For Christmas, they may be painted white for snow or in bright colors. Homes and town plazas may have a nativity scene. Tall poinsettia plants blossom.



A Charamicos display

Sharing time with friends and family is a priority over material giftgiving. In rural areas, friends and family may gather around a bonfire to share jengibre, a type of ginger tea with cinnamon. The main meal is on Christmas Eve, Nochebuena, and usually includes roasted pork, rice and beans, Pasteles en Hoja which are made with ripe plantains and meat. Apples, grapes, hazelnuts, cheese, bread and fruit bread are usually served after the meal. After the meal, people may go to midnight mass and set off fireworks.



Pasteles en Hoja

El recalentao are the leftovers eaten on Christmas Day, during which children may open presents from Santacló. Some families may hold off on gift giving until Epiphany when the Three Kings arrive. Angelitos, little angels, is the Dominican Republic's version of Secret Santa.

Links to learn more:

- [Christmas in the Dominican Republic](#)
- [Dominican Republic Christmas Traditions](#)
- [Dominican Christmas Traditions](#)
- [Dominican Republic Christmas](#)

Prior to the new year, many families will deep clean their homes to scrub out the old and start fresh.





As with other countries of the region, nativity scenes known as pesebres or nacimientos adorn homes and public spaces. Novenas occur the nine nights prior to Christmas when family and friends gather to pray for loved ones and sing villancicos, or Christmas carols. Each night represents a month of Mary's pregnancy. Some parts of the country will have a ribbon weaving pole and dance as a way to honor Mary.

During El pase del niño viajero a figure of Baby Jesus is carried through the streets accompanied by singing, dancing, decorated floats and children dressed as Biblical figures.

On Christmas Eve, Nochebuena, families gather for festive foods including roast turkey, ham, chicken or guinea pig. Accompanying that is arroz navideño, a yellow rice with ham, almonds, raisins, olives, peanuts, cheese, or sweetcorn. Pan de pascua, similar to a panettone, serves as dessert. Many will attend midnight mass, Misa de Gallo.

Children may set out old shoes by their beds hoping Papa Noel will bring a new pair and perhaps other gifts. Amigos secretos resembles the Secret Santa activity in the US.

Links to learn more:

- [Christmas Around the World - Ecuador](#)
- [Guide to Christmas in Ecuador](#)
- [Christmas Traditions in Ecuador](#)

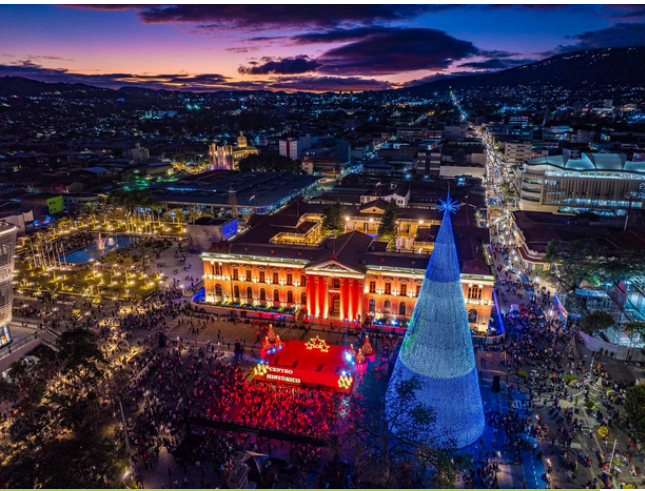


Singing and dancing during an Ecuadoran Christmas celebration



As the year end approaches, effigies representing the past year are stuffed with straw and fireworks to burn at midnight for a fresh start in the new year.





Christmas lights in El Salvador

Christmas El Salvador centers on faith, family and community connections. Early in December, Salvadoran homes and neighborhoods glow with colorful lights, Christmas trees, and Nativity scenes called Nacimientos, which honor the birth of Jesus.

On Christmas Eve, La Nochebuena, families dress up often wearing new clothes, a custom known as El Estreno, representing renewal and good luck for the coming year. As night falls, families attend Midnight Mass, or la Misa de Gallo, to celebrate the birth of Christ.

After church, everyone gathers for a feast featuring tamales, panes con pollo (chicken sandwiches with homemade sauce), yuca frita, ensalada rusa (potato salad), and sweet desserts. The air fills with laughter, Christmas music, and the smell of holiday cooking.

At midnight, fireworks light up the sky, children open gifts, and families wish each other ¡Feliz Navidad! The festivities continue well into the early morning hours, and on Christmas Day, many Salvadorans visit relatives, share leftovers called El Recalentado, and relax together. Some head to the beach to continue celebrating under the sun.

More than anything, Christmas in El Salvador is about unity, joy, and gratitude. It's a time when families reconnect, neighbors celebrate together, and faith shines brightly across the country making it one of the most meaningful and joyous holidays of the year.

Panes
de Pollo



Links to learn more:

- [Christmas in El Salvador](#)
- [El Salvador Customs](#)
- [Salvadoran Christmas Traditions](#)





Christmas in Guatemala blends centuries-old traditions, vibrant celebrations, and deep spiritual devotion. In early December, streets and homes come alive with decorations, twinkling lights, and elaborate nativity scenes called nacimientos. These displays often include not only the Holy Family, but also animals, rivers made of blue foil, and miniature villages representing Guatemalan life. Baby Jesus is usually added prior to midnight mass. Food plays a central role in the festivities. Families gather to prepare tamales wrapped in banana leaves, a dish that can take days to make, symbolizing patience, unity, and love.



Ponche de Frutas

Another Christmas favorite is ponche de frutas, a hot, fragrant punch made with pineapple, apples, prunes, cinnamon, and cloves. Its aroma fills the air, evoking warmth and togetherness.

Tamales with raisins and olives are usually the main dish served. On December 7, Guatemalans celebrate La Quema del Diablo, the Burning of the Devil, where people lights mall fires and burn effigies to purify their homes and hearts, preparing spiritually for Christmas. The celebration peaks on Christmas Eve with fireworks that illuminate the night sky.

Families return home afterward for feasting and gift giving. The birth of Christ is seen as a time of healing, forgiveness, and new beginnings. The celebration unites old and young with a reminder that even in hardship, love and community bring light to the darkest night.

Links to learn more:

- [Christmas in Guatemala](#)
- [Christmas Traditions in Guatemala](#)
- [Healing Waters - Christmas](#)
- [Christmas Celebrations](#)
- [Colors, Flavors, and Traditions](#)



La Quema del Diablo





The Christmas season in Guyana is one of the most anticipated and joyful times of the year, filled with music, laughter, and the comforting aroma of traditional foods drifting through the air. Preparation begins weeks in advance, as families deep-clean their homes, paint walls, hang new curtains, and decorate with bright lights and ornaments. The streets come alive with carols, church services, and the sounds of masquerade bands which are

colorful groups of drummers, dancers, and costumed performers who parade through towns and villages spreading cheer. Their lively rhythms and playful characters are a beloved symbol of Guyanese Christmas spirit.



Masquerade parade in Guyana.



Guyanese Pepperpot

In Guyana, the holiday table is a feast for all the senses. The famous pepperpot, a slow-cooked stew made with meat, cassareep (a rich cassava sauce), and spices is a national treasure, often enjoyed for breakfast on Christmas morning. Families also share garlic pork, baked chicken, cook-up rice, and black cake soaked in rum or wine for weeks beforehand. These dishes represent not only the season's abundance but also the deep cultural roots that connect generations.

Links to learn more:

- [Christmas in Guyana](#)
- [Christmas Tradition & Diaspora](#)
- [Christmas Preparations](#)





Haitian Christmas is a time of warmth, music, and deep community connection, a celebration that blends faith, family, and festive joy in a way that reflects the Haitian spirit. Though the season begins modestly, as December approaches, towns and villages light up with decorations, carols, and laughter. Children eagerly await Papa Nwèl, the Haitian Santa Claus, often placing straw under their beds in hopes he will exchange it for gifts during the night.



A Christmas music performance

Preparation for Christmas starts early, with families cleaning and decorating their homes, hanging lights and crafting handmade ornaments. The scent of traditional dishes fills the air: griot (fried pork), diri kole (rice and beans), fried plantains, and Christmas drinks like kremas, a sweet, creamy coconut liqueur flavored with nutmeg and rum. On Christmas Eve, known as Reveillon, families attend Midnight Mass, then return home for long feasts that last well past midnight, filled with singing,

storytelling, and laughter. Music is central to Haitian Christmas celebrations. The sound of carols, or chanté Nwèl, spills from homes and churches, with neighbors gathering to sing, dance, and share food. These gatherings embody the heart of Haitian culture: unity, generosity, and joy, even in challenging times.

For Haitians living abroad, these traditions carry deep emotional meaning. Recreating the flavors and songs of home helps keep their heritage alive and reminds them of the resilience and warmth that define Haiti. Christmas in Haiti is not defined by material gifts, but by the gift of togetherness of families and friends gathering to celebrate love, faith, and hope for a better year ahead.



Haitian
Pork Griot

Links to learn more:

- [Christmas in Haiti](#)
- [Haitian Holiday Traditions](#)
- [Christmas Traditions in Haiti](#)
- [Facts about Haitian Traditions](#)





Christmas in Honduras is filled with vibrant traditions, family gatherings, delicious food, and deep religious meaning. The Christmas season begins in early December and lasts through January, creating a joyful atmosphere across cities and small towns alike. Streets and homes are decorated with colorful lights, pine branches, and nacimientos (Nativity scenes) that represent the birth of Jesus. Many Honduran families take great pride in creating elaborate Nativity displays, often adding miniature houses, rivers, and animals to bring the scene to life.

Religious celebrations play a central role in a Honduran Christmas. On December 24th, families attend La Misa de Gallo (Midnight Mass) to commemorate the birth of Christ. After church, everyone returns home for a late-night feast and celebration. Traditional foods are an essential part of the holiday, including tamales, pierna de cerdo (roast pork leg), rosquillas, turrónes, and punche de frutas (fruit punch). Children eagerly await el Niño Dios (the Baby Jesus) or Santa Claus to bring gifts, though the focus often remains on faith and family rather than material



Turrón de
Navidad

Links to learn more:

- [Christmas in Honduras](#)
- [Honduras Christmas Traditions](#)
- [Christmas Traditions in Honduras](#)
- [A Honduran Christmas](#)

Music and fireworks are everywhere during the season. Hondurans love to celebrate with villancicos (Christmas carols), dancing, and firecrackers that light up the sky on Christmas Eve. Communities also host posadas—processions that reenact Mary and Joseph's search for shelter—followed by singing and food shared among neighbors. The spirit of generosity is strong, as families open their homes to visitors and share meals with those in need.





To prepare for Christmas in Jamaica, homes are cleaned, colorfully painted and may be refreshed with new curtains. Blue Mountain pines and other plants, including poinsettias are decorated with lights and ornaments.

On Christmas Eve, the Grand Market opens for shopping during the day. At night, people dressed in their best clothes enjoy music and dancing through the night. Some may attend Midnight Mass. Others may wait until the market closes and then attend a service on Christmas Day.

Christmas meals may include jerk chicken, ackee, saltfish, breadfruit, fried plantains, curried goat or pork with rice and gungo peas. Christmas cake has fruits soaked for months in red wine or white rum.

Junkanoo parades are based on African traditions from the enslaved people of the Caribbean. Spellings may vary but shared are colorful and elaborate costumes, dancing, drumming and processing during the Christmas and New Year season.

As a former British colony, Jamaicans celebrate Boxing Day on the 26th with National Pantomime, an annual performance by the Little Theatre Movement.



Links to learn more:

- [Christmas in Jamaica](#)
- [Holiday Traditions of Jamaica](#)



Colorful Junkanoo costumes





Luminaries guiding Las Posadas processions.

The month-long celebration of Christmas in Mexico begins with Las posadas on December 16th. Over nine nights, Las Posadas recreates Joseph and Mary's search for lodging when they arrived in Bethlehem before Jesus was born. Children travel the neighborhoods holding figures of the holy family, singing traditional songs, and searching for homes decorated with luminarias. These homes will welcome them in for food, fireworks, prayer, and piñatas. On Christmas Eve or Nochebuena, families add baby Jesus to their nativity scenes. After attending mass or Misa de Gallo, they enjoy tamales, buñuelos, and ponche, a warm fruit punch.

Humorous plays, pastorelas, about the shepherds traveling to meet Jesus are commonly enjoyed around the country. Gifts may be exchanged anywhere from the 24th of December to the 6th of January on Three Kings Day.

February 2nd ends the season with Dia de la Candelaria, bringing to a close a winter-long tradition of cheer and celebration.

Links to learn more:

- [Christmas in Mexico](#)
- [Holiday Traditions in Mexico](#)
- [EBSCO Research Starters](#)

A celebration for Dia de la Candelaria





December 7th, begins Nicaragua's holiday season. Las Purísimas, meaning the most pure, celebrates the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus. The nine day celebration spans to the evening of the 15th and involves food, caroling, and small gifts

The next part is all preparation leading up to the great Christmas festival, whose arrival on the 16th is foretold by a spike in candle, gift, and decoration purchases.

From then to Christmas day, nightly mass is customarily celebrated. Church bells can be heard tolling across cities to signal the start of each of these masses.

Christmas dinner is highly anticipated year-round. The same Spanish traditions that inform Nicaraguan Christmas also influence their menu. The traditional Valencian menu features paella, stuffed chicken, and biscochos, a type of cake. Guandu, rice with pigeon peas, is also common.

The festivities of Nochebuena is followed closely by the New Year on the 31st and Three-Kings day January 6th.



Altar to the Virgen Mary for Las Purísimas



Links to learn more:

- [Nicaragua Holiday Traditions](#)
- [Christmas in Nicaragua](#)
- [Christmas Around the World - Nicaragua](#)





Panama City Christmas Tree

Panama's Christmas celebrations span an entire holiday season of tradition and cheer. Festivities kick off the second week of December, a grand parade erupts in the streets with women wearing traditional dresses called pollares. Next they celebrate a four day carnival ending with the lighting of a big tree at the Panama City beach.

Special midnight masses take place leading up to Nochebuena or Christmas Eve. This string of masses culminates with La Misa de Gallo or Mass of the Rooster. Similar to this religious ceremony are the many nativity scenes which are put up during the season of advent.

In Panamanian homes, the night of Nochebuena and all of Christmas day are spent unwrapping presents and spending time with their families. Around a Christmas tree adorned with crafted ornaments and tropical decor, they gather to celebrate a holiday or familial love. Children look forward all year to the arrival of Papa Noel or Santa Claus and all the presents he brings.

Keeping the festivities joyous this whole time is the long list of beloved holiday foods. Arroz con pollo, tamales, and ron ponche, a Panamanian eggnog. Along with the salsa music, a staple of the season, Panamanians are left to enjoy the sights, sounds, and tastes of this magical season.

On New Year's Eve, people will create effigies to burn away the old year.

Ron
Ponche

Links to learn more:

- [Holiday Traditions](#)
- [Christmas Traditions in Panama](#)





Paraguay

Homes and communal spaces such as churches and town squares, are decorated with lights and colors. Family Christmas trees are adorned with fresh fruit and the family's nativity scene or pesebre.

The night of Christmas eve is the stage for La Misa del Gallo, the most important mass in which Paraguayans gather in community, reflection, and joy to signal the start of Christmas day activities.

An essential part of this tradition is the various cultural foods present at many Paraguayan meals. "Dishes like 'chipa', a cheese-flavored bread, and 'sopa paraguaya', a unique cornbread. Sweet bread like 'pan dulce' and drinks like 'clericó', a unique fruit punch, add sweetness to the festive menu."

Links to learn more:

- [Christmas Traditions in Paraguay](#)
- [Christmas in Paraguay](#)



Clericó, a fruit punch unique to Paraguay

Set to a background of traditional polka music, Christmas unfolds. Decorating

trees, gathering as a family, and exchanging gifts. Both indigenous and Spanish cultural influences converge during this season to celebrate during the long winter nights.



Lopez Presidential Palace
decorated for Christmas





Peru's Christmas traditions date back to around 1535.



Chocolatadas

One tradition involves an act of seasonal charity. Chocolatadas, so named because churches and community groups come together to give gifts and hot chocolate to the less fortunate. Eating a paneton, a traditional Italian cake, is also part of this tradition. In recent years these have grown more into community events, opportunities to come together with family and friends. However, its charitable roots still persist in many cases.

Also common are nacimientos or nativity scenes. They may be decorated with indigenous Peruvian animals interspersed with traditional figures like the three wise men, Mary, and Joseph. However, the baby Jesus is normally not put in place until Christmas day.

Like other Latin American nations, Peru holds nightly masses with the most important being La Misa del Gallo or Mass of the Rooster. This falls on Christmas eve or Nochebuena. With such a late mass (10pm) the rest of the night is spent eating Christmas dinner at which presents are opened. Following that is ringing in Christmas day with toasts of champagne, hot chocolate and fireworks.



A nativity scene in Peru

Links to learn more:

- [Christmas in Peru](#)
- [Christmas Traditions in Peru](#)





Christmas is a musical time in Puerto Rico. Groups of carolers called Parrandas gather late into the evening, walking door to door. Traditionally, these parranderos are meant to surprise the residents; however today these visits are normally scheduled in advance. Their repertoire is full of Aguinaldos or Christmas-songs. They can have creole, religious, or contemporary origins, with popular modern songs being as common as traditional ones.



Some Boricuas celebrate as early as the 19th of November with the celebration of Discovery Day, when Christopher Columbus landed. Greenery such as palm leaves and artificial christmas trees are common festive decorations. Many people construct three king figures and nativity scenes to commemorate the Birth of Jesus.

Like other countries, nightly mass is observed from December 15th until the night of Nochebuena, on which the special Christmas-eve mass dubbed Misa de Gallo is held. Christmas Eve is the big night with music, decorations, festivities, and food being at their absolute best. Typical feasts include lechón asado, plátano, and arroz con dulce.

Following this are a few more winter holidays. December 28th's Holy Innocents Day is treated much like April Fools. Unlike other countries, Three Kings Day begins on Epiphany, January 6th and ends on the 8th so each king has a day.

Link to learn more:

- [Christmas in Puerto Rico](#)





In Trinidad and Tobago, Christmas is so beloved that many celebrations begin in September or October. The first breezes of these seasons usher in the Parang season. Parang is a Caribbean style of music that characterizes the holiday season through to Three Kings Day in early January.

People repaint their homes, update curtains, and replace furniture so that homes are clean and fresh for Christmas. Painted decorations of crepe paper flowers adorn every celebrating home.



A Parang performance

Links to learn more:

- [Christmas in Trinidad & Tobago](#)
- [Caribbean Christmas](#)

The culture and processing of a lot of holiday foods is both rich and diverse. Foods which are commonly associated with Christmas in Trinidad and Tobago are expensive to import and fairly exclusive to this festive time of year. Apples, grapes and pears are all delicacies due to their luxury status. Additionally, many dishes are European-based with Caribbean influence. Leche-de-creme, is an egg nog type beverage. Black cake is a fruitcake baked in and preserved with rum. Along with this are the staples of turkey or ham, breads, and many ginger beers and wines.



The love of the whole season is very much in its preparation. The painting, decorating, cooking, updating, music work to bring people together all season long. The season is as much about the individual holidays as it is about the cheer and renewal of preparing for them.



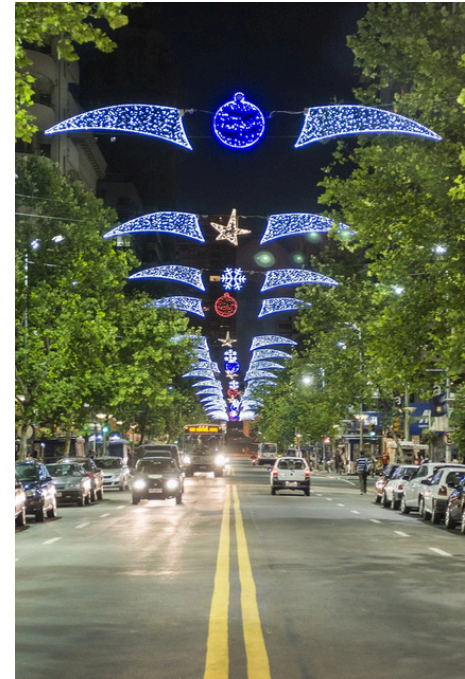


Uruguay

Contrary to the rest of Latin America: Uruguay does not officially celebrate Christmas. Following an 1860 move towards secularization in which the country sought separation of its church and state, Uruguay “eliminated official observances of Christmas, Three Kings’ Day, Holy Week, and other religious holidays”.

Not banning it outright, Uruguay pivoted the day to a celebration of family. Individuals are able to celebrate on their own with the calendar holiday dubbed Family Day. Despite its unofficial status, Uruguay’s winter festivities are embraced by many of the country's people.

Meals, music, and midnight fireworks displays help liven up the holiday spirit of Uruguay’s people. Like much of Latin America, Christmas Eve (Nochebuena) means a visit by Papá Noel and January 6th, Epiphany, marks the arrival of the Three Kings.



Festive lights in Uruguay



New Year's Eve fireworks

Links to learn more:

- [Uruguay Christmas](#)





Venezuelan Christmas is structured heavily around the practices of their deeply Catholic beliefs. Beginning December 16th, attending midnight mass (Misas de Aguinaldo) is very popular. In Caracas, the capital of Venezuela, there is even a tradition of rollerskating to



early morning church services each day from the 16th to the 24th. On the 24th of December or Nochebuena, gifts are brought at midnight by San Nicolás (St. Nicholas) or more often, Niño Jesús (Baby Jesus).

Many Venezuelan houses will decorate artificial Christmas trees, since evergreen trees are rare in the tropical climate. However, displaying a nativity scene or nacimiento is a more important tradition in Venezuela. These can become quite elaborate, sometimes depicting an entire landscape with mountains and valleys and a replica of the manger in Bethlehem at the center.

Another big holiday during this time of year is the Day of the Reyes Magos, often anglicized to Three Kings Day on the sixth of January (Epiphany). Music and good food are major hallmarks of Venezuela's holiday season, with communal meals of Hallacas and Pan de Jamón. This, accompanied by traditional Gaita folk music, played on the Tambora (a type of drum) and the Cuatro (four-stringed guitar).

Hallacas, a traditional part of Venezuelan Christmas dinner.



Links to learn more:

- [Christmas in Venezuela](#)
- [Holiday Traditions in Venezuela](#)

